

A GODLY PLAY® QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

JULY 2020

Of Champions, Succession,  
and Transition

Like a Mustard Seed:  
Godly Play in Flanders

Knowing Godly Play in a New Way —  
Knowing Godly Play in the Home

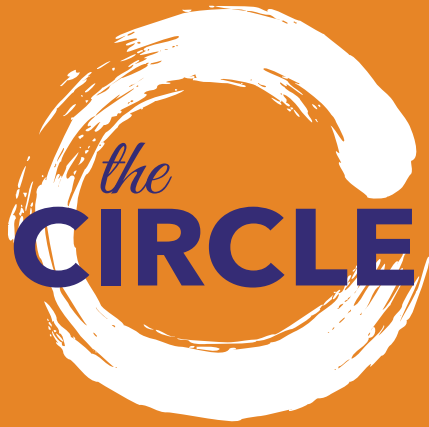
Ignatian Spirituality and Godly Play

The Story of Godly Play in Denmark



GODLY  
PLAY  
ETHIOPIA p. 4

by J. + S. TRUBY



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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)



JULY  
**2020**

**6**

OF CHAMPIONS,  
SUCCESSION,  
AND TRANSITION

By ANDREW SHELDON

**12**

KNOWING GODLY  
PLAY A NEW WAY—  
KNOWING GODLY  
PLAY IN THE HOME

By KATHRYN LORD



**4**

---

**GODLY PLAY  
ETHIOPIA**

By JOAN TRUBY

**7**

---

**ADDITIONAL  
READING**

**8**

---

**GODLY PLAY  
ROOMS**

**10**

---

**LIKE A MUSTARD  
SEED: GODLY  
PLAY IN  
FLANDERS**

By KATIE VELGHE

**14**

---

**GODLY PLAY  
AND IGNATIAN  
SPIRITUALITY**

By BRENDA TIMMER

**16**

---

**THE STORY OF  
GODLY PLAY IN  
DENMARK,  
2008-2020**

By ERIK HOLMGAARD

**17**

---

**FROM THE  
FOUNDATION**



# Godly Play ETHIOPIA

By JOAN AND STAN TRUBY, GODLY PLAY SOUTH AFRICA

## *Are you ready for a story?*

This is the story of Godly Play Ethiopia. GP UK Advocate, Bridget Steenkamp, visited Addis Ababa in January 2019 and was asked to do Godly Play Introductory sessions. The pastors who saw the method became very excited as it fit in so well with what their growing vision for children. In January 2020, thanks to funding received from the GP International Development Fund, Ethiopia's first Godly Play Core Training took place.

On 17 January 2020, we arrived in Addis Ababa to find our wonderful host, Pastor Hunde Wondafrash, waiting for us with a large pick-up truck which, despite its size, was not able to carry our luggage of stories and response materials to equip two Godly Play classrooms for the training. A second car had to be called to fit everything and everyone in.

Our three days in Addis, experiencing the city and the annual celebration of Timket, was an incredible experience. Timket, or Epiphany as we know it, is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's three-day celebration of Jesus' baptism in the River

Jordan. It is a UNESCO world heritage event and is filled with celebration, colourful parades, and much singing.

On Monday we left Addis in a mini-bus full of people. The three hour trip on narrow roads, with regular stretches of potholes from recent flooding, while negotiating traffic, which varied from slow donkey carts and small tuk tuks, to much faster trucks and large, speeding luxury buses, urged some of our team to enter into deep, intense, and slightly feverish prayer. We travelled south to Zeway, a town on the shores of Lake Zeway in the Rift Valley. We arrived safely and uneventfully, thanks to the amazing skill of our driver and the answered prayers of our team, at the Zeway Assembly of God Church where we were to do the training. The classrooms available to us for the training were in need of a good clean-out. The wonderfully energetic and resourceful evangelist and care-taker of the church was undaunted by this task and dragged an exceedingly large hose-pipe into the rooms, spraying the windows, walls, ceiling, and floor with a powerful stream of water to give it a good clean. All that remained was to sweep out the water and wait for it to



dry, then bring in church benches as shelves and set up the Godly Play rooms.

On Tuesday we were ready for the trainees who arrived from 11 towns and 13 different Ethiopian Assemblies of God churches from across southern Ethiopia, all excited and ready. We had two translators working with us who were both wonderful as they managed to not only translate every word for us but also became accomplished and accredited story-tellers themselves.

Two amazing women who serve as elders from the church, cooked three meals a day for all 30 people, and provided traditional freshly roasted and hand-ground Ethiopian coffee and tea for us every day. All this was done calmly, without convenient kitchen facilities, and, on the first day of training, they even managed without electricity, due to a fallen-down electrical pole in town.

In between the training sessions, Bridget taught different material-making skills, empowering everyone to be able to make their own story materials. It also meant that everyone had at least one complete story to take home with them. When the training ended there was a great deal of appreciation from all those who had attended, and everyone left with much enthusiasm. We were thanked for the blessing of the training which we had brought, but we too had been deeply touched by the joy and enthusiasm which the group had brought to us. We experienced the generous hospitality of the Ethiopian people and were truly blessed.

Godly Play Resources South Africa, together with Bridget Steenkamp, managed to leave enough materials behind to equip the first Godly Play room in Zeway, as well the first Godly Play room in Addis Ababa, with all the basic training stories.

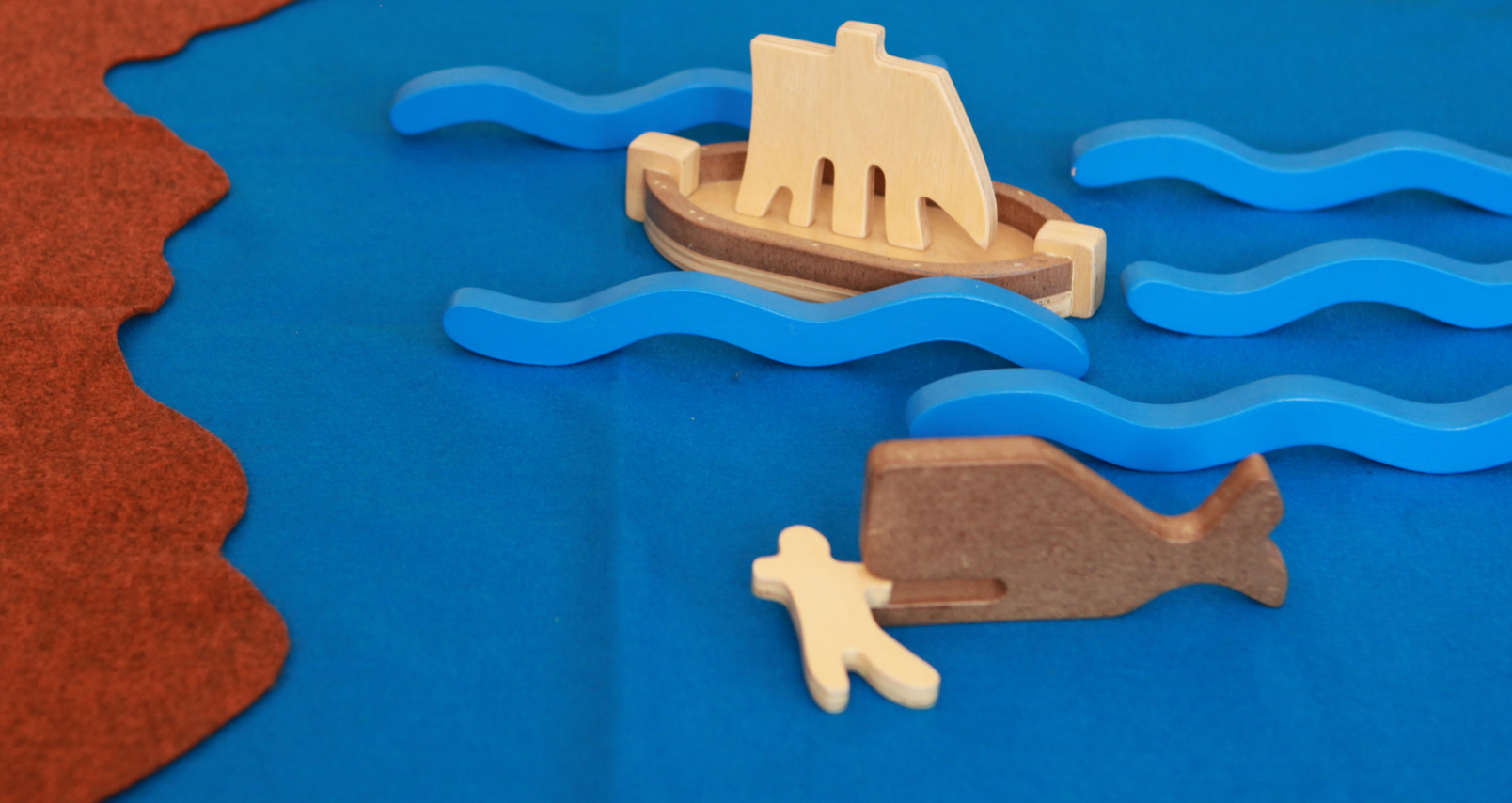
When we returned to Addis, just before leaving Ethiopia, we were treated to a fantastic feast of local food by one of the generous Addis church parishioners, ending with the rich sensory experience of the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

We said goodbye with the assurance that we would see them all again early next year for a follow-up training in January 2021, planned and organised by our hosts, Pastors Hunde and Binyam, and GP UK Advocate, Pastor Bridget.



Joan Truby is a Godly Play Trainer in South Africa. She came across Godly Play in 2004 and immediately embraced it with joy. It spoke to her of authenticity, meaningfulness, and community, and she did not hesitate to make this her work with children. She uses Godly Play with the children at her church, and the Godly

Play philosophy has also spread through her work with children as a play therapist, revitalising her joy and freedom in authentic play and creativity. She loves sharing Godly Play stories with people of all ages.



# Of Champions, Succession, and Transition

By ANDREW SHELDON

In the book *European Perspectives on Godly Play* I wrote a chapter titled *Where in the World is Godly Play?* In it I charted the development of Godly Play from the solitary work of Jerome Berryman through to the present situation which sees Godly Play activity in over 40 countries worldwide. As I charted that development I wrote about apostolic succession and the missionary activity of the church. The earliest apostles laid their hands on individuals and commissioned them to spread the good news, often in new places. That second generation laid their hands on others, and so it went from generation to generation, and the Christian gospel spread throughout the earth. Now I would not want to confuse Godly Play trainers with Apostles! But I would argue that the history of the spread of Godly Play very much follows this pattern.

The first iteration of this activity was the training of trainers in the United States. Having had Jerome metaphorically lay hands on their heads, they began to missionize the U.S. with the good news of Godly Play.

Even as this was taking place, there were those in other parts of the world who had heard of Godly Play and who were compelled enough to want to know more about it and do more with it. Out of the many who heard of Godly Play a few emerged who had the motivation, gifts, and skills to be the first to bring Godly Play to their country and region. Nonetheless, in each case, this first cohort of international leaders went to the United States to receive their training; since it was only there that Jerome and the first generation of trainers were to be found. Trained by Jerome and/or others, they returned to their constituencies, and a whole new cycle of Godly Play missionary activity began. And so it spread, hands on heads – so to speak – across the seas, across continents, and around the world.

A history of Godly Play's international expansion cannot be told without referencing the many 'champions' who almost single handedly birthed and provided early nurture in their country or region. Indeed champions continue to emerge and forward Godly Play activities in their region and/or country.



David Pritchard

But for the purposes of this article I want to focus on three champions who have embraced succession planning and are currently in a time of transition.

The first is David Pritchard. From 1985 to 2014 David was the National Coordinator of Children’s Ministries for Scripture Union Spain. At the turn of the millennium, he noticed increasing references to Jerome Berryman, and Godly Play. This piqued his interest and in 2003 he travelled to England to do his Core Training with Rebecca Nye and Peter Privett—Rebecca and Peter being part of that first cohort of international leaders mentioned earlier. In true champion fashion David then began to promote Godly Play in Spain, which was given even more momentum when he was trained as a trainer in 2008. Godly Play España, was formally established on 23 October 2011 and the years since have seen exponential growth in Spain; perhaps at this writing, the fastest growing Godly Play association on earth. Furthermore David was instrumental in forging a relationship between the Godly Play Foundation and Editorial San Pablo ensuring that Godly Play written materials could be translated and published in Spanish. Currently they have produced Teaching Godly Play and 3 volumes of stories.

But David’s Godly Play activity was not restricted to Spain. He was instrumental in introducing and/or nurturing

Godly Play in Bulgaria, Chile, Latvia, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Portugal, Switzerland, Uruguay, and the Anglican Diocese of Europe. An incredible legacy!

But we who knew him well most appreciated his deep spirituality, non-anxious demeanour, hospitable personality, and relational warmth. David often served in a chaplaincy role at various Godly Play conferences and meetings which was indicative of how he was viewed by his peers.

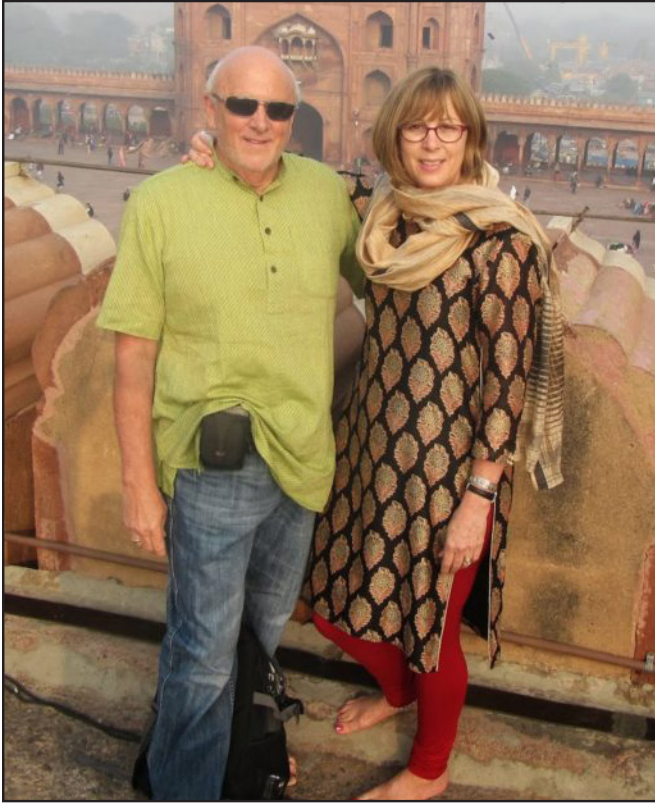
Earlier this year David stepped down as President of Godly Play Spain, leaving the organisation in good shape and under strong leadership. The good news, however, is that David will continue to tell stories and train; we hope for some time yet.

Thank you David.

The second person of note is Lee Dickson. Since January 2016 Lee had served as the Executive Director of the Godly Play Foundation. Previously, from 2008, she served as the Treasurer and then President of the Board. As a member of the Board Lee was instrumental in taking an organisation that was experiencing legal, financial, and credibility challenges, into a place of health, stability, and strength. In her role as Executive Director Lee’s primary role has been the oversight of Godly Play activity in the United States. In that respect she has nurtured the revision and expansion



Lee Dickson



Amy Crawford and Andrew Sheldon

of Godly Play stories, publications, materials, and training opportunities. She introduced the role of the Missioner and was instrumental in training Missioners and establishing that programme as a successful innovation within the U.S. Furthermore she has directed the formation of the next classes of Trainers and Missioners.

Although Lee's part in the international development of Godly Play may appear to be more understated, she has actually played a crucial role in supporting the global growth of Godly Play. When Lee recruited me to the Foundation Board she unequivocally supported my desire to function as a liaison between the Foundation and partner associations, and to focus my activities 'abroad' as it were. Later Lee became a strong supporter of the need for an Advocate for International Development role and ensured that the structure and funding was put in place for such a role. Since that time she has been a constant supporter and enabler of my activities, and it has been a true delight to have worked alongside her as both colleague and friend.

But perhaps her most significant contribution to the international development of Godly Play was her commitment to a particular philosophy when it came to the relationship between the Godly Play Foundation and other emerging national and regional associations. While taking seriously the Foundation's stewardship of the intellectual

property that is Godly Play, Lee was also prepared to view other associations not as subordinate to, but partners in, the stewardship of the core principles and practices of Godly Play.

This Spring Lee and the Foundation Board began a transitional process that will see Lee replaced as Executive Director. She will leave behind a thriving operation at home, and grateful partners abroad. And will, of course, continue to tell stories and train others in the art of Godly Play.

Thank you Lee.

Finally I want to turn to Amy Crawford. It is here that I name my conflict of interest, because as many of you know Amy is both my training and life partner.

Amy's introduction to Godly Play took place in the mid-nineties in Kansas in the U.S. when she encountered "this fascinating bearded guy who kept pulling stories out of his suitcase". In time she met a much less fascinating guy who was drawn to both Amy and to her practice of Godly Play. We were married in 2003 and upon arriving in Canada Amy immediately began to practice Godly Play at the local church where I served. At the same time, largely through her role as Programme Minister for Children and Young Teens in the United Church of Canada, she began to introduce Godly Play to constituencies and congregations across the country. Canada is a vast country but Amy has traversed much of it and Godly Play almost always accompanied her on these travels.

The first Core Trainings were held in 2004 – 2005, Godly Play Canada was formed in 2006 with Amy as Executive Director, and the first Training of Trainers held in 2008. Since then there has been slow and steady growth despite the challenges offered by geography and limited resources.

Amy was instrumental in the planning and execution of the first truly North American conference in Toronto in 2013. Indeed because of Amy's fundraising efforts the conference had a decidedly global feel with participants attending from the UK, Europe, and Africa.

And indeed it is Amy's global efforts on behalf of Godly Play that must also be acknowledged. Beyond the U.S. and Canada she has also introduced and nurtured the development of Godly Play in Australia, India, New Zealand, Russia and South Africa.

This past year Amy announced that she is stepping down as the Executive Director of Godly Play Canada. A replacement has been identified and a transition process is in place.

But above all Amy is a gifted storyteller and a skillful trainer and she will continue in those roles, because nothing delights her more than to sit in circles with children or



adults wondering with those stories that that fascinating bearded guy kept pulling out of his suitcase.

Thank you Amy.

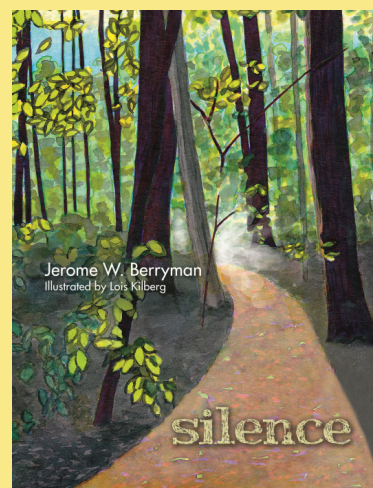
More and more over the next few years we will see other early pioneers and champions of Godly Play in their context enter into times of succession and transition. This is not always an easy thing to do, and especially for those early and initial pioneers and champions, but the future vitality and viability of Godly Play everywhere will depend on theirs and our capacity to embrace succession planning and effectively manage the transitions that will follow.

And when that happens we will celebrate them as well!



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)



## Silence

by Jerome Berryman

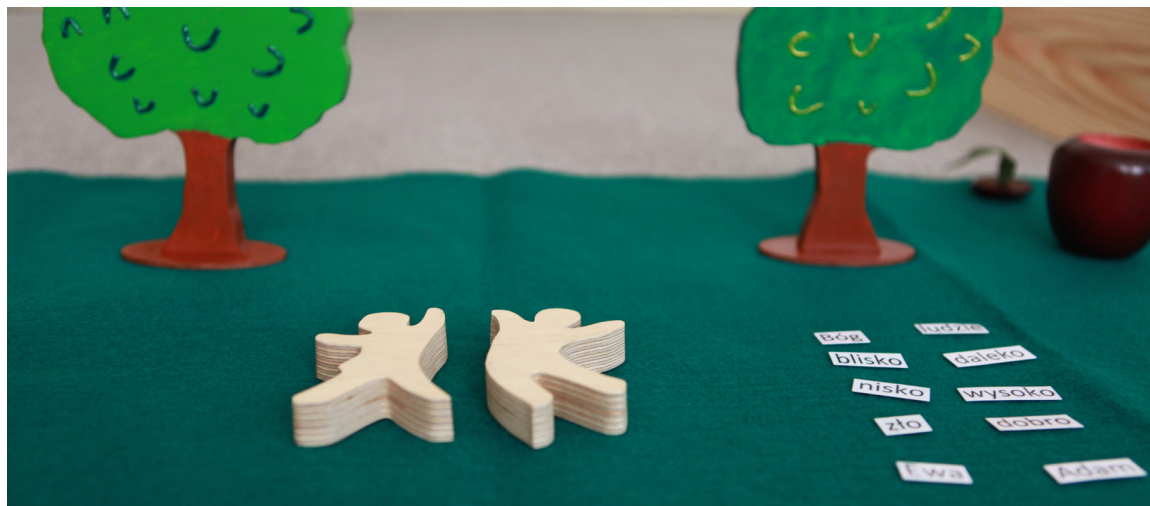
Godly Play founder Jerome Berryman has a timely new illustrated children's book out reflectin on silence. From the publisher, "This illustrated book for children captures the mindfulness, measured pace, and pauses that children experience in the Godly Play circle, or can be a supplement to any child's bookshelf."

Silence is important for children; it is the stillness—both internal and external—that children need in today's frenzied world.

# Godly Play ROOMS



## AUSTRALIA





KRAKOW, POLAND



MT. PEARL, NEW FOUNDLAND CANADA



UNIVERSITY CHURCH IN LEUVEN, BELGIUM



# LIKE A MUSTARD SEED: *Godly Play* IN FLANDERS

By KATIE VELGHE

## *Introduction*

Let's see if there is anything in here that can help us to get ready. This is just ... an empty piece of cloth. In 2001, hardly anybody in Belgium had ever heard of Godly Play. But nowadays over 350 storytellers are sharing the stories in numerous circles. They are supported by a strong team of trainers and regional coordinators. I wonder how this could happen?

Hmm, there is nothing else. All we can do is begin.

## *A Seed and a Person*

The Kingdom of heaven is like when a person took the tiniest of all seeds, a grain of mustard seed. I wonder what the name of that person could be. Maybe it was Annemie, head of the Interdiocesan Council for Family Ministry (IDGP), who told An and Katie that they should go to Birmingham to follow a basic course. Or was it Rebecca, who put a very first Godly Play story into the heart of Annemie? It's hard to say... I guess the person had many names.

One thing is for sure. On that windy day, November 16th of 2011, An and Katie hardly needed a plane ticket to fly back to Brussels: their hearts burned in them as they were talking about everything they had seen, heard, and felt at the course.

## *The Birds and the Nests*

IDGP decided to foster this small and wonderful seed, giving it warmth and food and everything it needed, and it began to grow. New branches kept spreading out: Godly Play in Catholic parishes and Protestant churches, but also in all kinds of educational settings, in pastoral ministries – The birds of the air came – there were so many of them.

Some solid birdhouses turned out to be necessary in order to welcome all these birds in a proper way. Fourteen persons were found to build these houses. We call ourselves the Godly Play team. An, Annemie, Caroline, Ellen, Gee, Heidi, Hilde, Joke, Joris, Kathleen, Katie, Katrien, Kenny, Marleen, Matthias, Ilse, Myriam, and Stephanie. Most of them are still with us to do their work, some traveled on to do their work. Nowadays we gather twice a year. We don't forget to build a circle ourselves, inspiring and encouraging each other. Three of us take care of the daily, small decisions. Five regional coordinators build lovely birdhouses for their storytellers. The eight trainers and coordinators provide them with new trainings, workshops, or DIY's.

As the tree grew bigger lots of new nests were built for hundreds of children and adults. We saw all kinds of Godly Play rooms appearing: in a corner of a classroom, in an abbey, in an office, in a church. Sometimes an old chapel found a new destination in becoming a Godly Play room. There is so much activity around that mustard tree. Storytellers can exhale and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a Facebook group.

The wonderful thing about this tree is that it has life in itself. We don't need to 'invent' or 'implant' new things. We never had a plan of growth. The new things just pop up. Whenever this happens, we wonder if this is what the children need. We wonder if this organic growth is what our storytellers need, also the storytellers who'll have to carry the responsibility for it. And last but definitely not least, we wonder if God can come and play in it. If we get yes three times, we just start fostering the best we can. It's a lot, isn't it? You can come and find more about it on our website [www.godlyplayvlaanderen.be](http://www.godlyplayvlaanderen.be).

## *As the Wind is Whispering New Songs*

While sitting under the Godly Play mustard tree in Flanders you might also notice that the wind has started whispering new songs in the leaves. IDGP translated the Godly Play stories from Volumes 2, 3, and 4, working together with Godly Play Netherlands, into our own language, and into the different liturgical languages of the denominations in Flanders and the Netherlands. All of these stories have been published.

Some stories were translated in virtual sessions, inviting the children to gather during Corona-times.

Some entirely new melodies developed slowly and carefully, such as the story of Don Bosco.

Some stories were told in an intergenerational way. Following the red thread of *Stories of God at Home* (Jerome Berryman, 2018), whole families started enjoying Godly Play.

Somebody started making DIY materials for storytellers in Flanders and the Netherlands.

It's amazing.

And I can't help but wonder how this all could come from one seed?

I wonder where such a wonder-seed came from?

I wonder if you'd feel like playing at the roots of our tree, enjoying the sound of birds in the morning and the breeze in your face in the evening?

You are so welcome.



Katie Velghe is a Flemish Godly Play trainer. Her work always had, for the last twenty-five years, children right at the core of it: as a mother and foster mother, as an educational worker for the Interdiocesan Council for Family Ministry, as an author of children's books, as a teacher at a Freinet school, and of course as a Godly Play storyteller and trainer.

She has a Master in Germanic Philology and is aggregated for religious education.

# THE GREAT FAMILY REUNION! GODLY PLAY NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE 2021



**SAVE  
the  
DATE**

JUNE 17-20  
KANSAS CITY,  
MISSOURI

# KNOWING *Godly Play* IN A NEW WAY— KNOWING *Godly Play* IN THE HOME

By KATHRYN LORD

## *Getting Ready*

With lockdown looming I brought almost all the stories from our Godly Play room back to my house where they were eventually stored in a cleared out toy cupboard and under chairs in our living room. With the help of two teenage sisters — who had come through the Godly Play spiral curriculum — I began to make up packs of story materials (which, with recent additions, now include the Holy Family, Creation, the first four desert stories, the Faces of Easter, the Mystery of Easter, the parables, the Deep Well, Baptism, and Julian of Norwich) and response materials (such as pipe cleaners, feathers, buttons and air drying clay). I delivered these, along with a desert bag, to the seven households of the ten children who were part of our Godly Play circle.

I communicated to the parents via email why I thought it was important for the children to have the stories at home and what I was hoping to offer to the children over the weeks to come.

I explained to the parents why I thought Godly Play could be helpful in this time:

“We are of course always living with the existential questions (who I am, what does it all mean, my aloneness even though I am also in community, the ending of things including death, freedom — the lack of freedom and the fear of freedom) but in some seasons of life these questions of existence are at the forefront. It is important that we give our children a language and their native languages are STORY and PLAY. Spirituality is also about relationships — with themselves, with others, with the environment they are in, and with God. My experience is that Godly Play provides all of this and is spiritually nurturing.”

## *Adapting Godly Play to be in Service to the Community*

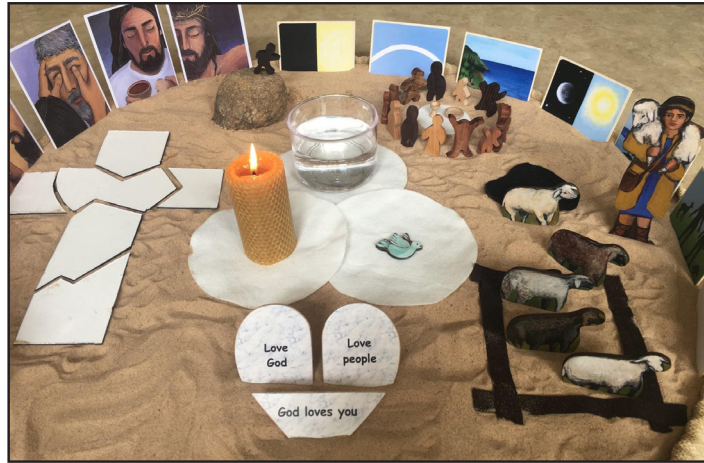
Whatever the season and context, the question we must ask ourselves is this: ‘What do people really need?’ I have had years of experience with some success and many mistakes — which I now view as learnings — in adapting the Godly Play approach to working in schools, with community groups, for church services, and for older people in care homes, including those living with dementia (Stories for the Soul). Online Godly Play required many adaptations in order to retain the key aspects of the Godly Play approach (threshold, circle building, story, wondering, response, feast and blessing) but I have been quite amazed to find that the same qualities — of Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy and Trust - are present in our Zoom circle as they were in our Godly Play room. We have met every Sunday afternoon (and every day during Holy Week) for a Godly Play session. By the fourth week, with feedback from the children, we had settled into the following pattern:



The circle is built — it feels very special to be a guest in each other’s homes. We catch up with each other (some find it easier to do this online than others) and we have a laugh - the children often choose to play with the virtual background options. I light the Christ candle — some children choose to light a candle in their own homes as well as set up ‘Holy spaces’ at home — and we proclaim with words and actions “I am here, you are here, we are here together.” We then pray both silently and with words - including for the friend who can’t join us and whose family is having a really tough time. We then share the Feast. We

say the words Jesus said, 'Whenever you share bread like this I am with you' and everyone breaks the food they have with them — which might be bread, a cracker, or a banana (sometimes satsumas — but they are difficult to break!).

The children are invited to mute themselves and switch to Speaker view for the story. I have adapted the story materials so that the children can always see all of the story as well as my face and I have made changes to improve the visual effect such as having the parable figures standing upright. After the story we come back together again in Gallery view to wonder. After



putting the story away I say something like 'I don't know how you need to continue wondering about the story — only you know.' We then say goodbye and the children leave the meeting.

Now the real work can begin! Some children choose to play alone, others with siblings and others to play and chat with their parents. Some children explore the story - and create their own story — in their desert bags at home. Responses have also included building towers with strong and weak foundations (after the story of the tower of Babel and Pentecost) and dressing up in the colours of the rainbow (after the story of the flood). And so this Christian story can now belong with all the other stories in which they find themselves and the children have the tools to enable them to create their own story. Adapting Godly Play for this online season is encouraging faith formation — of both the children and the adults — within families, which is where — even in the season of 'normal church' — it mainly takes place anyway!

The parents in our church have all experienced Godly Play for themselves and understand their role as 'door parents' — creating a space in which their children are free to play with God. This has been essential to enabling a Godly Play approach throughout.

## Reflections from the Parents

"Thank you Kathryn...I have found the sessions this Holy week to be really helpful in punctuating the working day and giving space for God and His story (although I am out of shot, I have been listening!). My son joins of his own free will and engages or does not engage as he pleases, so it's good for him to have that agency and for me to be an encourager and enabler."

"During the Zoom session I was watching the story from a distance in the room. As you moved the sand at the start it brought to mind that this time is uncertain - we don't even know when schools are going back. The stories don't answer

the questions but it is reassuring that they show that what is happening is a human experience. It struck me that you were giving the children invitations, no pressure, does anyone want to pray? It was a calm and safe atmosphere and I felt that they could be themselves. It is interesting that in the wondering two

of the children didn't want the tower of Babel to fall

down — human nature is to keep things as they are. I think it is helpful that during the wondering you keep your words to a minimum to allow the children's voices to be heard. You are showing the children how to be... you are helping the children to assert themselves."

"My son asked if I could be around after the Godly Play session so we could talk together about what's on his mind. After the Zoom session he wanted to build towers in the sand bag — one with a strong foundation and the other with a weak foundation. We chatted together and he wondered why Pentecost isn't given the same importance as Easter and Christmas — as we wouldn't have known about Jesus without Pentecost."



Kathryn Lord is a trainer for Godly Play UK and a Deep Talk facilitator (which is an adaptation of Godly Play for groups to help make new stories for their lives and communities). For the past twelve years she has been practising Godly Play with the children at her church and has been adapting the approach for her work in schools, with community groups, for church

services, for faith nurture at home and for older people in care homes. A teacher at heart (she was a Science teacher in a secondary school), Kathryn loves to facilitate people so they can help change the culture and ethos in communities such as schools, religious organisations, care settings and workplaces through the Godly Play approach. Kathryn lives in Sheffield. She has learned a lot from her children (now aged 22 and 23) and now views everything — the "successes" and the "failures" — as learnings along the way.



# Godly Play AND IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

By BRENDA TIMMER

I met Godly Play during a training in Spiritual Direction. One of the participants led our morning prayer by telling the “Great Family.” I was hooked. My life and ministry are centered in holding space for people as they grow in friendship with God. I do that as a preacher, pastor, teacher, and spiritual director. That winter morning in 2012, I was hooked. Godly Play offered me a practical way to offer spiritual accompaniment to children, and from that first day I could not get enough.

Spirituality is the core focus of Godly Play. We are intentional about creating sacred space within which children are able to wonder, play, and make meaning. Our underlying philosophy honours and advocates for the inherent and threatened spirituality of children. We create space, nurture community, and take seriously the indwelling presence of God within each child. Godly Play offers a creative, beautiful, and unique space within which

children’s spirituality is celebrated and supported.

Children become teens and adults and many will leave behind their Godly Play circles. We trust, however, that they will not leave behind their relationship with God. We are certain that God will never stop playing with them. People who are intentional about their personal spirituality may look for spiritual frameworks or rules which will support their lived out response to God. Denominationally, they will be nurtured in specific spiritualities - a Methodist spirituality focused on social holiness, an Anglican/Benedictine spirituality shaped by balance, and so on. Ignatian spirituality has shaped my life, has given me a way and structure to pay attention to my relationship with God, and has invited me ever deeper into friendship with God. For people who love Godly Play, Ignatian spirituality may be a wonderful framework for growing in their relationship with God.



Godly Play has taught us that spirituality, and especially children's spirituality, occurs in the everyday. For children, spirituality is not confined to special times or places. They experience a God who comes near in the midst of commonplace activities. The way we tell stories and invite wondering encourages children to notice God in their daily lives and to connect the stories of faith with their lived experience. Ignatian spirituality has at its core the principle of **God in All Things**. It offers a way of living that invites people to live expectantly, attentive to the active presence of God in all areas of life. For Godly Players, attentiveness to God in ordinary life is not unusual, children teach us to pay attention to play, stories, relationships, and to community. To live in an Ignatian way is to pay attention to the lessons children teach us and to find God in all things.

The legacy of St Ignatius of Loyola is the vibrant Society of Jesus. At the heart of the Jesuit way of life are the Spiritual Exercises. This extended retreat, taken over 30 days residentially or a year or more in daily life, invites people to **pray imaginatively** with the Scriptures. People are invited to imagine themselves in gospel stories, to listen carefully for what moves within them. These inner movements are attended to, reflected upon and become the focus of discernment. Godly Play lays a foundation for this type of reflective, imaginative praying. The invitation to wonder about what we like, what is important, what triggers resistance (what we would leave out) and what is for us are imaginative ways of listening to the Scriptures - praying creatively. The processes of Gospel contemplation (imagining oneself in a gospel story) and Lectio Divina (reading contemplatively) are familiar to Godly Players, even if the names are not known.

Ignatian spirituality forms people to live as **Contemplatives in Action**. In a world of incessant stimulation and activity, the Ignatian way of following Christ forms people to attend to God in their lives, to act from the place of stillness. Godly Play circles offer children silence as a genre of religious language. Ignatian spirituality is grounded in a similar openness to silence and contemplative attentiveness. Those who practise Godly Play are formed in deep stillness and listening. The Ignatian way is to relationally be with God and then to share God's work in the world. The Godly Play way is to engage in story and community, to be served by and to serve the circle in a similar rhythm of stillness and action. A Godly Play circle is contemplative and active, a wonderful foundation for living.

Fourthly, is to note that Godly Play forms children to take their own unique relationship with God seriously. Each child's perspective is valued, encouraged and nurtured. The different perspectives brought to our circles builds a fullness and creativity within which we find expression of the fullness of God. The fundamental approach of Ignatian

spirituality is to offer tools, principles, and ways of living that encourage each person to live out their own unique **personal vocation**. Each individual has a unique, God-given gift to share with the world and is encouraged to identify, nurture, and share that vocation. Godly Players are used to taking each person seriously and so are able to confidently embrace the notion of personal vocation and service.

As a practitioner in the field of spirituality, one final gift of both Godly Play and Ignatian spirituality is the gift of spiritual accompaniment. In my own context people are used to speaking about God, analysing and interpreting the Scriptures, or organising the church. What they are not used to doing is reflecting on their own inner experience of God. Godly Play forms children who are confidently able to express in religious language their inner world, and the dance of God in their own lives. Ignatian spirituality shapes spaces and people to accompany each other in the walk of faith. Those formed in Godly Play will have no difficulty in engaging in spiritual conversations which will enrich their lives.

I'd like to end this reflection with a word from two men who have accompanied me on the journey of faith (albeit from afar). Jerome Berryman said it is not Godly Play unless the possibility is left wide open for God to come and play. St Ignatius of Loyola advised that the spiritual director should allow the Creator to deal with the creature and not get in the way. In my own journey, Godly Play and Ignatian spirituality offer me perspectives and tools for abundant living and I joyfully share both whenever I can.

[Note: For adult Godly Players, Ignatian spirituality may be a gift that will nurture and form you. Look for Ignatian spiritual directors in your area. Many, including myself, also offer accompaniment by Skype/Zoom etc.]



I am Brenda Timmer, married to Nelisjan and Mom to Kayleigh, Paul, Romy and Morgan all of whom are now teens or older. I have been a Methodist minister since 1997 (ordained 2001) and currently serve as the Pastor of Durban North and Greenwood Park Societies and Superintend the Umngeni Circuit. I work as a Spiritual Director and trainer of others in the Ignatian tradition. I have been a Godly Play storyteller since 2014 and trainer since 2015.

I am passionate about creating spaces for others to grow in friendship with God.

# THE STORY OF *Godly Play* IN DENMARK, 2008-2020

By ERIK HOLMGAARD

These days people all over the world are discussing what is contagious — or more precisely: how to avoid what is contagious when we are talking about the dangerous COVID19 virus. Even though I'm not a specialist, I dare to say: It's not easy to avoid what is contagious when we don't know the virus at all!

That was my experience with Godly Play on June 13, 2008 in Bergen, Norway. I met my friend Rune Øystese at a café in Bergen for a couple of hours.

We sat down, talked, and enjoyed ourselves. Suddenly, Rune took his coke-bottle and two napkins and slowly he began to tell the story of the Good Shepherd and taking care of his sheep. It was slow — and I was captivated. How could he do this? He had just finished a Godly Play Core Training!

I went back to Denmark, and began to talk about Godly Play. I talked to national leaders of different Sunday School movements. In the spring of 2010, we had an Inspiration Day about Godly Play to which we invited pastors and other church workers. Anne Ludvigsen Kaldestad and Rune Øystese, both from Norway, came and introduced us to Godly Play. They demonstrated it to the group and answered a lot of questions. And people got it, thinking: "Godly Play has opened up a new, deeper dimension to these ancient Bible stories!"

September 2010 we had our first Godly Play Core Training in Denmark! And nine years later, in the autumn of 2019, we trained more than 200 Storytellers and Doorpersons — and now have regional gatherings where we share new stories and experiences.

What might be a little different in Denmark than other places is our approach to the Training of Trainers. We do Apprenticeship training for new Trainers. To become a Godly Play Trainer, you must participate in 5 courses:

- At the 1st course — you are an ordinary participant.
- At the 2nd course — you are an ordinary participant, and you also observe the Trainers carefully.

- At the 3rd course — you get small tasks.
- At the 4th course — you get big tasks.
- At the 5th course — you work as a Trainer and are supervised by the course leaders.

During the 2nd-5th course, the new Trainers are continuously supervised. We have three active Godly Play Trainers in Denmark and we do two or three Core Trainings a year. Godly Play in Denmark is hosted by DFS, Danmarks Folkekirkelige Søndagsskoler (Denmark's Folkchurch Sunday schools), who sustains all work in Godly Play Denmark (finance, administration, etc.). It's the largest church movement for kids in Denmark. Their generous support is crucial for our work.

Today, nearly twelve years after my first very contagious contact with Godly Play, I'm very grateful on behalf of all Danish Christian churches for the gift of Godly Play to us. Godly Play is not used in all kinds of churches (yet!) but we are trying to spread 'the good news' of Godly Play as a wonderful tool for spreading the BEST NEWS of THE GOOD SHEPHERD.



Erik Holmgaard, born 1968

- Married 1993 with Lene, and we have 3 kids 12-18 years old.
- Master of Theology 1999, ordained pastor in the Evangelical-Lutheran church 2000.
- National Leader of Inner Mission Youth Work 1999-2005; Bible schoolteacher and traveling-pastor 2006-2011.
- GP-storyteller and doorperson 2010; GP-trainer 2012.
- Parish-pastor i Haderslev, Denmark (near the Danish-German border) 2011-.
- Laughs loudly (the kids say too loud and too often) :-!)



## FROM THE FOUNDATION

*Friends,*

More than ever, I am thankful for the practice of Godly Play and the community of Godly Players doing good work around the world. Getting to know some of you through the Knowing Godly Play in a New Way has, perhaps, been the highlight of what my church has been calling “the season of social distancing.”

As the moderator of that group and, more recently, as the President of the Foundation’s Board of Directors, I have had the opportunity to see and hear how thoughtful, open, and curious the grassroots leaders of our movement really are. And Godly Play is, to my mind, most essentially a grassroots movement. There are structures, copyrights, and licensing agreements. There are publishers and boards. We exist to preserve the integrity of the process, and to do what we can to spread the Good News of Jesus through the good news of Godly Play.

But changing the hearts and minds of people who lead and love children isn’t something we can do from a boardroom. Honoring and nurturing the spirituality of children isn’t something you can tell people to do; you must show them. And that is what so many of you are doing—leading the way, often quite literally from the bottom (the floor!) up.

I look forward to the day when we can gather together in person, but until then I remain deeply grateful for this strange and unsettling season which has brought many of us from around the world together in the digital space.

**MARY HUNTER MAXWELL**



Mary Hunter Maxwell is the Director of the Preschool at Second-Ponce in Atlanta, GA, a Positive Discipline certified parent educator, and mother to a Montessori child. While on the staff at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Philip from 2006-2016, she established and managed a Godly Play program with 7 classrooms serving children aged 3 through 5th grade and was a member of the Cathedral Preschool’s board of directors. She then spent a year teaching religion to children in 1st-8th grades in an Episcopal school— often telling more than 20 Godly Play stories a week in her elementary school classes! Mary Hunter holds a an MA in Theology from Virginia Theological Seminary and was the adjunct instructor for Christian Formation in The School of Theology at Sewanee during her time as Canon for Education at the Cathedral. She is currently pursuing Associate Level certification from the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators and collaborating with Atlanta area educators to incorporate practices inspired by the schools of Reggio-Emilia into The Preschool at Second-Ponce. Mary Hunter’s husband, George, is the Vicar of the Cathedral of St. Philip and she occasionally writes about faith, Godly Play, early childhood education, and food at [www.thevicarswifeatl.com](http://www.thevicarswifeatl.com).



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