

Messy Meet Up



We had a Messy Meet up for Messy Church leaders and volunteers on Thursday 15th April at Ballyclare Presbyterian. Michelle Purdy kindly hosted us and plied us with tea coffee and biscuits to make sure we all stayed in a good mood.

The programme was as follows:

- 7.30pm Tea/Coffee on arrival
- 7.45pm Introductions
- 7.50pm Leaves and bricks small group activity - sharing ideas for growth/successes and also challenges faced/issues which have arisen
- 8.15pm Whole group feedback
- 8.30pm Discipling Messy church goes
- 8.50pm Sharing resources/ideas about good practise with each other
- 9.15pm Creative Prayers
- 9.30pm Home time

We started off by introducing ourselves and telling each other a bit about our Messy Churches, many of which were fairly new.

We then did an activity called Leaves and Bricks, the ideas being to write on the leaf shapes things that have been encouraging at our Messy Churches or areas of growth and on the 'bricks' write difficult issues or blockages to growth.

We added our leaves to a "vine" branch and made the bricks into a wall. This provided us with a visual representation of what was going on in our Messy Churches.



Here's a list of the encouragements and issues that we identified;

Encouragements

- Church staff team really supportive
- Relationships being built with people who wouldn't normally come to Sunday morning church
- Great food
- Two other Messy Churches in the area – we work in rotation really well
- Volunteers are enthusiastic and willing
- Imaginative crafts
- Increasing numbers
- We have a large preparation team for crafts
- Smiles on lots of faces
- Positive feedback
- Good number of volunteers helping out
- Early days but we have had a great turnout
- People are coming back
- Very supportive and encouraging congregation
- All ages working together
- Seeing kids worshipping
- Kids writing prayers and sharing them in worship
- Families have invited others
- Outreach potential
- Relationship building across generations
- Reaching those on the edge of church
- Growth in the team – stepping out of the boat
- Seeing volunteers having fun and excited about church
- Seeing unchurched kids and families attend
- A welcoming space for families
- Young leaders being involved
- Prayer time when kids and parents engage
- Building good relationships within the Messy Church team
- Messy church team diverse and all age
- An open space for pre-schoolers
- Deep conversations with parents

Issues

- People still have reluctance to come into the church building for the first time
- More volunteers needed
- Rest of church “not getting it”
- Feels hard to connect with people during the celebration
- Behaviour of kids towards the end of the celebration
- People not coming into the celebration –slipping away after the craft time
- Talking intentionally during the crafts can be hard
- The parents don’t always get involved
- Cheeky kids
- Limited space in the church hall
- Hard to cater for unknown numbers
- Some kids come without an adult – how to control them but not curtail them?
- Difficult to measure the impact of Messy Church
- Getting kids to engage with the talk
- Volunteers not committed
- Hard to engage both adults and children
- Lack of young volunteers
- No connection between Messy Church and Church
- How and when to disciple or follow up attenders of Messy Church
- Volunteers not mixing with people enough during the meal
- More people to do the clean up
- How to finance Messy Church

We divided ourselves into groups and discussed the issues together and shared our thoughts on the best to deal with them.



Some thoughts we shared are below:

Children coming with no adult

Most leaders said they did not allow children in without a parent. We felt that an important aspect of Messy Church is that it is all-age and allowing children to come without an adult may lead to Messy Church becoming a children's club. It is difficult to turn away children at the door, so if this is an issue for you, try some of these ideas:

Be friendly and stress that they are very welcome but must have an adult with them. Encourage them to come back either later or next time with an adult.

Consider having a few goodie bags made up if this is likely to happen with a sample craft, tray bake, drink etc. inside along with the date of the next Messy Church.

If you can, visit the home and invite an adult to attend Messy Church with their child.

Financing Messy Church

A few of the Messy Churches did not ask people for a donation and felt they wanted to bless people by giving to them freely. However this can be difficult to sustain as there is a considerable outlay when running Messy Church to cover the cost of craft materials and food. Many of the messy churches represented had a donations basket and found that people were quite willing to contribute to the costs. We thought that people who come regularly to Messy Church should be treated as part of the church rather than as a visitor or invited guest so that they build up a sense of belonging.

With belonging comes responsibility, to help out practically and financially.

It can be difficult to change practice if you feel that a pattern has been set which people expect to continue, but it may be easier to implement change than you imagine it will be. Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and get on with it if you feel it is necessary!

Getting the "rest of church" more informed and involved

One Messy Church leader said in their church they gave out "Messy Church take home bags" to the congregation. The bags contained information about what goes on at Messy Church and included sample crafts. The idea was to highlight Messy Church at the regular service and encourage people to take a bag to pass on to a family they know who might be interested in coming to Messy Church, helping people to realise that their responsibility is to invite others to church.

Making Disciples

We had a discussion on how to disciple people who come along to Messy Church.

References:

Making Disciples in Messy Church – Paul Moore

Messy Church Theology – George Lings

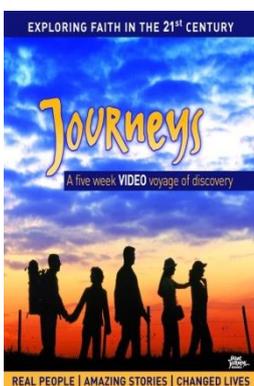
Messy Church seminar- “Messy Discipleship”

Hand in Hand children’s ministry conference 2014

<http://www.handinhandconference.com/resources/messy-church/>

Recommendations for Making Disciples at Messy Church (from “Making Disciples in Messy Church” by Paul Moore)

1. Give families a warm welcome, acceptance, help them to feel a sense of belonging, accept them as they are
2. Give families a taste of belonging to God’s kingdom community.
3. Be patient – research shows it takes between 1-5 years for someone to become a Christian. Messy Churches will need investment in leaders and resources for more than a couple of years if they are to bear fruit.
4. Personal invitations and coming along with someone you know is vital for introducing people into a new environment.
5. More resources for exploring Christian faith that are specifically designed for those who have little or no church background e.g. Journeys course developed in New Zealand <http://willowcreek.org.uk/product/journeys/>, Start <http://www.disciplekit.org/resource/start-discovering-christianity-in-six-small-group-sessions/> “Puzzling Questions” by Paul Griffiths – Monarch 2012 <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Puzzling-Questions-Leaders-Guide-Six-Week/dp/1854249509>



6. Encouraging new comers to take on tasks and responsibilities – reinforces a sense of belonging.
7. People at different stages on the Christian journey need different kinds of input, support and encouragement – at each stage to keep moving forward initial welcome, friendship and positive experience of Christian community, later sharing the good news, helping with questions, later mentoring as disciples
8. Need for all 3 kinds of learning formal non formal and socialisation
9. Disciple making requires mentoring and coaching, learning through experience and being sent out on mission. Team members need confidence to play their part by intentionally modelling the Christian faith, making the most of the craft time to talk informally about the gospel, building genuine relationships and being prepared to take time to mentor and encourage families over an extended period.
10. Developing social programmes at key Celebration times in the year- imaginative, participative all age celebrations.
11. Christ at the centre as our teacher and model.
12. Good relationships with one another are vital – patience, forgiveness, encouragement – focus on how to love and serve one another.
13. Team very important – Messy Church as main commitment- prepared to show their lives as humble imperfect examples of discipleship. If possible team should have Messy Church as their main church.
14. Welcome and bless the lowest and the least- have a childlike relationship with the Lord
15. Training necessary from BRF Messy Church team for team members of Messy Churches.
16. Messy Church is rediscovering a community approach to making disciples – should be culturally appropriate. Some may develop a variety of second meetings and extra courses; others will continue to focus on a once monthly session.
17. Ideas and resources should be shared through the messy church network while emphasizing no one size fits all programme of discipling exists.

18. Leaders should invite one or two people who are not yet committed Christians to join the team – take on certain roles, tasks, responsibilities - this can have a life changing effect.
19. Remember this is God's work- we don't have everything sussed. Go for it and see what God does.

Resources shared

Rev. Robert Ferris who is a Church of Ireland minister in Blarney Co. Cork advised us to check out www.cupcork.ie/messy where he has posted a range of resources that have been used in their Messy Church.

Rev. Paul Lyons recommended the site <http://www.worshiphousekids.com/> which has loads of fantastic songs and videos for kids.

A very simple recipe idea is this version of Chicken Stroganoff. This idea came from Rev. Emma Rutherford.

Ingredients

Cooked diced chicken (Makro or Iceland)
Frozen chopped onion
Frozen sweetcorn
Frozen peas
Chicken or Mushroom soup

Method

Fry the onions in a little oil or butter and add the chicken, soup, peas and sweetcorn. If the mixture is a little thick, thin with milk.
Make sure the mixture is piping hot when serving.
Serve with crusty bread or rice.

Creative Prayer time

We ended the evening with some prayer using some creative ideas from <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk> check these 3 ideas out yourself.
Finger Labyrinth- What is God saying to me
Bubble Wrap prayers - Giving God our worries
Play dough prayers –Make it and then pray it

