

Contents

Lucy Moore writes.....	3
News and upcoming events	5
Stories from Messy Churches far and wide! ..	6
Messy Nativity sheep flock to the shops	7
Traveller's tales	8
A day in the life of... ..	9
Reflections on the Messy Values	10
Youth column	11
Messy Church Theology	11
Sweaty Church	12
Messy reflection on Acts	13
Messy Readings	14–15
Dear Jane... ..	16

RESOURCES

September: The sower	17–20
October: Things that go bump in the night	21–24
November: The best ever home	25–27
December: Christmas	28–32
Mealtime cards	33
Handout sheets	34
Take-home ideas	35
Session planning sheet	36

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A ministry of 

How to use this magazine

Suggestions for planning

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, and note down any 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, and meet 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 what you're worried about.
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 www.biblegateway.com if you're not certain they have their own Bibles.
7. Include the take-home and Sunday Treat ideas on handouts, texts, a Facebook page or emails to families.
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.

Themes in this edition

September is a harvesty time of year, so we're taking a look at Jesus' parable of [The sower](#)—a good opportunity to keep focused on the Messy Church value of being Christ-centred, and ponder how important it is for us in the affluent developed world to stay in touch with our agricultural roots, and to practise being 'content in all circumstances' as Paul was: among other things, being grateful for what God provides for us to eat. In October, many churches look to provide a Christian alternative to Halloween, so [Things that go bump in the night](#) is our theme for this month. Fear affects old and young alike: how can the Christian faith turn it on its head so that 'love casts out fear'? The November theme is a challenging one and we didn't undertake it lightly. [The best ever home](#) links to All Souls' Day and Remembrance Sunday in the UK and gives us a chance to explore death and eternal life, picking up Jesus' teaching about going ahead of his disciples to get a room ready for them: something Messy Church leaders are all too familiar with, in our attempts to welcome families and make them feel at home. And December is the glorious festival of [Christmas](#). If ever you're tempted to go down the reindeer-and-pixie route, bear in mind that this may be the only time your families hear what really happened. Let's keep the story alive for the next generation.

Photocopying

You're welcome to photocopy the Bible reflections and session outlines for use within your team, but please don't send copies further afield. Copying other parts of the magazine is not permitted.

Reflections on the Messy Church value of being Christ-centred

'Is this church? Is this what I've been missing all these years?' Did this father of two young children enjoy his time with us at Messy Church? Did he make a meaningful contribution to the community we are creating? Did he meet with God and become a disciple? Who knows? He came to see if he liked it and his face said it all as he left us: radiant, happy, fulfilled. He still comes to Messy Church and enjoys everything we offer. Is he looking for something deeper? Or is he exploring in his own time and quietly seeking trust and assurance, space to wonder and discover Jesus as his friend?

We offer a welcome in Jesus' name, crafts and activities that help people to explore Jesus and the Bible, a celebration time to hear the story and talk and sing with God, a meal to share love and stories together, prayer and an invitation

'Is this church? Is this what I've been missing all these years?'

to hopefully return. I don't know if the dad sees this programme as a craft club. We could just focus on crafts and emphasise the need to make something and take it home to admire. We could easily add a meal and refreshments. Would Jesus be there too? He could be.

The Messy Church team could also be engaged in crafts and cooking and exploring Jesus for themselves at the same time as the father of two. Spiritual feeding happens in various guises. Serving the community is exciting and rewarding, and to see the team growing spiritually, too, is the icing on the cake! Yes, they belong to a team and bring their gifts and talents to the ministry, but where are they on their spiritual journey themselves?

Messy Church provides a space to use imagination and creativity to form a new way of doing church. What a joy to have two hours each month to build relationships and bring families together in a welcoming and hospitable way. What a joy to invite people to discover Jesus and community around the craft tables and mealtimes. Let's work with Jesus and develop a new style of worship and church that inspires all ages to live like him. Look out! The Spirit is carefully unfolding what comes next... watch this Messy space!

Jane Leadbetter

Inspired by the CMS resource 'The Christ We Share', I have put 'pictures' of Jesus from the New Testament alongside the various parts of Messy Church.

Welcome

As a swindling tax collector, Zacchaeus was not welcome in his community and probably didn't welcome many to his home. Yet here was Jesus opening closed doors by inviting himself to tea (Luke 19:1-10)! God the Father welcomes us through Jesus with arms open wide. How are we going to respond? How are we going to share this welcoming Jesus with others?

Crafts and activities

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). We associate this and the following verses (1-18) with Christmas, but they speak of the timelessness of Jesus' creativity, a creativity that brings life and light, grace and truth, an understanding of God's glory.

In the first few chapters of Revelation we are given a picture of the celebration

of heaven, full of light, colour, scent, sound, movement and, some time later, a dramatic pause of silence. At the centre of this celebration is 'one like the Son of Man', the 'Lion of Judah', the 'Lamb who was slain'. Jesus told two related parables that link the celebration of heaven with the celebration of earth: parables about a lost sheep and a lost coin in which we are told that, along with the rejoicing on earth of the lost being found, 'there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents' (Luke 15:10). In our celebrations, how can we make Jesus central and link the joy as well as the 'lostness' of our lives with the life of heaven?

A shared meal

On a Galilean hillside Jesus challenged his disciples to feed a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children. They mustered a few loaves and two fish! These Jesus accepted, blessed and broke, then asked his disciples to share them around. My guess is they must have wondered how this would feed so many, but we know the end of the story: twelve baskets of leftovers. Throughout his life Jesus shared meals with people of all ages and all walks of life, sharing his life with theirs. And as a way to remember him he left a meal that tells his story and involves us in it. How do we see Jesus in our Messy hospitality? How do others find him there?

As we plan and do Messy Church, what are the images of Jesus that come to mind for you, through the theme and in each part of Messy Church? How can they become the Christ we share?

Christine Rees is Messy Church Adviser for Derby Diocese.

Session material

September

The sower

by Kim Gabbatiss

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

God speaks to us in different ways, through the words of scripture and often through other people or situations. Do we always hear what God wants to say to us? If we look back over the past year, can we say that our faith in Christ has grown in some way? Are we growing more like Jesus? This session challenges us to listen to God as we receive from him in order to share our faith with others.

Bible references

Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–9

Messy team theme

- How has your faith grown in the past year?
- How do we share our faith with others?
- Are we sowing seeds of love, comfort, joy, wisdom and encouragement?

Activities

1. Matching game

You will need: various types of leaves; pine cones; acorns; sycamore tree seed pods; conkers; pictures of trees; names of trees; various fruits; seeds from the fruits; names of countries

Can you match the leaves and seeds to the trees?

Can you match the seeds to the fruit and the fruit to the country where it is grown?

Prepare a table with the pictures of the trees spread out. Invite people to match the name of the tree with the correct picture. Then ask them if they can match the leaves and seeds to the tree. You could also have a table with various fruits on it and the seeds from the fruits. Invite people to match the seed to the fruit and then the fruit to the country.

Talk about how mighty oaks grow from little acorns. Seeds need just the right conditions to grow and bear fruit.

2. Seed coaster/tile

You will need: air-drying clay; tools to work with the clay; rolling pins; melon seeds; sunflower seeds; table covering and/or boards to work with the clay; paper plate and bag to carry it home

Give each person a piece of clay to work with. Roll, mould and cut the clay into the shape of a coaster or tile. Create a pattern in the coaster or tile by pushing seeds into the clay. Allow to dry.

Talk about how the seeds that fell on the path were quickly eaten by the birds and didn't grow.

3. Harvest banner

You will need: a large piece of fabric to work on; coloured felt; templates for people to draw around (you may want to include a sower and some seeds, sunshine, birds, healthy looking plants, a path, rocks, thorny bushes; or some words of scripture); glue; scissors

This will be an individual/personal design for your church, based on the

The sower

parable of the sower. Provide the items you would like to use to build up the picture/story on your banner. Ask people to cut out the relevant shapes from the felt and stick them onto the banner. What message would you like to get across to people?

Talk about how when Jesus told parables he often didn't tell people the meaning of the parable. He wanted people to discover the meaning for themselves. However, Jesus does explain this parable. I wonder what sort of person you are?

4. God's Word

You will need: pre-cut coloured card (A5 or A6); Bible verses with references; sequins; glue sticks; gel pens; felt-tip pens; stickers; ribbon; scissors; hole punch

Provide a selection of Bible verses giving words of wisdom or encouragement, comfort or love. Make these available for people to copy onto their chosen piece of card. For non-readers/writers, prepare some on paper for them to stick on. Read the verses to the child and ask them to choose one. Decorate the border with gel pens, sequins or stickers. Make holes in the top to thread the ribbon through. Encourage people to give them away to a friend or relative.

Talk about how we share God's Word with others.

5. Make a bird beak

You will need: thin black card; scissors; tape; glue sticks; small white paper circles; tissue paper; feathers; thick card for the headband; a stapler

Cut strips of the thick card long enough to fit around a person's head. For the beak, cut triangles out of black card and fold for a 3D look. Attach to the headband. Add the two small white circles for the nostrils. Decorate the band with tissue paper and feathers.

Talk about how the seeds that fell onto the hard path were eaten by the birds.

6. Sowing seeds

You will need: outdoor space/church grounds (optional); a 10cm x 10cm wooden frame (for planting outdoors) or polystyrene or plastic food trays (indoors); a variety of pebbles or stones; soil and moss; seeds that are suitable to sow at this time of year

If sowing seeds outdoors, find a space in the church grounds. Place the wooden frame down and drop your moss, rocks, stones and soil within the frame. Scatter your seeds, water them and leave to grow. Remove the frame and allow someone else to use it. Perhaps over time you could visit the church grounds to see how your seeds are growing? Alternatively, make some drainage holes in a food tray, then place this tray in a slightly larger tray without holes in, to catch any dripping water. Scatter the smaller tray with the stones and soil, then sow the seeds.

Talk about how the seeds were scattered in different places. Some of the seeds grew and some did not. Which of your seeds do you think will grow best?

7. Prayer corner

You will need: coloured drapes/cloth; table; bowl of tiny seeds; bowl of sunflower seeds; bowl of small pebbles or stones; containers with some good soil

Invite people to take a pinch of tiny seeds and sprinkle them on the pebbles or stones. As they do this, use the time to say sorry to God for the times when God has been speaking to them, but they have not listened. Then invite them to take a sunflower seed and press it into the good soil. As they do this, ask God to help them to listen to him and to act upon his words. You may want to have some appropriate background music playing.

Talk about how God listens to all our prayers.

Mealtime cards

The sower

- Have you grown a sunflower this year? If so, how tall did it grow?
- What is the most interesting plant/tree you have seen?
- How easy do you find it to share your faith with others?
- What is your favourite Bible verse or story and why?
- Have you ever offered to pray with or for someone? What was their reaction?
- Has anyone offered to pray for you? How did you respond?

Things that go bump in the night

- What are you most frightened of?
- Do you think it is kind to scare people or play tricks on them?
- What is the best thing to do if you are frightened?
- Who is the most powerful person in the universe?

The best ever home

- Have you been thinking about someone special today?
- What are your special memories?
- What helps you when you feel sad?
- What do you think the 'best ever home with God' will be like?

Christmas

- Who in the Christmas story do you think had the most difficult time?
- If you could have been part of the real Christmas story, who would you like to have been? Why?
- What does Christmas mean to you?
- How do you celebrate Christmas?

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