

REmail: March 15, 2005  
Subject: Godly Play and Quaker Worship

Several Meetings are finding Jerome Berryman's work, Godly Play, a rich resource for their First Day Schools. Laurie Rizzo, Mt. Toby Meeting, has established a Godly Play Classroom and conducted cycles of Biblical Storytelling for three or four years. Godly Play combines Montessori teaching methods and philosophy with plain vanilla Christian theology and Episcopal practice. It is easy enough to side-step the liturgy and focus on the experiential storytelling and corporate "wondering." Friends are often impressed with the power of this simple storytelling method to convey the Light and lessons in the Bible stories. Laurie also finds a resonance between the cycle of activities for each class and Quaker worship. Below, is a piece written by Laurie Rizzo describing this connection.

### Godly Play – A Cycle of Activity That Supports Children by Laurie Rizzo

Story telling is central to the Godly Play curriculum, but Godly Play is more than a series of religious stories. A Godly Play session provides a cycle of activity that supports children (and teachers) in the creation of a community of worship. As is Friends' manner of worship, Godly Play is experiential, based on the premise that each of us can directly experience the divine. The cycle of activity in a Godly Play session is as follows:

Entrance  
Word and Response  
    Listening: The Story  
        Silence  
        Wondering  
    Responding: Work Time  
Thanksgiving: The Feast  
Sending Forth: Blessing Each Child

Jerome Berryman, who developed this curriculum, is an Episcopalian, and you can see how the cycle of activity listed above relates to the liturgy in a traditional Protestant worship service. Meeting for Worship at Mt. Toby, however, also corresponds to the Godly Play cycle.

*Entrance:* As the children gradually arrive in the classroom, we sit in a circle on the floor, and settle into quiet conversation. As the adults gradually arrive in the Worship room, we sit on benches, facing each other, and settle into silence. Both children and adults are gathering, getting ready to listen deeply.

*Word and Response:*

*Listening:* The children become still, and listen to the story. There are spaces of silence within the story, and wondering questions at the story's end. The ending becomes a beginning. The adults listen for the "still, small voice within." Sometimes there is a "story," told in spoken or interior word. Word leads to wondering, ending to beginning.

*Responding:* As adults in Meeting for Worship, we respond to the messages with stillness, at least outwardly. Ours is an inward response, whereas the

children need to respond actively, as well. They work with open-ended art materials such as clay, paint, and wood (or with the story baskets), creating whatever they are drawn to create. Their creative work can be seen as a manner of “active meditation.”

*Thanksgiving:* After cleaning up their work, the children gather with teachers for *the Feast* (a small amount of food, but rich in nurture because we are all together). Before we eat, each person in the circle has a chance to offer a prayer of thanksgiving. A prayer may be spoken or silent; it may be comprised of words, or it may be wordless. While we adults do not eat in Meeting for Worship, we may feast on the presence of one another. There may be prayers of thanksgiving offered, either spoken or wordless.

*Sending Forth:* As *the Feast* ends, children prepare to go forth. A teacher calls and blesses each child. The blessing may be as simple as a touch on the shoulder with the words, “I’m glad you were here today. Come back whenever you can.” As Meeting for Worship ends, we hold one another in the light when we say our names. This holding is like giving one another a blessing before we go forth.

There are strong parallels between Meeting for Worship and Godly Play at Mt. Toby. It seems that our children are not able to sit with us for an hour in worship, receiving from it the spiritual nurture that we receive. But the active, experiential nature of Godly Play provides children and teachers with an experience that is much akin to Meeting for Worship.

For more information check the [godlyplay.org](http://godlyplay.org) website. Mary Snyder’s Quakers I and II applies this teaching method to Quaker history. FGC carries the full collection of Godly Play books and Mary Snyder’s curricula and her figures for the stories.

Two training opportunities are occurring in or near New England this spring. The May weekend focuses especially on Quaker applications of Godly Play.

**April 7- 9, 2005**

Teacher Accreditation  
St. John’s Episcopal Church  
Stamford CT ( NYC area)  
Cost: \$325 per person  
Contact: Linda Clapp, [lclapp@stjohns-stamford.org](mailto:lclapp@stjohns-stamford.org), 203 348 2619

**May 13-15, 2005**

Teacher Accreditation  
Burlington( Quaker) Meetinghouse & Conference Center  
340 High Street  
Burlington NJ (Philadelphia area)  
Contact: Helen Fields: [helenfields@comcast.net](mailto:helenfields@comcast.net)  
215 241 7008/610 888 1252

In the Light,  
Beth