

Okay, What's this Godly Play and Good Shepherd Thing?

From: Rev. Mark Hillis, National Director Christian Education.

I felt a little strange and lonely in 1996 when starting to make materials for Bible stories and Christian education, replicating the 'Godly Play' approach. But it is not so weird anymore. More people are hearing about it and trying it out, in various contexts and ways. It is a slowly growing, yet profound, movement in Australia today.

'Godly Play' is the term used by Jerome Berryman (in the USA) to describe a style of Christian education that owes a great deal to Sofia Cavalletti and her friends in Rome, including the late Maria Montessori. Cavalletti's network is called 'The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.' That movement has been building in Catholic and Anglican circles since the late 90s. Through both these movements in education, 'Good Shepherd' and Godly Play, there are possibilities for quality encounters with the Scriptures and faith practices at home, in church and in schools.

Godly Play is a meditative and thoughtful process for Christian religious education. It introduces children to the stories and practices of our faith. Adults who get involved have the job of making the tangible materials, presenting them and then allowing the children to make use of them for their own learning. I find it quite enchanting, having used the process in schools, churches and teacher workshops since taking it up.

Since becoming deeply engaged with this approach to learning, particularly with young children, I have encountered a number of adults who, like me, find that it enriches their faith and learning too. Using tangible materials to represent stories and teachings, you are encouraged to wonder about your connection to Christian faith and human values. Wondering is a key component. It is both a playful and a profound wondering. Often, education becomes associated with 'testing' or 'quizzing' people for what they 'know.' Education to wonder, in the Godly Play style, brings an appreciation that 'knowing' is not so much about facts as relationships and the very deepest things in life.

Building a Network

As more people find out about and want to work with the Godly Play and Good Shepherd processes, it would be great to recommend good practitioners and others who can 'show their stuff' and build a network of people who are using these approaches in homes, schools, and other worship and learning contexts. To this end, I would appreciate hearing from you.

For more information about Godly Play and the Good Shepherd approaches, contact Mark Hillis on (02) 8267 4231 or markh@nat.uca.org.au

