

2017 - 2018



# FAITH FORMATION

FOR CHILDREN  
AGES 3 - GRADE 6



**GODLY PLAY**  
AGES 3 TO GRADE 4

**CONNECT**  
GRADES 5 AND 6

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
OF NATICK  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

# OUR FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY

At First Church Natick, we use the *Godly Play* curriculum for children ages 3 to grade 4 and the *Connect* curriculum in grades 5 and 6.

Our Faith Formation ministry teams combine an interest in children with an eagerness to explore their own personal spirituality through the lessons of *Godly Play* and *Connect*. We provide opportunities for leaders to attend both internal and external workshops to enhance their ministries and deepen their own spirituality.

We welcome your participation in this vibrant ministry! Come visit one of our worship centers to witness the excitement.

For additional information about our Godly Play Ministry, please contact Sarallyn Keller, Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care at sarallyn@FirstChurchNatick.org or (508) 653-0971.

## BENEFITS OF GODLY PLAY FOR CHILDREN

Godly Play is a distinctive approach to Christian ministry with children, both innovative and deeply grounded in our spiritual tradition.

- ▶ Godly Play teaches a sacramental worldview in a society that is often utilitarian and materialistic.
- ▶ Godly Play helps children recognize the sacred in everyday things.
- ▶ Godly Play teaches children that being quiet and deliberate about their work can be as satisfying as being noisy, busy and pushy.
- ▶ Godly Play provides sensorial materials to work with, integrating language and play, the two primary gateways of knowing for young children.
- ▶ Godly Play is a discovery method of teaching and learning. There is no rote learning here.
- ▶ Godly Play gives children the opportunity to enter into the story, wonder about it and then create meaning for their own lives in a creative response.
- ▶ Godly Play provides a nurturing “boundaried” environment where children are guided to make their own choices within constructive limits.

## DISCOVERING FAITH PRACTICES WITH CHILDREN

Our Christian spiritual tradition provides myriad ways to identify, express and evaluate our experience of God. The integration of language and experience helps children to live and think as Christians. We introduce our children to these traditions so that they enter adolescence with an understanding of faith practices that both deeply grounds them and yet leaves them open to continued growth in their spiritual faith.

### ▶ ENCOUNTERING SCRIPTURE

Children love stories and enjoy encountering the People of Faith in scripture.

### ▶ KEEPING SABBATH

Children like to experience a regular rhythm in their life, and although they may not appreciate the “resting” aspect of Sabbath, they like the idea of setting a day apart from the rest of the days to make it special.

### ▶ LIVING STEWARDSHIP

Children are responsive to suggestions for how they can be helpful. They like to plan ways to make a difference at home, school, and in the larger community.

### ▶ PRAYING AND KEEPING RITUAL

Prayer is a way to seek and find God; rituals mark the time and space where we encounter God.

### ▶ LIVING AND PLAYING JOYFULLY

Living in joy requires children to let go of the expectations of society and find delight in their life experiences.

### ▶ EXPERIENCING BEAUTY

Children can appreciate color, art, and music and enjoy an approach to worship where they are allowed to freely express thanksgiving and joy.

### ▶ WORKING FOR JUSTICE

Children possess a strong sense of Justice and injustice. They think concretely about whether a situation is fair.



## INFANT & TODDLER CARE

(THROUGH AGE 3)

Care is provided in the Nursery, located on Level 2, during the worship service, from 10:30 - 11:30 AM (9:30 - 10:30 AM July through Labor Day weekend).

An audio/video feed of the worship service is available in this room.

## GODLY PLAY

AGES 3 TO GRADE 2

Godly Play groups meet during the worship service following the Children's Time. Godly Play concludes at 11:45 AM. (See our website for Summer Godly Play information.)

Godly Play teaches children how to use religious language from parables, sacred stories, liturgical action and silence to help them become more fully aware of God's presence in their daily lives. In Godly Play, we tell Bible stories with visual objects to encourage children to enter into the stories and connect the stories to their personal experience. Godly Play respects the innate spirituality of each child, while encouraging curiosity and imagination in experiencing the mystery and joy of God.

Each Godly Play Worship Center is lined with shelves of stories expressed by multi-sensory objects. These objects help to make the images of our religious language come alive. Through the use and manipulation of these objects, the leaders and children tell and enter into the biblical stories. This approach does not rely on teachers simply transferring their knowledge to the children. Godly play values process, openness and discovery.



## "SIDE-BY-SIDE" GODLY PLAY

GRADES 3 & 4

Children graduate to a more mature version of Godly Play when they reach 3rd grade. This curriculum for older children is "Side-by-Side." They study two lessons together, or side by side, to see if anything new comes to light when viewed from the perspective of another story. This may be an Old Testament lesson next to a Parable of Jesus or a lesson about Daniel told next to the modern story of Ruby Bridges. Sometimes the best insights come from unexpected quarters and both the children and the adult leaders are surprised to find hidden truths in these lessons that they haven't discovered before.

Adults tend to assume that faith practices are for adults and that these concepts are beyond children. The children have already encountered scripture in Godly Play and learned that their response to these stories can be deeply personal. In Side-by-Side, we will continue to study faith practices that will allow the children to broaden their understanding of how to process the sacred in their everyday life.



## CONNECT

GRADES 5 & 6

Our "tweens" in grades 5 & 6 explore connections in the Bible stories they already know from Godly Play. They dig deeper into a theme by exploring Biblical text and discovering the narrative arc of the Bible (making connections between stories.)

This program helps preteens to make sense of the Bible, encouraging them to ask questions, make connections and reflect on what these people and stories





## IN THE GODLY PLAY WORSHIP CENTER WE...

- ▶ **MANAGE TIME**  
We have all the time we need.
- ▶ **MANAGE SPACE**  
the language of the Christian people surrounds the children in all of its beautiful, touchable richness. The room tells them, “This place and everything in it is for you.”
- ▶ **NOURISH RELATIONSHIPS**  
Through repeated actions and responses of invitation, respect and empowerment, the children come to experience the ethics of God’s People.

## GODLY PLAY STORIES

- ▶ Sacred stories stimulate our sense of Christian unity, while at the same time providing raw materials to the development of a coherent, mature sense of Christian identity. We tell the story of God’s People to invite children to become themselves in part of that story. Godly Play sacred stories move from Creation to stories of Jesus and the Church.
- ▶ Parables stimulate our creativity. They question our everyday view of life. Godly Play parables include six guiding parables as well as parables about parables.
- ▶ Liturgical actions stimulate our sense of the integration of identity and of the unspoken presence of God. Godly Play liturgical actions evoke an appreciation of “Ahh...” We mark life, time and space so children can know the Holy.

## A TYPICAL GODLY PLAY SESSION

### GETTING READY FOR THE STORY

The leaders greet the children, and lead them in a short worship service modeled on the order of worship that the adults are following in the Sanctuary.

### HEARING THE STORY

In the fall, we focus on the stories of Hebrew Scripture. In Advent, we begin with the birth of Jesus and move through the stories of His ministry and resurrection. We also introduce the sacraments of communion and baptism and celebrate many faith heroes.

### WONDERING ABOUT THE STORY

At the conclusion of the story, there is a time of “wondering” about the story and our place in the story.

### RESPONDING TO THE STORY

Each child chooses an activity – perhaps working with the story materials or using a variety of art supplies to create his or her own response. Projects do not need to be completed in one session. Each child has a special folder to store projects from week to week.

### GATHERING AGAIN

A time to “share the feast” and be together in fellowship!

### GOING WITH GOD’S BLESSING

Children are dismissed individually so that each may receive a special blessing from the worship leader. In the younger grades, a greeter for the class will meet parents at the door and help the children transition into the week ahead.

