

The Story of Creation in the Season of Creation



Once every year, from September 1 to October 4, we as members of the Christian family set aside time to deepen our relationship with the Creator, each other, and all of creation. This is the Season of Creation. During the Season of Creation, we join together to rejoice in the good gift of creation and reflect on how we care for it. This season offers a precious opportunity to pause in the midst of our day-to-day lives and contemplate the fabric of life into which we are woven.

As part of the Season of Creation this year, we are sharing with you a video of the Story of Creation, as told by Sharon, who is a Godly Play Storyteller, as well as a Trócaire volunteer.

Godly Play-Story of Creation

The story of Creation is an important story for us all. It is there, in the midst of God's Creation, at the ocean, in the mountains, or in their own garden, that many of us have our first encounters with something bigger than ourselves. There are hints and whispers of God everywhere in our natural world, but we, and young people especially need safety, permission and a language by which to discuss and affirm such experiences. This is why the story of Creation can be so enriching.

Godly Play

Godly Play' refers to an imaginative approach to religious storytelling. It has roots in Montessori education practice and philosophy. It is an approach that genuinely invites and enables young people to participate for themselves in the exploration of collective and personal meanings found in religious stories.

These religious stories are 'presented' in a thoughtful, prayerful manner in which the storyteller takes second place to the story, allowing the listeners to experience directly, without unnecessary mediation, the message contained in the story for each listener.

The experiential context for the spoken word (through the visual, kinetic, creative emphases of this approach) aims to ensure that young people don't hear the story as an end in itself. Instead, young people are actively encouraged to recognise clues to profound experiences and insights.

In using the Godly Play approach, storytellers adopt and therefore teach a deep respect for individual insight and personal meaning making. **There is explicitly no agenda to 'explain' what stories 'really' mean, and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.**

Immediately following each story, the group shares in a 'wondering' session, reflecting on how different people, feelings and issues in the story raised feelings or thoughts in their own minds. What seems to be a key element of Godly Play is an ability to demonstrate the open potential, the infinite layers of meaning and connections that faith stories contain.

It tries to avoid, at all costs, the impression that religious narratives have a closed system of meaning, a code that, once cracked, does not need further thought or engagement. This approach has much to recommend it as an innovative way of working with young people in Church, school and family settings.

Each session should end with a regular pattern of questions, depending on the story being told. In this video, Sharon tells the story of 'Creation' and after the story has been told she opens up the experience by asking the following wondering questions ...

- I wonder which of these days you like best?
- I wonder which day is the most important?
- I wonder which day you are in or which one is especially about you?
- I wonder if we can leave out any of these days and still have all that we need?
- I wonder what you are most thankful for from creation?

We would ask the teacher, having watched the video with their students, to pick up the wondering questions in the classroom. Here are some guidelines for wondering with young people:

Guidelines for Wondering with Young People in Godly Play

1. An invitation to wonder must have integrity. In other words, when a teacher says "I wonder," that teacher must actually be wondering. With true wondering questions, the teacher and young people wonder together. Young people can sense when the teacher is "pretending."
2. A wondering question is open-ended and relevant to the story and the young people's experience. It is never a test of comprehension or fact recall. It must move in the direction of entering the story or the participants' experience more deeply, and the teacher truly does not know what the responses will be. There is always room for surprise and reflection.
3. With wondering questions, every answer is welcomed and accepted because they are the fruit of imagination and personal experience. The teacher never guides the young people to a pre-conceived conclusion. There are no right or wrong answers. The teacher may reflect back to the young person, "**I wonder.**" There is great power in simply joining young people on the journey in that moment.
4. The order of wondering questions is important. Never begin with "I wonder what part of the story is most important." This can stifle wondering when a teacher opens with it. It can sound to young people like "Now, what is the moral, or point, of this story? Were you paying attention? How intelligent are you?" This wondering can, however, work quite well when it comes second or third in order. You might want to make it expressly experiential: "I wonder what part of the story is most important to you . . . today?" After all, each hearing, each experiencing, is new.

Young people often have wondering questions of their own, and it's important to make space for that. Sometimes the wondering questions they raise might "derail" the wonderings a teacher has carefully prepared or has learned for the story, but because we want to always be open to how the Spirit is working in the young people, and because we genuinely care about their experience, it is important to follow where the young people lead. A teacher may occasionally get an intentionally insincere wondering from a child—a wondering that is intended to attract inappropriate attention or to create mischief. When this happens it can help to simply repeat the child's words as though they were well-intended, and then move on to the next wondering. There are Godly Play® techniques for dealing with this just as there are for dealing with insincere responses. Such calm teacher responses can actually be helpful and affirming for the young person

What is Godly Play?

The result of a lifetime of research and practice by theologian, author and educator The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman, the Godly Play® method is a curriculum of spiritual practice exploring the mystery of God's presence in our lives. The Godly Play curriculum engages what is most exciting about religious education: God inviting us into—and pursuing us in the midst of—Scripture and spiritual experience. Godly Play practice teaches us to listen for God and to make authentic and creative responses to God's call in our lives.

Children have an innate sense of the presence of God. The Godly Play approach helps them to explore their faith through story, to gain religious language and to enhance their spiritual experience through wonder and play. Based on Montessori principles, the Godly Play method serves children through early, middle and late childhood and beyond.

To find out more about Godly Play, go to www.godlyplayfoundation.org or if you are interested in becoming part of the Godly Play Limerick Diocesan family, please get in touch with through St John's parish or the Diocesan Centre.

Trócaire

The theme for our Season of Creation this year is Cultivating Hope. We celebrate this season, in the awareness that we are in the midst of an international health crisis. The environmental crisis and this health crisis are interconnected. Both are global emergencies that are affecting many people. Pope Francis's ground-breaking encyclical *Laudato Sí* reminds us of our duty to care for Our Common Home and for the people and nature around us. We have all come from some kind of home and are held within the relationships of that experience. So too, we are also held within a relationship with the natural world and all of God's creation. Our connection with each other and with our common home is more important than ever. What we do locally can have global effects, the more we keep our locality clean, the cleaner our world will be. We all share much in common with the families and communities which Trócaire works with overseas.

To find out more about Trócaire's work, go to www.trócaire.org.

These notes were prepared by Godly Play storyteller Sharon Collopy of St John's parish in the Diocese of Limerick.