



A **GODLY PLAY**® QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

NOVEMBER 2016

Everywhere a Circle: The 2016
European Godly Play Conference

Godly Play in a School Setting

Taken Over by a Mad Cult:
How it all began in the UK

Godly Play “Down Under”

HOW GODLY PLAY FEELS AND WHY THAT IS IMPORTANT p.6

“When Godly Play is going well, it feels like it is done for itself, is voluntary, involves deep concentration, alters time, and is pleasurable.” –J. BERRYMAN





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Welcome to *the* **CIRCLE!**

At the heart of Godly Play are stories: stories that are shared in circles all over the world when children and adults sit down to hear and see these lessons so lovingly crafted by Jerome Berryman over so many years. But there are other circles in Godly Play; circles of storytellers and doorpersons, circles of regional and national associations, and worldwide circles of individuals committed to the integrity and advancement of Godly Play. These circles as well have their stories; there are stories about how Godly Play became established in countries and regions, stories about how Godly Play is adapted to particular contexts or circumstances, and so many more.

The Circle is a quarterly electronic newsletter that will capture these stories, share news from around the Godly Play world, communicate information that will be of importance to Godly Play practitioners, pass on the latest thoughts from our founder, and highlight Godly Play spaces from around the world. The Circle is yours, and it is yours to share wherever and with whomever you like.

—The Godly Play Foundation
info@godlyplayfoundation.org



4

EVERYWHERE A CIRCLE: THE 2016 EUROPEAN GODLY PLAY CONFERENCE

By THE REV. CANON
DR. ANDREW SHELDON

13

GODLY PLAY CLASSROOMS



NOVEMBER
2016

6

HOW GODLY
PLAY FEELS
AND WHY THAT
IS IMPORTANT

By JEROME W. BERRYMAN

10

GODLY PLAY
IN A SCHOOL
SETTING

By THE REV. DR. ROSEMARY BEALES

12

ADDITIONAL
READING
ONLINE ARTICLES

14

TAKEN OVER BY A
MAD CULT: HOW
IT ALL BEGAN IN
THE UK

By THE REV'D PETER PRIVETT

16

GODLY PLAY
"DOWN UNDER"

By CAROLYN HANDLEY AND
JUDYTH ROBERTS

18

FROM THE
FOUNDATION

Everywhere a Circle:

THE 2016 EUROPEAN GODLY PLAY CONFERENCE

By THE REV. CANON DR. ANDREW SHELDON

As the title of this publication suggests, circles loom large in Godly Play. In our room we have circles of the church year, a circle of the Holy Eucharist, circles on which the symbols of the Holy Trinity sit, and of course, a circle of children. Indeed there are circles of participants of all ages that meet in churches, schools, hospitals, senior centers, prisons, and workplaces—all to hear and wonder around a Godly Play story. Godly Play practitioners also form circles of relationship. Throughout the world, circles of storytellers meet to hear and debrief stories and to support one another in their Godly Play work. Circles everywhere!

For the purpose of this article, I want to focus on the circles, both formal and informal, that promote and nurture Godly Play in various regional and national contexts. Across the world, associations have formed to shepherd the work of Godly Play in a particular context. These associations take the form of foundations, trusts, registered non-profits, subsidiaries of an umbrella organisation, or simply a group of enthusiasts committed to doing Godly Play well in their setting. In some cases these associations have boards and by-laws, others have a champion who almost singlehandedly brings Godly Play to a particular place.

Sometimes circles join together to form a larger circle, and such is the case of Godly Play Europe. I was privileged to attend the Godly Play European Conference, recently held on the shores of the Baltic Sea just outside of Riga, Latvia. The organisation and leadership of the conference was a joint effort of Godly Play Norway and Godly Play Latvia, and by every measurement it was a resounding success.



The conference began with an academic day, which brings me back to the idea of circles. As I noted in the last edition of *The Circle*, there is always



an aspect of contextualisation that takes place as Godly Play spreads around the globe. That is, the context of a particular place will have an influence on how Godly Play is used and understood in that place. In my part of the world, Godly Play emerged out of church basements. Jerome Berryman's work was discovered by lay and ordained ministry leaders who saw it as an exemplary way of working with children in a Church School context. Not surprisingly, Godly Play grew as these practitioners spread the word, and as congregational leaders began to see the effectiveness of the method. They embraced Godly Play for a very practical reason: it worked. And so, also not surprisingly, much of the Godly Play leadership in this context is made up of congregationally based lay and clergy enthusiasts. This model is also undoubtedly the case in many other corners of the world.

But back to Europe. The advent and development of Godly Play in Europe had a somewhat different arc than the aforementioned model. In Europe, even as Godly Play emerged out of church basements and was embraced because it worked, it also significantly emerged out of the academy and was embraced because the undergirding theory was scholastically compelling. A disproportionate number of early Godly Play advocates in Europe were academics. Professors in the fields of religious education, child psychology, and practical theology discovered Godly Play and began to share it with one another. Rather than on the floor of a church-based Godly Play room using Godly

Play materials, first stories were often heard at conferences on—or under!—tables, using whatever materials were at hand.

As such, Godly Play in Europe very much reflects its beginnings. There is a commitment to research, a willingness to critique, and a desire to innovate that is robust within the Godly Play culture. There are academics throughout the Godly Play world who are researching and writing and going deeply into the theory. However, the concentration of this activity in Europe makes it somewhat unique. And although Godly Play Europe is a circle, it is a circle made up of many other circles, and they each have their own story, culture, and character.

Therefore, completely in character, the latest Godly Play European Conference began with an academic day. Various individuals shared their research on topics such as theologising with children, ethical standards in theological research involving children, Godly Play and existential issues, doing Godly Play with secondary school students, beginning Godly Play within a congregation, and the historic and theoretical roots of Godly Play. Others presented their research and experience by displaying posters of their work and giving a short introduction to it. We heard how Godly Play emerged and was adapted within the Salvation Army in the UK, of research done with children within a hospital context, about doing Godly Play with individuals facing significant disabilities, and at different ages and stages of life. And so much more.

The Conference proper then got under way with excellent keynote addresses and a number of workshops that focussed on the theory and practice of Godly Play. The good news is that Godly Play Europe will be publishing a book that contains much of the content of the conference as well as other pieces of research. When this book is available, we will be sure to communicate how you can get a copy.

Congratulations to all who collaborated to make the conference a great success. It was decidedly a European affair, but it should be noted that there were also guests from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia. A good time had by all!

So what could this mean for your circle?

Firstly, all Godly Play associations and practitioners should seek to emulate the European ethos of doing research on and about the method and practice of Godly Play. Find ways to measure Godly Play's effectiveness. Discover what works best for particular contexts and constituents. Innovate by using Godly Play in a setting not normally associated with Godly Play, and observe how it is received and what lessons could be learned

by this innovation. And then write up your findings, and we will ensure they are shared with the wider community.

Secondly, I wonder how you would describe the Godly Play culture in your part of the world? How did Godly Play get started in your context? Who started it? What, if anything, may be unique? You may have noticed that *The Circle* contains 'origin' stories: stories of how Godly Play came to be in a particular part of the world. I would encourage you to think about and write down these stories, and if you would be interested in sharing them with the larger circle to be in touch with me at andrew@godlyplay.ca



The recent conference in Latvia reminded me again

of the importance of relationships within the Godly Play community. Relationships are central to the idea of a circle of people. For these circles to come alive, we need to be present and facing one another. Conferences are a way of making this happen. Currently regularly scheduled conferences are taking place in Europe, North America, and Australia. These conferences may be held in a specific geographical setting but they are generally open to all. Indeed, save the date of next year's North American Conference to be held June 23-25 in Denver, US. If you are aware of any other meetings or conferences of Godly Play circles, please let me know and we will be sure to promote it.

Circles loom large in Godly Play. Circles in the room and in the stories, and circles of dedicated practitioners throughout the world.

It is all here. Everything we need. For every beginning there is an ending, and for every ending there is a beginning. It goes on and on, forever and ever.



Andrew describes his introduction to Godly Play in this way: "It was love at first sight!" Andrew immediately recognized the value of this innovative program and became an early advocate of the program in the Diocese of Toronto. He is an Anglican priest and professor and an experienced adult educator. Besides being a

Godly Play Trainer and storyteller, Andrew functions as the Godly Play Advocate for International Development. andrew@godlyplay.ca



How Godly Play Feels and WHY THAT IS IMPORTANT

By JEROME W. BERRYMAN

When Godly Play is going well, it feels like it is done for itself, is voluntary, involves deep concentration, alters time, and is pleasurable. The four dimensions of the creative process—flow, play, love, and contemplation—are engaged in an integrated way. The energy involved seems to come from beyond, beside, and within, which is the way God communicates with us as the Holy Trinity.

We adults can set up situations where this happens and guide children to be ready, but we don't cause these moments that transcend ordinary experience. They are experienced when we enter the creative process with the children, which flows out from and returns to the Creator. When we enter this flow, we discover our deep identity: the image and likeness of God, which we share with the Creator and ignore at our peril and the peril of the whole creation.

These moments of transcendence in Godly Play are enjoyable and to be enjoyed, but they are also to be affirmed—not with words so much as by resonating with

the experience and acknowledging its power and value. We know at some deep level that this is how we are meant to be.

The power of this experience is one that everyone instinctively desires, but not everyone discovers how to participate in it. This is why many seek shortcuts to counterfeit it through the use of drugs or the misuse of power. In both cases, people try to manipulate the creative process—consciously and unconsciously—to cause the desired feeling. This fails because it is only the byproduct of being in the deep current of our true identity. When the experience itself is turned into a false goal, it becomes destructive.

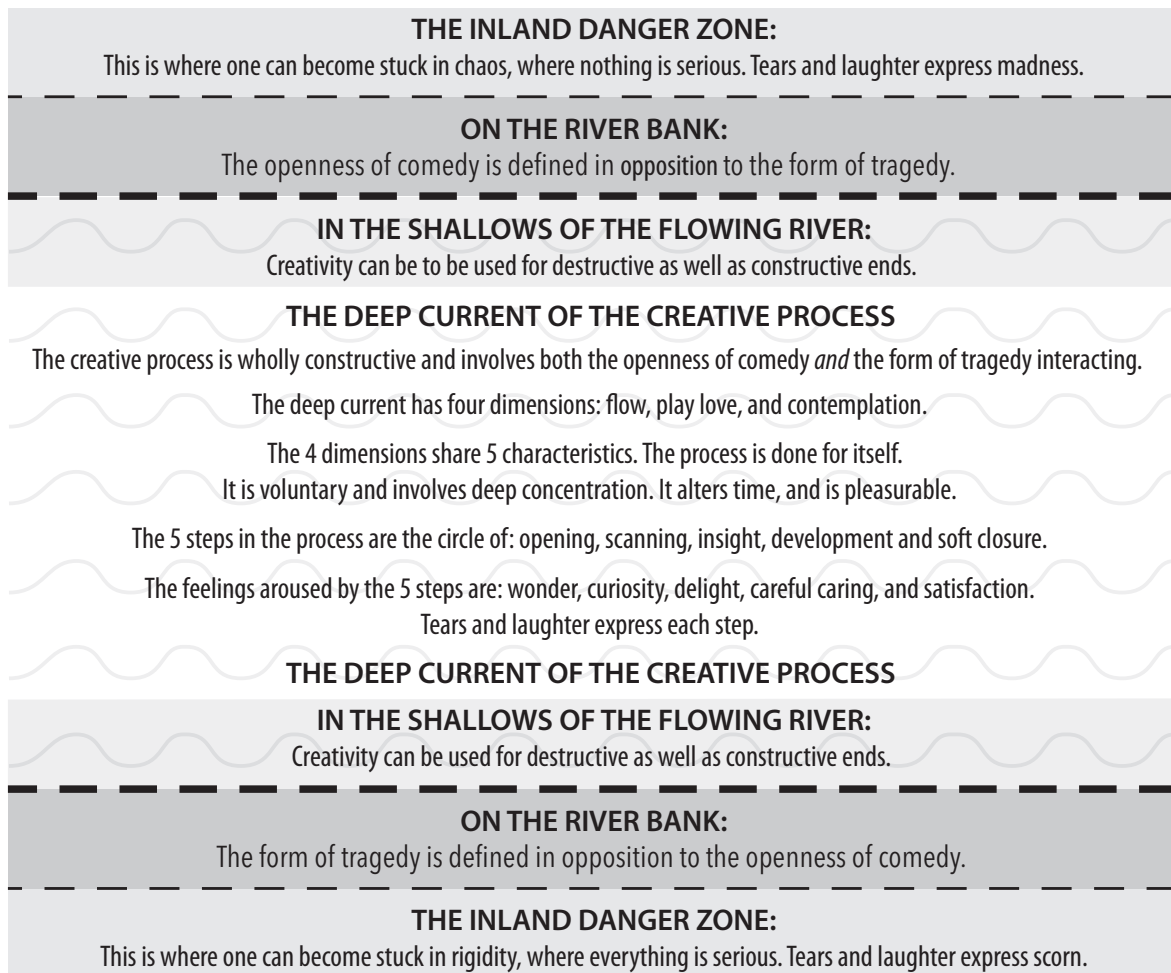
I would like to organize these ideas by using an allegory about a river's deep current, the shallows along the banks, the riverbanks themselves, and the evaporation of the water when it is left high and dry after flooding over the riverbanks. The danger of the water's evaporation is that it prevents a return to the river's flow except on rare occasions.

The first time I used this allegory was during the inaugural meeting of the International Association of Children’s Spirituality in 2000 at The University of Chichester in the United Kingdom. My keynote was published in 2001¹ and included a diagram, which depicted “the deep channel of living spiritually.” I was somewhat tentative about this idea then, but now, some sixteen years later, I am much more confident about it.

One of the reasons I am more confident about the allegory of the river is because in 2012, Daniel J. Siegel published his Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology and used a similar image and diagram to illustrate what he calls “interpersonal neurobiology.” Siegel defined interpersonal neurobiology as the brain, mind, and relationships working together as an integrated system. Siegel’s “river of integration”

was bounded on one side by chaos and on the other by rigidity while “harmony runs down the center of the river.”

Siegel and I borrowed this image from complexity and chaos theory, which explicates a domain as a “living system” that can reproduce itself. This complexity is maintained between deterministic order and randomness. The “river” I will refer to, however, flows out from and returns to the Creator and is found at all scales of creativity in the creation and not just the neurobiological. The riverbanks—or limits to creativity—provide energy, information, and shape for the creative process although the limits are sometimes shaped by the river’s flow. As you look at the diagram of this allegory, please go first to the deep channel, and then work your way out toward the riverbanks, and then to the dangers of becoming stuck in chaos and rigidity.



River Allegory chart courtesy of Church Publishing

¹ J. Erricker, C. Ota & C. Erricker, eds, *Spiritual Education: Cultural, Religious and Social Differences; New Perspectives in the 21st Century* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2001) 9-21. This chapter may also be found in *The Search for a Theology of Childhood: Essays by Jerome W. Berryman from 1978-2009* by Brendan Hyde, ed, (Ballarat VIC, Australia: Connor Court Publishing, 2003) 169-186.



A living system stores information, and yet is flexible enough to communicate, create, and sustain life. The interplay of chaos and rigidity causes creativity to emerge in children as well as adults. Adults are sometimes conscious of this flow and can speak about it, as we are doing here, but infants and children usually intuit it and express the quality of their involvement by laughter and tears—as adults also do from time to time. “Maturity” beyond the norm of accumulated age and experience flows when freedom (tending toward chaos) is combined with the ability to sustain continuity (tending toward rigidity) regardless of age.

When the flow of the creative process drifts over the bank into chaos, it spins apart and dies. When it drifts over the other bank into rigidity, it grinds to a halt, breaks down, and dies. These two kinds of “death,” which in the allegory we have also called “evaporation,” take place even if the person continues to exist biologically. Being stuck “high and dry” results in a diminished state of goodness, a *privatio boni* as St. Augustine might say, which frustrates our deep identity and warns us to steer back into the deep channel—if we can by God’s grace—before it is too late.

We sometimes laugh until we cry and cry until we laugh at our tears as we gain perspective on them, so healthy and creative laughter and tears are related. When tragedy and comedy separate and become defined against each other, laughter and tears also divide. They no longer refresh each other. In the deep current of the river, however, we hear them working together to express the wonder, curiosity, delight, careful caring, and the smile of satisfaction that show the movement of the creative process in action.

Our laughter and tears can signal being in the deep channel, but they also warn us when the river overflows either bank and water pools along either side of the river and begins to evaporate. The laughter and tears of disordered madness appear when the river overflows and gets stuck in chaos, where nothing is serious. Scornful laughter and tears show when the river overflows into rigidity, and everything becomes serious. Relentless comedy or endless tragedy disintegrates the creative self as a living system, so God’s image in the deep current is obscured or lost.

The tragic hero’s seriousness might arouse pity and fear, but heroic rigidity (blind, prideful commitment to a cause) can easily destroy the hero as well as those near and even dear. We are drawn toward tragic people because of their sacrifice and leadership, but at the same time something makes us draw back if we can do so ethically. This “drawing back” is our impulse toward life and the need to return to the deep channel. The narrow focus of the hero on the task and the willingness to sacrifice life to reach the goal rests on rigidity. The goal of the hero may be very important and of great benefit to others, but it is the way the goal is sought that makes it destructive rather than constructive. The means and ends of shallow creativity can be destructive as well as constructive.

Tragic heroes need a healthy dose of comedy to lend them some self-awareness and a creative and perceptive community to prevent them from getting hopelessly stuck in the rigidity of narcissism. The decay of Tolkien’s Saruman is an example of this descent into rigidity. He slowly lost any sense of openness to comedy, so there was nothing to counter his growing narcissism. The Hobbits, also described

in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, were different. Tragedy and comedy played back and forth in their lives to provide them with the flowing creativity to resist the evil that came to dominate Saruman and put their civilization at risk, as it does ours.

Comedy can also take over one's life. The comedic experience begins lightly with the integration of the main character into society. While a tragedy might end with people dying on stage, a comedy ends with people coming together or even getting married. A tragedy arouses pity and fear while a comedy arouses sympathy and playful teasing.

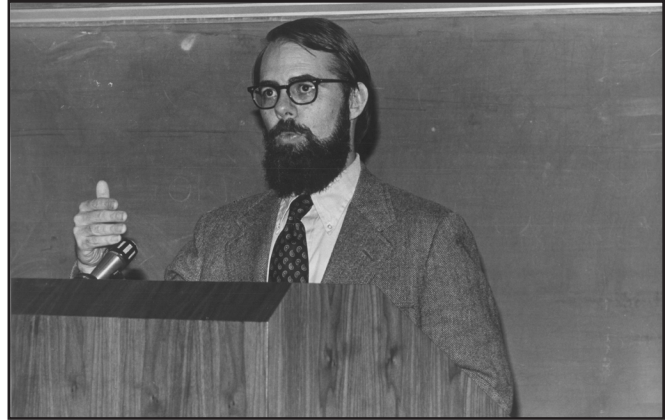
The danger of comedy is not comedy itself. The danger is its separation from form and getting stuck in formlessness. When comedy becomes chaotic madness, it no longer brings the fresh air of freedom into one's life and creativity to one's outlook. Sympathy for others is diminished, and one's authentic sense of humor is strangled. Even the union of marriage and being integrated into one's society gets contemptuously and sarcastically dismissed. An example is a beloved American comedian, author, and television personality who has been accused of rape, often involving drugs, by as many as sixty women from 1965-2008. He has maintained his innocence against criminal charges, but when we drift over the riverbank and move past comedy into chaos our constructive creativity is blocked. This is because we are no longer in touch with the structure and responsibility needed to give the creative process its deepest and most constructive expression.

Listening to the laughter and tears of children and adults is like listening to the turbulence in life's flowing river.² Henri Bergson argued that life is a "vital impulse," an *élan vital*. When it loses its fluidity and becomes thoughtlessly automatic, we are likely to hear warning laughter, and I would add, see tears of frustration and confusion. Bergson thought this was because we are no longer "ceaselessly adapting and readapting," and the self "slackens in the attention that is due to life." This results in mechanical movement.³ The resulting laughter or tears awakens us to the awareness that life's flow is in danger, and we need to recover our deep identity.

This is why the laughter and tears of children and adults are so important. They make up the nonverbal communication systems that express our feelings and show us when we need to steer back into the deep channel. These signs show us when we need to re-integrate the four dimensions of the creative process and become part of a community of creativity to sustain us. They show us, whatever age we might be, where the Kingdom of God can be found.

CONCLUSION

Mature Godly Play feels like steering between chaos and rigidity, drawing on both to live within the deep channel of our fundamental identity, which is the flowing of the



constructive, creative process. This experience is what children can teach adults by their intuitive "maturity," when we forget what we once knew. God's kingdom is always there in the deep channel, inviting us to enter its flow at all scales of the creative process from affinity with God to planning what to have for supper.

² Laughter such as the laughter of wonder, the laughter of delight, and the satisfied smile of soft closure are the signs that creativity is running in the deep channel. Laughter needs no words to communicate its meaning and can be shared by children and adults. Children often live in the deep channel unconsciously, but adults need to consciously integrate the whole person—psychologically, socially, biologically, and spiritually—to live there.

A "laugh" is not a person, place, or thing. It is a unique kind of communication that involves corporality, time, and place. We know what laughter means with our bodies and our spirits. After we laugh and reflect on our laughter, we can know what it means with our minds. What it means is that we are part of the creative process that comes from and returns to the Creator.

³ There are many printings of Bergson's *Laughter*. Wylie Sypher edited my favorite edition, which might be overlooked because of the complexity of its title. It is called *Comedy: An Essay on Comedy* by George

Meredith and Laughter Henri Bergson with an Introduction and Appendix "The Meaning of Comedy" by Wylie Sypher (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956).



I founded Godly Play with my wife, Thea. We worked together almost from the time we met in 1960 in Princeton until her death in 2009. Thea was a student at Westminster Choir College, and I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary when we met.

Godly Play IN A SCHOOL SETTING

By THE REV. DR. ROSEMARY BEALES

Nine years ago, I was looking for a call to a new parish when someone approached me about a chaplaincy position in an Episcopal school that was about to open. “It’s not what I’m looking for,” I said (ironically, in retrospect). “The only way I’d be interested is if I could teach Godly Play.” Having been led deeper into the life of the Trinity and into ordained ministry through this life-giving way of Christian formation, I could not imagine offering anything less to the children I would serve.

Fortunately, the leaders at St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Virginia were not only open to Godly Play—something new to them—but have embraced and supported it these past eight years. I feel blessed to serve as Chaplain to the Lower School to 400 children in grades Junior Kindergarten to 5 and to teach religion to students of various faiths and denominations in grades JK to 4. Every week, I welcome 21 classes of students into a beautifully prepared Godly Play room to learn the stories and traditions of the Christian faith, the classical Christian language system—and to learn from and with them.

The school setting offers several strengths. The children are present regularly, unlike the sporadic attendance that often afflicts Sunday schools. They know each other intimately, like siblings, because they are together all day, sometimes for years. The students have one consistent leader (myself) who is also their Chaplain, thus integrating what they experience in Godly Play with what they experience in chapel, in the community service I lead, and in my pastoral presence. I have also found that facilitating the spirituality of children from a variety of faith backgrounds enriches our conversations, most notably when we talk about Baptism or Holy Eucharist.

Much of the traditional Godly Play format translates well to the school setting. The primary adaptations are: a single teacher

performing both storyteller and doorperson roles; a shortened time span (30 minutes for JK through 2nd grade and 40 minutes for 3rd and 4th graders); and the (reluctant) elimination of a regular feast. Most weeks, my students get ready, receive a lesson, wonder about it, pray, and line up for their next class. Because hands-on response time is not possible every week, I schedule “work days” periodically when no lesson is presented, but



begin immediately asking each child to choose his or her work. These days are highly prized and a welcome change for busy students who spend much of their day in “head” activities. In Godly Play, they can also engage their hands, hearts, and imaginations. The work day is often a social opportunity as well, as many children like to work together in pairs or small groups.

Children come to an outside classroom door in a line escorted by their primary teacher, I greet and welcome them in, and we make a slow “procession” around the shelves that form a circle inside the larger room. This begins our getting-ready process. Usually, one student sounds a singing bowl or a triangle to invite the class into a moment of quiet centering. Then we enjoy the lesson. Because I fulfill the doorperson’s role in helping children get their work out, on “work days” I ask all the children to stay in the circle until everyone has finished choosing. This is so that I can keep supporting the circle during the choosing time and be free to support those who are getting out their work once the choosing has ended.

I continue to struggle with ways to introduce the feast. Because of the shortened class duration and the logistics of providing even the simplest of refreshments to 350 children in 21 separate groups, I have not offered it routinely. One year as we prepared for All Saints, the first of our five celebrations of Holy Eucharist in school chapel, I introduced the feast right after the getting-ready time. So that it would not be perceived as just



another snack, I asked them to be thinking about connections they could make with other things in our Godly Play room or with what we do in chapel. (This was more direct than we usually are in Godly Play.) The introduction, along with the ritualized manner of the feast, helped my students make the distinction from their routine school snacks (“because we waited until everyone was ready”; “because we prayed before we ate”) and make connections with other times of breaking bread together (“it reminded me of Thanksgiving”; “when my whole family goes to my grandmother’s in New Jersey”; “when we have communion at school”).

While some schools are careful to separate religious studies from worship, I decided at the outset that I would create one cohesive whole. Rather than use a lectionary, I choose a theme related to the Godly Play lesson many of them heard the previous week or one connected to the liturgical year or a saint’s feast. After everyone has received the Great Flood lesson, for instance, we might experience a chapel service in which the readings, prayers, and hymns celebrate the gift of water.

During the first three years of Godly Play at this school, all students in Godly Play heard the same lesson. Now that most have experienced a full three-year cycle of the spiral curriculum, I have begun introducing in grade 3 the stories of individual Old Testament figures (Volume 6 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*) and in grade 4 the stories of saints (Volume 7). All continue to receive the core stories they know and treasure, including the stories of Volume 8. School ministry with Godly Play at the center fits me like a second skin. I can hardly believe now my initial reaction that this opportunity was “not what I’m looking for.”

Nurturing the Nurturers. After a few years in school ministry, I began to see that the best way to serve the children was to serve their parents—who, whether they know it or not, are their children’s primary spiritual guides. To that end, I designed a series of six evening sessions to offer parents the chance to delight in God and in their children as they grow in

their own faith and claim their own traditions. Because of my own profound experiences with Godly Play as an adult and the way I have witnessed it nurture my students and the adults I train, I naturally decided to use Godly Play as the centerpiece of the six sessions I designed for parents.

The first session included children and parents together, experiencing and enjoying a full Godly Play session. Each additional session also featured a Godly Play lesson, offered in the context of a holistic approach to spiritual nurture that was intended to stimulate parent-child conversations and introduce or strengthen religious practices at home. Throughout the six weeks of this “Nurturing the Nurturers” project, participants gained confidence in their role as their children’s primary spiritual mentors. According to the data collected, parents became more active in practices that support their children’s formation and more comfortable with their children’s spirituality. (For a more complete description of this



experience, please see my Doctor of Ministry thesis “Nurturing the Nurturers: Equipping Parents as Their Children’s Primary Spiritual Guides,” available at www.academia.edu or by contacting me at rbeales@ssas.org.)

Results of this brief experiment were persuasive enough that I continue to lead a course of sessions and one-time events, both at school and at the parish I serve on Sundays. For me, work with parents is the frontier of my expanding ministry. Yet always, it is the children who are at the core, the children who are both my call and my delight.



The Rev. Dr. Rosemary Beales is in her ninth year as Chaplain to the Lower School at St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes, a school of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia in Alexandria. She has been a practitioner of the Godly Play method for over 20 years and a Trainer since 2000. rbeales@ssas.org

Godly Play CLASSROOMS



online articles

The Foundation regularly publishes *online articles* about the Godly Play curriculum. Here are our most recent articles. *Click on the image or text to read online.*



Wondering Skills— An Interview with W. Lee Dickson (pictured), Executive Director of the Godly Play Foundation

by Jeannie Babb

The Full Curriculum: Taking Time to Wonder— Extending Godly Play through the full curriculum to serve older children

by Jeannie Babb



Godly Play at Greenbelt in the UK —Godly Play out of the box and onto the green

by Andrew Sheldon

Godly Play as Spiritual Intervention presented at International Conference for Children's Spirituality—Hospital chaplains Ryan Campbell and Doug Watts debrief their Godly Play presentation in Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln, UK.

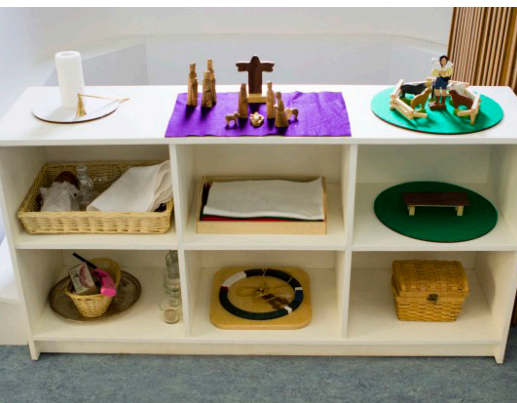
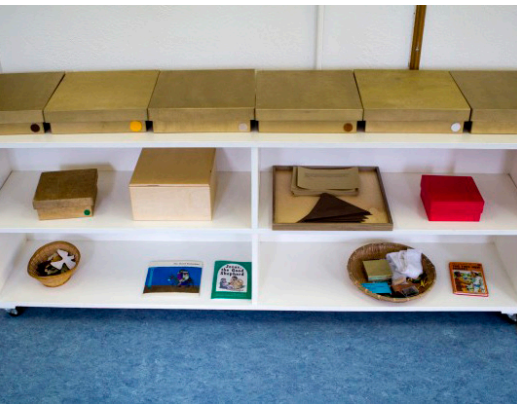
by Chaplain Ryan Campbell



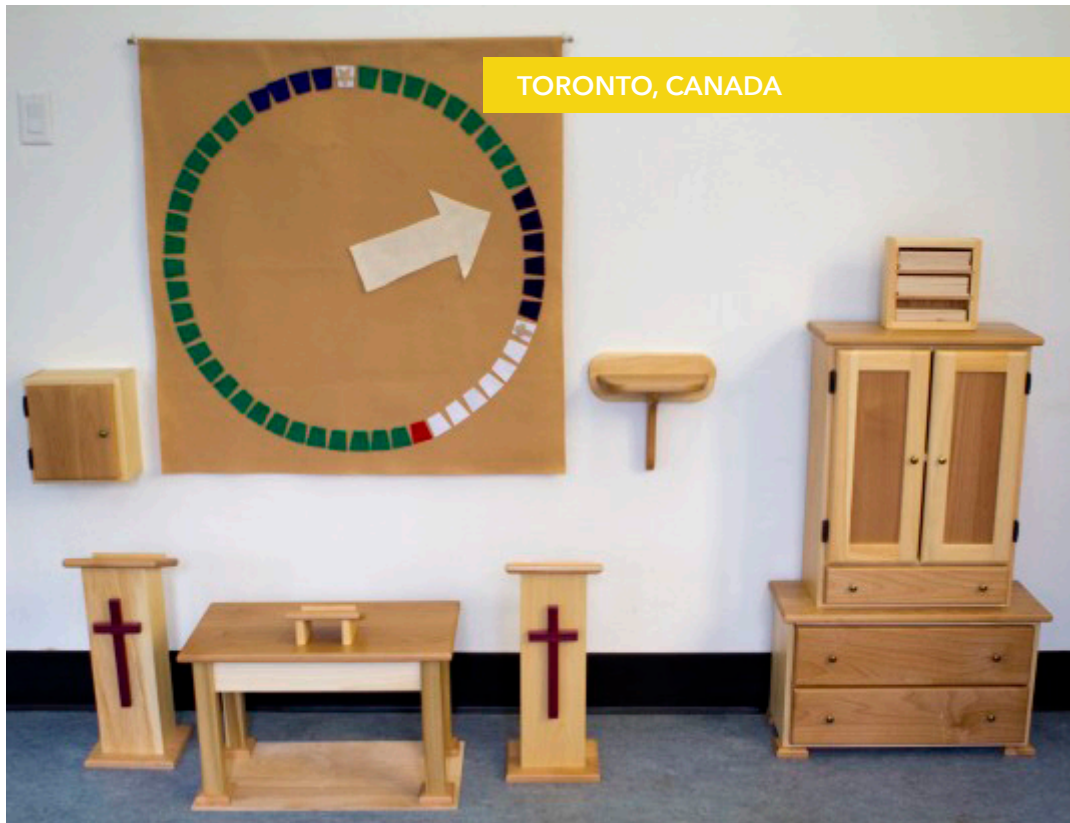
UUBI, UGANDA



MIDDLESBROUGH, UNITED KINGDOM



TORONTO, CANADA



NOKIA, FINLAND



Taken Over by a Mad Cult:

HOW IT ALL BEGAN IN THE UK

By THE REV'D PETER PRIVETT

“There is some interesting work being done with stories by someone called Jerome Berryman. You would love it.”

—John Hull

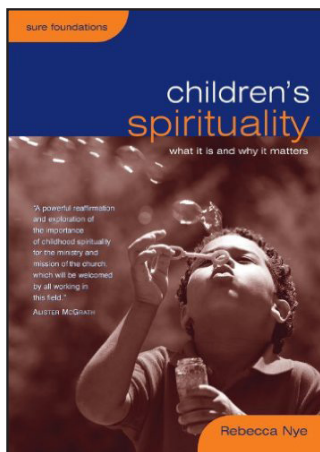
“And that is the great mystery that is Easter.”

—Jerome Berryman

These two comments were the ones that changed my life. The first was spoken by the Professor of Religious Education at Birmingham University in a conversation John and I had around about 1995. His comment went in to my sub-conscious and suddenly resurfaced when Jerome came to England in 1999 and told a group of us the Faces of Easter story. “Mystery,” I thought, “that is a wonderful word.” It connected me to my childhood love of stories and was sister to a more analytical approach to theology. “Mmmmm!”

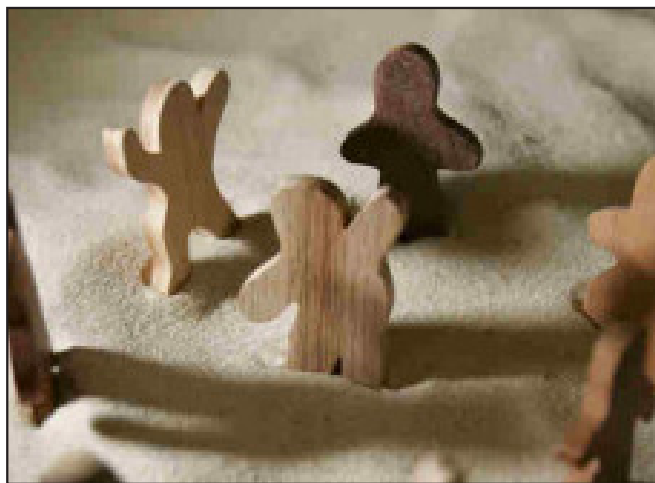


Rebecca Nye



At the same time, Rebecca Nye was undertaking her seminal research into children's spirituality, and as part of her PhD research had come across the work of Cavilletti and Berryman. In 1998 at a conference in the US, Rebecca identified the next part of the research as creating a curriculum to support children's spirituality. Godly Play Trainer Kathy Meyer was in the audience and invited Rebecca to see her room. There weren't any children present, but Rebecca remembers being overwhelmed by the space and knowing “that was it.”

Rebecca returned to England enthusiastic and



passionate about Godly Play, although many colleagues at first thought she had been taken over by a mad American cult. She presented the Good Shepherd at the Diocesan Children's Advisers conference, and many of us were intrigued to learn more. Jerome was invited to England in May 1999, and I was totally absorbed as he fished through his suitcase—he'd literally just come off the plane—and the story of Creation emerged from shirts and multi-coloured reindeer sweaters.

In January 2001, Rebecca used her base at the Cambridge Divinity Faculty to host a week with Jerome, at which members of the Centre Center for Jewish Education were also present. Shortly after this The Rev'd Tom Ambrose, vicar of a nearby parish, and his wife Gill, one of the Diocesan Advisers, agreed to host the first Godly Play room in Europe. Gill and Rebecca began to offer one day introductions, and hundreds of people began to attend—not just from the UK, but from Europe and other parts of the world.

Rebecca and I were invited to train as Trainers in the summer of 2002, a memorable experience for both us. The training held at Estes Park in the Rocky Mountains and was enlightening, challenging, and full of laughter. We held our first accredited course in January 2003, and Jerome came over to be with us. Twelve friends were invited, and we asked

them to pay! We thought that would be the end, but a thirteenth friend asked when we would do another course, and mysteriously we found that others wanted to attend as well.

There was very little advertising back in those early days, so people would pass the message on by word of mouth. But very soon we found ourselves offering at least 6-7 courses a year. Since 2002, we have trained over 1500 people, many of that number coming from outside the UK. This led to development work in Finland, Germany, Holland, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Latvia, China, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Canada, Australia, Belarus, Switzerland, South African . . .

In 2007, Godly Play UK became a registered charity and celebrated that event in Poets' Corner Westminster Abbey where Rebecca gave the first annual lecture on Children's Spirituality. We were really honoured as our event took longer than the Queen Mother's funeral! But that is another story . . .



An Anglican priest, a teacher, a Godly Play Trainer, a writer, a Children's Spirituality consultant, and a textile artist, Peter is a gift to many, many people. He resides in Rugby, UK with his wife where he also coordinates community art projects and gardens (we are not sure how he does it all). peter.privett@yahoo.co.uk
godlyplay.uk





Godly Play “DOWN UNDER”

By CAROLYN HANDLEY AND JUDYTH ROBERTS

This story takes place Down Under—one large continent with a variety of seasons and time zones. I wonder what the weather is like today where you live? I wonder what you can see out of your windows? Can you see buildings, countryside, forest, or water?

Seasons: Our seasons are the opposite of the northern hemisphere. This gives us an ongoing challenge with the northern hemisphere context of The Circle of the Church Year language. For example, our days are longest and hottest at Christmastime. The promise that “the people living in darkness have seen a great light” would fit better for us in late June!

Several story versions have been developed in Australia. In warmer places, jacaranda trees bloom purple just as Advent is about to start. In others, Advent comes at the start of the football season or with the ripening of the grapes.

In Australia, we start our school year at the end of January—usually close to the start of Lent. For our curriculum, this

means the first thing children learn about each year is Jesus’ passion and death. At least in Godly Play we have Jesus’ whole life, told in *The Faces of Easter*: Jesus was born, grew up, lived, died, and somehow is still with us today. It is not until later in the year that we learn about the Parables which Jesus told. We finish each year with Jesus’ birth, and children miss Epiphany because families are away on summer holidays.

Trainer practices: When we became Godly Play Trainers, we were told after a challenging Core Training: “People only remember two or three things anyway”. After all the effort we put into each session of the training, over three full days, we could not accept this! As Australian Trainers, we have reflected on our own training experiences. We carefully study feedback forms after each course, and we strive to get better every time.

We aim to intentionally embody the Godly Play principles in all we do. This includes sitting together as Trainers for Godly Play sessions whenever we gather. What a blessing it is to work collaboratively to offer Godly Play to Australians!





Carolyn Handley (right) is a Godly Play Trainer and spiritual director in Manly, NSW. When not storytelling or wondering, Carolyn can be found walking or swimming, reading books, singing or feasting with family and friends.

Judyth Roberts (left) is a Godly Play Trainer and curator of the Godly Play room at Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide as part of her role for the SA Synod as Leadership Developer.

Carolyn and Judyth became friends through their shared interest in Godly Play and coffee, and together they have done a lot of Godly Play training and travel.

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godlyplay.org.au



FROM THE FOUNDATION

Dear Friends,

Our circle is drawing wider, and I am so deeply humbled by each of you in your service to the children.

Just a week ago, an international group of Godly Players gathered in Jurmala, Latvia at the 2016 European Godly Play Conference hosted beautifully by Godly Play Latvia and Norway. There were rich presentations, stories in many languages, and deep connections made. There were people for whom this was their first conference—and many who have attended conferences in multiple continents and hemispheres. There were storytellers in their 20s and in their 70s. There were more than ten languages and more than eight denominations. The circle was wide indeed. I wonder how wide our circles really are?

Some of you reading this second issue of *The Circle* may be practicing Godly Play in beautifully appointed rooms with trained story tellers and a supportive parish. Some may be telling next week's story under a tree with homemade materials and a hand-typed translation. Regardless of your settling, you are serving those whom Jesus said are "of greatest importance in the kingdom of God": the child.



With wonder and thankfulness,

W. LEE DICKSON

Executive Director

Godly Play Foundation

lee.dickson@godlyplayfoundation.org



UPCOMING CONFERENCES 2017

**JUNE
23 - 25, 2017**
COLORADO, USA

2017 North
American Godly
Play Conference:
"DRAWING THE
CIRCLE WIDER"

**MAY
12 - 13, 2017**
SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

2017 Godly Play
UK Conference:
"COME DANCE
WITH ME"
John Bell and
Peter Privett



2017 NORTH AMERICAN GODLY PLAY CONFERENCE

DRAWING THE CIRCLE WIDER

JUNE 23-25, 2017
DENVER, COLORADO

godlyplayfoundation.org/2017nagpc

2017 NAGPC:

WHERE WE STARTED:

The Story of Godly Play &
Jerome's 80th Birthday

WHAT WE HAVE:

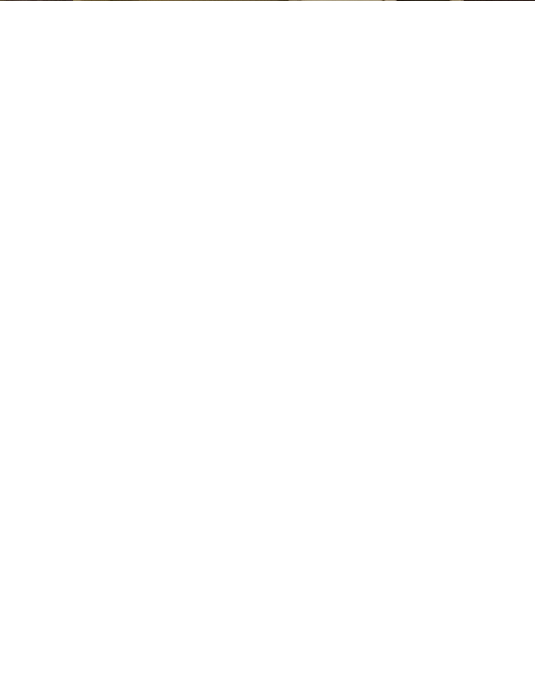
The Full Curriculum

WHAT WE NEED:

Spiritual Maturity

WHERE WE ARE HEADED:

New Stories, New Books



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