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Meet our session and Bible study writers for this issue



Christine Belsham is a Reader at St John's, Welling, Kent, where she has enjoyed working with children for many years, and helped set up and run its Messy Church. Christine is married to Mark, has two children and works as a school librarian.



Laura Webster lives in south-east London with her husband and one daughter, the other being at university a long way away. She is the Children's and Families worker for St John's Church, Welling, which has run Messy Church since 2009. She is convinced that messiness is essential for happiness.



Liz Lander is Vicar of St John's Church in Beckenham, Kent. She was introduced to the idea of Messy Church by a church member, and together with a dedicated team of helpers they began in December 2009. Liz lives with her husband Stephen, sons Samuel and Joseph, and their puppy Benji, who has taken the concept of messiness to new levels.



Bob Morris is the Youth and Children's Minister at Cirencester Baptist Church and has been running Messy Church there for the past four years while serving as Regional Coordinator for Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. He is passionate to see children, young people and their families reached, disciplined and released to serve Jesus, and to develop those who seek to do the same.



Anne Offler is a Children's and Youth Development Worker in the Methodist Church in the Durham area. She works with churches to identify and resource work with children and families, which leads many groups to engage with Messy Church, about which she is passionate. She loves working with people and sharing the fun of all things Messy.



Lucy Moore writes...

Messy extras



One challenge that is made to Messy Church leaders over and over—and over and over—again is ‘What next?’ or ‘How are you making disciples in Messy Church?’ or ‘Are you making disciples or just having fun?’ (as if the two are incompatible). Indeed, a radio interviewer once verbally pinned me against the wall and insisted with all the subtlety of a firing squad that it’s ridiculous to call Messy Church ‘church’ because it’s really just a bit of family fun.

Of course we would want to say this discipleship question is an excellent one to ask, and one that should be asked of every church and congregation, including traditional ones: if mere attendance is not enough, how are we *all* making and growing disciples?

Very briefly reiterating what Paul Moore explores in his book, *Making Disciples in Messy Church*, and what many of us are finding across the network:

1. It takes TIME, as these folk may be just starting out on a Christian exploration.
2. Learning (although that isn’t the sole aim of discipleship) happens in MANY WAYS, not just formally, and may well be happening more effectively with a postmodern congregation in Messy Church than in traditional church.
3. The aim of Messy Church is emphatically not automatically to incorporate those who ‘make progress’ into a traditional congregation. That may be the best place for them, and it’s encouraging when it is. But it may also be the case that we have to REINVENT a place to grow more like Christ, serve each other and our communities, and both nurture and be nurtured.

And that’s what I want to explore in this article: what are Messy Churches doing as ‘extras’ to Messy Church, and why are they doing them or indeed choosing *not* to do anything extra? Alas, due to space constraints I can’t write as much as I want, but check out the ongoing stories about this on the Messy Mag Facebook page.

We were offered on paper a beautifully worked-out programme of add-ons to a monthly Messy Church and it looked very exciting: a Messy youth group one week, a Messy house group the next, a Messy café-style church the next, and other lovely ideas. No doubt any congregation with this level of input would be on the fast track to canonisation. Why did we all feel uneasy about it? The problem is twofold. Firstly, *families are busy*. This means that while families might prioritise a monthly ‘festival’ gathering like

God wants to meet us in the messiness and limitations of our everyday lives

a Messy Church, making a weekly or fortnightly commitment to something smaller is a very big ask to a community whose available time is limited. We need to keep on remembering how different ‘today’ is from those days when much of the population (many married women, at least) didn’t go out to work and had all that energy and time to invest in their local church, never mind being bored rigid at home and in desperate need of adult company and a purpose in life. The second problem is *team members are busy*. Any team faced with the prospect of running not only a Messy Church but a series of weekly gatherings that all need input and

preparation and follow-up is likely to run whimpering for the hills. Statistics show that most Messy Church leaders are volunteers, working already in full-time jobs as well as bringing up families of their own. We don’t have unlimited time to pour into extra events, however worthy they may be.

I’m a great believer in the notion that God wants to meet us in the messiness and limitations of our everyday lives. It’s what ‘Immanuel’ and incarnation are all about. So a mum with small children isn’t expected to put her spiritual life on hold until she can have a perfect meditative quiet time once the children have left home in 35 years’ time; God wants to be alongside her in the nappies, food fights and toddler groups. For Messy Church leaders it means by extension that God *isn’t* in the business of making us feel guilty that we aren’t doing more for him. It also means that he wants to work with us in that messy busyness and limited space and will provide fantastic ways for us to do that, where the limitations create the structure of the new idea. That’s why Martyn Payne sometimes talks about the *multiplication* of encounters with Christ within Messy Church rather than *addition* of extra events, *subtraction* of segregated age groups or *division* of the body of Christ into silos of learning. Investing everything we have in that once-a-month Messy Church and expecting Christ to work in it is a theologically robust approach. In other words, if, after prayerful consideration, you feel your once-a-month Messy Church is enough for the time being, it may well be that you are absolutely right!

Continued on page 5



Session material

January

**The Pharisee and
the tax collector**

*by Christine Belsham
and Laura Webster*

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

In this session, Jesus explains that we should always pray for the right reasons. He warns us against showing off or thinking that we are better than other people. He also brings hope that no one is beyond the reach of God's love and forgiveness.

Bible reference

Luke 18:9–14

Messy team theme

- Thank God that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sins.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will help and guide us as we pray (Romans 8).
- Are we sometimes guilty of thinking that we are better than other people?

Activities

1. Disappearing paper

You will need: tissue paper; pens; bowls; water; lemon juice; bicarbonate of soda; baking powder; soap; pegs

Ask people to write some of the things they do wrong on the tissue paper. Using bowls of water and household basics, experiment to discover how long it takes to dissolve the paper. Use pegs to grip the paper rather than fingers.

Talk about how God's forgiveness acts like water to wash away all our sin when we say sorry.

2. Dressing up

You will need: dressing-up clothes in a range of sizes; mirror; camera (optional)

Encourage people to put the clothes on and see what they look like in the mirror. If you have parental permission, take a photograph of each person and email it to them after the session. (Make sure to follow your church's policy on digital photo storage if there is one.)

Talk about how boastful the Pharisee was. Do we sometimes show off?

3. Prayer weaving

You will need: pens; strips of coloured paper; sticky tape or glue sticks

Ask people to write a prayer on a long strip of coloured paper. Weave different prayers together. Fasten the ends down using the glue or tape.

Talk about how beautiful the prayers all look and how happy God is when we talk to him.

4. Prayer bracelets

You will need: embroidery thread or wool; scissors

Cut three pieces of thread the same length as the person's arm. Ask the

The Pharisee and the tax collector

person, with help if needed, to carefully twist the threads together, twisting the ends in opposite directions. When twisted tightly, knot both ends together. Attach to the wrist by passing the knotted end through the loop formed at the other end.

Talk about how the Jewish prayer shawl has tassels to remind the wearer to talk to God. Ask people to think about this bracelet in the same way.

5. Low obstacle course

You will need: parachute; scramble net; garden cane

Ask people to form two teams. In relay, have them crawl under the parachute and scramble net and limbo under the cane (while two people hold it), getting as low as possible.

Talk about how the tax collector humbled himself before God. Are there times when we find it hard to be humble?

6. Messy prayers

You will need: clip-art pictures of people doing things wrong; bowls of baked beans, jelly or corn flour; water and food colouring

Ask people to choose a picture they relate to. Pray, telling God how sorry we are for the things we have done that have disappointed him. After saying the prayer, encourage people to push the pictures into the 'messy stuff'.

Talk about how, when we say sorry, God takes away the bad things we do.

7. Patchwork prayer shawl

You will need: plain cotton fabric cut into 15 cm squares; pens (fabric pens if the shawl is being kept); needle and thread

Each person writes their name or draws their face (or both) on to a fabric square. If you wish to keep this project, iron the squares following the instructions on the fabric pens. Sew the squares together at the corners.

Talk about how we are all God's children and part of his family.

8. Chocolate fruit

You will need: milk chocolate broken up into squares; large microwavable bowl; cocktail sticks; fruit (e.g. strawberries, grapes and banana slices); paper plates (NB check food packaging to ensure no traces of nuts)

Melt the chocolate either in a microwave or over a pan of hot water. Using cocktail sticks, dip the fruit into the chocolate. Each person has a paper plate and takes at least one piece of fruit. They then have to give at least one away.

Talk about how the Pharisee gave away a tenth of all he had. Do we give things away for God? Should we give more? Don't think just in terms of money: time can be even more important.

9. Prayer boxes

You will need: small boxes (use old jewellery cases or cover small cardboard boxes with paper); PVA glue; spreaders; stickers and sequins; copies of a preprinted Bible verse: 'Be joyful always, pray at all times' (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17, GNT)

Decorate the box and the Bible verse. Fold the Bible verse and place it in the box.

Talk about how phylacteries are used. Just as prayer shawls remind Jewish people to pray, phylacteries remind them about God's word.

10. God's world

You will need: large outline drawing of the world attached to a pinboard; pens; small pieces of paper; drawing pins; string

Draw a picture connected to the country you would like to pray for. Put a pin in the country, pin the picture to the edge of the world outline and join the two together

Temptation!



Celebration

You will need: large piece of paper with the words 'Jesus, we want to be strong like you and live to please God'; basic ink pads (available from stationers); wet wipes for easy cleaning

Our world is a wonderful place! When God made it he was completely satisfied, but the choices people have made ever since mean it is no longer as nice to live in. Have any of you ever made wrong choices that led to something bad happening, either to yourself or to other people?

When Jesus was preparing to serve God, part of his training was to spend time alone with God in the desert, without food or friends. It was to be just Jesus and God. However, at the end of this time, the devil appeared to Jesus and tried to spoil his relationship with God, but Jesus was strong enough not to let himself or God down! Here's the story of how he did it.

During Jesus' 40 days and nights in the desert the devil felt sure he could tempt him to do things that would upset God. Firstly he came to Jesus when he was really hungry (*at this point everyone could rub their stomachs and make loud rumbling noises*) and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' How do you think Jesus must have felt?

But instead of doing this Jesus spoke out words from scripture to tell the devil to go away. 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."' Jesus must have been really strong inside to refuse that bread when he was so hungry!

Next the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem. As they stood on the highest point of the temple he challenged Jesus to throw himself down, if he was the Son of God, as God's angels would stop him from hurting himself. (*At this point everyone could stand up and wobble forwards as they pretend to look down from a high tower.*)

Jesus again refused because he wanted to please God. He said, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Finally, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (*at this point everyone could place their hand just above their eyes as if looking out over an amazing view*), promising that he could have them all if he would bow down to him.

Jesus came back at him again: 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'

The story in the Bible then tells us that the devil left and angels came to look after Jesus.

So what can this story teach us today? Well, we can remember that Jesus said NO to temptation. He was weak, tired and hungry and could have given in, but he didn't. We can only really stay out of trouble if we stick close to God like Jesus did. What do you think sticking close to God looks like? (*Ask for suggestions.*)

When we do all of these things we will be more like Jesus and able to say NO to damaging choices and YES to God! How can we help each other to do the right thing, even when it seems that the wrong thing would be easier?

To help us to encourage each other let's all put a fingerprint on to this large piece of paper, using the ink pads. We can put this up each time we come to Messy Church as a sign that we are trying to follow Jesus more closely.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for helping Jesus to overcome the temptations that were put in his way. Please help us to be strong like Jesus was, and to remember Bible verses like Jesus did and put them into practice as we stand up for you. Amen

Song suggestions

'Blessed be the name of the Lord'—Clinton Utterbach (Utterbach Music Inc./PolyGram International Publishing)

'I may live in a great big city'—Ian Smale (Thankyou Music)

'Be bold, be strong'—Morris Chapman (Word Music LLC)

Meal suggestion

Bread rolls with hot and substantial fillings like mince, chicken pieces in sauce or baked beans, or breads from around the world, such as naan, pitta, tortillas, rye, 'share and tear' and ciabatta... perhaps with toppings that also represent different parts of the world; lots of tempting sweets and cakes

Handout sheets

The Pharisee and the tax collector

We are thinking about how God loves hearing our prayers, no matter what we have done. Jesus teaches us that prayer is a quiet conversation between us and God.

What are we doing today?

1. Disappearing paper—God takes away our sin.
2. Dressing up—Showing off or being modest?
3. Prayer weaving—Combining our prayers in a beautiful way.
4. Prayer bracelets—Reminding us to talk to God.
5. Low obstacle course—Being humble is not easy.
6. Messy prayers—Saying sorry for messing up.
7. Patchwork prayer shawl—We are all God’s children.
8. Chocolate fruit—Sharing is always good.
9. Prayer boxes—Let’s remember God’s word.
10. God’s world—God made the world and he loves us, wherever we live.

Temptation!

Today we are looking at the story of how Jesus was tempted in the desert, and thinking how we can follow his example.

What are we doing today?

1. Tempting plateful—Avoiding tempting foods helps us stay healthy.
2. Bread rolls—‘People shall not live on bread alone.’

3. Stone noughts and crosses—Helping us think about right and wrong.
4. Skyscraper—How should we respond to a dare to do something dangerous?
5. Giant Jenga—How many questions will be answered before the tower collapses?
6. Sweet temptation—How long can we last out?
7. Globes—The world belongs to God, not the devil.
8. Hanging mobiles—Remembering the story of Jesus’ temptations.
9. Twister®—Do you need someone to rescue you?
10. Worship cubes—There are many different ways to worship God.

Healing Bartimaeus

Today we are looking at Bartimaeus, who kept calling out to Jesus, and how Jesus healed him so he could see. We are thinking about people who are ill and how we can help them feel a little better.

What are we doing today?

1. Putting the bits together—Working together to find today’s theme.
2. Blindfold obstacle course—We need guidance when we can’t see the way forward.
3. Changing faces—Bartimaeus met Jesus and was changed.
4. Fingertip pictures—Seeing with our fingertips.
5. Bandage cakes—Helping us heal.
6. Get-well cards—Let’s cheer up someone who is unwell.
7. Need an ambulance?—Remembering people who help when we are ill.
8. Knee blanket—Together we show we care.
9. Plaster prayers—Holding people in prayer.

10. Listen carefully—Hearing becomes more important when we can’t see.

Loving Easter

We are celebrating Easter today, not with bunnies, chicks or eggs but with rocks, crosses, hearts and angels. The Easter story is about the BIG, BIG love God has for every single person, and what he had to do for us to know it.

What are we doing today?

1. Easter rock cakes—The mystery of the rolling rock.
2. Messy crosses—Jesus died on the cross to sort out our mess.
3. Bead coasters—Crosses and hearts are powerful symbols for Easter.
4. Junk angels—Angels appeared in the empty tomb.
5. Wooden cross—God showed his love through Jesus’ death on the cross.
6. Woven placemat—We can celebrate Easter with a special meal.
7. Bead bracelets—Telling the Easter story with beads.
8. The colour of love—Knowing God loves us helps us every day.
9. Easter cards—Invite a friend to the next Messy Church.
10. Matchstick cross—Turning something ordinary into something beautiful.

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