



May-August 2023 £4.95

get MESSY!

**Making your
Messy Church
more ecofriendly**

Messy sabbath

**Making our Messy
Churches inclusive**

Sustaining your team

**Includes
Messy Church
at home
ideas**

Sessions in this issue

Who will help us?
John 15; Acts 2

**Grumbling meets
grace**
Exodus 16

Creation jar
Genesis 1

**The gift of
sabbath**
Mark 6; Exodus 20



BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE
+44 (0)1865 319700 | enquiries@brf.org.uk
brf.org.uk

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Note for subscribers

Get Messy! will now publish annually in June. See page 39 for more details or go to brfonline.org.uk/new-get-messy

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Send in news, stories, photos and general enquiries to our Messy Church administrator on +44 (0)1235 858238 or messychurch@brf.org.uk.

Meet our session writers for this issue



Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard are based in County Durham and have worked with many Messy Churches for many years. Sharon is children's ministry adviser for the diocese of Durham and Anne is a Methodist local preacher. Both have written resources for churches.



Formerly part of BRF's Messy Church team, **Martyn Payne** has a background in teaching, Bible storytelling and leading all-age worship and is passionate about generations exploring faith together. He is currently pastor of a church in Essex where he is in the early stages of establishing a monthly, mainly outdoor, Messy Church.



Sara Bardoll is the regional coordinator for Kirche Kunterbunt (German Messy Church, meaning 'colourful church') in Wuerttemberg. **Stephanie Spriegel** has a colourful family life with her husband and three children. She enjoys being outdoors and travelling in Scandinavia. Together, the two of them organise a Kirche Kunterbunt that takes place exclusively outdoors.



Melissa Neumann is part of the Intergenerational Ministry Team for Mission Resourcing with the Uniting Church Synod of South Australia. Her role focuses on equipping and encouraging congregations in intergenerational ministry and providing leadership development training, including through ecumenical partnerships throughout Australia. She is also a regional coordinator for Messy Church.



Themes in this edition

One word that describes the overarching theme for this magazine is 'sustainable'. Whether you meet indoors or outdoors, these four sessions will take your Messy Church on a journey to consider how we sustain our relationship with God, our community, our planet and our team.

In **May**, we remember at Pentecost how God sent us a helper to sustain us in our faith. This session explores John 15:26 and is an encouragement that God doesn't leave us on our own but sends the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and helper.

June's session 'Grumbling meets grace' explores how God sustains a community. The Old Testament story of God providing manna helps us to discover how our contemporary communities can depend on God, as we ponder on Jesus' declaration, 'I am the bread of life.'

In **July**, we challenge ourselves to consider how to live in a sustainable way and better care for the amazing creation that is written about in Genesis 1.

Finally, in **August** it's all about how we sustain our team and take a sabbath rest. How do you like to take time out to rest and listen to God?

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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:

- **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/getmessymay23 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.



This symbol shows activities that work well for Messy Church Goes Wild sessions. See messychurch.org.uk/goeswild for more ideas.

In our next issue

Future issues will include twelve sessions to cover the whole year. See page 39 for more details or go to brfonline.org.uk/new-get-messy



Aike writes...

Beware of the boar!

My family was privileged to visit Sardinia last summer. As we arrived at our rental apartment, we spotted a hand-written sign reminding us to shut the gate to keep wild boar out – DANGER! We dutifully made sure the gate was kept closed and bolted. Two days into the holiday, my teens went for an evening stroll down to the beach, to watch for shooting stars. However, within minutes they came racing back to the house in a state of panic, having stumbled across a large wild boar, on a similar night excursion. When I asked my son why he was so surprised, considering the warning sign in our garden, he replied, ‘Well, you just don’t think it will happen to you.’

This optimism bias is magnificently displayed in Jesus’ story of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24–29). My Messy Church Goes Wild explored this Bible story as part of a ‘Wild and rocky’ Messy Adventure. I pondered on the foolish builder’s story. The warning signs were all around, and yet he continued down the easier path of building a house on the sandy flood plain. Did this builder optimistically think the inevitable rains would never come? I found it easy to scoff at the lack of firm foundations and feel superior that I would obviously have chosen to build on the rock. However, there’s something about human nature that ignores the warning signs, and we only consider change when we hit rock bottom, like the young man Jesus describes in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

The Messy Church community has worked hard these past years to ‘keep going’ during the Covid pandemic and ensuing economic difficulties, all against the backdrop of a war in Europe and the climate change emergency. Rather than hit rock bottom and burn-out, this issue of *Get Messy!* addresses issues of sustainability in Messy Church. ‘Sustainable’ is one of three words God gave to me to explore when I started in this role. The articles, stories and sessions that follow take us on a journey to consider how we sustain our relationship with God, each other and our planet. We look at the importance of sabbath, not just as a time for rest, but a time to really listen to the still small voice of God both at a personal, as well as a community, level. We share stories of how Messy Churches have sustained relationships with their families during the lockdown years and suggest ways to sustain your Messy Church team and provide support between Messy Churches in the season ahead.

However, we also need to think big and consider the role that Messy Church can play in the global issue of climate change. The warning signs are all around us. The world is experiencing more natural disasters because of extreme weather events: droughts, wildfires and flash flooding. We shouldn’t be surprised. We hypothesised about global warming during my school years in the 1980s and have had decades of David Attenborough documentaries charting the changes humans are imposing on the natural world. The uncomfortable truth is that I’ve lived long enough for these events to now become a reality and have been a part of the problem. Like the foolish builder, I have opted for ease and convenience within my lifestyle as the consequences seemed so remote and far off until now. Climate change can feel overwhelming, but a key way to be a part of the solution is to start with small steps.

In a Facebook Live interview with Tearfund’s Bin Twinning team, Laura put out the challenge to do a rubbish audit. This involves keeping everything you throw in your bin for a month and then looking at the frequently used items. When Laura did this, she noticed she was eating lots of meal deals, so took to making a packed lunch and taking a refillable water bottle and coffee cup when out and about, halving the amount of waste she was creating and saving money at the same time. I only managed to do a rubbish audit for a week, but quickly realised that most of my fruit and vegetables came in unrecyclable plastic bags, and so have switched to choosing ‘loose’ items from the supermarket. I’ve also taken to meal planning, which has reduced the amount of food waste.

Rather than ignore the warning signs, I wonder what small changes your Messy Church could make to become more sustainable and care better for God’s creation? Could you undertake a rubbish audit and see what gets thrown away at the end of a session? Are the craft activities you choose able to be recycled at some point in the future, or could you swap out some of the plastic and glitter and use natural items in the first place? Check out the top tips on page 12, all about how to make your Messy Church more eco-aware.

Sadly, the issue of climate change will not go away if ignored. We all need to make changes, however small. For now, I’m going to keep talking about making our lifestyles and Messy Churches more sustainable, so beware of the bore!

Session material: May 2023



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Bible story

John 15:26 (NIV)

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me.’

Acts 2:1–12; 38–39 (NIV)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’...

Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’

Pointers

- When Jesus was with the disciples, he kept telling them not to worry about when he would no longer be with them to help and support them.
- Jesus knew that they would struggle if they were completely on their own. They needed someone to be there to keep them going and so Jesus promised the Holy Spirit as their helper.
- In the second part of the reading, we are told about one of the most important events in the Bible – the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- The Holy Spirit then came and filled each disciple. It was a personal thing, a promise for them as a group and as individuals. The strength and encouragement from the Holy Spirit kept them going and helped them grow in their faith.
- The Holy Spirit came the first time in a very unexpected but powerful way which encourages us to expect to find him in all sorts of situations today.
- The Holy Spirit is with us today to encourage and help us, to keep us on track and help us to grow in our faith too.
- The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives helps to sustain our faith.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This passage helps people grow in Christ as it paints a clear picture of what happened when God poured out his Holy Spirit. Such unfathomable, amazing things could not be explained, but were given as a gift to demonstrate the sheer power and possibilities of what can happen when the Holy Spirit shows up! We too can be part of that – maybe not experiencing the same things, but when we are given the Holy Spirit as God’s helper, truly amazing things can and do happen. This gives us the hope that we are never alone, the assurance that God has a special helper for us all and that he will send help when we ask for it. The end of the passage is especially important – the promise of a helper from God; the Holy Spirit is for everyone. Whether we are close to God or far off, the promise is to help us.

Add value

Mealtime card

- What is the most unexpected thing that has happened to you?
- How can we stay in touch with God?
- How have we been helped by the Holy Spirit when things have been tough?

Session material: June 2023

bread. Maybe this Messy Church session could be a time to make this explicit, as you offer a simple Communion for your congregation.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Find out from each other if there is one particular food your family eats every day.
- What's the main source of grumbling in your household?
- What's the strangest food you've ever eaten?
- When you are away from home, what home-cooked food do you miss the most?

Take-home idea

The people found the manna in the desert beneath the bushes every morning. Why not challenge your family to collect items to eat from gardens, woodland and parkland near home? Make sure of course that everything is washed and check that it is not poisonous before it is eaten. (You might like to look up online what foods can be safely foraged on a nature walk before you set out.) Before you eat together, spend a moment thanking God for the rich provision of food that is freely available in creation.

Question to start and end the session

So... can you remember a time when God miraculously provided for you when you were in need?

Social action

Sadly, the need for food banks has not gone away. God wants to use us to be the means of miraculous provision for those who are hungry. Invite your Messy Church families to bring a food item to this session so that together they can be collated and donated (see activity 8).

Activities

1. What is it?

You will need: a selection of ten small food items that can be safely wrapped in clingfilm (the more unusual and interestingly shaped the food items, the better!); a cloth or canvass bag with a narrow entrance; paper and pen (optional)

Hide the items in the bag and invite adults and children to guess 'what's in the bag' from the shape. You could record their guesses on paper to compare lists between family groups.

Talk about manna, which in Hebrew means, 'What is it?' Which bag items might they dare to try? Imagine how nervous the people of God probably were about tasting something unknown.

1



2. Rumbling-grumbling



You will need: items to make 'stomach rumbling' sound effects such as: wooden spoons and an empty container, a glass of water with fizzy tablets, a cheese grater and small items to grate, cardboard to tear, bubble wrap to rustle and pop, the human voice; a mobile phone's recording app

The people of God had stomachs that rumbled through lack of food, which also led to grumbling! Encourage people to experiment with the items to recreate rumbling/grumbling noises. Record them on a phone to see how successful their attempts have been.

Talk about how it feels to be really hungry and what things make them grumble.

2



3. Wild food



You will need: a colander; water; gloves; nettle leaves; butter; a pan; a small gas camping burner; wooden spoons; onions; some stock; flour; seasoning; bowls

Creation jar by Sara Bardoll and Stephanie Spriegel

Social action

Together, we can consider what each individual can do for the integrity of creation, e.g. collect, separate and recycle rubbish, save resources (ride a bicycle, switch off lights), handle food responsibly (save food, buy regionally) or support an environmental organisation (e.g. bintwinning.org.uk).

Activities

1. Welcome



You will need: music box with songs of creation; gummy bear animals; big empty jam jars

Today is about God creating the world like a beautiful garden. A garden is also being created in your jar today. At the moment it is still empty. At each activity point there are materials that will transform your jar into a creation jar. It is useful to do the activities in the right order. As a welcome, everyone may take a gummy bear and guess which animal it represents. As name tags, animal shapes can be cut out, labelled and attached with a clothes peg.

Talk about how your empty glass acts as an example of how the earth was desolate and empty in the beginning. But God and his power of creation made something wonderful out of it. In the end, you will be amazed at how beautiful your glass has become! Do you sometimes feel empty and exhausted? How could God 'fill' you?

1



2. Stones



You will need: sand; small 'gems'; bucket; spoon and stone for each team; small stones for the jar

Task one: stone search. There are precious stones buried in the sand pit. Can you find ten stones? Put them in the bucket.

Task two: stone course. Transport a stone on a spoon through the course and pass it on to the next person. Who transports the stone through the course fastest – parents or children? Have a race!

Talk about where you encounter stones in everyday life? Do you find stones beautiful and good like the precious stones? Or are stones bad for you like a stone in your shoe or stumbling stones? God created stones with all their diversity.

'The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner' (Psalm 118:22, KJV).

Creation jar: take your jar and fill it with stones!

3. Stone cairn



You will need: flat stones that can be stacked; earth and a small shovel for the creation jar



Try to build a cairn with the stones. Try it on different surfaces (stone, earth, sand, wood). Measure how high you can build it.

Talk about on which surface were you able to build the cairn best? Our soil is made of earth. We can stand well on it. Take some earth in your hand. How does it feel? Is it still a bit damp? What does it smell like? The earth beneath our feet is full of life. Some creatures are so small that you can hardly see them with the naked eye. And then there are the numerous microorganisms (bacteria, fungi) that can only be seen under a microscope. In a handful of living earth there are more living beings than people on the whole planet earth!

Creation jar: take your glass and fill it with a scoop of earth!

3



The gift of sabbath by Melissa Neumann

similar, or just a sheet of paper and some pens to write a list. You may also want a worship leader or someone with a good knowledge of music, either general or Christian and worship music.

Make a Messy Church playlist of songs that inspire people to spend time with God. They may be still and meditative (perhaps something classical) or maybe some nature sounds such as raindrops, bird calls or waves crashing (perhaps record something in a local park before or during Messy Church) or your playlist could include songs used in Messy Church that praise God or are about God's goodness to us. After Messy Church, email the playlist to your Messy Church people.

Talk about how we can connect with God through music and sounds.

Please note: Activity 5 and 6 are adapted from: cmla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guided-prayer-at-the-park.pdf

Celebration

Chat about the activities and discuss some of the following:

- How did you find it spending time connecting with God through the activities?
- Did you find it easy or difficult to focus?
- What activity did you find most refreshing?
- What did you find helped you feel close to God?

Get into groups of at least five people – choose one person to be Jesus, then others choose to be apostles (disciples) and others to be 'the people' (crowds).

In your groups, act out the Bible reading but without sound (*italics indicates an action people could 'act out' in their small group*).

Mark 6:30–31 (NIV) says:

'The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. (Gesture like talking about what they've done.)

'Then, because so many people were coming and going (bumping past Jesus and the apostles or walking around Jesus and apostles in circles) that they did not even have a chance to eat. (Rub tummies hungrily, gesture where's our food.)

'[Jesus] said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Jesus gesture, come with me, quiet, rest, apostles follow Jesus away from crowds.)

(If you feel it's helpful, invite people to swap roles and re-tell the story again.)

Have you ever been so busy you haven't had a chance to eat or you've forgotten to eat!? Sometimes when a family has a new baby it's easy for the parent to forget to eat. When at work or studying, with lots to do or the phone won't stop ringing, it might mean someone doesn't get a lunch break. Just saying that makes me feel tired and hungry. I wonder if that's how Jesus' apostles felt?

When everything feels busy and go, go, go – we can also forget to connect with God and that can leave us feeling tired and worn out and maybe struggling to sustain living in God's ways.

God knew this about us and gave us the gift of the sabbath – one day of the week when we could have time that is set apart for resting and delighting in God and his creation.

When Jesus said to his apostles 'come with me to a quiet place and get some rest – Jesus is reminding all of us to spend our time connecting with God and to enjoy the gift of the sabbath.

We've explored lots of different ways we can do that through our activities today. Talk in your small group about one way you might try this week at home to spend time with God – or even maybe to try a full day of sabbath and spending time connecting with God.

Prayer

'May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favour and give you his peace.' May you breathe deeply and know God loves you.

(Adapted from Numbers 6:24–26, NLT)

Song suggestions

'Be still and know that I am God' – Richard M.S. Irwin

'The Blessing' – Kari Jobe and Elevation Worship

'May you find peace' – Fischy Music

'What a wonderful world' – Louis Armstrong

Meal suggestion

Something that doesn't require a lot of time such as nachos. Bake the corn chips, with mince, chicken or refried beans (or use tinned beans and tinned diced tomatoes or passata sauce) and grated cheese. Have optional toppings available such as avocado (or guacamole); sour cream; diced onion; diced tomatoes; and fresh cilantro/coriander and extra cheese!

Or something that someone loves to cook as a gift to others that takes time, such as lasagna.

So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, adieu!



After ten years, it's time to say farewell to the current format of *Get Messy!* The magazine started back in May 2013, as a four-monthly subscription resource for Messy Church leaders. It's been a brilliant way to share good practice, inspirational stories and session ideas, in both print and downloadable ways. We want to say a massive thank you to everyone who has contributed over this past decade and celebrate this good ministry.

However, as we emerge from the pandemic and journey through cost of living and climate crises, the BRF Messy Church team have been challenged to make our resources more sustainable – our theme for this final edition!

We conducted a readership survey during September 2022 and were challenged by an uncomfortable truth: that the magazine was being delivered in plastic, at a time when we're encouraging people to use less! This has been followed up, along with your suggestions to diversify the writing team and include those from non-white ethnicities.

Unsurprisingly, the survey revealed that it's the session material that interests you most, with nearly 30% following the material each month. When it came to other parts of the magazine, your honest comments included, 'I'm bad at reading *Get Messy!* when it arrives but when I flick through to look for ideas I'm always amazed at how interesting and useful it is and get distracted into reading something.' One challenge for the BRF Messy Church team is that articles are submitted so far in advance (I'm writing this in October 2022, for the May 2023 edition!), it's hard to comment on time sensitive issues.

We asked the question: How would you feel if *Get Messy!* became digital only? While the majority of respondents were either okay with this, or thought it was a really good idea, we are aware that for some with poor eyesight or lacking means to connect online or who simply prefer having a physical copy, the paper version is still appreciated.

So, what next?

From September 2023, we will produce **twelve sessions of material** – a whole year's worth! – that will be available in June as a printed magazine and digitally. You'll be able to download a bundle of twelve (the cheaper option) or individual sessions. Support material will continue to be available in downloadable PDF format from the website. There'll be a new stories page on the website, so please send us your story! Blog posts and key messages will be signposted through our monthly e-newsletter and will feature across all our social media channels, so make sure you're connected by signing up through messychurch.org.uk.



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