

Pray and Play Corners

WHAT IS A PRAY AND PLAY CORNER?

Many churches already have children's corners. These can be useful in giving children a chance to move around during worship - but could they be more? Could they be an opportunity for children to engage in **imaginative spiritual play**?



A pray and play corner is a children's area that speaks of Christian faith and worship in its welcome, generosity, and quality. An area with toys, books and puzzles that relate to Christian faith and to the worship of the Church will enable children to play with things that are important in

the worship of the Church and the stories of the Bible.

When children play they work out their thoughts, emotions and feelings. They discover the chance to be in control of a world when usually their actions and routines are controlled by others.

Through play they explore the world about them and the roles that they see adults fulfilling so they will play mummies, daddies, school, builders, doctors, nurses... and church!

PLANNING A PRAY AND PLAY CORNER

Firstly, any children's area which involves moving church furniture or fixing anything to walls **will need permission from the Diocesan Advisory Committee.**

Consider:

- What age group is this area for?
- Is it primarily for children and parents to use during worship? Where is it best positioned to afford security for parents and children yet also allow them to feel welcome and included in worship? Can children see the front?



- Will it be used by visitors to the church for weddings, funerals, and other services where children are present?
- What will it say about welcome to children and to their families?

BUDGET

The ideas which follow can be started simply and on a small budget, though some toys are more expensive and obtained from specialist stores. Examples are held at the Diocesan Resources Centre for inspection or loan. Some may be gathered from eBay, charity shops, or using the skills of handymen/women in your own churches. Start small, grow slowly. **Resist any offers of old, worn and totally secular toys.** Provide your children with a corner that is different to any other environment that they might encounter in the secular world. Supplier details are supplied at the end. What follows are suggestions covering three key areas:

Bible Stories | Church Year/Seasonal | Liturgical

For inspiration and more ideas, visit:

Spiritual Child Network
<http://spiritualchild.co.uk>

Our Children's Work blog:
<https://stalbanscme.com/category/prayer-spaces/>

BIBLE STORIES

Prepare baskets for different stories and arrange them in Biblical order, moving from Old Testament through to New Testament:

Noah

A Noah basket might contain rainbow puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, zoo and farm animals, several small Bible story books of Noah and some fact books on animals.

Joseph

The basket could include Joseph play pieces, Reflect a Story, jigsaws, a doll dressed in a stripy robe.



Jonah

This basket might include whales, boats, books, a Jonah doll. Godly Play have a wooden boat, Jonah and whale for £43. TTS do a similar basket.

Other baskets can be made for Moses, Ruth, Esther, Daniel ...

Other suggestions for Bible Stories:

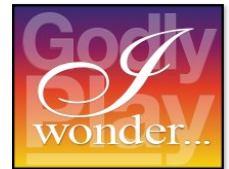
- A box or shelf of different children's Bibles and other Christian picture books or stories. The Little Bible Storybook - board book format, with others available in the series - for pre-schoolers. The Beginners Bible is suitable for young readers.
- **A Good Shepherd basket** containing sheep, shepherd, green felt circle, fence panels, story book of The Good Shepherd and maybe a story book of David, the shepherd King, book of Psalm 23. Trusty Toys have a selection of wooden figures, with a shepherd costing approx £11. These also have Bible story characters.
- **Bible animals** - keep a look out for sheep, wolves, leopards, lambs, camels, lions, donkeys, all available from Schleich at The Early Learning Centre and other good quality toy shops.
- **Puppets** - sheep and donkeys are available from The Puppet Company or Mustard Seed Kids.
- Simple dressing up clothes for children to dress up as Biblical characters - robes, head-dresses.



CHURCH YEAR

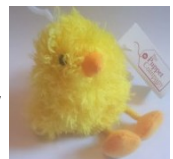
Christmas

- Why pack away the crib after Christmas; provide a child friendly crib set and leave it available all year for children to handle and retell the story – a reminder that each Sunday we remember the cycle of Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.
- Not all Godly Play is suitable for Pray and Play corners, but their website is worth browsing!



Easter

- Provide an Easter basket with Ukrainian or painted wooden eggs, a cross and some purple ribbons, butterfly puzzles and soft toys, an Easter Cube, palm crosses, Salvadorean painted crosses, soft chicks or cockerels, donkey puppets, and Bible story books of the Easter story.



Pentecost

- A Pentecost basket could contain: soft toy doves - hand stitched from felt, dove tree ornaments, windmills, flame toys, streamer toys, story books of Pentecost - one example is Teddy Horsley's Windy Day). The flame toy pictured is from Grimms, available from Mustard Seed Kids and others.



LITURGICAL PLAY

Bible stories and the cycle of the Church Year can be supplemented with toys that help children play through the liturgies and services of which they are a part. They have child-sized objects to play through Baptism, Holy Communion, dress up as clergy, and play with/talk to dolls representing Jesus and the clergy.

Baptism

A **Baptism** basket may contain a bowl, baby doll, baptism cube/book, candle, dove, all stored in a basket.

This can also be loaned out to toddlers whose younger siblings are being christened, to encourage them to play at christening “their” baby.



Holy Communion

A **Holy Communion** basket might contain some small dolls dressed as priests, a small table and a chalice and plate, toy bread (especially the wooden kind with Velcro that you can “break”), a Lord’s Prayer cube and some Children’s Holy Communion cubes.

Dressing a small focal table as an altar at which children can play will also act as a reminder to all that this corner is as much a “Sacred Space” as any other part of the church. The table can hold a play sized chalice (wooden egg cup) and paten (small wooden plate), a small holding cross and some icon pictures.

You can also supply simple dressing up clothes for children (stoles, chasubles, surplice, cassock).

The Lord’s Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer Cube is a great resource to help children engage with one of the key prayers of the Christian faith. Fun and easy to use, a great way of helping children learn and appreciate the Lord’s Prayer. Approx cost £9.



Jesus Dolls

Also good to have are Clergy Dolls and Play Churches. As a rough guide, you can purchase from Articles of Faith a Jesus doll for £18 and Clergy dolls from £33. Soft church from approx £32, various retailers.



SUMMARY

A children’s area like this is a great help to children and adults alike - for parents with children in the Pray and Play corner it encourages an awareness and sensitivity towards the spiritual, reflective nature of their play and an awareness of being part of the worshipping community. If it is to remain a place which encourages spiritual awareness it will need to be kept tidy and ordered ready for each time that it might be used. A small team of volunteers who will pop into church during the week, or stay after a service to check that everything is tidy and back in its proper place will mean that the Pray and Play corner remains as a welcoming and special place which speaks to the whole community of the presence of God.

BEGIN ON A BUDGET

Involve members of your congregation:

- Knit Noah’s Ark, Nativity Set, Last Supper set, lambs, chicks
- Sew simple dressing up costumes, hand puppets, doves etc
- Visit ebay and charity shops for good quality plastic animals, dress up dolls as Bible characters, Noah’s Ark

- Collect items and make up baskets with suitable books
- Small table with altar cloth plus wooden chalice and paten
- Laminate photos of parts of your church: font, altar, pulpit, lectern
- Ask members of your congregation to sponsor one of the specialist toys.
- Provide a craft activity that is relevant to the liturgical season or the theme of the day.

Start with one or two items:

Rug
 Nativity set: £20
 One or two Bible story baskets/bags: approx. £10 each
 A Jesus doll: £18
 An altar play table: £15
 Bible story jigsaws: £12

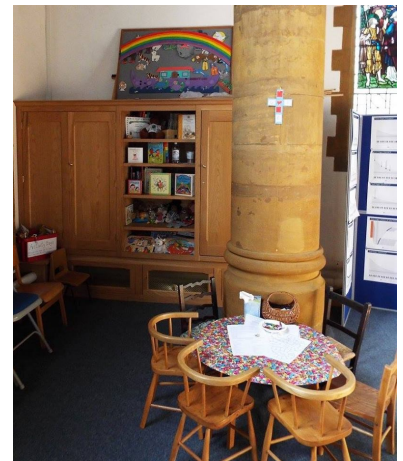
Cost: £85

(dependant on where you shop)

Small grants of up to £50 may be available from the Diocese for churches starting Pray and Play corners—email cme@stalbands.anglican.org for more information.

Top photo courtesy of St George's, Campden Hill
http://stgeorgescampdenhill.com/children_and_youth.html

Bottom photo courtesy of St. Andrew's Church, Bedford



Suppliers List - where to find suggested toys

All prices approximate

www.amazon.co.uk	Noah's Knits, Knitivity
www.articlesoffaith.co.uk	Jesus Doll (£18), Clergy Doll (£32.95)
www.bakerross.co.uk	Wood chalice and paten, Wooden Eggs (from £9.90-£16)
www.articlesoffaith.co.uk	Jesus Doll (£15)
www.eden.co.uk	Lord's Prayer Cube (£9)
www.notonthehighstreet.com	Boats (£5.95 for 4)
www.revruth.files.wordpress.com	Last Supper Knitting Pattern
www.schleich.org.uk	Schleich animals (or source from Early Learning Centre, Toys R Us etc)
www.stmichaelsworshop.co.uk	Godly Play (various)
www.trustytoys.co.uk	Wooden Shepherd (£11), Small Wooden Noah's Ark (£20)
www.tts-group.co.uk	Bible Jigsaws (approx. £6), Bible story play pieces (£14), Soft Church (£32), Wooden Church (£55), Church Jigsaw (£7)
www.mustardseedkids.co.uk	Wooden stacking flame/rainbow/water toys, doll baptism gowns, puzzles

(note: Mustard Seed Kids is Margaret's own company, so she's officially declaring a conflict of interest)