

Things that churches do

Messy Church

AIM

This is part of a series of documents giving concrete examples of evangelistic activities which other churches have been involved in. It aims to offer inspiration for others who may wish to look at similar activities

INTRODUCTION

Messy Church began in April 2004 in an Anglican church near Portsmouth. It is a church for families who find it hard to go to church on a Sunday, and a typical session would include chilling, creating, celebrating and chomping.

Its the first Saturday of the month and early afternoon. There are a small group of people (5 or 6) gathering at Well Street United Church, Buckingham. Some are getting the kitchen geared up for serving teas, coffee and squash, others sorting words and images for a simple service, and some getting board games out and others setting up crafts in the upstairs room. Why is this happening? It's a messy church afternoon! The theme and five or six simple crafts have been pre prepared and we are now ready and expecting to welcome young families from both inside and outside the church.

The theme is simple, and everything links to it.

CONTENT

When the families arrive, with children under 8 mainly, they are welcomed with a drink and a chance to play board games. I have played many rounds of 'twister', and 'guess who?' in this time. It allows everyone to relax, find their feet and to be welcomed, both children and adults alike. This time allows conversations to start, especially amongst the dads who are perhaps less at home in this environment. After a while, we clear the games away and attempt to sit in a circle(!) to hear the story. It is told, without props, sometimes with a children's Bible, so that children and adults are familiar with the story of the month. Not everyone is familiar with even the most common stories, but after the story telling we know enough to go upstairs. The upper room is the craft room. We have a range of activities, painting, sticking, playdough, water, 'girlie', construction, some very prescriptive, some 'freeflo', all planned so there is something for all the children to engage in. There is also a simple sheet which has a 'what to do' and a question on it. These are open ended to help parents, helpers and children to engage with the story. 'When the water turned into wine, how would you have felt?' 'Have you ever been lost? How was it when you were found?' 'How can you show you love someone?' This helps everyone to begin to think about the story. After 40minutes, we all then go downstairs for a simple service, drawing together what we have thought about. We try to include a song (accompanied on occasion by some of our teens), an application to the story and a prayer. There are often children running around the church and parents in hot pursuit! And it is rarely quiet, but the children leave singing snatches of the song, and having been accepted in church. Finally we go and have 'messy toast'. It could be a hot meal, but have found that toast works best for us. The children all sit round tables, with the adults serving them. Believe me the amount of mess that goes round faces and the floor qualifies us as messy church.

We started four years ago with a taster session at Easter. This followed a "childrens' ministry" conference run by Barnabas, the childrens' ministry arm of the BRF. They do very good training and produce very good tools for us to do the job. We then made our plans advertising through church, through some personal contacts and through a local school. We started "properly" in September 2007 and we have been going, once a month, ever since. There are pros and cons in a once-a-month programme but it is what we can resource so its what we do.

We are not the busiest messy church by far, but have had a constant flow of individual parents, who at the end comment that they have felt touched by God, or who have learnt something new and have felt welcomed. Which is lovely as that is part of our reason for doing this. Parents live increasingly busy lives and they may not be able or feel able to

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come to church on a Sunday morning, this space has given the opportunity to spend time with their children, to share with other parents the joys and hardships of parenting in a supportive environment, and to be a part of investing in their children's spiritual journey. The children have heard just a little of Gods story for us, and have begun to think about how God has a special plan for them. They have all been fed (so there are no excuses to rush away early to make tea!), and most of all we, as a small community, have been church. Where in the Bible did it say that we had to be clean? Or tidy? Or quiet?

Its messy church!

Caroline George

Well Street United Church, Buckingham

Note the websites: www.messychurch.org.uk
www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk
www.brf.org.uk

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

Take a look at the website for new materials appearing

Acknowledgements

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HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the evangelism year, you can email the V4L evangelism year coordinator via evangelism@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 1 – Transformed by the Bible: bible@vision4life.org.uk

Year 2 – Transformed through Prayer: prayer@vision4life.org.uk