

9 Issues Affecting Many Rural Messy Churches

Team

Messy Church does require a team. It won't work if one person takes it on alone.

The **problem** is often that there are few people to make up a team or that they appear elderly or infirm.

The **opportunity** is that this is a way of revitalising your existing congregation by giving them a mission-focused, outward looking but non-threatening task to achieve together.

Elderly people with their enormous life experience and serenity make excellent team leaders and Messy Church requires all sorts of jobs to be done, not just shifting furniture but a prayer support team, craft helpers, cooks, welcomers, chatters... there is a role for everyone who is prepared to join in. Age and infirmity are no object (or excuse!)

There is also an opportunity to grow a team from either several churches working together or to grow a team from unlikely people, including people with little or no active faith – parents from school or toddler groups for example, or spouses of church members, teenagers doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award. In fact one of the blessings of many Messy Church teams is that they do bring together people at all stages in their own journey of faith

Building

Many rural Messy Churches will have to decide between the value of holding Messy Church in the actual church building with all its inconveniences and holding it elsewhere which might lead to a disassociation from the established church presence. The existence or not of toilets may be the sole deciding factor; it is impossible in this day and age to invite families with children to an event with no toilet. Although not so immediately crucial, the deciding factor may also be the presence or absence of catering facilities, since food and eating together forms such a significant part of all Messy Church sessions.

Clergy input

There may well be less opportunity to have clergy input in a multi-parish benefice or in a rural area where the minister is spread around many churches. As many Messy Churches only hold an occasional Eucharist, if any at all, the absence of clergy is not a problem. Most Messy Churches are lay led and very effectively too.

Publicity

It may well be an advantage to be in a village where the word of mouth grapevine is much more effective than in an urban area. For example, in one suburban area, the children attend any one of seven local primary schools and four local secondary schools so the school gate network is non-existent. In a rural area there is more likelihood of children belonging to a smaller number of schools.

Ownership of the local church

Even in a dormitory village, there may well be more of a latent sense of ownership of the local church than there is in an urban area. This means more goodwill towards the church simply as a symbol of the community and a desire for what it does to work well. Messy Church is fun and works, so families may well be more likely to come and support it for the sake of the community than they would be in a town or suburb.

Thinking outside the box

Rural isolation gives the chance for imaginative thinking to solve problems, e.g.

- Diocesan funding for a Portaloo to travel between Messy Church venues
- A team preparing the same Messy Church session to deliver at several churches across an area
- A bus kitted out with crafts
- A rearrangement of pews to make better space
- A Mothers' Union bringing party food
- Rogationtide celebration of the local area with Messy activities
- Picnics, barbecues, pond-clearing, ditch-tidying, wide games, Messy activities at country fairs, (for example the Royal Norfolk Show has a Messy Church tent), Messy hospitality and activities for families during Fun Runs or Cycle Rides