

Quick Guide...

Messy Church



Reuben Addis

Every month, throughout Scotland the Messy Church Logo appears on banners and posters outside churches, school halls, and community centres. Lots of things are getting called “Messy Church”, but what really is it and is it right for every community? This Quick Guide describes what Messy Church is, looks at some reasons you might or might not want to do it, and finally touches on some practical considerations.

What is Messy Church?

To quote Claire Dalpra from the Sheffield Centre, “Messy Church is an all-age fresh expression of church that offers counter-cultural transformation of family life through families coming together to be, to make, to eat and to celebrate God”. It’s not a way of attracting more children to your existing Sunday services (though that might happen). It’s a church for people at all stages of their faith journey and of any age. A congregation that is as valuable and worthy of investment as any of your other congregations.

Messy Church is:

- for families who don’t yet belong to church
- a congregation of the church, not a stepping stone to the existing service
- for all ages, not just children
- not a franchise but a model to adapt to different contexts

Messy Church Values

Messy Church was started in 2004 at an Anglican Church near Portsmouth, but quickly spread around the world and across all the major Christian denominations. Messy Churches will have very different characters and emphases, depending both on the people who lead them and the context in which they grow. However it is explicitly Christian, and is resourced and enabled by BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship). To be Messy Church it has to be Christ Centred. It is for families who don’t yet belong to church, so also has to be reaching out. For everyone to feel included it needs to be welcoming, creative and celebratory. However these have become much more than practical considerations ; they have shaped a distinctive Messy Church theology which expects both children and adults to be equally able to encounter and respond to God.

Values:

- Christ-centredness
- Hospitality
- Creativity
- Celebration
- All-age, as equal priority is given to the needs of adults and children



What actually happens at Messy Church?

Messy Church is not a franchise and one Messy Church may look quite different from the next. However the practicalities of trying to genuinely be church together with families who don't have a church background also results in lots of similarities. In order to engage with families there needs to be a lot of different activities for people of different ages and energy levels. These usually include ten Bible story themed crafts, a science experiment or big build, a prayer activity, and some challenges or games. People will be anxious about coming into church so there needs to be a warm welcome; they want to know who we are so there also needs to be time to sit down and eat together. This is not only about hospitality but also about discipleship so our core team and families need to spend time eating together. In order to be church there needs to be an explicit sharing of our faith, and a celebration which all can engage with and respond to. This looks very different in different contexts, and ranges from a quiet Godly Play session, to drama and action prayers. Even with a fairly big team it takes a lot of work, and so most Messy Churches meet monthly (any less and it's hard to build relationships, any more and it's hard to sustain long term).

A typical Messy Church:

- A relaxed welcome time with drinks and snacks
- An activity-based learning time, with Bible-themed crafts, competitions, games, prayers and other activities
- A short celebration, usually with story, song and prayer
- A sit-down meal for everyone



Is it right for us?

As with all fresh expressions of church it is important to pray with others and develop a shared vision. This involves both listening to God and looking at your local context. Are you feeling called to bring families in to worship with you on Sunday, or are you feeling called to set up a fresh expression of church for them?

If a group of you feel called to do this then you need to get the rest of the church on board too. Some churches have had a few practice celebrations so people can see what it would feel like. There is a Messy Church DVD you can watch with your Kirk Session as a way of sharing your excitement, or use the Mission Shaped Intro material to run a course in your church.

Once the decision has been made you need to take time to plan it well. Read some books about Messy Church, visit several other Messy Churches, and seek advice. Your Messy Church Regional Coordinator is the most obvious person to talk with, but also talk to your Presbytery Youth and Children's worker, or Area Mission Development Worker.

Part of this planning will be to look at the practicalities. Do you have a big enough team and a suitable space? How are you going to manage the food, the crafts, or the publicity? What about food safety, or PVG checks? It can sometimes help to work with people drawn from more than one church. Also remember that there is the "Go For It" fund.

How to start:

Visit other Messy Churches.

Read the resources and look at the Messy Church website

Listen to God and your community

Contact your regional coordinator

Talk to your Kirk Session and gather a team.

Useful Resources

Regional Coordinators

We have regional coordinators spread throughout Scotland. They are experienced at running a Messy Church, and will have lots of ideas and advice. They may also run occasional introductory or training sessions as well as gatherings for people already running Messy Church. Do phone or e-mail for advice, or to talk plans through, and let them know if your team has any specific training needs.

www.messychurch.org.uk/regional-coordinators

Local Messy Churches

The best way to find a good local Messy Church is to talk to your local regional coordinator. However if you are going to visit several a good place to look is in the Messy Church Directory. Make sure that you also register your Messy Church so that others can find you too!

www.messychurch.org.uk/messy-churches

Mission Development Workers

Not sure whether Messy Church is right for you? There are regional - mission development workers who can help you find training or advice. They are always keen to know what is happening locally to them. There are also the Mission Shaped Ministry courses and support for emerging churches. www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/church_without_walls

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/emerging_church

Books and Resources

BRF publishes a range of books on Messy Church including themed sessions (with everything you need from crafts to food and story telling ideas). There is also a lot of free information on the Messy Church Website including useful forms and even more ideas. Finally there is a regular Get Messy Magazine and associated facebook page with yet more ideas! www.messychurch.org.uk/resources

www.facebook.com/MessyChurchMag

www.facebook.com/MessyChurchScotland

Forms and Practical advice

The Messy Church website has a lot of helpful resources. Not only are there lots of good ideas and sound advice - but there are also some really handy templates!

www.messychurch.org.uk/resources

www.messychurch.org.uk/about-messy-church

About the author

Reuben Addis works as a social worker in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team. He is based in Edinburgh but heads up the team of regional coordinators in Scotland on a voluntary basis.



The Church of Scotland
Mission and Discipleship Council

121 George Street
Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

T: 0131 225 5722
E: mandd@churchofscotland.org.uk
W: www.churchofscotland.org.uk
www.resourcingmission.org.uk



Scottish Charity Number SC011353