

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Mind for Children: Guided Play, Godly Play, and Holy Listening

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Having a heart for children is crucial and also insufficient if one wants to develop children's ministries that support robust meaning-making. Having a mind for children is also necessary so that we can create environments of guided play that encourage children to explore the language and practices of faith. Godly Play is a prime example of a guided play approach, and Jerome Berryman, its founder, is an exemplar of the heart-and-mind teacher. His work has inspired the development of a one-to-one practice with preschoolers called Holy Listening. Both Godly Play and Holy Listening demonstrate how mindfulness transforms children's ministries.

Introduction

Within Christian congregations, those who choose to work with children are often described as people who have a heart for kids. They love sitting on the floor or around small tables. They have infinite patience for children's antics, seem to speak their language with ease, and don't mind passing out crackers and juice to pint-sized humans who leave crumbs everywhere. They have ample laps and hugging arms. No matter how a child is feeling, they provide care as if the child were part of their own family. They are paragons of secure attachment who provide stable environments within which children can learn and thrive.¹

This understanding of children's ministers and dedicated volunteers points toward an essential aspect of a faith-formative relationship between adults and children. Accepting children for who they are and meeting them where they are demonstrates respect for their humanity. Loving and caring for them unconditionally fosters trust and builds rapport. Children gravitate toward dependable adults and may risk sharing their hopes, dreams, and fears with them. Thus, there is much to appreciate in the "heart for kids" ministry perspective.

But what if we flip the script and recruit children's ministers who have a "mind for children" as well as emotional attachment? Such people would focus on acquiring knowledge about children and their relationships with

¹ See John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 1, *Attachment* (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1982); and Mary D. S. Ainsworth and Sylvia M. Bell, "Attachment, Exploration, and Separation," *Child Development* 41 (1970): 49–67.

them. They would seek information about sociocultural theories of child development. They would develop and reflect on theologies of childhood. They would be curious about the rationales behind pedagogical theories and seek data to assess how well a particular theory would nurture and support children's spiritual lives.

Children's ministers who have both hearts and minds for children thus bring many kinds of knowledge and wisdom to their work. They are constantly weaving together these different sensory, emotional, and cognitive forms of information to prepare and sustain an environment conducive to learning what it means to be Christian. They build relationships that are rich in positive affect *and* intellectual challenges. They care for children by providing opportunities for exploration and growth. They show love for children by affirming their capabilities and encouraging them to think theologically for themselves. They treat children as sojourners on a spiritual journey rather than as empty vessels that adults fill with sound bites or blank slates passively awaiting adult instruction.

Guided Play as Theological Work

In a Logos Project video, Jerome Berryman talks about the importance of equipping children for a lifelong spiritual quest. He explains that an essential piece of that equipment is a Christian language system that includes verbal and nonverbal expressions of faith.² Berryman believed that children are quite capable of learning that spiritual language, particularly in the affordance-rich environment of a Godly Play classroom. As a priest and scholar who possessed both a heart and mind for children, he advocated a religious education approach that trusts in a child's ability to observe, process, embody, and express the stories and practices of faith they encounter.

The first time I heard Berryman talk about children's play as theological work, I was delighted by the depth he ascribed to an activity many see as simply cute, frivolous, and/or mundane. He later wrote, "Play is pleasurable, voluntary, involves deep concentration, changes the experience of time so it speeds up or slows down, involves verbal and nonverbal communication, and is, as children sometimes say, about being 'somewhere else.'"³ His definition challenges children's ministers to take children's play much more seriously than we might do otherwise. If we want to nurture children in faith, he would say, then we need to understand and honor their playful ways of learning.

² Episcopal Diocese of Texas, *Jerome Berryman: Children and Mature Spirituality*, video, The Logos Project, 2024.

³ Jerome W. Berryman, "Wondering about Whose Children They Are," *Religious Education* 118, no. 2 (2023): 94.

Developmental science supports Berryman's perspective. Psychologists and educators champion the use of guided play in early childhood, and several studies have demonstrated the benefits of combining some elements of child-directed free play with other elements of adult mentorship.⁴ They note that guided play can take multiple forms, one of which involves adults creating a learning environment designed to support specific learning goals and then inviting children to explore within that environment. This form corresponds with Berryman's description of how the organization of a Godly Play room guides children in exploring the Christian language system. He points to the story figures near where the storyteller sits that make up "the transformational core" of Christian faith, and then to the circle of materials related to the liturgical seasons, the parables, the "Great Story," and the stories of the church and the communion of saints, explaining, "That's what this room looks like. That's what is on the shelves. That's what is internalized by the children and then activated so they can begin to use this language, this powerful language that we have inherited . . . to make meaning while they're learning the language."⁵

Berryman also refers to adults in Godly Play spaces as "mentors" who help children prepare to participate and who support their agency as they encounter and explore the stories and practices of faith.⁶ This coheres with a second form of guided play in which "adults watch child-directed activities and make comments, encourage children to question, or extend children's interests."⁷ Pedagogical scaffolding—which in Godly Play occurs through story sequencing, the order in which wondering questions are asked, and strategic interpersonal interactions—provides soft guidance. Adults are trained to refrain from providing "right" answers or encouraging predetermined outcomes. How children engage with the materials, respond to the questions, and make meaningful connections between the Christian faith and their own lives remains the child's purview. Learning is thus

⁴ See Kathy Hirsh-Pasek et al., "Playing around in School: Implications for Learning and Educational Policy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Development of Play*, ed. Anthony D. Pellegrini (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 341–360, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195393002.013.0025>; Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, "The Great Balancing Act: Optimizing Core Curricula through Playful Learning," in *The Pre-K Debates: Current Controversies and Issues*, ed. Edward Zigler et al. (Baltimore: Brookes Publishing, 2011), 110–115; Deena Skolnick Weisberg et al., "Guided Play: Where Curricular Goals Meet a Playful Pedagogy," *Mind, Brain, and Education* 7 (2013): 104–112, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12015>; Claire Cook et al., "Where Science Starts: Spontaneous Experiments in Preschoolers' Exploratory Play," *Cognition* 120 (2011): 341–349, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2011.03.003>; and

Tessa J. P. van Schijndel et al., "Preschoolers Perform More Informative Experiments after Observing Theory-Violating Evidence," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 131 (2015): 104–119, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2014.11.008>

⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Texas, *Jerome Berryman*.

⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

⁷ Deena Weisberg et al., "Guided Play: Principles and Practices," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 25, no. 3 (2016): 177–182, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721416645512>

intrinsically motivated by a child's curiosity and imagination as they play, which generates more positive feelings about what is learned and the learning process itself.⁸

Guided play enthusiasts suggest that “finding an optimal balance between self-discovery and adult guidance is a serious challenge.”⁹ Studies suggest that when adults engage with learning materials playfully and wonder about possibilities, children are more likely to do the same.¹⁰ Berryman advocated a similar principle of playful teaching. In his keynote address during the Symposium for the Spirituality of Children in 2024, he offered a one-sentence theology of childhood: “We’re summoned from another realm to become like children playing in the flow of God’s creative power with tears and laughter as our guide and language as our leaven to know what is real and to show it as we play with God and each other.” He saw the Godly Play approach as an opportunity for all participants—children and adults—to be guided by God in a playful encounter with divine reality.

Holy Listening as Another Form of Godly Play

Part of Berryman’s legacy is how his emphasis on children’s agency and faithful play is shaping the practice of children’s ministries well beyond his signature curriculum. Wondering questions have become a staple element in many children’s resources. Using story figures to share the Scriptures with children is also now commonplace. Celebrating community through the sharing of a simple meal or snacks is a frequent component as well. Yet decoupling these pieces of Godly Play from the whole can diminish their power, particularly if the focus for these practices remains on the adult teacher, who adjudicates correct answers to the questions, encourages children to watch them rather than follow the story figures, and views snack time as a break from formal instruction rather than a playful experience of communion. The Children’s Spirituality Research and Innovation Hub wondered if Berryman’s ideals might translate into other efficacious spiritual practices that could function in other environments. In conversation with Amelia Richardson Dress, a United Church of Christ minister experimenting with the work of Lacy Finn Borgo, we developed a Godly play practice called Holy Listening.¹¹

⁸ Weisberg, “Guided Play” 180.

⁹ Weisberg.

¹⁰ See Elizabeth Bonawitz et al., “The Double-Edged Sword of Pedagogy: Instruction Limits Spontaneous Exploration and Discovery,” *Cognition* 120 (2011): 322–330, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2010.10.001>;

Amy K. Kittredge et al., “Show and Tell: The Effect of Instruction on Discovery,” paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Cognitive Development Society, Memphis, TN, October 2013; and Asheley R. Landrum et al., “Teaching through Questioning: Examining How Pedagogical Questions Elicit Learning,” paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Philadelphia, PA, March 2015.

¹¹ Lacy Finn Borgo, *Spiritual Conversations with Children: Listening to God Together* (Lisle, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

Holy Listening is a one-to-one experience for preschool (and older) children and a caring adult facilitator. It is similar to what Margaret Guenther describes as the art of spiritual direction,¹² in that its main purpose is for a child and adult to listen carefully together for transcendent meaning as the child shares stories and reflects on experiences. It takes place during “free choice” times in an otherwise structured classroom. Children are invited by a trained adult to voluntarily come to a table prepared with an electronic candle, finger labyrinths, a basket of twelve painted stones, and a tube of scented lip balm. If more than one child wants to come at the same time, the adult explains that this learning station is limited to a single child at a time and suggests that the others return later. If desired, the adult facilitator can create a waiting list of interested children to seek out after the current child is done. Some facilitators provide a waiting area a bit apart from the table, where children can observe what happens before they come to the table themselves.

The practice begins with the lighting (or acknowledgment) of an electronic candle to mark the area where the two participants sit as a peaceful place where participants listen to their thoughts and feelings. The child and adult then take a few deep breaths together as a first step toward centering themselves in the practice. They might place a hand on their heart as they breathe or let their hands sit in their laps. The adult then offers the child a choice of two labyrinths and shows the child how they might trace the labyrinth path. They explain that labyrinths have just one simple path. They are not like mazes that have many misleading paths and dead ends. Their lines may curve, but they always go to the center. Then the child chooses a labyrinth, and both participants trace the labyrinth path. Each might move at their own pace, or the adult might match their speed to the child's.

When the adult senses that the child is ready to move away from the labyrinth, it is time to introduce the stones. The adult points to the basket and explains that the stones are called “listening stones,” and that they can help children and adults note what's going on inside them. The adult asks the child if there are any stones in the basket that show something the child is thinking or feeling, and invites the child to take those stones out of the basket. Often, children spontaneously begin talking about the stones as they select them, but if not, the adult asks if the child wants to say anything about them. The adult follows the child's lead in the ensuing conversation, affirming what the child says through mirroring their statements and inviting additional reflection through questioning inflections or simple queries such as, “Do you want to say something more?”

12 Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992).

Once the child indicates they are done with the stones, the adult holds up the tube of lip balm and asks if they may give the child an invisible reminder on their hand. If the child agrees, the adult draws a heart or other simple shape on the back of the child's hand and says, "[Name], you are precious, which means loved, and you can help others know they are loved too." The child carries the feeling and scent of this blessing with them as they leave the table. Another child sits down, and the process begins anew.

The preparations for and the first step (candle lighting) of the practice correspond to Berryman's principles for preparing a holy space for children. He insisted that children's ministers, "pay careful attention to the environment you provide for children" by creating a space where "children may make genuine choices regarding both the materials they use and the process by which they work."¹³ While not as elaborate as a fully equipped Godly Play room, the Holy Listening table is an inviting space that is shaped but not limited by the resources available. Each element is present to the child and ready to be used at an appropriate time in the liturgy of the practice. The candle becomes an initial focal point, signaling that this space invites introspection and self-awareness. When children come to the table for the first time, they discover that lighting the candle sets off a whole series of reflective movements. As they return week after week, they switch on the candle as a sign that they are ready to center and reflect on their connections with self, others, the world, and God.

The deep breaths and labyrinth tracing are centering actions. They function similarly to the pause that Berryman describes when an adult mentor stops a child who enters the Godly Play room and says, "Slow down, wait," before inviting them to join the storytelling circle.¹⁴ Berryman considered this preparatory time necessary as children get ready to engage in faithful play. It increases the likelihood that children will accept the invitation to encounter, explore, and take into themselves the meaning of the Christian faith. It makes it possible for children to concentrate deeply on the experience to come. Without readiness, they cannot delve as thoroughly into the learning environment and may not be able to activate the experience and turn it into something meaningful for their lives.¹⁵

The stones are where the children encounter themselves and their world reflectively. They wrestle with social-emotional and spiritual meaning-making. The images on the stones, as well as the stones themselves, offer affordances for self-discovery. As children move the stones around, name the images on them, and tell stories about the thoughts and feelings evoked

¹³ Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, vol. 1, *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons* (Denver: Living the Good News, 2002), 53.

¹⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Texas, Jerome Berryman.

¹⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

by what they see, they learn to narrate their experiences for themselves and others. A crucial aspect of the stones is that the child decides how to define and use the stones. The adult facilitator does not label or ascribe set meanings to them but waits to see what affordances the child sees in them. If a child asks what a stone is or might mean, the adult turns the question back to the child by saying, “What do you think it is/means?” The child retains narrative agency within the guided play of the Holy Listening practice, in keeping with Berryman’s insistence that children are trustworthy explorers and interpreters of spiritual matters. He reminded teachers “that the children’s ‘work’ is serious play, deep play” in service of “the construction of the child’s spiritual knowing.”¹⁶

Ending the Holy Listening practice with a blessing mimics the Godly Play curriculum as well. Just as each child receives a blessing as they exit the Godly Play room, each child receives a blessing before leaving the Holy Listening table. Both blessings are shaped as affirmations of the child and of the child’s ability to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Each calls the child by name, recognizing their individuality, and also repeats words heard by all the other children as well, reinforcing communal connections. Many Godly Play blessings include placing hands on the child’s head or shoulder. Some are said boldly aloud, and others are whispered in a child’s ear. In Holy Listening, they are spoken while an image is drawn on the child’s hand. The default image is a heart, but sometimes children ask for something customized to their particular interests. The adult may also alter the standard blessing to incorporate something shared by the child during their session. These blessing practices focus attention once more on the centrality of the child as a spiritual meaning-maker.

Holy Listening and Children’s Meaning-Making

Berryman suggested that “the goal for Godly Play, the short-term goal, is that children enter adolescence with an inner working model of the Christian language system and that they can speak the Christian language fluently so that they live fluently as Christians.”¹⁷ While Holy Listening does not emphasize Christian language learning as a primary concern, it focuses on helping children find words to express what their experiences mean and how those experiences are shaping their views of the world and their place in it. Children’s ministers working in Christian preschools reported that children in those settings often identified the stone with an X-shape on it as a cross and would say that the stone with rainbow stripes signified a promise (FV, 12/14/22 notes¹⁸). They would also incorporate Christian language as they

¹⁶ Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday Morning Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 98.

¹⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Texas, *Jerome Berryman*.

¹⁸ The codes reference data sets collected by the [Children’s Spirituality Hub](#)

told stories prompted by the stones, particularly if opportunities to engage in Holy Listening followed the preschool chapel time. For example, a four-year-old in a program with both weekly chapel and Holy Listening sessions selected the stone with a heart shape and said, “This is peace.” She added the stone shaped like a green four-leaf clover and said, “Peace is nature.” She picked up the stone with the yellow orb and rays and placed it above the heart-shaped stone. She then laid the stone with an X-shape on it beside the orb stone, rotated the “X” to resemble a cross, and said, “The sun shines, and Jesus is over it all.” The Holy Listening guide, working with her, attributed the child’s meaning-making decisions to experimentation with the language heard in chapel (DV, 16¹⁹). In Berryman’s terms, the child was building fluency in the Christian language as she used the stones to organize and express her thinking about peace, the world, and Jesus’s relation to both. Perhaps she was even engaging in “a playful orthodoxy,” whereby she was using Christian language that reinforced her sense of security in the Christian tradition while also being open and interested in new possibilities.²⁰

Another goal of Holy Listening is to support children as they construct their identities as ethical beings in relationship with other ethical creatures. Part of social identity construction involves observing and exploring social interactions, particularly through childhood play. Berryman notes that play “is connected to the learning of social roles. That’s the beginning of ethics, isn’t it?”²¹ Another goal is to provide children with spaces to name and explore their emotions, thereby cultivating social-emotional regulation that enhances their relationships with others. Whereas Berryman talks about children learning a Christian language system, Holy Listening attends to the more broadly spiritual vocabulary of feelings and healthy connections. Yet both see this work as a process of creative meaning-making, which “gets incorporated into the child and is put into action and . . . gets activated.”²²

Sometimes specific Holy Listening stones serve as a means for children to identify and explore particular relational concepts. The stone with an image of a heart with a crack down the middle became a “broken heart” for several children. One preschooler shared, “My heart gets broken when W [toddler brother] hits mommy and me” (DV 14²³). Another said, “I feel broke down” as they pointed to that stone (A notes, 03/09/22²⁴). A third observed, “This one is because I had a hard night last night, and I still felt sad when I woke up this morning.” The same child then touched a stone with a plain heart

¹⁹ See footnote 18.

²⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

²¹ Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

²² Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

²³ See footnote 18.

²⁴ See footnote 18.

on it and said, “This one is because I started feeling happier and now it’s like my heart is back together” (AV13²⁵). A fourth used the stone to reflect on something they observed in their mother: “So when my mommy feels sad she has a broken heart, yeah, or maybe like a sad heart. If my mommy was happy, she would not have a broken heart” (CV5²⁶). In each case, the image and language of a broken heart helped a child parse their experience and share it with a caring adult.

Children frequently link stones together to narrate an experience or relationship. One child picked up the stone with an “X” on it and began talking about the complexities of a friendship: “This one tells me about the trouble, when Abbie is super mean to me. It was wrong, but I didn’t hit her. Abbie was saying mean things to me. [Picks up the stone with the heart shape.] This one tells me about Abbie’s heart. . . . Her heart in her tummy. I saw a movie, and I saw a heart inside us. [He holds the stone against his chest with the painted image facing inward.] The heart went this way. . . . It was growing and growing. That’s why I love Abbie” (BV25²⁷). Another child was also exploring peer relations: “This stone [blue face with downturned mouth] is sad because he [yellow face with upturned mouth] took his balloons [pointing to another stone with three colored circles and wavy lines]. . . . I think he [yellow face] will give them back soon” (GV3²⁸).

While children often told stories with little prompting, some narratives unfolded with thoughtful guidance from the adult. Note how the facilitator is careful to keep responses close to the words and ideas expressed by the child:

Child [picking up the stone showing a heart with a crack]: This is broken.

Facilitator: What do you think that could mean?

Child: Sad.

Facilitator [noting the child’s affect]: Are you feeling sad today?

Child: Yes. I’m sad because of my dad. He was angry at me because I’m too slow.

Facilitator: It can be a sad feeling when people are angry at us. Is there anything that helps you feel better when you’re feeling sad?

²⁵ See footnote 18.

²⁶ See footnote 18.

²⁷ See footnote 18.

²⁸ See footnote 18.

Child [very hesitant]: My friends? [Picks up stone depicting a yellow orb with rays.] Also, this!

Facilitator: Oh, what does that one look like to you?

Child: A sun! And we get to play outside today! (AV11²⁹)

The child in the next exchange is also working through personal feelings about connecting with others and the world around them. This facilitator guides the child to reflect on their social-emotional resources as they navigate difficult situations.

Child [takes stone with three colored orbs and wiggly lines out of basket]: These are balloons! Balloons are at birthday parties!

Facilitator: I wonder if there's a feeling that goes with that.

Child: It makes me nervous.

Facilitator [waiting a bit before speaking]: Nervous?

Child: Sometimes I am nervous at birthday parties. . . . I get nervous.

Facilitator: Is there something that helps you with that feeling?

Child: Yeah, my teddy.

Facilitator: Your teddy bear?

Child: I hug my teddy, I'm not nervous (BV1³⁰).

Because Holy Listening is typically a weekly one-to-one offering in preschool or church school classrooms, adult guides may only occasionally see how a child's practice of Holy Listening shapes their care for others. This exchange provides one example:

Facilitator [responding to a child who has come to the table while another child is already participating in the practice]: Would you like to come to this work? It's a one-person work and someone is here now, but I can add you to the list and come get you when it's your turn.

[Child 1 nods but doesn't move.]

Facilitator: Here, I'll write your name down. I promise I won't forget. I'll come find you when it's your turn.

²⁹ See footnote 18.

³⁰ See footnote 18.

Child 1: I'm sad because I miss my mommy.

Facilitator: That's really hard. I'm sorry you miss your mommy.

[Child 2, at table, listens in while holding basket of stones.]

Facilitator: What helps you when you miss your mommy?

Child 1: Thinking about her.

Child 2: Maybe this heart will help [slides the stone with heart shape over to Child 1] (AV9³¹).

The second child's work with the stones seems to prompt openness and care for a peer. He uses the heart-shaped stone, which he has previously associated with love, to communicate that love can address feelings of separation and sadness.

Mindful Children's Ministries

What guided play ministry practices like Godly Play and Holy Listening both represent is a move toward mindfulness as a core component of children's ministries. Those who nurture children's spirituality are called to be attentive to the child, the environment, the necessary preparations for engagement, the stories told, the connections made, and the blessings that flow from learning. Despite the church publishing world's emphasis on materials that require minimal preparation, we need to invest more time and thought into what happens when children gather to learn about God.

Berryman understood this and designed Godly Play as a system adults learn and then share with children as they continue to learn themselves. In introducing the method, he wrote, "You have to use it to learn it. You will need to practice these lessons, use them with children, reflect on them, and do them some more before they will be yours."³² Careful reflection on our practice is essential. We have to move away from a mindset of delivering a lesson centered around a predetermined main point to that of creating a space where children are immersed in an experience of personal and contextual meaning-making. We need to notice how children are engaging in the meaning-making process and what might be getting in their way. We must make time for self-reflection, asking whether we are encouraging creativity, providing appropriate yet nondirective guidance, and genuinely supporting children as they play in whichever spiritual sandbox we have offered them.

³¹ See footnote 18.

³² Berryman, *Complete Guide to Godly Play*, 9.

Developmental psychologist Paul Harris suggests that we view children as anthropologists who learn about their world through observation, language immersion, and reliable information from trusted informants.³³ Children's ministers, then, have a responsibility to provide learning environments that support children's anthropological work via guided play. When we think carefully about the context of learning and how we will invite children to observe, explore, and express meaningful experiences, our mindfulness enables children to cultivate a deep and rich spiritual life. It opens up spaces for children to experience what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called the "flow" of intrinsic motivation to learn.³⁴

Children's ministers also need to be adults whom children turn to as trusted sources of information. This requires us to pay attention to the quality of our relationships and the accuracy of the information we share,³⁵ as children four and older "look at the person's track record and prefer to learn from someone who has been accurate, no matter what their relationship with the person."³⁶ However, this does not mean we have to have all the answers or shower children with knowledge as if they are empty vessels waiting to be filled. A mindful approach to knowledge, in which we share what we know, admit what we lack, and offer to explore with children something that intrigues them, is far better than pretending to be omniscient or conveying a lack of interest.

Mindful children's ministries are time-intensive endeavors. To guide children in meaningful play, adults must have both a heart and a mind for children. Berryman serves as an enduring exemplar of this type of children's minister. He loved and respected children, holding them firmly in his heart as he told stories of faith, trained Godly Play leaders, and wrote articles. He knew children, continually researching child development and observing children in his sphere. He focused his mind on children, mining the Christian tradition and a wide range of Western philosophical ideas to shape and explain Godly Play as an effective approach to spiritual nurture. He firmly believed in the agency, creativity, and meaning-making capacities of young children, and they trusted him to share the Christian faith with them. May his legacy inspire us to be mindful too, as we find ever-new ways to nurture children's spiritual play and support them as they become fluent in the language and practices of a spiritual life.

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33 Paul Harris, *Trusting What You're Told: How Children Learn from Others* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 210.

34 Jerome W. Berryman, "Laughter, Power, and Motivation in Religious Education," *Religious Education* 93, no. 3 (1998): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408980930308>.

35 Karen-Marie Yust, "Let the Little Children Theologize: Moral Development, Critical Thinking, and Preschool Faith," in *Let the Children Lead: Exploring Children's Spirituality Today*, ed. E. DeGaynor (Alexandria: Virginia Theological Seminary Press, 2023).

36 Harris, *Trusting What You're Told*, 93.



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