



# GODLY PLAY

Dear Reader,

*Once upon a time...* Don't you love being told a good story? Maybe you love being the one to tell a story. For me, as a child I LOVED being told stories. These are some of my earliest memories: Being wrapped into the imagination of a tale, feeling loved that someone was spending their time with me. Story telling is a bond and old as time itself – I am just one of millions (maybe billions) of humans who love story time.

I am going to share with you now a story that just happened this year, about Children's Ministry and *Godly Play*, but whose beginnings go many years back.

Many chapters ago, I used to teach classroom music at an elementary school. The teaching philosophy of this school was traditional/conventional in many aspects, but also very Montessori in certain ways - like the strong encouragement they placed on learning and following one's own curiosity. Their belief was that gratification was the learning itself, not the end reward. They believed all children have an inner guide, and when developing their voice and autonomy guided by a teacher, the [children] experienced a deep sense of ownership when given freedom and space to discover. The other beautiful layer of this learning environment was that there also was a strong sense of community: each day, the students would clean up and assist. The emphasis was on each one having a piece of responsibility, for the common good of all. For me, experiencing teaching (and learning) in this environment, in this way, opened doors I never knew existed.

When I came on as interim Children's Ministry Director in summer of 2019, I came into this role knowing somewhere in my heart, that the relationship between children's growth, spirituality, and adult mentorship should look and feel like what I felt when I was teaching way back when. I had no idea what was out there in the vast world of children's Christian-based curriculum that could set this tone, so I set to work, researching and curating. Along the way, I found so many valuable and beautiful resources to use for our Sunday morning ministries. For a long time though, while I found resources and activities that engaged curiosity and were both lovely and aligned

with St. Luke, these never were a whole conceived program. One day, I typed in two words I never thought would go together in a single search: "Christian Montessori". Up came two new words "Godly Play". I asked myself, *What is Godly Play?* Thus, my own curiosity began to stir.

It was as if *Godly Play* came out of the woodwork. I discovered nearby Lutheran churches, Episcopal churches, and other churches used this! PASTOR BETH(!) told me she TOO had a wonderful experience with Godly Play! *How had I never heard of this before?!* I kept on with the query What Is Godly Play? I found Godly Play stories told on YouTube, I saw these beautiful wooden figures used as story manipulatives, yet I wasn't sure of the uniqueness of this curriculum... was it just... Bible stories?

In our early search, we invited Megan Dilitto, Godly Play leader at Messiah Lutheran, Vancouver, WA, to give an informational presentation on *Godly Play* to our children's ministry team and pastors. Megan gave us much more scope to what the program looked like, felt like, sounded like. She gave us a virtual tour of her Godly Play classroom at Messiah, told us a Bible story in the style of Godly Play, and following the story, invited us into wondering time together. Afterwards, we *KNEW* this was something that would be a beautiful fit with our kids AND St. Luke. But.... I also knew this was a program that, for us to say we were a *Godly Play* congregation, our children's ministry team needed to be trained, and how/when, funding the story kits with the wooden figures... it was a big dream in February 2020....and it felt far away.

Fast forward to March/April 2022, and Pastor Beth found out via Pastor Joan Beck, that Bethlehem Lutheran was now meeting at St. Mark's Lutheran, and they were looking to sell their Godly Play story kits. We reached out to them to let them know; we would be very interested in their Godly Play stories. Meanwhile, at the end of April, Godly Play training (which is offered nationally and internationally), CAME TO PORTLAND! Yes, because it was right here in Portland (at Trinity Episcopal!) we were able to afford sending 5 St. Luke members to receive the 3-day certification!

Sunday, May 1, 6:30 PM ended our absolutely WONDERFUL Godly Play training experience. (We felt like we were at a retreat!). Monday, May 2, 6:52 AM in came an email from council representative, Deb Schulz, at Bethlehem Lutheran: *We had our April council meeting last week. At that meeting we unanimously voted to **gift** our Godly Play materials to St. Luke's.*

I blinked. I could hardly believe my eyes! What was I reading, did I read this right?! And, RIGHT AFTER our TRAINING?! It was so beautiful, so joyful, and the timing so

aligned with divine energy. I was overcome with gratitude, energized, and couldn't wait to tell the good news to my fellow trainees and the pastors!

So... here we are today.... on the threshold of a new chapter at St. Luke Children's Ministry. Blessed with over 40 Godly Play story kits of the Old Testament, New Testament, Parables, Christmas, Easter, and sacraments.

So... where are we in this process? In honor of the *Godly Play* environment, where the environment both teaches and provides a sacred space, where the children are invited to handle and access the stories during their work time that follows the story and wondering, we are cleaning up the 3-room wing behind the Fellowship Hall stage, giving it fresh paint, installing new bookshelves, and creating a new space for our children! Our Godly Play program will launch this fall on Sunday, September 18.

*Follow your curiosity* by reading more on Godly Play:

Godly Play: History, Resource Links

<https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/>

<https://christianmontessorinetwork.com/godly-play-works-megan-cottrell/>

<https://buildfaith.org/tag/godly-play/>

<https://christianmontessorinetwork.com/godly-play-work-time-megan-cottrell/>

**Lastly, JOIN US, for Wednesday Night Church Dinner on Wed, Sept 7 in the Fellowship Hall, 6 PM!** We will be celebrating our WND kickoff with catering from Verde Cocina and immediately following dinner, we will be celebrating and thanking all those wonderful people who have been instrumental in bringing Godly Play to St. Luke with a Godly Play classroom blessing and story.

**Please let us know if you would be interested in joining Children's Ministry team as support roles this year!** We are looking for smiling faces who may love to do something as simple as be our greeter: signing in children as they arrive, or help us during the week, making sure our classrooms are tidied up between Sundays. Perhaps you love to interface with the children during their Sunday morning hour: we always need a second adult to assist – no prep required.

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