

One small group looked at “What Messy Church is/ isn’t” and looked at ways of starting up

The other group shared and discussed experiences as below.

Session 1 – Sharing experience

Variations in frequency:

- Monthly (fortnightly, if variations on MC counted)
 - Helps maintain continuity of contact
- 3-4 per year (often coinciding with holidays/events such as Easter, Christmas, Harvest)
 - Often piggy-backs on holiday club/mission events
- Every 6-8 weeks
- Frequency often depends on resources
 - Volunteers
 - Cost of crafts, etc

Variations in size:

- Anything from 20 – 80+

Variations in timing:

- Saturday morning
- Sunday morning (coinciding with ‘traditional’ church)
- Sunday afternoon
- Weekday, if at holiday time

Variations in format:

- Breakfast, followed by MC
- MC, followed by lunch
- MC, followed by light tea
- MC, with snacks throughout

Who comes?

- Often target 6-10 years age group, but often many pre-school
- Sometimes very young
- Broad mix of those who have no church connection and those who do

Other comments:

- Sacraments
 - Can be a 'feeder' into baptism
 - Messy Church communion very worthwhile
 - Important to do it as part of MC, and not 'import' it to traditional church
- Can be an opportunity to invite MC to other family services
 - Nativity
 - Easter
 - Family services
- Crucial to maintain family focus – not just for kids
- Complementary – dovetail, rather than compete, with other local MCs
 - Share ideas and resources
- Flexibility – MC resources are a starting point for our creativity, not a prescribed method
 - Find out what works and develop it
 - Find out what doesn't and change it
 - Be flexible on the day – just because it was OK last time...
- Make use of social networking, Facebook, church website, etc, **BUT**
 - ❖ **Make sure you have explicit signed consent before posting photos or videos on websites**
 - ❖ **Make sure your photographer is made aware of who is not to be photographed**
- Growth is often by word-of-mouth
- Make sure the word is good
- Ensure your welcome is warm and friendly
- Make sure nobody is uncertain about what is going on – they must feel comfortable being there
- Biggest problem is getting helpers/volunteers
 - Make use of all the skills available
 - Age is no limit – e.g. even an elderly, or less mobile, person may be able to help with colouring in, say

Session 2 – and beyond

For this session we split into two equal groups to look ahead discuss how Messy Church develops. This is a resume from both groups of thoughts and ideas. One group had the question asked “Is this an immediate problem? Does it need looked at now?” Consensus seems to be we must look ahead now.

Looking ahead:

- At planning meetings, build in time for reflection and review of these
 - Build relationships with all those coming along.
 - Not just for ‘the next one’, but further ahead
 - Pay attention to current age range and gender balance
 - Pay attention to who is getting towards the top end age range
 - Be honest about what works and what doesn’t
 - Develop team relationships as well
 - Is there a need to change the model in use at times?

- Methods of contacting and keeping contact
 - Contemporary methods essential
 - Use all means eg facebook

- Kids ‘naturally’ move on to different things (open to debate). Other youth organisations see a similar trend of reducing numbers in older sections.
 - But does it have to be like that?
 - Provide things to move on to

- Plan ‘bolt-on’ activities
 - BBQ
 - Quiz night
 - Pamper nights for Mums and grannies—and all1
 - Outings
 - Fish Supper nights for families
 - Scaletrix/ train nights for dads, boys, granddads
 - Carpet bowls
 - Encourages wider church participation
 - Encourages specific interest engagement
 - All these should be open to whole Church---Messy and Traditional
 - NOTE:- stressed by some that to be Church there must be a reflective time at all events----short probably but there; folk will expect it.

Developing relationships:

- MC is church, and should be afforded the same resources and support
 - Pastoral contact
 - Invitations to other church activities (inclusion in wider work)
 - Invitation to and inclusion in special services – Christmas, Easter, etc
 - Invite ‘Sunday morning congregation’ to come to MC
 - Showcase the work in MC – photo or film show on Sunday morning (or other times)
 - Two way traffic needs to be built between “traditional” Sunday congregation and Messy church
- Share resources across parish/area groupings/presbytery
- Avoid clashing events
- Encourage ‘your’ people to support other MCs

Main issues:

- Resources
 - Availability of willing people
 - Tailor activities to available resources, but also ask those with particular skills to help for one-off activities
 - Identify possible leaders/helpers from within the parents/carers who come (bearing in mind Messy Church does say children should always be accompanied by parent, carer, grandparent)---and people like to be involved and asked to help----, and also the older children
 - Cost
 - Don’t be afraid to ask local businesses, schools etc if you can borrow leisure equipment
 - Church of Scotland Go For It funding
 - Donation dish at registration table works wonders in at least one case

Coming through the whole two hours was the feeling that NOTHING SHOULD BE SET IN TABLETS OF STONE. Be willing to adapt, listen to those coming along.