

## How Best to Use Messy Church in Rural Areas

This helpful resource has been produced by Lucy Moore, the national Messy Church Team Leader, with assistance from some of her colleagues. Lucy has been the instigator of Messy Church from the very start – as represented by the publication of the very first Messy Church resource – *Messy Church: fresh ideas for building a Christ-centred community* – in 2006.

Messy Church has grown substantially from its origins in a suburban Anglican church in Portsmouth. As of July 2011 there are now well over 500 ‘messy churches’ in a recognised network all over Britain and further abroad, with substantial numbers of regional coordinators helping individual ‘messy churches’ both to get started and to develop. Increasing numbers of these ‘messy churches’ are in rural areas, and a significant number of these are joint ‘messy churches’ – formed when churches from a single denomination or ecumenically form a group in a local area to share resources and personnel in a vision for Messy Mission. Even more groups have adopted Messy Church approaches or use Messy Church resources without registering formally as part of the Messy Church network.

Research conducted in 2010 by the Arthur Rank Centre as part of the Rural Life and Faith project reveals something of this rural interest in Messy Church:

- 12 rural Messy Churches were identified that had started up in the past year in just the West Midlands or North East alone
- At least as many other groups or churches in the same regions indicated that they had been using a Messy Church approach, often by adapting existing Messy Church resources
- The single most popular non-rural resource recognised in a nationwide survey of rural practitioners – clergy and lay – was *Messy Church*.

However, Messy Church is not a specifically rural phenomenon. The bulk of ‘messy churches’ are not in the countryside, and many of the resources and materials produced by the Messy Church team have their origins in non-rural contexts. It is recognised that there are some elements related to Messy Church that for rural churches may require a certain amount of tweaking, adjustment, explanation or additional help. That is what this resource is intended to provide.

Besides the published Messy Church resources, which are highlighted in Section 9 of this resource, it is important to point out just how important the Messy Church website is (found at [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)). A great deal of advice and quantities of free downloadable resources are to be found there. Of particular value is the Messy Church blog (found at [www.messychurch.org.uk/blog](http://www.messychurch.org.uk/blog)) which is added to regularly, and provides a forum for much useful reflection and feedback, as well as up-to-the-minute stories from all over the network. (This can also be followed on Twitter as [@themessyblog](https://twitter.com/themessyblog).) Lucy herself can be contacted at: [lucy.moore@brf.org.uk](mailto:lucy.moore@brf.org.uk)

## Contents

1. What Messy Church Is and Is Not
2. The Basic Shape of Messy Church
3. Case Studies of Rural Messy Churches
4. Messy Church Resources
5. The Messy Church Network
6. How to Start a Messy Church
7. Advice on Ecumenical or Joint Messy Churches
8. A Sample Messy Church Session
9. Issues Affect Many Rural Messy Churches
10. Messy Stories from the Countryside
11. Rural Church Practitioners and Messy Church