



Godsend App

A. Overview

4 Basics

This unit invites us to consider:

- A compass to point you in the right direction
- A map to plan your route
- Food
- The address of your destination.

Specifically Messy Church interpretations of these four images might add to the suggestions for fresh expressions more generally, as follows:

A compass to point you in the right direction

Be missional – You might take the easy option and find yourself focusing on the needs of families who already belong to church. Messy Church’s default setting is to be outward-facing and to put the needs of those who don’t yet belong first. This might present as ‘when’ to do your Messy Church or ‘where’. It might be about the biblical themes you choose to explore, or even the levels of need you decide to meet (‘Nobody really needs a hot meal, do they? Let’s just give them a biscuit.’)

Be contextual – Encourage each other to keep aiming to be intergenerational, not completely child-orientated. One of the Messy Church values is hospitality: keep reflecting and acting on how your ‘guests’ might shape the community you’re creating.

Be formational – Another Messy value is that of being Christ-centred. Encourage each other to keep Jesus at the centre and never to water down the gospel in favour of entertainment. Expect to be formed and transformed yourselves.

Be ecclesial – One recommendation from Church Army Research Unit’s *Playfully Serious* report on Messy Church is that ‘Messy Churches should be encouraged to become fresh expressions of church’ rather than outreach events. It’s worth airing this as a team and seeing whether everyone agrees: traditionally ministry among children in the church has not been seen as church in itself and those attitudes may be hanging on.

A map to plan your route

The *loving-first* cycle can help you be church ‘with’ your Messy Church families rather than ‘at’ them. It’s worth noting that the extreme missional nature of Messy Church means that you need to be prepared for this route to take a long time. And that ‘Sharing Jesus’ may be both easier and harder than in other fresh expressions. Easier because often children are very open to God and profound conversations can spring up apparently out of the blue. But many people come along in the first place for reasons far removed from anything overtly godly, so it can take a long time of walking alongside them for them to come to something resembling a traditional expression of commitment.

Food

Messy Church is hard work and demanding on time, imagination and resources. Leaders often appreciate the resources developed by other Messy Church teams and shared via messychurch.org.uk and the social media outlets in the name of Messy Church BRF. The Messy network itself is starting to resemble a global church community, and it can be very enriching to learn from those in other cultures, who have faced the same problems as we now face and who want to pray, think and act through Messy Church. Connecting to the network will open up a wide range of resources and like-minded friends. It’s alarming to find many struggling Messy Churches who have never bothered to check out the help available!

The address of your destination

This element reminds us of the importance of relationships, which are more important than any structure. Through the 2020–21 pandemic, when Messy Churches couldn’t meet, many leaders continued to care for their families in low-key imaginative ways. Messy Church, like any church, isn’t about a putting on a big shiny event, but about a gentle web of friendships in all four directions, deepening over time.