



Starting Messy Church

The Messy Church Values

Christ-centred

We begin with the most important of all our values: Christ-centred. Jesus is at the heart of everything we do and the way we do it. Right before we welcome anyone through the doors, this involves encountering Jesus as we plan and prepare. All too often, particularly when we're time poor, it's easy to start with a nice craft activity we've found and try and find a Bible passage to fit.

As a team, we start each week by [dwelling in the word](#). We use the Bible passage from the [Get Messy!](#) Session for the month and spend a whole month on the same passage. Your discussion and the activity suggestions in Get Messy! will help you build your session. It's important to note that you don't have to deliver the Messy Church session exactly as it's written. One of the great things about the Messy Church way of being church is that you can adapt it to your particular context: to suit your location and your people. Reuben Addis, a member of our Support Teams, recently wrote on this subject in a Blog [here](#).

Dwelling in the word as part of your planning will also ensure the whole team know the Bible story or theme. The simple question of 'what stood out for you?' will enable the less confident members of your group to contribute. Listening to other's observations will also equip activity leaders with different perspectives and thoughts to share with the guests around their tables. We invited a group of Messy parents who were either exploring or new to faith, to be part of our planning. Our 'Messy Monday' planning meetings became Bible study as we read, reflected and prayed on the passage. The ideas flowed from there and people took away their activity to prepare.

During the activity time don't feel under pressure to 'teach'. This is a space for people to encounter Jesus, not just to hear about him. It's also an opportunity to learn. In the same way we might hear different perspectives on the Bible passage as part of our preparation, someone might come with their own thoughts on the message that we've never considered. And age isn't an indicator of knowledge either: I've had some really profound conversations with young people sharing their thoughts. And if you're busy, it's a good idea to have a sign to help others with instructions and provide some 'I wonder...' prompts for discussion around the table. Did you know that we provide downloadable table signs when you buy Get Messy?

Obviously, the celebration time is a space where you can bring all the activities together and link them back to your Bible story or theme. It can be tempting, particularly if you have your activities, celebration and meal all in one space, to have team members busy tidying away during this time. However, that can be seen as giving permission for some well-intentioned adults to opt out of the celebration to help clear up. There will be members of the team that need to be in the kitchen if

they're involved in the meal preparation but it's important for as many of the team to be involved in the celebration time as possible. They are not putting something on for others or performing at Messy Church. Messy Church is church and therefore they can come expecting to meet Jesus too! Just stick the Mission Impossible music on afterwards and challenge everyone to get involved in getting the room ready to eat together. You'll find people very willing to muck in, particularly when there's the promise of food on the way!

And finally, when you've completed your Messy cupboard Jenga, ask each other where you saw God at work in your Messy Church. You might be surprised by the fruit that simple question yields. A Messy Church leader shared with us the story of how a bit of feedback revealed that five different members of the team had conversations with five different families about baptism. As a result, they followed up and formed a Messy preparation group and have had several baptisms. It might be a quick chat over the washing up or you might like to check out the 'Maturing Teams' approach as part of '[A Voyage of Discovery](#)' into deepening discipleship in Messy Church. One of the participants noted that as a result of their reflective practice **'We have put Jesus into the middle so that rather than craft with a bit of Jesus, it has become more about Jesus with a bit of craft.'**

Review

- Messy Church is described as 'a church, not a craft club, that helps people encounter Jesus as Lord and Saviour'. Does this statement reflect your Messy Church?
- Are you confident that people who attend Messy Church recognise that they are coming to a church service and not a special event or church activity?
- Does the wider church acknowledge Messy Church as a congregation that exists as a core part of its pattern of worship and not simply a pathway to attending Sunday morning worship?
- Do the leaders pray regularly for Messy Church and those who attend?
- Are there opportunities to talk about faith openly through every aspect of Messy Church: its activities, its celebration and its meal?
- Does Messy Church provide people with an opportunity to explore and grow in the Christian faith, regardless of where they may be in their journey of faith?
- Do you cover a wide range of Christian themes within your Messy Church?

Explore

- Provide 'take home' sheets or small 'take home' gifts which enable families to continue to explore the theme of Messy Church at home in the week to come. Remember to keep it all-age accessible, simple and creative.
- Invite leaders/helpers and church members that are happy and confident sharing their testimony to talk at Messy Church.
- Experiment with different styles of worship that are multi-sensory and accessible to all ages within Messy Church.
- Make a prayer post box (or think of another creative way) that promotes the prayer life at Messy Church and encourages people to share their prayer requests confidentially.
- Provide a library of books/resources on life, faith and discipleship for people to borrow.
- Create a Messy Church Homegroup or host a Christianity Explored/Alpha-type course (for all ages or adult only) where themes of faith can be explored. Check out [Messy Basics course](#).
- Hold baptisms within your Messy Church services, when families who attend Messy Church want to have their children baptised.

- Arrange to hold a Messy Church Eucharist at various points during the year and do this with an approach that is appropriate to the context of Messy Church.

All-age

This is our shorthand for being church for everybody: we welcome all ages, abilities, learning preferences, backgrounds, levels of interest in God, and spiritual style.

Messy Church is intergenerational: this means there are two or more generations interacting with one another. Messy Church is a place where the adults, children and young people share in the same activity and conversation, as well as sharing life together. If we are intentional about discipleship within our Messy Churches, our ministry is about creating space for these different generations to encounter Jesus together.

What do you notice about your own Messy Church? How many generations are present? Do they co-exist or interact together? Does the team spend more time talking with children or adults?

We know this is really challenging. Our friend Chris Barnett from Messy Church Australia recently spoke to an online gathering of international leaders about his 5 Ps of intergenerational participation and contribution.

Planning: involve people of all ages on your planning team. If you're struggling to come up with ideas to engage all the different age groups, why not invite someone in that age group to join you? I recently met a Messy Church leader who told me about a 10-year-old who asked to join the planning team. She tried to dissuade him telling him he'd find the meetings boring, but he insisted. She told me that he turned up to the first meeting having read the Bible passage in three different translations to aid his understanding and had also come with a couple of activity suggestions! She said he was better prepared than all the adults. Our children have lots of different roles and responsibilities in school from an early age and if we're serious about making them part of the whole, we need to include them in all parts of church life. This will involve thinking carefully about when you meet to ensure it's at a time where those at work or school can come along. Aike's Messy Church Goes Wild has recently invited a couple of families to join their planning meetings. This time can also double up as a discipleship opportunity.

Preparation: could you ask a family to prepare an activity? Or older folk in your sending church to help prepare craft? Check out this inspiring story from Chris Herbert at St. Mary Magdalene Messy Church in Campsall, Sheffield, and his '[Crafty Cutters](#)'.

Participation: how can we create a space where the different generations can connect with one another? You will notice in the Get Messy volume 2 we have open ended 'I wonder' questions so that the power dynamic in the group is not weighted to adults. The activities can also support non-verbal participation whether that be for very young children or those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Trish Hahn is a member of our [Specialist Support Team](#) and has over 13 years of experience leading SEND Messy Church. You can watch Trish's video on 'How to welcome people with SEND' and download her 'Top Tips' on the subject [here](#).

Presentation: what does your Messy Church look like to those on the outside? We know that Messy Church is particularly successful in reaching families with primary aged children but if we don't show teenagers or single adults in our advertising and social media, they won't know it's for them. Another of our '[How to](#)' videos looks at advertising and includes some advice from a young person

on how to promote your Messy Church to them specifically. During the celebration time, who is leading up front? Do you have a mix of generations e.g. adult with a teenager?

Appraising: invite people of all ages to give you feedback on what they like about Messy Church and how they would like it to develop. Chatting over the meal is a great time to do this or you could have a suggestions box available into which people can contribute ideas for Messy Church. If someone comes up with a great idea, why not invite them to be part of putting it into practice?

Review

- Do you offer a range of activities at Messy Church that people of all ages interact with together?
- Do you provide opportunities for all ages to participate in the celebration?
- Are there adequate opportunities for adults, as well as children, to learn about and explore faith?
- Do children and young people contribute to the planning and running of Messy Church?
- Does everyone sit down together to enjoy the meal?
- Are parents/carers/grandparents aware that Messy Church is for their own spiritual needs as it is for their children/grandchildren?
- Is the worship relevant and engaging for all ages?

Explore

- Involve young people in all aspects of your Messy Church leadership – leading activities, the celebration or supporting the preparation of the meal.
- Invite families to lead prayers at Messy Church.
- Invite people of all ages to give you feedback on what they like about Messy Church and how they would like it to develop.
- Introduce a more difficult activity to your Messy Church, one that would require an adult to support their children in undertaking.
- Offer a variety of multi-sensory activities for people to explore together.
- Find out what people (of all ages) like to eat and drink at Messy Church and build a menu around these suggestions.
- Have a suggestions box available into which people can contribute ideas for Messy Church.
- When planning your Messy Church, consider how the youngest and the oldest member of the congregation will engage with the service.

Creativity

This is probably the value that we're most well known for in that we use hands-on activities to explore Bible stories, to reflect a God of creativity and to give people of all ages a chance to play together. I'm a kinaesthetic learner so the way in which Messy Church engages our brains, bodies and senses has always appealed to me.

It's important to provide a range of different activities, not just crafts. I have a particularly sporty bunch of young people at my Messy Church at the moment, so we always have something active. We've also found a lot of the parents are quite competitive, so a challenge type activity is a great way to get all the ages working together.

We have lots of books available to help you provide a broad range of activities to suit different learning styles,

[Extreme Crafts for Messy Churches: 80 activity ideas for the adventurous](#)
[Messy Church Does Science: 100 sizzling science-based ideas for Messy Churches](#)
[Sports Fun for Messy Churches](#)

Creativity shouldn't be restricted to the activity time. How can we welcome people into the space and signify that this is a different way of being church? Make sure you have a friendly face at the door, or even outside (particularly if you're a Messy Church Goes Wild!), ready to greet people and to help them settle in, especially if they're coming for the first time.

The celebration time is also a great space to get creative. There are lots of different ways to communicate the Bible story or theme. Our [Get Messy!](#) resource includes an outline for the celebration and there a number of different approaches to help you vary the style each time you meet. There are role plays, short talks with props and suggestions for short films or animations you can show. You might also take inspiration from great Messy Church storyteller Martyn Payne and have a go at writing your own material - check out [Messy Parables: 25 retellings for all ages](#) for inspiration. Don't forget to involve people of all ages in the celebration. If you have families or young people involved in your planning this could be organised in advance, or you could seek volunteers on the day.

You might have musicians, you might not, but again there are lots of great online videos or worship CDs to enable you to introduce new songs into your celebration time. Song suggestions are also included in our session material.

Jane Leadbetter's book [Messy Prayer](#) is a treasure trove of ideas to use both in the activity time and as part of the celebration. We've come a long way from the "hands together, eyes closed" of my childhood assemblies and our prayer time over the years has involved indoor fireworks, paper aeroplanes (prayer-oplanes!), a giant inflatable globe and Lego but don't be afraid to introduce times of silence and stillness too.

Our advice for the celebration time is to keep it short, simple and interactive!

And it doesn't end there! We've still got a meal to enjoy together and did you know that our session material also includes suggestions with how you can tie your meal into the theme? [Messy Cooks: A handbook for Messy Church catering teams](#) is a great resource packed with practical and easy to prepare crowd pleasing meals. If you're limited by people or facilities, you might need to add creativity to how you eat together. I know of a Messy Church in the North East where one of the activity stations is always sandwich making so that people can make something to eat together later. At our most recent gathering, we were short on team so we invited people to bring a picnic but one of the activities was to make fruit kebabs (we were doing Creation so this linked to day 3, [Genesis 1:11-13](#)) for dessert.

Review

- Do you provide a range of activities for people who prefer not to do crafts?
 - Are the activities well signposted and explained, and are people encouraged to join in as they approach each activity?
 - Are people encouraged to talk about the activities and the theme as they participate?

- Are the activities creative, engaging and fun?
- Is the story shared creatively?
- Is there an opportunity for volunteers and the congregation to contribute their creative gifts and skills to the planning Messy Church? (e.g. invitation to join the planning team. playing instruments, cooking, tidying up, acting, reading aloud, etc.)

Explore

- Creativity does not simply mean providing craft activities. Think beyond scissors, glue and colouring. Consider how you could incorporate new, interesting and different ways of enabling people to be creative at Messy Church, e.g. use the BRF Messy Church Does Science book to introduce some creative scientific ideas into the elements of Messy Church.
- Plan a one-off 'alternative' Messy Church service with an unusual theme or in unfamiliar surroundings. (e.g. Outdoors Messy Church, in the local woods, Sporty Messy Church at the sports ground or a special party at Halloween)
- Provide activities that are specifically linked to different learning styles.
- Use online videos to introduce new songs or to share the story during the celebration.

Hospitality

Hospitality at Messy Church is about more than simply eating together. Yes, we're looking to mirror the hospitality of Jesus himself in the way he went out to people, welcomed everyone, young and old, provided food for the hungry and enjoyed the food others provided, but there's more to it than that. In the introduction to '[Messy Hospitality](#)', Lucy Moore writes about becoming more convinced 'that hospitality lies quietly at the heart not just of Messy Church but of the whole story of God and his people.'

Messy Churches often see new people coming every month so it's important to have a friendly welcoming team at the door to make sure newcomers feel at home as quickly as possible. Explain a bit about what happens as well as practical help with where the toilets are and where to put coats/bags/pushchairs, etc. You may need several points of 'welcome' as you move between the different parts of Messy Church, i.e. from activity time to celebration and then onto the meal together. Make sure the going out from your Messy Church is also a good experience.

Hospitality at the activity table is all about creating a 'mini household'. As fellow guests in God's church with the families who enjoy Messy Church, the team are both hosts and guests at the same time, just as Jesus was in so many situations. As team, we should be open to gain fresh perspective on a theme or story from someone encountering it for the first time. If someone new arrives at your table, the most important conversation you have will be to get to know them. If it's someone you met before, remembering details like their name (badges help!), asking how that job interview went or that important football match all show that they matter, and you care.

During the celebration, hospitality is about making space for contributions from everyone. Messy Church isn't something to be done to or put on for others. It's about being church together. Involving everyone in all aspects of the session is important. It's about looking beyond the people who always speak up or put their hand up to contribute and finding ways for very young children or shy adults to take part and to be heard. Again in 'Messy Hospitality' Lucy writes that 'a good hospitable celebration doesn't just welcome people in but sends them out rejoicing, revived,

refreshed and bubbling over with good news to share with the world around them. What can we do in our celebrations to help people go out bubbling?’

And so, we arrive at the meal table where there is more time and space to get to know our Messy friends. If you’re looking for conversation starters about the session itself, don’t forget our [Get Messy!](#) session resources include a mealtime card with three questions to discuss. It’s a good idea to make sure you have team members who can sit with any newcomers, particularly if they don’t appear to know anyone else. Make sure team members do eat! Not only does it show care for the team (they won’t have to cook when they get home!) but sharing Jesus might just come more naturally over the meal. It’s also important to take account of any allergies or special dietary requirements so that everyone can enjoy eating together.

The mealtime can also offer an opportunity to get the whole congregation operating like family together. Everyone’s eager to eat so use that to your advantage in getting folk to get tables setup ready, particularly if you’re using the same space as your activities and celebration. At my Messy Church the children are always at the front of the queue which means they have usually finished eating well before the adults. However, they really enjoy serving so they dish out the dessert to the adults before they sit down to eat theirs. Although I have noticed the portions start very small...! Recently I visited another local Messy Church and as we were eating, I noticed a succession of older gentlemen arriving. It is a community space, so I had assumed they were arriving for another group in the evening. However, it turned out they were from the tidy church congregation and their contribution to Messy Church was to come and do the washing up!

If you’re looking for some advice on hospitality at the meal table, do check out our [‘How to feed your Messy Church’](#)

Review

- Are people attending for the first time given information regarding what happens as well as practical details such as the location of the toilets?
- Do you encourage everyone to sit and mix with new people during the meal/refreshments?
- Does the meal/refreshments convey a positive experience of generosity and care?
 - Does the meal/refreshments consider people with special dietary requirements so that everyone can enjoy eating together?

Explore

- If it’s difficult to recruit a team to do a meal/refreshments, consider creative alternatives.
 - Make your own sandwich station, pre-cook and involve families in the speedy preparation and serving of a basic meal. Coordinate a bring and share meal so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the hospitality offered.
- What happens when people arrive – dive straight into activities or welcome all together?
 - Some Messy Churches work best when people arrive, register and are able to dive straight into exploring the activities. Other Messy Churches work best when people arrive, sit in the church, are welcomed all together, the theme introduced and then people are sent off to seek out and participate in the activities. Do you need to consider again which approach would work best for those who attend Messy Church?
- Hold an annual ‘thank you’ event for the team.
- Encourage people to invite others.

Celebration

This value is all about reflecting a God of joy who wants people to have life in all its fullness. We want to share how life changing following Jesus is through worship and experiencing kingdom together as a community.

The Christian Year – Advent, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost – provides a framework of festivals to celebrate, all of which tell the story of God, and these are built into the Messy Church pattern around the year. Many outreach Messy Churches only meet a few times a year on these special occasions.

Celebration in Messy Church is also about marking what's important to us as individuals and showing that God is concerned with these too. These might be happy occasions but might also be sadder ones too, such as death and illness. Many more of us may have had to deal with this in recent years as a result of COVID. A Messy Church leader recently shared the story of how she had enlisted the help of a non-Christian friend when she was really short of team members. Her friend was a teacher so she knew she would be able to prepare and deliver an activity well as well as relate to both children and adults. The friend enjoyed her experience at Messy Church and offered to help more regularly. Some time later, her Mum died, and she was blown away by the support she received from the Messy Church congregation at this most difficult time. She realised she was part of something more: she belonged to this community who loved and cared for her when she needed them the most. She became a Christian and is now bringing a steady stream of teacher friends into Messy Church!

I wonder who you know outside your existing church congregation who you could invite to help out at Messy Church?

We were also contacted by a number of people after the Queen died asking if they should cancel their Messy Church scheduled for that weekend. We like to think that as a committed Christian, the Queen would very much have wanted us to carry on! We advised people to go ahead but perhaps with some subtle changes to acknowledge her death and to be ready to support anyone for whom this might have been a trigger following any personal loss. We as a team were hosting a Messy Church Goes Wild event two days before the funeral and we incorporated an activity inviting people to pray for the Queen and King Charles. The book [Seriously Messy: Making space for families to talk together about death and life](#) is a great resource to help you respond in such situations.

We also refer to the time of gathered worship, usually at the end of the Messy Church session, as the celebration. I remember Lucy telling me that someone had reflected on Messy Church and said, “but where’s the teaching?” to which she replied, “but look at all the learning!” Obviously, the whole session is worship but this time all together is where we hear about what has been experienced during the activity time, connect the activities to the Bible story being told, and share in a time of prayer and reflection. As with all other aspects of Messy Church, this time is for both adults and children to experience together. Unlike in other forms of gathered church, the children do not just perform before the ‘serious bit’ or during the singing. Every aspect of the celebration should encourage conversation and participation from all ages.

Review

- Does the celebration link to the theme and reinforce the learning from the activities?

- Is the celebration planned and well prepared? Is the Bible story told in a fun and engaging way?
- Do adults and children participate together in the celebration?
- Does the wider church connect with the life/achievements/celebrations at Messy Church?

Explore

- Routine can be helpful – introduce a set pattern for worship to your celebration.
- Find creative ways to involve the congregation in the celebration.
- Try alternative ways to enable people to engage in sung worship.
 - Small children probably can't read song lyrics off a projector screen, and if they can, often songs run so fast that it is hard for their reading to keep up. Teach the song words or the chorus lyrics to everyone before you sing the song.
 - Not everyone enjoys singing – try alternative ways of enabling people to engage with sung worship. (e.g. everyone closing eyes and listening to a recorded piece of worship music)
 - Introduce songs that the children will know from their school assemblies or those that the adults will know from when they were at school.

Training

Most of our training is delivered online on Zoom through our programme of '**Messy Masterclasses**'. Once you're established, you might like to give one of these other topics a try,

Messy Church Discipleship is a space to explore the growing body of research on how to make disciples of all ages through your Messy Church. It will give your team a language to talk about discipleship and several tried-and-tested approaches to consider for your own context.

Messy Church Goes Wild will give an overview of the Messy Church Goes Wild movement, why we're doing it, how it relates to the Messy Church values and what the Bible says about caring for creation. We'll also introduce the new 'Messy Adventures' and how your Messy Church can get the most out of these new resources.

Baptism in Messy Church aims to help Messy Church teams and leaders feel confident and equipped to celebrate baptism within Messy Church, in an appropriate way for their context and denomination. This session will include an opportunity to ask questions, share resources and hear stories of Messy Churches that have already celebrated baptism.

Communion in Messy Church aims to help Messy Church teams and leaders feel confident and equipped to celebrate communion within Messy Church, in an appropriate way for their context and denomination. This session will include an opportunity to think through the principles of including sacraments, ask questions, share resources, and hear stories of Messy Churches that have already celebrated communion.

You can find all full list of the dates and times these sessions are available, and the details on how to register to receive the Zoom details, [here](#).

***NEW* 'How to...' Guides** – these are short 'TED talk' style videos on key issues facing Messy Church teams. Written and recorded by subject matter experts from across the Messy Church network, these ten-minute videos are for time-poor Messy Church teams to get some top tips for tackling particular challenges. Watch the videos and download the accompanying 'Top Tips' PDF [here](#).

Onsite training is also available from a member of the BRF Ministries Messy Church team. We will travel to your venue, at a date and time to suit you, to deliver a bespoke training session tailored to your needs. For further details and to make a booking enquiry, click [here](#).

Resources

We have a variety of resources, tools and advice for Messy Church leaders and families.

You can find a full list of Messy Church books available to buy online [here](#).

Get Messy! magazine is an annual publication featuring 12 complete Messy Church sessions. [Get Messy! Volume 2](#), Christian Basics made messy, is a great place to start for newer Messy Churches. It is available in print, PDF download or you can purchase individual sessions. [Get Messy! Volume 3](#), Growing Christian Values, is also out now.

Both volumes have accompanying **discipleship courses** with Messy Church in mind. For groups young, old and anywhere in between, they comprise of twelve sessions helping people to explore further the themes in Get Messy! They work well for baptism preparation, a family devotional time or any intergenerational group. Check out [Messy Basics](#) and [Growing Christian Values](#).

There are also a number of free downloads available to mark special events and occasions [here](#). Our most recent free downloads are sessions on [Harvest](#), written in conjunction with Christian Aid, and [Rubbish](#), in partnership with Tearfund.

You can browse all our resources [here](#) and see a full list of session material by theme and Bible reference [here](#).

[Summary of Autumn festival resources](#)

[Summary of Advent and Christmas resources](#)

You can download the most up to date Messy Church logo [here](#). You can also download festival specific logos, e.g. Messy Church Christmas, and even request your own personalised version featuring your church name!

Keeping in touch

We have dedicated **Support Teams** who can help you with any aspect of your Messy Church – whether starting, running, developing, or simply praying for your Messy Church. Contact them through our website [here](#).

Messy Meetups – These are usually held termly on Zoom and are an opportunity to meet with other Messy Church leaders to share information and ideas related to a particular topic. [Click here](#) to access a summary of resources we put together for our most recent **Autumn Festivals** meetups and book now for our [Advent & Christmas Meet-up](#) on either **Tuesday 4 November, 12.00 to 1.00 pm GMT** or **Thursday 6 November, 7.30 to 8.30 pm GMT**.

Online network for young people

If you have **young people** aged 10-17 coming along to your Messy Church, please invite them to join our online network. These informal, online gatherings provide an opportunity for this age group to enjoy some fun, food (yes, even online!) and friendship. Our next session is on **Wednesday 15 October at 6.00 pm BST**. We need a parent or carer to complete a permissions form available [here](#) to receive the Zoom details.

Add your Messy Church to the **Directory**. It's free and simple to do. You, or a member of the Messy team, will need to create an account with us first here - <https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/user-register/> - and then you register the Messy Church here - <https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/dashboard/add-your-church/>

Sign up to receive the Messy Church **newsletter** and tick the box to receive reminders of any new [Messy Blogs](#) too!

Follow us on social media (search @MessyChurchBRF on Facebook, X and Instagram), [Pinterest](#) and the [Messy Church YouTube channel](#)

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