



**ASSOCIATES OF
GODLY PLAY UK**



The Magazine

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At the threshold

Welcome... you are so very welcome! We are glad you are here. Are you ready? If not, you know how to make yourself ready. Take all the time you need. When you are ready, cross the threshold and enter. There may be something here that is just for you. Take your time, wonder, and see where it leads you.

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

GODLYPLAY.UK



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Building the circle

There are many voices in this issue. We hear from an Irish guest at our Conference in June and a Polish Godly Player. Peter Privett introduces us to a Festschrift celebrating the work of Jerome Berryman, the Founder of Godly Play, with contributions from all over the world. We read of research investigating the use of Godly Play in Catholic schools and learn about a couple of conferences that people have attended over the summer. We are, above all, delighted that Stuart Lee, the speaker at our conference in June, has provided his keynote address for everyone to read.

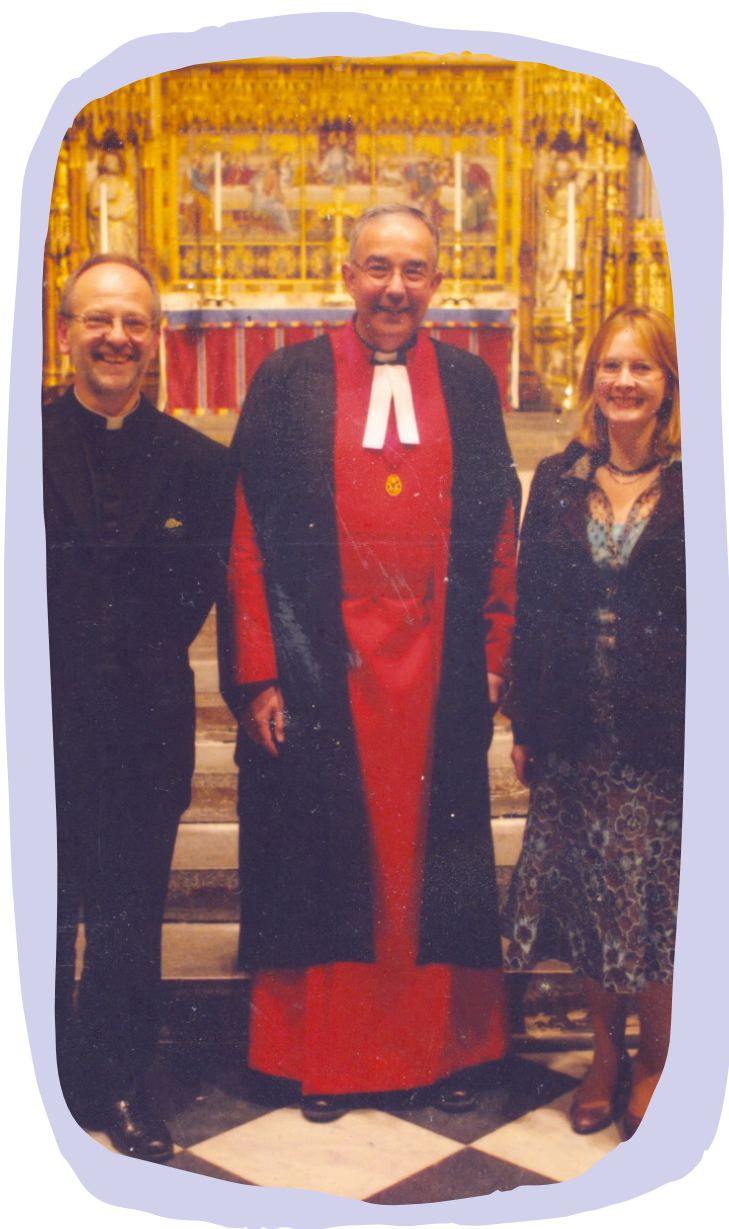
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Godly Play at twenty

Godly Play UK was born twenty years ago. After several pioneering years, a group of people worked together to create a registered charity, to ensure safe financial management and support for the work in the future. Godly Play UK was registered on 25 September 2006 and formally launched at an event in Westminster Abbey on 6 December 2006. In the picture you can see our first trainers, Rebecca Nye and Peter Privett, with the then Dean of Westminster Abbey, the Very Rev'd John Hall.

From that time, the training programme that was already being established grew and developed, led by Rebecca and Peter. A new group of people were trained to be trainers and the number of courses available grew in number and spread across the country.

Of course, over a period of twenty years, people have come and gone. We have had new trainers and new trustees; people have given their time and talents, leaving their mark on the way things have developed, and we are grateful to them all. And we are very proud of all they did; they must have done it very well, for after twenty years, we are still celebrating Godly Play and all that it offers to children and the communities in which they play and grow.



Comings and goings

Welcome to our new trainer! Cathryn Hoard



Cathryn has been working with children ever since she was one - a status that has changed only moderately over the years. An American, Cathryn lived in Turkey between 1990 and 2020. She was first introduced to Godly Play in 2013 at an introduction day in Portland, Oregon. Upon her return to Turkey, she enthusiastically shared what she'd seen and learned about Godly Play with the children's ministry. A year later Di Pagel was sent to train the first cohort of Godly Players in Turkey. In 2022 Cathryn became a certified Trainer of Trainers for Turkey. Today she lives in Oxford and continues to do Godly Play for both her local church in Oxford and a Turkish church in London. We are delighted that she can be one of our UK trainers.

Welcome to our new trustee! Jane Southward

Dr Jane Southward brings a great deal of experience to our Trustee board. A primary school teacher for 22 years, she was an RE co-ordinator and a school governor, as well as being a trustee for an overseas educational charity. Today she is Education Officer at The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk. She first came across Godly Play when she was working in school and fell in love with the approach and strength of Godly Play techniques. It has been a source of inspiration, personal growth and challenge over the years, and she is delighted to be able to serve as a trustee of Godly Play UK.



Thank you to a retiring trustee. Alison Shaw

Alison Shaw is a retired priest who has shared and advocated for Godly Play in Devon and Cornwall for many years. Despite her retirement she is ever busy and now wants to spend more time on Godly Play locally. We are grateful for all she has done and hope that she will long serve children and churches in the South-West of England. Thank you, Alison.

Resources update



We have been encouraged by the response from the Godly Play community over the past few months as we continue to explore new ways of supporting access to resources across the UK.

One exciting development is the launch of our new online shop, where a range of Godly Play resources can now be purchased directly. We hope this will make it easier for people to find and obtain materials

to support their storytelling and ministry. To explore the shop, simply scan the QR code to the left or visit the shop by [clicking here](#).

Behind the scenes, we are also working hard to develop new partnerships and explore future supply options. There is lots of work taking place, and while these conversations take time, we are committed to keeping the community informed of any significant developments as they arise.

At this year's Godly Play Conference, we carried out a survey and were delighted to discover that many people are interested in making some of their own resources. This has opened up exciting possibilities for how we can support and empower storytellers. As a result, we are developing resources, guidance and practical information to help those who would like to create materials themselves.

We are also grateful to the resources team who are currently compiling a comprehensive guide covering every story across all eight Godly Play volumes, together with the resources required for each one. We hope this will become a valuable reference tool for anyone building or expanding their collection of materials. We look forward to sharing an update on this work soon.

We know how important beautiful, well-crafted resources are in Godly Play, and we remain committed to helping communities access the very best materials possible. Whether through our online shop, new supplier partnerships, or supporting those who wish to create their own resources, we are working hard to ensure that Godly Play continues to flourish. Thank you for your encouragement, creativity and support as we develop these exciting new opportunities together. Again, if you know of anyone who may be interested in helping supply hand-crafted Godly Play resources, please do pass on our information to them, as we'd love to have a chat with them.



Feature articles

Godly Play UK Conference 2026

In Children's Shoes...

This year's Godly Play Conference brought together storytellers, practitioners and enthusiasts from across the UK and beyond for a day of inspiration, reflection and shared learning. We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Godly Play Conference such a memorable and enriching event, including our keynote speaker, workshop leaders, volunteers, organisers, and delegates who travelled from near and far, your contributions helped create a day filled with learning, encouragement and community.

Stuart Lee, our keynote speaker, has kindly shared the opening section of his keynote address, while Nóra Lawlor, who came to the conference from Ireland, offers a flavour of the day in a note back to her colleagues.



Containment: creating shape and boundaries that support communication

Written by Stuart Lee

Stuart was the keynote speaker at the Godly Play Conference in Rugby on 6 June. Many people asked whether his text was available, so here, he offers the first section of his talk. We hope that those who were not able to be present will also find something really helpful.

I will be talking about some of the psychological dynamics that lie beneath the structure and practice of Godly Play that, I believe, enable an adult to listen deeply and respond to children and other adults who sit in our circles. I hope that we will be able to think together about these dynamics and how we might best prepare ourselves to create a context in which deep engagement and thinking can enable spiritual learning and growth.

Godly Play in my ministry

You might be wondering why a psychotherapist has been invited to speak about the spiritual lives of children. So, I wanted to share a little bit of my own journey and how all this material has come together for me.

I was ordained as an Anglican priest in 2000 after a brief career in the theatre. Pretty soon I was introduced to Godly Play. I did my core three-day course a couple of years later in London and I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that it was life changing. It not only gave me a new way to interact with Scripture and the stories of the Christian tradition, but it gave me the experience that these stories actually work on us. They have their own agenda that they play out in our individual inner worlds, an experience that will be unique for each of us. No two people who watch and listen to someone doing their best to remember a story and moving a few bits of wood about have the same experience. It is there, I believe, that the Spirit dances in Godly Play and it does what it wants. But the environment has to be right, and that is what I will be speaking about today. There were times when I sat in Godly Play



circles where I truly felt I understood what it meant to be a Christian minister. Conversations, thinking and emotions could be experienced and explored there that I struggled to open up in other contexts in the parish. This led me to train as a spiritual director and then as a psychotherapist as it was precisely these types of conversations that I came to believe were of most value in fostering psychological and spiritual growth in an individual and in a community.

The more I participated in Godly Play and, later, began to train others, I felt that there were some deep psychotherapeutic principles that supported the practice. Although I promised to write a paper for the newsletter or for other trainers, I failed miserably. It is only after having a few years away from Godly Play that these ideas have crystalised, and I feel ready to share them.



Stuart delivering his talk at this year's conference.

The theory of Containment

The three things I will speak about are containment, reverie and symbolic thinking. In this article we shall focus on 'containment' alone. I believe that if we consciously know a little more about these principles, then we have a structure to think about why Godly Play can be so powerful and effective, and we can think about what it is in us and in our practice that can be nurtured and supported, if we are truly to be of service to those we sit with. Having reviewed what I wanted to say, it struck me that much of what we have to offer in Godly Play rests upon empathy, the experience of getting into someone else's shoes, of really getting a sense of their experience, hence the title of the conference, In Children's Shoes.

The experience of empathy

Empathy is a fundamentally Christian dynamic, rooted in God's reaching out to walk in human shoes through Jesus. But I want to go a little bit deeper than the usual thinking about empathy. I want us to think about what the experience of empathy feels like, what effects it has on those who experience it, and what we can cultivate in ourselves to give the experience of deep understanding and acceptance to others so that it can lead to spiritual creativity and growth.

Now, when I say that I perceive some important psychotherapeutic principles, I am not suggesting that we are doing psychotherapy when we do Godly Play. We are not, and we should not intend to. But if we understand what lies behind the creation of a supportive and nurturing relationship then we can better provide the conditions for a life-giving exploration and opportunity to nourish the soul.

The significance of spiritual experience

My background is predominantly in psychoanalytic, psychodynamic and Jungian therapy. This is a strand of psychological thinking that always tries to be curious about what lies beneath the surface, aware that words, images and emotions can reveal something far deeper than the surface appearance; accepting that there is always more that is as yet unknown, as yet not understood. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, believed that our spiritual and religious longings were somehow pathological and problematic, that they revealed where our development had gone wrong or got stuck. His one-time protégé, Carl Jung, went through his own profound spiritual experience and he believed something quite different. Jung was well aware that our spiritual and religious yearnings could get derailed and cause havoc, but he believed that they were an essential and healthy aspect of human experience and potential growth. But he did not just believe that, he came to know it as well.

Every spiritual journey is created in the chemistry between the life of the individual, the life of the divine and the life of the community in which we find ourselves.

This is why every spiritual journey is unique and has its own story; and those stories matter. But what sort of space is needed to tell these stories and do this sort of thinking?

Containment



Pictured above: a slide from Stuart's PowerPoint presentation to accompany his talk.

'Containment'

This brings me to the first psychological dynamic that I want to introduce and think about. 'Containment' is a word that is part of the core vocabulary of counsellors, psychotherapists, and psychiatrists and it is a concept that is key to mental health. However, it refers to a fundamental experience that all of us need and is an important condition in situations where we have the potential to learn or grow. That means it is also important for our spiritual health.

The theory of 'containment' comes from Wilfred Bion. He was born at the end of the nineteenth century in North India and after serving in the First World War, he trained as a doctor and later as a psychoanalyst. Psychoanalysis is one of the deepest and most intensive forms of psychotherapy. He learned from a woman called Melanie Klein, who developed her theories from her work with young children. She had this idea – crazy at the time – that children were complex individuals who are best supported through observation and curiosity rather than discipline. There's a link with Maria Montessori there, I think.

Klein certainly shaped Bion's thinking, but I think there are several factors in Bion's early life that make the development of his theory of containment especially poignant.

Bion was born in colonial India, into a British community dominated by hierarchy, tradition, and order. A community that used violent subjugation to control whatever was considered unruly or disorderly. As a very young boy he was sent away to an English boarding school, and a system which fostered the tradition of the stiff upper lip. During the First World War he encountered previously unimaginable horrors which resulted in thousands of returning soldiers suffering with shellshock, what we would now call post-traumatic stress disorder. So, out of this rather controlling and traumatic background, perhaps it is no surprise that Bion developed a theory about how people manage thoughts and emotions. But more than that, it is a theory about the way feelings and thoughts are managed in the context of relationship, and I think our Godly Play circles are places where things can emerge in the context of relationship.

What is the theory?

The theory goes something like this. The young infant is subject to physical sensations, maybe hunger, maybe a squidgy, full nappy, maybe a sense of coldness sweeping across the skin. The baby has no way to ask for what it needs. In fact, the baby doesn't even have language or mental structures to think about their experience. This simply leaves them with an intolerable, uncomfortable sensation and their only way to communicate this is to cry or scream. In psychological language we would say that the baby is unable to 'contain' its experience.

The caregiver can respond in two ways. They might sense the baby's panic and panic themselves. Or, they can look at the child and wonder about what is going on. This is the beginning of containment. The caregiver has become a 'container' where the unbearable and unthinkable experiences of the infant can be endured and thought about.

The caregiver might go a step further, she might say something to the baby like, 'You're feeling angry. I'm not surprised, you've got a big smelly nappy.' So now, what was unbearable and unthinkable has a word – anger – and it becomes something that can be named and thought about. The caregiver has 'contained' and given shape to something that was previously overwhelming and given it back in a way that the infant can, over time, make sense of.

When this experience is repeated again and again, the infant builds up its own structure of containment, whereby even difficult thoughts and feelings can be endured, thought about, communicated.

But let's be clear about what containment is not in this context. It is not simply rushing to give a feed, change the baby, or put a blanket on. It is not just comforting the baby, cuddling it and saying, 'There, there darling'. Containment is something that happens in the context of a relationship where an experience can be thought about, frustration and difficulty can be endured, where thinking, language and communication come before action. Containment gives shape and boundary to something which previously seemed scarily shapeless and overwhelming, and it depends on someone else already having a reliable psychological and emotional 'container' of their own.

Now, we might well ask, 'Why are we talking about infants and babies and nappies?' Well, this process of early 'containment' is the same process through which most of our emotional, mental and spiritual learning and development happens throughout life. The context changes, but the process remains the same.

Here, you might like to consider what needs 'containment' in the Godly Play process.

Stuart's seminar: In
Children's Shoes...
continuing the
conversation.



Shape and boundary

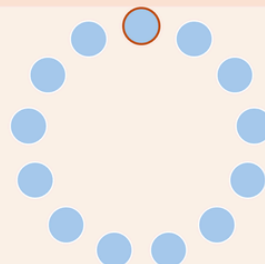
Let us now consider the significant idea of shape and boundary. This is the internal, psychological shape and boundary that the caregiver has, and which is gradually transmitted to the infant through wondering and communication. These are also expressed through concrete aspects of the environment. For the caregiver, it might be setting up a consistent routine that helps manage lots of competing demands. They also might try to arrange the environment in such a way as to make things easier: nappies, towels and bottles need to be ready and in reach. Some may be fortunate enough to create a dedicated space where everything that is needed is easily to hand and relatively tidy and ordered; others must do the best with what they have.

What Godly Play offers in this context

It seems to me that Godly Play's attention to the physical environment can also offer these concrete aspects of containment. I think of the consistency of time and space that we try to offer; the simplicity and accessibility of materials; the enclosing of the space to avoid intrusion or distraction; the careful putting away of materials after they have been used to explore ideas and feelings.

Pictured below: a slide from Stuart's PowerPoint Presentation to accompany his talk.

Containment in Godly Play – What are we containing?



I know how difficult it can be to ensure these things in a church or school environment but, considering the idea of containment, we can see why they matter and how they contribute to the effectiveness of the process. The physical environment supports the sense of emotional containment that the adults hope to offer.

So, containment exists in at least two ways or on two levels. There is the emotional and psychological containment that a caregiver or teacher can provide through their attitude; and there is the concrete, environmental containment that a space that has been well thought-about and cared for can provide. And they support each other. Trying to be attentive and thoughtful in a space where there is mess and distraction is very difficult.

Environmental containment in Godly Play

I hope I have given you an idea of the psychological concept of containment and how Godly Play has the potential to offer this experience to those who sit in our circles. When Godly Play works, I think it is because we have offered or been offered an experience of 'containment'.

Pictured above: a slide from Stuart's PowerPoint Presentation to accompany his talk.

A Note from Nóra

Written by Nóra Lawlor

Nóra Lawlor attended the Conference from Dublin. Here is her letter back to her Godly Play colleagues in Ireland.

On Friday June 5th, I took myself off to Rugby near Birmingham to take part in the Godly Play UK Conference 2026. The theme for the conference was In Children's Shoes, and it was hosted in St Andrew's Anglican Church.

Friday was an Enrichment Day and there were many choices of 'hands on activities' activities in working groups. I chose 'Jesus and the Women' and after gathering together, our group got down to making materials. Working in a group allowed us time to get to know each other and to share experiences.

We enjoyed a shared lunch, and in the afternoon the story was beautifully told. There was excellent wondering and some humour! We were then invited to view the amazing dedicated Godly Play room at St Andrew's. This permanent working area with its resources was the envy of many, including me.

We got a little free time in the late afternoon and returned for a shared dinner in the Church at 6pm. It was beautifully laid out and a lot of care, love and thought went into the preparation. We again sat in groups and shared our experiences of Godly Play practice. I left for an early night in my hotel, recommended by the conference team, and 10 minutes from St Andrew's, as I had left Dublin at 7am.

We gathered again on Saturday morning, joined by some new people and chatted over coffee. But there was a treat in store for the Godly Play 'Pop Up' shop, full of nice materials, was open. A book stall also featured. The centrepiece of the morning was the keynote speech by Stuart Lee, a psychotherapist and former Godly Play Trainer. He spoke about developing ourselves within the practice of Godly Play and made some key points.

- Being aware of the child's mind
- Understanding how unique the child's mind is, as is ours too.
- Thinking before action
- Holding on to the moment and letting wondering sit.

There was indeed plenty of wondering inspired by Stuart's presentation.

After lunch there were other workshops offered. I chose 'Supporting Neurodiverse Children in Godly Play'. It proved to be a good choice, especially as there were parents of neurodiverse children present, who are also working at Godly Play. This was eyes, ears and mind-opening, and gave huge food for thought.

In truth I felt a little lonely going on my own from Dublin, but I was given a huge warm welcome. There were about 60 participants from all over the UK and a few from further afield including the USA, Latvia and Norway. There was a real sense of being at one with the spirit of Godly Play. The experience they had and their openness to sharing was uplifting. I would recommend others in Godly Play Ireland to consider attending such conferences. I came away feeling nourished. Now let's see where it goes!

Godly Play in Catholic Schools – a research project

Written by Sue Price, edited by Gill Ambrose

Godly Play UK has worked with the Catholic Education Service to research and pioneer the use of Godly Play in Roman Catholic Primary Schools. Here is some of the learning, distilled from the final Report on the research.



If you'd like to read the full report, you can do so by scanning the QR code above or clicking on the image to the right.



When the Catholic Education Service (CES) launched a new Religious Education Directory (RED) in 2025, it suggested that ‘methods that advocate the “telling” of passages with the use of concrete materials, such as “Godly Play”, can also be very useful with young children.’ However, nothing in the Directory explained what Godly Play is! So, working in collaboration, a bid was made to the Sisters of the Holy Cross for grant funding for a research project to explore a way to implement the inclusion of Godly Play within the RE and Prayer and Liturgy curriculums in Roman Catholic schools. This provided funding to enable teachers from 11 primary school to undertake a three-day training with support for the acquisition of resources and some follow-up sessions. A follow-up report described the project and its impact on those who attended, including the challenge and opportunities of establishing the approach within a school context.

The course was led by Andrea Harrison, a Godly Play trainer, supported by Sue Price, an Advocate and lecturer at the Margaret Beaufort Theological Institute, and Maureen Glacklin of the Catholic Education Service.

The Godly Play approach sits well within the two-fold process for an authentic reading of Sacred Scripture as defined by the RED. A first level involves analysing passages, noting 'the presence of literary techniques, including figurative language, analogy contrast, dialogue, repetition, as well as attending to the circumstances of writing (author and community)' (RED, 2023: 22). The second element invites a more reflective, experiential engagement with Scripture which 'allows the reality of faith expressed in the words that are studied to be uncovered' (RED, 2023: 22), 'moving attention from the head to the heart', as pupils are invited to read and understand Scripture through the eyes of faith. This hermeneutical approach challenges teachers and pupils to become 'credible interpreters and translators' of their own cultural tradition and heritage so that they have the opportunity to encounter God through the reality of faith expressed in the Scripture studied (Pope Francis, 2020, cited in RED, 2023: 23).

A much greater emphasis is placed on Scripture than in previous Catholic Education curriculum directories, making it challenging for both teachers and pupils to adjust. But children and teachers discover that 'wondering' is freeing them to look deeper and discover more. Children are able to take ownership of their learning and Godly Play offers opportunities to bridge the gap between the RE curriculum and prayer. Where the Godly Play scripts are used as class prayer linked to the Scripture of the RE lesson, the children have a richer encounter with the Word of God.

The Training Course

Four introductory online sessions with the specific aim of 'Building the circle', studying Rebecca Nye's book *Children's Spirituality: What it is and*

why it matters, helped the group to get to know each other. The three-day training course ran from Sunday afternoon until Wednesday after lunch.



Working with the story of Noah

On the final morning, the group looked at the Godly Play liturgical action stories and discussed the ways that Godly Play could support not only the RED, but also prayer and liturgy in school.

There emerged a profound sense that the course had been transformative. One participant reflected: ***"You go to a one-day course and get talked at all day and are then expected to take that learning back into your school. Here, I have had an opportunity to be totally immersed in something and really practise and learn it. It has given me confidence to try it in school now."***

“

It has taught me to value wonder and open-endedness.



Exploring the story of Creation

Following the Training Course

Not surprisingly, once the group returned to the time pressure of school, it was hard to implement immediately what they had learnt. For some, the priority was to create a room to become a Godly Play space; for others, it was finding a way of sharing their enthusiasm with other staff members, either through an in-service twilight session or by inviting a local Godly Play trainer to come into the school.

A couple of participants had managed to tell a Godly Play story and were amazed at the response

and the depth of the children's engagement. For one nursery teacher, who had told the Creation story to her class, the verbal responses were at a depth that she had not heard before. She noticed that the conversation continued into play, especially when they went outside. Interestingly, these very young children asked for the story again, and enjoyed it even more.

The Webinar

As well as preparing a report, it was decided to hold a webinar to share the results of the research. The recording is available and has been circulated widely, with an invitation to watch a YouTube video of a Godly Play session.



Scan the QR code on the left or [click here](#) to watch the Webinar



Scan the QR code on the right or [click here](#) to watch the Godly Play session



This has been used for training within schools. What was evident throughout the webinar was participants' enthusiasm for this approach to enhance the RED and the PLD.

Conclusions

While using Godly Play in the RED is not the only method that can support the children's learning, what emerged very strongly is that Godly Play is more than 'useful', encouraging children's spiritual formation and their experience of prayer and liturgy and a valuable process to introduce into the whole ethos of the Catholic life, worship and prayer within a Catholic School.

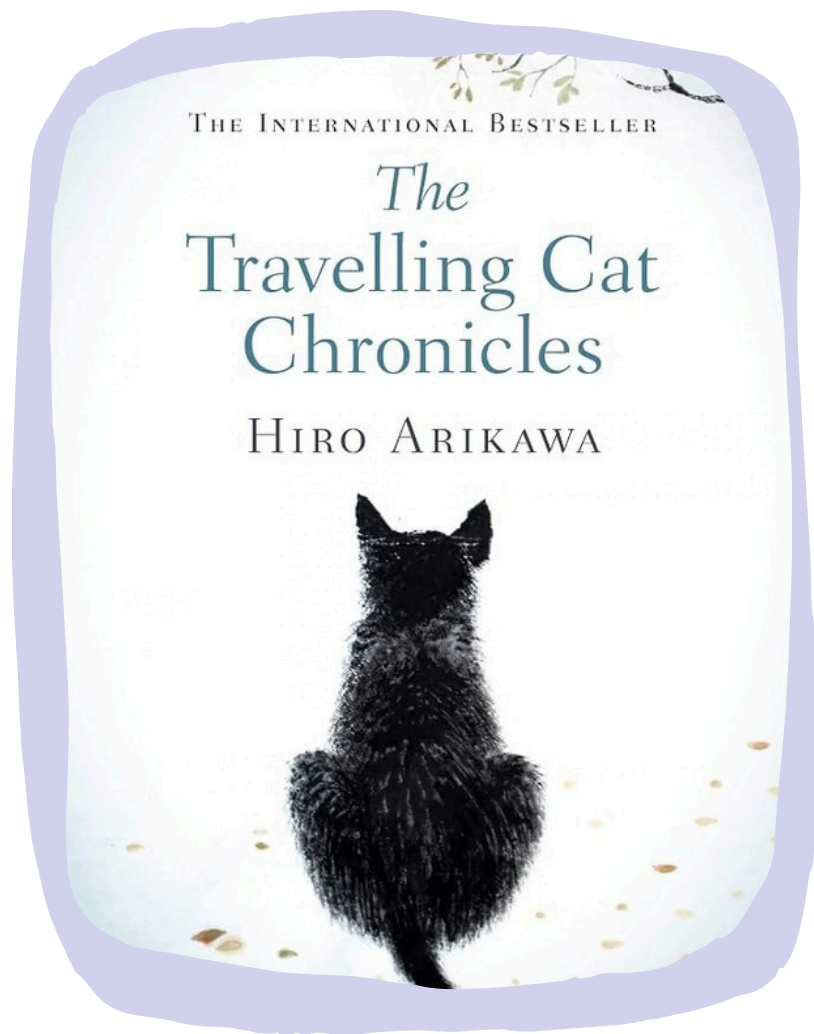
Taking your wondering further...

Book reviews

The Travelling Cat Chronicles by Hiro Arikawa , translated by Philip Gabriel, Penguin, 2017

Reviewed by Mine Yildirim

I deeply enjoyed reading The Travelling Cat Chronicles by Japanese author Hiro Arikawa, translated into English by Philip Gabriel this summer. Even after finishing it I kept the book on my bedside table for weeks as a tangible reminder of the emotions that the book evoked. It is a sweet and deeply moving novel about a man, Satoru, and his cat, Nana. Nana begins life as a stray, but after being injured he is taken in by Satoru, and the two gradually form a relationship built on affection, loyalty and quiet companionship. Years later, Satoru takes Nana on a journey across Japan, visiting old friends from different stages of his life as he tries to find Nana a new home, knowing soon he will not be able to take care of him. Each visit opens a window into Satoru's past and into the friendships that have shaped him.



What stayed with me most was the journey back into Satoru's childhood. Through Satoru's memories, we see how profoundly our earliest friendships and experiences can shape the adults we become. His childhood friends are not simply people from his past; they have each left something within him — kindness, resilience, loyalty and an ability to understand the feelings of others. In particular, the friendships formed when Satoru is young help him through difficult experiences. He carries these into adulthood.

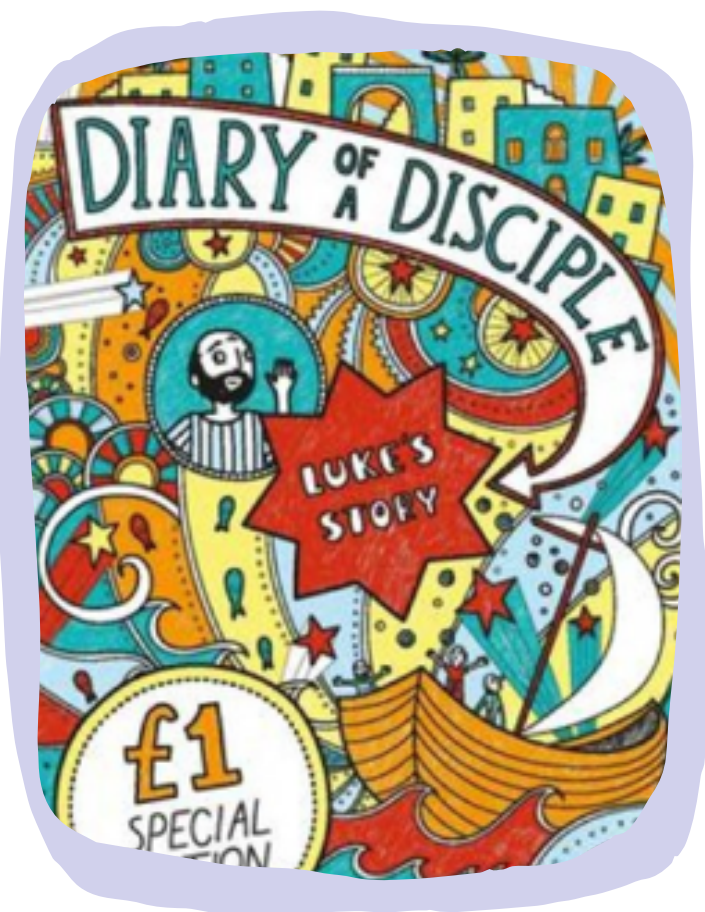
I was also moved by the insights children possess. Children often understand things in a very direct way. They can recognise loneliness, loyalty, love and unfairness without needing complicated explanations or even naming them. This is integral to their spirituality. Nana's observations and instinctive understanding of human attachment is also interesting. The relationship between Satoru and Nana made me think about how friendship does not always depend on words. Sometimes simply being present for another living being is an expression of love.

For me, the book ultimately became a reflection on childhood and how we carry it through life. The Travelling Cat Chronicles made me think about how the child we once were is still somewhere inside the adult we become.



Diary of a Disciple: Luke's Story, Gemma Willis, Illustrated by Emma Randall, Scripture Union, 2016

Reviewed by Gill Ambrose



Here is St Luke's Gospel in the style of The Diary of a Wimpy Kid (only more so!) It's been around a while but if you haven't seen it, you may like to look. We gave it alongside a Bible to Year 6 leavers at the school where I have been a governor.

This is a publication very much not in the style of Godly Play, but I feel it would be a good addition to a room for children who might like to read during response time. The structure parallels the chapters in the Gospel, and the text covers the narrative and teaching sequentially. Of course, any rewrite and paraphrase of a biblical text will be value-laden, and this is no exception, but the book provides an opportunity to encounter the shape and form of Luke's message in a fun and accessible way for children who like this kind of writing.



The Feast

Celebrating Jerome Berryman's Life and Work 1937-2014

Written by Peter Privett

Jerome Berryman's lifelong work has had a worldwide influence as he has honoured, supported and enlarged our understanding of children's lives.

In the summer this year, various people from around the world have recorded their own recollection of that influence in a special **Festschrift**. Festschrift is a German word literally meaning a feast (Fest) of writing (Schrift).

You can find the articles using an internet search on **'The Journal of Childhood and Religion, Special Issue 2026'**. The Journal is open to everyone, and the articles are a rich feast of experiences of personal transformation, insights from Godly Play practice and thought-provoking essays exploring Godly Play's contribution to theology and spirituality.

Heather Ingersoll, in the introductory article, uses this quote from Jerome:

*"We create creating in others, as God created creating in us. *"*

It might be worth stopping reading now and just spend some time allowing those words to sit and sink in. Heather suggests that the articles are part of Jerome's creative legacy.

There isn't enough room here to give a description of each article, and I am reluctant to single out one or two by saying, 'Oh you must read these!' In true Montessori principles, you must decide that for yourselves. All I can say is, 'Go and open the Journal link and start reading.' Then perhaps you might create your own Festschrift.

In what ways has Jerome's work been a feast for you?

In what ways have children during Godly Play sessions and other settings been a feast, not in just what they said or did but in who they are?

In what ways has your practice changed because of Jerome's work?

How might you Schrift these experiences. In other words, how might you share these experiences so that you might encourage others? How might you create creating in others as God created creating in you?

In what ways have YOU been changed?

In what ways has your thinking been changed?

* Berryman, Jerome W. 'Playing in the Flow of God's Creative Power: A Theology of Childhood.' In Let the Children Lead: Exploring Children's Spirituality Today, edited by Elizabeth DeGaynor. VTS Press, 2023.

A Chance to Meet – a story from Krakow in Poland

Edited by Mine Yildirim

Godly Play UK trainer Mine Yildirim, interviews Patrycja Prostak, who is a trainer and storyteller in Krakow, in the south of Poland.

I came to know about Patrycja's work through her Instagram account. I was initially drawn to the beautiful photos of the Godly Play room – the colors, children and the inviting nature of the space. As I followed her, I discovered the depth of her commitment, understanding and engagement with Godly Play. She also generously shares her knowledge and passion with others. Recently, I was inspired by her work to do a Good Friday retreat for children called The Emotions of Easter, based on her sensory retreats. She kindly shared the concept and text with me. It was a deeply meaningful and moving experience for me, volunteers and the children who took part. I am therefore very happy and privileged to introduce her to you.



GPUK Trainer: Mine Yildirim



GP Polish Trainer: Patrycja Prostak



Godly Play in Poland

Patrycja, can you tell us a little bit about yourself, including how you came to know Godly Play?



I am a wife and mother, an employee of a government agency, a storyteller, a Godly Play trainer and a leader of Godly Play in Poland. For more than eleven years, I have been sitting on the floor in a circle with children, and it is definitely one of my favorite places on earth.

I first heard about the method some years ago from my child's religious education teacher, who sent me a link to a YouTube video presenting the Advent Godly Play story. I watched it and immediately fell in love; it was love at first sight! I wanted to know more and learn more about the method, so with the help of friends I bought The Complete Guide to Godly Play from the United States. I read everything that was available about the method online at that time: blogs, articles, stories, anything I could find. Gradually, together with my husband, I began introducing Godly Play stories and creating handmade materials at my local parish.

Those were crazy times: we created materials at home based only on YouTube videos, with a limited budget and very modest equipment. Fortunately, my talented husband rose creatively to the challenge and today I can proudly and joyfully say that the Godly Play room at the Lutheran parish in Krakow is now almost fully equipped.



How was your discernment process about becoming a GP trainer?



My journey to becoming a Godly Play storyteller, and later a trainer, has been full of surprises and small miracles. During the first years, I explored and practised the method on my own, doing what was realistically possible for me at the time as a mother of six children. I studied books, stories, videos, and blogs, practised the method regularly, and reflected deeply on my own experience.

I dreamed, of course, of taking part in a Core Training, but traveling abroad was not possible because of family responsibilities, work commitments, and financial limitations. But everything is possible with God – instead of me going to the training, the training came to me. In 2021, together with Monika Auzemery from Godly Play Suisse Romande, I co-organised the first Core Training in Poland. It was led by Andrew Sheldon, then Godly Play Advocate for International Development, and in this way, after six years of leading a Godly Play Sunday school programme in my parish, I finally became a certified storyteller. Some time later, Andrew invited me, on behalf of the US Godly Play Foundation, to take part in trainer formation, and in 2023 I became the first homegrown Polish Godly Play trainer.





Tell us about Godly Play in Poland or Krakow?



The official beginning of the Godly Play method in Poland dates back to 2021, the year of the first Core Training. However, awareness of the method and the first stories had already been introduced in Krakow around 14–15 years earlier. Agnieszka Godfrejow-Tarnogorska, then a religious education teacher in the Lutheran parish in Krakow, began incorporating elements of the method into Sunday school classes while also sharing information about Godly Play with other Lutheran parishes.

After she moved to another city, I took responsibility for the Krakow group of children eleven years ago and began equipping the newly established Godly Play room with handmade materials and more stories according to the spiral curriculum. Following the Core Training in 2021, I co-established the Godly Play Poland Foundation with the goal of promoting and developing the method in Poland. Since then, the use of the method in Poland has been growing slowly but steadily. At present, there are around sixty trained storytellers in Poland, and new Godly Play rooms and spaces are being created where sessions are held, including schools, parishes, and even in a hospice. I myself volunteer regularly, leading weekly sessions both in Sunday school and in a Christian primary school (except holidays and summer time).

What is especially beautiful and unique about Godly Play in Poland is that it has reached communities and environments of many different Christian denominations, and continues to develop in an ecumenical spirit.



In addition to having regular GP sessions in your Godly Play room you also designed themed retreats for children. How did it come to be? Can you walk us through a typical retreat?



The idea for the themed sensory retreats first emerged in 2017 while I was preparing a Palm Sunday musical performance with children for our church entitled The Tale of the Three Trees. It is a beautiful and profound story with a strong evangelistic message. At the time, I realised that I wanted the children not simply to perform it for others, but to have the opportunity to explore its meaning deeply for themselves – slowly, peacefully, and without stress or tension.

Around the same time, I attended a workshop about the place of neurodivergent children in church life, and encountered the idea of thematic play centres. Combined with the contemplative, sensory, and reflective approach already present in Godly Play, this inspired the creation of retreats built around stations of reflection, prayer and sensory experience.

The first retreats I designed explored themes from The Tale of the Three Trees. Because the children responded to this format so well, I continued creating further thematic sensory retreats for different liturgical seasons, especially Advent and Lent. These have included Journey to Bethlehem, Women of Christmas, The Names of Jesus, The Emotions of Holy Week, The Alphabet of Christmas, The Colors of Holy Week, and a few others.

During the sensory retreats, children individually visit ten stations, in an order they choose themselves and at their own pace. Each station is a carefully prepared space for pause and reflection. There they encounter a short meditation, dedicated visual symbols or artwork, a Bible verse, sometimes a prayer, and a variety of sensory activities that help the children engage more deeply with the theme of that station.

The children might listen to music, taste food, touch different materials, gaze at visuals, manipulate some objects and sometimes simply learn to spend time in silence. They are given space to explore what feels meaningful to them, search for their own answers to the questions sometimes posed at the stations, and perform symbolic gestures or actions. At the same time, they develop motor and cognitive skills – all within the spirit of contemplative play.

When the children have visited all the stations, we gather together in a circle sitting on the floor for a closing reflection. We talk about which station they liked the most, which one felt most important, most surprising, or most difficult. And it probably comes as no surprise that the stations involving food or candle-lighting are usually the favourites, while remaining in silence is often the greatest challenge.

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The idea for the themed sensory retreats began in 2017 while I was preparing a Palm Sunday presentation with children, based on The Tale of the Three Trees. I realised that I wanted the children not simply to perform the story, but also to enter into it personally, slowly and without pressure.

Around the same time, I attended training about the place of neurodivergent children in church life and encountered the idea of themed play centres. Combined with the contemplative and sensory approach already present in Godly Play, this inspired the creation of retreats built around stations of reflection, prayer, and sensory experience.

Since then, I have created retreats for different seasons of the Church year, especially Advent and Lent. During the retreats, children usually move through around ten stations at their own pace and in their own chosen order. Each station includes a short reflection, a Bible verse, visual elements, and sensory activities that help children engage more deeply with the theme.

The children listen, touch, taste, make symbolic gestures, and sometimes simply practise silence and attentiveness. At the end, we gather together in a circle to reflect on the experience. Unsurprisingly, the stations involving food or candles are usually the favourites.



How has the experience been for the volunteers and the children that have taken part in these?



Children take part in the retreats with great joy and curiosity. They really look forward to them and enjoy discovering what has been prepared for them. One child once said: 'It is a good time when I can learn a lot, touch things, think, and do it in a way that suits me.'

The experience has also been very meaningful for the adult volunteers accompanying the children at the stations. Many speak about trust, attentiveness, and mutual learning. One volunteer reflected that instead of guiding children step by step, you learn to trust that they are capable of finding their own way and answers.

Others highlight the calm atmosphere, the simplicity of the materials, and the fact that the retreats often become a space of reflection for adults as well. In that sense, they are not only for children, but for the whole church community.



What would you advise someone who would like to give a try to organising a retreat for children perhaps for Christmas or next Easter?



I would suggest beginning with one biblical story or simple theme. Then think about how the senses might help children engage more deeply with it through sound, touch, taste, visual elements, or silence.

You do not need a large budget or perfect materials. What matters most is creating a space that invites children to slow down, reflect, and discover things for themselves. Very ordinary objects and simple ideas can become deeply meaningful.

I also think beauty and atmosphere matter very much as children are sensitive to these things. Simplicity does not have to mean superficiality.

In a world full of noise and hurry, sensory retreats can become an invitation for both children and adults to pause, listen, and experience the biblical stories more deeply, including Christmas and Easter.



How do you nourish yourself as a GP storyteller and trainer?



For me, everything begins with caring for relationships. Above all, my own relationship with God; also my relationships with the children entrusted to me, and with other enthusiasts of the method. I pray, seek God's guidance, and try to keep deepening my understanding of the method. I read books and articles about children's spirituality, revisit the Godly Play publications, listen to podcasts, and continue leading regular sessions. Simply being with children gives me an incredible boost and motivation to keep growing so that I can serve them even better.

After those first lonely years of learning the method and leading sessions on my own, when I often felt as though I was finding my way through a fog, meeting other Godly Play enthusiasts in Poland and abroad became especially valuable to me. That is why I try to take part in Godly Play events whenever I can, both online and in person. So perhaps, see you in Budapest in August at the European Godly Play Conference?



Would you like to add anything else?



If you would like to get a glimpse of more of my Godly Play practice, sensory retreats, and other creative ideas connected with my work with children, you are very welcome to visit my Instagram profile:

[@godlyplaywkrakowie](#)



Reflection on the Godly Play European Conference

Written by Mine Yildirim

Mine Yildirim travelled to Budapest for this summer conference

This was my first time attending the European Godly Play Conference, held in Hungary from 20–23 August, and I really wanted to go, so I put it in my diary as soon as I heard about it. I didn't really know what to expect, but as the keynote speakers and workshops became clear, I looked forward to it even more. The programme was very varied, with keynote talks, Godly Play sessions, workshops, worship and time to meet Godly Players from different countries and contexts. There were workshops covering both practical and theological topics, including making meaningful materials, translating Godly Play stories, working with vulnerable communities, Godly Play with older people, supporting parents and caregivers, and exploring the theology within the stories.

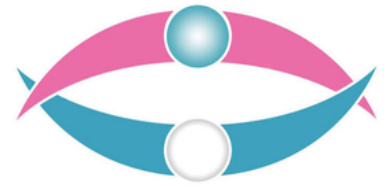
For me, one of the best parts was joining a full Godly Play session every day, except for the final day. I found this really nourishing. It was good to be able to take part as a participant and simply experience the session rather than thinking about leading it. It gave me time to slow down, listen and wonder, and reminded me how important it is to have opportunities to receive Godly Play as well as facilitate it.

I took part in the workshops Making Materials from Wool and Felt- I made a whale, Godly Play for All and Coming Close to My Childhood Spirituality. The session on Godly Play for All, particularly thinking about children with special educational needs, was important to me. I wanted to learn more and feel better prepared for when we have children or adults with SEN in the circle. The workshop on childhood spirituality also stayed with me, as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own childhood and experiences of spirituality and to share these and listen to others' experiences. It made me think about the experiences and questions – often unspoken – that children already bring with them into a Godly Play circle.

I really appreciated being with Godly Players from different countries and hearing about their experiences. It was encouraging to see the many different ways Godly Play is being used in different contexts. Meeting new people and reconnecting with friends I hadn't seen for a while was a real joy.

Godly Play Hungary, our hosts, also did a great job. Even though they are quite new, they cared for us very well and created a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Having a companion for the journey, traveling with my co-trainer, Jeanny, sharing the experience with someone I already work closely with, was great.

International Association of Children Spirituality



Written by Peter Privett

Peter Privett attended this conference in the summer

In July this year the International Association for Children's Spirituality had its annual conference in Canterbury. People gathered from around the world to explore different insights into children's spirituality in a time of global change. The title, 'Roots of Hope' helped us explore ways in which the spirit of the child might be best supported. I can only give a glimpse of what I experienced as I couldn't attend everything.

What did I like?

The conference was an assortment of recent academic research, practical discussion and workshops. The participants included academics and practitioners from the wider world of education. It was good to see that many were from the worldwide Godly Play community as well. Three days offered a rich, stimulating variety of subject. There was the fascinating research into spirituality before verbal language. This project examined the variety of body movements, the different nonverbal responses of babies during their baptism. An inspiring headteacher of a Catholic secondary school in London spoke of a project exploring parables by pupils, who were at first reluctant, writing their own poetry. A session of how popular culture might support spirituality focused on how children might make meaning for themselves. Children's self-independence and children taking charge of their own lives was a recurring theme throughout the three days.

What was important for me?

I was impressed by how non-religious institutions were beacons of hope. Their commitment of time, energy, expertise and resources were applied to support and uphold the spirit of the child. I found it challenging when I compared it to the lack of quality of resources and time that the church sometimes gives to the research of the same

subject. Repeatedly there was the suggestion that time for process was important instead of pressure of producing more content. Repeatedly there was a plea for silence and reflection as means of supporting children and requests for spaces and environments where children could explore their own spirituality.

Where was I in this experience?

One session explored the theme of how we as adults might affect children's lives. You can have all the right educational equipment, but it all depends on how the educators are. There was an open session about how autobiography might be used as a tool for research. It asked how an experience of the adult might have changed or influenced their practice with children. This was challenging and is one I'm still working on. It's asking questions like: Why are you so committed to supporting children's spirituality? Why did you get involved? Why did you stay? What have you learned?

Which is the one thing I'd hold onto?

Another full session had the theme of the movement from just seeing spirituality as personal meaning-making to one about structural spirituality and justice. In other words what needs to change in society's structures, in the church's structure that enables spiritual justice for all children?

This group is a great ally to our work in Godly Play, and I would suggest that you become a member. It's free. Click [here](#) to visit the website and find out more or scan the QR code.



Bite-size news

Godly Play Lectionary Companion

The Godly Play Foundation has now produced a Lectionary Companion, indicating how to fit Godly Play stories into the Revised Common Lectionary and Scripture index, for those who might find this helpful. It is a really carefully compiled document, with a page for each lectionary year, A,B and C and explanatory notes and suggestions. It is free to access and you can find it here: [Lectionary Companion](#).



Sending out Events and Training opportunities

Core Training

URC Core Training - Nottingham, Oct 2026

Location: East Midlands Synod Office, Sherwood, Nottingham

Date: 16 October 2026 – 18 October 2026

This course is hosted in partnership with the United Reformed Church (URC) East Midlands Synod and will take place at the Synod Office in Sherwood, Nottingham. The course is a non-residential but if you would like information about overnight accommodation nearby, then please email: trainingpa@urc5.org.uk

Cost: £50 to anyone connected with a URC congregation, available to others at a cost of £315

To book: [Booking Form for Godly Play Core Training Course, 16 – 18 October 2026](#)

Cambridge, March 2027

Location: St Mark's Church, Barton Rd, Newnham CB3 9JZ

Date: This course is aimed at those who unable to commit to three consecutive days. It takes place over 3 separate Saturdays: 6th March, 10th April, 15th May 2027.

Cost: £335 (Early Bird Rate of £315 until 6th December 2026).

To book: [Cambridge Core Training Event and Booking Page](#)

Core Training

Walsingham, March 2027 - *This is a residential course*

Location: The Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, 2 Common Place, Walsingham NR22 6EE

Date: 12 March 2027 – 14 March 2027

Cost: £490 (Early Bird Rate of £460 until 12th December 2026.

To book: [Walsingham Core Training Event and Booking Page](#)



Bursaries: Bursaries are available to anyone who needs financial support to attend these courses providing they meet the requirements: please email admin@godlyplay.uk if you wish to apply for a bursary or visit our Bursaries page for an application form and more information. [Click here](#).

Experience Godly Play

Date: Sat 10 October

Time: 1.30 - 4.30pm

Venue: Lidgett Methodist Church
Wheatlands Grove
Acomb, York
YO26 5NH



Are you interested in children's spirituality?
Maybe you're working with children or
looking for ways to explore faith in the life of your
own family or community.
Perhaps you're involved with supporting staff or
volunteers working directly with children.
Maybe you're looking for ways to nurture your own
spirituality.

Godly Play is a gentle, engaging way of exploring
sacred stories. Through beautiful storytelling, quiet
reflection, creative response, and shared
wondering, participants are encouraged to listen,
imagine, and discover the presence of God in their
own lives.

You are very welcome to join this free Godly Play
taster session. Find out more and book your place
here: <https://godlyplayyorktaster.eventbrite.com>

Sign up here



Scan me!





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GODLY PLAY UK



The Magazine

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May the Good Shepherd,
who knows all of the sheep by name,
lead you to the good green grass
and stay with you in time of danger.
May you find your pearl of great price,
and know that your journey
with all the people of God
who are as many as there are stars in the sky
and grains of sand in the desert.

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[Become an Associate](#)

This issue was devised and edited by
Mine Yildirim, Gill Ambrose, Peter Privett and Chloe Sargent

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