

Godly Play in the church primary school



Godly Play is a discovery method of teaching and learning, originally developed by Jerome Berryman, Director of the Center for Theology of Childhood in Houston, Texas. It focuses on the needs of the whole child – mind, body and spirit and it aims to help children make connections with stories from the Judaeo-Christian tradition and their own experience. The national non-statutory framework for RE identifies two essential aspects of the RE curriculum - learning *about* religion and learning *from* religion; the Godly Play method helps teachers to provide opportunities for their pupils to grow in spiritual awareness and understanding as they explore the key Biblical stories and parables which form the foundation of the Christian faith.

The typical Godly Play lesson, as used in Sunday school or Junior Church, mirrors the pattern of the Eucharist. First the **preparation** - the children are welcomed, they gather in a circle and get ready to hear the story. Next, the **ministry of the word** - the teacher tells the Bible story 'from the heart' (i.e. from memory) focusing on simple but beautiful 3-D materials and the children are then invited to 'wonder' silently or aloud about the meaning and significance for them. The children may also be given time to respond to the word by drawing or painting, re-telling the story for themselves or finding the story in appropriate children's books or the Bible. After this comes an opportunity for **communion**, as the children gather in the circle again for

the 'feast' – just slices of fruit or a handful of raisins each, preceded by a moment of quiet reflection and a prayer of thanks. Finally – the **blessing and dismissal** – the storyteller says goodbye to each child.

Following training to become an accredited Godly Play teacher Lesley Mason has worked with primary schools across the diocese to demonstrate the method and show how it could be adapted for use in the primary school setting. A range of Old and New Testament stories were covered, following the Godly Play scripts. Class teachers and teaching assistants were delighted by the way the children responded so readily to this way of teaching RE and by their creative and imaginative use of art materials, computers, construction toys and drama. The children were able to connect the stories with their own lives and experiences and some began to explore wider dimensions of faith as they reflected on the mystery of God.

Courses have been offered in this diocese to enable staff to look more closely at the theory and methodology of Godly Play. Teachers commented that they found Godly Play inspiring, intriguing and engaging. They see it as a method which could transform their teaching – not only in RE but in other subjects as well. If you would like support in introducing Godly Play please contact educationtraining@chichester.anglican.org where an inset day or bespoke course can be arranged.