

Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine

Issue 11 September 2022



At the threshold



When the Covid-19 pandemic began to impact us all, people sometimes spoke of a ‘new normal’ that would emerge, though nobody could imagine what this would be. As we began to think about themes and articles for this issue, we wondered, fleetingly, whether we had now reached that ‘new normal’. What does the world look like now, for Godly Players? We realised, however, that we are still travelling. Change is all around us: unprecedented summer temperatures, the most challenging financial circumstances most of us can remember, the death of our Queen and the inauguration of the reign of our new King.

When we consider our Godly Play stories, and the content of the Scriptures more generally, maybe we begin to recognise that change, and momentous change, is not just a ‘new normal’ but simply normal. We might think of Abram, Moses, the Ark and the Tent, the Exile and

Return; or Jesus, ever on the move, healing those with no hope or challenging with his parables, or Paul, travelling to share his discovery.

In this issue we hear about initiatives that seek to make Godly Play more inclusive, more available to a wider range of participants. We start with a reflection on the challenge of offering courses online and we hear of the *Beloved Me, Beloved We* anti-racism initiative in the USA. Wolfhard Schweiker describes work in Germany that aims to make the Godly Play circle more welcoming of those with disabilities, and Julie Robertson offers an account of her quest to include Makaton signing in her storytelling. Sam Wells describes how his Godly Play experience birthed the Being With course at St-Martin-in-the-Fields.

Our book reviews come from members of the Sussex network, and towards the end of the magazine, we read the news that the Welsh translation of the core Godly Play stories, by one of our trainers, Cass Meurig, has now been published.

We wish you well as you travel this autumn.

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Building the circle

Thank you once again

In this issue, we're reflecting on the bodies which we bring – and which bring us – to Godly Play. After so long away from other people, away from our Godly Play spaces and unable to touch and handle our Godly Play materials, it's been wonderful this year to start meeting again in rooms and buildings.

Our dedicated volunteer Advocates have been bringing people together for Godly Play in local Network Groups around England and Wales, and in our news section below you'll hear more about them making materials, liaising with dioceses, sharing stories and above all supporting individual practitioners as they take Godly Play to all sorts of places: churches, schools, after-school clubs and homes. We're hugely grateful to our Advocates for their steadfast support for Godly Play, arranging meetings and booking venues so that people can come together with others who live and work near them.

We've been able to resume introductory days and three-day courses in person, and look forward to core training for storytellers and door-people happening at Ripon College, Cuddesdon; Cliff College, Sheffield; Gloucester, and Llandudno over the coming months. Meanwhile our Trainers continue to offer online introductions to Godly Play, reaching people for whom travel may be difficult.

Some of us travel to Belgium this month for the European Godly Play Conference 2022, with the theme of nurturing trust and transformation through Godly Play. From the UK, Peter Privett will give a plenary lecture and others will participate in sessions, workshops, storytelling and worship.

But this ongoing work and growth in Godly Play UK would not be possible without your support, as members of our Associates scheme. Your financial gifts kept us afloat through the huge challenges of the past few years. This year you helped us train new Godly Play Trainers who are now working throughout the UK, Belgium, Estonia and Latvia. Thank you more than ever for being part of the circle – it is very good to have you here.

Feature articles

The bodily experience of a storyteller

By Alison Summerskill

Alison discovered Godly Play in 2002, becoming first a trustee of Godly Play UK and subsequently a trainer. She was a Reader, and a children and families' pastor for 16 years and now retired, she is collaborating with local schools to explore how Godly Play might inform RE and PSHE delivery. She is also a guide at Discover DeCrypt, the church in Gloucester associated with Robert Raikes, who founded the Sunday School movement.

The pandemic prompted many of us to evaluate our practice in a changing landscape. Doing Godly Play online over Zoom has highlighted for me, as a trainer, the importance of bodily experience. The storyteller needs to get out of the way, yet still be fully

present to those in the room. It is so much harder to read the room when all you have to go on are faces on a screen, or you can't so easily express a shift from telling the story to telling our stories, or inviting people to play with parable possibilities. This article looks at some of the ways bodies help and hinder our practice, and how we might accommodate to bodily limitations online.

In Godly Play, the storyteller hopes to disappear into the background, so that people are free to wonder, to do their own work. At first sight then, it might seem that the online environment is ideal. Cameras can be positioned so that only your hands are visible. With spotlighting, the story materials really do take centre stage. What is lost from the experience, is bodily awareness. For the circle, a focus on the story alone sacrifices the physicality of the storyteller, and the reactions of others in the circle. It can be harder to build a rapport with others on the screen. For the storyteller, it can be hard to interpret what is being expressed by participants, be that in words or in silence, without clues of facial expressions or movements. In some ways it is comparable to the experience Jerome talks about during the first decade of researching Godly Play¹, when observers were



¹ (2009) *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* p.142

coding behaviour in the observation room but were unable to pick up on the feelings in the classroom

One way to help the circle see more of the storyteller, yet not lose the detail of the story materials, is to have two cameras – one positioned at a distance and one close by the materials, and then spotlight both views side-by-side.

Whatever the experience of a storyteller, getting to grips with new technology provokes anxiety, and makes it harder to notice how the circle is responding. To state the obvious, it is worth practising with your door person so, for example, you can be confident that all of the story is visible all of the time, is well lit and clearly audible. During the session, you might start with a stilling exercise – listening to sounds or lighting a candle. This will help you to be present, while also showing participants how they might ‘get ready’ too.



Photo: SEPPics

One of the casualties of anxiety is silence. It can be tempting to fill the silence with words. There are many kinds of silence: imposed, embarrassed, bored, uncomfortable, thoughtful, peaceful. To distinguish between them, you need to be able to observe whole people. You need to notice facial expressions, how people are sitting, shifts in position indicating engagement or discomfort. These tools are not at your disposal online.

Sometimes the silence can be a reflection of how safe people feel in the group. To help participants build rapport with one another, you might spend longer at the start of a session on building the circle. Online, as in real life, this time is never wasted. People will not be confident to share personal insights and stories if they do not feel safe. Building relationships offline can help with feeling safe online. In training, I send out emails before the first session letting people know what to expect, offering help with Zoom controls beforehand, and then between sessions, picking up on discussions we have had and linking to external material.

One of the important ways of building community in Godly Play is through sharing the Feast. Online during training, it does not seem to ‘work’ in the same way. That may be because there are strong social taboos against eating and drinking in meetings online. If a feast is about how you feel about it² the predominant feelings may be ones of embarrassment! There can still be a shared sense of ceremony, for example through the lighting of a candle, before prayers spoken aloud or silent are invited. The Feast may still be a pleasurable experience with a group who already know one another well, and where the strangeness of online becomes another shared experience in the life of the community.

The internet expands the availability of training to accommodate people’s locations and schedules. These advantages mean that online training is likely to remain a popular option beyond the pandemic, alongside training in person. Beyond training, meeting online can also support communities of practice.

² ibid p.98, 99.

Godly Play and Inclusion: what is compelling us forward

By Heather Ingersoll

Heather Ingersoll is the Executive Director of the Godly Play Foundation in the USA. She has a particular interest in early childhood education and before joining the Foundation in 2020, she worked in a variety of church and school settings.



In July 2020, the Godly Play Foundation Board President, Mary Hunter Maxwell, committed that the Foundation would engage an anti-racism task force in a process to examine how our organization ‘reflects the structures of oppression that plague our nation’ and ‘confront the realities of racism that exist even in our most sacred spaces.’ This statement came at a time of significant unrest in the United States. In our reflection during this season, Board member and author, Mark Bozzuti-Jones, continually reminded us that Godly Play is uniquely situated to embrace a prophetic way forward as we participate in the collective work to dismantle racism in our communities.

Dr Jerome Berryman developed this profound pedagogical and theological framework where the least powerful in our society, children, are invited to find identity and meaning in shaping, exploring, and sharing their individual experiences of God, Scripture, and spirituality. We are compelled to live more fully into this robust pedagogical and theological framework by being bold and courageous in our anti-racism initiative.

Children as change agents

Often left out of opportunities to support meaningful change, children play a crucial role as leaders in imagining and creating beloved communities today and in the future. In our work toward expanding inclusion, we focus on centering the child and seek to uniquely inspire children to find their identity as change agents in a world needing creative, imaginative, unfettered inspiration from our young people.

We began in late 2020 by identifying a group of people who would push us beyond our comfort zone, challenge us to dream expansively about where we could grow and whom we could become, and allow us to identify an anti-racist path forward. This was challenging due to the lack of racial diversity in our Godly Play circles and networks. It meant reaching out to people on the edges of our networks to elevate and amplify voices historically underrepresented in our organization. Ultimately, we had an anti-racism task force of seventeen people who met for five months culminating in the development of our Godly Play *Beloved Me, Beloved We* initiative.



The vision: Beloved Me, Beloved We

The vision of the *Beloved Me, Beloved We* initiative is to delightfully and prophetically inspire brave spaces so that every child who comes close to Godly Play encounters a felt sense of their inherent worth and dignity as one uniquely and fully created in God’s

image (*Beloved Me*) and co-creates a way of being and inspiring inclusive communities which celebrate the diversity of God and God's creation (*Beloved We*).

Grounded in the Godly Play framework of individual contemplation, collective storytelling, holy wondering, deep play, and mutual blessing, the *Beloved Me, Beloved We* initiative is an intentional process to make lasting change.

The *Beloved Me, Beloved We* initiative has five priorities.

1. Audit our storytelling and training curricula, materials, and processes to identify what terms, phrases, art, and materials 'bump' people from different perspectives out of the circle. We will update our language and materials so that everyone can encounter the felt sense of belonging and worth in a Godly Play classroom, and we commit to highlighting and increasing access to those updated lessons and materials.
2. Increase the diversity and inclusivity of our organizational leadership (in terms of race, LGBTQIA, disability, age, denomination, and languages spoken) to uplift traditionally marginalized voices, ensure that children from various perspectives are honored, and expand our ways of being together.
3. Engage our leaders in an educational process regarding white dominant culture and anti-racism to have a shared language.
4. Reimagine our funding model to increase equity and accessibility to Godly Play materials, training, and resources.
5. Convene a *Beloved Me, Beloved We* Advisory Committee to keep us accountable.

Almost two years after we first convened the anti-racism task force, we are moving forward in all areas, including progress on developing a tool kit for adjusting language and materials for equity and inclusion, which will be disseminated for free to Godly Play practitioners globally.

The work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the Godly Play Foundation has been challenging, difficult, but valuable and beautiful work. We hope to inspire Godly Play associations around the world to engage in this work in their unique contexts, to amplify and elevate the voices of those who have been marginalized, to challenge and push one another to see beyond our own experiences and lenses, and to join a collective *Beloved Me, Beloved We* movement in our Godly Play spaces.

Dotted around this issue, we offer some wisdom from Maria Montessori, founder of the educational method that is the bedrock of Godly Play. Thank you to Peter Privett, who mined Maria Montessori Her Life and Work by E M Standing to find these pearls.

The first essential is that the teacher should go through an inner, spiritual preparation ... this is the most difficult part of her training, without which all the rest is of no avail.

Once the teacher had made this act of humility, she will no longer look upon herself as someone whose duty is to mould the growing personalities in her charge by the force of her own. Rather she must regard herself as one that serves ...

Opening the Circle: nobody left behind

By *Wolfhard Schweiker*

Wolfhard is a Godly Play trainer, special educator and Protestant pastor in Germany. He lectures at the Center of Pedagogy and Theology in Stuttgart and the University of Tübingen.

‘Sometimes someone comes to read the very words of the Good Shepherd, and to give us the bread and the wine. And sometimes the people of the world come to the table – and of course, the children come.’³

What a wonderful world community. The people of the world build a circle around the table of the Good Shepherd, a picture of paradise touching our soul. World and church community at their best. People of all colours, from East and West, North and South stand side by side: young and old from all cultures and nations. In this circle, while different, we celebrate diversity.

Depicting diversity

In Germany, when we reviewed the materials for the story of the Good Shepherd and World Communion, we found the aspect of dis/ability was missing. Designing new figures to add to the set, the Godly Play Trainer and performing artist Hans-Jürgen Hinnecke also tried to illustrate the socio-economic gaps between rich and poor. He drew a child in a wheelchair and a blind man with a white stick. However, the differences in bodies are much more diverse than this circle of the world communion is able to show. In real life, for example, there is a whole spectrum of gender. But how can you depict different sexual orientations or gender identities?



And what about different religions and world views? Will these bodies find a safe space at the Christian table of the Good Shepherd? Will they be served? At least this is sure: the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name and will seek every lost one around the globe and bring them back to the green grass. And sometimes someone comes and reads the words of the Good Shepherd: ‘This is my body given for you!’ This is a universal call. This very word invites everybody around the globe. And Jerome Berryman underlines this call: ‘A Godly Play community begins right here, by building a circle where each and every participant is warmly welcomed’⁴.

So far, we have thought about the Godly Play story with its theological aspirations. Now, let’s think about the real world. How diverse are your Godly Play circles? Everybody is warmly welcomed, but does everybody feel comfortable and able to come? What about those with different disabilities and special needs? Will they be able to move in, sit on the floor, stay quiet and understand the very words? In the Godly Play Quarterly *The Circle* (May 2017) I wrote about some of my ideas and experiences of removing barriers. Welcoming involves more than greeting people with a smile. We should also prepare our hearts and environments in an inclusive manner, always sensitive to diversity. A group of

³ Berryman, J.W. *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Vol. 4.* Morehouse Education Resources 2008. p. 97.

⁴ Berryman, J. W.: *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Vol 1: How to Lead Godly Play Lessons.* Denver: Living the Good News 2002. P.

us in Germany are currently working on an 'Inclusive Religious Education in Diversity'. We realised that the geometry of a circle encompasses all differences at once, but our eyes and brains do not work like that. For that reason, we have developed the ability to zoom in. Like a photographer, you try to focus on one detail, which may be an aspect of a special need or an intersectional knot of differences. Looking sharply at reality helps us to bridge barriers.

A Godly Play session already offers opportunities to do this. You have plenty of time to observe the participants during their creative work, and to notice individual preferences when you greet and say goodbye to each person in the circle. And yet, we should be aware that we may be holding a blinkered view of our somewhat closed 'church-y' bubble. What about those who are members of the church but never come? Does your offer fit their fundamental needs? Zooming in on the bodies outside the Godly Play room might help us more realistically to prepare and get ready to welcome and include new members. Comparing our circles with the picture of paradise around the table of the Good Shepherd, we recognize the fundamental discrepancies. The world is ragged and broken by rival parties. Countries are divided and wars go on. It is not in our hands to gather them peacefully around the table. However, we are able to read the very words of the Good Shepherd: 'This is my body given for you!' And we may share the bread and the wine.



Too different

The handicapped American theologian Nancy Eiesland (1964–2009) was convinced that there is no common human experience. Bodies are too different. Therefore, there is hardly any universal sense of being at home, even in church. Yet, when Eiesland looked at the body of Christ she noticed the body as a crucial locus of theological reflection. It is Christ who represents and shares our diversity. In his body, she recognized the wounds in his hands and his side. When Thomas wanted proof of his suffering and resurrection, the risen Christ still showed him his wounds from the cross. Eiesland derived comfort from this discovery, and called her book *The Disabled God* (1994)⁵. God himself bridges all differences. Looking at the trinitarian God we see God's colourful diversity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So the Divinity him:herself is the spring which reconciles painful differences and the well which celebrates diversity.

This might be quite exhausting if we set out to provide equal access, design welcoming settings, and remove barriers. However, if we go back to the spring, share bread and wine and listen to the very words of the Good Shepherd, we receive the power to go on. Many Godly Play stories encourage us to deal with plurality and become more inclusive-minded. The Holy Family on the focus shelf presents us with a non-average, patchwork family. It reminds us of two quite different stories of Christ's birth, in Matthew and Luke. The Circle of the Church Year on the shelf beneath highlights various colours, mirroring multifarious liturgical actions. In the Creation stories we enjoy God's rich gifts of life and think about human beings eating from the tree of differences. Noah's Ark delights us with all sorts of bio-diverse animals. These sacred stories tell us about the unconditional positive regard of all creatures. And there was once someone who invited everybody who was weary and burdened (Matthew 11.28). And he went to them. He visited the humble,

⁵ Eiesland, Nancy L.: *The Disabled God. Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abington Press 1994.

the outcasts, the little ones and even the super-rich. Crossing borders is a benchmark of the kingdom of heaven. The Good Samaritan transgressed his cultural and religious borders. And the seeds of the sower fell on a variety of different grounds.



Another touching story points out that even the Good Shepherd stepped beyond the frontiers of his mind and religious realm. A foreign woman from Canaan came to him. She asked him for help, but at first, he rejected her request: 'I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15.24). This shows that it is not only we who find it difficult to open the circle. Even for the Good Shepherd, this is hard work. It seems that transgressing religious borders is one of the biggest challenges in the field of managing diversity. The hard confessional fights between Catholics, Protestant, Anglicans and Orthodox seem to be widely a matter of the past. In the German materials for the Godly Play story of the World Communion we have a Catholic priest and a female protestant pastor. And in ecumenical services both will stand behind the table of the Good Shepherd. But what about the challenge of interreligious communication?

Religious diversity

In 2015, many refugees came to Germany. The gym opposite my workplace was filled with Syrians. I decided to take my desert bag over there and told them the story of the Exodus. The children understood very little German language, but they discovered: 'We know that story. It's also in the Quran!' Meanwhile Godly Play has also crossed the threshold of the Christian community, probably in many places. Rabbi Dr Michael Shire introduced Torah Play to his Jewish congregation in Boston, USA. And it seems further steps are ahead. A Muslim RE teacher from Innsbruck, Austria attended a Godly Play core training. She was fascinated and started to write stories from the Quran in the style of Godly Play. In 2020 I had the pleasure of introducing Godly Play at an interreligious theological seminar at the University of Tübingen. Professor Dr Fahimah Ulfat and the Muslim students were delighted. So, we proceeded to cooperate in interfaith studies. In the summer semester of 2022, the students of Islamic and Protestant Theology were wondering about the Yunus story in Islamic tradition and the Jonah story in Judean-Christian tradition. We will report on this in a workshop at the European Godly Play Conference at Mechelen, Belgium this September.

I wonder how we can open the circle to one another. How can we learn from each other by regarding commonalities and respecting differences? I am sure that representatives of different religions will enrich the circle of storytelling. This specific circle is not a common Eucharist, nor a liturgical action, but an interreligious sharing of precious stories.

Finally, I wonder what you think about this. I wonder what the Good Shepherd would say. And I wonder if he will join these circles.

Using Makaton signs in Godly Play

by Julie Robertson

Julie is the Children, Family and Youth Worker at Strathaven Trinity Parish Church in Lanarkshire.

My introduction to Makaton came in November 2017, when my daughter was at her second visit to her speech therapist. She was two years old and completely non-verbal at that time. What was believed to be a speech delay was found to be an extremely severe phonological disorder. In this visit her speech therapist signed 'cat' and Ellie immediately copied the sign, and so we started to learn.

We began to use signs for all communication until we could communicate effectively with signs and our whole bodies! It meant I saw signs everywhere in life. Making up signs for those we didn't know and beginning to translate signs in my head. So, at my first introduction to Godly Play, I listened to the story and saw how close some of the movements were to those of Makaton signing.



What is Makaton signing?

Makaton sits between British Sign Language and signed English. BSL is a language of its own and signed English is spelling every word. With Makaton we sign as we speak, and we speak as we sign. You also don't need to know every sign as you only sign the words you want to or know how to in my case!

In our circle, I will use the signs for 'animals', 'Jesus', 'yes', 'no', 'sorry', 'love', etc. To provide an example, in the story The Exodus when Moses says, 'Let my people go' and Pharoah says 'No', the sign for 'no' is palm facing out and moved from left to right and for 'yes', it is closed fist and 'nodded' forward. With a slight adjustment to the already familiar movements, we are in the realms of 'official' signs!

Additionally inclusive

As a storyteller, I have found that signing has allowed my circle to become additionally inclusive, offering another layer of understanding and interaction with these wonderfully rich stories. It has allowed us to introduce sign across other mediums in our church life. We have a few children with autism and additional support needs, and it has allowed more open conversations about the child and the family's needs because they feel seen and understood.

For the children, it has offered opportunities to learn a new skill. For Ellie and others like her, it has brought friendship and a reduction in frustration at not being understood. Where there were barriers, there are now opportunities. Most children who are non-verbal will have more than one diagnosis. In my daughter's example, she also has an auditory processing disorder meaning she can hear but not process and so she sits in the bottom percentile for this. For her visual understanding she is in the 98th percentile! This will be a common thread for many of the children we meet with additional support needs and the beauty of introducing Makaton signing means it works for all. I can't imagine removing signing from our practice now, as there's nothing like a child included; one who sees the beauty in all that they are and the wonder of connection with the story, God and each other.

Godly Play and the *Being With* Course

By Sam Wells

Sam Wells is Vicar of St-Martin-in-the-Fields and Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King's College London. He is a regular contributor to the BBC's Thought for the Day.



It's hard to assess how deeply Godly Play has shaped my ministry, but any quick judgement is likely to be an underestimate. I was privileged to train with Jerome Berryman in Cambridge in (I think) 2000 with many who remain doyens of the Godly Play community in this country. At the time I was vicar of a small church in Norfolk. The training renewed and transformed my approach to all-age worship, as well as yielding a Godly Play room and local charity. Subsequently my interest has been largely in the power of Godly Play in mixed-age settings. As my face-to-face work with children has shrunk, my use of the notion of wondering has continued to expand.

A fourth discourse

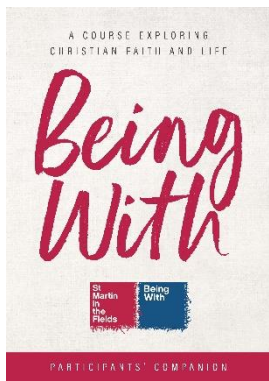
For me, wondering is a fourth kind of discourse, in addition to indicative ('this is that'), imperative ('do that') and interrogative ('what is that?') It is an invitation to enter the realm of the imagination – which often includes memory. I never write a wondering sentence with a question mark at the end – and I never use the expression 'wondering questions.' Wonderings aren't questions. Questions have specific, intended answers. Wonderings explore the unknown, the hidden, the buried, the suppressed, and give permission to cherish insights and perceptions that might never previously have been articulated.

Over the years I've come to distinguish between two kinds of invitation. One kind begin 'Tell about'; these draw on memory, and refer to events in the past: 'Tell about a great teacher you had,' 'Tell about a day that didn't turn out as you expected.' The other kind begin 'I wonder'; these draw on imagination, and refer to the future or the land of maybe: 'I wonder what it would be like to have no enemies,' 'I wonder what it would feel like to have no regrets.' Every time I host a leaving party for a member of my senior staff, we prepare two hats, one with Tell abouts, like 'Tell about one initiative that went really well,' the other with I wonders, like 'I wonder who you'd like to meet in heaven.' The person leaving answers twice as many as the rest of the room. The act of listening and paying close attention to one another both affirms the departing person and bonds the group.

A new course

In 2019 Sally Hitchiner and I reflected on the way many churches feel uncomfortable with some enquirers' courses currently available, and thus struggle to share faith in ways more in tune with their own church culture. So we created a new course, designed to evoke the dynamism and joy of Godly Play – but among adults who are largely outside the church and strangers to one another. Because of the pandemic, the first two years of the course were almost entirely on Zoom. The course has two foundational principles. (1) The Holy Spirit has been at work in your life since your life began. (2) The universe was created because God wanted to be with us in Christ. The first principle means that rather than be wholly focused on providing new and transformative information, more

than half of each session is spent attending to how the Holy Spirit has already been at work in the life of the participants – in their own words and without comment from leaders or participants. The second principle means that relationship – what I call ‘being with’ – is not God’s way of achieving something more important – it is the more important thing. In heaven it’s the only thing we’ll have – there’ll be no need to put things right; and rather than impoverishing life, this will be more than enough. So the experience of being cherished and understood in the group is crucial to helping participants perceive what Christianity is fundamentally about.



There are now several *Being With*⁶ courses, but the original one (known simply as the *Being With Course*) runs across ten 90-minute sessions. Each has the same format. (1) It begins with each participant answering a question – ‘What’s been the heart of your week?’ This assimilates each member into the session, sets a tone of honesty (because the heart may well be ‘I had my first epileptic fit for a year on Friday’) but carefully affirms that in these significant moments the hand of the Holy Spirit may well be discerned. This takes 10-15 minutes. (2) There’s then 40-45 minutes of wondering. Usually four wonderings are offered (usually having been sent to the participants a few days ahead) and each person has the chance to listen and speak or just to listen as participants respond to each one in turn. People say truly remarkable things in response to a prompt like ‘I wonder what you’d change about the world’: one person said, ‘I’d abolish the word “normal.”’ No one gets to correct, comment, compete with or fix what’s been said – they only get to tell their own truth.

(3) Then there’s a talk that lasts 5-8 minutes. The storyteller weaves 4-5 salient remarks from the previous 55 minutes into the talk as illustrations; the wonderings have, after all, been chosen to earth the talk that follows. The talk is read from a script, in order to enable the storyteller to concentrate on interlacing the participants’ sharings. (4) Then for the last 25 minutes the format loosens, and participants can discuss any part of what’s gone before, e.g. ‘Did you ever see that guy again?’ or ‘Do all Christians believe in life after death? Because I don’t.’

Evoking trust

While many participants appreciate the talks and discussion, what they refer to over and over again is the lasting impression of the first two elements. In a very short time, they come not only to trust one another, but to know things that matter about each other, and to feel and hear those things being reinterpreted as experiences of the Holy Spirit. There’s no jargon – even the term ‘Holy Spirit’ is seldom if ever used – and no expectations: no Bible passage is read, no prayer is said – you just bring what you are and the group work with that.

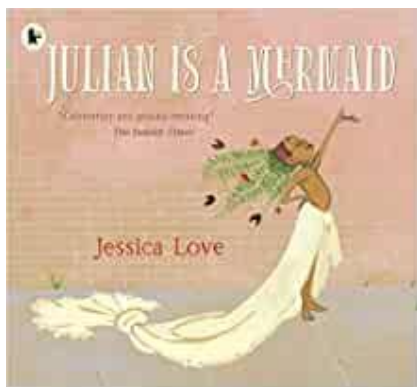
It’s the been the most successful – and by far the most enjoyable – form of faith sharing I’ve ever been involved with. And I’m not sure it would have come about had I not spent so many years soaked in the habits and approaches of Godly Play. I remain grateful to those who introduced me to Godly Play and to all who practise its ways today.

⁶ *Being With: A Course Exploring Christian Faith and Life* by Samuel Wells and Sally Hitchiner is published by Canterbury Press in September 2022. ISBN 9781786224392

Taking your wondering further...

Book reviews

The reviews of children's books are from Sussex Godly Play Network members Chris Wheatley, Audrey Jesty and Judy Yeomans.



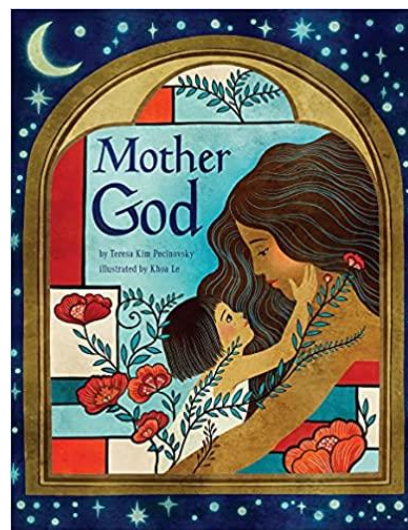
Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love. Walker Books, 2018

This has become a classic in the few years since it was published in 2018. Read it without looking at the text, and this is joyous in its evocation of childhood discovery and exploration of self and identity. The gentle acceptance of difference by someone who might have scoffed or scolded will be reassuring for children too. But the straightforward introduction of Julian, his Nana and the mermaids, without explanation, is what gives the reader permission

to dream with Julian about being and living differently. Suitable for any age, this book deserves a place on your shelf!

Mother God by Teresa Kim Pecinovsky, Beaming Books, 2022

I was sceptical about this book, feeling that there might be an agenda to drive home hidden within its pages, but it is quite lovely, a real delight! The powerful words are poetically gentle and invite wonder, as do the stunning illustrations. With ease the author refers us to many biblical images of God and God's character that make the feminine clearer for us. God is a baker with a 'huge supply of flour' (would that be three measures, 'which is a lot?'), and a skilful seamstress (Psalm 139.13). I will be giving this away to my godchildren, boys and girls.



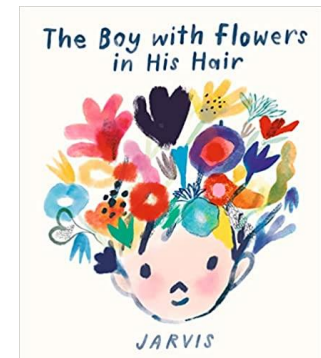
Your Name is a Song by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow. Innovation Press, 2020

This beautiful book deals with identity and self-acceptance. The girl in the story is unhappy after her first day at school because her teacher and classmates struggled to pronounce her name. Her mother teaches her to sing it, encouraging her to find beauty in the rhythm. She weaves in messages of strength, respect, cultural heritage and the power of imagination. She gives her daughter a gift to pass on to her teacher and classmates, showing her that names are an important part of who we are as individuals.

The illustrations are colourful and clearly express emotion and movement; when the girl feels angry, she stomps; when sad, she hunches and when singing her name, she dances. When the teacher struggles to pronounce her name, she looks embarrassed and awkward, and the girl's face is downcast.

Reading the story aloud to my granddaughter (aged 5) I found the names tricky to pronounce, which was actually good, given the message of the book, but having the correct pronunciations in parentheses helped. I had to read it carefully, which was a crucial message in the story; to take care over a person's name shows them respect for who they are as an individual. My granddaughter enjoyed the story, particularly when she heard her own name in it.

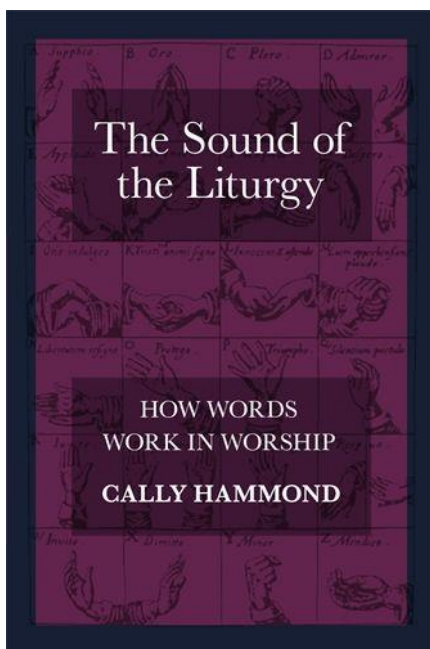
The Boy with Flowers in his Hair by Jarvis (Author and Illustrator) Walker Books 2022



Friendship and love in good times and bad, acceptance and tolerance, difference and individuality are all presented in this book in an imaginative, colourful, energetic and yet reflective manner. It is hard to find fault with this book: it is visually attractive and the textured white cover depicting in bright, light relief the boy with flowers in his hair, invites interaction.

From first glimpse until the end cover closing, this book is a delight. The illustrations are hugely appealing, capturing character and bright detail throughout. For a three-year-old, this is a story to re-read regularly, simply through its pictures. Asked for his thoughts on reading this book for himself, a local seven-year-old said the hand-painted images were so much better than 'computer pictures'. He gave the book 10/10, his only criticism being that he wished there were page numbers. A local 70-year-old doesn't want to return the book to its rightful owner. These three cameos show that this is a book with age-wide appeal. One to share.

Our review of a book for adults is by Fiona Prentice, a Godly Play Advocate in Norfolk.



The Sound of Liturgy; how words work in worship by Cally Hammond, SPCK 2014

Cally Hammond, Dean of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, is an eminent classicist, philosopher and theologian. Her book is a rigorous exploration of Anglican liturgy to help us re-evaluate some of the inherited riches in The Book of Common Prayer. She argues that paying attention to its verbal and non-verbal language can be transformative in worship. Godly Play has many symbols, learnt postures, gestures, rhythms/repetitions and set punctuation as well as silence, reflecting the liturgical heritage that contributed to its evolution. When he read the book, Godly Play's Lead Trainer, Peter Privett, found that there are many resonances with Godly Play in helping us to deepen our spiritual experience, indeed our spiritual development.

Dr Hammond is critical of those who undervalue ritual; those who call it hypocritical or restricting in today's goal to be spontaneous, authentic

and mindful. She gives many examples of actions and phrases acquiring deep meaning through repetition and familiarity. Literacy is not a requirement for faith development. There can be great comfort to be had through the cadence of repeated phrases or the annual cycle of familiar collects. Godly Players also experience this possibility in the invitation to go deeper by revisiting Godly Play stories through the circle of the church year. Changing postures can give an external signal of an internal attitude/mindfulness or helps bring about deeper focus. This is experienced in the choreography of the traditional Triduum liturgy or the sacred space in a Godly Play circle, in the hand gesture of the blessing or standing to face east when reciting the creed.

Some of Cally Hammond's ideas challenge us. She has interesting thoughts on 'creative boredom' and the opportunities that arise in what she calls 'mind-slip' in worship, when individual mental focus is lost and the mind wanders. One has the impression of a fresh and curious mind thinking through what it means to share in an act of worship. Is this book useful for Godly Players besides validating our pedagogy? Cally Hammond helps us craft the development of our practice: to be mindful of our use of repeated phrases, the cadences and rhythm of our speech, in our gestures and expressions knowing these have accumulating and powerful emotional effects to create a safe space in which to play and create. There are also reminders to be aware of cultural misinterpretation, to closing down individuality and spontaneity. Despite Hammond's technical language, I valued her discernment that there is so much more to be revealed.

'You can go now.... You know Miss Wilson, except to count the register and see about the dinner money, there isn't really any need for you to come to school at all as we do everything for ourselves.' The directress took this secretly and very rightly, as the highest compliment.

The adult's duty is to observe the child, not only in order to find the psychological moment to give the necessary instruction along some new path, but also that she may be able to understand its tentative gropings, its doubts, its sudden discoveries, its joyous wonderment; so that nothing – no experience – which comes to the infant shall pass without bearing fruit ...

The essence of the new relationship is a mutual respect between the directress and the children. From this it naturally arises that each considers, as afar as possible, the wishes of the other party.

Yet for some there is reward higher still, but it is not of this world – but rather treasure laid up in heaven. 'For inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my little ones ye have done it to me.'

The whole art ... one might say, lies in knowing when to intervene and when not.

The skill, care and devotion with which the directress gets ready the environment is the very condition of the child's freedom.

To live day by day, month by month, in such a joyous company – for joy is the keynote.

The Feast

A chance to meet ... Mary Hawes

Mary is a trustee of Godly Play UK and for fourteen years she was the National Going for Growth (Children and Youth) Adviser for the Church of England.

Godly Play starts with children – so tell us about when you were a child.

I grew up in the depths of rural Buckinghamshire in a small village called Padbury, the eldest of three children. My mother was a cleaner in the local pub and cottage hospital and my father was a lorry driver. I have fond memories of going out with him in the holidays, either delivering bricks or collecting milk churns. We'd leave the house at first light, armed with a flask of hot sweet tea, and cheese sandwiches which would be sweaty by the time we ate them.



I loved going to church – each Sunday morning a coach would travel round the local villages, picking up congregational members and taking us to the Roman Catholic Church in Buckingham. I was a very pious child – I created a chapel for the Virgin Mary in my bedroom cupboard, and would spend hours in there, lighting candles and being holy!



I also loved school. My infant teacher introduced me to books and when she realised we had none in our house, would bring round the books that were deemed no longer good enough for our classroom library.

Tell us a bit about your family.

Until eight years ago, I thought I was the eldest of three, but after my mother's death I discovered that I had an older brother in Ireland whom I had always thought was my cousin! So my kin-family has expanded to three brothers, three sisters-in-law, four nephews and nieces and a great-niece. My family also includes my godchildren (all now grown with families of their own) and their parents. Never having wanted children of my own, I have delighted in being part of the growing lives of these children.

How did you first come across Godly Play?

At a conference for Anglican Diocesan Children's Advisers, Rebecca Nye introduced us to this new idea she had come across in America. Using animals from her children's farm sets, she told the story of the Good Shepherd – and I was so bored! The slowness, the questions, no set craft – my immediate thought was that it would never catch on and had very little to offer. How wrong can you be!

Thankfully, my nature means that even if I'm not interested in something, I still want to find out more. I attended a couple of more structured days about Godly Play, went on the first three-day training (at which Jerome Berryman was present) and I was hooked!

Why do you think it makes sense?



In a world which rushes from one thing to another, which wants to have certain answers, Godly Play brings something completely counter cultural. The space to stop and wonder is rare. Godly Play offers this within a framework of faith, recognising that children have the capacity to go deeper with God. We know that children are full of questions – but often as adults we are anxious that we need to have the answers. It makes sense to me that the wondering together – and not having to find the answer – enriches all ages. Most ministry with and among children focuses on learning about God, rather than going deeper with God. Knowledge is good – but if divorced from engagement and relationship with the Divine

it only takes us so far. I want children (and adults!) to be discovering how the narrative of our faith makes a difference to the way we live. That's why (for me) Godly Play makes sense.

Do you enjoy what you do?

I love the privilege of being a Trustee of Godly Play. I get to listen to the champions of Godly Play, to be challenged and enriched by them, and to realise that once you've 'got it', Godly Play is a way of life, not just the presentation of a story. My sadness is that we have yet to fully introduce Godly Play within my church.

As the world changes post pandemic, what do you think might be Godly Play's potential?

Post pandemic, many churches have experienced a drop in numbers of children attending. They are struggling to find volunteers to lead children's groups. With its ability to reach a range of ages within a single session, Godly Play offers a practical solution to the numbers challenge.

However, Godly Play isn't about being 'a practical solution' – it requires the commitment to discover and live its ethos and understand the processes it employs. That's big work – but it is work which, if we invest in it, will offer a rich, spiritual experience not just for children, but for the whole church.



Bite-sized news

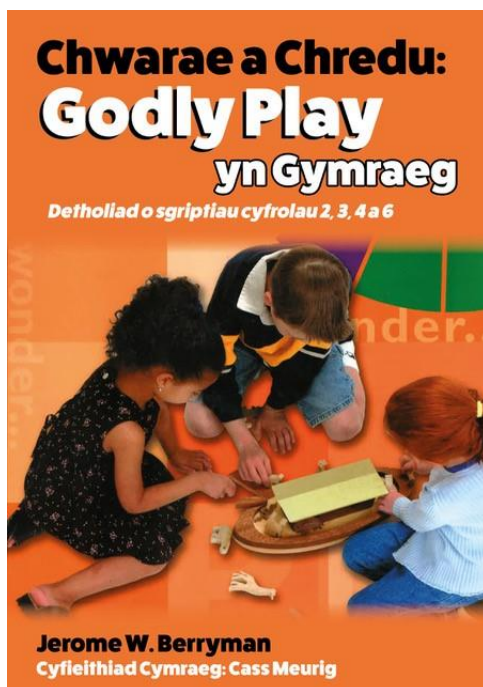
Welsh translations

Cass Meurig is a Godly Play Trainer living in Bala, in North Wales.

Godly Play in Welsh has been a passion for me ever since I started practicing Godly Play 14 years ago. Welsh is the first language of my family, and from the first day of training I felt a vocation to make Godly Play available through this medium. It seemed like a wild dream at the time, especially as I was new to the whole method. However, I knew that I was going to be telling the stories in Welsh myself, so I decided to translate them as I learned them, one by one. Like the journey of Abram and Sarai, it took a long time...



Eventually I had translated all of Volumes 2, 3, 4 and 6. So I contacted the Godly Play Foundation to discuss the way forward. Their advice was to road test the translations myself and to get feedback from others. So I made them available to people who had been trained, used them myself and tweaked things for another few years. In the meantime the Revised and Expanded editions were published, which contained a whole lot more stories and quite a few changes to the originals. So back I went through all the translations, matching them up to the 2nd edition and translating all the new stories! That took another year!



When all of that was done, I contacted the Welsh publishers Cyhoeddiadau'r Gair, who were delighted to take on the project. In conversation with the Godly Play Foundation it was decided to produce a companion volume to the English books; a one-volume book with the scripts and diagrams to Volumes 2, 3, 4 and 6 but without all of the background material of the English volumes. A long discussion followed about what to call it. There really is no satisfactory way of translating 'Godly Play' into Welsh which conveys the same nuance as the English! Every solution didn't quite hit the mark, and in practice we felt that people tend to know the method by its English name anyway. So in the end the title of the volume translates as 'A selection of Godly Play scripts in Welsh'! Snappy eh?

It is exciting to be nearing the end of the project and I am looking forward to using the book and hopefully training others through the medium of Welsh. The next Core Training event in Wales will be in Llandudno on July 13th-15th 2023 led Diana Williams and myself. Although this will be through the medium of English, participants will have the option of practising their stories in Welsh using the new book. And so the journey will continue!

Godly Play at Greenbelt

Festival goers had a chance to experience Godly Play as part of the Greenbelt festival in the beautiful grounds of Boughton House, Kettering last month. A team of Godly Play UK Trainers and volunteers led three full Godly Play sessions in the children's venue, 'Ta Dah', sharing the stories of Creation, The Great Family, and Exile and Return with at least a hundred people of all ages. Our souls were fed by the circles of children and adults who joined us to listen, wonder and respond. We sent them onwards with the Godly Play blessing and the hope that some may take Godly Play with them on their journeys. If you would like to be part of Godly Play at Greenbelt another year, please let us know.

News from the network groups

Local Godly Play Network Groups meet regularly around the country, bringing together people who use Godly Play in a great variety of settings. We asked some group coordinators to tell us a little about the 'body' of people in their Godly Play communities. It is wonderful to read the news of people meeting again.

The Bradford and Leeds Network, facilitated by Mandy Thorlby, is now very small but has continued meeting online throughout the pandemic. Members of the network are using Godly Play in quiet days and adult house groups, in Sunday school, at an after-school club, in services for adults with learning disabilities and as part of worship at a drop-in centre for homeless folk.



A member of the **Bristol Network Group**, Carla, has been using Godly Play with children in church, twice a month (their 'pop-up' Godly Play room is pictured). 'The weeks we don't have a group we have response materials in the church and a story at the beginning of the service. I always invite everyone to use the response materials or work with the story if they want to. We started to do this when we were not having a group due to the Covid restrictions.'

Also in Bristol, Carol's church has been using Godly Play as a discipleship tool for Seniors. 'They like it to be called 'Reflections' and we have been doing it now for some four years. We hand-picked the individuals who had no or little church background and invited them to come for 'Reflections' which we conclude with a 'Feast' of cakes and tea. We have done most of the parables, Advent, Lent and other stories. We have seen real journeying in each of the guests towards faith in Jesus and wouldn't be without this resource now.'

There are about forty people in the **Oxford network**, which meets regularly. In February they shared a full Godly Play session, and in May had a 'creating' session, making Creation or Advent plaques from foam-board and felt, provided at cost. A number of the group are based at Cuddesdon, the Anglican training college, where a three-day Core Training course was held in 2021, with another scheduled for October 2022. Many in the network are fairly new to Godly Play and keen to explore ways to use it in their context. Carol Carter tells us, 'We have been pleased to receive people into our group from other areas of the country and also the world!'

The Norfolk & Norwich network has up to eight Godly Players meeting three times a year in different venues. Fiona Prentice and Trudie Morris manned a Godly Play stand at a recent Diocese of Norwich event for families, children and youth workers, chatting and



networking. The Diocesan Resource Centre has recently completed a stock take of their Godly Play materials which are a great asset to those who cannot have a classroom or those who want to explore a less familiar story.

The Diocese funded a three-day course in May, primarily for teachers and teaching assistants.

The Godly Play presentation on Julian of Norwich was recently used by Liz Cannon at two schools' days at Norwich Cathedral where some 200 children learnt of Julian of Norwich, many for the first time! Trudie Morris has set up Godly Play classroom in her vicarage in North Norfolk and is growing the provision with Saturday morning sessions for children and school visits, while Andrew Whitehead has created a classroom in Cawston church and uses Godly Play in the local school with the children and the governors. The minister of Bowthorpe Worship Centre, Mark Elvin, recently trained as a storyteller with the aim of reaching into local schools and care settings.

Godly Play is increasingly used in all-age services and seems to be greatly valued. Karen, of the Catholic Cathedral in Norwich, finds it particularly helpful to children with additional needs who engage better in a quiet session than a high energy, fast-paced group.



In our September 2021 issue we celebrated the life of Godly Player Louise Clark, who was a member of **Sussex network**. Judy Yeomans tells us that a fund-raising effort in her memory from church, community and the school where she had been Chair of Governors resulted in a significant donation to the school, to be known as 'Louise's Legacy'. This was to be used to establish spaces within the building and grounds to promote opportunities for spiritual reflection and nourishment for the children and staff. Louise's husband, Rob, wanted to donate all her Godly Play resources to the school to help furnish a dedicated Godly Play space. I was able to help Rob sort the resources before spending several afternoons with the RE co-ordinator discussing how best to set up the area and ensure it is well used. I led a staff meeting in which I told the story of the Great Family, introducing Godly Play to some staff for the first time and reminding others of some of the key principles. I was then invited to work with Reception and Year 3 classes who

attended a full session, complete with work time and feast, in the newly established Godly Play area. The children have responded enthusiastically (as always) and some staff have been surprised at the depth of their thinking and responses.

We are now encouraging a parent helper to attend training and perhaps to take on some responsibility for the Godly Play programme. I hope to continue to support the school as they plan how best to use Godly Play within the RE curriculum. It seems that despite a time of great sadness and loss, God's blessings abound.

For more information about regional Godly Play Network Groups, visit <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 £50 and booking is online.

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

To book by email contact admin@godlyplay.uk



Fridays 7 October – 11 November 10 am – 11.30 am

Trainers: Alison Summerskill and Natalie Jones

In-person Introduction to Godly Play

Saturday 15 October – 9.30 am – 3.30 pm

The Cotton Hall, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PN

Trainers: Andrea Harrison and Eona Bell

This day is hosted by the Diocese of Ely. Please book through their website

<https://elydatabase.org/events/view?course=3390>

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 £460) depending on whether the course is residential or not.

Places are still available on all these courses.

8 - 10 November 2022

at Cliff College, Calver in Derbyshire

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

shortcourse@cliffcollege.ac.uk

Trainers: Brenton Prigge and Andrea Harrison

4-6 April 2023

at Cliff College, Calver in Derbyshire

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

shortcourse@cliffcollege.ac.uk

Trainers: Judy Yeomans and Richard Knott

14 - 16 May 2022

at Discover DeCrypt, Gloucester Cost £325 This is a non-residential course.

Trainers: Alison Summerskill and Sian Hancock

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

13 - 15 July 2022

at Loreto Spirituality Centre, Llandudno Cost £460

This is a residential course and can be booked here:

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

Trainers: Cass Meurig and Diana Williams

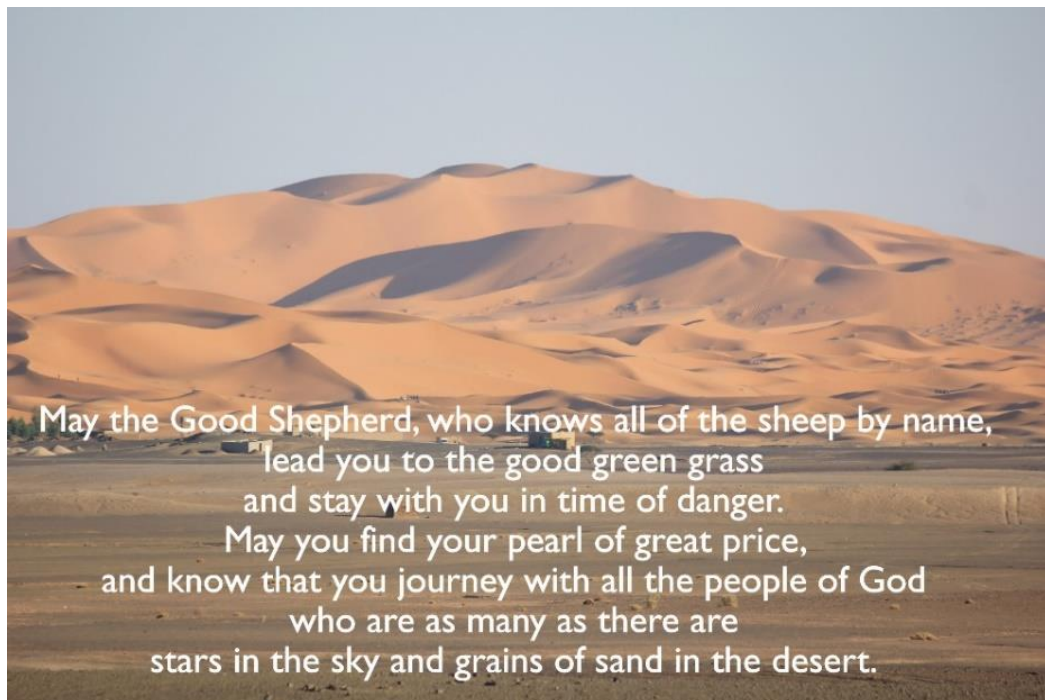


Associates of Godly Play UK support the work of Godly Play trainers in England and Wales. Associate membership offers the chance to be part of our community and to share our vision in a supportive and meaningful way. We welcome membership from individuals, churches, and organisations from the UK and abroad. New members can join using the direct debit form here:

<https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Godly-Play-UK-Associates-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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