



get MESSY!

Messy Church
(still) does
science

Companions
for the journey

The lowdown on
Messy Vintage

Mothers' Union
gets messy!

Sessions in this issue

May-August 2019

£4.60

Pray, pray, pray!
Luke 18:1-8

Dazzling disciples
Genesis 15:1-6

**Everything worships
God**

Psalm 8

Created for community
Genesis 2:4-7, 18-22

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Meet our session writers for this issue



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Lindsey Goodyear is a writer living in Huntington Beach, CA, with her husband and two young sons. She's on the Messy Church planning team at her local church and also a regular blog writer for Messy Church USA. In her time off, she loves adventures with her two 'wild boys', volunteering, running and quiet nights with her hubby.



Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard are Messy Church Regional Coordinators in the Durham Region. Sharon is the Children's Ministry Adviser for the Diocese of Durham and Anne, now retired, is still busy working with children and young people.



Martyn Payne retired from the BRF Messy Church team in December 2017. Since then, he has managed to carry on being messy, particularly through the leadership of his own Messy Church in east London, taking local services of all-age worship and writing for BRF. He enjoys running and walks in the countryside, and is currently trying to learn the piano.

Themes in this edition

The first four Holy Habits in this issue are prayer, making more disciples, worship and fellowship. In **May**, which you might want to link to the Thy Kingdom Come prayer movement, we look at Jesus' parable of the persistent widow who never gives up on the judge. Imagine inspiring a generation of people who refuse to give up praying!

In **June**, we go to the very core of what it means to be a community of believers and look at the way the early Christians lived in the Spirit and how their numbers grew in Acts 2. The resonances with your own Messy Church may well be striking.

In **July**, we ponder what it means to worship God, enjoying the psalmist's worship in Psalm 8 with its archetypal awe and wonder, and in **August**, we look at the first couple, Adam and Eve, and their community of God, humanity, earth and animals – all living in joyful community together. We try not to repeat Bible stories too often in *Get Messy!* and surprisingly, perhaps, we haven't looked at Genesis 2–3 before, so I'm looking forward to the Facebook photos from this session.

As you enjoy these familiar stories and themes, do reflect for yourselves on what they might mean in your own walk with Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to draw your life and attitudes even more into line with God's purposes for you.

1. Ask God to bless and guide you as you consider what's most helpful to bring families in your community closer to him in the coming months.
2. Glance through the four sessions so that you have an overview of the months ahead, noting down resources that will take time to source.
3. Use the downloadable planning sheets to share this month's session with your core team in plenty of time to shape the ideas together to suit your own situation.
4. If you're meeting face to face with the team, talk about this month's theme, using the Messy team theme provided.
5. Tell God your worries.
6. Ensure that the whole extended team has copies of your final version of activities, together with the Bible reflection provided to give them the background they need. You could give them the link to the passage on biblegateway.com if you're not certain they have their own Bibles.
7. Include take-home ideas on handouts, texts or a Facebook page.
8. Print copies of the mealtime question cards for the meal tables.
9. Encourage review and reflection from everyone after the session has taken place and respond to suggestions for change ready for next time.
10. Thank God for wherever you saw him at work.

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Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay19 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

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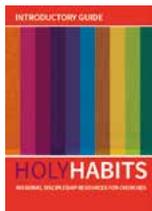
- September: God loves a cheerful giver
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- November: Feast of faith
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HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

Lucy Moore writes...

Let's do this... together!



It's six years exactly since the first issue of *Get Messy!* appeared. And as this new year gets underway with the theme of *discipleship* running through every month, we're just about to go into our second International Conference, also on the theme of discipleship. When Messy Church began in 2004, 'discipleship' wasn't really something we had on our mind. (Pasta was.) It's a sign of the journey God's brought us on that the question of 'living as a Christian' has come so much to the fore since then, and has become one of the main concerns in our BRF team: how do we help people grow in Christ in and through Messy Church? How do people come closer to God and to each other? How does our Messy Church team grow? How do we discover 'life in all its fullness' unique to each person? Where does comfort stop and challenge start? How can we tell when someone starts walking the way of Christ? What can our church traditions teach us and what do we need to reimagine for today's society and for an all-age community?

It's a challenge that we've gladly taken up, knowing there's no way we can meet it solely in our limited resources at BRF, but delighting in the way we're discovering, as a global network, how we 'crack' this *together*. BRF acts as a catalyst, throws in resources, permissions, blessings, ideas, encouragement, opportunities to share and feed back, but the real pioneering and discovery happens in Messy Churches like yours: in Canada, South Africa or Germany, in the Methodist, Lutheran or URC church... (*Why not add your own country and denomination here?*) Jesus' invitation to join his rag-tag band of followers is one to grow closer to him in community, and you and I, my Messy friends, have the incredible gift of doing just that without any of the normal barriers of church tradition or national barriers: we're in this *together*.

Will we 'crack discipleship'? Is that even the right question? (Many of my church friends would wince at the idea of 'cracking discipleship' or even at calling the Christian life 'discipleship' in the first place.) Yes, we will. We can do this thing! I think we need to be robust and let the nuances look after themselves, afterwards. Once people in walking boots have trodden a path, those in flip-flops (or thongs, dear Aussie friends, but not UK ones for reasons of decency) can follow. We need to '*carpe the diem*', because we know exactly how short the '*diem*' can be for a child growing up, or a family moving on after a short sojourn in our area. So let's commit to working *together* to try out the ideas from the Discipleship Pilot and others of our own, and to sharing those results with the rest of the network through the BRF hub, so that everyone can benefit and together we can find a fruitful way forward. Let's communicate better what seems to work and what seems to be a failure or just a very slow boil. We can build up a body of wisdom that will be as robust as Messy Church itself, in order to bless those in all churches, not just in Messy Churches.

So how do the sessions in these 2019–20 magazines help? The session themes reflect the ten 'Holy Habits' Andrew Roberts explores in his book and resource materials of the same name: **prayer, making more disciples, worship, fellowship, gladness and generosity, biblical teaching, eating together, sharing resources, service and breaking bread**. The stories we explore are the usual range from the whole Bible, not just the 'easy' stories, as we try to be church for everyone. And the writers have given helpful inspiration, not just to wheel out a Messy machine, but to try out ways to enrich and deepen what we do and how we do it in the suggestions surrounding the actual activities: make the most of them!

To share your Messy Discipleship ideas and experiences, email lucy.moore@brf.org.uk

The impact of Messy Church

Jo Birkby, Children and Families Worker at Holy Trinity and St Saviour's Churches, Knaphill with Brookwood

Our Messy journey began over ten years ago, after a visit to St Wilfrid's in Cowplain, the founding place of Messy Church. Six months of prayer followed, our excitement mounting as we realised that this might be the breakthrough for which we'd been looking. Back then, our Sunday children's groups at St Saviour's were run by the parents of the children who came, and we were attracting no other families other than those who came to our once-a-month puppet service. Messy Church offered us another way of reaching out to local families who'd never thought of coming to church before.

Our 'launch' was at the local school fair. We gave them a taste of what Messy Church would look like on our stall, asked them if they'd come and on what day they'd prefer us to hold it. Saturdays were earmarked, and gallons of PVA and a tonne of glitter were purchased by amazing members of our church who 'got it' immediately and, what's more, wanted to join the team! And so began a journey that has been a rollercoaster ride, attracting a regular core of families whose children have grown with us and are now young leaders themselves.

Last year, we began a Messy mentoring scheme where these young leaders were invited to set up and test-run all of the activities before the 'big day' itself. It's been a great opportunity to share the Bible stories with them, help them grow in their relationship with Jesus and each other, and give them the skills and confidence they need not only to direct the activities but to engage in those all-important 'Messy' conversations. One of our young leaders, Chloe, who is just twelve years old, says, 'Becoming a young leader has really boosted my confidence and given me

the skills to deal with challenging things now.' It's had an impact not just on her time at Messy Church but in so many other areas.

One of our Messy mums writes, 'Messy Church has been a part of our family life since we moved to Brookwood from Australia and first heard about it. Our children Rebecca, Amy and Zach have loved being involved each month with the creative activities (Zach particularly loves the edible ones!) and the Bible learning. For us, it's been a great way for them to experience truths about God, share prayers and learn with friends and the lovely Messy team. Rebecca and Amy have now both grown and moved on to being young leaders, which they love. They are so supported by a godly group of mentors and this is really special for me as well, knowing that they have these relationships.'

Regular contact with the children and families has been key. We meet at other times and places throughout the month in school lunch clubs, assemblies and cafes. Relationship is so vital to everything we do – and keeping Jesus at the centre so we can continually point to him, giving him the glory for all of our Messy endeavours!

As a leader, the impact Messy Church has had on my own life has also been immense. I began Messy Church as a church member and mum of two and, since then, I have been appointed as the Children and Families Worker for our parish. God has shown me what is possible when you're willing to take risks and are prepared to make changes to the way 'things have always been done'. It's been an incredible ten years and we look forward to the continuing adventure as we move into the next decade!



Discipling young people

Iain Nash, Children's Pastor, Southcourt Baptist Church, Aylesbury

Messy Church Aylesbury has as many as 300 people who regularly attend from all over the local community. In order to be able to manage such numbers, we need a strong team in place that has plenty of energy and exuberance. What excites me the most is that the team is made up of a large contingent of young people from within our church family.

It is even more remarkable because, by rights, they should still be in bed when Messy Church Aylesbury happens, as we meet during the school holiday. However, we are always amazed at how willing they are to come along and serve so faithfully each time.

From helping on craft tables to manning bouncy castles and supervising computer consoles, the young people are given specific roles and responsibilities that match their skills and passions. We are blessed to have some wonderful artists among the young people who do face painting, as well as those who love drama, puppets and sound and visuals, all helping to bring the drama stories and songs that we do to life.

Where the young people really swing into action is the preparing and serving of our famous hot-dog lunch. As the families get into small groups to eat, the young people bring the food to the people and serve them. It can be really hard sometimes when you have nearly 300 hungry people desperately wanting their food, but the young people continue to serve with a smile and take joy and pride in providing for people in this way.

Once Messy Church has finished and those who came along have gone home, you will still find the young people clearing up and packing away. Mind you, there are hot dogs left to be eaten, always a good incentive to stay!

I really do believe that we must continue to give all young people opportunities like this. It excites me because this is exactly where I started my journey to becoming a Children's Pastor: as a fresh-faced young person who was asked if I would help at a church event like Messy Church. I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and never looked back. It excites me to see these young people responding in the same way that I did.

One of the many key characteristics of Jesus' training of the disciples was that he gave them tasks to do, commissioning them by giving them authority in the process and trusting them to do what he asked them to do. In the same way, I have done just that. I continue to model things to them, encourage them and point out improvements, but I never stop praying for them. Result? We see these young people become true disciples of Jesus Christ as they share him with people through their words and actions.

I pray this discipleship continues for years to come as they grow in their faith and as Messy Church Aylesbury sees Christ's kingdom grow on earth.



Seriously Messy

Making space for families to talk together about death and life

Victoria Slater, Project Researcher for Oxford Diocese

Seriously Messy (BRF, published June 2019) is designed to resource those who want to help families and people across all generations talk together about what our mortality and our encounters with death and dying might mean for how we choose to live out our lives and our faith.

It starts with the acknowledgement that, for all sorts of reasons, it's hard to talk about death and dying. However, this is part of life and the natural order, and we can't deal with it by avoiding it; we all know that we will have to face it for ourselves one day. It's good and healthy to be able to talk about it as a society and as individuals, and society is beginning to wake up to this fact.

For example, 'Death cafés', where people can come together to talk about death and dying over a coffee, are commonplace, and organisations such as the National Council for Palliative Care (ncpc.org.uk) and the Dying Matters Coalition (dyingmatters.org) have brought the topic of death and the process of dying back into the public arena. This is part of a wider recognition that we need to talk about death so that we can be practically prepared and better equipped to face up to it; familiarity reduces anxiety. Talking about death can also help make us more mature human beings who have a better chance of living life well, because we will have seen the bigger picture and gained a sense of perspective.

One of the important things about *Seriously Messy* is that it is for families. It recognises that we need to include children in our talk about death. This is for several reasons, including the basic fact that we can't prevent children from encountering death, for example, through the loss of a pet, grandparent, sibling, friend or parent. Although children are often exposed to death in unreal ways on TV, in video games or on social media, the physical reality of death can be totally unexpected and shocking. It's better to provide some wise resources than to leave children uninformed and without resources. People of any age experience death and loss, so it is important that we are able to talk about it together and, in so doing, support and equip people for whenever they encounter death in their life.

This book addresses the fact that, although the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the transformation of death to life – stands at the centre of the Christian faith, churches are not very good at making space for people to talk about what death and dying means to them. *Seriously Messy* puts talking about death in the context of the Christian faith by suggesting ways to make this space and offering relevant examples from the Bible. By engaging with death in this way, people can explore their questions and concerns, as well as being able to rediscover the hope of eternal life that is central to the Christian faith.

Seriously Messy helps people to explore fundamental issues such as: the messiness of life and death; the Christian message of life and hope in the midst of death and loss; and the need to include children and to take care about how we talk about death with them. It also looks at how leaders can take care of themselves when helping others to talk about this subject.

We have attempted a 'bottom-up' approach to the subject in the book. It accepts that everyone will come with different experiences, questions and understandings, both of death and dying and of the elements of the Christian faith. The approach that we advocate is to encourage honest conversations that involve wondering, reflecting, explaining, telling stories and, above all, listening. This way of approaching the subject can enable those involved to develop a deeper sense of the meaning of the hope of 'resurrection' and 'eternal life'. They will encounter different perspectives and understandings that may illuminate, enlarge or challenge their own. We also recognise that no one has all the answers. There is so much about death that is a mystery, that we will only understand when it comes to our own death. But we can live with the questions and explore them honestly together in the light of the gospel and, in so doing, enrich our lives and our faith. Perhaps we will even better prepare ourselves to meet the end of our own life, whenever and however it comes.

Seriously Messy is written by Joanna Collicutt, Lucy Moore, Martyn Payne and Victoria Slater, and is available from brfonline.org.uk from June 2019.

Messy Church (still) does science!

To find out more about Messy Church Does Science, visit messychurch.org.uk/science.

Is it really nearly two years since we first launched Messy Church Does Science? It must be time for a round-up of what people are saying... and if you haven't yet given it a go, grab a copy of the book and see where it takes you!

Our children love it. I borrow a child-size lab coat and goggles from the school, appoint our scientist of the month, who puts it on, and name him/her 'professor'. The professor then follows the instructions. It's great fun and the children are engaged in the Bible story.

Linda

It's always the 'best part' when we do a science activity, so now we try to fit one in every time. The older kids especially love it.

Bekki

I try to include some science every time. Boiled cabbage juice and 'acid' is popular, as well as growing beans, building balloon rockets, etc. In one of my churches, we are blessed to have our very own electrician, who built 'lemon batteries' with the kids (including using a very important-looking multimeter!). What especially pleases me is that it seems to appeal to girls and boys alike. I often use these activities to reflect on God's awesome creation and the importance of learning about and looking after it.

Melanie

We have done a number of scientific activities. Older boys and dads love them!

Alison

We do a science activity each time. It's amazing how you can link them to the themes. Lots of the children enjoy it. It's added another dimension and engaged those who don't particularly enjoy crafts.

Cath

When we do science, it's always popular!

Emma

We do it every time, now! We have a teenager scientist-in-residence. Not sure yet how much it is impacting for building faith, but the children love it! Makes for good variety.

Ann

We have tried to include a science activity in all our Messy Church events for a couple of years, now. We are in the excellent position of having a team member who is a retired Science Consultant for schools. She used to run numerous workshops and also trained teachers in delivering the science curriculum – so, as you can imagine, she has a great wealth of scientific knowledge linked with a wonderful faith. Her activities are always very enjoyable for the children and parents who attend Messy Church.

Sue

We are enjoying using Messy Science with our new Messy Young Leaders group.

Jane



Messy Café



Is there something missing from your Messy Church?

Dave Martin, Children, Youth & Families Coordinator Licensed Lay Minister, Christ Church & St John's, Radlett

I wonder if you can relate... You meet every month, with a beautifully committed team of individuals, armed with glue sticks, cake and an unwavering desire to reflect the love of Jesus to all around. However, each time you open your doors, you feel this urge to go deeper somehow. You want to go beyond crafts and truly cultivate an environment where intergenerational relationships enable both young and old to lead each other on in faith. If you're honest, you want so much more for your Messy Church, but getting there is hard.

Last year in Radlett, we challenged ourselves to look critically at what we were providing. After many prayer-fuelled team meetings and a lot of listening, we realised that, for us, the area for improvement was the base relationship between 'church' and 'wider community'. It's not fair to say that it wasn't there at all, but frankly we weren't as welcoming and relevant as we thought we were, and our Messy Church felt more like a children's club than an all-age congregation. Eek.



So, although we didn't know exactly what the future held, our amazing team said a big 'YES' in faith to our next challenge, and on 4 October 2017, we launched Messy Café! Since then, each week, we have transformed our church building into a community-focused café space where everybody is welcome, regardless of faith, background or circumstance.

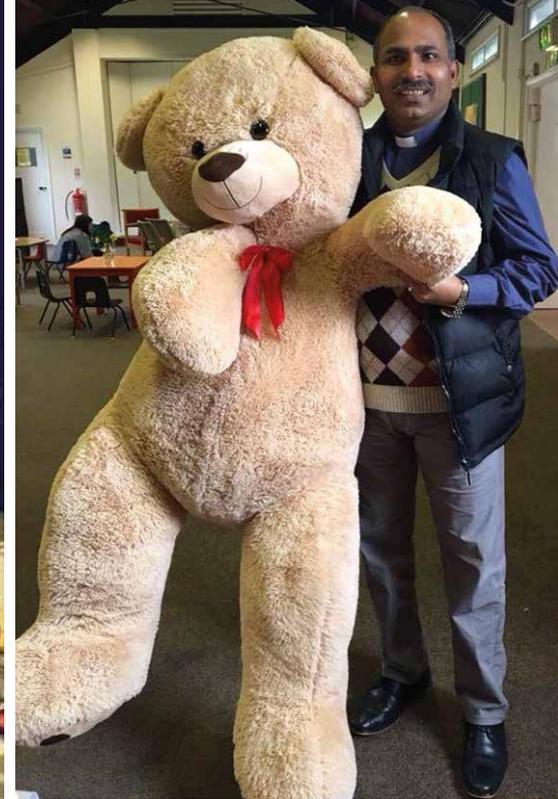
For about a year and a half now, we have not only served hundreds of fairly traded lattes, over a thousand milkshakes and more slices of home-made cake than you could dream of, but we have also created a vibrant, life-giving space for the church and the wider community to grow in relationship together.

Although Messy Café is distinct from Messy Church, it is firmly connected to it and its vision. Messy Café is primarily about loving people like God loves us – through relationship – and Messy Church is more focused on who Jesus is, how our lives can be positively impacted by God, and how we can love him in return.

Each week, Messy Café meets at the same time and in the same place as Messy Church (except the fourth week, which is Messy Church) to ensure the two spaces are both familiar to and practical for most people. Inside, you'll find adults

[Messy Café is] a model based on relationships built through intentional conversations with key persons who are not only sociable, but also have a confident faith in Christ... Participation has been key and the intergenerational nature has been one that is encouraging... I love that it exemplifies mission – without having to be something stylised. A faith expression that is naturally inclusive.

Dean Pusey, Diocesan Youth Officer in St Alban's Diocese



connecting over a coffee, children doing activities and whole families spending quality time together. It's a drop-in space for all ages, and people can stay for the whole hour and a half, or just pop in for ten minutes.

For us in Radlett, Messy Café has provided a much-needed relational stepping stone for so many people on the discipleship journey through Messy Church, who now love being a part of the whole community. What was a gathering of 25 people once a month last year has turned into a vibrant community of (on average) 70 people each week. It's so wonderful to see what God has done and continues to do through it.

If you would like to explore the idea of running a Messy Café alongside your existing Messy Church, please feel free to contact Dave for more information, as he would love to explore with you how this could benefit your community: childrenandyouth@radlettchurches.org.uk; 01923 857998.

Four Messy Church values for Messy Café

As well being a Christ-centred environment, Messy Café is rooted in Messy Church's core values...

All-age: It should be a space where every age group WANTS to go, not where parents HAVE to go for the sake of their children.

Creativity: It should embrace the creative contributions of each individual. Like the body of Christ, every member should be encouraged to contribute their God-given gifts.

Hospitality: It should offer a high-quality service with a friendly, welcoming and relational environment. It's about reflecting Jesus' unconditional love and giving our absolute best, every time. So, bye-bye instant coffee, and hello filter!

Celebration: It should not only be a space where intergenerational relationships are celebrated, but where everyone feels able to share the messiness of life together; the joys, struggles, and questions of faith.

Its drop-in ethos works really well for us.

It has brought together the community.

It has helped me to learn about Jesus.

I want to tell more people about Messy Café and Messy Church.

Children and adults at Messy Café

Messy Café has opened our church doors to the community and provides a safe space where we are able to share God's goodness and love together. The welcoming and open atmosphere enables deep and meaningful conversations about the realities of life and how God might be part of it. We are so thankful to God.

Revd Javaid Iqbal, Team Rector, Christ Church and St John's, Radlett



Companions for the journey: A Messy small-group experiment

Johanna Myers, Director of Christian Formation, Aldersgate UMC, South Carolina

Are we making disciples at Messy Church? Yes! Any time we invite people to join other disciples at work and play in God's kingdom, discipleship happens. After five years of doing Messy Church, though, I wondered, 'What would Messy Church look like as a small group?' In 2018, folks from Messy Church at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Greenville, South Carolina took on this Messy experiment!

We formed small groups (six to ten people, or three to four families) that met monthly for a meal together, prayer and Bible study. The only catch? These groups would be intentionally multigenerational. No sending the kids off to play while the adults got down to the 'business' of Bible study. No lecturing adults telling kids what this Bible passage *has* to mean. These would be groups where all ages learn *together*. Group members would be companions for one another on their discipleship journey, so we called this experiment 'Companion groups'.

The five core values of Messy Church – hospitality, all-age, celebration, creativity, Christ-centred – form the Rule of Life for our Companion groups. A Rule is simply a guide that we've agreed on to help us navigate the messiness of life together. Companions promised to go beyond being a fellowship group to create space for encountering God in transforming ways. We promised to honour the gifts of everyone, from youngest to oldest, making room for everyone to lead and share. We promised to explore faith creatively and to be open to trying new things. We committed to meeting around a meal, extending hospitality to one another. All of this, we promised, was so that we might celebrate life together.



After a lively meal together – spent catching up with one another and sharing life – groups turn to study the month's Bible passage. Everyone, from youngest to oldest, is invited to ask questions and think creatively about the Bible. What do you notice about this story? What do you wonder about the people in the story? Where do you see yourself? After talking a bit about the story, groups get hands-on: playing a game, doing a craft or tackling a science experiment. Basically, groups do one activity that would be like an activity done at Messy Church. One month, a group built a labyrinth out of blocks as they talked about the walk to Emmaus. Another month, a group made bread and learned about Jesus feeding the 5,000. Groups planted seeds, painted and played together throughout the year. Each group chose their monthly activity, so it suited their own ages and strengths.



After a year of this Messy Discipleship experiment, what can we say about Messy Church and small groups? I am in awe of the depth of the relationships formed through Companion groups. It is a beautiful thing to see a four-year-old run up to her Companions because they have become like grandparents to her. It's rather amazing to see twelve-year-olds *EXCITED* about hanging out with a group of adults and looking forward every month to their Companion gathering. Relationships formed in Companion groups have been transformative.



On the other hand, I've also learned some hard truths about us adults! Many of our adults struggled a bit, especially early on, with the imaginative aspect of exploring

scripture together. They want answers, a lesson plan! Even after a year of following this same rhythm, I noticed that some adults still struggled with defaulting into 'lecture-mode'. When we do this, though, we miss out on what our kids have to share. And, trust me, our kids have so much insight and wisdom to offer!

Just as the activities help to ground a Messy Church, the hands-on activity grounded Companion groups. If we're going to have intergenerational groups where children feel included, the activity is *essential* – and interestingly, I learned

through our experiment that groups which spent too much time *talking* about the story lost the kids' attention quickly.

This Messy Discipleship project is still a work in progress for us. What I can say is that the core values and model of Messy Church do work well together as the basis for small groups, for Messy Churches wanting to dive deeper into new ways of growing as disciples.

For more information about Companion groups and our discipleship experiment, feel free to contact me at: jmyers@aumcsc.org.

Youth column

Eleanor Bloxham

I am a creative person. I love making things: painting, crochet, clay-modelling, bottle rockets powered by methylated spirits – it's all so much fun! Creativity is an important part of Messy Church as one aspect of the activities, but it's also there in the celebration, in how you express hospitality and in making it accessible to a whole range of ages. Creativity can also be an expression of worship and a great reminder that we are made in the image of our creator God.

Messy Church has a fantastic ability to say that you are welcome and you are loved, even if other church services don't suit you or you want something that your family can do together. It is such a joy to be able to learn about God with all ages through creative activities – and that you can engage with and explore the stories with the people you have come with, people you have just met or people that you have only got to know through Messy Church. The relationships that are developed here and while sharing food are key to building the sense of community that many in Messy Church feel. When I found that Messy Church BRF were looking for another intern, that is why I wanted the job.



I spent the last few years studying Chemistry and so am thrilled to be part of the Messy Church Does Science project, joining in with the roadshows and science training events. Science is great fun at any age – especially when you don't have to do any homework! You may go away from our science activities slightly damp or smelling of vinegar, but I guarantee you will have had the chance to enjoy experimenting and probably learned a bit about how the world works, too. I think science in Messy Church is a significant asset as it provides great scope for creativity and allows us to get to know the world we live in and the God that created it.

I have been a part of Messy Church in Christ Church with All Saints Blackpool since 2014, along with my mum (who does a lot of the planning), my dad (who comes up with science-based activities like volcanoes or magnetic fishing) and my grandma (who helps in the kitchen). I have really enjoyed my involvement in all aspects of helping Messy Church sessions happen. It has been encouraging to see the growth of our Messy Church and the responses of the families that attend regularly.

This year, I moved to Nottingham and have been working with three Messy Churches at St Wilfrid's Calverton, St Andrews Skegby and All Saints Stanton Hill. Working with these churches, which all operate in different situations, and visiting other Messy Churches, has been really interesting as it has helped me to see how different Messy Churches are adapted to fit the needs of the people who attend. I have also had the chance to speak to many people about their own experience of Messy Church and, from this, have found out favourite songs, favourite foods and how to set up Messy Church in all sorts of different spaces!

Over my year with Messy Church, I have been researching Messy Churches on urban estates to find out more about the joys and challenges of working in this context, with an aim to discover if there is more we could do to better support these Messy Churches. We also hope that this research will be useful to anyone who is thinking about starting or is already running a Messy Church in this setting and to the people who support them.



The lowdown on Messy Vintage

Debbie Thrower, team leader of The Gift of Years

‘It’s too much fun to be kept for the young, isn’t it?’ enthused a curate, chatting to me about Messy Vintage. This latest form of Messy Church, specifically for people in the second half of life, is taking off... fast!

Messy Vintage services are happening on the south coast in Dorset, parts of Hampshire and Sussex, as well as in Surrey, Kent and Essex – and these are just the ones we know about. We’re finding new churches every week who tell us they’re giving it a go. A man piped up at a meeting in Crickhowell, in the Brecon Beacons, to add, ‘We’re doing Messy Vintage in the care homes around Abergavenny.’

Just as Messy Church is ‘all age’, its missional offshoot Messy Vintage, supported by BRF programme The Gift of Years, attracts volunteers in their 50s and 60s-plus, while those attending are typically in their 80s, 90s and even 100s. That represents five- or six-decades’ worth of all-age worship!

The trend has even reached New Zealand. The Revd Ruth Dewdney explains how her Anglican church, in the Bay of Plenty, Te Puke, has just held its first Messy Vintage in the dementia unit of a facility for the care of older people, called Carter House.

‘We had twelve of the fifteen residents involved, plus helpers from the parish, plus staff. We are planning on holding a Messy Vintage each month, then afternoon tea with the residents.’

Whether at home in the UK or abroad, Messy Vintage always ends with food – usually tea and cakes – or, if taking place in a care home, some services end with grace before residents depart for lunch or high tea in their own dining room.

Above all, it is fun and creative. It brings older people together for worship, craft and discussions around our messy, but special, lives. Even when later life brings challenges, joining together for fellowship in this way helps everyone glimpse the ways God is alongside us at every age and stage, even in the sometimes chaotic times in our old age.

BRF offers twelve free session plans for anyone wanting to know how to get started. There are scarecrows to be made at Harvest time, mini maps of the world to fashion with an environmental theme and mosaic tiles to be created, which remind us how we can meet Jesus in unexpected places. These can be downloaded online at thegiftofyears.org.uk/messy-vintage-sessions.

Key to Messy Vintage is that:

- It helps older people know they are part of something bigger
- It’s about being ‘a blessing’ and being ‘blessed’ by others
- Worship often releases the voice of older people; this is church for the voiceless
- It’s about a church creating sacred space where people are
- The food should be as beautiful as the people involved.

What began in Jersey has – thanks to pioneer Katie Norman, the National Coordinator, and a little help from The Gift of Years team – started catching on as word spreads from place to place. Salvation Army Major Sharon King wrote to tell us how she got involved:

'As I was leading worship one Sunday, I suddenly came to the realisation that a lot of my congregation did not know the basic Bible stories and so I began a monthly Messy Vintage for adults. A time of devotion would commence; I used stories from Godly Play, which were well-received, and quite a few of the ten folk who attended commented over time that seeing the Bible come alive in this way helped them to understand more about the scriptures. I shall never forget one Friday afternoon when I made an altar call and four people made a commitment to Christ.'

In conjunction with other Christian charities, BRF's Messy Vintage is also encouraging churches to 'Make a meal of it'. This is an initiative of Christians Together Against Loneliness (of which The Gift of Years is a member). The idea is simple:

use a meal event to reach out to the older people in your community.

What better way to 'Make a meal of it' than to put on a Messy Vintage session, which then moves seamlessly into a hearty meal for those who'd welcome a little bit of TLC, some warm company and quality hospitality?

The details of how to plan such an event, a leaflet explaining what's what and our helpful top-tips factsheet can all be downloaded at thegiftofyears.org.uk/messy-vintage.

Don't forget our Pinterest page, either, with its growing 'virtual noticeboard' of tried-and-tested ideas to suit all abilities right across the ageing spectrum: pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/messy-vintage.



COLOSSIANS 1:15-17

1

Getting beyond the 'meh'

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

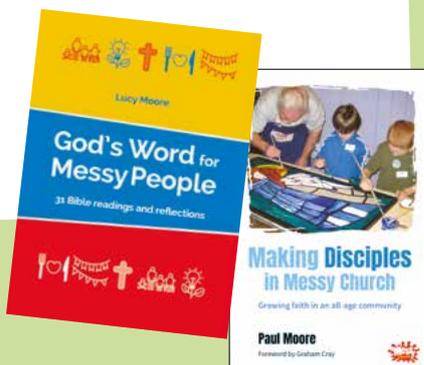
Jesus. How does that name make you feel? I'd love to be like Paul here, bubbling over with passion about him. But if I'm honest, my reaction is too often more like the 'meh' that pops up on social media: the lazy verbal equivalent of a shrug. I hear 'Jesus' so often! 'You do, when you belong to a church, don't you? And it's too easy to pretend to have the 'right' reaction.

Jesus stands for the truth. He claimed to be 'the truth', spoke the truth, lived the truth, rejoiced to see it in others and saved

his harshest criticisms for hypocrites, for those who pretend. So we can be sure that he wants us to be honest with him as we read on, even when that makes us think something that startles or even shocks our conscious mind.

We're going to step out of the busyness of life and catch the vision of Jesus again through a month's worth of Bible passages. We'll explore the way he demonstrates the Messy Church values of creativity, hospitality, inclusivity and celebration. Perhaps, if we could become more like Jesus in who we are and in what we do, our world would be revolutionised by the church.

If Jesus made the invisible God visible 2,000 years ago, we can make the invisible Jesus visible today as we ourselves come closer to him. It's an enormous dream, almost as enormous as Paul's description of him here.



#discipleship: team

We're bringing out a new discipleship resource specially for Messy Church teams and other lay leaders, providing a month's worth of daily reading notes focused around the Messy Church values. Publishing in June, *God's Word for Messy People* contains 31 short Bible passages, with a reflection on each passage by Lucy Moore, reinforcing the creativity, hospitality, joy, inclusivity and character of Jesus.

And for wider thinking around discipleship and how it plays out in Messy Church, Paul Moore's classic *Making Disciples in Messy Church*, reprinted with a refreshed cover, is a must-read for your team.

Visit brfonline.org.uk to get your copy!

Mothers' Union gets messy!

Catherine Kyte, Faith Officer at Mothers' Union

Back in 2009, Lucy Moore spoke at a Mothers' Union (MU) Conference about Messy Church, at that time in its infancy, and we were blown away by what she shared! Since then, many of our members have plunged into Messiness in their local areas, embracing the concept with gusto!

Of course they have – the values behind Messy Church totally line up with the vision and mission of MU. We are proudly known for our hospitality as we wield the tea urn with purpose, providing welcome, a listening ear and a safe space alongside physical sustenance. As for craft – MU sees this as a ministry, rather than just an activity!

And encouraging faith in the family has always been a key part of our aims and objectives, ever since our founder, Mary Sumner, made the first hesitant step in 1876 to gather mothers of all classes in her parish to help the women support one another in raising their children. A vital part of this was the encouragement to nurture their families in the love of God.

So fast-forward to today, and we see our members getting involved with Messy Church in a variety of ways as our shared aims weave themselves together. Penny Northall, from Derby Diocese, gives a great illustration of this:

Mothers' Union members of Hognaston and Hulland branch have skills and gifts that they bring to Hulland's Messy Church. These might be in creativity, cooking, listening, welcoming, leading or planning. The aims are the same for MU and Messy Church – 'sharing God's love with families'.

Then, on a larger scale, MU and Messy Church have joined together at Liverpool Cathedral for Messy Palms on Palm Sunday, where children and adults enjoyed crafts, activities, worship and a picnic; and for the Mothering Sunday service 'Mother Love', where Messiness was the order of the day. The seasonal theme has continued, with MU taking part in the Messy Nativity Advent project; while Southwell and Nottingham members celebrated Lady Day in 2018 along very Messy principles, with all ages enjoying creative activities and prayer ideas together (some of which used chocolate – a winner!).

And the connections between us grow even stronger as we see the similarities we share on a global level. Since 1876, MU has grown to four million members in 84 countries – all of which are caring for families and nurturing faith in their own cultural context. As Messy Church has already started to expand into other countries, the potential for global partnership is beginning to take shape. Now that's an exciting thought!

Bev Jullien, the CEO of Mothers' Union, sums up the joy of the links we share:

The aims and values of MU and Messy Church align very well, so it's wonderful to work together for the good of families and the growth of God's kingdom.

May our partnership together become increasingly Messy as we live out our shared vision to nurture faith in the family in ever more creative ways!

Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families



£100 Appeal



Messy Church helps people follow Jesus

Mona's story



Faith and community for all ages

Last year, we received a lovely photo from a Messy Church leader in a small village in Scotland. It showed Mona, a centenarian, cradling eight-month-old Alister in her arms. Mona is a regular at Messy Church and loves being part of the family. Every month, she goes along to have a chat, join in the activities and, of course, see her buddy, Alister!

The leader of Mona's Messy Church recalled how one afternoon they were exploring the story of Moses and the burning bush. The noisiest table was not one with children, but a group of adults colouring in a burning bush and all talking at once. At the centre of that group was Mona, chatting and smiling away and giving it her all because faith and community are important at all stages of life.

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is the home of Messy Church and we're a little younger than Mona, but not by much. Since 1922, we've been helping children and adults of all ages explore Christianity and grow in faith. We believe we have something to offer to everyone, whether you're a centenarian like Mona or a babe in arms like Alister.

Today, our creative programmes and resources impact thousands of lives across the UK and overseas, and Messy Church is one area where we've seen astounding growth and development. Every month, a staggering 500,000 are estimated to attend Messy Church. Some go to a Messy Church in a village, like Mona. Others meet in big cities and their suburbs or schools, care homes and even prisons.

Wherever it's found, the aim of Messy Church is the same: to help people become followers of Jesus. We regularly hear that children and adults of all ages are taking this important step because of what they've seen and experienced at Messy Church. It's fantastic news and something of which we are justly proud.

If you want to see more people coming to faith because of Messy Church, would you consider leaving a gift in your will to BRF? Legacies are an important source of income for us and we value every gift, small or large.

For more information about making a lasting difference through a gift in your will to BRF, please visit brf.org.uk/lastingdifference, email enquiries@brf.org.uk or call us on 01865 319700.

Session material: May

Holy Habit: Prayer



Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay19 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

#discipleship: individual

Messy reflection by Lindsey Goodyear

Jesus told his disciples a story. He wanted to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, 'In a certain town there was a judge. He didn't have any respect for God or care about what people thought. A widow lived in that town. She came to the judge again and again. She kept begging him, "Make things right for me. Someone is treating me badly."

'For some time the judge refused. But finally he said to himself, "I don't have any respect for God. I don't care about what people think. But this widow keeps bothering me. So I will see that things are made right for her. If I don't, she will someday come and attack me!"'

The Lord said, 'Listen to what the unfair judge says. God's chosen people cry out to him day and night. Won't he make things right for them? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, God will see that things are made right for them. He will make sure it happens quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find people on earth who have faith?'

Luke 18:1-8 (NIRV)

When I was a child, I used to write letters to my great-grandmother. Although it took some time for each letter to make its way to her, and then for her response to make its way back, it was worth the eager anticipation when I'd check the mail and see her letter. I'd swiftly read it, tuck it away with the others and get busy writing another. I was disciplined in my determination to stay in close contact with her despite the distance between us.

We live in different times, now. Gone are the days of handwritten letters that outline the details of our daily lives and events. Instead, we can pass along a short, impersonal email to anyone, anywhere around the world, and, once they've written their own quick response, mentally check a box as though we've held a great conversation.

The widow was diligent in her quest for justice. She never wavered despite the fact that the judge was unjust and

unwilling to meet her requests. The judge openly says he doesn't fear God, nor does he respect anyone. He has no patience for the nagging widow until she finally wears him down and, out of annoyance, he gives up and gives her what she wants. She is exactly what God wants us to be.

The widow is the antithesis of what communication is today. There is no instant gratification for her. Instead, like the way God calls us to pray to him, she is persistent, knowing what she wants and waiting patiently for her request to be answered. These are the two words we should be focusing on: persistence and patience. We aim to be persistent in our prayer and communication with him, and patient for how and when he answers these prayers.

For a world now used to instant gratification, this is a seemingly impossible task. We want things done now. So praying persistently and waiting for our own 'justice' is going to take practice. Although it's hard to admit, in many cases we can relate better to the unjust judge. It's easier to think only of ourselves and forget about prayer at a time when we feel on top of the world or untouched by burden. However, we need to remember that praying consistently does not mean prayer only in a time of crisis. We cannot send an email to God and expect a response within the hour. So, instead, we have to practise the same amount of determined prayer as the widow in order to find satisfaction with our own life cases, no matter what the status of our life at the moment.

Like the determination and diligence I had for staying in communication with my great-grandmother, I will endeavour, like the widow, to stay unwavering in prayer and keep striving for the same communication with God. Will you join me?

#discipleship: team

Messy health check

How important is prayer to my life?

Messy team theme

- How can we make sure that prayer still stays top of our agenda when it comes to all the preparations for and busyness of running a Messy Church?
- What sorts of unfairness might drive us to pray for the people of our community?
- How can we remember to keep on praying for each other and for those who come to our Messy Church once the session is over?
- Encourage each other with stories of how God has answered prayer because God is a faithful judge.

Pray, pray, pray! by Martyn Payne

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This parable shows us what God is not like – the unfair judge – but also what we are not like – the persistent widow. God is passionately concerned about unfairness in this world and longs for us to talk to him about it so that justice is done. Giving up on prayer is so easy and being unmoved by injustice around us is widespread; and being faithless about God's power to change things is a temptation for us all. God is just, and he calls us to be prayerful. This session is an opportunity to think about how important prayer is for us and for our families, and to recommit to praying about injustice.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- When was the last time you said, 'It's not fair'?
- What's been the best way of sorting out unfairness in your family?
- What makes it hard for you to remember to pray?
- When is your best time to pray?

Take-home idea

Challenge yourselves to add a routine to your day, namely the habit of prayer. Talk together as a family about when the best time would be to do this together or on your own. Turn a paper plate into a clock face and decide on your special prayer moment in the day, filling in the hands of the clock to say when that will be. Make one clock face for yourself to keep in your room and one for the family which you stick up prominently somewhere.

Question to start and end the session

So... if I dared to pray more, what difference would it make?

#discipleship: extra

Decide on a particular justice issue that affects your community or a part of the world with which you have links. Make this a prayer focus for all at Messy Church over the coming months, by setting up an information board with ideas for writing letters, campaigning, raising money and of course prayer.

Social action

Have a selection of local, national and international social projects' leaflets and invite families to take one away to pray for at home.

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Session material: May

6



Activities

1. Widows' weeds

You will need: scissors; A3 black or dark-coloured paper; black plastic bin bags cut up into squares

Widows used to wear special clothes to show they were in mourning. Fold the paper into a party hat (find instructions online). Fold the plastic bag over and over lengthways concertina-style and then cut out holes at regular intervals so that, unfolded, it becomes a veil with lots of holes in it. Trap the veil under the cap to become your widows' weeds.

Talk about whether you know anyone in your community who has recently been bereaved. How can you show you care?

7



2. Headgear for the judge

You will need: a variety of cheap striped cloths; broad Kylie-band elastic sweatbands or white strips of cloth; felt-tip pens

Use felt-tip pens to decorate the bands and cloths. Attach the 'judge's headgear' with the bands. You could use this headgear when retelling the story in the celebration.

Talk about what guidelines you would use to try and work out what is fair and just.

8



3. Perpetual prayer

You will need: strong scissors; sticky tape; water; a large two-litre water bottle; one-metre length of tubing; stopper

Cut off the bottom of the emptied bottle. Make good any sharp edges with tape. Turn the bottle upside down and attach the tubing to the stopper. Arrange for the tube to go below the bottle and then up one side, before finally being directed back towards the newly cut-open end of the bottle.

Pour water from a jug into the opened bottle. Gravity and water pressure should push the water through the tubing and back up the tube and out to keep refilling the bottle! You will need to experiment with this, making sure there are no leaks and finding the right volume of water to make it work. How long can you keep the water going in a cycle?

Talk about how we can keep on praying and not give up, as Jesus asks of us.

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Pray, pray, pray! by Martyn Payne

4. Not giving up

You will need: needles and thread; balloons; ribbon, scissors; empty boxes

Try the following challenges: threading a needle; blowing up a balloon and then tying a knot in the end (or tie a knot in a string if you want to avoid using plastics); creating a perfect bow around a box (add more ideas if you like). Will people persist or feel like giving up?

Talk about what it feels like to have to keep on trying. Why do we find it so difficult to keep praying to God?

5. Justice for the widow!

You will need: pieces of card; bamboo sticks; sticky tape; paints; paint brushes; water bowls

Create your own campaign placard on behalf of the widow, painting and illustrating slogans such as: 'Justice now'; 'Just be fair, hear her prayer'; 'What do we want? Widows' rights.' Attach the placards to the sticks.

Talk about how far you would be prepared to go to campaign for justice for someone else.

6. Hanging in the balance

You will need: two 2-litre water bottles; a coat-hanger (preferably with hooks at the end of its arms); scissors; hole punch; pieces of string

Cut off the top part of your bottles neatly, taking care to leave no sharp edges. Using five long pieces of string for each bottle, tie them so that the knot sits beneath the base of the bottle and the ends of the string come up the side, through five holes that you make with a hole punch beneath the upper rim of each bottle. Tie the loose ends of the string together so the bottle hangs evenly. Hook the strings over the end of the coat hanger, one bottle on each side.

You now have home-made scales and can experiment putting things into the bottles so that each side balances the other.

Talk about how God can help us to make good judgements about things that happen to us in our everyday lives.

7. Prayer snacks

You will need: Hula Hoops; cream cheese; crackers; paper plates; plastic knives

Spread the cream cheese on three crackers and then use the hula hoops to create the letters A, S, K, placing one letter on each cracker. Just as the occasional snack during the day can give us energy to keep going, prayer is a vital ingredient to our lives that we need to exercise anywhere, any time.

Talk about what you are praying about at the moment.

8. Just keep praying!

You will need: cardboard tubes; sticky tape; small marbles/dried chickpeas; large board; plastic container

Create a marble run by cutting the tubes in half, making a hole at the end (to enable the marble to drop through) and attaching the tubes into each other in a downhill zigzag pattern supported by a backboard. Place a container at the bottom of the run and then set the marbles rolling down. As soon as one arrives at the bottom, pick it up and re-feed it into the system. How long can you keep the supply of marbles running down? You will certainly need help from others.

Talk about the sort of things that help us keep praying.

9. Prayers for justice

You will need: lots of mission and aid magazines; a tabletop map of the world; scissors; glue sticks

Find headlines and/or photos of situations of injustice in our world from the magazines. Cut out and glue them to map of the world, pausing to say a simple prayer asking God to help.

Talk about what God might be asking us to do about some of these situations.

10. Finding faith

You will need: shallow trays; labels; coloured marker pens; sand

Write the word 'Faith' on labels and attach them in several places on the base of the trays, sometimes at an angle and sometimes upside down but with plenty of space in between the words. Cover the words with the sand to a depth of 3 or 4 cm. Invite those who come to the table to hunt around in the sand in the trays for the word 'faith' without any of the sand spilling out of the tray.

Talk about what keeps you trusting in God. What encourages you to pray?

Session material: May

Pray, pray, pray! by Martyn Payne

Celebration

The two big things in today's Messy Church have been prayer and justice. Hands up if you've ever said, 'It's not fair!' Hands up if you've ever been angry that someone else has been cheated or badly treated.

God has given us a strong sense of right and wrong because that's what God is like. God is always completely fair. This world badly needs justice. Hands up if you've ever tried praying. Hands up if you've found it hard.

God has put into all of us an instinct to pray but so much seems to get in the way and we easily give up. Jesus once told a story about prayer and justice.

Invite adults and children who made widows' weeds, judges' headgear or placards to go and collect them to help you tell the parable.

In the story there was a bad judge (*gather some of those dressed in judges' headgear and ask them to stand on one side of you*), a judge who didn't care about being fair. He couldn't care less! (*The judges should all turn their backs on everyone, with arms folded and look grumpy.*)

And in the story there was a widow (*gather some of those dressed in widows' weeds and ask them to stand on the other side of you*), a widow who had been treated very badly. For her, life was just not fair. She wanted justice. Day after day she brought her case to the judge. (*Gather some of those with placards on behalf of the widow and ask him to stand in front of you.*) She never stopped asking the judge to hear her case. (*Ask the 'campaigners' to chant the words on their placards and to get louder and louder.*)

But the judge kept on ignoring the widow. The shouts from the widow got louder and louder. It went on for weeks! (*Encourage the 'campaigners' and the widow to up their cry for justice.*)

Finally the judge grew so angry (*invite the judges to act in response to your words*) that he turned towards the widow... stamped his feet angrily... sighed very loudly... shook his fist fiercely... and cried out, 'STOP,' at the top of his voice. 'I give up,' he said, 'you can have justice. Now please go away!'

(Everyone should return to their places.)

The bad judge listened to the widow in the end because she never gave up. I want you to be like the widow and not give up with prayer. But it's much better news for you because God is a good judge and will always listen and answer your prayers. So pray, pray, pray... God wants there to be fair play in the world, between all peoples, in every family and in each one of our lives.

We take it for granted that we look after our bodies. We make sure our eyes, ears, noses, tongues and hands are all working properly! We want all our senses in tip-top condition. God has given us our bodies and we need to look after them. But God has also given us prayer muscles – to talk with and listen to God... and these need exercising too. This story is saying that we need to make sure we pray regularly because that's the way God made us. And, more importantly, God has loads of answers to give us that are just waiting for our prayers. So pray, pray, pray!

(There is another celebration idea for this parable in *Messy Parables*, BRF, 2017.)

Prayer

Jesus promises that when we ask, seek and knock in prayer, God will answer us. Invite people to work in twos or threes to create, one at a time, human sculptures of the following capital letters: A, S and K. When each letter is formed, ask everyone to freeze and be still for each of the following prayers in turn.

Help us, Father God, to **ask** for your help every single day.

Help us Lord Jesus, to **seek** justice for those who are caught up in the unfairness of life.

Help us, Holy Spirit, to **knock** on heaven's door and welcome you into our lives every day. And all the people said AMEN

Song suggestions

'Ask, ask, ask' – Junior Praise

'Prayer is like a telephone' – Kidsource

'Lord, we cry' – Kidsource

Meal suggestion

Eating with hands, which can also of course be used to pray, would make a connection to the theme, so why not serve up tacos with a variety of fillings which individuals can fold in for themselves? You might also like to introduce pretzels as a snack dessert on the tables, with their prayer shape (hands crossed over the heart), familiar to the baker monks who invented them.

Session material: June

Dazzling disciples by Jocelyn Czerwonka

Holy Habit: Making Disciples



Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay19 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

reading, we too are asked to shine in the world, especially in impossible situations and with difficult people. We are asked to trust God and to share his love with others so they can be encouraged to trust him too and become one of his disciples. Abram's descendants were many like the stars in the sky, and we, along with other Christian disciples, are some of their number. I wonder if, when we encounter the seemingly impossible, we can shine even brighter.

#discipleship: individual #discipleship: team

Messy reflection by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'

But Abram said, 'Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1–6 (NIV)

Abram seems to be in an impossible situation. He and his wife, Sarai, are old and they have no children. Abram is sad, as he spends time talking to God, he hears something amazing. God promises that the impossible will happen, that he and his wife will have a son. God uses the wonderful example of the stars in the sky to reassure Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Even though this sounds impossible, Abram trusts God. He believes what God says and, as the following chapters in the Bible tell us, God's word came true.

Part of being a disciple today, as it has always been, is to trust God, to listen to him and believe in the things he says and the guidance he gives. This is sometimes a challenge as, like Abram, God seems to ask, suggest or promise the impossible. We are still called to trust him. Sometimes things around us look impossible to change, have no obvious solution or seem very unlikely. As the stars twinkle and shine in this Bible

Messy health check

Take a moment to name the people in whose lives you've seen God at work through your Messy ministry over the last few months.

Messy team theme

- Are we dazzling disciples, showing and sharing God's love with the people we meet?
- As a team exercise and preparation, do the Acrostic Disciple Challenge (activity 1). Brainstorm what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session helps people understand what a disciple is and to realise that we are all called to be disciples of Christ. Just like the stars shine to brighten up the dark sky, so too can we as disciples bring God's light to the world and the people we encounter. We can dazzle like a star if we are filled with God's love and share that love with those around us.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- Could you be a dazzling disciple?
- What do you think a dazzling disciple looks like?
- Who do you know who would really like to be dazzled by the good news of Jesus?

Take-home idea

Let the stars remind you about being a dazzling disciple. At home, make stars to attach to your bedroom ceiling or make a star mobile. Write messages on them to remind you of what a dazzling disciple might do and look like. How can you be a

Session material: June

dazzling disciple for God? Think about others who would like to be dazzled by God's love. Maybe add their names to your stars and pray for them at night. Perhaps you could think about inviting them to the next Messy Church.

Question to start and end the session

So... can I be a dazzling disciple for Christ?

#discipleship: extra

Plan a Messy Outdoors event to reach people even Messy Church doesn't reach.

Social action

Tell the story of someone in your church who is a 'star' in all they do for social action.

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Activities

1. Acrostic disciple challenge

You will need: notice board; pins; nine pages of A4 paper; smaller pieces of coloured paper; pens

Using A4 paper, write each letter of the word 'DISCIPLES' on a separate piece of paper. Pin these at the top of a large notice board. On the strips of coloured paper, ask people to write under each letter words (beginning with that letter) relating to being a disciple e.g. D – Devoted. Pin them in columns to the board. See how many words people can come up with. See how long the list gets! Or take it further:

1. Choosing one word from anywhere in each column, see if you can make an interesting sentence working across from left to right e.g. Devoted – Inspirational – Servants – Committed – In – Prayer – Lovingly – Engaging – Spontaneously.
2. You can also work down a column and see if you can come up with alliteration – using at least four words starting with the same letter e.g. Daring disciples dutifully dedicated to God, or People pondering prayerful promises proclaiming peace poetically.

Talk about how Jesus calls us all to be his disciples. A disciple is a dedicated follower of Jesus. We can do this in our everyday lives sharing God's love with the people we meet, praying, being in fellowship with other Christians, breaking bread together and learning from the scriptures.

2. Bread making

You will need: pre-prepared bread dough; paper plates; baking trays; oven facilities

Have some pre-prepared bread dough ready to work and divide into small ball shapes. Shape dough as you like, maybe into people or the first letter of your name. Place on baking tray for baking and sharing together at meal or celebration time.

As Christians, we need to develop these Holy Habits such as breaking bread together. At the last supper, Jesus broke bread with his disciples and told them to 'do this in memory of me' (Luke 22:19, GNT).

Talk about how we can remember Jesus every time we eat or break bread.

Dazzling disciples by Jocelyn Czerwonka

3. Woven stars

You will need: a selection of coloured A4 paper cut into strips; scissors

New Zealand is in the Southern Hemisphere, where some Messy Churches will be acknowledging Matariki (Maori New Year) with the rising of the constellation of stars called Pleiades. It is traditional to weave 'Harakeke whetu' (a flax star) as part of this celebration. Let's just start with paper stars. Choose four different colours, one of which you want to represent how God your creator is woven into your life.

Follow this link for instructions to make an eight-point Matariki Star: youtube.com/watch?v=kZf5ewNd-q4.

Talk about how we can never count the number of stars, as much as we may try. But stars are a reminder that our work as disciples is never finished; there are always more disciples to be made. As we weave the stars today, reflect on how much you allow God to be woven into your life in order for you to be a shining disciple of Jesus. How might you shine like a star to be a disciple of God?

4. Stargazing with Abram/Abraham



You will need: a darkened room or gazebo; cushions; cardboard stars; scripture verses printed out on paper (download online); string; safety pins; torches; clipboards; quiz sheets (download online); pens; dark cloth or black polythene for canopy

'The Lord took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and try to count the stars; you will have as many descendants as that"' (Genesis 15:5, GNT). If it's a fine night and dark where you are, go outside and see how many stars you can count. Alternatively, make your own stargazing room and use this quiz.

Before the session, paste printed scriptures (enlarged font) on to the cardboard stars. Use string and safety pins to hang stars from the canopy.

As people arrive, hand out torches and clip boards with quiz sheet and pens. Encourage them to take their time answering the questions and reflecting on what God might be saying to them.

Talk about whether or not you were surprised to learn that God had decided the number of stars and knows them all by name. Just as God knows the stars by name, so he knows us each by name.

5. Rocket disciples

You will need: pencils; felt-tip pens; paper straws or paper strips, thick pencils and sticky tape; paper; scissors; coloured Post-it notes

As Jesus' disciples, what messages would you like to send around the world on your rocket?

Use paper straws or make your own by rolling 6 cm x 20 cm paper strips lengthwise around a thick pencil. Tape edges and remove the pencil. Wrap a bit of tape around the bottom edge so it doesn't get soggy when blowing through it.

Make your rockets using 12 cm x 6 cm paper strips. Write lengthwise the message you would like to send, e.g. 'You are loved by God'. Decorate the rocket, and then wrap it around your straw and tape in place. Add wings using small Post-it notes; fold along the sticky edge and stick to the rocket.

Tape a 'cap' to the rocket. Using a lid about 5.5cm in diameter, draw a circle on paper and cut out. Mark a dot in the centre, rule a line from centre to edge and cut. Slide the edges to form a cone shape, tape edges and tape it to your rocket.

Now fly your rocket by inserting your straw and blowing through it. See how high it will go! Be careful not to aim at people.

Talk about what special messages you think Jesus would want us to send to people today.

6. Praying for Messy Churches all over the world

You will need: large map of the world; print-out or poster of countries and their flags; flags on toothpicks; Blu Tack. For a list of countries where Messy Churches can be found around the world, see messychurch.org.uk/international#countries.

Find the flags belonging to Messy Church countries, find the country on the map and, with a blob of Blu Tack, fix the flag to the map.

Talk about the fact that there are Messy Churches all over the world sharing the good news of Jesus! They have all started thanks to the faithful work of Messy Church disciples being led by God, spreading the good news and praying for people everywhere. See how many Messy Churches you can find. Take time to pray for them.

Session material: June

7. Concertina paper people

You will need: A4 paper; a dinner plate about 20 cm in diameter; pencil; pens; scissors; coloured card; glue

Trace around the plate and cut out a circle of paper. Fold it in half three times. With the paper still folded, draw half of a person on the left side (on the fold) and half on the right side (on the fold), with their hands holding in the middle of the paper. Cut out and open your circle of people. Stick on to coloured card and decorate.

Talk about how the circle of people reminds us of the importance of being together with other Christians, so we can grow strong in our faith and learn to be disciples of God.

8. Galaxy dough creations

You will need: galaxy play dough; star cutters; card in different colours; star-shaped paper plates; string; hole punch

Make your galaxy play-dough by adding blue and red food colouring to make a deep space colour. Add coloured glitter to form a galaxy of stars.

Press the dough in to the star-shaped plates. Using the star cutters, make some stars from the card. Add some stars to your plate by pressing them into the dough. Punch a hole in the plate and hang with the string.

Talk about how big the galaxy and the world are. God thought of everything and created stars to light up the sky. He created us to be dazzling disciples, spreading God's light to all the world.

9. Dancing disciples

You will need: balloons (dazzling colours, if possible); thin tissue paper; scissors; felt-tip pens; sticky tape

Draw a picture of a disciple on the tissue paper, and carefully colour with felt-tip pens. Cut out your disciple. If the tissue is two-ply, then pull the plys apart. Tape the disciple's feet to the table. Blow up your balloon and knot it. Rub the balloon through your hair or woollen jersey for about 10–20 seconds and see if you can make your disciple stand up and dance!

Talk about what you think helped make the tissue disciples get up and dance. How does God help us to be his disciples?

10. Dazzling disciple dress-ups

You will need: dazzling clothes; paper; crêpe paper; string; fabric scraps; glue; glitter

Make hats, headbands, scarfs or accessories and dress up to look like a dazzling disciple.

Talk about how we can make our lives shine the love of Jesus.

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Dazzling disciples by Jocelyn Czerwonka

Celebration

What did you discover about being a disciple from the Acrostic Disciple challenge? What interesting words, alliterations or sentences did you all come up with? For example, we came up with: Dazzling disciples dutifully dedicated to God. Have you ever thought of yourself as a dazzling disciple?

Do you ever look up into the stars and think about what an amazing God we have to make stars so bright?

What is so amazing about stars? (*Ask some people to give you suggestions.*) They dazzle and twinkle in the dark night; they give light to the dark; they help people to find their way, just like the wise men searching for baby Jesus. A long time ago, long before Jesus was born, God said to Abram: 'Look at the sky and try to count the stars; you will have as many descendants as that' (Genesis 15:5, GNT). Even though Abram and his wife Sarai were old, God promised them as many children, great-grandchildren, great-great-great-great grandchildren as the stars in the sky. And God wants all of those children to be his disciples – people who are followers of God. That means we have some work to do!

Can you dazzle like a star? I'm sure as one of God's children you can – whatever your age! Think about how you can be a dazzling disciple, showing love and care to your family, friends and neighbours. Sometimes, to be a dazzling disciple, it's not about what you say, but what you do, how you behave, how you show kindness and love to others. Can you shine bright like a star so people can see God's love shining from you?

In the Bible, it talks about the new believers meeting together daily, learning, eating, praying and praising God together (Acts 2:42-47) – a bit like we do at Messy Church. Maybe you can think of people who would like to become new believers and invite them to Messy Church next time. Let's take time to pray together for places and people all over the world.

Prayer

You will need: a brightly coloured ball of wool for each group – dazzling colours would be great

Everyone stand in a circle (up to 12–15 people per circle). The first person holds tightly to one end of a ball of wool, calls out their own name and then a person (first name), country,

town, village, school, Messy Church or place they would like included in the prayers. They then throw the ball to another person across the circle and they also call out their name and another person or place. This is repeated around the circle as many times as you like, but remember everyone needs to hold tight to the wool. By the end, everyone should have had a turn and there will be a criss-crossing of wool and prayers around the world.

Discipleship happens when we all work together as a team, like the wool that has come together to form something beautiful. The leader or a volunteer can pray for all the people or places named and ask God to help us all be dazzling disciples, wherever we go.

Song suggestions

'I've got the joy, joy, joy down in my heart' – Heritage Kids
'This little light of mine' – traditional/public domain
'Go tell everyone' – John J. DiModica
'There were twelve disciples' – traditional

Meal suggestion

Corn Chips with mince and/or vegetarian option of black beans in a tomato sauce, dazzled with grated cheese. Add corn kernels for a star effect.

For dessert, serve blackcurrant jelly with yellow jelly stars. (For stars, make a firm white jelly using half the amount of water required and a little coconut milk to whiten. Allow to set. Pour over a firm yellow jelly, also using half the amount of water required. When set, cut into star shapes and place on to the blackcurrant jelly.) Serve with fruit and ice cream.



Session material: July

Holy Habit: Worship



Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay19 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

#discipleship: individual

Messy reflection by Martyn Payne

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in the wholeearth!

You have set your glory in the heavens. You have made sure that children and infants praise you. Their praise is a wall that stops the talk of your enemies.

I think about the heavens. I think about what your fingers have created. I think about the moon and stars that you have set in place. What are human beings that you think about them? What is a son of man that you take care of him? You have made them a little lower than the angels. You placed on them a crown of glory and honour.

You made human beings rule over everything your hands created. You put everything under their control. They rule over all flocks and herds and over the wild animals. They rule over the birds in the sky and over the fish in the ocean. They rule over everything that swims in the oceans.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in the whole earth!

Psalm 8 (NIRV)

The book of Psalms is an amazing collection of poems, prayers and songs of praise. They give us words for all sorts of occasions and moods in the messy rough and tumble of everyday life. Some of your Messy Church congregation may be surprised to discover that, as well as expressing thanks and delight in God, it is also okay to argue with God, express despair and depression, shout angrily about things that are wrong and even have doubts about God's love. All this is in the Psalms – and a lot more. It is an important resource.

Psalm 8 is a great outburst of praise and wonder, inspired by looking up into a night sky that is bright with stars. We too are awed by the majesty of the heavens and prompted to ask the big questions such as, 'Is there a God?', and if there is, 'What is God like?', and then, significantly, 'What part do I play in all this?' The stars, galaxies and solar systems above bear witness to God's grandeur. The power of God is made visible

by glimpsing the immensity of the universe. And the psalmist concludes that human beings are a special part of this glory, each with a unique job to do, ruling it on God's behalf. God is the star-maker and God makes people – you and me – 'star attractions' within that creation.

For many of us, it was in childhood that faith was nurtured as we encountered the wonder of the heavens. Perhaps this is why David includes the verse about the praises of children. It might even be that this is a psalm from David's own early years, composed while he was out in the fields, watching over the sheep beneath a starlit night sky.

#discipleship: team

Messy health check

Go round the team and each say what it is about Jesus that excites you most at this point in your life. Pray about this.

Messy team theme

- How do you encourage one another to worship God?
- Can you identify worship in all the parts of Messy Church?
- How can you help others see God is worthy of our praise?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This psalm encourages us to praise God and see that we are not alone in praising him. We are reminded of the worth and majesty and greatness of God, the God who loves and cares for each one of us. We are reminded that all of creation praises God, that all things are made by God and that God has given a special job to humans – the care of all of his creation. We are encouraged by the might and majesty of God and the result is that we praise him in and through our worship of him.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- How do you like to worship God?
- What is your favourite song to praise God?
- Where is the most unusual place you have worshipped?
- What do you do to show people you think they are fab?

Take-home idea

When it gets dark, look up and see if you can see the stars. Find out about the different stars and see if you can identify any. Have a quiet moment and think about God making the stars in

Everything worships God by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

the sky and then remember that God made you and all of your family. Think of a good praise sentence to say to God.

Question to start and end the session

So... how does creation worship God?

#discipleship: extra

Have a 'Starty' (a Star Party) and get together to stargaze. Read Psalm 8 as part of your evening.

Social action

In the book of Micah, God's people are asked to worship God first of all by 'acting justly'. Challenge each other to do one thing this month to bring justice to your world.

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Activities

1. Majestic name

You will need: air-dry clay; beads; sequins; laminated sheets of A4 coloured card or paper

Roll a piece of clay into a long sausage shape. Use the clay to make the individual letters of the word 'God' and put them on to one of the coloured laminated boards. Push beads and sequins into the clay word to decorate it. Take it home and let it dry.

Talk about God's name and how it is described as majestic. What does majestic mean? Do you think this is a good description of God?

2. Praise flags

You will need: card flag shapes (available from Baker Ross) or card rectangles; drinking straws; sticky tape; felt-tip pens

Draw lots of members of your family and your friends on a flag using the coloured pens. Attach the stick to the card to finish the flag.

Talk about all the earth praising God. How do you praise God? Can you wave the flag and make a noise? Be ready to take your flag to the celebration to praise God with everyone else.

3. Fish and birds suncatcher

You will need: laminating pouches; laminator; scraps of tissue paper; coloured cling film (cellophane); silver or gold foil stars; scissors; hole punch; ribbon; large bird or fish shapes; marker pens

Fill a laminating pouch with scraps of tissue paper, coloured cling film and little silver or gold foil stars. Work with an adult to put the pouch through the laminator. Place the bird or fish template on to the pouch, draw round it with the marker pen and cut out the shape. Add ribbon and hang in the window.

Talk about the different fish and birds God has made – so many colours and shapes and sizes! They are all beautiful and special. We are all different, too. In what ways are we different from birds and fish and from one another? Do you think we are beautiful and special?

Session material: July

4



4. He's got the whole world in his hands

You will need: thick card; large circular picture of the world from where you are; coloured paper; pencils; marker pens; scissors; glue

Stick the picture of the world on to the thick card and cut around the edge to make a circle. Draw round your hands on coloured paper and cut them out. Stick one hand on each side of the bottom of the world you have just made, as if the hands are holding it. Write the words 'He's got the whole world in his hands' across the world or the hands.

Talk about what it might mean that God holds the world in his hands. How do we know that God cares?

5



5. Animal runaround bingo

You will need: a master sheet of twelve animal black-and-white outlines; photocopies of this sheet (one for each child or family); twelve smaller pieces of paper with one of the animals on each (each animal coloured something different); sticky tack; coloured pencils or pens

Preparation: Stick or place the coloured clue cards around the room. Put the pens or pencils on a central table.

Each child or family should have a sheet of uncoloured animals. Go around the room until one of the clue cards is found. Look at it, leave it where it is and return to the central table and colour the animal on your sheet to match. Continue until all of the animals have been found and your sheet is completely coloured.

Talk about all of the animals God made. Which one is your favourite? How many can you name?

6



6. Worship at God's throne

You will need: a high-backed chair; coloured fabric; a crown; large pieces of paper or card with the outlines of words 'WORSHIP', 'GOD' or 'HOLY'; small coloured pebbles

Make a throne using the coloured fabric. Place the words in front of the throne. Take a pebble and hold it. Think about God or pray to him quietly before placing it on one of the words. Add as many stones as you would like to.

Talk about worshipping God before his throne as something special to do.

Everything worships God by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

7. The night sky

You will need: star and moon cookie cutters; plates; slices of bread; assorted sandwich fillings; knives (not sharp)

Make a sandwich using the filling items provided. Using the cookie cutters, cut out shapes from the sandwich and make a night sky. Put your cut sandwiches on your plate for later.

Talk about how the night sky is lit up by the stars and the moon. Have you seen the moon? Have you seen the stars? Do you think we will be able to see them tonight?



7

8. Amazing angels

You will need: chenille wires (pipe cleaners); ribbon

Make a loop in the middle of one of the wires. Join the ends of the wire by twisting them flat and form into a triangle for the body. With the other wire, twist two loops for the wings, leaving a few centimetres at each end. Lay the head and body part on the wings and twist the ends of the wings around each side of the body. Attach the ribbon to hang up the angel.

Talk about angels being very special to God. How/why do you think they are special? People are nearly as special as angels. Do you think that makes people special?



8

9. Worship words

You will need: a Scrabble board and letters

Use the letters to make words used to worship God. Build them up on the board, overlapping them as you do when you play Scrabble.

Talk about the words you have made. Look at the words made by others. Which words do you think you would use to worship God?



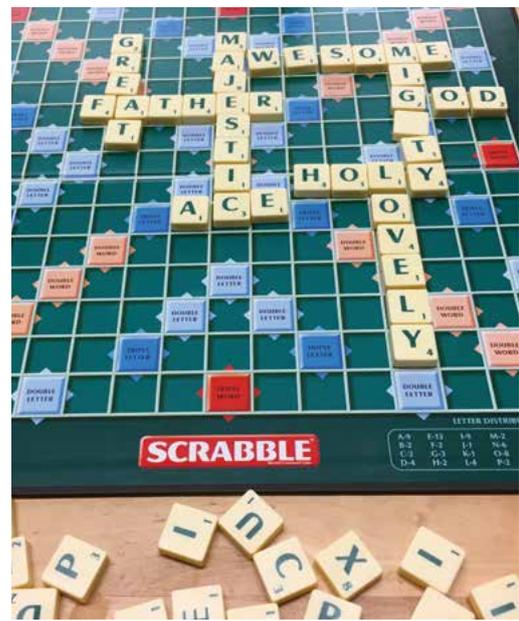
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10. Egg-box animals

You will need: egg cartons with each egg cup cut out; pens; scissors; chenille wires (pipe cleaners); glue; googly eyes; paint; paint brushes; scraps of felt, fabric, etc.

Make a range of animals using egg cups. Paint or colour the cut-up egg box, using the materials on the table to make the animals.

Talk about the animals God made and how we look after them, protect them, value them.



Session material: July

Everything worships God

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

Celebration

I wonder how you tell people that you think they are fab, that they are kind, that you love them? I wonder how you would show this? (*Take some examples and all practise together.*)

A man called David, who lived years and years ago, wanted to tell God that he was fab, that he was kind and that he loved him, so he wrote a song. He actually wrote lots of songs and some of them are in the Bible in a book called Psalms. We have been looking at one of the psalms today, Psalm 8. In this song, David is telling God that he is the greatest. And David says that everything worships God.

Split the group into five small groups. Give each group the following actions:

- Group one: Wave flags or your arms
- Group two: Flick your fingers out like stars, hold your hands in a moon shape or draw a sun in the air
- Group three: Choose an animal and do actions of that animal
- Group four: Choose a bird and do actions of that bird
- Group five: Choose something that swims in the sea and do that action

Count to three and have everyone do their action together, then stop.

Get ready to read the psalm and ask everyone to listen carefully and, at your prompt, do their action. Stop when the next group starts.

All start by saying together, 'Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' (NIRV). As you read verses 1b-2, have the first group wave their flags or their arms. Read verses 3-5 and have the second group do stars, sun and moon shapes. Read verses 6-7 with group three doing their animal actions. Read verse 8 and have groups four and five together do their bird or fish action. Invite everyone to say the last verse together doing their group actions: 'Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' (After you have read this through once, you might want to repeat it as people now know what they are doing!)

So, everything worships God and so do we. Let's get ready to do some more worship as we sing, wave flags, pray and go about our lives every day.

Prayer

(Use the five groups who will do their actions as their action is mentioned.)

Loving Lord God, we worship you. Children and grown-ups worship you (*group one*), the sun and moon and stars worship you (*group two*), animals (*group three*) and birds (*group four*) and fish (*group five*) all worship you and we worship you. We say a huge thank you for loving us and caring for us. We think you are amazing for making the world and everything in it. We think you are so fab and we want to tell you how much we love you, so we say: 'We love you, Lord' (*all wave flags or hands*). Amen

Song suggestions

'He's got the whole world in his hands' – traditional
'Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest' – Carl Tuttle
'We praise God' – Alan Price

Meal suggestion

Assorted food buffet – sandwiches from the activity, crisps or chips, salad or vegetables. For dessert, have creamy rice pudding and fruit e.g. peaches.

Session material: August

Created for community by Lindsey Goodyear

Holy Habit: Fellowship



Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay19 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

#discipleship: individual

Messy reflection by Jocelyn Czerwonka

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being...

The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:4-7, 18-22 (NIV)

God had a good idea: 'I'm going to make something!' But what? It needed to be big, beautiful, fun and free. So it was that God created our beautiful universe and world with its teeming life, colour, wet and dry, light and darkness, and freedom. And God also created people, not just one on his own (Adam) but two (Eve, as well) and then more and more and more – until we came along! More will follow until all is ready for God to complete the grand design of life and join us for a big party.

The story of creation in Genesis is likely very familiar, but don't let that stop us from noticing its special features. First, God chose to create; nothing forced God's hand. Next, even the heavenly bodies – the sun, moon and stars – were made by God. God took time and care about this process. The seven days describe a process of unfolding development. They also include a period of rest, a repeating sequence that still forms the pattern of family and communal life.

The animals named by Adam were potential companions but not quite right as equals. Some animals were tamed to become domestic, while even the wild creatures had their purpose and place. But God formed the woman out of the same flesh as the man. Adam and Eve were of equal origin so could have a relationship of mutuality, which was not possible with the animals. God intends us to live in companionship, but with another voice and opinion comes the possibility of making choices against God's will. We likely know the second part of the creation story: at the advice of the serpent, Adam and Eve were tempted and fell into sin by listening to someone other than God. They chose to redefine good and evil according to their own desires. Making choices, for good or evil, is part of the reality of living in community.

#discipleship: team

Messy health check

If your team was a toolkit, what item would each person be?

Messy team theme

- How has the fellowship you've developed within your Messy team helped your own personal growth?
- How has God specifically had a hand in that growth?
- How do we help support that same growth in our Messy Church members?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

When God created the heavens and the earth, there was an expectation he had from humanity: do not eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. Though he knew what would happen, God watched as Adam and Eve listened to the manipulations of the serpent instead of his own word. Because of this, the original sin, our world was changed from the perfection that was the garden of Eden to a world that knows suffering. Thankfully, there is still a light at the end of our tunnel.

Session material: August

Through the forgiveness of God and the blood Christ shed for us, we can all know eternal salvation. We must work together, here on earth, for a companionship with Christ that we can call fellowship. The importance of building a loving and abiding group foundation that will hold us accountable and help us grow in his word is imperative to a successful walk with God.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- When God created the world, he expected fellowship from his people. What do you think life would have been like for us if Adam and Eve had not given in to the temptation of the serpent?
- What is your favourite part of the fellowship you've found at Messy Church?
- How do you think praying for each other can strengthen fellowship in a church?

Take-home idea

Choose one verse a week to study with your family at home. Each day, set aside 10–15 minutes to discuss individual thoughts on the verse. One of the most beautiful things about studying the Bible is that you get different perspectives from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Work as hard to build fellowship in the home as you do at your church.

Dear heavenly Father, we ask that you continue to show us love and grace through our imperfections. We ask that you help us to find the good in each other so we can live in this world you so lovingly created for us with a feeling of encouragement from those around us. Help us to continue to build our love for you through a Christ-centred community and give us the words to inspire those who have not yet found you to start looking. Amen

Question to start and end the session

So... what does fellowship mean to you?

#discipleship: extra

Do something for the isolated people in your local community: who are they? What would be ideal?

Social action

Collect ideas on a display board of all the ways your community falls short of God's perfect way of living. Talk about what you could do together to change things for the better.

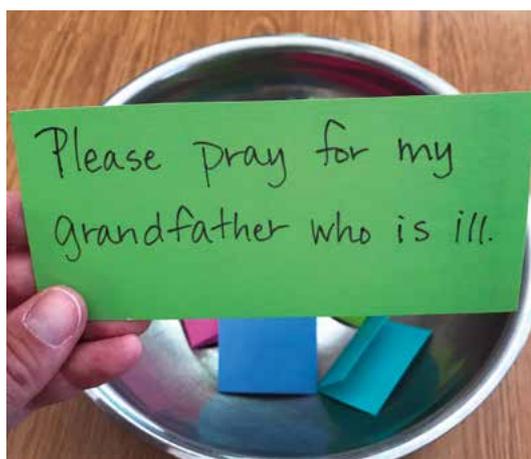
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Created for community by Lindsey Goodyear

Activities

1. Fellowship cloud

You will need: a large roll of paper; coloured ribbon; glue; paper; scissors; markers

Work as a group to cut a large cloud out of a large roll of paper. Attach different-length ribbons to hang from the bottom of it. In the centre of the cloud, write Galatians 3:26: 'So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith' (NIV). Decorate your own name tag to attach to some part of a hanging ribbon to show that we are all children of God.

Talk about how uniquely and perfectly each one of us is made in God's image.

2. Praying fizz

You will need: fizzy vitamin tablets; water; a glass

Give each person a fizzy vitamin tablet and set a glass of water in the middle of the table. Have the activity volunteer explain how excited God gets when we work on developing our fellowship through prayer, gatherings and supporting one another through Christ. Allow the vitamin to represent our fellowship and the glass of water to represent God. Have them drop their tablet into the water and watch the 'excitement' that 'God' (the water) shows when we work together to follow his word.

Talk about a time when you felt excited during worship.

3. Take-home prayer

You will need: paper, pens/pencils, and a bucket

Part of fellowship means praying for others, not just yourself. Write down one or two personal prayer requests, then drop the paper into a bucket and mix it up. Before the end of the night, each person should take a piece of paper from the bucket to bring home and thoughtfully pray for others from Messy Church.

Talk about a situation you prayed for that was answered in God's perfect timing.

4. Faith identity bracelets

You will need: empty paper towel rolls cut into three-inch long tubes; scissors; felt-tip pens; stickers; paint; paint brushes

Take the empty paper towel roll and cut down the long side. This will create a cuff that will fit around your wrist. Write 'child of God' on the outside and decorate the rest with stickers, pens or paint.

Talk about what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ. What are the advantages to such close fellowship?

5. Walking on eggs

You will need: four to eight boxes of a dozen eggs

With all the eggs still inside their boxes, ask people what they think would happen if you were to put your full weight on the eggs (most will say they'd break). Allow one person after another to walk across the top of the egg containers and see that they stay perfectly intact. Explain that the experiment is exactly the same as our walk with God. When we put our faith in him, the seemingly impossible becomes possible.

Talk about a time where the seemingly impossible was made possible by giving your doubts to God.

6. The fellowship fire

You will need: white paper or card; brown paper; yellow and orange tissue paper; glue; scissors; pens

Take a piece of white paper or card. Using yellow and orange tissue paper, create a fire and glue it to the paper/card. Cut out a number of small rectangles from brown paper (the fire logs) and write one word or phrase on each log of what fellowship means to them. Glue the logs on to the paper as well, under the fire.

Talk about how to keep the fire of fellowship alive. How can we be sure not to let our fire for the Lord fizzle out?

7. Walking colours

You will need: six glass jars; water; food colouring; paper towels

A huge part of fellowship is what our walk with God looks like. Using the food colouring, fill the six glass jars with different coloured water and set them close together in a row. Take a paper towel and put one end in the first jar and the other end in the second, then again with the second and third, and so on. Watch as the water 'walks' from one jar to the next and the colours combine.

Talk about how the flow of our lives looks different in fellowship than it does on our own, like the colours flowing together in this activity.

Session material: August

8. Walk with Jesus

You will need: a large roll of paper; flat pans; colourful paint

Create a line from one end of the room to the other using a large roll of paper. Barefooted, take turns stepping into flat pans of coloured paint and walking across the length of the paper. At the end of the meeting, have fun observing all the different colours and sizes of prints. Explain that even though we may all be different, the road we're taking is the same.

Talk about walking together with the Lord. How can we hold each other accountable to stay on the right path?



6

9. Raise your hand

You will need: a large piece of paper; decorative paper; pens; scissors; glue; felt-tip pens

Hang a large rectangular-shaped piece of paper on the wall with the words, 'Raise your hand if you're a child of God' written across the middle. Have members outline, cut out and individually decorate (optional) their own hand prints (up to about mid forearm). Glue the cutouts around the outside of the large paper and enjoy the colourful art they've created!

Talk about how our world might have been different if Adam and Eve had raised their hands as a child of God instead of giving into temptation.

10. Strong foundation Jenga

You will need: several games of Jenga; sticky tape; felt-tip pens

Take a little wooden block and write words or phrases that represent fellowship to you (you can cover one side with a piece of tape and write on that if you don't want the ink on the actual wood pieces). Stack the blocks the same way you would in the game (three one way, three the other). Explain that fellowship means following all aspects of God's word and if we start abandoning bits and pieces here and there, the foundation of our faith will crumble. Play your Jenga game, taking out the blocks piece by piece and see how long before the tower crumbles.

Talk about how having a strong foundation with Christ can strengthen the fellowship you have with others.



7



8



9

Created for community by Lindsey Goodyear

Celebration

In the very first garden, God instructed Adam and Eve, the very first humans, to stay away from the tree that was forbidden. However, after some bad influence from the serpent, the two of them gave in, thus changing the world we live in with sin. In reality, we will all deal with our own versions of the 'serpent' every day. Pressures and temptations to do what we would like, instead of following God's word, are all around us. For example, standing up to peer pressure can be nearly impossible. Though it may be hard, we have to stay strong in our faith and follow what our heavenly Father asks of us. There is a reason they call it 'the road less travelled'! If it were easy, everyone would be walking it perfectly. Keep God's word nearby and do your best to separate yourselves from the 'serpents' of the world.

Divide the congregation into small groups (maybe five or so). Give each group ten water bottles and one rubber ball. Nine of the water bottles should be full and one should be empty. Have the group experiment with different ways of setting up the bottles and hurling the ball toward them. They must figure out a way to knock over all of the full bottles and leave the empty one standing. At the end of the experiment, have the groups explain which formation worked best for them. Ultimately, for the empty water bottle to remain standing, it is best to keep it as far away as possible from the others.

Explain that the full water bottles represent the things in life which God loves us to enjoy. These are things that will 'fill' our lives with goodness but may be harder to knock over, just like staying on the road of righteousness is a difficult task. The empty bottle represents something that would disappoint God. These decisions bring us 'emptiness' in life. The empty water is easier to knock over and, like sometimes in life, this road seems easier to take than the road less travelled. The further we keep away from the things that bring God sadness, the more we will please him.

Prayer

Since a huge part of fellowship is working together and supporting one another, invite a small group of members up to do a multipart prayer, each person thanking God for something relating to Messy Church. Have one member start and, before they finish, let another join in by saying their thanksgiving, and so on and so on. All will say 'Amen' when the last person has finished.

Song suggestions

'Blessed assurance' – Third Day

'We're on this road' – Fischy Music

'I am loved' – Heather Price

'In the sweet by and by' – Ben Hester

'How great thou art' – Lauren Daigle

Meal suggestion

Pizza with every topping (save some with no meat as a vegetarian option) to represent all of us together in fellowship. Sides can include seasonal fruit or salad.

Give each person a dry cupcake and set out a bowl of frosting, sprinkles and other edible decorations to let them decorate their own desserts.

Dear Jane

Advice for Messy Church leaders from Jane Leadbetter

✉ Email jane.leadbetter@brf.org.uk with your Messy questions and for advice.



Phil in Leicester

How do we go about getting food hygiene certificates for our Messy Church team? We are already so busy and give a lot of time in preparation and delivery. How many hours are the courses for?

Hi Phil

There are various companies that offer online courses. If you look on the internet, you will find courses at a reasonable rate which, on average, take about three hours to complete. Some courses you can complete a section at a time. Messy Churches have recommended the following as a starter for you: virtual-college.co.uk/courses/food-hygiene-courses/level-2-food-hygiene-for-catering and thesaferfoodgroup.com.

Level 2 options seem to be the most popular and include food preparation, handling, storage and serving. You can print off your certificate at the end of the course. There is a handy checklist for hygiene requirements at: food.gov.uk/business-guidance/hygiene-requirements-for-your-business.

Joanne in Yorkshire

We would like to attach a Messy Church banner to some railings near our church. Would we need permission? Who from?

Hi Joanne

Please contact your local council for information. Some councils give permission so long as the banner is not permanent; some councils say between 14 to 30 days is okay. It may also depend on whether you are in a conservation area. Examples of Messy Church banners can be found at CPO (Christian Publishing & Outreach), who supply lots of Messy Church merchandise: cpo.org.uk. There are new free digital visuals to use, too.

Sharon in Cheshire

I was recently in my local Christian bookshop looking for resources to give to my Messy Church baptism families. The bookshop could not suggest anything, which disappointed me. Do you have any ideas?

Hi Sharon

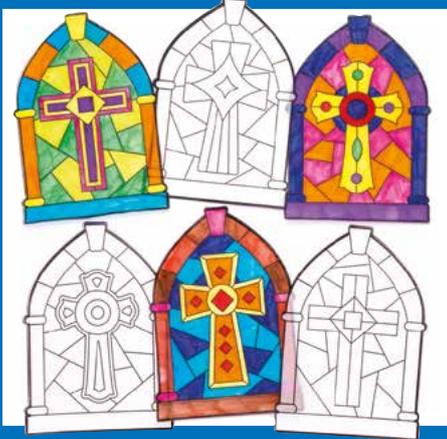
We are finding that the Messy Church mini-books range is proving rather popular as gifts for Messy families. Many Messy Churches have been asking for something like this. We can now offer interactive, user-friendly and jargon-free booklets designed to help families talk about the basics of the Christian faith. *Family Question Time* (just £2.50) is one option, with a discount available on multiple copies. Find these mini-books at brfonline.org.uk.

Andrew in Surrey

My Messy Church planning team comprises myself, my vicar, a lay person and a young leader who can only come intermittently. How can I help them to focus on the vision and discipleship opportunities that Messy Church can give to this parish? I am struggling to communicate the importance of this mission in our community.

Hi Andrew

We applaud your endeavour! Have you seen our Messy Church Discipleship Pilot or the Messy Church Self-Review Toolkit? These tools could help you to choose a Messy Church value each time your planning team meets. They encourage you to explore your Messy Church and revisit your aims and objectives and explore avenues of opportunity. Get out the coffee and cake, and pick which approach you will take. Lots of downloadable documents are on our Messy Church website at messychurch.org.uk/discipleship. Some Messy Church teams are choosing a Messy Extra, or focusing more on prayer. Other avenues could be mentoring a family or engaging in some social action. Get excited about the Messy opportunities! Please feed back to us anything that you try.



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