

The Godly Play International Covenant of Agreement

September 2019

Introduction

The Godly Play International Covenant of Agreement (COA) is the work of the Godly Play International Council (GPIC).

The GPIC is made up of representatives from each country/region where Godly Play is active. The GPIC has been meeting annually since 2011 and up to 2 representatives from each country/region are welcome to join the meeting, including representatives from the Godly Play Foundation. Physical representation fluctuates depending on where the meeting may be held, but all countries/regions are invited to provide feedback on the agenda for any particular meeting, and this feedback is taken into serious consideration.

Furthermore the GPIC provides stewardship of the International Development Initiatives Fund (IDIF) and three members of the Council are elected to positions on the IDIF granting team.

The COA seeks to address the principles, practices, and protocols that are at the heart of Godly Play, and which are generally shared wherever Godly Play is present. Under each category the COA suggests both minimum requirements and best practices that the GPIC believes will ensure that Godly Play is carried out with integrity wherever it is practised.

The GPIC recognises that context is important and that contextualisation does take place within the practice of Godly Play. The COA tends to focus on those areas which we all hold in common.

The GPIC is supported by Andrew Sheldon, the Godly Play Advocate for International Development, a position funded by the Godly Play Foundation. Andrew can be reached at andrew@godlyplay.ca. The current Chair of the GPIC is Jenny Sjögren of Godly Play Sweden and she can be reached at jennysjogreen@gmail.com .

On Core Training

We agree that Core Training is at the heart of our work with Godly Play. And we also agree that our philosophy on the spirituality of the child is at the heart of a Core Training.

Minimum Requirements:

- At least 22 contact hours.
- At least two accredited trainers.
- Each participant tells a story with wondering for feedback and evaluation by group and trainer.
- Three plenary presentations including the Spirituality of the Child, the Sacred Environment, and Building and Supporting the Community of Children
- A fourth plenary session that would include one of the topics found in point 3 below, under best practices.
- Experience of the four languages or genres of Godly Play, sacred stories, parables, liturgical action, and contemplative silence.
- That two full sessions are included.
- Model principles and practices of Godly Play, including a wondering and playful attitude.
- Experience and practice doorpersion role, including debrief.
- Create a space reflective of the Godly Play environment principles.

Best practices:

- All participants act as doorpersion and experience debrief of the role
- Commit at least 2 hours to the Spirituality of the Child plenary.
- The integration of the following aspects: building the circle; spiral curriculum; the importance of play; the Montessori Method; the art of wondering; making the most of response time.
- Participants are encouraged to engage in ongoing training, and associations are encouraged to develop advanced training models.
- If utilising the Commuter Core model*, time should be given during each session to review previous and intervening learning.
- If utilising the Commuter Core model, a full session should be included each of the three days.

- If utilising the Commute Core model participants should experience the same trainers throughout the training.

*Rather than a single 22+ hour event the training takes place on two or more occasions within a period of time.

On The Ongoing Formation of Godly Play Practitioners

No matter the quality of a Core Training we are aware that in order to achieve proficiency in Godly Play there is need for further and ongoing formation in the art of Godly Play.

Minimum Requirement:

- That a national/regional association find ways and means of supporting trained Godly Play practitioners through providing ongoing formation opportunities that can be found in the list of best practices below.

Best Practices:

- Enriched training event modelled along the lines of a Core Training; including storytelling, plenaries, and opportunities for participants to share case studies from Godly Play practice.
- A national or regional Godly Play conference that includes opportunities for learning.
- Use of social media for communications, support, and learning.
- Use of web-based technology in the form of webinars or podcasts.
- Establish the role of the Godly Play Advocate; someone who is not a trainer but has particular responsibilities for supporting Godly Play within a local area.
- Local enrichment days.
- Local circles – sometimes called guilds – that gather for storytelling, support, and ongoing formation.
- Use of association website or newsletter for articles that promote learning and formation.
- Develop a mechanism for following up on those who have attended a Core Training.
- Provide resources to congregations that host Godly Play as a means of educating clergy and lay leaders in the practices and principles of Godly Play.
- Equip practitioners to promote Godly Play within their own contexts.

On the Training of Trainers

We agree that Trainers are the primary equippers, enablers, and nurturers of Godly Play principles and practices throughout the world. As such it is of vital importance that trainers are selected, trained, and nurtured according to a high standard of expectations. To achieve this we consider 3 questions: What are the elements of a discernment process to determine who should be a trainer? What are the core elements of the actual training of Trainers? What are our ongoing expectations of Trainers in order to consider them active or competent to do the work? In each of these areas we propose minimum requirement and best practices.

The Discernment Process

Minimum Requirements:

- That the discernment is mutual; both sponsoring association and potential trainee are engaged in the process.
- The trainee has completed a Core Training, and has at least four years' experience as a Godly Play storyteller/doorperson with children. (We recognise that the four year expectation may not always be possible in countries/regions where Godly Play is newly emerging.)
- The trainee is fluent in the Godly Play core stories.
- The trainee evidences fluency around the theoretical foundations of Godly Play.
- The trainee has an intimate knowledge of the flow of a Godly Play session, the Godly Play genres, the categories of stories, and the layout of the space.
- The trainee has experience working with children and evidences knowledge of a contemporary understanding of children's spirituality.
- The trainee shows evidence of having the skills necessary for working with adults.
- The trainee evidences appropriate communication and learning skills.
- The trainee has evidenced commitment to ongoing learning, such as participation in further Core Training sessions, Godly Play Conferences, Refresher Courses, Advanced Training etc., beyond the discernment process and the Training of Trainers' event/process.

Best Practices:

- The trainee practices Godly Play in a room that is exemplary in the quality of space and materials and number of stories available.
- The trainee has read Jerome Berryman's *Teaching Godly Play*.
- The trainee evidences biblical literacy.
- The trainee has experience leading or training or facilitating groups of adults.

- The trainee has knowledge of the current learning in the areas of children's ministry, discovery learning, theological reflection, and group dynamics.
- That the trainee is assigned an experienced mentor.
- That Godly Play Associations create and utilise forms such as applications, letters of reference/recommendation, self-declaration checklists, etc.

The Training of Trainer's Event/Process

We recognise that the usual setting for the training of trainers is a single event over a number of days, but acknowledge that this training may also take place over a period of time and involve numerous gatherings and other components.

Minimum Requirements:

- The length of the training should allow each participant to fully engage in the required learning content.
- The training is led by at least two accredited Trainers.
- That the lead Trainers have at least 3 years' experience as trainers, have led a number of Core Trainings, are active in a Godly Play circle, operate out of a context that models an exemplary Godly Play program, and have been invited by their association to lead the training.
- Each trainee tells a story and is debriefed on that story.
- Each trainee has the opportunity to debrief a storyteller.
- Each trainee designs and leads a plenary session on either the Godly Play Environment, The Spirituality of Children, or Supporting the Community of Children, and is debriefed on that presentation.
- Training includes advanced learning on the theoretical foundations of Godly Play.
- Training includes learning on effective feedback techniques and resources, and learning on how to effectively design and lead a plenary session.
- Training includes learning on, group dynamics, adult education, learning theory, conflict management, and the spiral curriculum.
- Training includes an introduction to the global community of Godly Play and the instruments of unity that define it, and trainees are given a copy of the Godly Play Covenant of Agreement.

Best Practices:

- The training could include additional leaders who could function as advocate/assistant, chaplain, or other desirable role.

- Training includes learning on the training policies, practices, and protocols of the host national/regional association.

The Ongoing Formation of Trainers

Minimum Requirements:

- That the new Trainer has the benefit of a mentor/co-trainer for at least their first Core Training and/or for the period of one year.
- The Trainer leads at least one Core Training per calendar year.
- The Trainer augments Core Training by leading other Godly Play events such as workshops, introductory days, tastings or material making events.
- The Trainer is active in a Godly Play circle, functioning as storyteller/doorperson.
- The Trainer is up-to-date on all background checks or legal requirements necessary within their jurisdiction.
- The Trainer stays up to date on the latest learning in the areas covered in a training of trainers.
- The Trainer engages in ongoing personal and spiritual formation.
- The Trainer maintains a relationship with their Godly Play association.
- Godly Play associations maintain a relationship with their accredited Trainers.

Best Practices:

- The Trainer attends national/regional Godly Play conferences/meetings.
- Godly Play associations are encouraged to develop advanced and ongoing learning opportunities for Trainers.

On International Training Agreements

The GPIC acknowledges and affirms the importance of the college of trainers in every country in terms of informing the development of core training in that country/region. We also recognise and acknowledge that the discernment and development of trainers in emerging regions/country will necessitate the support of established associations and individuals. As such we offer the following principles and practices:

Regarding training in countries other than the Trainers' own country:

- Trainers do not promote or provide trainings in countries/regions with existing Godly Play organisations except by invitation or agreement of the organisation in that country/region.

- Trainers do not go into emerging countries without being mutually accountable to and consulting with international colleagues.
- When considering training in an emerging/new country, either by invitation or initiation, contact the Godly Play Advocate for International Development to communicate and coordinate plans.
- If someone indicates a desire to participate in a Core Training in a country other than their own, their home country organisation should be informed and concurrence given.

Regarding the Training of Trainers:

- A shared database of current trainers and in which languages they train will be developed. When new trainers are added associations will communicate information to the Advocate for International Development so they can be added to database.
- Countries do not train Trainers from other countries except at the request of the other country's organisation.

Regarding the language of the training:

- Where there are Trainers that can speak the native language of the country or region where the training is happening then the native language speakers should provide and/or participate in the training.
- Whomever the Trainers are it is a best practice that wondering take place in the language native to the participants.

On Criteria For Creating and Sustaining a National/Regional Godly Play Association.

Across the world circles have formed to shepherd the work of Godly Play in a particular geographical context. These circles take the form of foundations, of trusts, of registered non-profits, of subsidiaries of an umbrella organisation, or simply a group of enthusiasts committed to doing Godly Play well in their setting. In some cases these associations have boards and by-laws, in others a much more informal approach. Nonetheless it is important that these associations operate effectively and responsibly in promoting and nurturing Godly Play with integrity in their context.

Before forming an association:

- Ensure there is a need for an association. This could be the case when there is a critical mass of Godly Play practitioners; when there is a need to support trainers; when funds are available for supporting Godly Play; and/or when formal communications become necessary.
- Consult with the Godly Play Advocate for International Development in order to learn from the wisdom of others who have followed this route.

When forming an association:

Minimum Requirements

- Maintain the (Association) in good standing in the jurisdiction of its incorporation or organisation, make all required filings, and comply with applicable laws
- Adhere to and promote the minimum standards and best practices of Godly Play as found in the Godly Play International Covenant of Agreement and encourage adherence to these standards within your country/region.
- Maintain an active role in the Godly Play International Council, provide up to two members to the Godly Play International Council, and attend annual meetings when feasible.
- Provide an annual report of operations in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Godly Play International Council.
- Negotiate in good faith with the Godly Play Foundation and relevant parties all agreements and licenses to do with the translation and publication of Godly Play print resources and/or the manufacture for sale of Godly Play materials in your region/country.
- Recruit leaders who have a diversity of gifts and skills including those with administrative and financial expertise.
- Establish fee structures for Core Training and other events.
- Develop communication tools appropriate to the context.
- When a Godly Play association is formed under the auspices of another organisation, the Godly Play association is to ensure that their activities adhere to the protocols, principles, practices, and ethos of Godly Play.

Best Practices

- Have a mentor who has experience forming a Godly Play association.
- When forming a leadership team consider ecclesiastical diversity.
- Leadership should reflect a gender balance.
- Consider a model that utilises two separate entities: one to oversee the actual Godly Play activity, and the other to provide administrative support.

- Have an online presence through a website and/or a social media platform such as Facebook.

On Translation of the Godly Play Stories

In support of training and storytelling in places where Godly Play is established and emerging, the Godly Play International Council desires and encourages that Godly Play stories will be translated into the native language(s) of those places where Godly Play is established and emerging. For the purpose of this category Godly Play stories are stories found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* as created by Jerome Berryman.

Therefore when considering translations the following are offered as minimum requirements:

- Notify the Godly Play Advocate for International Development when a group begins to make translations.
- Translate in groups comprised of trainers and country association representatives where applicable.
- That the translator(s) have an intimate knowledge of the languages translated from and translated to, and an intimate knowledge of Godly Play, its ethos and method.
- That great care is taken to ensure the result is a translation as opposed to an interpretation, an adaptation, or a change.
- Try out the translations with children, and elicit feedback from a range of storytellers/doorpersons.
- Don't rush the process.
- All translated stories should be distributed in conjunction with the telling of stories and the training of storytellers/doorpersons.

Best practices:

- In any initial translation work include the translation of *Teaching Godly Play*.
- Those who provided the initial training in a region/country are encouraged to assist in the process.

N.B. If translations are to be published for sale, the Godly Play Foundation is required to give approval. If a country/region association desires to publish a translation for sale they should be in touch with The Godly Play Advocate for International Development in order to begin the process.

On the Production of Materials for One's Own Use

In support of training and storytelling in places where Godly Play is established and emerging, the Godly Play International Council desires and encourages that Godly Play practitioners will be encouraged, equipped, and enabled to make Godly Play materials for their own use.

As in other areas we understand that in each country/region the local Godly Play association is responsible for ensuring minimum requirements and best practices are met within that country/region.

Minimum requirements:

- That materials made for one's own use will be in line with, and take their lead from, those materials produced by licensed Godly Play material makers. And that trainers will direct practitioner to the relevant websites and/or other resources for purposes of comparison.
- That there will be consistency across stories regarding size, depth, colour etc.
- Trainers will communicate the importance of adhering to materials standards.
- That materials used in Core Training are of the highest quality available.
- Where and when appropriate, the materials can and should reflect the diversity of context, both ecclesiastical and cultural.
- That individuals who make materials are encouraged to ensure that Godly Play materials comply with national child safety laws in force in the country/region.

Best Practices:

- That within each country/region there will be a centre(s) of excellence with a room(s) containing materials of high standard that will serve as a model for aspiring material makers.
- That Godly Play associations will offer trainer led material-making workshops

N.B. If within a country/region association there is interest in making materials for sale that country/region association should be in touch with The Godly Play Advocate for International Development in order to begin a process of consultation.

On Stories in the Style of Godly Play

Godly Play practitioners have and are creating stories in the style of Godly Play; stories inspired by Jerome Berryman's particular approach to storytelling. These stories should be developed for a particular context or character, and in consultation with an existing Godly Play national/international association. If these stories are to genuinely be 'in the style of Godly Play' what criteria are to be employed in their development?

Minimum Requirements:

- Meets a genuine contextual need.
- Created by person(s) with intimate knowledge of Godly Play's principles and practices, and in collaboration with other experienced Godly Play practitioners.
- Take time; don't rush the process.
- Connects to Godly Play core stories through inclusion in one of the existing genres, sacred, parables, or liturgical action.
- Uses quality materials/objects in telling story.
- Includes wondering.
- Uses an economy of words.
- Leaves room for multiple meanings.
- Leaves room for silence.
- Biblical sacred stories should be consistent with and not contradict biblical text.
- Fits all stages of faith development; can be told to children or adults.
- Are not used in Core Training.
- An addendum to any printed versions of the story should attribute and acknowledge Jerome Berryman's Godly Play stories as the inspiration for the story.

Best Practices:

- Is told to, and tested with, children.
- Is sensitive to the spiral curriculum; can be placed in one of the categories of core, enrichment, extension, or synthesis.
- Can be experienced in silence.
- Can be placed on one of the existing shelves in the Godly Play room
- Uses language, gestures, and movement commonly found in Godly Play stories.
- Has the potential to address the existential needs of hearers.

NB: If the story or stories in the style of Godly Play proceed to publication it would be important to collaborate with the Godly Play Foundation. If you anticipate proceeding to this stage please be in touch with the Godly Play Advocate for International Development

On Godly Play With Adults

We understand that the Godly Play method can be equally effective in the faith formation and spiritual nurture of adults as it has proven to be with children. And we

understand that Godly Play practitioners throughout the world are doing Godly Play with adults in a number of settings. We affirm this practice.

Nonetheless we uphold the principle that Godly Play as practised with adults should, as much as is possible, follow the method, model, and practices of Godly Play as have been used with children.

We also affirm that the default model for the practice of the Godly Play method is with children, and when developing programmes for the use of Godly Play with adults attentiveness to the principles of childhood spirituality should always be considered.

As such when using Godly Play with adults the following are to be employed:

Minimum requirements

- Participants gather in a circle.
- The Godly Play story is told in the form and format it was created, including wondering
- Materials are used.
- All genres are utilised, including silence.

Best Practices:

- Materials are available for a response time.
- A feast is held.
- The space used has a threshold.
- A doorman is present.
- When working with seniors and persons with dementia additional training is provided. Resources are available for this purpose.