

# Associates of Godly Play UK

## The Magazine

Issue 14 March 2024



### At the threshold



Welcome to this latest issue of our magazine! I wonder what you are expecting or hoping to find here, in a publication *about* Godly Play. Can you say what that is?

Many of us find it's actually quite hard to explain or talk about

Godly Play in words – it's more of an experience, a way of being with people and with God, a process not a product. But maybe there is something you can name which you are looking for, and hope to find, within the circle of people who value Godly Play. This magazine is for you, so why not push open the door a little further, cross the threshold and step inside. We hope you will find something that you need in these pages – and if you don't, please tell us! We'd love to hear from you, and look forward to hearing your response to what you've read and seen here, or elsewhere, as together we explore what Godly Play is really about.

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### Building the circle

Oddly, when a new year begins, those who head up organisations seem to have to turn back to the year that has just gone, so that they can report on what has been happening. As a charity, Godly Play is obliged to submit a report to the Charity Commission each year and so our trustees must review the work of the Trust. This has provided quite a lot of ideas for this magazine however, and we hope that you will enjoy reading about them.

It is good once more to hear about the experience of someone who took part in a three-day core training, and to be able to celebrate two parallel core courses in Wales, signifying a significant commitment to Godly Play by the Church in Wales.

We have some reflections on research into church work with children and families post-pandemic, and we learn from two trainers that Godly Play certainly is not 'just storytelling.' Dominic Black compares Godly Play and its antecedent, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, for us. Angela Clare, who hosts a Godly Play circle tells us all about her quest for response materials for the pre-school children with whom she works.

Then there is our Conference. You will find all the details towards the end of the magazine. Save the date! 28 and 29 June. The full conference is on Saturday 29 June, and it is preceded by a day of Enrichment events. You will be most welcome to come to both – or either! We are particularly pleased to feature opportunities to learn about how Godly Play is an ideal way to support those who have suffered from trauma. And we are really looking forward to welcoming Daniel Norris to tell us how Godly Play is at the heart of the school he leads.

Godly Play Scotland tell us all about their new story, ready for an Olympics year, about Eric Liddell, the distinguished Scottish athlete and missionary. And you can read a little bit about the Godly Play Foundation's beautiful new logo.

## Starting the journey

*By Hannah Green*



*Hannah Green is a Youth Worker for a cluster of Methodist churches in Cornwall. She completed Core Training in Godly Play on a course at Ripon College Cuddesdon in October 2023. Here she offers some reflections on her learning.*

In October last year, I attended a Godly Play training weekend at Cuddesdon, near Oxford. My church has a history of using

Godly Play and has been kindly lent a lot of the materials, and they therefore wanted me to be able to use them.

I was delighted by the training and loved the format of the storytelling. The small group size gave us all a chance to interact and ask questions. Actually, being able to be a part of Godly Play sessions as they are intended to be run is absolutely integral, because you experience the format for yourself and can see how profoundly the stories land with different people.

In my work, I not only run Sunday school sessions but also assist with the toddler groups, as well as putting on church parties for the local community. I have found that Godly Play works well with all these groups, in different ways. This year, I used the Holy Family story to introduce the nativity to the toddlers during their Christmas parties, and those who engaged seemed to love the style of storytelling. They also really wanted to hold and interact with the materials – at one point, as I was placing each piece and telling the story, I had one little person taking them away again to play with!

I also used Godly Play during our Light Party in October, which was attended by a mixture of church children and unchurched members of the local community. Using the Parable of the Good Shepherd, I explained something of what it means when we say we follow Jesus. No matter whether the children were from the church or from outside, they were all thoroughly engaged in the story and loved to listen and interact with the materials. When the last sheep got ‘lost’ in the scary place, one little girl in particular was pointing out where it had gone, and she was laughing as I looked under each piece of felt until I found it. Even the parents who were sat with their children and listening remarked that they enjoyed watching the story play out, and they helped to answer the ‘I Wonder’ questions too.

All in all, I have found Godly Play engaging to all generations, and a profound and sometimes moving insight into Bible stories I have heard many times. There’s always something new the Spirit wants to show you through it, and the stories speak into all situations in a myriad of different ways.

## Feature articles

### More than a story: What is Godly Play really about?

*By Judy Yeomans and Peter Privett*



*Peter Privett has brought Godly Play to hundreds of children and trained many storytellers and doorpersons over more than 20 years. Here he tells fellow Trainer Judy Yeomans about how his understanding of the essence and significance of Godly Play has changed and how these changes came about.*



**Judy:** Tell me what happened when you first discovered Godly Play?

**Peter:** In the beginning, I was seduced by the technique of storytelling, and the whole visual element. Not reading from a book but telling the story from the heart impressed me. When I first heard Jerome Berryman tell a story at a Mothers' Union gathering in London, he brought out objects, and I remember thinking, 'I did this when I was 14, when I was a Sunday School teacher'. I used to tell Bible stories with my toy box and things I had lying around the house.

After that first experience, I remember going back and collecting materials to create stories, experimenting not just with Bible stories, but Greek myths. I wondered if you could use this technique to tell other stories. It was the storytelling that grabbed my attention at first. Then I was at a training of trainers' session, where our focus on telling a story and de-briefing it upset one of the trainers. She said, 'This has got nothing to do with Montessori! The most important part is when the children get their hands on the work.'

#### **The real work is in the response**

**Judy:** What happened when you realised that Godly Play might be more than just telling a story to children?

**Peter:** That blew my mind. That was a radical shift to see that the concentration on storytelling was not what this was really about. The response is when the real work happens, although it doesn't happen every time. Children start using the response materials in lots of different





ways, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious. I remember one time telling a desert story with some Methodist ministers, and afterwards two of them took the desert bag. What appeared to be happening was they were doing what children often do: burying figures, creating new pathways in the sand. I didn't interfere, and to me it looked as though quite a lot was going on. After lunch, I asked them what it was like and one said, 'I was just playing with the sand!' And I said 'Oh, just playing....?' And suddenly he realised that what was happening was more than that.

I've learned that I don't actually know what is going on in people's heads and I don't need to know. But what I'm aware of is a gut feeling that something might be going on. In my head I am constantly asking myself if I need to intervene. It's their work and they might not be able to explain why or what it is. If they come and initiate a conversation, I have to be careful. It's constantly being in a cloud of unknowing and accepting that.



I recently decided to tell some saints stories and we'd got to Margaret of Scotland. Well, the children absolutely didn't want to do Margaret of Scotland. They were bored silly! There was absolute silence. 'We didn't like anything about the story, we're not in it and we couldn't care less what's missing!' I sat there, thinking 'I'm an absolute failure. How did I mess this up?'

Conversation started once I brought out the map and timeline for the saints, and I went away thinking I'd done a geography lesson! I thought it was a bit of wasted time, but Rosemary, my wife, said it sounded as though that conversation was about origins and identities, deeply spiritual stuff.

This role, the storyteller, is about much more than storytelling. It's a whole juggling process and being adaptable but keeping some structure.

**Judy:** And you don't always need to intervene to be facilitating the process for the children?

**Peter:** We had some juice knocked over in a session and the doorman wanted to go and get a cloth to wipe it up. Instead, I looked at the child and said, 'Don't worry. You know where the paper towels are, don't you? You can go and get them to mop up the mess.' I'm getting the child to take responsibility, not just for the spill.

In a sense that's what you're doing through the whole session, respecting what is already there in the child; that they are responsible, not in the sense of duty – 'You have done this, so you've got to do that' – but in empowerment,



'You have the ability to respond'. The doorman has this practical role, but practical things are part of the spiritual life.

When you look at the list of tasks that the doorman does, it's saying that the spiritual life is not an airy-fairy thing. Matter matters and this materiality of stuff is a way to get into the other stuff, the means by which we explore the whole of life. Spirituality is not a disembodied thing. And for a young child, that is absolutely true, and the doorman embodies this incarnational role. Maybe 'door person' is not the right word, but I don't know what else you'd call them. It's not about keeping the door, it's about how you embody the role which begins with a deep sense of meeting another at the door. 'How will I respect and respond to you at the door?' What goes on at the threshold is more than a greeting. The welcome is giving the entrant a bit of space.

**Judy:** These two roles in the Godly Play room, the storyteller and the door person, are so much more than the list of tasks. They start and end with an attitude that informs the way in which you fulfil the role of facilitating emotional attachment through story and play.

**Peter:** Yes. What I've learned is that storytelling is only one aspect. I once saw Jerome Berryman tell the Parable of the Sower and then rattle through the wondering questions and I thought, 'Hang on! Give us time to answer. I've got something to say here'. But I then wondered if he did it on purpose, trying to break that pattern of trying to say something wonderful. Was he throwing out the pattern of spoken wondering so that you can get on with doing the wondering when the questions have finished?

The 'story' isn't just the written text, it's something to do with the whole process of verbal and non-verbal wondering. It's about painting, spilling your juice, talking about identities. Story is important but it's not just that little text in the book.

I don't worry about the silence now.

# Where are the families? Recent research on parents' views of church and faith formation after Covid-19

By Eona Bell



*Two recent research projects have explored the changing relationship between families and church communities in Britain and the US, revealing differing assumptions of what parents really want and need from churches to support their children's spiritual growth. Eona Bell, a Godly Play trainer and academic researcher on cross-cultural approaches to parenting and family life, reports on these studies.*

The first research project, by Cheryl Minor, Hannah Sutton-Adams and Heather Ingersoll of the Godly Play Foundation (2023), used surveys and focus groups to gather the views of congregational leaders and parents from various Christian denominations in the United States and Canada. The team found a mismatch between church leaders' perceptions of parents, and the reality of many families' lives.



Church leaders felt frustrated that, despite their best efforts to attract young families with dedicated programmes and activities, there was a lack of engagement. They put it down to a declining interest in spirituality and faith among parents. Families were simply not attending church groups which had been a regular part of their lives before Covid-19. Church leaders expressed the view that work and other activities were taking priority, at the expense of faith formation and church involvement.

The US study found that clergy and other church leaders themselves felt exhausted from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and were aware of the enduring social and emotional cost of Covid-19 on families: some observed that parents were tired, and profoundly challenged by the demands of raising children in a world indelibly altered by the experiences of the last few years. With declining support from volunteers within the church, many clergy felt constrained and inadequately resourced in their longing to reach out and rebuild their congregations.

## **Parents' longings**

Meanwhile, parents themselves expressed a different reality. Many longed to provide spiritual nurture for their children, specifically hoping for their children to grow up feeling loved and valued as children of God, and to find



meaningful connections with the world around them. Various challenges got in the way of these desires and hopes. Long working hours, financial pressures, mental health challenges and social isolation all made it harder for adults to look after their own spiritual wellbeing, as well as that of their children. A number of parents recalled negative experiences of church involvement which they decisively did not wish for their own children; but they found a lack of positive alternatives.

When asked what they needed, parents knew that they wanted resources to help them integrate faith and spiritual exploration into their family lives. They mentioned concise and easily accessed materials such as storybooks, videos and podcasts which they could use at home – but also a desire to meet other parents, online or in person, with whom to share experiences and a mutual interest in supporting children’s spirituality.

In considering how to start untangling the ‘crossed wires’ between church leaders and parents in the US, Ingersoll and team urge churches to listen to families, rather than assuming to know what they think about faith and spirituality. Simply trying harder to offer the same type of activities is not going to work for a generation of parents who have, to some extent, been wounded both by the immediate past experience of the lockdown and all sorts of social pressures, and also by negative experiences of church. It is not only because of Covid-19 that families are abandoning the church, but because churches are not providing the kind of community they are seeking. The US study found parents who are “longing for a community in which to wrestle with their deep spiritual questions so that they can more confidently walk alongside their children as they do the same” (Ingersoll et al 2023: 13).

### **And the UK experience?**

The study conducted by Ann Casson and team (2023), ‘Rethinking the place of the family in the post-Covid church in the UK: an exploration of families’ engagement with church during and after Covid’ is a helpful counterpart to the US research, given the differing religious cultures and family structures on either side of the Atlantic which might lead to different findings. Like the American study, Casson and colleagues focused on Christian families and church leaders, and used in-depth interviews to complement a larger survey. This research also included the views of some children on church life, adding an extra dimension to their account.



The UK families reported mixed experiences of engagement with church during the pandemic: some churches had provided resources and services for children online, while others had delivered materials to use at home, and others nothing at all. There was similar variation between parents who said the pandemic had encouraged them to worship and explore faith together at home, more than they had done previously. Others had not found it easy to do this, and many lamented the falling away of community and connection with a wider congregation. The return to church after lockdowns had not been straightforward, with many families simply ‘getting out of the habit’ of attending groups and



services. Those who did return to church on Sunday mornings felt it was no longer the same, with fewer people, and noticed that the return to congregational worship actually engaged them less than the more participative home-based services of the lockdown period.

The responses of British parents to a question about their needs was very similar to their American peers: they wanted the church to provide resources to empower and help them nurture their children's faith at home, and they wanted connections, with a greater emphasis on authentic relationships within all-age church communities. Many did not want to return to church as it had been, but looked for worshipping communities where they and their children could play an active part.

### **The challenge for us**

Each of these studies reflects the thoughts and experiences of church leaders and parents who have been involved in churches in the past. These are people already longing for relationship with God and with other people, and with a strong desire to involve children in this spiritual exploration. There is hope – but also a challenge to churches to move alongside young families in their thinking and practice. I wonder how Godly Play might help that happen?

- I wonder how Godly Play can listen better to parents and children?
- I wonder how Godly Play might empower parents and children to ask questions and explore relationships – with God and each other – at home?
- I wonder how Godly Play can help families overcome feelings of isolation, and find the meaningful connections and community they long for?

### **References**

Ann Casson, Sarah Holmes, Shelley Logan, and Richard Powney, 2023. 'Rethinking the Place of the Family in the Post-Covid Church in the UK: An Exploration of Families' Engagement with Church During and After Covid' in *Practical Theology* 16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2023.2221587> [Open Access]

Cheryl Minor, Hannah Sutton-Adams & Heather Ingersoll (06 Nov 2023): Crossed Wires: The Disconnect Between Christian Leaders' Perceptions of Parents and the Lived Experiences of Contemporary Families, *Religious Education*, DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2023.2269342 (You can request a copy of the research from the authors.)

# Developing response materials

By Angela Clare

*Angela Clare works with children at Hope Church Islington in London.*

In the autumn of 2019, when I was asked by the Hope Church Kids team to set up a Godly Play circle for children aged 0 to 5 years, I wanted to create a warm, cosy and playful space, full of homemade Godly Play stories and simple child-friendly equipment.



I was wondering what response materials would encourage and engage such young children? I was also mindful that we would have parents/carers within our circle too. I began by looking at a few resources I had from my training and teaching days, which were a small collection of natural materials I had used with childcare students to demonstrate 'loose parts play' and the benefits of natural/nature play.



My focus was on providing an assortment of natural items such as shells, pinecones, corks, dried orange slices, and plain wooden shapes of 2D and 3D varieties. I also used a lot of observations which allowed me to see individual interests developing, I did this by watching the children at response time, interacting with their parents/carers and with each other. I watched with particular interest how the children used the desert bag. At first a lot of 'cooking and baking' took place with the provided pots, pans, spoons, bowls, all full of sand, but over time this changed into burying and finding, so I added a set of child-friendly 'bones' and dinosaur skeletons.

The children delighted in these response materials. On another occasion after the Ark and the Flood story, an interest in all things related to rainbows began. To support, I added a collection of rainbow-themed items, such as scarves, wooden people, balls and cups.



It has been so lovely to see how much the children enjoy these new additions. Recently a group of our age 4+ children used the scarves tied to their wrists in a beautiful 'rainbow dance'. I really enjoy how movement and dance are now a central part of our response time.



Another recent conversation about inclusion in our Godly Play Circle led us to look at how to support and welcome children with additional needs. At the beginning of September 2023, we were blessed with lots of new volunteers in the Hope Kids Team, so there is a Door Person most weeks, and parents can now safely leave their children if they wish to. This has resulted in

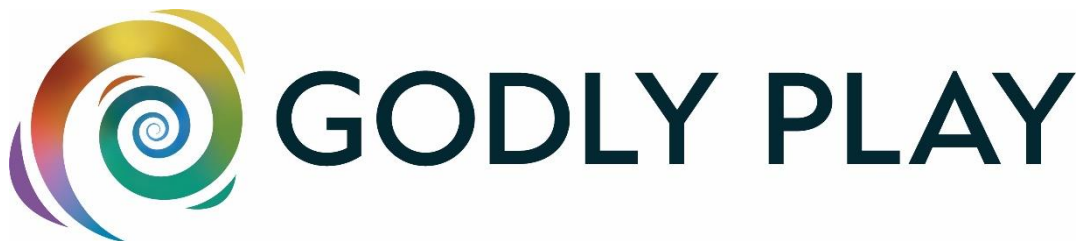
having a big range of age groups, 2-6+ years, and some children with additional needs.



While the Godly Play Circle has changed and evolved over time, so have the response materials, the focus being on multi-sensory play resources such as a small light box, playdough items, scented water play (we use herbal tea bags) with droppers and cornflour. By having a range of multi-sensory materials on offer, we hope that all children can be involved, included and encouraged.



I very much look forward to discovering the ways the children mould this truly joyful space over the coming years and how carefully chosen response materials can support this process.



The Godly Play Foundation (<https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/>), our parent body, based in the USA, have developed a new logo, or group of logos. Here their Director, Heather Ingersoll, tells us about the way it was developed.

‘What does Godly Play represent in people’s hearts? It represents transformation and wonder and community. It represents coming close to God and a place of making meaning. So when we embarked on the process of designing a new logo, we wanted to honour that and also recognise that Godly Play is expanding to new spaces and new places, to a circle that is not yet, but is becoming. As the world is becoming more digital, they needed to create a design that was suitable for the digital mediums we are increasingly using to communicate and reach people. This new logo had to represent “what was and what is not yet”. It had to honour the playfulness, the movement and the invitation to wonder in the old logo, but also be flexible and adapt to digital and print spaces. There was a long process of reflection, discussion and exploration of ideas – attention to “what makes Godly Play what it is”.

The new logo represents the “inward journey of Godly Play, the meaning-making, the spiral curriculum, the movement, the wonder, the inclusivity and the play”.

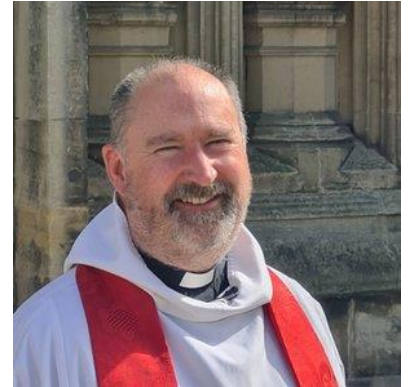
Heather acknowledges that not everyone will immediately like the new logo but hopes that we will come to like it for what it represents.



# Comparing and contrasting the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play

By Dominic Black

*Dominic Black is Vicar of Hull Minster. He first came across Godly Play in 2001 and with his wife, Heather, developed a Godly Play room in his former parish in Middlesbrough. His thesis, Learning from Christianity through Godly Play <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/14498/> (Durham, 2021), explored the value of Godly Play for children growing up in deprived urban contexts. He has trained in all three levels of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.*



Jerome Berryman describes the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) as the third stage of the application of the insights of Maria Montessori to Christian Education and acknowledges its important influence on his method. Sadly, there have been some grumpy criticisms of Godly Play (GP) from the United States Catechesis of the Good Shepherd community in recent years, which I think fail to appreciate its distinctive merits.

At the behest of Montessori's pupil, Adele Costa Gnocchi, to prepare children for their First Holy Communion, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was developed in Rome beginning in 1951 as a collaboration between the Hebrew Scholar, Sofia Cavalletti and Montessori educator, Gianna Gobbi.

## **A revolution**

The application of a Montessori approach to Christian Education was revolutionary in an era when the usual method was rote learning of the Catechism. Building on the work that Maria Montessori had developed in her model school in Barcelona after the First World War, Cavalletti and Gobbi gradually expanded the range of materials until Cavalletti's death in 2011. In the late 1950s they began formation courses to share their work with others. In 1971 Jerome Berryman met Cavalletti when he came to Italy to train in the Montessori method, beginning their long association and friendship. In 1975 Cavalletti gave her first course in the USA, where the method became known as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Learning from this, and earlier experiments, Berryman would develop his own distinctive method.



Jerome Berryman and Sofia Cavalletti in Houston, Texas in 1978. Photo courtesy of Godly Play Foundation.

Though they share similar roots, including some common materials, there are several practical and theological differences between the two methods. Practically, Godly Play is much easier to implement. Berryman produced a series of carefully constructed scripts to be used for each presentation and the materials are readily purchasable. Although mastery is a long process, it is possible for someone to begin well using the scripts following the three-day core training. By contrast, formation

## **Contrasts**

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in CGS is, in classic Montessori style delivered entirely aurally. There are no set scripts. Catechists are expected to produce their own 'Album Pages' for each presentation which are then checked by the formation leader. Catechists are also encouraged to make their own materials, though increasingly these are also available to purchase. Though both offer a spiral curriculum<sup>1</sup>, Godly Play building from the core presentations to increasing synthesis for example, the developmental phases in Catechesis are clearly separated into Level

1 (age 3-6), Level 2 (6-9) and Level 3 (9-12). The number of presentations, each of which must be written up by the Catechists, requires two weeks of formation for Levels 1 and 2 and up to four weeks for Level 3. I often hear people complain that Godly Play is too difficult and expensive to implement in a church setting, but Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is on a whole different scale again!

### Different emphases

And there is a difference in the purpose and application of the two methods. Godly Play can, if sensitively done, be used in an educational setting with children from non-Christian backgrounds, whereas Catechesis (as its name suggests) is much more clearly Christian catechesis. Though originally designed as a form of Christian formation, the openness of Godly Play means that children can learn from Christianity and look around inside the world of the Bible as the Christian Church has understood it. CGS is more clearly about formation into the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. Though there is an invitation to go deeper with God and the Church in Godly Play, the CGS has a much stronger devotional emphasis, including a more structured prayer time. The Christian moral life, implicit in the unspoken lesson in Godly Play, is also taught much more directly in CGS.



Godly Play also places far more emphasis on the importance of play. Although openness and imagination are valued in CGS, there is little time for free response or art, which Cavalletti generally saw as a distraction.

### Approaches to Scripture

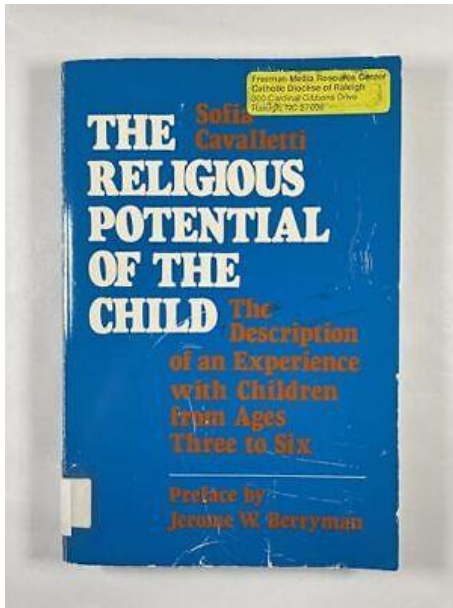


Photo: Congerdesign

A striking difference is the approach to Scripture. Inspired by the Catholic biblical movement, Cavalletti became increasingly convinced that children should have the words of the Scriptures in their hands. Intrinsic to the materials in CGS is the availability of the biblical text. By contrast the scripts in Godly Play often paraphrase and condense the

<sup>1</sup> Key presentations are repeated on a regular basis (see pages 119-128 of *Teaching Godly Play: How to mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* by Jerome Berryman) for more on the spiral curriculum

Scriptures. Unlike Godly Play, in the CGS version of the parables, the biblical text is always provided with the materials. The other significant difference is the explicit relationship between the Bible, the life of Jesus and the liturgical worship of the Christian Church. These connections first made by the Church Fathers (the early bishops), and often discovered by the children themselves in Godly Play, are made very explicitly, particularly in Level 3 of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. In this respect CGS is highly Christocentric. The Old Testament texts are very directly linked to Jesus and do not have the same space to speak for themselves as they do in Godly Play.



Perhaps the most important theological difference, however, is the treatment of eschatology, what will happen at the end of time. The Godly Play sacred history shelf begins with the Genesis account of the seven days of creation, but the end is not the book of Revelation. Instead, it is the ‘page that hasn’t been written’, at least until children discover it in a blank book. By contrast from the very earliest 3–6-year-old stage Cavalletti introduced the Parousia, the time at the end of time when God will be all in all. The timeline of salvation history from creation through the redemption of the cross to the summation of all things in Christ is central. Cavalletti talks of the blank page that the children will write upon but, for her, the full stop is clear: Berryman is less sure.

## Conclusion

To summarise, Godly Play is easier to introduce and is adaptable to use in schools. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd could only really be used in a church setting, other than perhaps in Catholic Schools. CGS goes into much more depth in sacramental preparation and as such is more applicable to Roman Catholic, Orthodox and some Anglican settings. Those using Godly Play in such settings may find useful material from CGS to enrich their sacramental preparation.

## Core texts of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: 3-6* (Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications 1992)

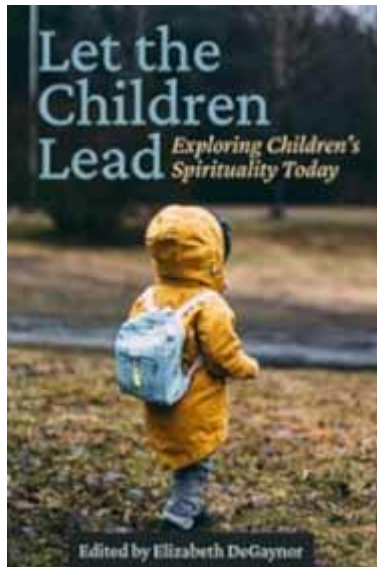
*The Religious Potential of the Child: 6-12*, trans. Patricia M. Coulter and Julie M. Coulter (New York: Paulist Press, 2002)

*The History of the Kingdom of God, Part 1: From Creation to Parousia*, trans. Rebekah Rojcewicz (Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications, 2011)

*The History of the Kingdom of God, Part 2: Liturgy and the Building of the Kingdom*, trans. Rebekah Rojcewicz (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2013)

# Taking your wondering further...

## Book reviews



*Let the Children Lead: Exploring Children's Spirituality Today*, Elizabeth DeGaynor (editor), 2023, Virginia Theological Seminary Press

*Reviewed by Trudie Morris*

*Trudie Morris is Priest in Charge of the Briningham and Briston benefices in the Diocese of Norwich*

Approaching this book, compiled from a range of perspectives on research into ministry with children in a North American cultural context, was like being given the best gift ever. But, like a parable box, I had to work hard to discover the gift inside.

I approached the task with a feeling like triumphant euphoria: 'YES! AT LAST!' Having worked through successive reports, research and literature through my own research into the spiritual impact of child participants on themselves and on the adults present when children co-curate with adults in intergenerational liturgical worship, the key words in the title of this compilation, 'Let the children lead', were like an answer to prayer. 'Let' and 'Lead' have been key words in research and writing about children's ministry for many years, for example: *Let the children come: reimagining childhood from a Christian perspective* (Miller-McLemore, 2003); *Let the Children Come to Communion* (Lake, 2006); *The rise of the child's voice: the silencing of the spiritual voice* (Adams, 2009) and *Let the little children come to me; do not stop them: inhabiting the sacred space: exploring the curatorial with children* (Morris, 2016).

My reading began well with the first contributor, Jerome Berryman (*Playing in the Flow of God's Creative Power: A Theology of Childhood*), writing about being summoned 'from another realm to become like children, playing in the flow of God's Creative Power with tears and laughter as our guide and language as our leaven, to know what is real and to show it'. For Godly Players this is the gift of a Godly Play session with children where we discover that children show us, lead us, into what is authentically real by enabling us to become like children so that we can be 'consistently open and available to others to create creating in them.'

The next chapter is from Alfred Pang (*Prophetic Wonder with Children in the Call to Teach: A Lasallian Inspiration*), who draws upon the tradition of John Baptist de La Salle to discuss the 'holistic formation of children and youth' and in doing so builds upon Berryman's thesis 'that children are also spiritual agents, who call forth the Christian vocation of teaching' in forming adults through their 'openness to wonder.'

As I read further however, I began to lose the thread of a central argument about children leading the way. For example, Karen-Marie Just (*Let the Little Children*

Theologise: Moral Development, Critical Thinking and Preschool Faith) presents research into the cognitive and moral development of pre-school children where she concludes that the most important setting for 'robust theologising in the early years' is 'cultivating family spirituality in the home.' However, the focus is upon role modelling by adults to 'engage questions seriously and know where they and their child might be able to find answers together.' Yes, I wondered, very important, but the emphasis is upon the knowledge of adults to develop the spirituality of children, so where does this fit with the main thesis of letting children lead? The thread is becoming thin.

This adult-centric rather than child-centric model of spiritual and moral development really marks out the rest of the chapters. Laura Alary, in posing the question, 'Are Bible stories good for children?', presents her work in rewriting Bible stories so they are 'open and spacious' and 'to stir in readers a sense of awe and mystery' to ensure Bible stories can be 'very good for children – and the rest of us.' Peterson's chapter focuses upon the importance of listening with children in matters relating to race. We can learn from children about how they negotiate 'racial messages from the media ... from peers, from school' and so on. Peterson concludes that we must open ourselves in humility and genuine curiosity about others, with children as our guides.

I found the whole book stimulating reading in appreciating the serious work going on in the field of children's spirituality in the United States, but the book raised two key questions for me. How far does the American context of teaching through the still strong Sunday School network and wealth of families in congregations translate to the reality of church life in the UK? Why is the spiritual agency of children in developing the spirituality of adults still the area in the field of children's spirituality that we skate around?

### Contributors

Jerome Berryman: *Playing in the Flow of God's Creative Power: A Theology of Childhood*; Alfred K.M. Pang: *Prophetic Wonder with Children in the Call to Teach: A Lasallian Inspiration*; Karen-Marie Yust: *Let the Little Children Theologise: Moral Development, Critical Thinking and Preschool Faith*; Tanya Marie Eustace Campen: *Holy Work with Families: Living Out Our faith Together*; Catherine Maresca: *Children, Signs, and Spiritual Literacy: An Interfaith Experience*; Laura Alary: *What is this story doing to me? Biblical Storytelling for a Global Generation*; David M. Csinos: *All, Some, None: A Multilayered Interpretation of Children's Theological Meaning-Making*; Henry Zonio: *In His Image: Constructing Gender in Sunday School*; Amy L. Chapman: *Being Seen, Known, Valued: A Phenomenological Exploration of a Spiritually-Supportive Conference Presentation*

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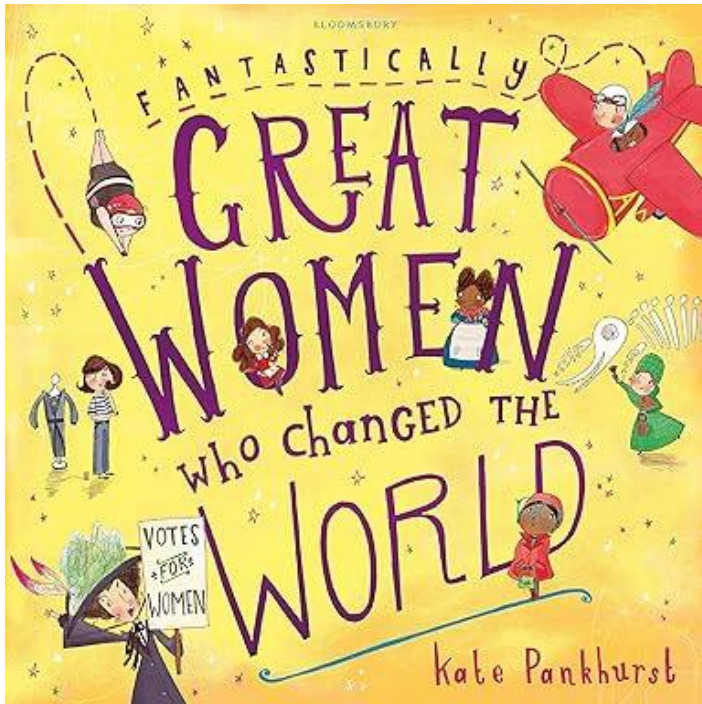
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## The *Fantastically Great Women* series



*Fantastically Great Women Who Made History*, Bloomsbury, 2018. EAN/UPC 9781408878903

*Fantastically Great Women Who Saved the Planet*, Bloomsbury, 2020. EAN/UPC 9781408899298

*Reviewed by Eona Bell*

An eminent Godly Play practitioner inspired me to read these children's books as they'd certainly find a place on the shelves of his Godly Play room! The series, which now runs to four picture books, and two chapter books for older readers, has recently inspired a 'smash

hit' musical touring the UK, so may well have caught the eyes of children in our circles.

With lively text and colourful illustrations by author-illustrator Kate Pankhurst, each book introduces women from around the world who have contributed to the fields of science, the arts, invention, politics and conservation. I learned about Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey, who inspired 19<sup>th</sup>-century Americans to observe and appreciate birds, and campaigned to end the use of feathers in the fashion industry, which was destroying 5 million wild birds each year. In our century, Isatou Geesay organised women in The Gambia to create businesses recycling and re-purposing plastic bags: women gained a steady income for their families, and the whole country benefitted when the government banned single-use plastic bags in 2015.

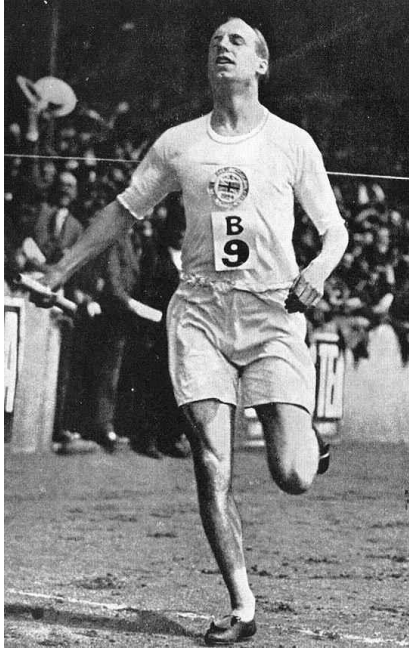
While I celebrate the recognition of women's achievements (so often overlooked) in books like these, in the interests of equality and diversity in a Godly Play room I would also want to provide similar titles which tell the stories of men, boys and non-binary people!

Stories like this nicely complement the stories of the saints in Godly Play, showing children how people in diverse times and places have found purpose and meaning in their lives, and are remembered for their service to others. The books challenge the readers to reflect on what their own contributions may be to society and our understanding of the world. Indeed, there is even a writing challenge running in connection with the musical, where children are invited to write their own stories, to be included in 'The Fantastically Great Library of YOU'. Of course, the 'Fantastically Great' women featured in the books are not all Christian, nor does faith feature explicitly in many of the stories, but perhaps this might provoke interesting conversations about what motivates us, who is remembered by society, and why.

# The Story of Eric Liddell: a story in the style of Godly Play

By Alex Mackenzie

*With the approach of the Paris Olympics, Godly Play Scotland has created the story of Eric Liddell, a great athlete and truly a Scottish saint.*



Eric Liddell was a Scottish sprinter, rugby player, and Christian missionary. Although he was born in Tianjin, North China, Eric had strong links to Scotland and Edinburgh. He studied at the University of Edinburgh, represented Scotland in Rugby and Athletics, lived and taught in Edinburgh.

At the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, Liddell refused to run in the heats for his favoured 100 metres because they were held on a Sunday. Instead, he competed in the 400 metres held on a weekday, a race that he won. He returned to China in 1925 to serve as a missionary teacher. Aside from two furloughs in Scotland, he remained in China until his death in a Japanese civilian internment camp in 1945.

Many people encountered a cinematic version of Eric Liddell's story in the 1981 film, *Chariots of Fire*.

This year, the 100th anniversary of Eric Liddell's historic gold medal and world record, celebrations are being held throughout Scotland under the banner of [The Eric Liddell 100](#). As part of this centenary, our colleagues in Godly Play Scotland have developed a new story in the style of Godly Play.

This story is part of a collection of stories of Scottish 'saints', written to supplement the stories of saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. These stories are written 'in the style of Godly Play. Volume 7 includes a lesson called 'The Child's Own Saint' which invites children and Godly Play mentors to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. The story of Eric Liddell is an example of this – a

Christian person who inspires us all to honour God and respect the dignity of every human being.



The script is freely available to download from <https://www.godlyplayscotland.co.uk/scottish-stories/>, where you can also access a video of the story and find out about borrowing the resources from Godly Play lending libraries in Scotland.

# The Feast

## A chance to meet . . . Carol Carter

*Carol is a Godly Play Advocate and for several years has facilitated the Oxfordshire Godly Play Network*



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

I was born in Belfast in the volatile time of 1970, as my parents were working there. It wasn't long before they decided to leave and so I became an 'Essex girl' at about 18 months old. Looking back on my childhood I remember lots of playing out in our street and in our own and our neighbours' gardens, lots of imaginative, make-believe games of which a favourite was the one where I was an international gymnast! Our family were regular churchgoers and I was brought up in a Methodist Church along with many other young people. We had amazing times away with our Junior Church as we got older - occasional weekends but also an annual 'Hike': whole weeks away, staying in youth hostels and hiking in the hills of northern England. We built great friendships in a caring Christian community and the memories have stayed with me.

### **Tell us a bit about your family**

I live with my husband, who is a Methodist minister in the Oxford Circuit. We have a son who is away at university in his second year of a maths degree. When I am not Godly Playing, I am a part-time financial administrator for a not-for-profit business based in Oxford. I also volunteer twice a week to support readers in my local primary school (where I am also a governor) and I love having that connection with a school and the pupils, having been a primary school teacher before my son was born.

### **How did you first come across Godly Play?**

I first heard about Godly Play when I was living in York and my son was quite young. I think my husband came home from a church meeting with a leaflet and wondered if I was interested. I read the name and thought it was going to be about playing in a 'godly' way – no guns/fighting, etcetera – and I was not interested. Some time later, I must have found out more and realised my assumptions were not quite right as I then attended a taster day in York and was mesmerised by the storytelling technique and wondering. The rest (as they say) is history!

### **What do you like best about Godly Play?**

The chance for all ages to wonder. I feel it gives people so much opportunity to engage with Bible stories in a new way and creates an open space for discussion and debate. My dream has always been to run a regular house group/bible study group for adults based on Godly Play storytelling. I have not made it happen yet, but I am still dreaming.



### **What does your role as Godly Play Advocate involve?**

The main thing I do is to run the Oxfordshire Godly Play network group and try to offer help, support and encouragement to people in our area who are at any stage of their Godly Play journey. I try to arrange useful meetings when we share a story, talk about experiences, learn stories together, etc. It is so important to put people in touch with others who are using Godly Play: often I find people who are enthusiastic but don't know anyone else using it in their area, and this is why our network is so useful. I also help people find and resource story materials, answer their questions, encourage new initiatives, and share information about forthcoming training or events that people might be interested in. I have had contacts from schools who are interested in having some Godly Play and we have managed to organise a rota of volunteers to go into one of our local C of E primary schools each week this term to share stories. I've also recently helped Alison Summerskill to run a Materials Making day and that was great fun and a huge success. So, it is a varied role and some weeks I am doing lots of Godly Play advocating and other weeks I am doing nothing!

### **Do you enjoy what you do?**

YES! I have always been someone who likes to help others and I love Godly Play, so being able to promote Godly Play while helping others explore it makes it a win-win!

## Bite-sized news

### Network Groups

Godly Play network groups are once more flourishing as people have slowly redeveloped the habit of going out and sharing together following the long-lasting impact of the pandemic. You'll find a list of all the Network Groups we know about at <https://www.godlyplay.uk/help-and-support/network-groups/> If you are part of, or know of, a network group that is not listed, please tell us, so we can add it to the list.

### A double course in Wales



Two parallel three-day core training courses were held concurrently at St Padarn's, the Church in Wales Training College in February resulting in the welcome of 27 new Godly Players. This follows the publication of the Welsh translations of the core stories into Welsh. Parts of one course were therefore able to be bilingual. We are so thrilled with this fantastic development in Wales.





# LAUGHTER!

## THE THEME OF OUR CONFERENCE

**'The laughter of Godly Play flows out of God's playful presence.'** (Jerome Berryman)

**'Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with songs of joy.'** (Psalm 126)

**'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.'** (Genesis 21.6)

### Our main speaker on Saturday is Ian MacDonald



Ian Macdonald is passionate about human flourishing, facilitating ways for people to live into and from the deeper self – being more able to be with themselves, with others, and with God. He describes himself as a 'Laughter Enabler, Storyteller and Theologian!' Ian is passionate about laughter (to this end he teaches a happiness course, is a laughter yoga instructor and a stand-up comedian) and about storytelling. Trained by the Hearth Community, he teaches storytelling, and is a member of the Society for Storytelling. He believes that western culture has lost so much of what it means to live, tell and engage with story. Ian is Tutor in Mission at Sarum College. He has one wife, three quirky, wonderful grown-up children, and one dog; these have been some of his greatest teachers.

**Afternoon Workshops** There will be two one-hour long workshops.

**Godly Play in Schools** Daniel Norris, Head of St Jérôme Church of England School, Harrow St Jérôme's School opened in 2016 in the north-west London suburb of Harrow-on-the-Hill. The area is extremely diverse and 39 different family languages are represented among pupils. From the first, Godly Play influenced the ethos and development of the school, with a visible threshold at the entrance to every classroom and a deliberately community approach to the eating area. A dedicated

Godly Play room was created in the school from its inception and every child experiences a full Godly Play session fortnightly from a dedicated teacher. Daniel Norris has been the Headteacher of St Jérôme's since its inception. He is a priest in the Church of England.

**Trauma-informed Godly Play** Susie Steele and Siân Hancock, Godly Play trainers

This workshop will consider how the underlying principles of Godly Play support a trauma-informed approach to work with children and young people.

**Laughter Yoga** Ian MacDonald

Our morning speaker invites you to try out laughter yoga with him.

**Godly Play story**

A chance to experience a story within the context of a one-hour Godly Play session.

**I've got a question: A Godly Play surgery** Mary Hawes

Godly Play is an art, not a science and we never stop learning. Come and join a café-style discussion over the things you wonder about. Mary is a Godly Play Trustee and was formerly the CofE's national Growing for Growth Officer.

**Travelling Godly Play** Alison Summerskill

We are often invited to take Godly Play into neighbouring venues - schools, churches, training groups. This session will explore what you really need and how to get it there.

Book online at <https://www.godlyplay.uk/events/godly-play-uk-conference-2024/>

**Saturday Conference Tickets £50** including lunch and refreshments

*Early Bird Discount £10 until the end March making tickets £40*

**Enrichment Events on Friday**

Trauma-informed Godly Play £30

Introduction to Godly Play £30

Making materials Day £12 plus cost of materials

Bring a packed lunch for the enrichment days.

## Friday 28 June 2024 Enrichment Days

### **Trauma-informed Godly Play** Susie Steel and Sian Hancock

How might trauma manifest in a child or adult's behaviour? It is something that people are talking about more and more as we understand the impact of trauma on adults and children; in fact, the whole of society. What Godly Play can teach us about being trauma-informed? This enrichment day will include the experience of a full Godly Play session before we consider how the underlying principles support a trauma-informed approach. It is relevant to Godly Players from all settings and will seek to clarify what it means to be trauma-informed. Time will be given to transfer our learning to specific contexts, questions and appropriate resources.

**Susie** was a teacher in Hull for more than 25 years. When she discovered the research that had been done into the impact of trauma on children, she became something of an activist, working to raise awareness in Hull through film screening and a conference. She now trains adults in the impact of trauma with ACEs UK and also works as a Family Practitioner in a Women's Refuge.

**Siân** has worked with children, young people and their families in a range of school and community settings in Bristol and now advocates for children and young people affected by domestic abuse and crime, supporting them with trauma-informed approaches and accompanying them through the criminal justice system when necessary. A Godly Play UK Trainer and Associate Tutor at Bristol Baptist College, Siân has a doctorate in Practical Theology where her research focussed on the faith development of girls aged 7-14.

### **Making Materials** Peter Privett and Heather Moger

Come and spend a day making Godly Play materials. Peter Privett is Godly Play UK's most experienced trainer. He is also an artist and teacher, extremely experienced in helping people to make what they need to develop their Godly Play resources. He will be helped by Heather Moger who set up a Godly Play classroom in Stornoway in the Hebrides.

### **An Introduction to Godly Play** Richard Knott

Come and experience a day of Godly Play discovering the breadth of what it has to offer – an ideal opportunity to introduce a friend or colleague to Godly Play. Richard is a Godly Play trainer and the Children and Youth Development Officer for the URC in the East Midlands.

## Friday 28 June 2024 Evening Gathering

There will be a chance to meet up with other Godly Play people socially over a light meal.



## The Venue: St Mary de Crypt Church, Gloucester



As our last two conferences were in the north of England, it seemed a good idea to move to another part of the country!

St Mary de Crypt is a mediaeval church in the centre of Gloucester associated with Robert Raikes who publicised the Sunday school movement in the 18th century. It has therefore been associated with valuing ministry among

children for over two centuries. The church is 15 minutes walk from Gloucester railway station and close to the redeveloped Gloucester docks area where there are car parks and hotels.

## Sending out: Events and Training Opportunities

### Three-day Training

**Walsingham:** 26-28 April 9.30-4.30

Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Trainers: Eona Bell and Andrea Harrison

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

**Oxford:** 19-21 October

Ripon College Cuddesdon Trainers Brenton Prigge and Judy Yeomans

Book: <https://www.godlyplay.uk/events/core-training-oxford/>

Find fuller details and more information about our events at [www.godlyplay.uk](http://www.godlyplay.uk) Enquiries to [admin@godlyplay.uk](mailto:admin@godlyplay.uk)

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

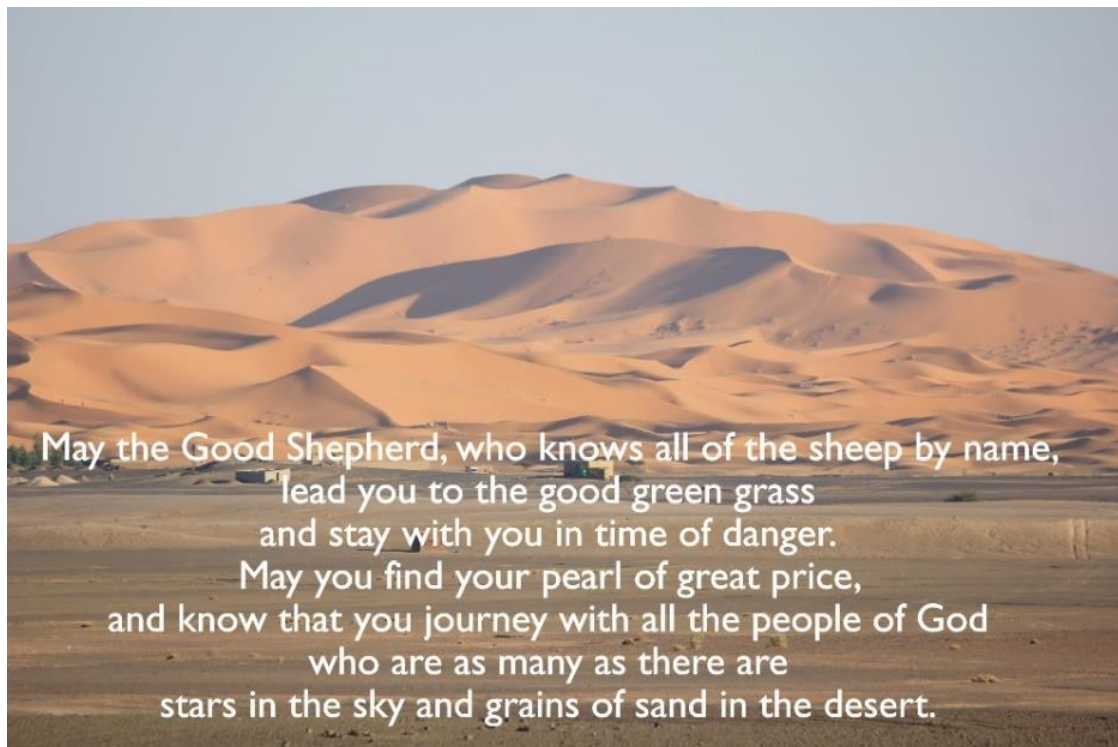
We also welcome online giving via our website: <https://giving.give-star.com/online/godly-play-uk/godly-play-uk>



[www.godlyplay.uk](http://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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