



Ministry for Families and Children

What's Next for Christian Formation

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www.godlyplayfoundation.org

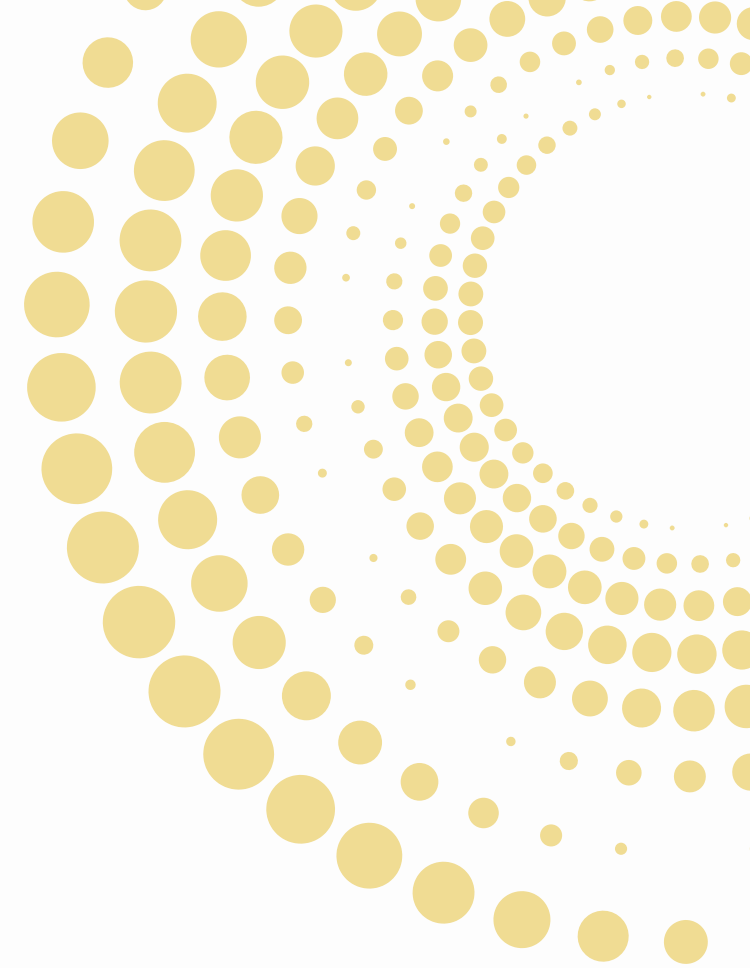


REFLECTION

What are the top issues worrying you right now in terms of your work with children, parents, and families?

CENTRAL WONDERINGS

- How are faith leaders responding to decline in family participation within faith communities?
- What do families need for spiritual well-being?
- What are the concerns of parents regarding spirituality?



DATA GATHERING

Families

61 online survey responses

5 virtual and in-person listening
and learning sessions with 26
adults and 36 children

Post-listening and learning
session surveys

Parents and Caregivers

98% identified as white or caucasian

One identified as a single parent

Just over 50% reported attending
religious services about once a week
or several times a week.

Denominations represented: Episcopalian,
Lutheran, Nazarene, UMC, Presbyterian,
UCC, Catholic, Mennonite



DATA GATHERING

Faith Leader Demographics

114 online survey responses

4 virtual listening and learning sessions with clergy; 25 total participants

2 virtual listening and learning sessions with school chaplains

55% Christian formation directors (lay or ordained), 10% lead pastors

Congregations ranged in size from less than 50 and more than 200

25% Episcopalian; other denominations represented: Baptist, ECLA, UMC, Nazarene, Interdenominal, and Church of England



DATA GATHERING

Limitations

Skewed towards families somewhat connected to
Christian communities (mostly mainline)

Limited sample size

Limited to North America

Listening and learning sessions led by proponents of Godly Play



THEMES: Faith Leaders

- Concern about family commitment and engagement with local faith community
- Anxiety about lack of family participation
- Exhaustion and burnout as they struggle to figure out what families really need.



FAITH LEADERS: Commitment & Engagement

Faith leader concerns regarding families and children:

- Does lack of attendance equate with disinterest
- Decrease in volunteer availability, i.e. Sunday school teachers, youth leaders

"Many young families are too busy with other events on Sunday mornings to attend."

"It's just a seeming lack of interest from our families in participating in the life of the Church."

"Lack of volunteers, lack of space, high turnover of staff."



FAITH LEADERS: Exhaustion, Anxiety, and Burnout

"I don't know what to offer parents and parent's aren't taking the time."

"It is hard to know which projects and activities to put my time and energy into..."

"... we haven't been able to get back into the pre COVID routine or the post COVID practice of coming every week."

Creative programming doesn't work

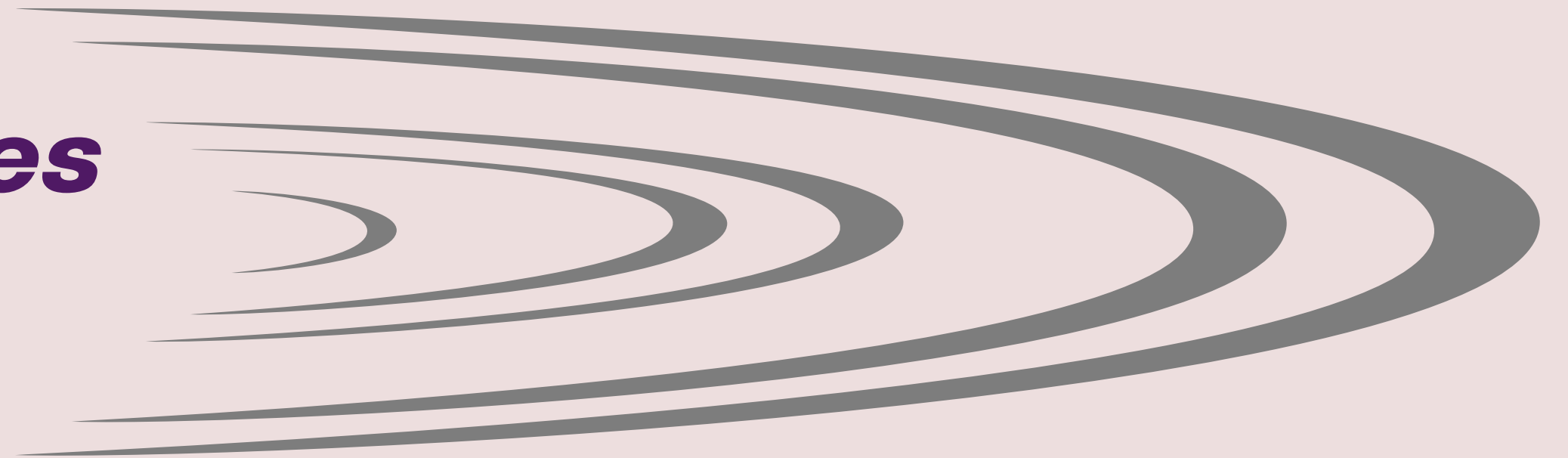
- What will happen if they don't come back
- Concerns about the future of the church
- Concerns about the children
- Willingness to think and act creatively to engage families

What do families want and need?



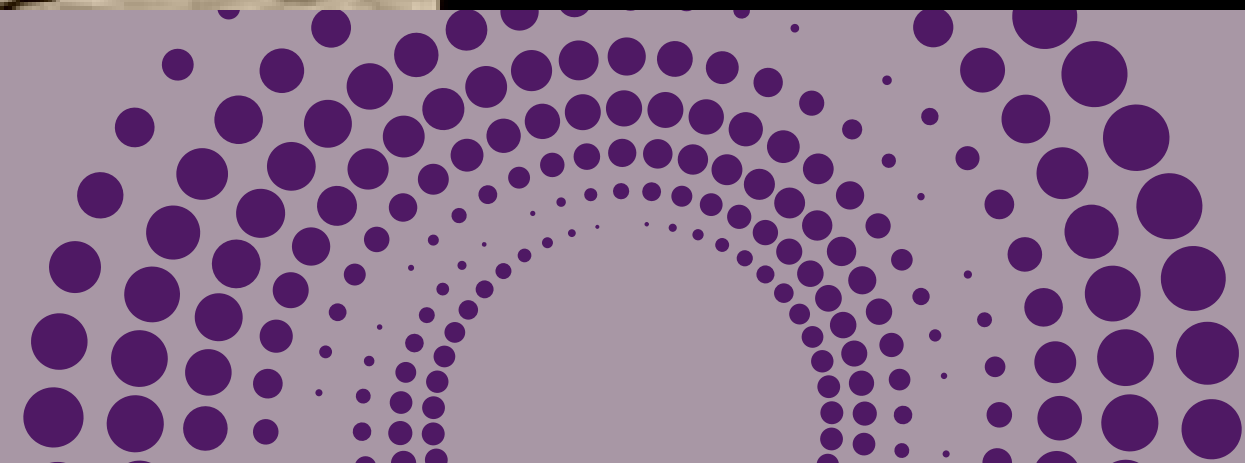
FAITH LEADERS: Exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout

***What resonates
with you?***



INVITATION

Stop, watch, pay attention...



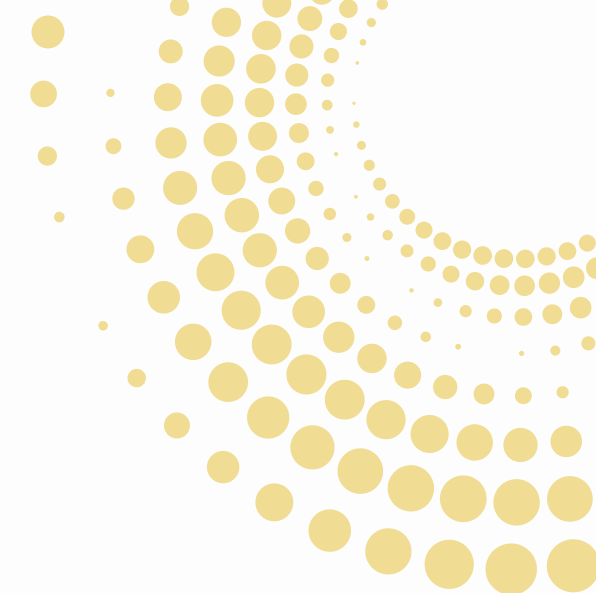


THEMES: Families

- Longing to provide a spiritually nurturing home.
- Concerns with contemporary life, i.e., stress, COVID, finances, time management, and social pressures
- Felt lack of connection or “fit” with faith community and support
- Spiritual and religious questioning



FAMILIES: Longing to provide a spiritually nurturing home



"That my child knows himself treasured, loved, deeply known and safe. That he is encouraged to live the mystery and wonder of God, the world and himself.

That he experiences integrity and spirituality and faith from those around him."

Hopes for their children's spirituality:

- Feeling of worth and value as a child of God
- Feeling a sense of connectedness

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FAMILIES: Contemporary life concerns

"I have trouble balancing work and taking care of my child."

"Balancing life and multiple children's schedule."

"Navigating social media with my soon-to-be preteen."

Stress and time

- Quality time with children
- Healing past traumas
- Financial stress
- Mental Health
- Faith shifts
- Overall exhaustion



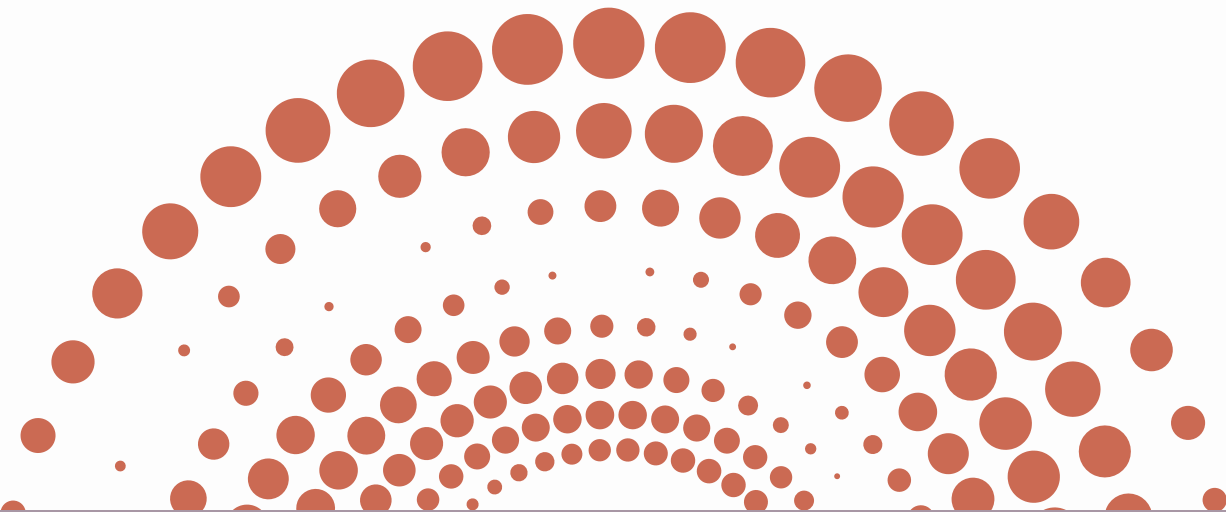
Families: Felt lack of connection

- Social/ideological isolation
- Caregiver "void"

"No support. No family. No faith community. Few friends."

"Nobody. We have nobody. It's extremely discouraging. I'd love to be part of a faith community that could be a second family."

"Raising 7 children with little physical and emotional support."



FAMILIES: Spiritual and religious questioning

Spiritual Isolation

- Conflicted relationship with religious institutions and spirituality
- Ability to nurture children's spirituality
- Suspicious of provided religious education

"Trying to impart knowledge or answering questions when I am going through my own faith shifts."

"I don't feel very spiritual myself, and don't know how to talk about God with them other than demonstrating gratitude every now and then."





A WAY FORWARD

Families and faith leaders share...


- Mutual concerns regarding spirituality though they emphasize different facets
- Feelings of stress, fatigue, and burnout
- An awareness of a mismatch between the contemporary reality and their longings





OUR RESPONSE: A time to reimagine

“...being-with means [to] regard the other,
not as a problem to be solved,
but as a mystery to be entered.”
–Sam Wells



Shifting our approach...

Transactional



Transformational



GODLY PLAY TRADITIONS

NARRATIVE

Importance of stories and
hearing them more than once

WONDER

Learning centered by a
sense of awe and curiosity

PLAY

Supports holistic
development and learning

RHYTHM

Way of being that sets
the table for fostering
a sense of well being

LISTEN & LEARN SESSIONS

Virtual Resources

- Podcasts
- Videos
- Blogs

Physical Resources

- children's books
- storytelling materials
- subscription box
- resources for caregiver reflection

EVERYDAY GODLY PLAY PILOT



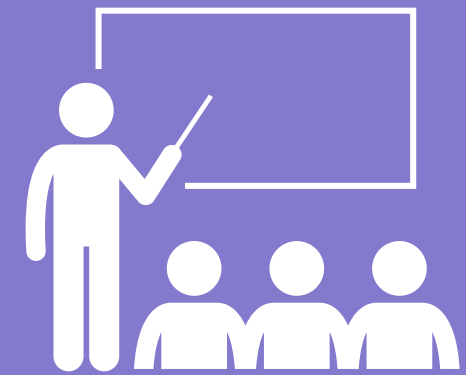
**Subscription
Box**



**Podcasts/
Videos**



**Online
Hub**



Trainings

RESOURCES

Wondering Together project by Sally Thomas

wonderingtogether.org

Upcoming webinar, October 2, 7 pm EST

Trauma-informed Children's Ministry

godlyplayfoundation.org/everyday-godly-play

EVERYDAY GODLY PLAY

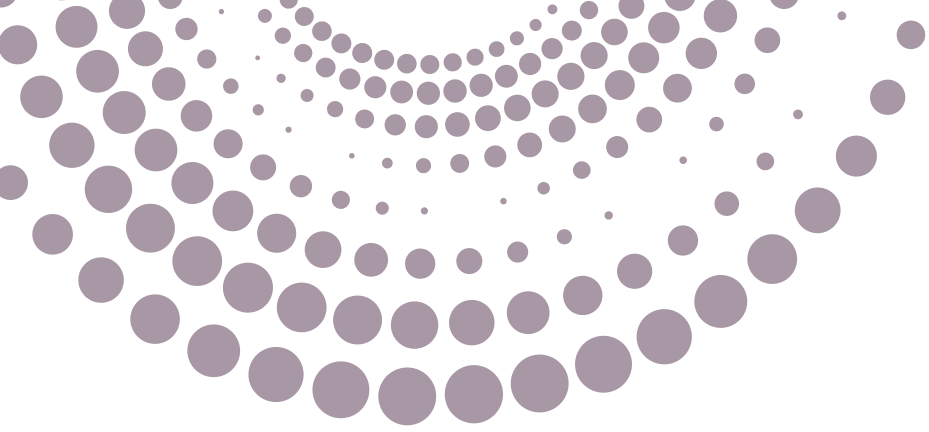
RESOURCING | INSPIRING | CONNECTING



**LEARN
MORE**

Move with us beyond the walls of the church into the home! Through expanded resources and their faith communities, parents and caregivers will receive support to develop their children's spirituality, embracing wonder, narrative, rhythm, and play.





LEARN MORE ABOUT GODLY PLAY

Contact Us

For any questions or
clarifications on our report

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