

St. Gregory's of Nyssa

September 13, 2009

Dear Parents,

As you may know, Paul arranged for a group of interested St. Gregorians to begin Godly Play training with Kathleen Capcara earlier this summer. St. Gregory's also completely rearranged the church office and other meeting space in the church to enable your children to enjoy a dedicated Godly Play classroom, complete with all the essential materials and supplies. This was no small undertaking, and we have enjoyed adding uniquely St. Gregory's touches to the Godly Play program. We're really looking forward to this year with your children.

We are writing to give you an idea of what to expect this fall as we begin together. Please bring your child/ren downstairs in the administration building at 9:30 on Sundays and return to pick him or her up at 10:40 in the same place. One of us will greet you at the door and help your child get ready to enter our classroom. (We will leave our shoes in the hallway and we have a special basket where any toys from home can stay safe while we're playing together. As the children pass through our saintly curtains, they get ready to join the circle of friends on the storytelling rug.) You can say goodbye there in the hallway.

We are so happy to have this beautiful Godly Play classroom for Sunday School, and we are even more delighted to share and wonder with your children each week. Please be sure to talk with us and let us know week by week what you think!

~ Nina and Amy

A Little Bit about Godly Play

Godly Play is a program for children's religious education that has evolved and developed over more than 20 years. Jerome Berryman, an Episcopal priest built on many of the fundamental principles of the Montessori method to develop a way of working with children that we believe is very well suited for St. Gregory's. It is respectful, patient, reflective, realistic and joyful.

Each Godly Play session consists of an Opening, Storytelling and Response, Feast, and Closing.

Two teachers collaborate to create an environment that supports children's experience of the mystery and wonder of the world. Each story is associated with a set of sturdy and beautiful materials that the children are welcome to work with during the response time each week. Children are also invited to respond through art materials and dramatic play. Our stories will range from sacred stories to parables to stories that focus on the liturgy itself, with silence and wondering together every time.

We assume that young children have the ability to know God, and that we can create an environment that helps them develop language and awareness of both great mysteries and of God's love.

The Stories We Plan to Tell This Fall...

The Circle of the Church Year

This lesson sets the context for the whole year. Each year, at St. Gregory's we move through a circle of memory and expectation to open ourselves to the elusive presence of God. In the Godly Play classroom, we will pay attention to this circle of movement through time each week, noticing the colors that mark each season and wondering together about beginnings and endings and beginnings again.

The Holy Family

We first present this lesson at the beginning of the church school year. We repeat the lesson whenever we change the liturgical colors in the room to reflect the changes in the liturgical season – at St. Gregory's that means indigo blues for advent, shiny for Christmas, mudcloth for lent, and so on. On those occasions, one purpose of the lesson is simple: we take the Holy Family off the shelf, change the colored cloth on the shelf to a new one, then replace the figures on the new cloth. However, the Holy Family holds deep significance for our work throughout the year. That is why it sits right in the center of the focus shelf in the room, right behind the storyteller, every week of the year.

The Creation

With this lesson we begin to trace the elusive presence of the mystery of God in the story of God's People. We begin to play Hide-and-Seek with the Holy One and ask, "What can we know of the Giver by the gift?"

The Flood & the Ark

With this story we move the People of God from the creation to the re-creation and God's promise to Noah, to God's family and to us.

The Great Family

In this story, we continue seeking the elusive presence of God. God was present at Creation, blessing all that was made, Noah walked with God and was led by God's presence to build the ark that preserved life. And then?

The people living around Abraham and Sarah believed that there were many gods embedded in nature. This meant that gods had to be "here" or "there." Abraham and his family believed that God was everywhere, but was that really true? What if they went into an unknown place or experience, would God be there?

The Exodus

In this story, we continue to evoke the People's experience of God's elusive presence. These moments of high drama reveal the complexity of such experiences and provide a narrative of their richness. This not only gives children an appropriate language to name, express and value their own experiences but also encourages children to talk aloud about them.