

Messy Church sessions on a Christian Unity theme

Introduction: What is Messy Church?

Messy Church <http://www.messychurch.org.uk> is a way of being church for families, based around hospitality, creativity and celebration. It began in the UK in 2004, partly from a desire to help families with members of all ages grow together in their faith, and from a belief that we grow best as a church when we walk the journey with as many different people as possible. It has since caught the imagination of churches of many denominations around the world as they try to rethink how to be church for people who have little or no church connection. It is a core ministry of the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) <http://www.brf.org.uk> and is endorsed by Fresh Expressions <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk> which encourages new forms of church for a fast changing world.

These Messy Church sessions were originally put together for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer which takes place in most areas from 18-25 January each year, but sometimes at another time of the year by local agreement. As they have a general theme of churches coming together these sessions can be used at any time of the year to encourage people to think about church unity.

Messy Church sessions for Christian Unity

These crafts are all based on the theme of being united, joined together, strength in diversity and the beauty of complementing each other's differences.

1 Ice cream in a bag

Ingredients

1/2 measure milk
1/2 measure whipping cream
1/4 measure sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla essence
1/2 to 3/4 measures table salt or rock salt
2 measures ice
1 larger sealable plastic bag
1 smaller sealable plastic bag
Gloves or protective cloth
Bowls and spoons

Method

1. Add sugar, milk, cream, and vanilla to the smaller bag. Seal the bag securely.
2. Put ice into the larger bag.
3. Add the salt to the bag of ice.
4. Place the sealed smaller bag inside the larger bag of ice and salt. Seal the larger bag securely.
5. Put on gloves and gently rock the larger bag from side to side. WARNING: it will get cold enough to damage skin, so wear gloves or use a cloth to hold it.

6. Continue to rock the bag for 10-15 minutes around the group or until the contents of the smaller bag have solidified into ice cream. Some rhythmic music may help to while away the time, or you could use the opportunity to share stories of what God's been doing for you recently.
7. Remove the smaller bag, open it, serve the contents into bowls and enjoy!

Talk about the way the ingredients join together to make something delicious, just like God wants the different churches to join together and bring something wonderful to the world. If you're feeling a bit tougher, you might point out that the Church needs a good (gentle) shake to make it see sense sometimes!

2 Prison building

Use old cardboard boxes and other junk to build a prison that you can get inside. Graffiti on the outside the names of countries where Christians are imprisoned for their faith.

Some Christians are put into prison for their beliefs: does this put our disagreements into perspective? Do we also voluntarily imprison ourselves and cut ourselves off from other churches when we want to do things differently from them? How can we make sure we all stay free together?

3 Macramé

Make a key fob or bracelet from knotted lengths of string. If no-one can do macramé, look up instructions for Friendship Bracelets. Strings knotted together are very strong – and beautiful! Do we feel strongly bound together with Christians in other countries and other local churches?

4 Wooden joints

Find someone competent to teach basic carpentry. Have small pieces of wood to join together in different ways. Which technique is the strongest? What sorts of things keep churches 'stuck together', not falling apart?

Suggestions: nailed, nut and bolt, glue, screw, staple, tied together with string, sticky tape, chewing gum, sticky tak, wet Weetabix, treacle.

5 Bridge building

Choose some materials for bridge building (such as marshmallows and spaghetti / drinking straws and sticky tape / junk) and see who can make the strongest / longest bridge.

What builds bridges between Christians?

6 Watercolour mingling

Have small squares of watercolour paper. Paint the square with water. Add small shapes of different colours of watercolour paints and watch them flow into each other creating different patterns.

Back the finished work of art on to a piece of card.

Talk about the different 'colours' of Christianity – the different styles of worship from quiet monasticism, loud worship bands, solitary hermits, massive churches in huge arenas and churches from all round the world. Together they make a beautiful and varied pattern.

7 Fruit kebabs

Cut up and add different types of fruit to a wooden cocktail stick.

The church is like a strange tree that grows all sorts of different kinds of fruits! Just like fruits look different from each other, so are there lots of ways of worshipping God.

8 Sharing game

Two competitors or teams face each other across a floor space (on which may be a tarpaulin or other waterproof covering). In front of each are containers – pots, jars or buckets some of which are empty and some of which are full. At the signal, each team tries to fill up all the opposite team's containers that are empty. After a set time (about 1 minute, depending on age of participants) see which team has managed to share most of its resources with the other team. Talk about how different this game is from the way the world often works, where people try to snatch off each other instead of give to each other. God loves his churches to share what they have with other churches and with the world. When one church in the Bible was starving, another sent money to the Christians there. And he will always come along and fill up our buckets from his never-ending supply when we need it!

9 Stamping rainbow inkpads

Have a couple of rainbow inkpads available and different sorts of stampers. Have fun printing designs on to paper or card. Talk about the lovely different colours and how people have a favourite colour but that doesn't make one colour better than another: they're just different and that's fine. Just like different sorts of churches.

10 Local churches

Have broom handles, with the name of a local church stuck to each broom handle, a little way apart. Make paper chains to join up the churches – either the standard strip of paper stapled into a loop with another strip looped into the first and stapled in turn and repeated, or cut out big heart shapes / X-shapes or cross shapes and sticky-tape them together into a strip that joins the churches together in love. Talk about where the churches are in your local area and what you like about each one.

Prayer Table

Have some pictures to look at of different ways Christians pray.

Using bubble mix or Fairy Liquid, blow bubbles and pray for a different local or global church as you pop each bubble.

Celebration

Sing: We are one in the Spirit, Bind us together, Jesus stand among us, Let there be love shared among us, or similar.

Either

Story:

The Rainbow that Nearly Wasn't - from

<http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/pages/data.asp?layout=page.htm&Type=&Id=1808>

– a story in which the different colours of the rainbow argue that they and they alone should make up the rainbow. It's only when they see each other through God's eyes that they realise they are far more beautiful and useful when they all work together.

Or

Based on John 17:20-21: Jesus said, *'I am also praying for everyone else who will have faith because of what my followers will say about me. I want all of them to be one with each other, just as I am one with you and you are one with me. I also want them to be one with us. Then the people of the world will believe that you have sent me.'*

Have fun throwing a ball of wool or soft string across the circle, with each person who catches the ball holding on to the string, unwinding a length more and throwing the ball whilst continuing to hold their piece of the wool. Continue until everyone is holding the wool and it looks like a tangled web across the circle.

Say: This may look like a real mess, and there are short lengths and long lengths and bits that haven't unravelled, knots and tangles, but everyone's included and nobody – yet- has dropped the piece of wool, so everyone's connected. This is just how God wants his church to be – Christians from all over the world, worshipping in all sorts of different ways, but all linked up to each other and feeling sad if anyone lets go of the network and ends up on their own. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a special week each year when Christians all over the world pray for the whole Church to be united, brought together as one. Messy Churches and other churches all belong to each other and we need to pray for each other.

Give out prepared stickers to everyone: on each sticker is the name of either a local church, another Messy Church, or a denomination or a country. Each person sticks the sticker on to their front. Now ask everyone to join hands (either with the people either side of them or by reaching hands into the middle of the circle and taking hold of the first hand they come across – this is messier but more fun. Say, 'Look! All these different churches, all joined together! God's really pleased about that! I'm going to say, *Jesus, we pray for the Christians in.....* and I'd like you all to call out the names of the churches and places on any stickers you can see around you – or whoever's on your own sticker. If you can't read, just ask someone near you to tell you what's on their sticker. Ready?'

Meal

Whatever you have, why not try serving it in such a way as makes people on a table share with each other – have a pot to share out from or a plate of something to pass round the table, rather than dishing up a plateful per person from a hatch. And point out that we're going to be sharing from one pot / plate today deliberately to show we want to look after each other, not just ourselves.