



**Sports Fun
for Messy
Churches**

Lucy Moore



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About Messy Church

Messy Church® is growing! Every month, families who have never set foot in a church before are enjoying Messy Church, and every month more Messy Churches are started all over the UK and worldwide. Messy Church is proving effective in sharing God's good news with families across denominations and church traditions. We estimate that some 100,000 people belong to Messy Churches—and the number is growing all the time. For more information about Messy Church, visit www.messychurch.org.uk.

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Would you be willing to support this ministry with your prayer and your giving? To find out more, please visit www.messychurch.org.uk/champions.

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Introduction

We all know that exercise is good for our health, games can bring people together, disciplined training can be character-building and very few of us do a sensible amount of exercise, either of body or of soul. In church we follow Jesus, who came to bring life in all its fullness and who spent much of his time making people physically healthy as well as spiritually healthy. We therefore have a responsibility to encourage all sorts of wellbeing in the people we serve.

A major sporting event of any kind is an opportunity to focus on this wellbeing among the families who enjoy Messy Church, and can even be an occasion that encourages members of the family who haven't yet come and joined in to give Messy Church a try. Whether it's the Olympics, the World Cup, the Ashes or Wimbledon, there is usually a sporting event happening that can provide a reason to focus a Messy Church session on sport or to put on an extra sports-related community family event.

There are plenty of opportunities for individuals of different ages and abilities to be sporty in segregated groups, but Messy Church is all about getting different people together: people of different ages, with different abilities, in different family situations. So the sport-related activities in this book try to be as inclusive of all ages and abilities as possible. They are suggested in the spirit of bringing whole families and communities

together to enjoy themselves and to find out how brilliant different people are in different ways. There are some elements of competition for those who enjoy competing, some elements of creativity for those who like constructing, and some elements of healthy eating, healthy spirituality and healthy 'being' for those interested in the holistic nature of health; that wholeness which is sometimes called 'shalom'.

Another theme running through the book is that of enjoying the international element of sport. With competitors coming together from all over the world, sporting events are a good time to think about other cultures—their flags, their languages, their games, and their foods.

It's worth mentioning that not all agree that competitiveness is to be prized. While some people enjoy competing, in many sports there can only be one winner amid many runners-up. Family is all about helping every member to grow, so the activities in this book include more activities that don't have runners-up than ones in which there is only one winner. (Although there are a few for those who do find competition fun.)

You may wish to pick and mix from the whole book and use all sorts of different activities for your particular event. It's just a starting block to encourage you to think about the possibilities in your community for making the most of a national emphasis on sport in the media at a particular time.

As with any Messy Church, the spiritual value will come even more from the commitment, relationships,

awareness and understanding of the people running it than from the content of the events themselves. Team training has never been so important!

LUCY MOORE

One-off community family events

Messy sports trail

This is an excuse to get the whole family out in the local park, wood or open space doing mild exercise but mainly having fun together. You could also hold this event inside, in a sports hall or church building.

Select ten stations at roughly equal distances from each other. Try to use a route and sports that are accessible for all ages and all abilities, including people with disabilities. At each station post two or more team leaders with an activity.

At each station you will need: high-visibility jackets (one per helper), a drinking water supply, first-aid kit, mobile phone, score sheet (optional), stopwatch, simple passport made from folded card (one per family), stamp and inepad for the passports.

You will need Public Liability Insurance and permission to use the land. (Your local council should be able to advise you.)

You'll also need to have a risk assessment and to make clear to families on the publicity material that they are responsible for their children. People also need to be aware of any hazards you foresee, such as messiness, uneven ground, unsuitable footwear, need

for water, insect bite cream, sun cream and so on.

Each family is given a passport that they get stamped at each station to show that they have attempted the activity. If you're running the event as a competition, you'll need to time or measure each family's achievement and record it. Either way, make sure everyone gets a medal or prize of some sort.

The activities are suggested on the assumption that you don't have access to qualified coaches and equipment, but, if you do, you will no doubt wish to make use of them!

Sports trail activities

- Transporting as much water as possible in a spoon held between your teeth (or in your hand if you want to break people in gently)
- Balloon badminton or volleyball
- Archery with foam-tipped or suction pad arrows
- Time taken to eat a strung-up doughnut without using your hands
- Skittles
- Pétanque
- Football goal scoring (using hands or feet)
- Building a boat to sail across a paddling pool, powered by water shot from a water pistol
- Building the highest tower in a set time out of marshmallows and uncooked spaghetti
- Water-balloon throwing
- Hula hoop: who can hula the longest

- Paper-plate discus: throw or flip a paper plate as far as possible
- Cocktail-stick javelin
- Blowing the most bubbles through an opening
- Human noughts and crosses: the first team to have three members sitting in a straight line on chairs set out in a three-by-three square
- Cross-country skiing: in advance, drill four holes at regular distances along two planks and thread cords through them. Four members of a team place one foot on each plank, hold the cords taut and try to cover a short distance in as short a time as possible whilst keeping their feet on the planks.

Slightly messier activities

- Apple bobbing
- Wet slide: how far can you slide down the wet tarpaulin? (Protective clothing will be needed.)
- Hand to mouth: in a dustbin bag for two, with one person behind the other, one person feeds the other
- Fishing out alphabet pasta letters to make words
- Taking sweets out of mashed jelly using only your teeth
- Carrying water in a leaky bucket in relays to fill a container
- Throwing wet sponges at someone in the stocks with points for hitting different parts of them.

N.B. Any website with 'games for your youth group' will have many really messy activities to choose from.

Virtual torch relay

Start the ball rolling by getting one person to email an image of an Olympic torch to another person in the congregation or community with a simple message attached inviting that person to send it to two other contacts in the area. Those two people each send it to two of their own local contacts, and so on. Ask for the people who receive the email to copy in the senders when forwarding it so that you can keep a tally of how many people you manage to email before the deadline. You could include an invitation to see an actual torch burning at a picnic, sports afternoon or other event you're organising locally.

Messy water sports

Devise family-friendly water sports on a beach, or in a garden with all the paddling pools and baby baths you can get your hands on. Make sure that families are fully aware that they are responsible for the safety of their own children and that they need to take all necessary precautions to avoid accidents. Conclude the event with a barbecue.

All-age, all-ability adaptations of the water sports could include:

- Diving: pick up objects from the bottom of the pool by dipping in your hands. (Participants are given blindfolds to wear.)
- Swimming: travel down a water slide made from a long sheet of tarpaulin (drenched with a hosepipe)
- Synchronised swimming: with one person in each paddling pool, videoed from above
- Canoe or kayak sprint: compete with wind-up boats or use bath toys
- Canoe or kayak slalom: compete with radio-controlled boats
- Beach volleyball: use a large, lightweight beach ball
- Sailing: build and race homemade rafts and award prizes for speed and style
- Rowing: propel a wheelchair across land with oars with a child on your lap to 'help'.

Round the world safari meal

Organise a family safari meal with a global theme. You need different houses to host each course of the meal and the whole group walks together from house to house between courses after helping with the washing up. You could invite the hosts to plan their course with healthy eating and with the theme of a particular country. At each home, a family game could be played from the

country represented (see **Active all-age games from around the world**, pages 47–51, for ideas). You might want different people to organise the games each time to save the host having to do everything. On a larger scale, you could organise a safari meal between Messy Churches in your area and travel by bike, car or bus.

Messy 'get healthy' programme

Hold a 'get healthy' month. Each day for one month, invite families to try to achieve one manageable challenge that will exercise body, mind or spirit without taking too long or costing much.

- Day 1: run past five lamp posts
- Day 2: be kind to one person
- Day 3: try a fruit you've never eaten before
- Day 4: have an arm-wrestling competition
- Day 5: sit for two minutes in silence round a candle
- Day 6: phone someone and cheer them up
- Day 7: go for a walk together
- Day 8: drink an extra glass of water
- Day 9: ask one unanswerable question
- Day 10: climb a suitable tree and take a photo of each other in it
- Day 11: say a prayer for someone who is unwell
- Day 12: do ten star jumps
- Day 13: walk to your local church and decide which is your favourite part of it

- Day 14: listen to a piece of music chosen by the youngest member of the family
- Day 15: do one thing for another person without expecting any reward
- Day 16: say thank you to God for the meal you share
- Day 17: give something away
- Day 18: bake biscuits together
- Day 19: put on some lively music and dance for one whole track
- Day 20: do something you've never done before
- Day 21: say a goodnight prayer at bedtime
- Day 22: do 20 press-ups or sit-ups
- Day 23: listen to a piece of music chosen by the oldest member of the family
- Day 24: say hello to everyone you meet
- Day 25: say what the most mysterious thing in the universe is
- Day 26: learn how to say hello in a foreign language
- Day 27: tell each other your favourite Bible stories
- Day 28: invite someone to choose their favourite picture and ask everyone to listen while they explain why they like it
- Day 29: do the conga round every room in the house
- Day 30: play indoor skittles
- Day 31: buy a skipping rope and challenge each other to personal bests.

Messy gym

Negotiate with your local gym, swimming pool, dance or sports centre to hold a family event there.

Messy family weekend

Have a whole messy family weekend camp on a healthy living theme, including fun sports, dancing, celebration, construction and lots of food and drink.

Messy family Grand Prix

Hold a family-friendly fundraising race with entrance fees and sponsorship going to a worthy cause. Invite family teams to take part together to go round a manageable course on whatever vehicles they like: scooters, rollerblades, tricycles, pushchairs, wheelchairs, shopmobility scooters, pogo sticks, and so on. Encourage fancy dress or team colours.

Wii Fit family fun

Get your hands on as many Wii Fit machines as you can and arrange a circuit so that each family can have a short time on each machine. Persuade your teenagers to compile a set of funny YouTube clips of sporting events to watch together at the end over fruit juice and wholewheat snacks.

Healthy eating cookathon

Hold a family cooking session to make a healthy, tasty meal on a tight budget and, of course, eat the resulting meal together.