



May-August 2021 £4.75

get MESSY!

Meet our new
Messy Church
Coordinator

Sustainable
Messy Church

A new season
of support

Messy
questions

Includes
Messy Church
at home
ideas

Sessions in this issue

**Blinded into
seeing**

Acts 9:3-18

**Don't bury your
talents**

Matthew 25:14-30

**The rich young
ruler**

Mark 10:17-27

Two by two

Genesis 6:5-8



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Meet our session writers for this issue



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Sharon Sampson loves showing all ages that being a Christian can be a fun adventure! She runs church camp-outs, Easter experiences and interactive prayer stations, hides painted rocks around the village and in the last couple of years has set up a Messy Church.



Marty Drake

Leyla Wagner and Marty Drake are from Huntington Beach, California. Marty serves as the director of children, youth and family ministries at Community United Methodist Church, Huntington Beach. They have both been on Messy Church teams since 2013 and are founding members of the Messy Church USA Board, for which Leyla is secretary and Marty is board president. They are both Regional Coordinators and Leyla is also a Messy Church trainer.



Leyla Wagner

Themes in this edition

Some more cracking stories in this magazine! I think we were on a roll when we chose the themes for this year. In **May**, while we're enjoying a Pentecost celebration, we can also enjoy exploring the dramatic story of Saul/Paul on the Damascus Road. As Paul is one of the key characters in the New Testament, it's good to find out how things all kicked off for him on his journey with Jesus.

In **June**, we plunge into Jesus' parable of the talents. Some churches might be thinking about Generous June, so this would tie in nicely with the idea of using our gifts (of all sorts) wisely.

In **July** we look at the bittersweet story of the rich young man who really wanted to go deeper with Jesus but found there was something that stopped him. Perhaps this is a chance to think about what's woven so closely into the fabric of our own lives that it creates a barrier between what we are and what we're called to be.

And in **August**, it's all aboard Noah's ark. This is a story of humanity facing calamity, often masked by the jollity of animals and rainbows, so a very real one for people who have survived a catastrophic event and known the wooden symbol/reality that carried us through. 'Nothing in my hands I bring / Simply to thy cross I cling,' as the hymn says.

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What is Messy Church?

Messy Church is a form of church for all ages together that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. Church, but not as you know it!

What are its values?

Christ-centred
All Age
Celebration
Creativity
Hospitality

What's involved?

A Messy Church usually meets once a month and includes four sections:

- **Welcome:** a warm welcome.
- **Activities:** An hour of fun interactive activities exploring the biblical theme.
- **Celebration:** a short gathered time with story, song and prayer.
- **Meal:** A sit-down meal for everyone.



Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessymay21 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet.



If you are using these sessions for a Messy Church at home, look out for this symbol! These are activities that can easily be adapted to the home.

In our next issue

SEPTEMBER Trusting is believing
OCTOBER Alone and scared
NOVEMBER Sew miraculous!
DECEMBER The birth of Jesus



Lucy Moore writes...

Sowing in tears



I've cried a lot over the last year, as I expect many of us have. I'd like to claim that it's been because of the national and global crisis that's traumatised us all at such a profound level – and indeed, some of the tears were for that reason. It's been miserable for old and young and in-betweeners. Many of us knew the loving and energetic Julie Quantrill in Aberdeenshire, who threw herself with so much commitment and generosity into her Messy Church ministry as well as many other ways of helping people know Jesus. We were devastated to hear of her sudden illness in 2020 and miss her so much. With so many attacks from so many directions, I wondered whether this was the moment when Messy Church would go under and never resurface. 'Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll – are they not in your record?' groans the psalmist in Psalm 56:8 (NIV).

But as the months pass and the devastation of 2020 and early 2021 has given way to a new year and new opportunities, we can see the rhythm of the seasons being worked out, like the faith expressed in Psalm 126:5–6: 'Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.' It's particularly striking as an image as, this year, we're thinking so much about ways Messy Churches can be in touch with the things of the earth. Planting seeds, acorns and bulbs is very much at the forefront of our minds. We've all enjoyed planting into pots with Messy families – a good muddy, messy activity, always surrounded with laughter, smiles of achievement and the sense of creating something real to look forward to

**'Those who
sow with tears
will reap with
songs of joy.'
Psalm 126:5**

as the plant grows. The thought of sowing those sunflower seeds with tears pouring down our faces, or of wretchedly sprinkling cress seeds on to paper towels in despair, just feels wrong. Sowing should be a

time of hope for what is to come.

The Messy Church sowing during 2020 – as we reimagined Messy Church for the new situation – was often done with tears in

our eyes. But perhaps now we're seeing hope rising again. God's faithfulness has held us through it all so far. **YOUR faithfulness** to the families in your Messy Church and **YOUR determination** to keep on sowing in the expectation of a harvest, even when it's had to be done in metaphorical sleet, with a broken tractor and, as it were, gremlins rising from the soil to attack your ankles – **YOUR commitment** has been part of the reason Messy Church is making it

through. You've stayed connected and you've encouraged those around you. You've shared ideas, resources and skills. You've been vulnerable and said what isn't working as well as what is. You've believed enough in the values to want to reimagine them, rather than take the easy option and abandon them. Some have even started new Messy Churches!

We're still enjoying the connectivity of Facebook Lives on a Wednesday, thanks to the generosity of so many friends. Some of these too have helped us take steps to come closer to the created world – remember Rachel Summers and Wild Worship? Or Benjamin Carter and God's tent? Or Sandy Brodine out in the wilderness of Australia?

The pattern of the seasons is one of death to life, just as the rhythm of our life in Jesus reflects his death and resurrection life. As the lover says in the ancient poem:

*See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone,
Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing
has come,
the cooing of doves is heard in our land.
The fig-tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines
spread their fragrance.*

Song of Solomon 2:11–13 (NIV)

When we're watching for God in whichever season of the natural world we're in around the world, let's look for those signs of life and hope.



Session material: May 2021



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Bible story

Acts 9:3–18 (NIV, abridged)

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked.

‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’

‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.

The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight’...

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised.

Pointers

This month we are focusing on what is surely the most dramatic conversion story in the Bible. No one expected Saul the Pharisee to become a follower of the way of Jesus – not even the very first Christians in Jerusalem! Here was an orthodox, up-and-coming Jewish leader – one who, no doubt, had his sights set on high office – who had his world turned upside down on his way to Damascus. Everything that he thought

he understood and believed was suddenly challenged and changed by his encounter with Jesus.

It makes me wonder if anyone had been praying for Saul before that life-changing day. Maybe someone in his family? Perhaps his wise teacher Gamaliel? Or was it Stephen, who perhaps caught his eye during his trial before the Sanhedrin? We know Saul was there when Stephen was stoned to death, and he would have heard Stephen say that he could see Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

This month, as part of the ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ initiative between Ascension Day and Pentecost, we are encouraged to pray for five other people, that their eyes might be opened to see Jesus. This story should spur us on to believe that those we pray for – even the most unlikely among them, like Saul – can be ‘blinded into seeing’ Jesus for themselves and become his disciples.

#discipleship: team

Messy health check

In what ways could your Messy Church be to your families like Ananias was to Saul? (Brave? Hospitable? Patient? Trusting, etc.)

Messy team theme

- Would anyone in the team like to share their story of how they came to faith in Jesus?
- Does anyone know who might have been praying for them before they became Christians?
- Who at your Messy Church are you praying for today?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Everyone’s journey to faith in Jesus is different – only a few have as dramatic a conversion as Saul. Sometimes there may be a moment or a period of months in a person’s life when everything begins to make sense; for others, the light of Jesus comes much more gradually, like a slow dawn at the break of day. However it was for you, this story encourages us to believe that God still breaks into people’s lives as a result of our prayers and our faithful witness. God is already at work in the lives of Messy Church families, and we are being asked to join in with what the Spirit is doing to bring them home to God in Christ. The bright light of Jesus, which shone into Saul’s life, can shine into the lives of those we meet each month. If someone as hostile as Saul can become a disciple, then any adult or child who walks through our doors this session can have their eyes opened to see themselves, others and God in a new way.

Session material: June 2021

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session helps us to recognise the gifts God has given us and also recognise the gifts God has given others. It teaches us to honour God by taking risks and using the gifts we've been given instead of burying them away like the last servant. This session teaches us to trust that God has given each of us exactly what we need to carry out God's work. Lastly, this session gives us an example of what it looks like to be a good and faithful servant by loving God and others, sharing our resources and using our talents for good and for the kingdom of God.

#discipleship: families

Mealttime card

- What is your God-given superpower and how do you use it to bring joy to others?
- How do you know what ability or abilities God has given you to use?
- What gifts has someone shared with you to make your life better?

Take-home idea

This month at home, encourage, compliment and celebrate family members when you notice something special about them. Remind them that God has given them that special ability.

God, we give thanks for the special gifts you have given each one of us. Help us to always encourage others when we see them using their gifts, and help us to be brave and use our gifts instead of burying them away. Amen

Question to start and end the session

So... what special talents has God given you?

#discipleship: extra

Get together with another family and retell the parable of the talents. Talk about and celebrate each other's gifts.

Social action

Celebrate the gifts of first responders in your community by writing cards to thank them for sharing their gifts that keep you and your neighbours safe and healthy.

Activities



1. Talented people

You will need: large poster paper; marker pens

Create a group acrostic poster of people's individual talents. Write the word 'talents' vertically, leaving space between each letter. Hang the poster on the wall. Each person adds their talents to the poster.

Talk about how we all have different abilities. It is more important to use them for God than to compare them with others. How can you use your special gift for others?

2. Money bag and coins

You will need: felt or muslin; a hole punch; wool; large needles or masking tape; clay; toothpicks; scissors

Cut circles out of the material. Punch holes around the edge of the material. Weave the wool through the holes, using needles or masking tape wrapped on the end of the wool. Give a small amount of clay to make three coins to go with the money bag. Use toothpicks to decorate the coins. The clay will dry hard over time.





4. Climate research

You will need: access to a computer and the internet; word-processing software and spreadsheet software; Canada's carbon footprint PDF (download online)



You might like to ask people to do this activity before your session. Using the statistics in the PDF as an example, research the same data for your country. Should you have the same categories or different ones? Using the internet, find out from your government sources how many gigatons of CO₂ your country is creating for each category and create three pages like those in the downloadable PDF.

For an extension of this activity, people could put together a large poster on a display board showing climate issues in your country.

Talk about how your country is working to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) production. How are you, as individuals, helping to reduce it as well? Was the data you needed easily available? How will not acting on our carbon production affect the rich, the poor, the biosphere?

5. Climate burdens

You will need: a piece of plywood approximately 60 by 90 cm; six plastic plant pots; a small plant pot filled with small polished rocks or plastic coins; sticky tape; the statistics found in activity 4; pictures of carbon emissions

Create a voting booth by placing the six plant pots on the plywood so they can all be seen. It's good to tape them to the

5



7



plywood. Stick pictures to each plant pot to represent the different areas that contribute to your carbon footprint. People can look at the pictures and take a rock, or coin, and vote for which category they think makes the most carbon emissions in their country. At the end of each vote or at the celebration time, bring out the pie chart from activity 4 so people can see which is the biggest producer for your country.

Talk about how our lifestyle is putting a great burden on our planet. How can we unburden ourselves to help reduce our personal carbon emissions? What are the most effective steps we can take? The website drawdown.org has many answers to this question.



6. Rich man's maze

You will need: printouts of the maze PDF (download online); pens, pencils or felt-tip pens



Find your way through the maze. The answers to the questions below may be found along the way.

Talk about what the rich young man has to give up in order to get to heaven. What does the rich young ruler have to start doing to get into heaven? Are there some things that you might need to give up? Some answers can be found to these questions by following the maze.

8



9



Two by two by Sharon Sampson

Noah: Wow God! That is a big boat. Where shall I start?

God: You will need to [*Noah acts it out*] chop down lots of trees, cut them into planks and nail them all together. Maybe your family can help.

Noah: Can you help? [*get everyone to join in*] Chop down a tree, cut it up, nail it. Maybe the elephants could carry the trees? [*ask if anyone wants to be an elephant*]

Narrator: Finally, decades later, he had finished the ark. Phew you can stop now! I wonder why God didn't just give Noah a boat? [*pause*] Maybe because he wanted to see how much Noah trusted him, or he wanted to give bad people a chance to change. It took Noah many, many years to build the ark and all the people around probably laughed at him, [*get everyone to laugh*] but Noah trusted God and kept on going. Noah and all his family got on the ark. [*Noah and the others get in the ark*] God sent them two of every kind of land animal and bird and they went on the ark too. [*chuck in animal costumes and soft toys*] They took enough food for everyone [*hand them a box of oats*], as there were no supermarket deliveries back then, and they would be on the ark for months and months. Then God shut the door and sent the rain.

God: [*spray a fine spray over people's heads*]

Narrator: It rained for hours, it rained for days, it rained for weeks. Just imagine what it was like when it didn't stop for 40 days and 40 nights. The waters rose and rose until the ark floated. Then they carried on rising until all Noah could see was water everywhere. Because Noah had followed God's instructions the ark was perfect for the job. It floated safely on the flood and inside the ark, the animals and people were safe and dry. The Bible doesn't tell us what it was like inside the ark all that time, but I expect they were very busy keeping all the animals fed and mucked out. I expect it was quite smelly too. Or maybe God got all the animals to hibernate for a few weeks. Who knows? Eventually the rain stopped. But it took several more months for the floods to go down. One day, they felt a bump and the ark landed on the top of a mountain. Noah sent out a dove. [*Noah send out the dove*] The dove flew around, searching for somewhere to land. Eventually it came back with a freshly picked olive leaf, so Noah knew that there must be dry land somewhere. The waters carried on going down and more and more land appeared. Finally, all the people and all the animals could leave the ark. How happy they must have been and how

excited, to go out into a new world and start a new adventure. [*get everyone to sit back down*]

God: Well done Noah. You have worked hard. I promise that I will never again wipe the earth clean with a flood. To remind you of my promise, I will put a rainbow in the sky. [*get those with paper plate rainbows to hold them up*]

Narrator: God had given Noah and all his family the chance to start afresh, just like he gives us that chance every day and every year. Like the people of Noah's time, we are also messing up – just look at the way we are destroying the planet God made for us. But Noah didn't have Jesus. (He lived a long time before Jesus.) When Jesus died on the cross, he took all our mistakes on his shoulders and paid the price for us. That doesn't mean that we can carry on being bad, or ruining our planet, of course we shouldn't. It just means that we don't need to worry. God won't punish us. And remember, whenever we see a rainbow or a cross, we can remember God's promise, not to flood the whole earth again.

Prayer

Let's play 'chat and catch' with God. We can chat to him and then try to catch his reply. It might be a thought or a picture, or just a feeling. He has so many ways he can speak.

Father, thank you so much for giving us this beautiful planet and all the amazing animals. Sorry that we are messing it up, not treating it as well as we could. Now in your head, chat to God and tell him your favourite animal. [*pause*] Tell God your favourite place. [*pause*] Tell God something about your favourite friend. [*pause*]

Now we will try to catch.

Ask God to show you a way that you can help his creation, making this world a better place. [*pause*] Wait for that picture or word to come into your head. [*Count to ten in your head to allow God to speak to everyone.*] Amen

Song suggestions

'The Arky Arky Song / Rise and Shine' – traditional
'Who put the colours in the rainbow?' – J A P Booth
'I can sing a rainbow' – traditional nursery rhyme
'Eye of the storm' – Ryan Stevenson
'Beautiful Day' – Jamie Grace

Meal suggestion

How about a buffet of food with animal feed labels, e.g. hay bales (bread chunks), chimp food (bananas and other fruit and veg), giraffe leaves (salad), chicken feed (crisps), panda bamboo (celery), worms (spaghetti), mice food (cheese)?