

GET MESSY!



NEW

CONTAINS TWELVE MESSY CHURCH SESSIONS INCLUDING CHRISTMAS AND EASTER



VOL. 1

Intergenerational Discipleship

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Aike writes...



Welcome to the new format of Get Messy!

We hope this twelve-session edition will help your team plan a bit further ahead. While some sessions link to church or cultural festivals (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the Paris Olympics 2024), feel free to swap the order or choose sessions that are most suitable for your context. It's important to remember that any resource is just a springboard, and we hope that you will creatively adapt ideas for your Messy Church. If the themes in this edition are not quite the right fit, as we're all at different stages on the Messy Church journey, remember we have a massive back catalogue of resources available on the website: messychurch.org.uk.

I just want to say a huge thank you to our writers who have taken time to create and test-drive these sessions. Each session includes a Bible story and some pointers to get your team thinking about how to talk about the theme during the activities. We suggest you take time at the start of your planning meetings to pray, reflect on where you noticed God at work in your previous session, then read the Bible and be curious about which words or verses stand out.

You'll also find a choice of ten activities, designed for a range of ages and abilities, with both indoor and Messy Church Goes Wild activity suggestions. Remember that you don't have to do them all! The social action idea can help your Messy Church be church throughout the month, encouraging people to put into action the Bible theme. In the celebration section, you'll find ideas to retell the Bible story in an engaging way, together with a prayer, plus song suggestions. Finally, to help you with hospitality, we've included downloadable mealtime card question ideas, designed to keep the conversation flowing when you gather to eat, together with a meal suggestion.

Themes in this edition

When I started in role as BRF Messy Church ministry lead, I fasted and prayed, asking for God's guidance. God gave me three words: sustainable, intergenerational and discipleship. I believe these are areas for the Messy Church movement to dig into and explore, so that we can experience the fullness of God's kingdom through our Messy Church communities, holding on to our values of being Christ-centred, for all ages, with creativity, hospitality and celebration. We will explore these three words in our session material.

We start and end with a 'sustainable' theme, as we care for God's world together (Psalms 24 and 65; Romans 1:20); we pick up on the 'intergenerational' theme as we explore conflict and forgiveness between generations in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–47); a vision of how the generations can live well alongside each other (Zechariah 8:1–23); and how we celebrate Christmas together around a fire (Luke 2:1–20).

As we head into 2024, we climb aboard the DiscipleShip, designed to help people set sail on their journey of following Jesus. Part of discipleship is to embody God's radical love for everyone, and we've created a session exploring the theme of racial justice, to complement Racial Justice Sunday on 11 February 2024. We then explore the stories of Jesus' disciples: Mary Magdalene and Peter, around the events of the first Easter. Our Pentecost session, 'God speaks my language', encourages us to be equipped with the Holy Spirit and find ways to talk to other people about Jesus in a language they can understand, which is not easy in every country as we discover in the 'Shh! It's a secret' material. In July we celebrate the Paris Olympics, and in our final session we challenge you to get outdoors and rediscover God in creation and our role in its stewardship.

Remember to check out the stories and articles that accompany these sessions on our social media, blogs, e-newsletters and website.



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Session material: September

Care for our world

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

Bible story

Psalm 24:1–2 (NRSV)

The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

Psalm 65:6–13 (NRSV)

By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Pointers

God made the world and everything in it, as the psalmist says. The world has a real beauty in the things we see around us – the mountains, seas and all things on the earth. This beauty, made by God and enjoyed by us all, gives us a sense of joy. God made the world carefully, with a balance in nature that is evident when we look around us and have those moments of wonder that just seem to take our breath away.

The psalmist also talks about an abundance, an overflowing amount of food created for us to enjoy, providing water and warmth for crops to grow. God has created so much to feed us with. This should remind us to voice our thanks.

Just as God made the world with care, we need to participate in caring for the world in the things we do and how we use what God has provided. Maybe we need to think about the carelessness we sometimes show in wasting resources, including food.

We can join in the celebration of all God has made by appreciating our world and all that is in it.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

It is a reminder of the beauty in the world around us, made by God, and how we can all work together to maintain and enjoy its beauty. It is also a reminder of the abundance of food God has given us to enjoy and to share, maybe drawing our focus to what we can do to use the resources in the world wisely without wasting them.

Add value

Mealtime card

- What is your favourite meal?
- What could you do to keep your food waste bin empty?
- What challenges could we take on to better care for our world?

Take-home idea

Use the nature grid (from activity 7) and look for the things you have drawn on it. When you see one of the things, tick and/or date the box and make a note of where you saw it.

Question to start and end the session

So... how can we celebrate and care for the world and all its resources?

Social action

Look around your local area to see what you can do to help improve it, such as litter picking.

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4. Family history documentary

You will need: a camera; basic costume pieces (aprons, hats, scarves, tools, etc.); a copy of the Joseph story if needed

Have people act out a family history story, or what they think life was like for their ancestors. They could also act out the story of Joseph and his family. Film it and show it to the group.

Talk about whether you think life was more difficult for people who lived a long time ago or whether it was easier. Do you think Jesus did chores? How do you think Jesus helped his family? Why do you think he did or didn't?

5. Food family

You will need: sliced cucumber; cherry tomatoes; baby carrots; sliced bell peppers; pretzels; mini breadsticks; sticks of cheese (plus any other food that is easily accessible and in season); plates

Take the different foods and create a food family (people-shaped characters) on a plate. You could try and make them look like your family or another family!

Talk about whether anyone included Jesus as a member of their food family. Do you think of Jesus as part of your family? Why or why not?

6. Heritage photo frame

You will need: small picture frames (can be repurposed or purchased, or you could construct a basic frame from wide craft sticks); glue; paintbrushes; small container or plate for the glue; some of the following supplies which you are happy to be torn up – old books, sheet music, flat lace, newspapers, magazines, old letters, scrapbook paper, buttons, etc.

Paint a small amount of glue on the rim of the frame. Tear or cut pieces of material and supplies and glue on to the frame, wrapping around the sides of to cover all the surfaces with paper or other materials. When it is complete, if desired, you could coat the entire frame with PVA glue or Mod Podge to seal it. Take the frame home and put a picture of your family in it to remember your heritage.

Tip: If you use bigger pieces of paper, it covers the frame much quicker, so this would be better for smaller ones or people who like to try to complete as many activities as possible.

Talk about when you use an old thing to make something new, you honour your ancestors, but also take care of the

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2. Walls



You will need: an outside wall or fence of some description

Take a careful look at the wall – it could be a brick wall, a drystone wall, a fence. What can you see making its home in the wall? It's important to use just your eyes, as you don't want to hurt any small creatures or be bitten by them. Look but don't touch. I wonder if you can see a spider web, or a tiny bug darting between the shadows. I wonder if there is lichen or moss growing on the wall. What does this tell you about creation?

Talk about our Creator God being the source of all life. All faiths and cultures through time have sacred stories about how the world and all creatures came to be. Did you know there are two tellings of the creation story in Genesis? Humans are called by God to care for the earth, not to abuse it or trample it. How might we care for the earth in our local community and globally? What are the steps we can take as individuals and as communities of faith?

3. Hopscotch

You will need: chalk; an outdoor paving space to draw a hopscotch (or a large sheet with a hopscotch drawn with a marker pen); pebbles

Instructions to play: players take turns to throw the pebble so it lands on each square in turn starting with the first. The player who threw the pebble then lands with one foot on the single square and both feet on the double square, but not landing on the square with the pebble. If someone is unable to hop, they can throw the pebble and have a partner for the jumping.

Talk about what the favourite games are of those in the group, both older and younger.

4. Build a city

You will need: Lego; boxes; anything else that can be used to build

Build a city together using the materials provided, just as the people rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. Work with others in a team and allow each group to add their own parts, whatever is important to them. Remember it is the process, not the finished result!

Note: this could also be run as a Messy Minecraft activity depending on your group and their skill-set. For more information, see banyuleuc.org.au/messy-church-facebook-live.

Talk about what you think is important for a city today and why? How might that be different to Zechariah's time? What might be the same? Why?

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Session material: December

Christmas around the fire

by John White



Bible story

Luke 2:1–20 (NIV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Pointers

We are going to tell the story of Christmas over the course of the session by using creative symbolism and questions.

This session is designed to take place outside around a firepit. Remember to complete a risk assessment and make your team and guests aware of potential hazards. We suggest you station buckets of water near each firepit. You might need to check for permission from your venue or landowner.

If the weather is stormy, or you'd prefer to meet inside, consider creating a fake campfire out of sticks, using battery tealights to create a glow when you pretend to light the fire.

The activities can be done at any point during the session. You might like to start with the activities, giving people something to do while you wait for people to arrive or for it to get dark.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session is a creative and welcoming way to share the Christmas story of Jesus being born. A warm and welcoming space to invite those who don't usually attend church services or a Messy Church group.

7. Food craft – mini food ships



You will need: mini tomatoes; small peppers; hummus; toothpicks; cucumber slices for sails or pieces of wrap; raisins for people

Make a boat. Make sure to put yourself and Jesus in it as discipleship is about a journey with Jesus. You can add others too as it is easier to travel this journey with other Christians.

Talk about how far you would travel for Jesus. Think about the wise men who travelled hundreds of miles and for months or years, or Jackie Pullinger who got on a boat and asked God to tell her when to get off.

8. Fellowship – prayer station: the body of Christ

You will need: toilet rolls or bandages

Bandage someone's hand and arm while praying for those in Nigeria. For example: 'Dear God, please stop the armed bandits in Nigeria from hurting people. Protect Christians and churches from attack and pour your peace into their fearful hearts. Heal all those who are hurt and help them to feel your presence. Stir up the government and security forces to do more to protect people. Amen.'

Talk about how Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. Although around 100 million people (half the population) are Christian, there are extremist groups who have vowed to eliminate Christianity from the country and are targeting men and boys in particular. Although we may not be in Nigeria, we are all part of one big body of Christ, and they will get incredible strength from knowing that we care and are praying for them. See opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria for more information.

9. Worship – decoupage cross

You will need: large wooden cross; PVA glue in a container, decoupage paper (or tissue paper); brushes

Decorate the cross by tearing off bits of paper and gluing them on to the cross. Then use half PVA glue and half water and cover the whole thing in glue as a type of varnish.

Talk about how the first step to discipleship is belonging to a church family. We are not decorating our own individual crosses, but a large communal one which can serve as a centre piece to the celebration part of Messy Church. When we come back and see it, we will be reminded that we belong. This is our church.

10. Questions corner



You will need: big cushions; rug; questions written up on giant cards

Depending on your age range, you may also like a corner with tables and chairs.

Why did God create the world? Why does God allow suffering? Is reincarnation real? What is heaven like? Why did Jesus have to die? Hasn't science disproved the Bible? Why doesn't God answer my prayers? One of the best ways to journey further in your faith is by delving into these big questions with friends. We won't always be able to work out the answers, but that's okay. We are on a voyage of discovery.

Talk about how, if you enjoy this session, you might like to sign up for an exploring faith course such as Alpha.

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Celebration

Before you start, make sure every family has a flag to wave with writing in big letters, either DISCIPLESHIP, WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP or STEWARDSHIP, preferably a fairly equal mix. You might also like to have a camel and wise man as a visual aid.

Did you notice that today's activities have all been about ships?

9. We are all one

You will need: a large piece of cardboard and or a roll of brown wrapping paper; scissors; cotton wool balls or wool for hair; PVA glue; Post-it notes; coloured pens; printed copies of 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

On the large piece of card or brown wrapping paper, draw around a child and cut it out – now you have the body of Christ (the church). Read together the Bible passage (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Invite people to draw on the outline or add Post-it notes or stick-on items (e.g. cotton wool balls or wool for hair). As they do this, ask the question: which part of the body of this Messy Church do you feel you are or could be?

Talk about how everyone has a part to play in the body of Christ (the church). We have different roles to play. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, evangelists, prophets, apostles, teachers and pastors are all mentioned. What other roles are there in Messy Church? Which part will you play? Which parts of the body of Christ might be missing at this Messy Church?

10. Make a percussion instrument



You will need: an assortment of items from your recycling bin (make sure they've been washed!), e.g. plastic milk bottles, elastic bands, empty tissue boxes, cardboard tubes, masking tape

Using the items provided, make a percussion instrument, such as a drum or something from another culture to play in the celebration. For example, you could make a lyre (type of harp) that David played in the Old Testament psalms.

Talk about how the church is global. The style of sung worship differs around the world and yet we are all part of Christ's kingdom.

Celebration

Find out what people have discovered through the activities about how God views each of us, our differences and our part in God's kingdom.

Messy Church news sketch based on Mark 11:15–17

Studio presenter: Hello, just yesterday we reported how Jesus brought Jerusalem to a standstill as he rode into the city on a colt. The crowds went crazy, spreading their cloaks on the ground, waving palm branches and shouting, 'Hosanna! In the highest heaven.' There are high expectations resting on this young prophet's shoulders, but has the pressure been too much? Today he was spotted in the temple courts overturning the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, preventing the sale of merchandise. Has Jesus gone rogue? We go live to the scene.

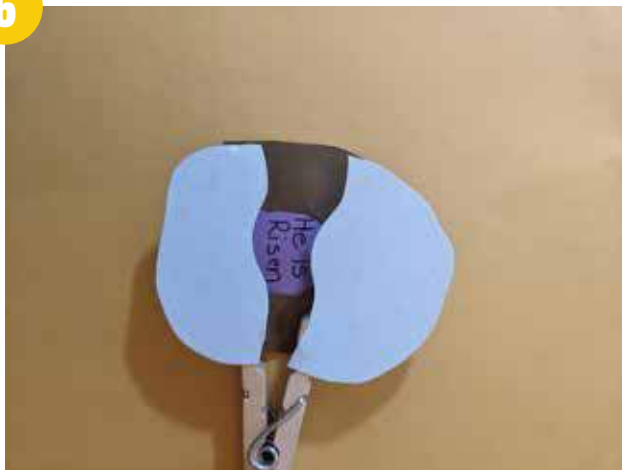
Messy Church news reporter: Hello, my names is _____. I'm reporting live from the temple courts in Jerusalem and it's in a state of disruption. Tables have been tossed to the side, there's temple coins scattered all over the ground and people scrabbling to pick them up. The air is thick with feathers, as doves have been released and have flown away. Let's speak to one of the moneychangers now. Excuse me, tell us what happened?

Moneychanger: I was just going about my business exchanging Roman denarius for temple coins – it's a big week for me with Passover in the next few days, so I've put the exchange rate up to reflect demand. Suddenly, Jesus strolls in with his disciples. He's looking angry and starts turning the tables over. Money starts flying everywhere, people are scrambling to pick it up – it's chaos!

News reporter: It certainly is chaos, let's speak now with Abigail and her family who are here to worship at the temple. Abigail, you watched it all happen. Why do you think Jesus has done this?

Abigail: We come to the temple for all the festivals. Each season the price of doves just keeps going up. We can't afford it anymore. It's rigged against poor people like us, while the moneychangers just get richer. The systems not fair. I heard Jesus say, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it "a den or robbers"'

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you have felt if you came prepared to face a terrible situation and all of sudden you felt happy? Have you ever had to change your mind from sad to happy? Was it easy? Confusing?

7. Easter grass sensory table

You will need: large shallow tub; Easter grass (preferably the shredded paper variety or just shredded paper); magnetic letters that spell out 'He is risen'; strong wand magnets

Fill the tub with Easter grass and as you do, layer the magnetic letters throughout the grass. Using the magnet, fish out the letters. For reading ages and up, encourage them to unscramble the message, while younger ages can just fish the letters out of the paper.

Talk about if you have trouble finding Jesus in our world sometimes. Where do you look? What draws you to Jesus?

8. Things change paint craft

You will need: various colours of liquid acrylic or tempura paints; super heavy paper or painting canvases; combs; towels or disposable towels (bamboo if possible)

Drop blobs of paint on the canvas/paper in any pattern you wish. Take a comb and drag through the paint, wiping the comb off occasionally if it gets too full of paint. Watch the art change as you comb through it. Put aside and let it dry.

Talk about how something small can change our world a lot. What has changed for you over the last year? Two years? How do you think the life of the disciples changed after hearing the news that Jesus was alive again?

9. Beautiful butterfly snack

You will need: mini bagels; cream cheese; food colouring; plastic sandwich bags for piping or knives; scissors; small pretzel sticks; sprinkles or coloured sugar

Cut each bagel in half width wise, then put one side away. Then cut the half in half again height wise. Flip the two edges round edges into the centre to appear like butterfly wings. Poke pretzel sticks into the top of each half to create antennae. Decorate bagels with cream cheese, by placing cream cheese and food colouring in a sandwich bag and squishing together to distribute the colour. Cut off the corner of the bag and squeeze the cream cheese out on to the bagel. Sprinkle the top with coloured sugar or sprinkles.

Talk about how butterflies are symbols of new life. How has being a part of Messy Church given you new life? Is there someone you want to share that with?

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10. Sheep headband



You will need: copy of the sheep headband printed on to card for each person (download online); cotton wool balls; PVA glue; glue spreader; scissors; black felt-tip pens; stapler or sticky tape

Cut out the pattern for the sheep headband. Glue the cotton wool balls to the sheep's body and draw on some eyes and maybe a nose. Attach the two ends with the stapler or sticky tape so that it fits securely on your head.

Talk about how sheep like to follow each other, maybe because it helps them feel like they belong, or feel more secure and happy. Jesus said we are to follow him – I wonder if this is to help us feel like we belong, feel more secure and happy. What do you think?

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Celebration

Explain that you are going to play a game a little bit like 'Simon says' but it's called 'Follow me' – everyone does everything. Proceed with some easy actions e.g. 'raise arm', 'pat head' and progress to things like 'stand on one foot'. Walk over to one side of the space with the words 'follow me'. Move the group around the room with these instructions, eventually coming back to sit down again.

When Jesus told his followers to 'follow him', he didn't quite mean that they had to do the same things as he did when he raised his arm or jumped up and down or sat in one place or another. I wonder what he meant (*take some suggestions*). Jesus wanted his disciples to notice how he spoke to people and how he was kind to people. He wanted them to follow him, meaning to be like him in praying and trying to make wise choices.

When people were sad (*everyone makes a sad face*), Jesus helped them (*smile again*). When people were lost or had made poor choices (*scratch your head and look confused*), Jesus helped to put things right (*smile again*). When people were scared (*make a scared face*) or tired (*make a tired face*) or angry (*make and angry face*), he helped them because he cared (*smile again*). He asked his disciples to care for people just like he cared for people. That's what he meant by following him.

Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about us so much.

Thank you for noticing when we are sad or lonely, confused or angry, upset or just really under the weather.

Help us to care for our family and friends just like you care for us.

Help us to notice when they are sad or lonely, confused or angry, upset or just really under the weather.

Just as you help us, may we be like you and help them.

Amen.

Song suggestions

'I want to walk with Jesus Christ' – C. Simmonds

'I have decided to follow Jesus' – Lydia Walker

'I will follow' – Chris Tomlin

'My lighthouse' – Rend Collective

Meal suggestion

Jacket potatoes and an assortment of fillings such as cheese, beans and tuna. Fresh fruit kebabs.

Session material: May

God speaks my language

by Martyn Payne

Bible story

Acts 2:1–8, 12, 14 (NIV, abridged)

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 it 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 own native language?'

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'

Pointers

God certainly knew how to draw a crowd! The dramatic wind and the mysterious flames excited people's curiosity, but then it needed inspired words that made sense for people. So, when God chose to speak to people that day, God's Spirit gifted the apostles with languages that people could understand.

Each of us is unique, with our own particular upbringing, way of understanding the world, culture and learned way of relating to others. At Pentecost, we see how God's Spirit takes all this into account so that each of us is able to make our own unique sense of God's love for us.

It was the Spirit who connected Peter's words with the people's hearts. This is the miracle of Pentecost that has happened again and again throughout history. And it can still happen today.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Pentecost is stage three in God's salvation plan to put the world back together again. First, God spoke through a particular nation and through its prophets. Then, God spoke through Christ Jesus, who was 'God with us'. Finally, God sent the Holy Spirit to be 'Christ in us', enabling us to become all that God originally created us to be. Pentecost is the moment we can experience not just God for us and God beside us, but also God within us. Each of us needs to experience being filled by the Spirit; and not just once, but again and again, because we leak! Pentecost also teaches us that this same Spirit can help us share our faith with our family and friends.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Can you say something in another language?
- Would you like to learn another language and, if so, why?
- Do you think that sometimes the church uses a language that people can't understand?

Question to start and end the session

So... what do you think would draw a crowd to listen to the story of Jesus nowadays? How do you think the Holy Spirit can help us today to talk about Jesus in a way that people can understand?

Social action

Find out if there are any people in your church or local community who have recently come from another part of the world and/or who speak another language. Some may be refugees or recent immigrants. How can you make them welcome? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you share God's love for those who come from a different background to your own.

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Give people a penalty of a sticker on their forehead for every forbidden word they say.

Talk about how as a secret Christian you never know who could be listening. Some words will give away that you are a Christian, so you have to be careful.

8. Fish food

You will need: sliced bread; hummus or cheese spread; cucumber; red pepper; olives; sweetcorn; salad leaves; paper plates

Make a fish out of food. Use cucumber for the scales and be creative with what you have!

Talk about how early followers of Jesus used a secret symbol of a fish. Why? Several of the disciples were fishermen, Jesus talked about becoming 'fishers of men' and told lots of stories about fish. Also, the Greek letters for 'fish', pronounced 'ICK-THOOS' became an acronym: 'Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour'.

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9. Dirty job



You will need: dirty wellingtons or something else that needs cleaning; nailbrushes; buckets of water; towels

Can you clean the wellingtons with this little brush?

Talk about how in some countries like Pakistan, Christians get all the really dirty jobs as they are looked down upon. As you clean, pray that God will draw close to men, women and children who are suffering persecution for their faith.

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10. Bible smuggling



You will need: car; Bibles; blindfold; timer; picnic basket; blanket; cushions; suitcase; printed-out prayer (see below)

One person has three minutes to hide as many Bibles as possible inside the car. Then get them to say Brother Andrew's prayer: 'Lord, in my luggage I have scripture that I want to take to your children across the border. When you were on earth, you made blind eyes see. Now I pray you make seeing eyes blind.' Finally, a second person is blindfolded and has three minutes to find them.

Talk about how Brother Andrew smuggled hundreds of Bibles inside his blue Volkswagen Beetle, into countries where owning a Bible was illegal. He prayed the prayer above. In all his years of smuggling he was never caught, and the prayer is still prayed by Open Doors staff today.

Celebration

Today's session was inspired by a letter written to the Hebrew people in the early church. It talks of throwing off everything that hinders us, running the race marked out for us with perseverance and keeping our eyes on Jesus. I wonder what was meant by that. We've also been thinking about the Olympics and Paralympics today, where there will be lots of running and races of all different kinds. Put your hand up if you've ever taken part in a race. Who here likes running? I need a volunteer to run a race for me.

(Select a volunteer.)

I'd like you to run one lap around the room/outdoor space.

(Ask the rest of the congregation to cheer on the runner!)

Brilliant! You're a very fast runner. I'm going to ask you to do that again but this time I'm going to ask you to carry this backpack which is weighed down with heavy items (as used in activity 1).

(Help them put the backpack on. Make sure it's weighed down appropriate to the size and age of your volunteer. Again, ask the congregation to cheer them on.)

How was that? More difficult this time?

Life is like a race God has marked out for us, but we all have sin and 'baggage' that makes it harder. Can anyone give me an example of the type of 'baggage' we might be talking about?

(Invite responses and remove items from your volunteer's backpack as they are called out. You may wish to have a few examples to start with, e.g. telling lies, being disrespectful, things from the past, etc.)

Jesus wants us to remove anything from our lives that stops us from fixing our eyes on him and from following him.

The letter also tells us we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. As well as competitors at the Olympics, who else is there?

(Invite people to answer.)

That's right, a great crowd of supporters, the athlete's coaches, their friends and family.

(Ask your volunteer.)

How did it feel when everyone here was cheering you on? Do you think it helped you finish the hard, weighted-down race because these people were encouraging you?

So who can encourage us when we are trying to follow Jesus?

(Invite people to answer.)

We don't have to run this race on our own. We have friends, parents, grandparents, teachers, ministers and everyone here at Messy Church trying to do the same, to help us. Jesus is cheering us on too! This race isn't about being the fastest or the strongest. If we train together and help each other to get rid of the weights we might be carrying, we will win in following Jesus.

Prayer

You may wish to take the prayer tubes created in activity 10 and offer the prayers contained in them to God. Ask people to take their tubes home and continue praying for the situations inside. Or you might want to pick one to put all the prayers in and have a volunteer take it home to pray for everyone's prayers. That volunteer can either keep it until the next Messy Church, or pass it on to someone else they see from Messy Church at school, work or just out and about locally. When it's returned, people may want to talk about answers to prayer and others may wish to add new prayers to it. It can then go home with another member of your Messy Church.

Loving God, surround us with the right people to support us. Help us to get rid of the baggage in our lives. Give us the strength to train every day to run the race of life. Remind us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and follow his example in all that we do. Amen.

Song suggestions

'My Lord is higher than a mountain' – Ishmael

'One more step' – Common Praise #548

'Jesus, all for Jesus' – Robin Mark

'May the mind of Christ my Saviour' – Mission Praise #463 (possibly just the verse that references Hebrews)

'All I have' – Matt Osgood

'Run the race' – Holly Starr

'Running the race' – Freedom Church

Meal suggestion

As well as being a gathering of athletes, the Olympics also provides a chance for people from different cultures from all over the world to share their unique heritage. Ask those who attend your Messy Church to bring a dish that is special to them to share with others.

6



8. Seascape collage

You will need: a large piece of paper or art paper roll; paint; coloured paper; origami paper; whatever art materials you have, e.g. foam, glitter pens, pipe cleaners, etc.; netted bags from fruit such as oranges

Make a large collage of the sea using whatever paint, coloured paper and art materials you have. Add the netted bags as fishing nets. Stick the collage to the front of your communion table or display prominently in your worship space for use during the prayer section of your celebration.

Either use the origami paper to make paper boats, or simply cut out boat and fish shapes. Don't add these to the collage yet (they will be used in the celebration prayer).

Talk about how many of Jesus' early followers were fishermen. He met them on the shores of Galilee. I wonder what they knew of God from the local environment. I wonder how they responded when Jesus suggested they could 'fish for people'! Pray for your local environment, and for people you know who do not yet know Jesus.

7



9. Make a sailing boat

You will need: corks; elastic bands; skewers; foam; scissors; big plastic box full of water (or another large container)

To make a sailboat, join three or more corks together with elastic bands. Make a sail with foam and attach to the cork boat using the skewer. Have a sailing race on the water!

Talk about how travelling on the sea or a lake by sailboat was a regular way to get from place to place in Paul's time. It was one of the ways people came to know about the world that God has made, but it could be a scary or dangerous way to travel. Have you ever been on the sea in a sailboat? Was it a fun or scary experience?

8



10. Sensory play: playdough



You will need: playdough; dried coloured pasta (you can colour pasta by putting dry pasta in a ziplock bag with white vinegar and food colour. Massage the pasta around in the bag and then put on a tray out in the sun to dry. This makes a safe, non-toxic sensory play element for children who are young enough that they put things in their mouths)

Make either sea creatures or other elements of God's world, depending on your local environment.

Talk about when we see God's world, we can know what God is like. What do you think God is like?