



A PUBLICATION FOR THE GODLY PLAY FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 2017

The Challenge of Context: Part II

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Torah Godly Play:  
Godly Play for Jewish Education

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Honouring Older People  
in Care Settings

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Graceful Nurture: Using Godly  
Play with Adults

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We Listened: The Second Edition of  
*The Complete Guide to Godly Play*

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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](mailto:info@godlyplayfoundation.org)



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FROM THE  
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# The Challenge of Context: Part II

By THE REV. CANON DR. ANDREW SHELDON



Godly Play in South Africa.

This past May I supported a Core Training in Cuba, and some of the circumstances started my mind percolating on issues around Godly Play and contextualisation. I have written before on this topic—in the first issue of *The Circle* in July 2019, where I wrote about ‘Godly Play and the Challenge of Context’. At that time I concentrated on the ways that Godly Play appropriately bends toward the context it is being practised within and gave many examples of what that could look like. What occurred to me in Cuba, however, were the ways in which culture may need to bend towards Godly Play. Bending at least in the way in which we train or present Godly Play in a new context.

What do I mean by bend towards? What I mean is what are those, dare I say, non-negotiables that we adhere to when we introduce Godly Play into a new context? The new context may be ecclesiastical—denominations or churches that may not have previously embraced Godly Play. They may be linguistic—Godly Play translated into new languages. They may be ethnic—new countries or regions, or indeed, new ethnic communities within established countries or regions. I would argue that as Godly Play expands into these

new contexts that we need to be a both/and people. It is not that either Godly Play bends toward the context or the context bends toward Godly Play, but that Godly Play bends toward the context and the context bends toward Godly Play.

As I wrote above, I have addressed the ways Godly Play is appropriately contextualised. But what are those ways in which we encourage, perhaps insist, that the context does the hard work of contextualisation in order to truly practice Godly Play with integrity? In other words, what are those aspects of Godly Play that a consensus may agree are to be adhered to whatever the context? This discernment is, in part, the work of the Godly Play International Council and is reflected in the Godly Play International Covenant of Agreement. As I wrote in the third issue of *The Circle* this

past February, the Covenant of Agreement focusses on issues that have universal application. Its conclusions are directed towards country/region associations for implementation. Within each subject area, there are two categories of adherence: minimum requirements and best practices. But the Covenant primarily emphasises practices and protocols as opposed to principles and philosophy.

Thus I return to my original question: What philosophies and principles undergirding the practice of Godly Play do we consider inflexible—philosophies and principles that we would expect any Godly Play context to ‘bend towards’? In considering this question, there may be those who would say that conviction without compromise is not a Godly Play value. But I would argue that conviction without compromise is actually what makes Godly Play such an effective method. That strict adherence to the practices and principles of Godly Play is at the heart of its effectiveness. And so when it comes to those areas in which it may be important to be inflexible, I would suggest the following:



## The centrality, capability, and capacity of children

What distinguishes Godly Play from so many other faith formation or spiritual nurture methods, programmes, and curriculums is how we view children. In Godly Play we embrace the centrality of children in our midst, taking seriously Jesus' perspective when "he called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"" (Matt 18:1-5).

Furthermore, and unlike many other approaches to ministry with children, we also believe in the capability and capacity of children to engage in the deep work that is required of them in Godly Play. I do not need to expand on this because Godly Play practitioners are well versed in these principles. But my point is that there is something that is inviolate about how we view children. We must all be vigorous in not allowing other views to prevail, even if they may be accepted in a particular context.

Having said that, I can understand that other contexts—both ecclesiastical and ethnic—struggle with these concepts. I am prepared to, and do, empathise with the challenge inherent in Godly Play to long held beliefs around children and around the faith formation of children. Indeed I believe that when introducing Godly Play into new contexts, we need to be compassionate, caring, and considerate about the challenges our view of children brings. But I also believe that this is one area where our default position is to be uncompromising in our stance.

### Identity is found in story

In Godly Play it is a truism that identity is not formed by being told who we are but by hearing stories that help us

to discover who we are. All too often what passes for faith formation in the church is about telling children of all ages precisely what it looks like to be a person of God, including what to believe and how to behave. In Godly Play we tell stories. We tell them without interpretation and without application. We tell the stories of people of God from the past in order that those in the present can find their identity as a person of God.

The practice of telling stories as a way of making meaning subverts the more traditional dialectical approach of bequeathing information or persuading. When I think of this approach, I imagine participants sitting in rows of chairs with the 'teacher' standing at the front indicating the relevant points projected on the screen behind. While this method may have its relevant applications, identity forming is not one of them. The more appropriate image to me is of a circle of participants listening to and seeing a story that draws them in and asks the question: 'I wonder where you are in this story, or what in this story is about you?' And so again this strikes me as being one of those aspects of Godly Play that is applied universally in every context; we tell stories as a way of helping hearers find their identity.

### Meaning is found through wondering

In Godly Play we hear the stories, and then we wonder. The wondering is a way of engaging the imagination, and engaging the imagination is our method for making meaning out of the story. What makes this work, of course, is that our wondering questions are genuine questions; we really do wonder what part of this story the hearer likes the best. When the wondering question is not genuine, we

fall into a dialectical approach which suggests that there may be a 'right' answer to the question. Godly Play does not do right answers. We do not employ an 'I know something that



Godly Play in Turkey.



Godly Play in Costa Rica.





Godly Play training in South Africa.

you don't know and now I'm going to tell you' attitude. Our goal is not that the hearers assent to a set of propositions that the story is meant to assert. We simply wonder and let the circle determine what meaning the story may have for them.

Now the dialectical approach of coming at things may, in some cases, make sense of something, but it does not make meaning. In Godly Play we employ a sacramental imagination, which suggests that in the process of wondering, God the Spirit is active in the circle. Such an approach honours the innate spirituality of all and the work of the Spirit in all. Such an approach must remain one of the central aspects of the Godly Play way that we hold to without compromise.

### And Much More

When it comes to the ways in which the context should bend towards Godly Play, there is, of course, more that could be said. We could talk about how space and materials matter in the face of the all too prevalent practice of consigning children's ministry to sub-standard spaces with whatever inadequate resources may be at hand. We could note that in Godly Play the circle is more important than the individual—but not more important than the authority of the all-knowing one. And certainly there are more principles that we could identify as being central and important to hold

to with conviction. I wonder what we could leave out and still have everything that we need?

I have argued for the necessity of context to bend towards Godly Play and for the authority of certain Godly Play principles. But I would also maintain that this conviction should be held lightly and applied with sensitivity. If we introduce and impart Godly Play with this in mind, then I suspect that these deeply held convictions will be imbued rather than enforced. And that is as it should be.



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](mailto:andrew@godlyplay.ca)

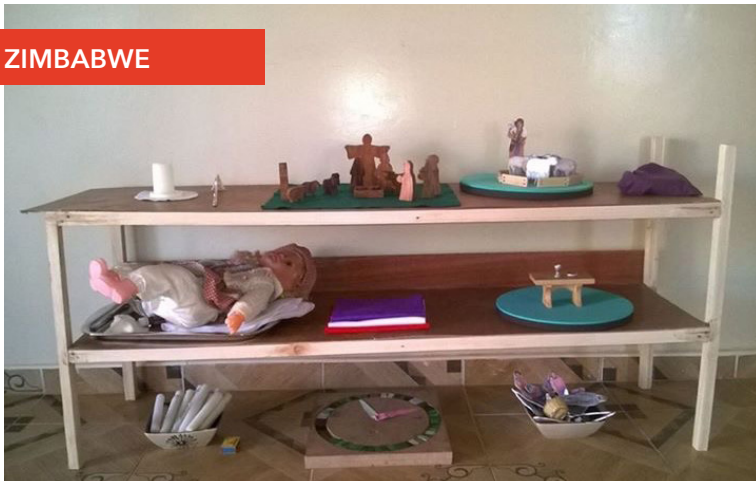


# Godly Play ROOMS



RIGA, LATVIA

ZIMBABWE



OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA







# TORAH GODLY PLAY: *Godly Play for Jewish Education*

By RABBI MICHAEL SHIRE, PH.D.

I first met Jerome in Houston in the late 1980s. I was a doctoral student in Religious Education at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and had fallen in love with a rabbinic student whose home town was Houston! We would visit Marcia's parents in Houston each summer and stay for a month. Having explored the city, its environs and all the museums, there was little left to do, and I was looking for action!! It came to me that having read some of Jerome's articles on religious education (particularly [Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith](#)) and noting that he was resident in Houston, I might well get to meet him and talk religious education. Jerome was gracious enough to invite me to Christ Church Cathedral in Houston, and we sat on the floor with wooden objects all around him. I had no idea what I was about to experience, and it was a transformative experience. A first Godly Play story—particularly if told by Jerome—is a life-altering experience. There was something in the experience that I had never experienced before and yet had always been searching for. I had grown up in a liberal Jewish household in Birmingham, England and committed myself to Jewish education as my career—but nothing in my Jewish Education paralleled that

spiritual experience and filled me with such wonder and delight. Suddenly my Torah came alive in a whole new way, and having studied faith development and religious growth, I realized that here was a methodology that combined inner consciousness with religious language and sacred story. As a teacher, I wanted to share it with others.

Marcia and I moved back to the UK, and I became the national director of Jewish Education for 65 synagogues and Jewish day schools. It was a busy time, but I managed each summer on our visits back to Houston to get some time with Jerome and Thea, including glorious long lunches at his favorite Italian restaurants! In the UK, I had become involved with a group of interfaith religious educators (ISREV) and was invited to their conference. Jerome had been invited to speak, and I seem to remember his topic was 'laughter'. I sat next to a young woman who was as excited as I was to hear him. We were both writing up our doctoral dissertations, and remarkably our topics and research designs were quite similar. It was the beginning of a long and firm friendship with [Rebecca Nye](#) and her family. Rebecca and I discussed the possibility of inviting Jerome back for a Godly Play



training session for Jewish and Christian religious educators, and in 1999 in Cambridge at the old divinity school, we all came together for 3 days of Godly Play Core Training with Jerome. Unfortunately, I became ill during the first day and had to leave my colleagues behind. But I was not daunted. Over the next few years, I worked with Jewish educators to promote Godly Play, but only two educators managed to set up fully developed classrooms, one of whom emigrated to Australia and rebuilt his classroom in his Melbourne synagogue! I attended the first Godly Play lecture given by Rebecca at Westminster Cathedral and met many of the Christian educators beginning to come into [Godly Play UK](#).



Pictured left, above, below: Godly Play Training in Cambridge, UK, 1999.

Jerome and I discussed the suitability of Godly Play for Jewish settings, and it took some time to fully realize how it could fit into Jewish Education. The very methodology of contemplative reading and telling was unknown in Jewish Education, and its role as an opening for spiritual wonder did not square with our very instrumental approach which emphasizes knowledge, skills, and values. It needed more thought to understand its place in our work. Very few Jewish educators even knew of Godly Play, but one insightful rabbi and storyteller had built a classroom in her synagogue and was using the scripted stories. Jerome invited me to join with [Rabbi Sandy Sasso](#) at a consultation about Godly Play for Jewish Settings in Denver in 2005. Godly Play US Trainer The Rev. Dr. Rosemary Beales led this consultation where we discussed the theological, midrashic, and liturgical implications of Godly Play. It got me thinking anew about why it was so important to expand the very definition of Jewish Education to incorporate social, emotional, and spiritual learning—and how crucial it was to introduce it properly and authentically to the Jewish community.



In 2011, I was called to take up my current position as [Dean of the School of Education at Hebrew College](#) in Boston. I left no time to waste and within six months of arriving had

contacted [The Rev. Cheryl Minor, Ph.D.](#) and organized the first ever training for Jewish educators in Boston. We got a remarkably big group to do some of the Core Training of the Hebrew bible stories, including Sandy Sasso from Indianapolis. It heralded a wonderful new beginning for our work over the next six years. One synagogue in Lexington,

Massachusetts decided to build two classrooms and train all their teachers. Somewhat shy of the word ‘God’, they decided to call their practice ‘Torah Play,’ and a wonderful team of educators came together to make it a reality. Personally, I thought ‘Godly’ was the most important part of a new paradigm for Jewish education and decided our official name would be ‘Torah Godly Play’. We formed a group of Trainers,

all of whom had worked with Cheryl, and established a Facebook group and Community of Practice and a set of materials stored at Hebrew College. We have trained over 100 Jewish educators, and there are Torah Godly Play classrooms in over a dozen synagogues, community centers, and Jewish Day Schools from Boston to Rochester to Cincinnati to New York City. Each year we offered training in Boston—once led by Jerome himself and most recently by Cheryl—and now it happens twice a year.

At the opening of each academic year at our rabbinic school student retreat, I offer a story. My faculty colleagues, my students, and

I wonder about the telling over what seems like hours. We wonder about the sacred narratives of our tradition, and as the year begins, we are all invited to enter a journey of discovery of our texts. I now offer a graduate school course on ‘Spiritual Development for Jewish Education’ at Hebrew College where our rabbinic, cantorial, and education students all are researchers in searching for old and new methodologies to transform Jewish Education and spiritual growth.

Our most recent project is to fine-tune Jerome’s stories for Jewish settings and create new stories for Jewish





Jerome Berryman and the author, Rabbi Michael Shire, Ph.D., at the 2015 Godly Play Conference.

festivals. A group of Trainers and authors, including Sandy, have now created 12 new stories for each Jewish festival, including Shabbat and the New Moon. We have much to do as we move forward: we are thinking about the role of Hebrew in our scripts; we are planning new materials for the cycle of the Jewish year; and we are developing a plan for the classroom layout of stories from the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), Midrashim (Rabbis' stories), and liturgical stories. Jewish Education is being enriched by the introduction of Torah Godly Play, and each one of us involved in teaching, writing, exploring, or telling has new found passion for entering into the world of imagination, creativity, and story to enhance the spiritual life of our children and their families.

Links of interest:

- [An Introduction to Torah Godly Play](#)
- [A Documentary on Torah Godly Play](#)
- [Rabbi Dr. Shire tells the Torah Godly Play story of the Exodus](#)
- [The Reform Jewish Quarterly Article by Jerome Berryman](#)

Rabbi Michael Shire, Ph.D. is the Dean of the [Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education](#) at Hebrew College in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. He has been widely published in the field of Jewish Education and Spiritual Education. In addition, he has published four books of creative liturgy with medieval illuminations in association with the British and Bodleian Libraries. He is founder of the Torah Godly Play pedagogic methodology and serves as the chair of ALOHA, the Association of Institutions of Graduate Jewish Education. [mshire@hebrewcollege.edu](mailto:mshire@hebrewcollege.edu)







# A LOOK BACK ON OUR 2017 NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE COLORADO





# Honouring Older People in Care Settings

By KATHRYN LORD

## Honour yourself

There were only nine commandments left in the desert sand after Barbara had got up during the Wondering Time and taken 'Keep the Sabbath holy'. Perhaps that was the one she liked the best, or perhaps it was annoying her that this plaque was not in a line with the others (she needs things to look 'just right'). During the Response Time Barbara laid the nine commandments and a large shell on a coffee table and spent half an hour drawing the shell and writing some commandments inside and around a big heart.



Next to her, Alice (who also has dementia as well as very poor hearing and sight) arranged tree blocks, ten of them crowned with shells. Stepping stones in lines of four, six and three lead up to one of the stacks. During the story 'The Ten Best Ways' had been laid out in groups of four and six, with a summary of three: Love God, Love others and God loves you. Alice showed the doorman her arrangement with a beaming smile, thinking back to the time when her teacher had told her that she was 'no good at art.'



When tidying away, Barbara was happy to exchange the hidden 'Keep the Sabbath holy' template with one specially made for her to keep. But by now the shell had also disappeared; jokes and banter led to her playfully pulling out the shell from under her jumper. Barbara was pleased with her finished picture: 'Do not covet what others have' was written out three times along with a new commandment 'Honour yourself'. Co-prepared tea and biscuits were served. It was a blessing to be part of this special time that was honouring all those who were present.



## Honour others

Honouring someone involves offering profound respect and a place of importance. The opposite of honouring people is trivializing and treating them as if they do not matter. It has not always felt a blessing to visit care homes for older people. Large rooms with chairs up against the walls and a television constantly on in the corner; staff who are overworked or disengaged; and a worship service in which the vicar towers above the seated residents. The honouring and dishonouring experiences have left me passionate to play my part in helping Godly Play to enrich the lives of all concerned. The overarching question for the work I am involved in is: How can Godly Play be the best it can be in showing love and honouring all the participants: the older people, their relatives, the care staff, and the Godly Players?

## Mutual Blessings

[Mutual Blessings](#) is a local expression of the work of Godly Play in the UK. The purpose of Mutual Blessings is to offer spiritually enriching practices using the method and principles of Godly Play to people of all ages or needs, but especially to those who may be on the edge of the church's



ministry. One of the initiatives of Mutual Blessings is a three year project to develop Godly Play with older people in care settings. These settings include nursing homes and retirement homes, so the older people may have dementia or physical limitations or may be living completely independently. The Godly Play with Elders project began in January 2016 with the employment of a development worker to grow and support the ministry of Godly Play in care settings in the Diocese of Sheffield, UK. Two Godly Play Trainers work with the development worker and with Godly Players from around the UK and internationally to develop and adapt the method in the context of care settings. We are also collaborating with experts in fields such as the spirituality of older people and dementia care. The project has been made possible by financial support of local church bodies and a national grant making charity.

### Let us reflect

Godly Play is based on good theory and practice in the disciplines of spirituality, theology, psychology, and education. The principles and structure of Godly Play are transferable to working with adults, but the details need to be adapted for each situation. The Godly Play with Elders project is using a structured set of questions in a Reflective Debrief to help improve the practice of Godly Play with older people. The purpose of reflecting after each session is threefold: to help practitioners become more skilled in the art of Godly Play; to find what practices and adaptations best help the participants in that particular situation benefit from the Godly Play session; to share learnings with others, possibly through the Godly Play with Elders project.

The debrief involves a conversation between the storyteller and the doorperson and includes, when possible, feedback from the care staff and from the older people. An online space called Slack Elders ([complete this online form to join](#)) is where people can share their stories and experiences, view resources, find all the latest updates on this work, ask questions, and interact with other team members. Here I offer five questions for reflective practice, with some thoughts for starters:

### How can Godly Play be a ministry of presence to older people?

Lois Howard from Kentucky, USA, who has been using Godly Play with people living with dementia for over eleven years asserts that 'this is a ministry of presence'. I think that we do well to remember this in *all* we do in Godly Play, with people of all ages, but especially with those older people

who are living with dementia.

After the story of the Baptism, the doorperson offers hand



messages to the elders during the response time.

### How does Godly Play offer spiritual accompaniment?

Emotional connection and thinking about big issues are sometimes avoided in care settings, partly because of the pressures of time and staffing and partly because we try to keep everything nice and happy. After the story of Jesus and Jerusalem, the older people wondered about how terrible Judas must have felt and the forgiveness received both by Peter after his denial of Jesus and by the thief on the cross. A visiting sister of one of the residents with dementia had joined us and, whilst holding the hand of her brother, wondered about the hope that comes from the forgiveness demonstrated by the cross and by the washing of feet. Later, after his sister had left, the resident talked to me about the wrong he had done which had caused a breaking of the family relationships, and we were able to continue wondering about grace, love, and forgiveness. We are hoping to develop a liturgical story on funerals in the style of Godly Play as well as more parables for people who are experiencing loss, decline, death, and mourning.

### How is Godly Play adapted for the needs of the older people?

Godly Play is based on the work of Maria Montessori, who put the child in the centre: clearly we need to put the older person in the centre and ask whether what we are doing is appropriate for the older people in our particular settings. We need to adapt all aspects of the Godly Play session: the threshold, building the circle, the story, the wondering, the

response time, the feast, and the blessing. In our online Slack community, people are invited to share how they have tried adaptations. As an example, one possible adaptation of the parable of the mustard seed is with woollen nests and felt birds. You can hold and feel the homes that the birds built rather than just see and hear about them.



### How is Godly Play adapted to the environment of a care setting?

The Godly Play with Elders project has been addressing lots of questions related to taking Godly Play into care settings. Here are some of them: How do you make Godly Play attractive and ensure ongoing favour from the manager, the activities co-ordinator, and the care staff? How do you train the staff who are involved in the sessions? How do you manage the situation when the tea trolley is wheeled into the centre of the circle during the story? How do you raise financial support for the Godly Play sessions? The solutions to these questions, for each particular situation, will determine whether Godly Play takes place and the quality of spiritual care that the Godly Play program can offer.

### How can Godly Play help change the ethos and culture in care settings?

In a care system that is under-resourced, treating people (the carers and those being cared for) with love is not always the priority. There is the potential for Godly Play to help bring a change in the culture and ethos of care.

By the way in which Godly Play models person-centred care, all those who work in the setting might be introduced to and given new tools for a new way of being with people. In the project we have asked care staff to be present in the Reflective Debriefs, which we hope will encourage and enable reflection amongst care staff at other times and

situations. There has been interest in using the Godly Play sessions to help train staff in person-centred care, and we are prioritising a method we have learned called [Deep Talk](#) to help staff think through purpose, value, hope, and meaning in their work place. The creator of Deep Talk, Tuula Valkonnen, has visited Sheffield on three occasions and has trained us in this adaptation of Godly Play which helps work communities to develop in creative ways.

### Making the circle wider

So how does this important work move forward? One of my favourite Godly Play stories is the “Parable of the Deep Well” in which a person crosses the desert and finds a well, but the water is so deep that there seems no way to get to the water. The person takes time and discovers golden strands and a rusty object like a big cup, eventually walking around picking up the golden strands and tying them together. The person lowers the bucket into the well and draws forth the refreshing water. The person tastes the water and is changed. There are two alternative endings given for the story. In one ending, when the person went on their way, the bucket and the many strands tied together were left so that the next person could also taste the water. In the second, the golden strands were untied and scattered again so the next person could figure out for themselves how to reach the water. I think both endings are necessary. We can learn from what others have done before but we have to discover things for ourselves and for our unique situations. I think for this project there is also a third way: a circle of people working things out together. I wonder what the water that changes everything could be?

If you wish to find out more about the project and how you might be part of the circle, including an invitation to join the online forum called Slack please go to [godlyplaymutualblessings.wordpress.com](http://godlyplaymutualblessings.wordpress.com). You are also invited to join the [Godly Play Elders Facebook group](#). In writing this article, I have used extracts from a book chapter I recently wrote. The book will soon be published and available for all: Martin Steinhäuser, Rune Oystese (Ed./Hg.): *Godly Play - European perspectives on practice and research*. Gott im Spiel - europäische Perspektiven auf Praxis und Forschung. Münster: Waxmann 2017.



Kathryn Lord is a Trainer for Godly Play UK and co-lead for [Mutual Blessings, Sheffield](#). She is committed to helping change the culture and ethos in communities such as schools, religious organisations, care settings, and work places through Godly Play and [Deep Talk](#).  
kathrynlord22@gmail.com





# A LOOK BACK ON OUR 2017 UNITED KINGDOM CONFERENCE SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

*Every child has known God.  
Not the God of names.  
Not the God of don'ts.  
Not the God who ever does anything weird.  
But the God who knows only four words  
and keeps repeating them, saying,  
Come Dance with Me.  
Come  
Dance.*

This poem, by the fourteenth century Sufi mystic Hafiz inspired the Childhood Spirituality Conference hosted by Godly Play UK on 12 and 13 May 2017.

The conference, held at Sheffield Cathedral in the north of England, was attended by almost two hundred people. Reflecting on dance as an art form, Peter Privett, one of two main speakers, suggested that it 'is the one that most reminds us of our own mortality . . . of all the art forms, it is the one that is the most fleeting, the most ephemeral, transitory, because it operates in time and space. Unlike a painting, it lasts for only the amount time it takes for a movement to happen, and then it is gone. It calls us to live in this moment.' By contrast, at the conference John Bell of the Iona Community in Scotland considered the tangibility of Jesus, looking at Gospel accounts of ways in which he came close to people and, in defying social taboos, released them from whatever bound them.

The Cathedral proved to be a splendid venue. Extended around an ancient medieval church when Sheffield became a great industrial city following the industrial revolution, the Cathedral's many beautiful chapels proved wonderful spaces for a range of afternoon workshops and regional meetings and provided space for variety of stalls. The Cathedral, possibly

uniquely for an English Cathedral, has its own Godly Play Room, which was well-used throughout the Conference.

Mark Elvin, Chair of Bowthorpe Community Trust, a sheltered workshop which is the UK's official supplier of Godly Play materials, was warmly welcomed when he described the way in which the Trust supports people with learning disabilities to provide materials used across the country and beyond. Their stall, stretching half-way down the building's south aisle, included an example of every item they make! The rest of the aisle was taken up by a flea market to serve Godly Players, offering art resources, baskets, stones for the wilderness, and a host of other treasures.

The Conference also saw the launch of a new venture: the opportunity to become an Associate of Godly Play UK. It is hoped that this development will widen the Trust's support base, allowing it to work more widely and offer training to places with different needs and to those for whom it might otherwise be inaccessible.

Godly Play UK's Advocates, recruited nationally and trained at our last Conference, worked closely and very effectively with the Trainers to set up and ensure the Conference ran smoothly. They worked together with an invaluable group of local volunteers recruited by Kate Cornwell, a Sheffield Trainer, who took on the role of event co-ordinator and master-minded the whole thing. We couldn't



have been made more welcome by the Cathedral Chapter and all their staff, and those attending took away with them an experience of warm Yorkshire hospitality as well as new insights, challenges and ambitions.

Gill Ambrose is Chair of the Trustees of Godly Play UK.

# GRACEFUL NURTURE: *Using Godly Play with Adults*

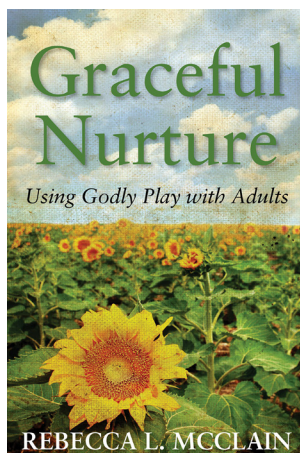
By THE VERY REV. REBECCA L. MCCLAIN

[Graceful Nurture](#) was written to do one thing: to open up a conversation about the spiritual wellbeing of adults. Although I hope it will be a useful resource to the Godly Play community, more importantly, I hope this book unleashes your own creativity to welcome adults into the work of re-creation.

*Graceful Nurture* does not stand alone but lies underneath the enormous tent that is the inspired creation of Jerome and Thea Berryman and the many faithful practitioners who sit in the circle of children every week. I commend every bit of it—books, training, resources, conferences and conversations, even the hard work of creating organizations and structures to support this ministry: all of it matters. May I also be so bold as to say I believe we hold the seeds of reformation in our hands as we go back to the ground and enter deeply into the stories that break us open and make us whole.

For me, it was time to state the obvious: Godly Play is for all of us, at every age and stage of life. From longstanding practitioners to first timers, the invitation to come into the circle is provocative. We are coaxed to cross the threshold and rediscover this deep longing to engage in a dance with the Divine, or as we are reminded by Jerome Berryman in [Becoming Like a Child: The Curiosity of Maturity Beyond the Norm](#), to enter the four dimensions of creativity: flow, play, love, and contemplation. It is a way of being that brings us to a place of deep

satisfaction and a profound sense of being in the presence of God. Godly Play is a spiritual practice.



My journey with Godly Play began in 1985 in the office of my bishop. Newly ordained, I was invited to one of those terrifying chats about my vocation as priest. There was another priest in the room. He was also recently ordained but older and thankfully incredibly gracious—smiling as we met, signaling to me that all would be well. The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman stood to greet me thus, and my first glimpse into the wonder of Godly Play began. Jerome shared a vision of children and a process of opening them to the whole language of the Christian people. I was captivated and knew our paths would cross again.

It was several years later when I extended an invitation to Jerome and Thea to come to Phoenix to share the Godly Play story with Christian educators in the Valley of the Sun. But first, I was invited into a small circle of two.

A gold box appeared, and Jerome began. He told the “Parable of the Good Shepherd.” Here I was: cradle Christian, lover of Jesus, educated and ordained, faithful in my worship and my spiritual life, an excellent student, immersed in Scripture, theology, history, ethics, liturgy, preaching and the pastoral arts. And in that moment of wonder, my entire worldview was reordered. In the kind of knowing that can never be fully explained, I knew this mattered—this work mattered—and I would never be the same.

In 1997, while serving as Dean of Trinity Cathedral in Phoenix, I invited







Jerome to come to be Theologian in Residence for two weeks. In that two weeks, we designed and assembled a model Godly Play classroom, trained storytellers, videotaped stories, and invited Jerome to preach. We also spent an entire Saturday telling stories to our seven diocesan diaconal candidates. That was my first glimpse into using Godly Play with adults, and their engagement spoke volumes. These were faithful Christians, called out by their congregations to serve as ordained deacons; they were active in church in every way. And yet, hearing the Godly Play stories exposed something significant—a gap, a missing piece in their formation. I could feel a deep longing in these wonderful people, an awareness that Jerome has beautifully articulated in *Becoming Like a Child*. At the end of the Chapter Four: “The Creator/creator Affinity,” he offers this conclusion:

“An affinity with God evokes our ultimate identity and moves us into the deep current of creativity beyond normal maturity. Maturity beyond the norm, then, is not an end state. It appears when we steer at any age between rigidity and chaos, consciously or unconsciously. Still, this glorious opportunity of living in the deep channel of our true identity can decay into rigidity or chaos at any moment, so we must ask, ‘How then shall we live.’” (p143)

That is the question, and yet for this small group, it was clear this experience had awakened something in them that had not been in view before this day. The glimpse of that beautiful state of creativity was not part of their normal experience of church. They were awakened to something that had eluded them, even though they were among the

most dedicated and faithful members. How and why have we missed this? Why have our endless programs and classes left this longing unfulfilled? It was and is a question that has stayed with me for decades.

Godly Play became a source of celebration among the children and adults at Trinity, and I continued to see moments of grace in our life together. Trinity was a community that expressed maturity beyond the norm—so much so that even the chaos of a major fire could not pull us from that deep channel of our true identity. After my departure from Trinity Cathedral in 2005, I continued to explore using Godly Play with adults, trying a variety of stories and experiences. Each time, I became aware of the value of stretching beyond the norm. Each group helped me appreciate the challenges for adults to get ready or to do their work. Even in community, we are programmed to stay in our heads, disconnected from the whole self and each other. One observation became clear: people wanted to touch the stories, to put their hands in the desert box and to march the figures across the desert, to leave footprints. They needed to manipulate the pieces of the Greatest Parable, and always laughed each time I touched the red-hot Pentecost block. These were children longing to come out to play. Using object boxes helped them tell their own remarkable stories, and after weeks together these communities began to nurture each other.

Three years ago, I began to work on the book *Graceful Nurture*. As I played with various courses, I remembered the years I used Godly Play for adult baptism and confirmation. I always wanted participants to have something to take away with them, but I never quite figured out what that might be. While writing, I realized I wanted them to take



the stories with them. Through the years, my two daughters and I have made various rosaries and necklaces. Often, they were created with great intention, representing hopes and dreams—tactile reminders of people and places. I wondered if I might find some beautiful beads, each one representing a story. For my own play, I made one, then two rosaries, each representing the stories we had shared. It is just a simple mnemonic but I carry one with me and sometimes while waiting, I take it out and begin: Time, time, time. Each bead is a story, and as I work my way around the rosary, the whole story is in my hand. Perhaps you will find a way to keep the stories alive. Most of all, *Graceful Nurture* is an invitation to be creative—to enter in flow, play, love, and contemplation. I wonder what you might imagine?

Watching the Godly Play community grow and spread all over the world has been a great joy. And now, today, *Graceful Nurture* is offered as a source to extend my internal conversation to all of you in this community. Please use this book as a guide but be even more bold and imaginative, and then, share your stories with each other.



The Very Rev. Rebecca McClain has served in many roles in The Episcopal Church: parish priest, Canon to the Ordinary, and Dean and Interim Dean of several cathedrals. Recently retired after serving 20 years on the Godly Play Foundation Board, Rebecca became a founding member in 1997. Her vocational life is marked with a capacity to manage communities

in transition and a profound sense that we are all called to flourish as children of the Holy One. Rebecca has three grown children and four grandchildren. They are the joy of her life.

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## additional reading

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.*



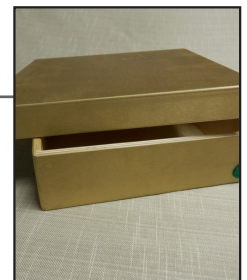
Playing with Icons:  
The Spirituality of  
Recalled Childhood  
by John Pridmore



Drawing Close to God:  
A Reflection  
by Alyssa Pasternak Post



All We Can Do is Begin:  
An Interview with The Rev.  
Thomas Blackmon  
by Sally Thomas



When the Good Shepherd  
calls your name



# WE LISTENED: THE SECOND EDITION OF *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*

By THE REV. CHERYL V. MINOR, PhD

Fifteen years ago the first volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* were published. Since then, hundreds of copies have been purchased and used to support the work of Godly Play mentors in circles of children of all ages around the world. In time, Volumes 5, 6, and 7 were published as well. When [Volume 8](#) was published in 2012, we all knew it was time to begin the process of revising the earlier volumes. Revision literally means “to see again”—to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. Volume 8 gave us that fresh perspective: a chance to go back and look at the whole curriculum with new eyes.

As with any published curriculum, revision ought to be a regular part of the work to keep Godly Play fresh, up-to-date, and accurate. Almost as soon as the early volumes were published, corrections were needed—grammatical mistakes were missed, illustrations were wrong or confusing, and practices needed more clarity or perhaps new words. Then, as the lessons were used in many different cultures and settings by people all over the world, the growing circle had suggestions for enhancements. We listened, we combed the existing volumes, and we revised and expanded. Meet the second edition of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*!

In addition to pulling out all the file folders full of emails and notes from people and programs across the globe, Jerome Berryman invited US Godly Play Trainers Rosemary Beales and Cheryl Minor into the process of revision. Rosemary Beales is an Episcopal priest serving as chaplain for an Episcopal school in Alexandria, Virginia. Rosemary earned her M.Div. and D.Min. from Virginia

Theological Seminary. Cheryl Minor is the Director of the Center for the Theology of Childhood of the Godly Play Foundation and is a priest serving a congregation just outside of Boston. She also earned her M.Div. from Virginia Theological Seminary as well as a Ph.D. from Northcentral University in Scottsdale, Arizona.

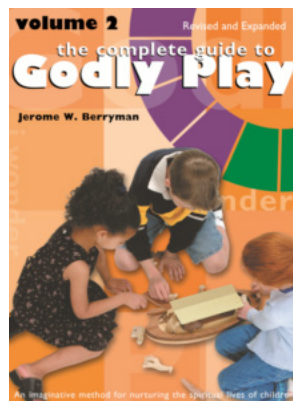


This team went through the introductory material and every lesson word by word looking for grammatical errors, biblical errors, confusing directions, poor illustrations, culturally bound language, outdated practices, and more. Beyond revisions, a few new stories have been developed where we felt there were holes in the curriculum. The emails and

letters with questions, suggestions for enhancements, and more were always on our mind as we worked through each lesson—and in the development of new lessons.

Published in August 2017, [the revised and expanded Volume 2 of \*The Complete Guide to Godly Play\*](#) introduces a new weekly practice for Godly Play circles introduced through

“The Holy Bible” lesson. When Jerome Berryman was actively telling stories week after week in the room he developed with his beloved wife Thea, he often presented the materials we call “The Books of the Bible.” He also had a beautiful presentation Bible that he used for the lesson—along with bookmarks to mark the stories he told. However, the story materials for “The Books of the Bible” in the original Volume 2 are expensive, and many programs never purchase the materials for this story. As we pondered this conundrum, the team thought it would be helpful to have



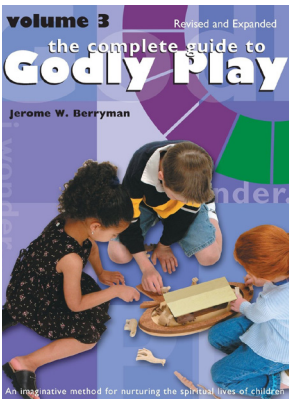
a new Core Lesson about the Holy Bible that could be used with all ages and would be less costly.



Dr. Berryman wrote the lesson called “The Holy Bible,” which introduces the book (or books collected into one book) and underscores that the stories in our room come from this one big book. It is recommended that you present “The Holy Bible” to your circles every year. The material is simply a large, beautiful Bible on a bookstand, which may be purchased from [Godly Play Resources](#). In your Godly Play room, the Bible and its stand are placed on the top of the Transition shelf, located between the Old and New Testament Sacred Story shelves. It is suggested that before you sit down to tell a story from the Bible, you open the presentation Bible to the passage from which the story comes. Children can go over to the Bible during work time and read the passage—or they can make a bookmark to mark the passage.

### [The revised and expanded second edition of Volume 3](#)

became available in September 2017 and, for the first time, describes two Godly Play practices that some mentors may already use. The first is side-by-side storytelling, which enables circles familiar with the stories presented to go



deeper into their theological connections. To begin this practice, Volume 3 lays out the logistics for side-by-side parables. Additionally, Volume 3 includes details for a practice called “Making Silence.” Contemplative silence is the fourth story genre of Godly Play, and after following Volume 3’s story introduction for making silence, Godly Play mentors

may invite children of all ages into this practice at the beginning of any Godly Play circle.

More details about the curriculum changes in the new Volume 2 and Volume 3 can be discovered at [www.godlyplayfoundation.org/second-edition-of-the-complete-guide-to-godly-play/](http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/second-edition-of-the-complete-guide-to-godly-play/). Along with in-depth stories about the updates, we have posted one-page quick guides, which we recommend for every Godly Play storyteller and for every Godly Play room. The revised and expanded Volume 4 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* is expected out in January 2018, and details about the curriculum updates in Volume 4 will also be posted on this webpage.

We want to conclude by saying thank you to all Godly Play practitioners around the world. We truly appreciate your emails and questions over the last fifteen years as you worked with these lessons. We listened carefully and hope you will see that reflected in the revisions. We look forward to many more years of working collaboratively with the greater circle—please keep the feedback coming!

### [Feedback on The Complete Guide to Godly Play Materials Feedback](#)



The Rev. Cheryl V. Minor, Ph.D. is the director of The Center for the Theology of Childhood.

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## FROM THE FOUNDATION: What's New at Godly Play Resources!

This year there has been an explosion of new materials to enrich and grow all Godly Play rooms. With all the new items emerging, it is hard to know where to begin! Some new materials were created to reflect the updates and additions in the second edition volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*. Other new materials were developed to enrich existing lessons and classrooms.

One of the newest items we have been working on was inspired by the seasons of the church year: **banners!** There are four different banners to reflect four different seasonal periods in the church year. The first banner is inspired by “The Circle of the Church Year” language explaining that ordinary time is a season for growth. This banner is called the Great Green Growing Sundays Banner. Next is a banner for Advent and Christmas. The Advent banner is more interactive as the different layers of felt that reflect the weeks of Advent and Christmas can be flipped forward progressively. The wooden symbols on the felt layers correlate to the Godly Play “Advent” lessons. Inspiration for the third banner comes from the mechanics of two lessons, “The Faces of Easter” and “The Mystery of Easter,” in which the puzzle is flipped to reveal the joy of the Resurrection. This Lenten/Easter banner also flips forward to depict this revelation. The final banner is for Pentecost, which shows the twelve tongues of flame for the twelve disciples along with the flame at the bottom referring to the mystery of the Trinity. We hope to have each banner ready for the seasons they represent in the coming year, in the form of both a complete banner and in a do-it-yourself kit.

The second edition of Volume 2 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* adds a new core lesson, “The Holy Bible.” After some time discussing how the bookstand was to look, it was a great sight to finally see the first 10 lacquer-finished cherry bookstands brought into the office. Not only the bookstand, but also the beautiful Illuminated Bibles, with their elaborately decorated illustrations that catch the eye and inspire children of all ages. Additionally, the lesson on “Jonah, the Backward Prophet” has been changed to “The Prophet Jonah.” This changes the status of the lesson and shows that even though Jonah was an unusual prophet, he was a prophet nonetheless. The materials for Jonah now include an icon to be placed on the wooden tray congruent to the other enrichment lessons.

For the revised “Parable Synthesis I + II” lessons in the second edition of Volume 3, we have added materials to better tell these stories. The context cards to go with the triangular “I Am” cards underscore where in the Bible the “I Am” statements are found. As the second edition of Volume 4 moves toward production, we are working on the new lesson “Saul Changes.” This story tells the beginning of Saul’s spiritual transformation into Paul, who wrote the letters detailed in the extension lesson “Paul’s Discovery.” I was lucky to see the new story told at the 2017 North American Godly Play Conference this past June! We are also continuing to develop new materials to support existing stories, such as “The Symbols of the Holy Eucharist.” We hope these items will enrich the stories by leading circles to further theological discoveries. Additionally, we would like to add liturgical linens to the miniature altar and pulpit set which would look similar to the banners as well as a child-sized chalice, paten, and ciborium.

Although the mini-sized lesson materials have been on our website for a few years, they will soon be especially important given the 2018 arrival of Dr. Berryman’s new book [Stories of God at Home: A Godly Play Approach](#). These mini lessons include “Creation,” “The Parable of The Good Shepherd,” “Advent,” “The Faces of Easter,” and “Knowing Jesus in a New Way.” These smaller lesson materials are a great way for families to bring Godly Play into their homes and to share in Christian formation with loved ones.

These new items are exciting both to those adding to the depth of their existing Godly Play rooms and to those just beginning their “I wonder” adventures! We at Godly Play Resources continue to draw the circle wider in our efforts to supply story materials, books, and much more for the enrichment of practice of Godly Play throughout the world. Be sure to take a look at what’s new on our website [www.godlyplayresources.com](http://www.godlyplayresources.com)! Let us help you add to the wonders of Godly Play!



Teika Arnold is a product vendor and prints manager at Godly Play Resources. She discovered the wonders of Godly Play six years ago through her husband’s mother, Connie Herl, by helping to paint the people in the Good Shepherd World Communion lesson. “I can’t imagine working anywhere else! This is a dream job most would wish for.” Teika has now become a third generation product vendor for Godly Play through her husband’s grandmother, Helen Arnold. [GPPrint@ucom.net](mailto:GPPrint@ucom.net)



[godlyplayfoundation.org](http://godlyplayfoundation.org)

