

# What is Godly Play?

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*Godly Play* is a term coined by Jerome Berryman<sup>[1]</sup> to describe an approach to children's spiritual formation that is based on creating a sacred space in which to present the stories of faith, wonder about them together, and then allow the children open-ended opportunities, usually with art supplies, to engage the story on their own terms.

This is play. It is Godly.

*Godly Play* is unique. It is what Jerome Berryman calls his interpretation of Montessori religious education. It does not tell children "how to do it" or exactly what they should believe. Instead, it gives them a way to discover how to come close to the mystery of God's presence in their lives.

The goal of *Godly Play* is to teach children the art of using the language of the Christian tradition to encounter God.

In *Godly Play*, the invitation is given not for play in general but for play with the language of God and God's people; sacred stories, parables, liturgical actions and silences. Through this powerful language, through our wondering, through the community of players gathered together, we hear the deepest invitation of all: an invitation to come and play with God.<sup>[2]</sup> By engaging children through play in sacred stories they are invited to begin lifelong wondering about the God of love revealed through Jesus.

The *Godly Play* process includes:

- gathering the children in a circle
- telling the story using manipulative objects
- wondering questions that are open ended

*I wonder what part of the story you like best.*

*I wonder what part of the story is about you, or who you are in the story*

*I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need.*

- responding by using craft materials, books, pictures, etc.

### **Ideas for Wondering Questions with Parables:**

Parables don't look at the world in an everyday sort of way. They prompt us to begin anew to make sense of life without the ordinary cultural limits. With parables there is no single answer. There are many right answers. The fundamental wondering questions for the parables are variations on: "I wonder what this could really be?" The wondering can go on and on, and the direction it takes will depend on the children who are gathered that day and what their needs are.

The Mustard Seed (Matt 13: 31-32, Lk 13: 18-19)

- I wonder what the person who put the tiny seed in the ground was doing while the seed was growing?
- I wonder if the person had a name?
- I wonder if the person was happy to see the birds?
- I wonder if the person can take the shrub that grew so big it was like a tree and put it back inside the tiny seed?

### **Ideas for Wondering Questions for Sacred Stories:**

The wondering that follows a sacred story is about our deep identity. This type of wondering engages the great story of Scripture to give our own stories context and a larger meaning. When the story is finished there is a pause. The teaching material remains in the centre of the circle for the children to continue looking at as they wonder.

- I wonder what part of this story you like best?
- I wonder what part of the story is the most important?
- I wonder where you are in the story? I wonder what part is about you?
- I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need?

### **Ideas for Wondering Questions for Liturgical Stories:**

This kind of wondering connects what children learn in a Catholic school and their experience of worship in the church.

To probe how things work in the church you might ask:

- I wonder how many places you can find this colour in the church?
- I wonder who put the colour there?
- I wonder which colour is the most important?<sup>[3]</sup>

For more information please see *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* series of books.

## Wondering Questions for significant Church seasons

### Lent and Easter

I wonder how things grow?

I wonder why some things change when they grow?

I wonder what it was like to know Jesus?

I wonder how chickens know when it is time to hatch?

I wonder how God shows love?

I wonder how the people felt when Jesus died?

I wonder how Jesus felt when the people were yelling at him?

I wonder how the women felt as they ran to tell the other disciples that Jesus was alive?

I wonder how the disciples felt when they heard Jesus was alive?

I wonder how Jesus friends felt when he said "Do not be afraid?"

### Advent and Christmas

I wonder how Mary felt when she saw the angel?

I wonder what an angel looks like?

I wonder what an angel sounds like?

I wonder how Mary and Elizabeth felt about their babies?

I wonder how excited they were?

I wonder what Mary and Elizabeth did while they were together?

I wonder what great things God has done?

I wonder how it felt to be in Bethlehem that night?

I wonder how Mary felt when she saw her tiny baby?

I wonder how the shepherds felt when they heard the angels singing?

I wonder what it is like to be visited by a wise one?

I wonder how Jesus felt about all the people who came to visit him?

I wonder what gift you would give baby Jesus?

[1] Jerome Berryman, an Episcopal priest, based in Colorado, who developed Godly Play along a Montessori educational model as a way of eliciting the spirituality that is already their Godly inheritance.

[2] J Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, vol. 1, Living the Good News, Colorado, 200, p.12

[3] J. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play*, Morehouse Education Resources, Denver, p.45-52