

GODLY PLAY at Holy Trinity: “Entering with Wonder to Live the Questions”

Godly Play is a time-tested program that supports Christian Formation by incorporating the experiential/discovery method of “learning by doing” with the stories of the people of God. Godly Play starts with the premise that children experience the mystery of the presence of God in their lives, but they often lack the language and/or the permission to enjoy that mystery.

By taking part in Godly Play, children learn the language of Christian Tradition--parable, sacred story, silence, liturgical action--to encounter God and find direction for their lives.

Godly Play follows the Christian tradition of trusting the stories of our Faith as the primary way to form faith and transform our lives.

Godly Play is grounded in what we know about child development and children’s learning capacities and styles. It respects their deep capacities and needs for faith expression. Godly Play gives children the tools to identify, name and value their religious experiences.

Godly Play is a Montessori-based Christian Formation program developed by Rev. Jerome Barrymore, an Episcopal priest. It has been adapted for use by several denominations, including the Orthodox. We continue to adapt the curriculum as needed to best serve the children at Holy Trinity.

Children use verbal (stories) and non-verbal (play) to look at the existential questions of life. Rather than teaching right or wrong answers, wondering offers a way to live and be with the questions. The essence of Christian spiritual formation is the ability to live with paradox.

What are the children learning?

...about God

...that all of God’s creation is “everywhere present and fills all things,” including each of us.

...that our lives can be formed and transformed by coming close to the mystery of the elusive presence of God.

...to trust in a gracious God who is real and accessible in all the mysteries of life--awe, sadness, confusion, pain, joy.

...about who we are as Christians

We are a people of the story. Our faith is passed on through story. Godly Play offers the stories, trusting their forming and transforming power.

We are a people in community. Godly Play models kindness and mutuality by its ritual character and by how it organizes the space, learning material and the community of children. It embodies the biblical ethic of how the people of God are to live together. Godly Play engages the whole child--hands, heart, mind, senses and intuition--which helps the child internalize and retain what is learned.

We Orthodox are also a people of “the Book.” Deeply grounded in our spiritual Tradition, Godly Play follows the pattern of worship that Orthodox Christians use to be with God in community.

...about how we are as Christians

Children learn to respect the space, materials, and people they work with, enjoying each with care and patience.

...And the Central Lesson

The most important thing that children learn each week is how Christian people work together in community. In every interaction they have at church they learn something about **“this is what it means to be a Christian.”**

What happens in a Godly Play Worship Center (classroom)?

Godly Play follows the pattern of the Divine Liturgy. Children get ready to hear the story (“Blessed is the Kingdom...”), listen and respond to the story (Liturgy of the Word) have a “feast” (Liturgy of the Eucharist) and say good-bye (Dismissal).

Getting Ready

Children gather all together in the hall near the church office. An adult “doorkeeper” then greets children outside the appropriate worship center/classroom. Before they enter, children are welcomed and invited to focus their energy so that they can “get ready” to enter. Godly Play is a special and different time and space for children where they can learn about God.

Entering In

Like going into the Sanctuary, when children cross the threshold of the worship center they find a safe and attractive environment and they join a community that supports and respects their learning. The setting encourages children in learning that being quiet, careful and deliberate can be as playful and satisfying as being noisy and busy.

“I wonder...”

The heart of Godly Play is listening in a meditative way to a story from our faith tradition and having the opportunity to enter into that story through the process of wondering. Both the story and the way it is told invite children to wonder together and on their own, encouraging them to enter into the story and relate it to their own personal experience. Considering “wondering questions” is a way to open up to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Following the wondering time, children use art materials to create an individual, expressive response to what they feel, think or imagine after hearing and seeing the story. The children have the opportunity to “enter” the story, “wonder” about it, play with it and then find and express spiritual meaning that connects that story to their own lives.

Feast, Prayers and Blessing

After a time of response children put away their materials and return to the circle. We pray together for concerns that each individual may bring. The Children then take turns serving each other a small snack. We intentionally call the snack a “feast”. Children learn that it is not what we eat, but the “fellowship it engenders” that makes a feast. The children are dismissed with a blessing from both the storyteller and the doorkeeper.

Other Opportunities for Spiritual Formation at Holy Trinity

Several times per year we depart from the Godly Play curriculum to do service to the great community. This has included sending cookies to college students, making Valentines for community members, assisting with neighborhood food distribution at Christmas time, practicing singing for worship and other activities.

Our Godly Play program serves children ages three through fifth grade. Youth from sixth through twelfth grade have their own class taught by Mrs. Kring and Mr. Barks.

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