

# LIKE A MUSTARD SEED: *Godly Play* IN FLANDERS

By KATIE VELGHE

## *Introduction*

Let's see if there is anything in here that can help us to get ready. This is just ... an empty piece of cloth. In 2001, hardly anybody in Belgium had ever heard of Godly Play. But nowadays over 350 storytellers are sharing the stories in numerous circles. They are supported by a strong team of trainers and regional coordinators. I wonder how this could happen?

Hmm, there is nothing else. All we can do is begin.

## *A Seed and a Person*

The Kingdom of heaven is like when a person took the tiniest of all seeds, a grain of mustard seed. I wonder what the name of that person could be. Maybe it was Annemie, head of the Interdiocesan Council for Family Ministry (IDGP), who told An and Katie that they should go to Birmingham to follow a basic course. Or was it Rebecca, who put a very first Godly Play story into the heart of Annemie? It's hard to say... I guess the person had many names.

One thing is for sure. On that windy day, November 16th of 2011, An and Katie hardly needed a plane ticket to fly back to Brussels: their hearts burned in them as they were talking about everything they had seen, heard, and felt at the course.

## *The Birds and the Nests*

IDGP decided to foster this small and wonderful seed, giving it warmth and food and everything it needed, and it began to grow. New branches kept spreading out: Godly Play in Catholic parishes and Protestant churches, but also in all kinds of educational settings, in pastoral ministries – The birds of the air came – there were so many of them.

Some solid birdhouses turned out to be necessary in order to welcome all these birds in a proper way. Fourteen persons were found to build these houses. We call ourselves the Godly Play team. An, Annemie, Caroline, Ellen, Gee, Heidi, Hilde, Joke, Joris, Kathleen, Katie, Katrien, Kenny, Marleen, Matthias, Ilse, Myriam, and Stephanie. Most of them are still with us to do their work, some traveled on to do their work. Nowadays we gather twice a year. We don't forget to build a circle ourselves, inspiring and encouraging each other. Three of us take care of the daily, small decisions. Five regional coordinators build lovely birdhouses for their storytellers. The eight trainers and coordinators provide them with new trainings, workshops, or DIY's.

As the tree grew bigger lots of new nests were built for hundreds of children and adults. We saw all kinds of Godly Play rooms appearing: in a corner of a classroom, in an abbey, in an office, in a church. Sometimes an old chapel found a new destination in becoming a Godly Play room. There is so much activity around that mustard tree. Storytellers can exhale and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a Facebook group.

The wonderful thing about this tree is that it has life in itself. We don't need to 'invent' or 'implant' new things. We never had a plan of growth. The new things just pop up. Whenever this happens, we wonder if this is what the children need. We wonder if this organic growth is what our storytellers need, also the storytellers who'll have to carry the responsibility for it. And last but definitely not least, we wonder if God can come and play in it. If we get yes three times, we just start fostering the best we can. It's a lot, isn't it? You can come and find more about it on our website [www.godlyplayvlaanderen.be](http://www.godlyplayvlaanderen.be).

## *As the Wind is Whispering New Songs*

While sitting under the Godly Play mustard tree in Flanders you might also notice that the wind has started whispering new songs in the leaves. IDGP translated the Godly Play stories from Volumes 2, 3, and 4, working together with Godly Play Netherlands, into our own language, and into the different liturgical languages of the denominations in Flanders and the Netherlands. All of these stories have been published.

Some stories were translated in virtual sessions, inviting the children to gather during Corona-times.

Some entirely new melodies developed slowly and carefully, such as the story of Don Bosco.

Some stories were told in an intergenerational way. Following the red thread of *Stories of God at Home* (Jerome Berryman, 2018), whole families started enjoying Godly Play.

Somebody started making DIY materials for storytellers in Flanders and the Netherlands.

It's amazing.

And I can't help but wonder how this all could come from one seed?

I wonder where such a wonder-seed came from?

I wonder if you'd feel like playing at the roots of our tree, enjoying the sound of birds in the morning and the breeze in your face in the evening?

You are so welcome.



Katie Velghe is a Flemish Godly Play trainer. Her work always had, for the last twenty-five years, children right at the core of it: as a mother and foster mother, as an educational worker for the Interdiocesan Council for Family Ministry, as an author of children's books, as a teacher at a Freinet school, and of course as a Godly Play storyteller and trainer.

She has a Master in Germanic Philology and is aggregated for religious education.

# THE GREAT FAMILY REUNION! GODLY PLAY NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE 2021



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