



RE Centres Southern Regional Group

www.recentres.org.uk

Newsletter no. 18 Spring 2006

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Our meeting in November in Abingdon on Godly Play (see page 4) was interesting and inspiring. Some of you I know have subsequently gone to great lengths to locate pieces of coloured felt and gold boxes of certain dimensions! I am reliably informed that it is a growing area for requests to many resource centres. Thanks to Gill and Ian for organising this useful meeting.



I am delighted to welcome to the group the Keswick Hall Centre for Research and Development in RE at the University of East Anglia. Linda Rudge is our contact there. I hope we will be able to meet up soon.

Unfortunately I learned recently that the BFSS RE Centre at Brunel University, which we visited in November 2001 and which has been a longstanding member of our group, is due to close this summer. This is because of the move of the Osterley Campus to Uxbridge and lack of space there. This is a very sad and disappointing turn of events. We send our thoughts and best wishes to Lynne Broadbent, Karen Woodhouse and their colleagues. The RE and School Effectiveness (REaSE) Project will continue under Lynne's guidance.

Interestingly, also in London, there are negotiations afoot by the Diocese of London and the Culham Institute to open a new national centre for RE. My interest was alerted by a mention in a BBC Songs of Praise programme on Wren's churches in January. It is early days yet, with funding and planning permission currently being sought (see page 3).

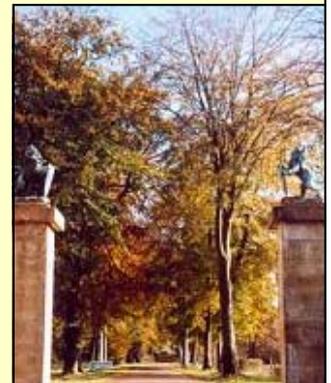
Our thanks as always to Sue Bloomfield for her management of membership and subscriptions, to Gill Hunt for managing our accounts, to Ian Knight for our newsletters and to Heather Collins for minuting our meetings. Their efficiency and generosity with their time makes my job as chair a straightforward one.

I look forward to seeing you at the conference in July—Sue has been working hard to make it an interesting and fulfilling event for us.

With best wishes Lydia

23rd Annual Conference Wednesday 5th July—Thursday 6th July Wells, Ammerdown, Glastonbury £45 per person

- Visit to Bath & Wells Education Resource Centre
- Workshops on Creative Prayer, Working with Young People and Labyrinths
- Overnight stay at Ammerdown
- Visits to Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey or the Bishop's Palace, Wells

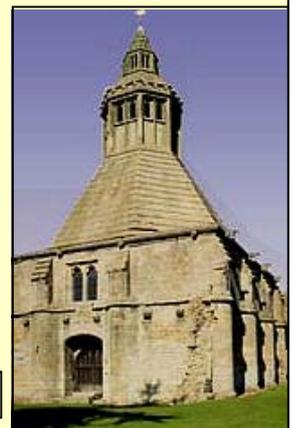


Ammerdown



Wells Cathedral Shop

Find out more about:
Ammerdown Centre
www.ammerdown.org
Wells Cathedral
www.wellscathedral.org.uk
Glastonbury Abbey
www.glastonburyabbey.com
Bishop's Palace, Wells
www.bishopspalacewells.co.uk



Glastonbury

Persona dolls in RE

Persona dolls are frequently used in the context of PHSE (Personal, Social and Health Education), but they are brilliant for use in Religious Education too. For teachers who are anxious that their foundation stage pupils or year 1 and 2 children have little understanding of who Hindus, Christians, Jews, Sikhs etc are, the persona doll provides a solution.

At KS 1 and in the foundation stage the requirement is that pupils should be introduced to the beliefs and practices of Christianity and one other religion. Some schools have purchased two persona dolls, one as a Christian and the other from the other religion in focus.

Whenever teachers reach the Contextualise element in the required cycle of learning they use the persona doll as a reference point. For example: "Shall we find out about Fatima's special place?" (Muslim) or "Let's find out about who is very special to Amrit." (Sikh) or "I wonder which story Colin likes to hear best when he goes to Sunday School." (Christian). The persona doll enables pupils to engage with a range of different beliefs and practices that they would otherwise have difficulty in accessing.

A persona doll can be used by any class in the infant school, or nursery, but the important point is to remain consistent with each doll's persona. Details which teachers build up around the doll must be noted in a book and regularly checked by staff each time the persona doll is used.

A persona doll can never be heard speaking (no ventriloquist acts please!) but whispers answers to the teacher who speaks for him/her (rather like Sooty, those of you who are old enough to remember!). Information is always conveyed through the teacher. If the teacher feels a little wobbly about being asked questions about a religion that they have limited knowledge of, remember that the persona doll is as young as the pupils and s/he may not know the answers either. This gives the teacher the opportunity to do a little research. Child: "Miss, can Fatima tell us some Arabic words she uses at home?" Teacher: "Let's see if she can... No, she has gone very shy. Maybe she will tell us some words tomorrow." PHEW!

At a Hampshire Special School, persona dolls were purchased to help the pupils access ideas about Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism. They have played an important role in the school. They join in many RE lessons and tell the pupils about their experiences. The RE manager has created a book illustrating important features of Polly's life in a Christian family.

We have some dolls available at the RE Centre for teachers to trial, if they would like to borrow a 'visiting' persona doll, but we do recommend that they purchase some for their school.

Lydia Revett
Hampshire County RE Centre

Judith Lowndes,
Hampshire County RE
Inspector, with Fatima,
an Asian doll to whose
clothing (normally a
sari) we have added a
hijab.



Suppliers

Religion in Evidence (TTS) Dolls cost £22.50 each
0800 318 686 www.tts-shopping.com

Persona Doll Training

www.persona-doll-training.org

Can supply a variety of persona dolls and training in their use. They also publish Persona Dolls in Action video and support book.

Articles of Faith (Bright and Early)

www.articlesoffaith.co.uk

The Parrotfish Company

www.parrotfish.co.uk

Books

The little book of persona dolls by Marilyn Bowles
Featherstone Education ISBN 1 904187 86 2

Strongly recommended

Kids like us: using persona dolls in the classroom
by Trisha Whitney

Redleaf Press ISBN 1 884834 65 5

Combating discrimination: persona dolls in action
by Babette Brown.

Trentham Books ISBN 1 858562 39 2

Images of Faith

We have just completed another series of inter-faith forums entitled "Images of Faith". The title came from an exhibition launched in September/October 2006 at St Mary's Church, Banbury. It was sponsored by the RE Centre and displayed the banners made for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Each banner quoted the Golden Rule. With this in mind we decided to call our series of three evenings "Images of Faith – Can we pray/meditate together? study together? celebrate together?"

It seemed that it would be a practical application of the theory if we were able to hold a celebration but cost always enters into things and whilst it seemed a dream it was hardly a reality....until the Government offered grants of up to £50,000 for developing inter-faith relations. We applied for and were successful in obtaining a small grant to cover the year 2006/07, planning another series of meetings and holding a celebration.

Plans are at their very early stage but we hope to have an evening during One World Week when friends, family and invited guests can come together to enjoy each other's company and learn more about each other's culture.

Gillian Hunt
Banbury Area Religious Education Centre.

Plans for a new National RE Centre

This article appeared in the *Church Times* on 10 February and was kindly sent to us by the author, the Revd Dr John Gay, Director of the Culham Institute and the Church of England's spokesman on RE.

RE is currently on an upswing in schools. Over half of all teenagers now take a GCSE short or full course in RE and at A-level it is the fastest growing subject. As a teacher training subject it has been awarded Golden Hello status. Recently a National Framework for RE was launched and there are hopes for a resourcing Strategy to match.

The partnership between the state and the faith communities which drives forward RE as a fully educational subject within the school curriculum is the envy of many other countries. Understanding the religious dimension of life is seen as a crucial part of every child's educational entitlement. Furthermore the subject is seen as having a significant part to play in working for a safer and more cohesive society.

Yet despite its importance there is no national centre for RE. Its umbrella organisation, the RE Council, which brings together some 50 national organisations working in RE, is a 'wandering Aramean' when it comes to finding places to hold its meetings and has no permanent postal address. Whilst electronic communication and virtual communities have their place, the lack of a national physical focus is a major drawback.

Plans are afoot to establish such a centre in London's Square Mile. The estate agents' mantra of 'location, location, location' is reflected in the choice of a redundant Wren Church just off the Millennium Walk between the wobbly bridge and St Paul's Cathedral. School parties and visitors of all nationalities abound as do those working in the commercial and financial heart of the country. Transport links are excellent.

The building itself, on Queen Victoria Street, is St Nicholas Cole Abbey – nothing to do with an actual abbey but it seems the name was a mistranslation of 'Cold Harbour'. The radio and television presenter architect Maxwell Hutchison is re-designing the interior to include a multipurpose hall, office and meeting space, a café/bar, display and resource areas and, round part of the outside, an open cloister area.

It will become a centre for teachers, researchers, national RE organisations, RE development projects, visitors from both home and abroad and a showcase for English RE. It will house some physical resources and will be the home of the virtual resource centre REonline. It will be one of the sites included in school and other visitor tours doing the City. The intention is that by bringing together various disparate elements of the RE world through this centre there will be a multiplier effect which will benefit each.

The plans are being developed by the Culham Institute, a Church of England educational body which promotes and develops RE in all types of school.

It collaborates with similar endowed trusts formed out of the closure of Church colleges of education in the late 1970s and also with the many other supporters of RE.

A small part of the building goes back to mediaeval times and the shell is Wren - hence its Grade I listing but much of the interior is a 1960s rebuild

following war damage. It is in excellent structural condition but a one-off capital of around £4 million will have to be raised within the year in order to convert and equip it to fulfil its 21st century purpose whilst preserving its character as a heritage building. Once building work has been completed, Culham will be moving its base to St Nicholas from Oxford in order to spearhead the centre's early development and to underwrite its business plan.

Although RE is making great strides, it suffers from fragmentation and too many teachers feel isolated and unsupported resulting in a loss of confidence in the value of their teaching and of their subject. This new centre will help build up confidence. It will become a hub of national activity, it will provide a focus for teachers wherever they are working and it will be a showcase for RE both nationally and internationally.



St Nicholas Cole Abbey

DIY Godly Play

It might not be possible to have a whole Godly Play room in your Centre, but you can make a start with the free resources which can be downloaded from www.stgilesaintree.org.uk/section/39 This is a website produced by a parish in Liverpool which is enthusiastic about Godly Play. Our Schools Officer discovered it when he was having a little surf.



There are sets of pictures for the Creation story, the parables, Advent, Christmas, Easter, Jesus and the Twelve and the Books of the Bible. All you need is a colour inkjet printer and, if possible, a laminator, or take the pictures to a printing shop to have them laminated. Then you will need some pieces of felt to lay the pictures on and some cardboard boxes to keep the sets in. This should be a lot quicker and cheaper than ordering from Bowthorpe, although you will of course need to go to them for your 3D figures (or chat up a friendly woodworker).

Ian Knight
Winchester Diocesan Resource Centre

Visit to the Godly Play Room, Abingdon—November 2005

The November meeting of the Group included a session in the Godly Play Room at Abingdon. We were ably guided through this by Jenny Hyson, Children's Advisor for the Oxford Diocese and an enthusiastic accredited trainer of Godly Play within the parishes of the diocese.

Godly Play is an approach to working with children, developed by Jerome Berryman and based upon the Montessori method, helping to guide children on their spiritual quest.

It aims to do this by providing a sacred space - the Oxford Diocese has a special Godly Play Room - in which children can hear God's story. The room is set out with material for the Bible stories arranged in sequence around the edges and the storyteller enacts these stories using special small wooden figures, fitting these cameos into the sequence in the room. The atmosphere, set by the storyteller as children enter the room, is most important.

Following the story, particular questions are asked of the children e.g. What did you like best? What was the most important part? Where are you in the story? Which part could you leave out and still have the same story? Then the children are allowed to choose an activity, usually related to the story just heard - re-enacting the story with the figures, painting, modelling, reading further details around the story.

Although you may recognise certain methods you have used, training in this particular method is most important for leaders. Several areas around the country organise training.

Jenny Hyson is in charge of the training programme for the Oxford Diocese and she will also hold explanatory sessions for parishes / schools within the diocese and can be contacted on 01865 208255.

It is an exciting approach to work with children, having several possibilities, and is certainly well worth enquiring about.

Heather Collins
Slough & District RS Centre



The Focus Shelf in the Godly Play room showing the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus

As someone who had never come across Godly Play before, I was amazed at how the whole idea and presentation had impacted on me. The room of course was beautifully presented and for me that added to the whole experience.

The story was excellently and quietly presented, which showed me how moving story-telling could be with the appropriate resources. For me the whole Godly Play idea came alive and showed me what story-telling can and should do if we are to encourage children in understanding sometimes difficult Bible stories.

I loved looking around the room at the different areas of beautifully kept trays of material for each story. Each was so perfect in its detail, I found it all mind-blowingly beautiful. If only I could have such a room! It certainly is a much needed resource and I left feeling really envious of their facility and the impact it must have on everyone who is privileged to listen and play in that room.

Julia Traill
Bristol Methodist District Resource Centre



Shelves with some of the New Testament stories in the Godly Play room



The People of God pass through the Red Sea as they escape from Egypt