

## **2 What Messy Church Is and Is Not**

### **What Messy Church is!**

A church for adults and children to enjoy together.

It's primarily for people who don't belong to another form of church already.

It's all-age.

It's fun.

Its aim is to introduce Jesus, to give an opportunity to encounter him and to grow closer to him.

It usually includes some creative time to explore the biblical theme through getting messy; a celebration time which might involve story, prayer, song, games and similar; and a meal together.

Its values are those of hospitality, creativity and celebration.

It's about building relationships and creating community.

From the very start, Messy Church has emphasised its underlying five-fold ethos: creative, hospitable (e.g. food!), all-age, Christ-centred & worshipping.

### **What Messy Church isn't!**

#### **... Just for children**

It's much easier to aim a Messy Church at one particular age group, but do stop and reflect on whether the non-verbal messages it sends are what you want to say about God. If your Messy Church's teaching, crafts and food are all aimed just at the under elevens, think what message you're giving both children and adults: church is only relevant / fun / meaningful / interested in you until you're twelve? God is for babies? No, Messy Church needs to be constantly creative in its thinking about how to involve very different people: young and old, families and single people, male and female, academic and practical, poor and rich.

#### **... A club**

The whole of Messy Church is about worshipping God, having fellowship, exploring faith matters. It welcomes everyone, involves everyone, values everyone, is always there for the outsider. It's a church.

#### **... A way of getting people to come to church on Sunday**

It won't, except in a few rare cases. If people wanted to come to established church, they would be coming by now. Messy Church is interdependent with established church, but will usually operate as a separate congregation or church.

#### **... Just for church families**

Anyone already belonging to church should be thinking about serving on the leadership team of Messy Church, however old or young they are and helping others come to know Jesus.

### **... Just for families**

All are welcome: single, widowed, childless, divorced. Church is inclusive, not exclusive.

### **... A quick fix**

Growing disciples takes time. Messy Church has only been going a few years anywhere. It usually only meets once a month. Growth will probably be slow.

### **... An easy option**

It takes money, time, prayer, commitment and energy from the church and leadership team.

### **... A drain on church resources**

Yes, it will take money and time, effort and gifted people to run it, but it will give back in return a group of people who are fired up for mission, empowered by using their God-given gifts. It will spark off ideas and inspiration about what church is all about and will renew vision. It will grow goodwill in the neighbourhood towards the church, and most importantly, provide the opportunity to do effective mission in your own community.

### **... Set in stone**

We're learning all the time. As the network of Messy Churches grows and develops, so the best ways of delivering Messy Church will develop and grow. BRF has deliberately chosen to have a 'non-controlling', 'hands-off' approach in the way we promote Messy Church in the hope that this will give God space to grow his church as he wants to and that it will give everyone encouragement to experiment and innovate.

It models and promotes good ways of growing as a family: a nuclear family, an extended family and a global and local church family.

It meets any time during the week, at a time most convenient for people locally.

It usually meets once a month.

The first one started in Hampshire in 2004 and the idea has spread so that there are now many Messy Churches and the number is growing all the time.

The organisation at the heart of Messy Church is BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship), a charity with Messy Church as one of its core ministries, which resources and connects Messy Churches through prayer, staff team, books, DVD and a website.

If you look at the Messy Blog ([www.messychurch.org.uk/blog](http://www.messychurch.org.uk/blog)) you can see many different examples of Messy Church, as well as discussion about this broad flexibility.

To quote one blog post from 2009 reflecting on the parable in Matthew 13:24-30:

*"We all know there are lots of Messy Churches who aren't completely 'in step' with the values of Messy Church as we see it ... But we don't want to stomp in with toxic weedkillers ... (or) blunder in and damage the growth that is finding its way towards the sun."*

And quoting Lucy from a further blog post in 2011, talking of evaluation:

*"I'm a little nervous with hard and fast questions as they might imply there is (just) one way of 'succeeding' in church and that simply isn't the case with Messy Church."*