



Godsend App

A. Overview

2 Share faith

What might it mean to interpret faith into a language that families can understand and enjoy? Perhaps it could mean living out a little bit of what it means to be a Christian community once a month and inviting families to join in and see if they like it? Giving them an experience of a creative space where the people making that space genuinely care about every person, young and old, and have an abundance of imaginative, hospitable ways for everyone to explore the stories of the Bible and the person of Jesus together? Giving everyone a chance to participate in a short accessible act of worship to find out what worship can be like and to experience prayer, songs and Bible exploration in community? And then to experience the way God provides for people at a glorious sit-down meal where everyone is welcome, everyone is equal and no dietary need is too much trouble: it's all part of the hospitality?

Calling it 'Messy Church' does several things. It transparently names what you're doing as 'church' right from the publicity, so everyone knows what they're coming to. It names it as 'Messy' which means both the fun of creativity but also the openness to anyone who may feel their life is a mess, their relationships 'aren't good enough' or their children 'behave badly'. The name 'Messy Church' makes it explicit that this is a church which will be fun, engaging, light-hearted and creative, and where it's okay to come just as you are, whether that's not needing to dress to impress or to put on any sort of mask, front or pretence to be better than you are.

Take the five steps outlined in the main part of this unit of the app.

1. You've pulled a team together with a shared vision for reaching households. Have you named the intention to share faith as well as that of eating lots, getting sticky, making things explode and so on?
2. At your Messy Church, will the short celebration time be thrown together at the last minute or will your team plan it with the same sense of purpose as a minister does for other forms of worship? (Phrased like this, it sounds obvious, but we see Messy Church after Messy Church where the opportunity of the gathered celebration is thrown away in favour of entertainment or just by dint of 'not being bothered'.)
3. Be ready with a meaningful response to the possible question, 'Why do you do this?'

4. At a Messy Church, while it's busy and chaotic, there are also little oases of space and opportunity for conversation, if the team members have the intention of making these spaces. At your planning meeting, why not practise how you might use the suggested open discussion starters (copied below from the main app) over the activity tables, during the celebration or at the meal table? Which would be most appropriate to get a conversation started with a pre-schooler? With a primary school child? With a child with additional needs? With a teenager? With a distracted young parent? With a dad who has English as a second language? With a grandparent brought up to see church as something very different from this?

Does faith always need sharing through words? How might you use the objects from the activity to help share the story, or share the God behind the story? How interested are you in the insights of the person you're talking with, or do you just have a pressing need to tell them what you think is the 'right answer'? Are you looking for what God wants to teach you through a stranger?

A reminder of the open-ended questions:

- If this story happened today, what would it look like?
 - What does this story say to me?
 - How could the story make difference to my life?
 - How did it make a difference?
5. The free-flowing nature of a Messy Church can feel very threatening to some leaders who want to have all the answers and make sure they remain in control. Practise modelling to each other in the team an attitude of 'it's okay not to know the right answer' and 'it's okay not to be perfect'. Notice and reflect as a team on the moments when *how* someone says something is more important than *what* they say.
 6. As soon as humanly possible, wherever appropriate, invite people of all ages to take part in some aspect of leadership in your Messy Church – welcoming people at the door, leading an activity table, telling the story in the celebration, helping in the kitchen. There are many easy ways in a typical Messy Church to encourage people to learn by teaching or by serving.
 7. In Messy Church, put crudely, you get out what you put in. If you set out to put on an entertaining event for kids with babysitting adults in tow, you'll probably manage that very well. If you set out to encounter Jesus together in a creative and hospitable gathering of all ages, you're very likely to achieve that instead!

Trusting the Spirit can take the form of a commitment to prayer, an attitude of humble listening, recognising the God-moments in the middle of the mayhem, taking the opportunity to articulate your own faith when that opportunity presents itself and noticing when people take even the smallest step of transformation. It might also mean being in it for the long haul and accepting that this ministry is less about harvesting a ripe crop of converts and more about sowing seed, or even ploughing fields, or even removing the stones from the field ready for the plough.