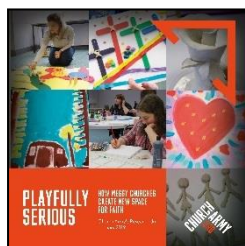


‘This works!’ How Messy Churches create new space for faith Lucy Moore responds to new report on Messy Church



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 glad the report states objectively what Messy Church leaders have felt instinctively: that Messy Church is making disciples. 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. I’m thrilled that the report recognises what we’ve been hearing from churches for the last 14 years: Messy Church is working.

The report is a massive accolade to the effectiveness of Messy Church teams up and down the country and indeed around the world. It’s moving that the report places these teams in the spotlight and pays tribute to their often-unrecognised ministry in their local church. Without these teams, who just get on with it without making a song and dance about their ministry, so many families would never have discovered that they belong in their local church, that God loves them, that Jesus died for them, that we all have a journey with God to go on. These team members are the hitherto unsung heroines and heroes, often lay people, mostly unpaid, simply following God’s call to do mission in their local community in partnership with the rest of their church. Lay leadership, training on the job, empowering of church members of all ages, bewilderingly impressive outcomes around discipleship in families and teams, servant leadership: so much to celebrate.

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.

more/.

If Messy Churches can achieve this much with limited resources, and limited recognition or encouragement from their diocesan leaders or local clergy, imagine what they could do with the affirmation, resources and training that the report advocates!

Compared with the cost of setting up some forms of church, this report shows there are huge spiritual returns from a Messy Church for incredibly small financial outlays. Encouragement costs time and effort, to be sure, but not much money. This is 1 Corinthians 12 in action – we need to look after each other across the various ‘styles of church’: we are one body; we may have different jobs within that body, but we all glorify God better when we celebrate and support each other. As Messy Church respects and honours inherited church, let inherited church respect and honour its somewhat Messier member, rather than treating it as second best. After all, Paul claims it’s these ‘uncomely parts’ that have more ‘abundant comeliness’.

In Messy Church, we need a very generous understanding of discipleship. We’re in it for the long haul. We can’t simply value the one moment someone becomes a Christian or throws themselves into a life of holy habits and discipleship practices. We’re meeting people much further back on their journey: but if we don’t put the early stepping stones in place, they might never go on the journey at all. Instead, we enjoy the way God is calling people to him a long time before they might notice it or articulate any sort of faith language. We rejoice that discipleship might begin with a vague desire to ‘do something the kids will enjoy’ or ‘get a free meal’ and that the journey towards a head-and-heart understanding of God’s love and call on our lives might take a very long time. We’re celebrating the vibrant spirituality of younger people and the way they often lead the family into Jesus’ path. Likewise, we enjoy God’s sense of humour as he lights up the lives of team members and churches as they turn to face outwards and suddenly remember they have a God who acts, a story people want to hear, a community with a purpose, a hope and a future.

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.

It’s obvious from the report that doing Messy Church intentionally as church, as has always been advocated in our training and books, is far more likely to make and grow disciples than doing it as an outreach event. So how do we encourage ‘outreach Messy Churches’ to become intentional about being church? How do we create appropriate milestones to celebrate our Messy journeys with God, which will help people move forward, without dictating the direction they should travel? How can we help more churches do Messy discipleship, perhaps via the Discipleship Pilot on our website, and feed back their findings? What resources can we usefully provide to support discipleship – perhaps films that tell stories or books to convince different traditions of the value of Messy Church? The report opens up many helpful possibilities, but how do we do enough of it with such a small team to make it happen and such limited financial resources? And, of course, we’re trying to support Messy Churches in all the denominations and in about 30 countries. But God is good... The Bible Reading Fellowship is a great ‘home’... the Messy network is incredibly generous, and we will do what we are able to!

I’ve been privileged to work alongside great colleagues who have helped shape the movement. Richard Fisher, BRF’s CEO, was the one to spot what God was doing in and through Messy Church and make it possible for me to join in; Jane Leadbetter and Martyn Payne have both been colleagues without whose gifts Messy Church would be a very different animal.

more/.

Our Regional Coordinators are amazing and do so much so generously. Charis Lambert from London, for example, has been with us from very nearly the beginning and is a vital part of the wider Messy family, as are many others. God has blessed us with individuals to guide us: George Lings, previously in the Church Army, has always been our guiding light; Graham Cray has affirmed and encouraged us before Messy Church was more than a few scattered examples. Michael Moynagh, Val Mylchreest, Tim Lea, Andrew Roberts, Dave Gregory, Andrew Vertigan and so many more have given us courage and hope when we weren't sure what we were doing. And that's just in the UK! We're also grateful to the very generous individuals and charitable trusts who have faithfully supported us with money and prayer.

Messy 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.

Lucy Moore
February 2019

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

Messy Church is a movement resourced and enabled by The Bible Reading Fellowship, a registered charity

The Messy Church name and logo are registered trademarks of BRF

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

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

messychurch.org.uk | brf.org.uk

For interviews with Lucy Moore contact:

Eley McAinsh 01865 319708 eley.mcainsh@brf.org.uk or out of hours:

Karen Laister 07872 838814 karen.laister@brf.org.uk