

upfront: kids' entertainment

Divine Inspiration

Religious toys find their calling at retail

Creating quality, well-designed toys is a hallmark of specialty manufacturers. That dedication—and a focus on family-friendly, educational products—has seen many small firms expand their selections to include Christian and Jewish toys.

“We’ve been overwhelmed by the positive response from our buyers,” Jacqueline Lampert, director of marketing for Dallas-based KidKraft, tells *PLAYTHINGS*. The wooden toy maker has added religious role-play items, puzzles and playsets to its secular offerings. “When we launched this line 5 years ago, we knew that there were parents and grandparents who wanted wholesome, positive toys that draw on religion and tradition for inspiration and imagination,” Lampert says.

Noah kidding

Beyond holiday items, at specialty toy stores, Pockets of Learning’s bestselling religious toy is the S.S. Noah, a soft 20-piece playset. “That’s universal,” Grant says. For Imagiplay, Boulder, Colo., its Noah’s Ark playset has also been very popular, founder Barbara Aimes says. It’s one of only two religious items the company makes; a nativity set is also successful, but appeals to a fewer buyers. “Our Noah’s Ark is selling extremely well,” Aimes says. “[It] transcends any religious connotation and seems to be accepted as just a classic toy theme...There are so many ways you can use this to teach or inspire children’s imaginations.” It’s a natural fit for Imagiplay, whose focus is “animals, nature, people and earth history,” Aimes adds.

