



How to ...

Start a Messy Church

It is no secret that over the last ten years Messy Church has grown in popularity in the UK (and the world!). As more and more churches are considering starting their own Messy Church or wanting to know a little more about this fresh expression phenomenon, this 'How to' guide will steer churches through the process and get them on the right track to establishing a fresh, relevant and fun Messy Church...

First of all – is Messy Church right for you?

This may seem an odd question but did you know that Messy Church is very specific about its values? – see here <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/our-values>. Have you considered what your aims and objectives might be? Here are some useful questions that are worth asking if you are thinking about starting your own Messy Church...

Some good reasons

- We want to make disciples.
- The people in our area who don't belong to church would like coming to a Messy Church.
- We want to share the love of God in Jesus in a way that's as accessible as possible to families.
- We believe that the best way for people of all ages to come closer to God is by journeying together.
- We want to share Jesus more than we want to share our particular denominational traditions.
- We want to model who Jesus is to those around us.
- We believe God is in Messy Church and we want to follow where he leads.
- We think Jesus is the person to give people in our community life in all its fullness.
- And many more. (In fact, many more good reasons than bad ones, we find, as we hear people getting excited at Messy Church training events, which is reassuring.)

Some possible less good reasons

- It's the latest thing so it must be good.
- The church up the road is running a Messy Church so we need to or we'll get left out.
- The minister says we need one.
- We need younger people in our church to do the jobs we used to do when we were young.
- We want to revamp our Sunday congregation.
- We want to get together for a nice sociable time with knitting and painting.
- It sounds fun.
- We're bored with sermons and want to change.
- I have a stationery fetish that I can indulge shamelessly.

Hopefully you will now have a good indication if Messy Church is the right way forward for you and your church. Remember that Messy Church is a 'church' (and not a craft club) that helps people encounter Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The next stages are not rocket science but will ensure that all the foundations are in place to ensure that all the preparation and launch goes according to plan...

1. Start with a prayer

This basic principle shouldn't be glossed over especially during the foundational period of any ministry. Invite key people to be a part of this process, especially the prayer warriors in your church who can pray for you, recruiting the right people and the work throughout the early stages of Messy Church's life.

2. Gather together the core team

Having the right people in place from the beginning is essential. Invite key people who you think have the right personality attributes to lead the program, interested parents (and your minister) to an informal discussion on Messy Church. Don't finalise anything just yet; instead simply spend time talking and praying through the opportunities, hopes (and expectations) and some of the possible outcomes with those who have a "heart" for the youth in your church/community.

This leadership team is the group that will direct the program and make the major decisions to get the program started.

3. Agreeing on the aims and objectives

Establishing core aims or a vision statement is a great reminder of the origins and why Messy Church began in the first place. They will also become good pointers in the months/years to come that you can be accountable too as the congregation evolves. As Lucy Moore says...

You are being a pioneer, taking on the role of a church leader, whether you're ordained or not: this is serious stuff and not to be undertaken lightly or without due reverence, as the Marriage Service says. But it's also a huge amount of fun and adventure: just save yourselves a lot of grief by deciding right from the start that you are all in the business of making disciples.

The way you go about making disciples may involve horrifying amounts of icing sugar and glitter glue, but it's always there, this priority that will keep you all going through the hard times: we're here to make disciples, not to try to get people coming to our church service or to give them a 'nice time'. It's like an artist imagining the whole picture in her head before she knuckles down and starts painting in the detail of the clouds in the top left-hand corner: she knows in the broadest terms what the big picture will be, even if it changes hugely in the process. Messy Church, like other forms of church, traditional or new, is ultimately about making disciples.

Starting your own Messy Church (BRF 2012)

4 Stick to the format

Messy Church states that its values are based around creativity, hospitality and celebration. Sitting down and having a meal together is an integral part of the Messy Church formula but can often become a contentious issue. Don't be tempted to switch with the format, especially the meal part. Some churches will have better facilities than others and people that are gifted in creating vast amounts of great tasting food. Remember that you are not being asked to create a 3-course gourmet meal. Work and plan within your limits - if this is fish fingers and chips, soup and a roll, or hot dogs, sandwiches, pancakes, cupcakes - it's easy to treat children to a party meal, but the adults should be catered for too! For example, serve a fine wine/nice coffee and include savoury snacks! Parents will then feel special and re-emphasise that Messy Church is for everyone and not just aimed at children.

5. Establish safeguarding guidelines

You will need to adopt some basic safeguarding policies for Messy Church. If you are just starting out, the diocese provides some guidance here <http://www.bristol.anglican.org/parish-resources/safeguarding/policies-and-procedures/> (scroll down to No.11) and Leanne Smith and Dan Jones are available to help advice you through this process – their details are at the end of this guide. Once complete, ensure that your leaders and helpers have read the policy and are familiar with any protocols – this will include vital information on recruitment and child protection.

6. Set a launch date and advertise well

Yes it may sound obvious but setting a realistic start date which gives you (and the church) plenty of time to fit in all the preparation, planning and promoting. When advertising Messy Church (using the Messy Church logo as much as possible) aim to build a sense of excitement within your team, the congregation and the wider community. If you have a good relationship with the local school(s), promote Messy Church through the school newsletter and ask permission to hand out flyers at the school gates. If you have the finances, commission a big banner that can be displayed in a public place (do get permission!).

Remember that you are *selling* Messy Church to a consumer-immersed society. Building awareness, familiarity and a positive reputation takes time and a good starting point for thinking about how you promote Messy Church is the 'Rule of Seven,' formulated by marketing expert Dr. Jeffrey Lant. Lant states that to penetrate the buyer's consciousness and make significant penetration in a given market, you have to contact the prospect a minimum of seven times within a 12-month period. Also remember to register your Messy Church on the official website <http://www.messychurch.org.uk> – you never know who might be searching in the internet and stumble on yours. So, be creative in your advertising and if Dr. Lant is correct, the more the better to get the message across to people that Messy Church is going to be the place to be!

7. Recruit and train volunteers

Most importantly schedule in enough time for you and your 'Messy Team' to meet together, bond as a team and assign roles and responsibilities. Do not be tempted to rush this as experience shows that good, solid teams built on a relationship of trust benefits both the short-term and the longevity of any new initiative.

8. Communicate with the wider Church

Any new project or initiative will need the church's full support to get off the ground and grow. With the minister/leadership team's backing, once the ball is rolling you'll have lots of opportunities to involve the church through reporting and prayer requests in the church bulletins, to making public announcements and encouraging other people to get involved.

9. Evaluate and refocus

So you have made it across the line and Messy Church is up and running. Do expect obstacles and roadblocks from time to time, be realistic, focus on the tasks-at-hand but most importantly, remember what your original values and aims are and they will keep you in focus and purpose driven. After each session/calendar year meet as a team to reflect on Messy Church. Simply answering these simple questions will enable you and your team to evaluate Messy Church and help you, your team and the congregation grow and evolve as time passes:

- How was the session/How has the year been?
- What was good about the session/What have been the highlights?
- Did anything go wrong? Have there been any lowlights?
- What can we do better next time/Do we need to change anything next year?

10. Persevere and rest

Messy Church requires a constant commitment. Investing plenty of time into your team will bless you with a happy, motivated and committed bunch. Hopefully by keeping a track on their enthusiasm and commitment (and yours too!) your team will continue to serve on the Messy Church team because they want to not because they feel they have to...

If you would like further information about Messy Church or practical advice please go to <http://www.messychurch.org.uk> or contact Daniel Jones (Youth & Children's Adviser):

0117 906 0100 | daniel.jones@bristoldiocese.org

Written by: Dan Jones, Diocesan Youth and Children's Advisor