

## ‘This works!’ How Messy Churches create new space for faith



Significant new research from the Church Army’s Research Unit confirms the serious effectiveness of Messy Church. *Playfully Serious: How Messy Churches create new space for faith* proves that Messy Church is not ‘just a bit of fun’, as some critics persist in believing. Rather, it is reaching people who weren’t previously attending church, it is growing disciples and it is modelling new patterns of leadership – and it is doing so across a wide range of economic and social contexts.

Founded in 2004 by Lucy Moore, and supported throughout its remarkable development by The Bible Reading Fellowship, Messy Church now numbers over 2,800 registered groups in England alone and some 3,500 worldwide.

### **Lucy Moore comments:**

‘I’m thrilled that the report recognises what we’ve been hearing from churches for the last 14 years: Messy Church is working. This is a massive accolade to the effectiveness of Messy Church teams up and down the country and indeed around the world.

‘There are so many findings to celebrate: the 81% of participants seeing evidence of changed lives through being a part of Messy Church; the 76% of female leaders and all those leading in a “generous”, “empowering” and “sacrificial” way; the 100% engagement with the Bible; the 61% of families belonging who otherwise might not belong to any church; the way it “seems to work almost anywhere”. Actually, every page of this report is so full of delights that it’s impossible to list them all.’

*Playfully Serious* is the result of a two-year research project by the Church Army’s Research Unit, commissioned by The Archbishops’ Council and led by Claire Dalpra. According to the Church Army’s own statement, it ‘documents at the highest level what has been learnt about the effects of Messy Church in the Church of England’.

### **CEO of BRF, Richard Fisher, comments:**

‘We are delighted with the Church Army’s Research Unit’s report *Playfully Serious: How Messy Churches create new space for faith*. It’s a huge encouragement to all of us at BRF and to everyone involved with Messy Church as it has grown to become a vibrant international movement. We celebrate all that God is doing in and through Messy Church and give thanks that this report confirms the impact Messy Church is having on so many individuals and families, from first-time participants to long-term volunteers. Parents, children and grandparents are encountering Jesus, often for the very first time, and lay people are discovering gifts for ministry and leadership they’ve never been able to explore before.

‘It’s wonderful to have this recognised and evidenced by careful research, but the report also highlights the challenges faced by Messy Churches: the challenge of resourcing the work and overcoming resistance. At BRF, we’re focused on addressing these challenges and looking forward to new opportunities to work with the Church of England and other denominations to enable Messy Churches to flourish.’

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For Lucy Moore, and for all those involved in leading and promoting Messy Church, those twin challenges are a daily reality:

‘God has given the church a generous gift in Messy Church. It’s frustrating that pockets of inherited church remain sceptical, indifferent and even publicly hostile to what God is doing in it. It’s a commonly voiced frustration by Messy Church teams that their Sunday congregations ask, “When are the families from Messy Church going to start coming to church?” The report demonstrates that Messy Church is in itself an effective disciple-making form of church, especially when it is done as church rather than an outreach event. We need to value different expressions of church and encourage each other, recognising that one shape doesn’t fit all.

‘A Messy Church leader told me recently of a family who had started coming to their Messy Café outreach project because their five-year-old was asking about God; the family then came to Messy Church, joined the Sunday congregation too, are on the Messy leadership team and are now asking to be baptised. They’ve brought six extended family members into the church by enthusiastic invitation and they want to help raise money for Messy Church. If this isn’t discipleship, what is? Others take longer to taste and see that God is good, that they belong in their local church, that there is no hidden agenda, just love, hospitality and acceptance.

‘Messianic Church is the story of God giving the church the chance to laugh together, eat together, worship together and come closer to him and to each other across the age groups and social divides. This report clearly sets out how the church might bless the Messy work. For the sake of the families who haven’t yet found their way into the kingdom, I hope it takes the findings seriously.’

#### **Bishop Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester, comments:**

‘As the Chairman of BRF’s Trustees, I am delighted to read the findings of this report proving, beyond reasonable doubt, the significance of Messy Church for discipleship and the development of lay leadership as well as evangelism. The inspirational faith of both the staff and the trustees of BRF, coupled with the creativity and hard work of Lucy Moore and the immense generosity of a small number of trusts and individual donors, have given Messy Church the opportunity to grow into what it has become today – the largest Fresh Expression of Church in this country. But little of that would have happened without the thousands of lay people and clergy who have grasped the vision for fostering a new form of church – not just an enhanced outreach activity – and giving it the energy it has needed. From reading this report, I thank God for all of them but also, more importantly, I thank the God who enables his church to preach the gospel afresh in each generation.’

#### **About Lucy Moore**

Lucy Moore is the founder and pioneer of Messy Church. She has been a member of The Bible Reading Fellowship staff team since 2000. Messy Church started in St Wilfrid’s, Cowplain, in the Diocese of Portsmouth in 2004. In 2008, the generous grant and donation of a trust and an individual enabled Lucy to pioneer Messy Church. Lucy is in demand as an international speaker and trainer, alongside writing publications to resource the Messy Church network and helping lead Messy Church in her own church.

Find out more about Messy Church at [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)

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Read Lucy Moore’s statement in full [here](#).

Read the Church Army report and all supplementary materials [here](#).

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