

FULLY REVISED AND UPDATED

STARTING YOUR



MESSY CHURCH

LUCY MOORE, JANE LEADBETTER
AND AIKE KENNETT-BROWN



Messy Church: it's church, but not as you know it. Every month thousands of people come together to discover Jesus, including those who have never been to church before. In over 30 countries around the world, we eat, play and worship together. Expect activities, songs and prayers and an entirely new way to express your faith.



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AND AIKE KENNETT-BROWN**



For Lesley Baker and Denise Williams, two friends who started the first Messy Church, who have stuck with it right from the beginning, who have thrown ideas into (and, mercifully, out of) more planning meetings than any of us can remember and who have helped our Messy Church become what God wants it to be through their tireless love, faith, wisdom and hope.

Lucy Moore

For Sandra McCann and Christine Eyre at L19: Messy Church for their creativity and vision for the local community, and for the best bacon butties ever!

Jane Leadbetter

For Lucy Moore, who pioneered and championed Messy Church for 18 years, both nationally and internationally. We give thanks for your God-given creativity and inspiration that has enabled others to be bold and brave and experiment with a messier way of being church together.

For Jane Leadbetter, now retired from the BRF Messy Church team, but still continues to lead L19: Messy Church once a month. We give thanks for your passionate care of the environment and for starting us on the Messy Church Goes Wild adventure.

Aike Kennett-Brown

About the editor

Aike Kennett-Brown took over as BRF Messy Church ministry lead in 2022. She leads the BRF Messy Church team as they seek to support the Messy Church network both nationally and internationally, through writing, reflecting, speaking, developing resources and championing best practice, so the work of Messy Church can continue to transform lives. Aike has been involved with Messy Church since 2010 and has held both local and regional roles. She is currently involved with a Messy Church Goes Wild that meets near the O2 Arena, Greenwich.



**THANKS TO ALL MESSY CHURCH LEADERS
WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR ADVICE
AND OPINIONS THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK**

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Introduction

If you're wondering about starting a Messy Church, this book is for you. It's short, punchy and aimed at those who might not have time to read the longer Messy Church books. It gets the basics across quickly and will give you a good idea of whether or not Messy Church is for you. It sets out clearly just what you'll need to consider and will also help you avoid some of the pitfalls other teams have encountered on their Messy Church journeys.

This book complements the online training provided by the BRF Messy Church team. Combined with the downloadable material on the Messy Church website (messychurch.org.uk), you should have all the help you need to get going with a Messy Church in your community, but don't forget that even more help will come from other people. Your neighbouring Messy Churches will be delighted to cheer you on and share their experiences. If you are in the UK, we have support teams who can help you with different aspects of your Messy Church, whether starting, restarting, running or developing your Messy Church. You can contact the support teams and the BRF Messy Church team via the website, so you need never be alone with a problem to solve or a wonderful story that you simply have to share with someone.

God has graciously and inexplicably chosen to work through many Messy Churches, drawing together teams of Christians who have suddenly found the opportunity through it to share God's story and their own story of faith in a non-threatening way, and drawing in families with no church connection to show them how warm, welcoming, relevant and fun a church can be. This may be for you too. Our prayer is that every Messy Church will be an opportunity for congregations and teams to meet Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and be a place where the kingdom of heaven has the space to grow within individuals and families to the glory of God and for the healing and wholeness of the local community.

Lucy Moore and Jane Leadbetter

Messy Church: the bigger picture

Before you leap into a morass of glue and spaghetti, ask yourself a question:

**WHY ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT
STARTING A MESSY CHURCH?**

There may be any number of honest answers, but what matters is that you want to help people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds meet Jesus. With that in place you can't go far wrong, whatever you do.

**I LOVE THE IDEA OF MESSY CHURCH.
THIS IS WHAT WE NEED.
I SUPPOSE WE JUST NEED TO GET ON WITH IT**

Possibly good reasons for starting a Messy Church

- We want to make disciples.
- People in our area who don't belong to church might like coming to a Messy Church or a Messy Church Goes Wild.
- We want to share the love of God in Jesus in a way that's as accessible as possible to families.
- We believe that the best way for people of all ages to come closer to God is by journeying together.
- We want to share Jesus more than we want to share our particular denominational traditions.
- We want to model who Jesus is to all.
- We believe God is in Messy Church and we want to follow where he leads.
- We think Jesus is the person to give people in our community life in all its fullness.
- And many more. (In fact, many more good reasons than bad ones, we find, as we hear people getting excited at Messy Church training events. Which is reassuring.)

Possibly less good reasons for starting a Messy Church

- The church up the road is running a Messy Church, so we need to or we'll get left out.
- The minister says we need one.
- We need younger people in our church to do the jobs we used to do when we were young.
- We want to revamp our Sunday congregation.
- We want to get together for a nice sociable time with knitting and paint.
- It sounds fun.
- We're bored with sermons and want a change.
- I have a stationery fetish that I can indulge shamelessly.

**A TEAM NEEDS TO BE PREPARED TO WORK HARD
IN ORDER FOR IT TO BE SUCCESSFUL**

Running a Messy Church is hard work, tiring and relentless, may make you vulnerable to deep disappointment and hurt, and may bring you into conflict with people who don't get it or who take you for a ride. (Sounds like the experience of Jesus already.) It will bring you into a greater intimacy with heaps of raw sausages than you really want. It will make you search your soul for answers to questions you've never thought about or cared about before. It will send you into a panic about your own Christian journey and how you articulate and live out that story. And it will be exhilarating, eye-opening, moving, radical and might/will/should change the way you look at Christ and God's church. We thoroughly recommend it.

All this is to say that starting a Messy Church is about involving you and your team and community in something bigger than 'a little kraft klub for the kiddies'. You are being a pioneer, taking on the role of a church leader, whether you're ordained or not: this is serious stuff and not to be undertaken lightly or without due reverence, as the Marriage Service says. But it's also a huge amount of fun and adventure: just save yourselves a lot of grief by deciding right from the start that you are all in the business of making disciples. The way you go about making disciples may involve horrifying amounts of icing sugar and junk modelling, but it's always there; this priority will keep you all going through the hard times: we're here to make disciples, not to try to get people to come to our church service or to give them a Nice Time. It's like an artist imagining the whole picture in her head before

she knuckles down and starts painting in the detail of the clouds in the top left-hand corner: she knows in the broadest terms what the big picture will be, even if it changes hugely in the process. Messy Church, like other forms of church, traditional or new, is ultimately about making disciples.

For this to happen, the 'A Voyage of Discovery' research report published in 2021 (available on the website) recommended that a Messy Church needs to:

- Decide to be a community of reflective practice.
- Decide to notice God at work.
- Decide to be church all month.
- Decide to value quality as well as quantity.
- Decide to make Messy Church a priority, to make it a deeper, richer experience.
- Decide to journey together and be deliberately intergenerational and hospitable to others who are different.
- Decide to be disciples and to make disciples.

DON'T BE AFRAID! PRAY ABOUT IT AND GO FOR IT

What Messy Church is and isn't

All this is explored in depth in *Messy Church*, the first book. But as you have taken the trouble to buy this one, here's a brief recap: it's a way of being church based on the values of being Christ-centred, for all ages, that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. Messy Churches come in different shapes and sizes. Most gather monthly at a time and place that suits people who don't already belong to church and usually looks something like this: welcome, activity time, celebration or 'overt' worship, meal. More recently, you might discover a Messy Church Goes Wild that meets outside, helping people encounter God through nature, encouraging us to be more eco-aware in all we do.

It's not a way of attracting more people to your existing Sunday services, though this might happen.

It's a church for people at all stages of their faith journey and of any age, a congregation that is as valuable and worthy of investment as any of your other congregations.

In the words of Archbishop Justin Welby: 'This is not church for children, it's church for church. It's church for everyone.'

Children are an integral part of the congregation and are both models of discipleship and disciples themselves, as are the adults who play the same dual roles. You'll see an experienced Christian learning from a less experienced one and vice versa; a child teaching an adult; sometimes one family learns from another en masse; sometimes the Christian community demonstrates how to live for Jesus to those who don't yet know him; sometimes a parent or carer teaches a child something.

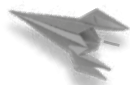
If discipleship needs a mixture of formal learning, informal learning and social learning, Messy Church has elements of all three as it (formally) explores the Bible through activities and story, provides opportunities for informal conversation and observation, and encourages all sorts of levels of social learning both at the gathered Messy Church and in encouragement to take that learned faith back into the home during the rest of the month. Of the three sorts of learning, it is stronger on the social and informal ways of learning.



A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL SCHOOL(S) HELPS AS THEY CAN ADVERTISE THROUGH FLYER DISTRIBUTION OR NEWSLETTERS. PERHAPS A MESSY CHURCH LEADER COULD TALK ABOUT MESSY CHURCH IN ASSEMBLY? COULD YOU MEET IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL DAY?

How it all began

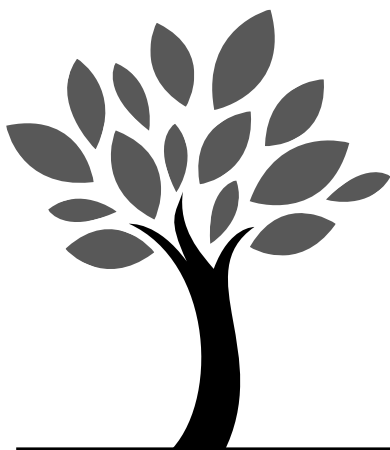
Messy Church began in 2004 at the Anglican church of St Wilfrid's in Cowplain, a suburb of Portsmouth. As Lucy Moore was on the core team of this first Messy Church and was also working for BRF's ministry among children, BRF was the logical place to base the wider ministry of Messy Church as it developed in training, website and resources, giving the movement the backing of a larger infrastructure than St Wilf's could have provided.



**BE PATIENT WITH EACH OTHER — YOU ALL HAVE THE
SAME OBJECTIVE BUT MAY COME AT IT
FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS**



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



Anna Chaplaincy
Living Faith
Messy Church
Parenting for Faith

BRF is a Christian charity that resources individuals and churches. Our vision is to enable people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and to see more people equipped to exercise their gifts in leadership and ministry.

To find out more about our work, visit

brf.org.uk

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Sustaining your Messy Church

Lucy Moore is the founder of Messy Church and now heads up the Church of England's Growing Faith Foundation. Formerly part of the BRF Messy Church team, Jane Leadbetter coordinates L19: Messy Church. Aike Kennett-Brown is BRF's Messy Church ministry lead.



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