

Adaptations to Wondering

Godly Play is person centred and because each care setting and each group of adults is unique there is no one size fits all. There may be people in the group with physical impairments, e.g. back problems, hearing loss, speech impairment, limited vision, unable to walk. There may be people in the group with cognitive impairments e.g. dementia, memory loss, stroke.

We offer some ideas for adaptations, followed by 'Reflections from the Field' to help you ask the question - how can I best serve the needs of the older people in this particular context? You might find the Reflective Evaluation Sheets helpful in reflecting on your own practice. We encourage you to share your experiences with others - perhaps through our Facebook page. We would like to include some of your ideas and experiences in updated versions of these documents.

The wondering time can feel the most difficult, especially if you are working with people with dementia. Remember that not all wondering is expressed verbally. Still allow for silence. Often verbal wondering may take place one to one during the Response time or the Feast.

Reflections from the Field

1. "This afternoon I shared the Jesus and Jerusalem story with 8 older people in an assisted living care home. We did a full session - including the Response and Feast. They wondered how terrible Judas must have felt and the forgiveness received both by Peter after his denial of Jesus and by the thief on the cross. A visiting sister of one of the residents (who has dementia) had joined us and, whilst holding onto the hand of her brother, wondered about the hope that comes from the total forgiveness of Jesus and that, as Jesus demonstrated by washing the feet of his friends, that it's all about grace and forgiveness. Later, after his sister had left, the resident talked to me about the wrong he had done which had caused a breaking of the relationships he has with his family... and we were able to continue wondering about grace, love and forgiveness. He said he had thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon and by the time we had left had already invited another male resident to join in when we do the Faces of Easter in a fortnight."

2. "Godly Play enables a recovery of childhood spirituality in the confidence that it is that which has structured adult spirituality. Older people are connected with their own, inner child's sense of the divine. Godly Play offers recovery and an opportunity for a new experience. It can often be a move into reminiscence, a recovery of the emotional tone of the memory, followed by a move into making meaning in the present moment."

“When practising as a parish priest, a Godly Play trainer used Godly Play in his work in a care home for people with dementia. This was the conversation he had with a resident in response to the potential death of one of the babies after the story of Sarah.”

‘I had a sister who died.’

You had a sister who died?

‘She was a baby. Very sad.’

A baby who died. That is so sad.

‘When will I die? Don’t want to die. Sad.’

You are thinking about dying and it feels sad.

[We sat for a while and feel sad together and then the person asked if there will be a cup of tea.]

“This example points to a deep moment of emotional connection and thinking about big issues with another. These are sometimes avoided in care settings, partly because of the pressures of time and staffing and partly because we try to keep everything nice and happy. Perhaps such encounters, witnessed by staff, can help to rehumanise those they are caring for.”

3. *“We have found that the wondering can continue during the response time and into the Feast.”*

4. *“There were only nine commandments left in the desert sand after Barbara had got up during the Wondering Time and taken ‘Keep the Sabbath holy’ to put into her name lapel. Perhaps that was the one she liked the best or perhaps it was annoying her that this plaque was not in a line with the others (Barbara needs things to look ‘just right’). During the Response Time Barbara laid the nine commandments and a large shell on a coffee table and spent half an hour drawing the shell and writing some commandments inside and around a big heart. ”*

5. *“Godly Play was tried out in a Bible study for Spanish speaking people with early stage Alzheimer’s disease and found to be tremendously successful. One Christmas, for example, one participant responded to the ‘I wonder’ questions by reciting a poem she had learned when she was a child.*

“Another woman told us that Fidel Castro took Christmas away from them in Cuba. She then described Cuba without Christmas as if it had just happened yesterday. During the telling of the Creation story participants energetically echoed my words every time I said, ‘And God saw that it was good.’ The program kept people engaged and helped them recover lost memories.”

6. *“Because the participants had been able to enter into the story of Holy week—which was told using a beautiful wooden model of Jerusalem—this enabled a deep reflection about the washing of feet and the cross. A visiting sister had joined us and, whilst holding the hand of her brother who has dementia, wondered with the group about grace, love and forgiveness in family relationships.”*