

## Does God Play?

What does a bunch of theologians have in common with a three year-old child? The answer may not be as rude as you think! In fact, it is simply that we have led sessions for them all, and many others, using the methods we have been developing at Mersey Street this year, influenced by the Godly Play movement.

As we wrestle with how to worship together in a relevant, inclusive "all-age" way, we have become increasingly aware that our children don't have the Biblical stories rammed into them in the way that those of us who grew up in Sunday School did.

Jesus, of course, used parables to tell his stories. What we are trying to develop is a modern parable-telling method. There are a number of important principles behind what we are doing:

1. The story must be told in an 'open-ended' manner which invites the audience to enter into it. Questions are woven into the narrative. I wonder...?

2. The story must be told beautifully. Those who have read *Crumbs of Hope* will know how important we believe words and language to be. Each word is important.

3. In an environment like Openshaw, it is particularly important that the objects used to tell the story are as beautiful as the words used to describe them. In this way, the story is "hallowed."

Having begun by using material developed by other people, we have now started to write our own. So far, we have re-told the stories of Abraham & Sarah, Job and the Christmas story. We also used this methodology to link the Massacre of the Innocents with our Sunday Remembrance of those who died in the world wars.

All of our material, together with prayers and other worship resources will soon be available from our new website:

[www.dancingscarecrow.org.uk](http://www.dancingscarecrow.org.uk)



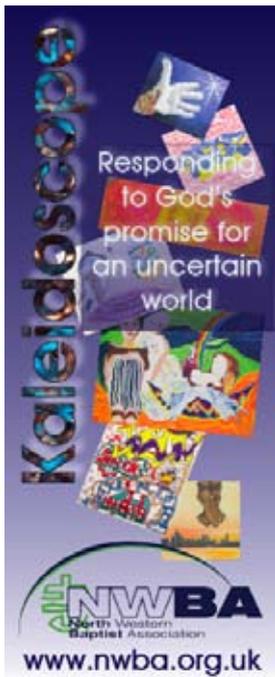
## COAT of many colours?

Our ecumenical links have grown from strength to strength this year. COAT (Churches of Openshaw and Abbey Hey Together) have organised two joint study groups. The pre-advent groups drew upon the Godly play methodology, while the Lent course was more art and discussion based. We have also held a number of joint services around the study groups.

At the same time we are developing closer working links with the Eden Project, an innovative church-based project based in the local Salvation Army hall.

And we should not forget that the Pentecost Baptist Church from Liverpool are now using our building for worship on Sundays. We had a highly enjoyable joint Harvest service and lunch together and hope to do more in future when the building allows!

# KALEIDOSCOPE of Creativity



One of the year's highlights has been the Kaleidoscope exhibition which Deborah curated for Baptist Assembly.

It is some time since Assembly came to the region, so to celebrate we were asked to showcase the creativity of the churches of the NWBA.

In future, we plan to develop as a centre for art and spirituality.

You can view some of the art by following the links from our website: [www.openshawconnection.org.uk/2](http://www.openshawconnection.org.uk/2)



## Mary and Joseph Visit Hawkshead

We have continued to value our partnership with Hawkshead Hill Baptist Church during the year. In particular it is great to receive such strong support from a church which is almost as small as we are!

As you can see from the picture above, last December when we visited, we took with us some very important guests.

Mary and Joseph were the focus for our Advent worship last year as we adapted the Mexican tradition of Posadas which sees giant statues of Mary and Joseph carried around the "nine inns" of the village before finally finding rest on Christmas Eve.

Our Mary and Joseph were carried to a variety of locations for worship including the residents' Christmas lights and songs event; the local primary school assembly; Lees Street Congregational Church; PJs URC and Hawkshead Hill.

## Associating

Openshaw Connection is produced as a result of the support group set up by the North Western Baptist Association.

For over ten years now, we have been negotiating with Manchester City Council so that we could move out of our existing building. Over the last four years, believing their promises that we would soon be moving out, we have allowed the building to become ever more run-down.

This has proved to be a big mistake. Given the current state of the housing market, it now looks as though we will have to continue our mission and worship from our delapidated old building for some time to come.

NWBA have generously offered to support us. We have agreed to produce a worship pack which will enable churches to explore what it means for churches to "associate" together. We will focus the stories on Openshaw and Hawkshead and produce a variety of prayers, reflections, activities and songs which will help churches to explore the theme.

Alongside this, we are going to organise an "Associating Weekend" at Mersey Street. We will ask churches to send willing and able volunteers to come and help us to clean and decorate the building, weed the garden and generally make the building a warm and welcoming environment in which to worship God.

If you would like to join us for the weekend—which will be in the early spring—get in touch and we'll let you have details.

## Contact Details

The Openshaw Connection is a two-way process. Please get in touch with us to share your stories and reactions to our stories.

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