

Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine

Issue 10 March 2022



At the threshold



Welcome to this 10th issue of our magazine! You are part of a circle of Associates enabling Godly Play in all sorts of places. Some of us have been able to gather again in churches and schools and elsewhere, while others are connecting in virtual space, or maybe not playing as much as they used to. As we started thinking about what we might need for this issue, someone said that after all this time of virtual meetings, it would be good to think about space and place. Where is Godly Play? What kind of space do we need? What really matters – posh places or safe spaces?

In the story of the Great Family, Abram and Sarai journey to many places, and this was not easy for them: 'When it came time to move to a new place, they were not sure that God would be there. They also wondered what the new place would be like.' In this issue we hear from people who have created space for Godly Play in new places: an island, a bus, a temporary classroom in a primary school. What are these places like? How did they use the materials they found to help people play?

Two young people tell us about books they have read which helped them wonder about some big and important questions – 'big work' that can happen in a Godly Play room, or maybe a comfy armchair, or somewhere else entirely!

And we learn about new research on the invisible 'building' which goes on in a Godly Play space – the building of a very particular, safe space which allows listening and dialogue at a deep level.

I wonder where Godly Play will take you in 2022?

Eona Bell is an Advocate for Godly Play UK.

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Building the circle

Thank you once again

In this spring issue, we want to express our huge gratitude to you, the Associates of Godly Play UK. The pandemic has curtailed so much, and without you, we would simply not have survived. Your generous support has genuinely been a lifeline. THANK YOU!

Things have happened, however, and the determination of our trainers to keep things going has been heart-warming. The online Introductions to Godly Play have been more or less monthly and every course fills, enabling us to reach people that we had not contacted before. There have even been some face-to-face courses, and with more planned in the coming months, we are beginning to return to normality. Tribute should be paid to trainers who have had the faith and confidence to plan and deliver these. Many of the local Godly Play network groups have continued to flourish in ingenious and diverse ways during the lockdowns and one or two are now starting to meet face-to-face once more. They are a huge support to their members, and it is wonderful to be able to put new storytellers and enquirers in touch with these groups where they are flourishing.

And there are brand new opportunities. The success of Zoom encounters persuaded us that this offers some new ways for Godly Players to learn across the world, so this year the international Godly Play community will offer a number of online enrichment sessions that can be booked from anywhere in the world. The first will be offered by one of our UK trainers, Susie Steel, who will consider Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Godly Play Circle.

Working online also offered some extended time together so that a small group of trainers developed a more playful logo, using ideas from the newly developed website.

Finally, news from St Michael's Workshop in Bowthorpe for all our Associates. Now that Bowthorpe are back at work again, it has been decided that they will offer all Associates of Godly Play UK a 5% discount on all purchases. This will be available continuously henceforth and Associates will receive their personalised discount code in the coming weeks. We are truly grateful to Bowthorpe for this generosity to all our Associates.

Feature articles

Matter matters

By Peter Privett

Peter has been with Godly Play in the UK from its very beginning and was one of its first trainers. He is still a storyteller at St Andrew's Church in Rugby. As an artist he has contributed images to Godly Play materials made in the UK at St Michael's Workshop. He is currently the Lead Trainer for Godly Play UK.



What might matter when setting up Godly Play space? And if you can't have a designated Godly Play room, what might really matter?

Matter matters. Take a while to spend time with those two words.

Recently I've been reading about the following unrelated people and wondered whether they might have something to say to us about Godly Play space. Matter mattered to Herod the Great. He is the Herod who orders the massacre of children under two. It mattered, also, to his son, Herod Antipas, responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist. Matter mattered to Archbishop William Temple when he claimed that Christianity was the most materialistic of all great religions. He wrote, 'The incarnation regards matter as destined to be the vehicle and instrument of spirit, and spirit as fully actual as far as it controls and directs matter.'¹ And matter mattered to Maria Montessori, the great twentieth century educator. Her emphasis on the importance of the physical learning environment has directly influenced Godly Play.

So, what might matter when the Herods, an archbishop, Maria Montessori, and Godly Play are set alongside one another? Let's consider them each first.

Herod the Great (72 - ca. 4 BCE) and Herod Antipas (20 BCE - 39 CE)

Matter mattered to the two Herods. What the New Testament doesn't record is the massive building programme that occurred during their rule.

Herod the Great's authority rested upon support from the Roman Senate. In 40 BCE, the Senate granted him the territories of Idumea, Judea, Samaria and Galilee as a client king of Rome (see Luke 1, 3). To consolidate his power, Herod needed the continued support of Rome, but both Roman and Jewish demands had to be delicately balanced. It required enormous energy and manoeuvring to keep these opposing forces appeased.

The archaeological remains of the massive civic building programme, which used Roman architecture as its inspiration, can still be seen today. Structures range from heavily fortified royal residences to the creation of major cities that had never existed before, and to the construction of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem which was considered to be one of the most spectacular sacred sites of the ancient world.

These projects dominated the whole of the eastern Mediterranean, a symbol of Herod's power and character. The city of Caesarea Maritima, and its port Sebastos, were entirely new. The site was neither a natural harbour nor had a natural water supply, so the

landscape had to be dominated and subdued. Herod spent astronomical amounts of money on façades of marble and plaster, and on mosaic floors and decorated columns, financed by increased taxes.

Herod Antipas also embarked upon similar massive Roman-designed building projects in Galilee, namely the two new cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, ensuring that poverty-stricken peasant farmers quickly became landless and destitute.



In their book, *Excavating Jesus*², Crossan and Reed suggest that the spirit motivating Herod the Great was his need to dominate and impose his will; his desire to control both nature and society. The physical spaces he created articulated his manipulation of a rigid social order, highlighting inclusion and exclusion. Hierarchical power was at its heart. For his son, Herod Antipas, they suggest the motive was slightly different. It was about personal status, a desperate need to claim the title of king, as the Romans had denied him that rank.

Matter certainly mattered to both Herods. They created beautiful spaces but to what purpose and at what cost?

William Temple (1881-1942)

An outstanding church and civic leader, Temple was Archbishop of York and, for a brief two years, Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1941 he convened and chaired the Malvern Conference which was a key opportunity for the Church of England to address issues of social exclusion, poverty, and unemployment. Among these were those associated with the needs of children.

- Every child should find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity.
- Every child should have an opportunity for education up to maturity.
- The most influential of all educational factors is the conversation in a child's home.



The ideas from Malvern were promoted in his 1942 book, *Christianity and Social Order*, a landmark in Christian thinking about a just society. It had direct influence on the Beveridge Report and laid foundations for the post-war Welfare State.

To use a Godly Play image, the shelves of the public space in the 'room of society' needed to be filled with quality objects: hospitals available to all, schools available for all, housing, and services available to all. These material entities had a direct influence on the human spirit. For Archbishop Temple, a sacramental approach permeated everything. It was key to the mission of the church, and the embodiment of human dignity. Abstract ideas of faith and love needed to be grounded in the material elements of a hospital bed, in medicine, in bricks and mortar.

To plagiarise the popular Marks and Spencer advert: 'This is not just bricks and mortar. This is not just a hospital bed.'

For Archbishop Temple, matter mattered.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

'The first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult.'³



The structure and order of physical space that helps children to gain an internal order of the universe, to enable freedom of choice and a spirit of exploration, are well documented in Maria Montessori's writing. The importance of beautiful, natural materials rather than plastic or synthetics, reflect the natural world and in the unspoken language of sacraments, they speak of the need to care responsibly for creation. Their design should be such that they can be used without frustration and adult interference. The task of the adult is to prepare

the space, making it as beautiful as possible, so that children will respond to the environment as soon as they enter it. Based upon observations of children, the quality of space, and thoughtful preparation of the materials within it, invite independent activity and work.

But for Montessori, matter is not just about the well-prepared physical objects on the shelves or the carefully designed use of space, important as these are. Matter is also a trinity of relationship, of the many interactions dancing and flowing between the three elements of the environment, the adult and the children.

Where and how do children mentor and learn from each other? How is uninterrupted time preserved and cared for to give children time to become deeply absorbed in an activity? 'When a child is continuously interrupted while fulfilling cycles of activity, the child gradually loses the courage, the constancy, and the determination necessary for achievement and fails to acquire a habit of applying himself to purposeful ends.'⁴ Where and how is empathy and care displayed for the whole environment which includes both people and objects? How well does the adult contain the desire to interfere and control learning outcomes?



Montessori's advice to the adult is indeed challenging: '...to shed omnipotence and to become a joyous observer. If the teacher can really enter into the joy of seeing things being born and growing under his eyes, and can clothe himself in the garment of humility, many delights are reserved for him that are denied in those who assume infallibility and authority in front of a class.'⁵

So, for Montessori matter really does matter: for the development and liberation of both adult and child, the nature, the intention, the function matters. In other words, the spirit of the matter matters.

Matter matters to Godly Play

Godly Play has at its heart a sacramental approach. Much of what we have noted about Montessori's attention to the importance of space and materials applies to Godly Play. Godly Play spaces are carefully designed so that the space and the objects within them encourage exploration and learning. Materials are explored, encountered, played with, and handled to explore Christian language, to enable a sense of holy presence manifested in multiple ways. Natural materials matter, today more than ever.



In the early days of Godly Play in the UK, a young child overheard a training session with adults. The participants had experienced the story of the Exodus and were confused about the lack of adult teaching. Someone asked, 'When do you tell the children the meaning, the point of the story?' 'Ah,' said the child later, 'You mean they all want to be like Pharaoh.'

Matter in its widest sense really does matter because it testifies to so much else. It can be an indicator of intention and relationship.

There is many a dream of the ideal Godly Play room, but in reality this will never be a possibility for some. For most, space will be about transferable principles and practice. It will be both confirmation and a change of existing practice. The creation of Godly Play space is always work in progress, something to work towards, an ongoing process. That ongoing process is a continual wondering about what really matters.

In conclusion, in your continued creation of Godly Play spaces:

- Where and how you might see the sacramental? What enhances or diminishes it?
- What contributes to quality in the space where you tell stories?
- Thinking about motives, what, for you, is like a Herod? Who and what might Herod really be?
- What do you like in the paragraphs above about Maria Montessori? What is important for you? What might you really need?
- In the continued creation of Godly Play space, what do you need right now?
- In what ways does matter really matter?

References

¹William Temple, *Nature, Man and God: The Gifford Lectures 1934*, <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/nature-man-and-god> ²John Dominic Crossan & Jonathan L Reed, (2001) *Excavating Jesus (especially Chapter 3 How to Build a Kingdom)* HarperOne; ³Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*; ⁴Maria Montessori (Trans. A G Prakasam), *What You Should Know About Your Child*; ⁵Maria Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*

Raising a Generation of Peacebuilders

By Liesl Baldwin

Liesl is a Salvation Army Officer and, together with her husband Chris, leads the Belfast Temple congregation in Northern Ireland. In August 2021 she was appointed by the Salvation Army as their Godly Play Support Officer for the UK and Ireland. She is currently training to be a Godly Play Trainer. Liesl became a Godly Play storyteller in 2014 and has enjoyed sharing in Godly Play circles in various contexts within her ministry. Here she shares with us some of the findings of her masters degree research.



When I embarked on my masters studies in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding, I never imagined that they would resonate so profoundly with all I had come to know of Godly Play. A personal epiphany, an ‘aha’ moment came when I recognised in Godly Play not just a desire to transform religious education but a fundamental aspiration to build peace. As storytellers, we build a circle in which adults ask questions alongside children and the child becomes the teacher in order that we may be mutually enriched. By nurturing curiosity and opportunities to make meaning together, we also engage in the profound power struggles between the validity of a child’s experience of God and those of an adult. Far from being just a storytelling method, Godly Play offers a new way of being a Christian community. In the face of religious conflicts that risk destroying our species, the Godly Play circle offers a way of restoring the ‘constructive function’ that religion had thousands of years ago (Berryman, 2005, pp. 440-441).

As a student of Peacebuilding, I was keen to explore the possibilities that might exist within the space of the Godly Play circle, and this question guided my academic wondering: I wonder how Godly Play storytellers model good dialogue practice?

Seeing Godly Play as a Form of Dialogue



Dialogue circle - Lbeaumont, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://bit.ly/dialogue-circle>

Dialogue can be described as a process of communication whereby new meaning is formed (David Bohm, 2003). In contrast to debate, where people listen to refute what another expresses, dialogue allows the meaning of what is said to transcend the need to choose one view and negate the other. True dialogue happens when we can recognise the boundaries of own perspectives and begin to consider what lies beyond them. Our narrow, individual horizons can give way to the discovery of much more generous and curious shared perspectives. Instead of seeking to persuade others of

something, we are invited to create new meaning together. By creating a space where respectful listening can happen, prejudices and assumptions can be deconstructed in ways that allow dialogue partners to find meaning through or across (dia) their words (logos). Partners, who at first perceived each other in detached and isolated ways, can begin to orient themselves towards mutuality and reciprocity. Dialogue becomes a space of yielding, where directness is possible because partners experience presence together in ways that reach out beyond the presence of each.

William Isaacs likens dialogue to a container of conversation that is intentionally created (Isaacs, 1999). The leader of conversation needs to prioritise the crafting of a safe space large enough to hold the diversity of what participants bring with them. For this, ‘entry is everything’ (Isaacs, 1999, p. 293). The container is to become ‘a holding space’; a circle that holds all, ‘a setting in which creative transformation can take place’ (ibid. pp. 242-243). It is a circle that nurtures deep listening; safely permits expressions of difference and engenders an environment where judgements and assumptions are suspended by all. As the conversation moves through politeness and instability, the leader of conversation nurtures an atmosphere of inquiry and curiosity that supports people sharing their direct personal experience. An enforced slow pace creates space for them to think, and for fragmented thoughts and relationships to be replaced by more broadened views, a sense of common identity and a deeper pool of shared meaning. As the process concludes, participants are supported in taking new shared meanings beyond the container in transformative ways.



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As I read of this dialogue process, I noticed similarities with the idea of ‘flow’ as painted by Jerome Berryman. In Godly Play we welcome children by name, help them across the threshold to join the circle and encourage them to get ready. As storytellers we work intently to build a circle of mutuality and interdependence, big enough for everyone. The slow pace of the story supports the process of inner dialogue, and the wondering, silent or aloud, is encouraged through questions and our own search for meaning: ‘I hadn’t thought of that’, ‘I wonder about that too’, ‘Hmm’ (Stewart, 2008, p. 19). During response time, the deep inner work continues and, as the children gather again to feast together, unprompted opportunities for sharing are carefully supported. This may result in a voicing of deep inner dialogue, but equally it may not. As storytellers we don’t force a response, nor do we encourage ‘show and tell’. As the session ends, each child is helped to move from the collective flow of the session into an individual reality and invited to take all the creative possibilities into the everyday.

Experiencing the Godly Play Space

An initial wondering about connections between the Godly Play method and dialogue theory gave me helpful insights. However, I could not assume that these also existed in practice. I needed to wonder further. What else might I discover by asking my research question in a context of Godly Play practice?

Five adults agreed to participate in four full Godly Play sessions and then a recorded group conversation in which they reflected on their experience in response to focused questions. Using a research method that centred on careful interpretation (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis), I was able to discern the key, shared group themes that emerged. Everyone valued the comfortable environment created and the common sense of feeling understood and heard by the storyteller. Each appreciated the storyteller’s intentional timing, deep listening and consistent response to difference, and they also communicated an awareness of their own inner dialogue.

Even though they were, in the words of one participant, ‘all at completely different places’, they felt that there was ‘no wrong answer... It was just our thoughts and us

being able to speak them'. Differences could be suspended, and transformed perspectives were described. Repeated expressions about being able to be 'honest' served to underline that a brave space had been created.

Creating the Godly Play Space



As well as hearing the perspectives of people participating in Godly Play, I was keen to also hear from storytellers who could reflect on the process of creating their Godly Play space. Twelve storytellers kindly responded to a set of survey questions that asked them to evaluate their practical experiences and observations. These related to play, listening, living with difference and disagreement and possibilities for reconciliation.

Although the responses reflected each participant's unique and nuanced awareness of themselves as creators of their space, four common determinations emerged: they sought to create a safe, intentional, respectful, and playful space.

The careful crafting of this space confirmed that what it contains is so much more than just the telling of a story. The 'important task' is that of 'building the circle'. It matters that 'people are invited'. 'It needs to be a safe, a respectful space and every single gesture, every single action, every word should help build a circle'.

Calmness and playfulness are fostered by 'the acceptance to speak but also to listen, to not have someone judge at the front or to respond to what is being said' and 'knowing that' it's a safe space to "fail", to try things outside their comfort zone ... they know they all get treated equally'.

Furthermore, storytellers are deeply intent on 'doing the right thing during the wondering time', and keenly aware that the space depends on their own approach: 'If you're going to ask a wondering question you have got to listen... Allowing space for children to speak or not to speak is vital if dialogue is going to happen.'

The Godly Play Storyteller as Model

As I sifted carefully through the storytellers' responses, an awareness also emerged about what modelling good dialogue practice might mean for the storytellers. This was the most fascinating discovery. In the richness of their responses, modelling was communicated as an embodied posture that the storytellers adopt alongside deep personal reflection on experience and self-awareness.

As well as showing themselves to be playful and trusting as examples to the children, the storytellers spoke of leading them from within their own curious posture: 'I wonder because I'm curious. I wonder why'. This kind of modelling goes beyond single actions to be copied. We adopt a posture in the hope that those participating will emulate it. We don't just communicate value in our words, we 'show' it by the way we touch, hold, and carry each story object, and by the way they interact with each participant (Berryman, 2013, p. 96).



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As I sought to interpret the storytellers' responses, I noticed that those who seemed most alert to connections between Godly Play and dialogue also communicated greater depth of Godly Play experience and self-awareness. As one storyteller concluded, 'the more we immerse ourselves in this method, the more it grows in us'. As Kathy Meyers described it, 'There was a day when I discovered GP, and there was another day when Godly Play discovered me' (Meyers, 2008, p. 67).

Could it be that the more we immerse ourselves in Godly Play, the more alert we are to opportunities for transformative dialogue that exist within this safe container we are creating? The idea that our modelling of good dialogue practice can help to raise new generations of peacebuilders within our circles inspires me to keep creating this important, brave, and safe space.

References

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Godly Play on Wheels By Kim Gabbatiss and Ellen Monkwin

Originally from the United States, Deacon Ellen Monk Winstanley has been ordained for 30 years and has been a Godly Play storyteller for most of that time! She serves in the Chorley and Leyland Circuit of the Methodist Church and was one of the original group who had the idea for the Godly Play bus.



A deacon in the Methodist Church, Kim Gabbatiss leads the Godly Play bus team in Lancashire. She lives in Preston.

Have you ever had a dream and dismissed it as a pipe dream - something that would never come true? That is how we felt when we first began talking about a Godly Play Bus. It happened like this. Three Methodist ministers in the Lancashire District – all Godly Play practitioners – met for coffee one day. One of us had just returned from the training

for Godly Play storytelling and was full of enthusiasm for the importance of sharing the gospel using this method.

I said, 'We really need a place in our District where we could have a Godly Play classroom.' Our frustration was that we didn't have a space in which the whole Godly Play experience could happen. We then realised that if we had one space, it wouldn't benefit the whole District which covered the whole of the county of Lancashire.

'Maybe we should see if we could get a bus!' someone suggested. And with that suggestion wheels were set in motion!

Funding found

We shared our idea with our District Chair, who was very excited and suggested that there could be funding opportunities for the project. We were asked to put together a bid for the Lancashire District grants committee, which we did. This involved much guesswork as none of us had ever converted a bus. Our bid included funding for a project coordinator; the first year was for a Lay Worker and subsequently we appointed a Deacon to co-ordinate the project.

Our District Chair also discovered that we could apply for a grant from the Methodist Church which funded outreach projects. We applied for and received both sets of funding totalling over £40,000 a year for three years. So, we had funding but no management team and no bus!

God was with us as we began our search. We had looked at converting a library bus, but then heard that the Liverpool Methodist District had a double-decker play bus for sale. Their project had ended and soon our Lancashire Godly Play Bus Project had a bus!

Conversion

We put together a management team with some talented people. The bus was delivered to us in January 2019, looking very tired and run down. The company that refurbished it for us took our vision, worked with our wood-working friend and made it into a clean, fresh and brand-new sacred space. It is open plan on the top level with a seat at the back for a focal shelf. There are three fixed shelves on one side and two moveable shelves that we use as parable shelves. We installed deep shelves downstairs to store the response materials and there is a built-in desert box. We recruited a talented lay worker to help us set up the project and we were off! The project launched in November 2019. We were so excited, anticipating that we would soon be sharing the Godly Play Bus with schools and other ministries.



Unfortunately, the bus had many mechanical problems, so things got off to a slow start. Again, talented people at the bus depot helped us. While the bus was being repaired, we recruited volunteer storytellers, drivers and doorkeepers and organised for relevant training to take place. We bought storytelling materials, and yet the bus was still having problems.

Never give up

I can tell you that this dream which had felt so blessed suddenly felt like it was being challenged at every turn. The frustration was very hard to bear but the vision was so clear. Our lay worker was fabulous at getting all the procedures set up and publicising the bus throughout the school communities. We felt like God was at the centre of this project and we weren't giving up now!



In the spring of 2020 Covid hit, just as we were finally getting the bus moving. We had planned a pilot project with a church school and a community school and all that had to be put on hold. Our lay worker kept up the good work by doing many things online with the schools and our volunteers. Then in September 2020 the Deacon came to co-ordinate the project, but Covid was still a problem.

On the road at last

Thankfully in the autumn of 2020 we spent much of our time online sharing Godly Play with schools and with churches, and keeping our volunteers involved. It wasn't until autumn 2021 that we finally delivered the pilot project with the church school that we had planned two years before! It was fabulous to see the dream come to fruition. Since we had never had a group of children in the bus, I had worried it wasn't all going to work (O ye

of little faith!). It was amazing to see all that we had imagined come alive! We had worked out the logistics beforehand, and the children loved the storytelling, and responded using all the materials, engaged throughout the whole session, and finished with a feast, where they also offered to pray. They made connections as they wondered between what they knew and what they had heard. They used all the materials and discovered new stories beyond those told on the day. It was such a blessing and a delight to see the dream come true!

We are now planning (depending on Covid) to start a full programme of ministry with the over 50 schools that have indicated an interest. Going forward our District has committed to funding the project for another three years. We are asking schools to donate towards our costs, and we will be seeking more grants in order for the Godly Play Bus to continue beyond three years.

The Godly Play Bus is now a reality and even with the many challenges it has been such a joy to be a part of making this dream come true! So, the next time you have a dream and think that it is a pipe dream, listen to our story. Don't be afraid to step out in faith with a God who can always do more than we can ever ask or imagine!



An island room

By Heather Moger

Heather Moger and her husband Peter have lived in Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis, since 2019. A Suzuki music teacher, Heather is part of the Full Circle Arts Worker team, travelling with her boxes of instruments around the island.

Our Godly Play room, still ‘work in progress’ on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, is an answer to prayer and a product of the pandemic. This is the story of how it came to be.

My husband and I moved to Stornoway from York Minster when Peter was appointed priest at St Peter’s Scottish Episcopal Church. My previous experience of Godly Play rooms was twofold: a brief encounter with the room set up by Gill Ambrose and Rebecca Nye in Cambridge in 2002, and many years later in Rugby, where I completed the accredited three-day training course. The first room was fresh and new – a trailblazer for Godly Play in Europe. My initial encounter with GP had a profound impact, but the time was not right for me to pursue it. I began praying that there would be future GP opportunities and waited on God. The second room was a mature space, overflowing with well-ordered, long-lasting materials, some made by St Michael’s Workshop, Bowthorpe, others beautifully home-produced. Clearly loved and cared for, it inspired me to begin thinking about the potential for GP on the island, and I thanked God for his faithfulness.

Where to begin?

‘The start of a successful GP environment is the nurturing of appropriate relationships in a safe place with the best materials you can manage at the time.’¹ Our congregation is largely mature in age, and there have been no children for two generations. Our main church building is tiny, and its unreconstructed Victorian interior provides no flexibility of furniture or space to accommodate young children. An additional, small side-room is equally unsuited to family-friendly development. With no physical place on site in which to ‘nurture appropriate relationships’ beyond a warm smile and encouraging word at the door, finding an alternative venue where we could create a GP room from scratch seemed the ideal solution.



We gave our search to God, and again he provided, through the generosity of a couple in our midst. Owners of a renowned gallery, café and shop closed during lockdown, they had been considering ways in which their space might be re-purposed. A GP room seemed an ideal fit. They offered the use of one wing: a light, airy room with cloakroom and parking facilities, sited in a stunning location off the main road from Stornoway to the north of the island and our second church building, the historic St Moluag’s.



Celebrating the local context

From the outset I was very keen that our GP room should embody *dùthchas*, a Scottish Gaelic term which embraces the island context, traditions and culture. Reflecting the landscape in which it was conceived (fine wool cloth has been handwoven for centuries in the islands), Harris Tweed was a must. We are using it for the 'soft furnishings', for example all the underlays, the wall-mounted liturgical clock and the desert bag. With its rich palette of colours and varied patterns of its weave, *clò na Hearadh* has also worked admirably for parts of the Parables, the Red Sea and Tabernacle curtains and coverings.

The shoreline was the other obvious local resource. Our desert stories are played out on beach-sand, with altar stones of Lewisian gneiss and other collected pebbles, and rivers of fisherman's rope. Finding a suitably shaped rock for Mount Sinai proved an enjoyable challenge! Noah's Ark was built from driftwood, as were the animals, which include some of our familiar neighbours: a doe and stag, and pairs of seals, otters and eagles.



Community project

I also wanted to engage the exceptional creativity on the island, from visual artists to craftspeople working with wood, clay and textiles. To this end, the task of illustrating the wooden parable figures, the Advent plaques and similar work was shared by a number of painters, who have brought them to life in meticulous detail. A mixed-media artist undertook the Creation plaques, and the three types of ground for the sower's seed. A woodworker re-imagined Jonah's boat in the style of an island skiff and designed a whale with a hinged jaw using traditional boat-builder's copper nails. Eager to contribute, I have learned some wood-working skills, a new venture for me, under the expert guidance of a friend with a fully equipped workshop.



Involving people in this way has enabled us to broaden our reach way beyond our church folk and the small pilot group of potential leaders we have gathered. For example, a former church member, known for her love of birds and delicate paintings of flora and fauna, moved off island last year to join her daughter in Southern England. I sent her some blank bird shapes, and an exquisitely decorated flock flew

back. In Yorkshire, my mum (who always gets involved in my projects) has spent the lockdown months embroidering a picture of Christ in Majesty that will form the central panel of a triptych for our focal shelves. The side pieces are currently being created by a skilled quilter in the congregation, with American roots.

Finding the funds

To finance everything, once again the pandemic played a part. In York I had founded a Community Interest Company, Music at Heart, which became unsustainable during Covid, leaving a generous donation unspent. When I asked the donor what she would like to do with the money, she suggested I re-direct it to a good cause and was delighted for it to go to GP. We have needed to find other funding too, but this gave us a really good start. Our furniture was paid for through the sale of chairs from a redundant Episcopal church in Harris, and for a time, no trip to the mainland was complete without a visit to IKEA!

In all this we are indebted to Alex Mackenzie and the people of Godly Play Scotland, a wonderfully committed, enthusiastic and supportive community. When in-person gatherings became off limits from March 2019, our GP steering group turned online, and over the next year or so took part in a virtual Discovery weekend and GP book groups discussing Rebecca Nye's *Children's Spirituality* and Jerome Berryman's *Teaching Godly Play*. For islanders, a mainland event of any kind involves two days' extra travel; the internet has enabled us to overcome the barriers of logistics and expense. Most of all we have found the 'Circles' network meetings an invaluable source of strength and nurture. Through our computer screens we have made new friends and enjoyed deep fellowship, participated in stories and learned from how others tell them, seeing materials brought to life. We have asked endless questions about resource making and received no end of advice and tips in return. Thank you, Godly Play Scotland.

The People of God in the Sacred Stories discovered the profound truth that 'God's presence is not here or there, but everywhere, waiting to be found and to find us.' We hope that our Godly Play room will help bring this to fulfilment in the Western Isles.

References

¹Jerome Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2*.

Setting up temporary GP spaces *by Judy Yeomans*

Judy is a Godly Play trainer, and a keen storyteller in Sussex. She is working towards becoming a Registered Play Therapist, whilst continuing to support the school where she used to share Godly Play, as a Governor. South Malling Church of England Primary and Nursery School provided space and time for some experimental Godly Play sessions in 2017/18, before committing to providing this for one year group for a year in January 2019.



As I think about setting up a space for Godly Play in a 'hut' classroom, a temporary building, still in use long after it might have been replaced with a more permanent structure, I wonder what makes a place feel special and safe. Is it the endurance of the place? If the wind whips around the sides of a tent, do its inhabitants have sufficient confidence in the stability of the tent to relax and do what they need to do? Is it

something inside that place? Does the presence of a table rather than a picnic rug, a collection of things, rather than just one item, contribute to a feeling of security and belonging? Could it be the people themselves in this place, how they respond to the room and how they create a place of safety for others?



Few of us have the luxury of a permanent home for our Godly Play circles. We're used to setting up and packing away our spaces, sometimes on a weekly basis, and in all sorts of rooms. When I was invited to offer Godly Play to children for six weeks through Lent, I wondered about how to give this multi-purpose room, unfamiliar to me and used in different ways with different classes, the feel of a special place. Berryman (and others in a previous edition of this magazine) have spoken about what can happen at the threshold and in the process of

crossing it, to guide us into a different way of viewing and being in a special place. But once in the room, what else can be done to engender a sense of acceptance and belonging, freedom and courage, to wonder and play?

In Vivian Paley's approach to storytelling and story-acting (as described by Flewitt et al 2016), children sit around an improvised stage, a temporary space marked out with masking tape, where everyone has a 'front-row' seat. A front-row seat in a Godly Play circle contributes to fostering unity and equality and this might be where the safety of the Godly Play space is located. Making space in the room for the circle gives everyone access to the story. There needs to be another kind of 'space' too, in the way in which the storyteller holds this circle, to affirm all the wondering that will take place. This is less about what and more about who is in the room.

But surely what's in the room matters too! We need some 'things' to signify the sacred or special quality of this space. I'm reminded of how we needn't limit the 'sacred' to particular places, or as Richard Rohr (2021) puts it 'don't desecrate them by [our] lack of insight or imagination'. Children are such people, and if we can convey a respect for the relational dimension of their spirituality, perhaps we'll notice their reverence for the everyday things in their space. (This picture of items laid alongside the Faces of Easter demonstrates this nicely.) As mentoring adults seeking to nurture children's spirituality, we model respect for the items in the space (however temporary), items that both we and they bring, and items that may come to be imbued with meaning and significance over time. It is important therefore to keep a note of what to bring for each session, how to set up this space and what is available for the children to work with. Keep photographs and lists as a record.



Choose your focal area and items carefully, making sure they are accessible, child-friendly and durable.

For the response materials, I think less is more! I began my Godly Play journey cramming every space I was offered with interesting 'bits and pieces' for children to work with. But in schools, it's worth remembering that children are denied regular

opportunities to engage in this kind of self-directed, unstructured activity. Faced with an abundance of choice, they are apt to race around, trying everything within the time available to them, rather than allowing themselves to engage fully with anything. Keep a box for 'unfinished work' that children can come back to (or better still, give each their own box or folder) and remind them of the chance to return to work in future sessions.

All your materials need to be carefully stored between sessions, so invest in some sturdy, lidded boxes: not too big, because you'll need to be able to move them. You might be able to use one or two as your focal shelf/table, with appropriate liturgically coloured fabric to cover them.

These are just a few musings and suggestions from one storyteller, but if you'd like to share your experience or learn from others, please get in touch with me. I hope to set up a few Zoom discussion sessions later in 2022. I loved working in school before the pandemic and hope that my travelling Godly Play room will be back on the road again soon.

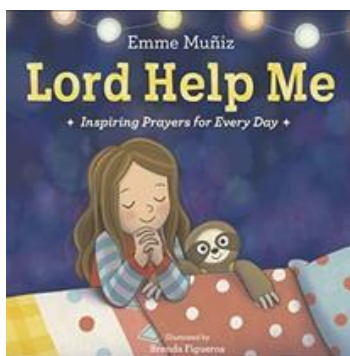
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Taking your wondering further...

Book reviews

Helen (13) and Ruth (11) live in Edinburgh and have experienced Godly Play since they were pre-schoolers. We asked them to tell us about books they would recommend for a Godly Play room, or books to read at home which might take your wondering further.

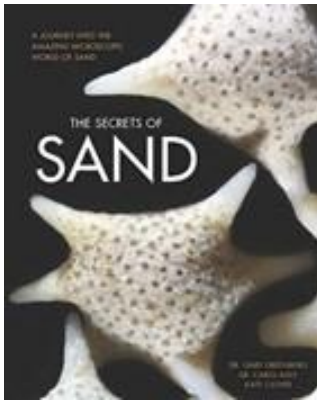


Lord Help Me: Inspiring prayers for every day
by Emme Muniz, illustrated by Brenda Figueroa, Crown Books for Young Readers, 2020.

Helen says: This book is a list of prayers, as the 12-year-old author Emme Muñiz, goes about her ordinary life. The author's mum is Jennifer Lopez, so I'm not sure how ordinary her life really is. We call this 'the sloth book' because there are loads of sloths pictured on every page, though they're not mentioned in the text. Emme Muñiz is very aware of the world she's living in, and she sometimes struggles to be patient with herself, but God helps her.

One illustration shows her bedside table on which she has a jar of coins labelled 'Save the rainforest', showing that she cares about that cause.

Through the theme of gratefulness we see how Emme Muñiz always has God to lean on in times of hardship, and how sometimes we can forget how blessed we are. It's very real in showing how life isn't always perfect. She wants to be more grateful for all the love and support that she has in her life. At the end she says that we can all do something, no matter how small, to help our planet heal.

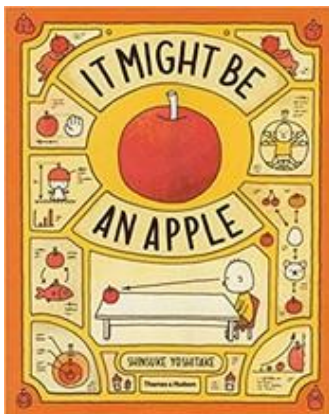
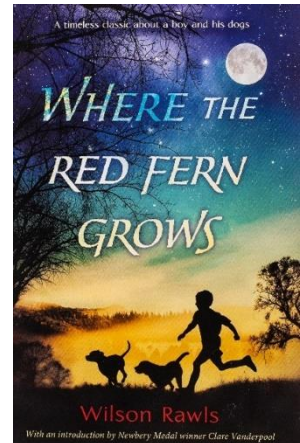


The Secrets of Sand: A journey into the amazing microscopic world of sand by Gary Greenberg, Carol Kiely and Kate Clover. Voyageur Press, 2015.

Helen says: This is a non-fiction book about sand. The photographs are zoomed in so you can see all the cool details engraved in the grains of sand. The illustrations are fascinating, and it is beautiful to see what sand looks like through a microscope, and the different shapes it takes. They almost look like sea creatures; they are such amazing colours. Some look almost metallic.

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls. Yearling, 1990.

Ruth says: I wasn't sure I'd be that interested in a book that was about dogs, boys and hunting, but it was really good, and I got a lot from it. It's not just about hunting; it's about love, passion, loyalty, friendship and faith. There are miracles too. The ending is so sad that it made me cry, and me and my mum had to stop reading for a bit because it was too overwhelming. I don't really want to talk about it. The copy we own has a different title; *Hunters of Cherokee Country*, and I like that better because if you read the book, you'll understand that the phrase 'where the red fern grows' is too much to bear.

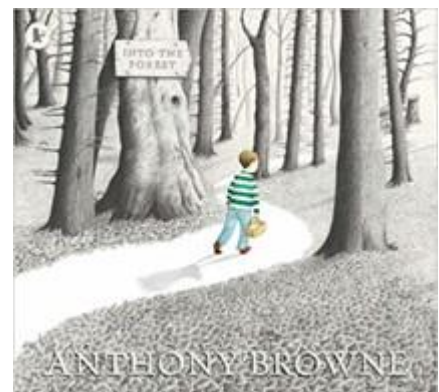


It Might Be An Apple by Shinsuke Yoshitake. Thames and Hudson, 2015.

Ruth says: This is the best book ever! It's so funny. It's about an apple and this boy's wonderful imagination. He imagines it being lots of different things, for example; 'It might be all peel with no apple inside'; 'It might be a huge cherry'; 'It might be packed with clever devices'; 'It might have feelings'; 'It might be my grandma in disguise'; 'If I eat it, it might make me into a giant'. If you enjoyed these examples, then you should definitely get the book, because the pictures help bring it to life, and often they're the funny bit.

Into the Forest by Anthony Browne. Walker Books, 2005.

Ruth says: I love this book because it's a great show of imagination from the author. It's basically Red Riding Hood, but with a boy. I like that: it doesn't have to be a girl. The author imagines all the fairy tale characters in the wood. The trees are shaped to suggest fairy tales, and you can see spindles and objects from fairy tales lying around in the wood. It is scary at the beginning. There was a flash of lightening and when the boy woke up, his dad was gone. It's also very scary when the boy is walking in the wood, and he starts running because he feels something is following him. I really like how everything apart from the boy and his family is colourless; black and white. There's lots of danger in the atmosphere. There's an unknowingness – he goes into the woods.



The Feast

A chance to meet ... our new trainers

At the end of March there will be six new Godly Play trainers in Britain. To begin, we asked them each about their first encounter with Godly Play.



JEANNY WANG lives in West London and has been doing Godly Play at Holy Trinity CofE Primary School Northwood for the last seven years. She is now an ordinand training to be a priest in the Church of England. I had never heard of Godly Play until I asked for a job at my children's primary school and the headteacher sent me on a three-day core training course in 2014 with Rebecca Nye and Peter Privett, at a Catholic retreat centre in Essex. I remember feeling unexpectedly 'found' and being totally immersed in the story of The Great Family in a way that I had never encountered, known or felt.

HILARY LACROIX lives near Inverness, in the Scottish Highlands, and enjoys Godly Play with her church, King's Inverness, and sometimes beyond. I first encountered Godly Play over a decade ago, when I was part of the L'Arche Community in Inverness. I was looking for something that adults with learning disabilities could access to explore faith and their personal stories, in a way that wasn't childish. I somehow came across Godly Play online, and by happy coincidence, there was a Discovery Day in Inverness not long afterwards. I went along and was warmly welcomed by Alex Mackenzie and Margaret Grant. The experience of being immersed in the story of The Great Family was incredible. It touched me profoundly and allowed God to speak to me in an entirely new way. I didn't understand why it was so powerful, but I definitely wanted to know more.



JESSICA LANG lives in Crail, Scotland and shares Godly Play at St Andrew's Episcopal Church in St Andrews. I first encountered Godly Play 20 years ago on the floor of a lecture hall at Wheaton College in Illinois, USA. Professor Scottie May shared the Parable of the Good Shepherd as part of a module on Children and Ministry. As Scottie slowly moved each sheep on the felt, I was immediately drawn in by the storytelling. But it was the wondering questions that really piqued my interest. It was different from anything I had experienced as a child growing up in the church. I loved that the storyteller

was not looking for the 'right' answer and there was silence and space for me to reflect and even ask my own questions. A couple of years later I moved to Durham, North Carolina and happened to attend a church where a Godly Play programme was just beginning. I immediately jumped on board!

NATALIE JONES lives in Oxfordshire and does Godly Play at the college where she is training to become a priest in the Church of England. My first encounter with Godly Play was when I was in university near Chicago studying Christian Formation and Ministry. My tutor in Children's Spirituality told us the Parable of the Good Shepherd, and from that day I was hooked; the creativity, openness, and curiosity that the method invited enthralled me.





EONA BELL lives in Cambridge where she does Godly Play with children at St Bene't's Church, and with adults in the Cambridgeshire Godly Play Network. Around 2005, my mother, Eilie Blackwood, came back full of enthusiasm from a Godly Play intro day in Edinburgh. My son was then a toddler, and I was looking for ways to explore faith with him at home, and fresh ideas for the 'Young Disciples' group of children at our church in North East London. Soon after, I went to a taster event and experienced Godly Play for myself. The storyteller told the Creation story, and at the line 'there was nothing . . . except perhaps an enormous smile' I burst out

laughing and knew this was for me.

LIESL BALDWIN is a Salvation Army officer and lives in Northern Ireland. I first encountered Godly Play when I attended a three-day core training at Audley End in Essex in 2014. A friend recommended the course after I said I was looking for something that would help me 'improve my storytelling skills'. Little did I realise that I would also discover a whole new way of knowing God!



What do you like best about Godly Play?

JEANNY: I like the way Godly Play captivates me in a fourth-dimensional kind of way – body, mind and spirit and being taken away into a time that is so 'other' yet so connected to real time and real life.

HILARY: Godly Play has so much to offer people of all ages – with or without disabilities: welcome, forming community, story, multi-sensory materials, silence, conversation, taking seriously the spirituality of individuals, the wide choice of response materials, prayer and feasting. It can provoke laughter and be deeply profound at the same time. I think what I like best however, are the surprises! There are always surprises. I never know how a group, or an individual, will respond to a story, where the wondering may take us, or what responses may be given. These have opened up and enriched my relationship with God and understanding of Scripture enormously. Sometimes, it is just the atmosphere in the room – thoughtful, playful, peaceful, lively, even tearful. Of course, some surprises are less welcome than others, but that's important too, to push me to lean on the Holy Spirit to be guided, and to keep

learning about myself, about my circle and about God.

EONA: I like the openness and the fact there are no right or wrong answers. There is space for faith and doubt, paradox and mystery, and always the invitation to explore further.

JESSICA: Godly Play takes children's faith seriously and does this in a playful and life-giving way. I like how it begins with the assumption that children come to us already with a deep spiritual life. Each time I share Godly Play, it's the children who show me something new about God and faith. I love how Godly Play creates a space for mutual blessing.

LIESL: I love the way Godly Play makes space for God intentionally. When I first accepted the invitation to play with God, I discovered new ways of being with God that nurture my inner life in ways I never imagined. Although I'd been a Christian for many years, I discovered again what it means to be a child of God.

I also like how Godly Play helps children make sense of their experiences of God in uncomplicated ways. I always thought that children know much more of God

than we gave them credit for, and Godly Play validates that. I love being challenged about allowing Godly Play to transform my whole approach to ministry.

NATALIE: I love that Godly Play calls us to fuse our horizon with that of the story. Through creative storytelling, wondering questions, and the open response, we are not only teaching people the traditions and stories that form our faith, but also inviting people to make these stories and traditions their own and to find themselves within them.

What are you looking forward to doing as a Godly Play trainer?

JEANNY: I'm looking forward to seeing, journeying with, and enabling others to be captivated by God in Godly Play ... and of course, all the fun to be had in the process.

HILARY: I really enjoy meeting new people, discovering new places, and the great variety of churches in Scotland. I am hoping that as I meet people for the first time, and start sharing Godly Play with them, I will be able to witness them being surprised and delighted by God through Godly Play. I also hope to have the opportunity to encourage them on their journey with Godly Play, just as I have received so much encouragement and friendship from the wider Scottish Godly Play community.

EONA: I hope to continue helping others reflect and go deeper in their understanding of Godly Play through my work with the editorial team of this magazine! I enjoy playing with words. And I am looking forward to sharing with other trainers in leading courses in the East of England and perhaps beyond.

JESSICA: Meeting new people and journeying along with them as they explore how Godly Play could be used in their context is the most exciting prospect. I also hope to play a part in growing Godly Play in my corner of

Scotland and establishing a network of local Godly Players where we can learn from each other.

LIESL: I am really excited about getting to know and working alongside other trainers who have such rich experience of Godly Play. I have already learned so much from my co-trainees!

My church, the Salvation Army, have asked me to support the development of Godly Play within the UK and Ireland. This is a real privilege and an amazing opportunity to share stories of Godly Play's impact on me and others. We have a number of keen storytellers and I want to support any opportunity for them to grow in confidence, enrich one another and find creative ways together to stay alert to what God is doing as we make space for Godly Play.

NATALIE: I would love to see a deeper integration of the principles of Godly Play in the formation of priests and faith leaders, and look forward to working with institutions to offer Godly Play to those training for ordained and lay ministry. I love to teach, and can't wait to see lightbulbs go on as people learn to engage with the spiritual lives of children, as well as their own spiritual journeys, in new ways.

Bite-sized news

Welsh translations

In Wales, trainer Cass Meurig is looking forward to the publication of Welsh translations of Volumes 2, 3 and 4 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*. Cass has been working on the translations for several years and trialling them with her own Godly Play group in Bala. The Welsh book will be a one-volume companion to the English books containing the story scripts, illustrations and instructions. More details to follow soon!

Godly Play local network groups

There are local network groups for Godly Players around the UK. Each group works in its own way supported by Godly Play advocates and trainers. There are groups in Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds; Bristol; Cambridge; Cumbria; Devon; Guernsey; Norfolk; North-East; Oxfordshire; Sheffield; York; South Wales. You can find a list with contact details here: <https://www.godlyplay.uk/help-and-support/network-groups/>

Sending out

Courses

Online Introduction to Godly Play

An Online Introduction to Godly Play is run over 4 x 90-minute sessions, each a week apart. Over the four sessions participants encounter the basics of Godly Play and experience three different types of Godly Play story. The cost is £45 and booking is online.

<https://www.godlyplay.uk/training/>

To book by email contact

admin@godlyplay.uk



Fridays 22 April – 13 May 10 am – 11.30 am

Trainers: Alison Summerskill and Eona Bell

Wednesdays 27 April – 18 May 7 pm – 8.30 pm

Trainers: Alison Summerskill and Brenton Prigge

Tuesdays 14 June – 5 July 10 am – 11.30 am

Trainers: Andrea Harrison and Alison Summerskill

Three-day Core Training

Three-day core courses are led by members of the College of Trainers of Godly Play UK. This training enables you to use the Godly Play method and understand its principles. The training follows an action/reflection model of learning, through hands-on experience and reflection, rather than lectures. Costs vary (between £315 and £440) depending on whether the course is residential or not. **Places are still available on all these courses.**



14 – 16 March 2022

at Discover DeCrypt, Gloucester Cost £320

This is a non-residential course.

Trainers: Alison Summerskill and Peter Privett

You can book here: <https://www.godlyplay.uk/events/three-day-core-training-3/>

5 – 7 April 2022

at Cliff College, Calver in Derbyshire

This is a residential course and is booked directly with the College:

shortcourse@cliffcollege.ac.uk

Trainers: Mary Cooper and Judy Yeomans.

7 – 9 June 2022

at Chelmsford Diocesan Retreat House, Pleshey, Essex Cost £465

This is a residential course and can be booked here:

<https://www.godlyplay.uk/events/three-day-core-training-chelmsford/>

Trainers: Andrea Harrison and Peter Privett

Enrichment opportunities and ongoing training

Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Godly Play Circle

Thursday 3 March 2022 at 9 am and Thursday 31 March 2022 at 7pm on Zoom

Speaker: Susie Steel

This session will offer a basic introduction to the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (e.g. bereavement, abuse and neglect), and the way in which the Godly Play room can be a safe place for those who have had experience of these – both children and adults.

Booking sign up

3 March https://godlyplayscotland.makeplans.net/bookings/new?booking%5Bevent_id%5D=28709

31 March https://godlyplayscotland.makeplans.net/bookings/new?booking%5Bevent_id%5D=28710

There is no charge for the workshop, which is being supported by the Godly Play Foundation International Committee. However, donations are welcome to support the work of emerging Godly Play circles across the world and can be made when booking.



Godly Play Retreat 29 April – 1 May 2022

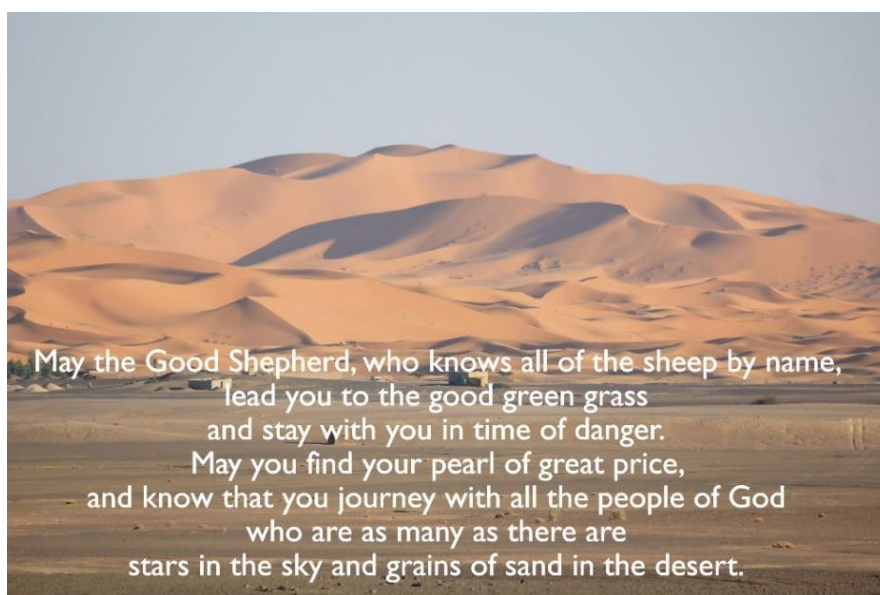
Booking is now open for a creative retreat based in the story telling and creative response methods of Godly Play.

The location is [Shepherd's Dene Retreat House](#), an outstanding example of the 'arts and crafts' style of architecture, in Riding Mill, Northumberland, NE44 6AF.

Cost £250 Booking admin@godlyplay.uk

For more details, contact Mary Cooper cooper.mary@blueyonder.com

"Godly Play methods provide an ideal medium as it is so reflective and non-threatening, giving lots of time for personal reflection and internal conversation."



Associates of Godly Play UK support the work of Godly Play trainers in England and Wales. Associate membership offers the chance to be part of our community and to share our vision in a supportive and meaningful way. We welcome membership from individuals, churches, and organisations from the UK and abroad. New members can join using the direct debit form here: <https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Godly-Play-UK-Assocoates-app-form-and-direct-debit-form-Oct-2020.pdf> We also welcome online giving via our website: <https://giving.give-star.com/online/godly-play-uk/godly-play-uk>

www.godlyplay.uk

Charity No. 1116846

*A Christian movement centred on childhood spirituality
providing training to transform thinking and practice for the whole of life*

This issue was devised and edited by Eona Bell, Gill Ambrose, Peter Privett and Judy Yeomans.

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