

Godly Play Foundation Pandemic Response

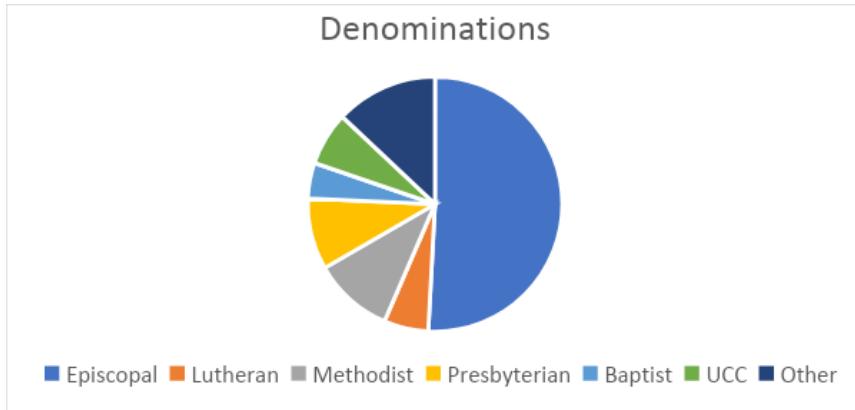
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While the novel coronavirus had been in the country for at least a month, in March of 2020 cases began to jump at alarming rates as did the hospitalizations and deaths. At that point many churches suspended all in-person activities, including Christian Formation. Churches scrambled to pivot from their usual ways of gathering to new ways to meet the needs of families juggling working from home and remote schooling. The Godly Play Foundation, led by our President, Mary Hunter Maxwell, moved quickly to find ways to support the spiritual lives of children and their families during this time of high anxiety and isolation. An anonymous gift was given to make materials and training available to church staff working to create a whole new way of delivering the Godly Play method online and in the home. As we entered 2021, we wondered what was most helpful to both the beleaguered church staff, the families and their children. We sent out a survey to our mailing list, posted it on our social media sites, and began to collect those responses. Here is what we discovered.

Geographic Location: We heard from 187 Christian formation leaders (lay and ordained) in 39 States, the Virgin Islands, and 7 of our global partners.

<u>United States</u>		Maryland	5	Utah	1
Alabama	1	Massachusetts	11	Vermont	1
Alaska	1	Michigan	2	Virginia	7
Arizona	2	Minnesota	4	Washington	9
California	10	Missouri	2	Washington DC	2
Connecticut	3	Nevada	2	Wisconsin	2
Florida	5	New Hamp.	1	Virgin Islands	1
Georgia	5	New Mexico	1		
Hawaii	1	New York	3	<u>Global Partners</u>	
Idaho	1	North Carolina	12	Australia	2
Illinois	2	Ohio	8	Belgium	1
Indiana	6	Oklahoma	1	Canada	6
Iowa	3	Oregon	2	Germany	1
Kansas	2	Pennsylvania	11	Ireland	3
Kentucky	7	South Carolina	1	Netherlands	1
Louisiana	2	Tennessee	5	Spain	1
Maine	2	Texas	20		

Denomination: The people we heard from represented 19 denominations, 3 non-denominational churches, and one Jewish Religious Educator.



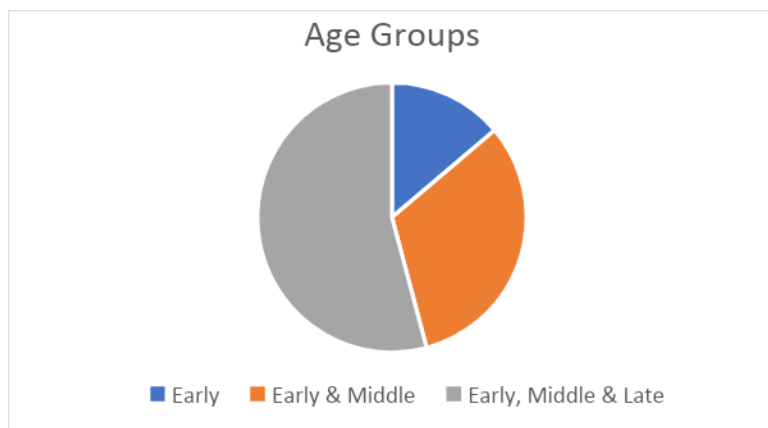
Anglican	2	Lutheran	10	Presbyterian	16
American Baptist	8	Mennonite	2	Quaker	2
Catholic	6	Methodist	18	Reformed Church	1
Church of God	1	Nazarene	3	UCC	12
Disciples of Christ	1	New Apostolic	1	Unitarian	1
Episcopal	89	Non Denom.	3	Jewish	1
Evangelical Cov.	1	Orthodox	1		

Experience: The respondents were asked how long they had been using Godly Play. Over half reported using Godly Play in their setting for 6 or more years. While that high percentage is encouraging, as it points to the longevity of the program, it could also be that those who have longer experience with the program were more motivated to respond to the survey than those just getting started.

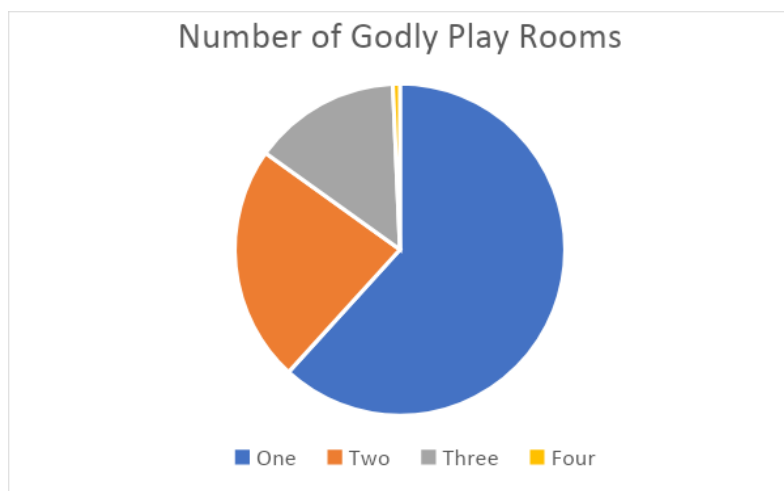


Age Groups: The respondents were also asked to tell us with what age groups they used the program. More than half indicated they used the program with children in early, middle & late childhood which is encouraging given the fact that many suggest Godly Play is only for children early childhood. However, one must consider the possibility that those who responded to the

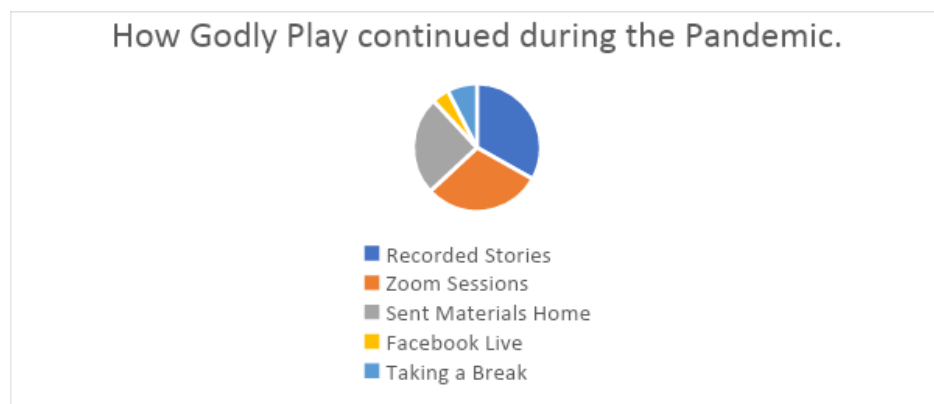
survey were among the most committed practitioners who tend to be more convinced of its ability to transcend age.



Rooms: While most surveyed were offering Godly Play online or providing materials to families for doing Godly Play at home, we were also curious how many programs had created more than one room for the children to do Godly Play before the pandemic hit, as opposed to the “one-room schoolhouse model” often seen in smaller congregations. We discovered that well-over half were using the one-room model no matter what the ages of the children in the program.



Offering Godly Play sessions during pandemic: Many sent home recorded stories (via email) to families to view on their own time during the pandemic (114). Others offered Godly Play sessions over Zoom (103). Respondents also reported sending Godly Play materials home for families to use on their own (86). A small number offered Godly Play on Facebook Live (15).



Godly Play Materials Developed in Response to the Pandemic: As mentioned earlier, the Godly Play Foundation provided a myriad of materials for Christian Formation Leaders to use in their work or to send home to families. The most used were the Season of Wonder Videos produced by the Godly Play Foundation Staff during Advent (48). Also used were the DIY Home Edition stories (100 of those who responded) and the Parent Pages, now sold digitally by Church Publishing. Please note that this survey was taken before the very popular Lent at Home Bags developed by the Godly Play Foundation Staff and the Faces of Easter video series.

Of note are also the sales of the DIY Home Edition stories which were offered at a reduced price due to the anonymous gift in 2020. Here is a final tally of the sales of special products developed by the Godly Play Foundation Staff:

Final Tally of Sales Developed in Response to Pandemic

Prints in color	139	\$422
Coloring pages	706	\$1942
Downloads	248	\$3599
Carboard Kits	527	\$8,485
Completes with wooden boxes, cards and underlays	152	\$26,174
Making Meaning in Exile-2020	239	\$3,570
2021 Lent at Home	939	\$19,694
Home DIY Nativity	269	\$5,366
Home Easter Puzzle w/bag	98	\$892
DIY POGS only	39	\$664
White Easter Eggs (qty. dis.)	381	\$564
Home Edition Cardboard Box only (qty discounts)	341	\$703
Hand Crosses (qty. discounts)	193	\$1754
Book-Stories at home	246	\$3,433
Total Gross Revenue		\$77,262

Other materials sent home to support families at home: Many respondents reported sending home a number of home-grown items to support Godly Play at home. Some examples include:

Art Response Materials (weekly/monthly)

Homemade GP stories

Foil pan with sand for a desert box

Homemade Desert Bags

Homemade Mystery of Easter Puzzle

Homemade Advent Series

Homemade People of God (Peg People)

Parables - pictures of characters to cut out, Parent Pages, felt, in paper bags with handles.

Story book with pictures of Godly Play lessons, activities such as coloring pages, Lenten cross puzzle, stickers, etc.

Advent wreaths for the Mystery of Christmas,

At home kits to support Faces of Easter for Lent

Workshops to support Christian Formation Leaders: The Godly Play Foundation College of Training developed a series of online workshops to support Christian Formation leaders. The first series were offered free due to the anonymous gift. After that we began to charge for these workshops, but in almost every instance the workshop filled! We are now evaluating which of these workshops will continue to be offered post-pandemic. Four different types of workshops/panel discussions were offered online:

1. Workshops for those just getting started.
 - a. Getting Started: An introduction
 - b. Creating the Environment
 - c. Book study on *Teaching Godly Play*, by Jerome Berryman
 - d. Doorperson Workshop
2. Workshop for those looking to go deeper
 - a. Book Studies
 - i. *Children's Spirituality: What it is and why it matters*, by Rebecca Nye
 - ii. *Becoming like a Child*, by Jerome Berryman
 - b. Expanding your Program
 - c. Response Time
 - d. Writing Stories in the Style of Godly Play
 - e. Workshop for Chaplains in Health-care Settings
3. Pandemic related workshops
 - a. Godly Play in New Way (offering Godly Play online)
 - b. Nurturing the Nurturers
 - c. Webinars for Godly Play in the Home (Creation, Advent, Lent)

Videos for Congregations: Our Executive Director (Heather) and our Communications Person (Anna) developed a series of videos for both the season of Advent (A Season of Wonder) and the

season of Lent (Faces of Easter). Congregations used them as part of Sunday morning worship, in emails to the parish, and on their social media platforms. For many it was a chance to take a much needed break from producing content for a season.

Trainer Support: In-person gatherings and continuing education for trainers and missionaries were suspended due to the pandemic. However, there were multiple opportunities for Trainers and Missioners to gather online throughout the pandemic. These included gatherings for Missioners, for Missioners & Trainers, Regional Gatherings, and more.

Training of Trainers: A class of new trainers was set to be trained in March of 2020. When all in-person events were suspended, the Trainers contracted to deliver the training pivoted to move the preparation for that group online. Several Zoom sessions were held. We are tentatively planning a final, in-person portion of this training in October of 2021.

Next Steps

Follow-up Survey for Families: One of the questions we asked on the survey was if the respondent would allow us to send a survey out to their families, asking about the impact of all these efforts (online Godly Play, Godly Play at home) had on their lives during the pandemic. Over sixty of those who responded said yes, so we will create the follow-up survey this summer and get it out to those congregations.

Research on the use of Godly Play in Middle & Late Childhood: This survey helped us identify a large group of congregations who are using Godly Play in Middle & Late Childhood. We plan to do some research with those congregations around the ability of Godly Play to grow with children, as opposed to being something that is only used with very young children.

Evaluating the Workshops: We realized early on that the online format for workshops was effective, and also made our offerings accessible to people in a way that in-person workshops often are not. We are in the process of discerning which of our online offerings should become part of our standard offerings post-pandemic, continuing to utilize Zoom as a way to deliver the workshops.

Online Core Training: Our experience of using Zoom to offer workshops has opened us up to the possibility of offering a Core Training online. It would not replace in-person Core Training, but become another way to make this training available. We have developed a design and will be piloting it this summer.

Developing more “at-home materials”: In an effort to continue to support the use of Godly Play at home, we are planning to continue to develop materials for families to us. Next on the list is something for the season of Advent that includes the Home edition created for “Stories of God at Home,” the new DIY Nativity set, candles, etc. A guide will be produced for families to go along with this grouping.

Pattern books: Throughout the pandemic we saw many people sharing ideas about how make Godly Play materials to use, since many had lost access to the materials at the church. This highlighted for us the need to create our own pattern books. We are close to having a book of patterns ready for the Volume 2 stories.

More analysis of both the Geographic regions represented in this survey and denominations: We believe our strategic thinking and planning about the work of the Foundation can be informed by some of the information gathered here about both geographic regions represented and denominations. For example, several of the Methodist churches represented are in Texas. Do they know/influence each other in any way? What can we learn from that about helping to spread the word about Godly Play in Methodist circles.

Conclusion

This tells the story of this past year in the life of the Foundation, and the many practitioners who worked tirelessly to help children and families through a time of great trauma and anxiety. It is inspiring to look back on it and see the creativity, thoughtfulness, and sacrificial love embodied in this work. None of us know what the impact of this year will be on the spiritual lives of the children we serve, but we can be hopeful that they were given many tools to help them make meaning of all that they experienced. And no doubt...God came very close.