

So MESSY!



NEW

CONTAINS TWELVE MESSY CHURCH SESSIONS INCLUDING CHRISTMAS AND EASTER



VOL. 1

Intergenerational Discipleship

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Get MESSY!



What is Messy Church?

It's church, but not as you know it.

Every month thousands of people of all ages come together to discover Jesus, including those who've never been to church before. In over 30 countries around the world, we eat, play and worship together. Expect activities, songs and prayers and an entirely new way to express your faith.

Look out for the following symbols by activities, which give you extra materials and more!



PDF DOWNLOAD

This symbol means you can go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessyvol1 to download templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet.



MESSY CHURCH AT HOME

If you are using these sessions for a Messy Church at home, look out for this symbol! These are activities that can easily be adapted to the home.



MESSY CHURCH GOES WILD

This symbol shows activities that work well for Messy Church Goes Wild sessions. See messychurch.org.uk/goeswild for more ideas.



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Send in news, stories, photos and general enquiries to our Messy Church administrator on +44 (0)1235 858238 or messychurch@brf.org.uk.

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Meet our session *Writers*

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Arul Israel is a youth and children worker for the Birmingham Methodist Circuit, having previously worked as a secondary school teacher for 15 years. She loves working with young people, dancing Bharatanatyam (a classical Indian dance) including choreographing and performing liturgical dances as part of worship. Having a nearly teenage son helps with the skills her job needs!

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Anne Offler is based in County Durham and has worked with Sharon Pritchard and numerous Messy Churches for many years. Anne is a Methodist local preacher and writes resources for churches and children's ministry publications.

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Sharon Pritchard is based in County Durham and works alongside Anne Offler and many Messy Churches. Sharon is children's ministry adviser for the diocese of Durham and writes resources for churches and children's ministry publications.

Greg Ross is a Uniting Church minister in the south of Western Australia. Greg is one of the Regional Coordinators for Messy Church Western Australia and is part of the National Messy Team for Australia. He is passionate about building up local congregations and enabling people to collaborate with God on mission in each community, so that they continue to build new and appropriate forms of church where everyone is welcome.

Sharon Sampson is a photographer, dog walker and mum of three, from a little village in the English countryside. She loves showing all ages that being a Christian can be a fun adventure! She runs church campouts, Easter experiences and interactive prayer stations, hides painted rocks around the village and runs a Messy Church.

John White is originally from the USA and is now a priest in the Church of England. He is the founder of Hazelnut Community Farm, a worshipping community that has social innovation, economic inclusion and political and spiritual transformation at its heart, all looking at how to connect with creation and address the reality of the climate emergency. Hazelnut is also a growing network around the UK that is encouraging and resourcing churches to think about their connection with and care for creation. Find out more on their website: hazelnutcommunityfarm.com.



Sonia Baidoo



Sandy Brodine



Jane Butler



May Dappa



Claire Dawe



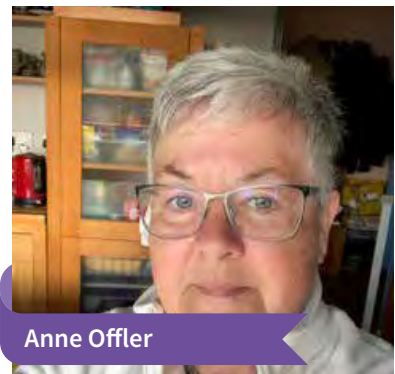
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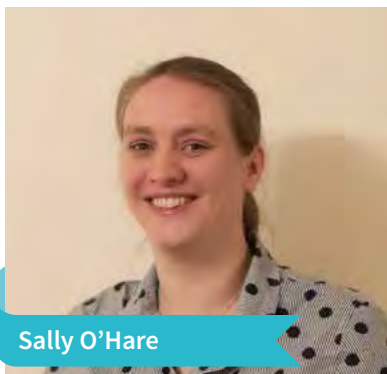
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Aike writes...



Welcome to the new format of Get Messy!

We hope this twelve-session edition will help your team plan a bit further ahead. While some sessions link to church or cultural festivals (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the Paris Olympics 2024), feel free to swap the order or choose sessions that are most suitable for your context. It's important to remember that any resource is just a springboard, and we hope that you will creatively adapt ideas for your Messy Church. If the themes in this edition are not quite the right fit, as we're all at different stages on the Messy Church journey, remember we have a massive back catalogue of resources available on the website: messychurch.org.uk.

I just want to say a huge thank you to our writers who have taken time to create and test-drive these sessions. Each session includes a Bible story and some pointers to get your team thinking about how to talk about the theme during the activities. We suggest you take time at the start of your planning meetings to pray, reflect on where you noticed God at work in your previous session, then read the Bible and be curious about which words or verses stand out.

You'll also find a choice of ten activities, designed for a range of ages and abilities, with both indoor and Messy Church Goes Wild activity suggestions. Remember that you don't have to do them all! Additional templates and activity signs for tables can be found at messychurch.org.uk/getmessyvol1. The social action idea can help your Messy Church be church throughout the month, encouraging people to put into action the Bible theme. In the celebration section, you'll find ideas to retell the Bible story in an engaging way, together with a prayer, plus song suggestions. Finally, to help you with hospitality, we've included downloadable mealtime card question ideas, designed to keep the conversation flowing when you gather to eat, together with a meal suggestion.

Themes in this edition

When I started in role as BRF Messy Church ministry lead, I fasted and prayed, asking for God's guidance. God gave me three words: sustainable, intergenerational and discipleship. I believe these are areas for the Messy Church movement to dig into and explore, so that we can experience the fullness of God's kingdom through our Messy Church communities, holding on to our values of being Christ-centred, for all ages, with creativity, hospitality and celebration. We will explore these three words in our session material.

We start and end with a 'sustainable' theme, as we care for God's world together (Psalms 24 and 65; Romans 1:20); we pick up on the 'intergenerational' theme as we explore conflict and forgiveness between generations in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–47); a vision of how the generations can live well alongside each other (Zechariah 8:1–23); and how we celebrate Christmas together around a fire (Luke 2:1–20).

As we head into 2024, we climb aboard the DiscipleShip, designed to help people set sail on their journey of following Jesus. Part of discipleship is to embody God's radical love for everyone, and we've created a session exploring the theme of racial justice, to complement Racial Justice Sunday in February. We then explore the stories of Jesus' disciples: Mary Magdalene and Peter, around the events of the first Easter. Our Pentecost session, 'God speaks my language', encourages us to be equipped with the Holy Spirit and find ways to talk to other people about Jesus in a language they can understand, which is not easy in every country, as we discover in the 'Shh! It's a secret' material. In July we celebrate the Paris Olympics, and in our final session we challenge you to get outdoors and rediscover God in creation and our role in its stewardship.

Remember to check out the stories and articles that accompany these sessions on our social media, blogs, e-newsletters and website.



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Remember that you can visit messychurch.org.uk/getmessyvol1 to download all sorts of extra content for these sessions, including photos, templates, table signs, mealtime cards and a session planning template!

Session material: September

Care for our world

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

Bible story

Psalm 24:1–2 (NRSV)

The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

Psalm 65:6–13 (NRSV)

By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Pointers

God made the world and everything in it, as the psalmist says. The world has a real beauty in the things we see around us – the mountains, seas and all things on the earth. This beauty, made by God and enjoyed by us all, gives us a sense of joy. God made the world carefully, with a balance in nature that is evident when we look around us and have those moments of wonder that just seem to take our breath away.

The psalmist also talks about an abundance, an overflowing amount of food created for us to enjoy, providing water and warmth for crops to grow. God has created so much to feed us with. This should remind us to voice our thanks.

Just as God made the world with care, we need to participate in caring for the world in the things we do and how we use what God has provided. Maybe we need to think about the carelessness we sometimes show in wasting resources, including food.

We can join in the celebration of all God has made by appreciating our world and all that is in it.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

It is a reminder of the beauty in the world around us, made by God, and how we can all work together to maintain and enjoy its beauty. It is also a reminder of the abundance of food God has given us to enjoy and to share, maybe drawing our focus to what we can do to use the resources in the world wisely without wasting them.

Add value

Mealtime card

- What is your favourite meal?
- What could you do to keep your food waste bin empty?
- What challenges could we take on to better care for our world?

Take-home idea

Use the nature grid (from activity 7) and look for the things you have drawn on it. When you see one of the things, tick and/or date the box and make a note of where you saw it.

Question to start and end the session

So... how can we celebrate and care for the world and all its resources?

Social action

Look around your local area to see what you can do to help improve it, such as litter picking.

Activities

1. Seed bombs



You will need: blue, green and white tissue paper; bowls; water; seeds

Tear strips of each colour of tissue paper and soak separately in some water in the bowls. Take some of each colour of the wet paper in your hand and flatten it out, then sprinkle some seeds on to the wet tissue paper. Squeeze the wet paper and seeds into a ball shape over a bowl to catch the excess water. Leave to dry a little, then place the seed bomb in your garden. Don't forget to water it and watch as the seeds grow over the coming weeks.

Talk about how our world is full of beauty and how it is our job to look after it as best we can. Seed bombing an area helps new things to grow and can also provide a home for bugs.

2. Prayer ramble



You will need: sketch map of the outdoor area you will use with stopping points marked; instructions at each stopping point, e.g. 'Listen to the sounds', 'Look at the flowers', 'Sit on the bench', 'Look at the mess', 'Look at the houses', 'Listen to the traffic', 'Collect a few leaves and twigs' (this activity is to be personalised for your outdoor space)

Look at the map and walk around the stopping points. At each point, listen, look or collect the things listed. What will your prayer be? Examples could include thank-you prayers for the birds we hear, sorry for the mess we make of the world God made, thank you for clever people who made cars and wagons but help us to use fuel resources wisely, thank you for times when we can have a rest and when nature rests in winter time, thank you for the flowers, trees, etc. that we can see.

Talk about looking and listening carefully to see the world around us that God made and to wonder how we can help to care for it.

3. Big, beautiful world

You will need: a large blue paper tablecloth; magazines; scissors; glue; felt-tip pens; green, brown and yellow paper; fabric, fur, feathers, sequins and any other crafty bits you can find

Cut the tablecloth into a large circle (you could do this more easily by folding it in half, then half again and cutting a quarter-circle). Using the coloured paper, cut out some shapes to represent some countries and stick on to the world shape. Cut pictures out from the magazines

1



2



3



that show some of the things in our world that are beautiful – for example, pictures of mountains, animals, trees, food sources, people, etc. and stick them on to the world. Decorate further with your extra craft material.

Talk about how the world is full of beauty – if only we would stop to take notice of the creation around us more; we see God’s beauty all the time, everywhere we look!

4. Bird feeder



You will need: empty crisp tube; bird seed; string; scissors; peanut butter (or alternative such as almond butter); spatula; tray

Cut two small holes in the lid of the crisp tube and thread a piece of string through them, tying it together to make a loop to hang the bird feeder with. Using the spatula, spread the peanut (or alternative) butter on to the tube (be aware of nut allergies). Fill the tray with the birdseed. Roll the butter-covered tube in the tray of birdseed until it is all covered. Hang the bird feeder up with the string and watch the birds enjoy!

Talk about how it is our responsibility to care for all creation. Look to see how many new birds are coming to use the bird feeder in your garden!

5. My promised fridge-magnet



You will need: printed copies of the ‘person holding the world’ sheet (download online); felt-tip pens; scissors; self-adhesive magnets

Using the printed template as a base, draw features that personalise the figure to look like yourself, adding hair, eye colour, etc. Think about a promise you could make to help care for creation and write or draw it at the bottom. Colour in the world in green and blue to show the land and the seas. Cut it out and stick a magnet to the back so that you can pop it on your fridge when you get home.

Talk about how we all need to make promises and remember to care for God’s creation. This fridge magnet will remind you and will help you to act on that promise.

6. Food travelogue

You will need: a large map of the world; a variety of food in tins and packets; small pieces of card folded to make markers to stand on the map; pens

Look at the map and identify where you live. Put a card marker on the country. Choose a tin or pack of food and try to guess where it comes from. Look at the label to check your answer and then put a card marker on the map.

Talk about the people who produce our food and the

4



5



6



countries in which they live. How can we support them? Consider the miles our food travels. Could we grow more of our food closer to where we live? How can we reduce the travelling distance of our food?

7. Nature in our place



You will need: a copy of the nature grid for each person (download online); card; glue; pencils; pictures or photos of local wildflowers, trees, birds, butterflies, etc. (optional)

Choose three weather features and create an illustration of one in each of the three boxes. Choose three each of trees, wildflowers, birds, butterflies and draw one of each in a box on the grid. Stick your grid on to a piece of card and decorate the card. You can do this based on what you can see around you or from your imagination.

Talk about nature being all around us and all the amazing things God created. How can we look after all of the things on our grid?

8. Treasure under the sea

You will need: a parachute; a box; A5 pictures and/or words of things found in the sea (both good and bad), e.g. starfish, shark, plastic bag, dolphin, boat, oil drum, rusty ship, crab, fish, pebbles, seaweed, plastic can holders, etc.

Fold each piece of paper with the picture or word on several times and put them in a box. Gather around the parachute, with the box on the floor in the centre and practise making waves – stormy waves, big mushrooms, etc. As one of the mushrooms is made, call the name of one of the people around the parachute who ‘swims’ under it to the box in the middle and takes out one of the pieces of paper. Look at what is on the paper and decide whether it is good or bad to find it in the sea. Take turns calling the name of the ‘swimmer’ and repeat until the box is empty.

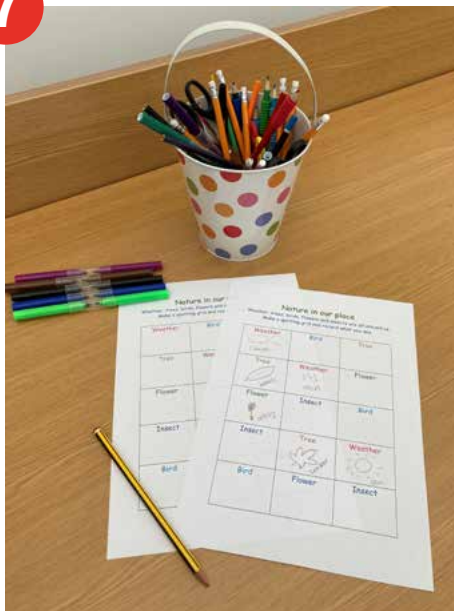
Talk about all the things we find in the sea. Why are some things good and some things not so good? How can we help to keep rubbish out of our seas?

9. World cupcakes

You will need: a cake-making machine/oven; a packet of cupcake mix or a cupcake recipe from online; cupcake cases; blue and green food colouring; bowls; spoons; cooling trays

Heat up the cake-maker/oven and make up the cupcake mixture according to the packet or the recipe. Put half of the mixture into a bowl and add a few drops of blue colouring. Add a few drops of green colouring to the remainder of the mixture. Put cake cases on a tray or plate. Put

7



8



9



a teaspoonful of each mixture on to a large spoon and gently swirl it. Drop the mixture into each cupcake case. Bake the cakes for eight minutes (or according to recipe), then take them out (make sure an adult does this!). Allow them to cool on a tray.

Talk about mixing lots of things to make the cake. Which part was the most fun? Where do we get flour, butter, sugar and milk from before they go into the packs in the supermarket?

10. Plenty-to-eat placemat



You will need: placemat template (download online); strips of coloured paper 2.5 cm wide; glue sticks; food stickers

Use the template to make a placemat for each person, cutting where shown. Take a strip of paper and weave it in and out across the base. Put a little glue at each end to stick it down. Decorate the placemat with the food stickers.

Talk about all of the food we eat, what we like the best and what we don't like as much. Do we always eat all of the food on our plate? How much food do we waste? Can we do more to waste less?

10



Celebration

Gather everyone together in a circle, seated on the floor. Put the 'Big, beautiful world' collage in the middle so that everyone can see it. Start by asking who made what on the collage and why they decided to include it on God's big, beautiful world.

After a short discussion, ask everyone to close their eyes. Ask one person to recite some of the psalm, a verse at a time, pausing to allow time for reflection on the words. Talk about how the words of the psalm are beautiful and help us to remember that God's world is so beautiful and that we are tasked to take care of it as best we can – how can we do that in our church? In our schools and communities and in our homes?

Prayer

Using a bubble machine, thank God for the things in his beautiful world – you may want to ask for suggestions. Elaborate on any suggestions. For example:

Thank you, God, for flowers, for the wonderful colours they are and how they brighten up our gardens and fields, how they smell sweet and provide nectar for our bees. Help us to look after flowers well God. Amen.

Song suggestions

'He's got the whole world in his hands' – Complete Mission Praise #225

'Jonny Appleseed grace' – traditional

'Our God is a great big God' – Nigel and Jo Hemming

Meal suggestion

You could have an outdoor picnic with mini-foods such as mini pizzas, breadsticks, mini-carrots, cherry tomatoes, cocktail sausages, cheese strings, etc.

Session material: October

All together now

by Crystal Goetz

Bible story

Genesis 47:1–12 (CEB)

Joseph went to inform Pharaoh and said, ‘My father and brothers with their flocks, herds, and everything they own have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the land of Goshen.’ From all of his brothers, he selected five men and presented them before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph’s brothers, ‘What do you do?’

They said to Pharaoh, ‘Your servants are shepherds, both we and our ancestors.’ They continued, ‘We’ve come to the land as immigrants because the famine is so severe in the land of Canaan that there are no more pastures for your servants’ flocks. Please allow your servants to settle in the land of Goshen.’

Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since your father and brothers have arrived, the land of Egypt is available to you. Settle your father and brothers in the land’s best location. Let them live in the land of Goshen. And if you know capable men among them, put them in charge of my own livestock.’

Joseph brought his father Jacob and gave him an audience with Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How old are you?’

Jacob said to Pharaoh, ‘I’ve been a traveller for 130 years. My years have been few and difficult. They don’t come close to the years my ancestors lived during their travels.’ Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left Pharaoh’s presence. Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them property in the land of Egypt, in the best location in the land of Rameses, just as Pharaoh had ordered. Joseph provided food for his father, his brothers, and his father’s entire household, in proportion to the number of children.

Pointers

The story of Joseph and his family is a rocky road. There are many twists and turns, just like we have in our lives, but in the end, they work together and help each other. Pharaoh knows that Joseph’s father Jacob is very old

and can provide wisdom but also has a lot of information about the family’s history. There is a sense of remembrance of their ancestry in this story. During the three-day celebration of All Hallowtide – 31 October, 1 November and 2 November – we are called upon to remember our ancestors and include them in the narrative of our lives.

In our modern world, it is hard to imagine generations living together and having the same occupation. We can find commonality through difference, as God desires for us. Some thoughts:

- Life is challenging! God and family can help you through it.
- Any age has value and God has made each of us uniquely gifted to help our world and our families prosper.
- Pharaoh recognises that the family has history; Jacob’s viewpoint is valuable because of his age, not in spite of it.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Jesus came to remind us that we are all a family: God’s family! Joseph made sure that his family had a place to live and food to eat. Jesus came to make sure that we could care for each other and remember the lessons of those that came before us to help us move forward. He reminded us of the wisdom of the people that came before and how, when we use that wisdom, we can have fuller, richer lives.

Add value

Mealtime card

- What generation are you part of (Baby Boomer, Gen X, etc.)?
- Do you identify with that generation? Why or why not?
- What generation do you look to for advice and why?
- Have you ever had to provide for your family? Or did someone that came before you provide for your family?

Take-home idea

Sort through your family photos with members of your family from multiple generations. Have them tell you about the people in the pictures and mark them so that you can pass the story on to the next generation. Consider a project that can tell these stories to future generations.

Question to start and end the session

So... why is spending time with, providing for and remembering other generations important to God?

Social action

Find an organisation that assists people outside your generation. Find out how you can help. For example, an organisation that teaches adults how to read, coaching a children's sports team, teaching a craft to a senior or letting them teach you a skill. Take it a step further and, if you find an area that isn't being served, start something that can help those in need.

Activities

1. Dendro-generational

You will need: photos of cross-sections of trees of different ages, or if you are lucky enough to have actual cross-sections of trees use those; access to this website loaded on to a phone or laptop climatekids.nasa.gov/tree-rings or a book on dendrochronology from the library (there are many online resources to help with this activity)

Take a walk around your church grounds or a place where there are trees. If you do not have access to any trees, use photos of cross-sections of trees to explain that we can tell the age of a tree by the rings in a cross-section. The Climate Kids website explains a lot about this. The rings tell us about weather patterns and growth patterns that are unique to certain years. When you find a dramatic dark line, it relates to a certain year of growth and then you count outward to determine the age of a tree. Each ring represents a year. Try to determine the ages of the trees in the photos or those of actual samples.

Additional information can be found at: nps.gov/learn/education/upload/10treeringactivities.pdf

Talk about if a tree is better when it's older or younger. What makes it better? Strength? Durability? As a tree ages, it grows thicker and stronger – does it reach an age when it's not getting stronger? Is the same true for people?

2. Remembrance circles

You will need: various items from nature, e.g. leaves, twigs, stones, flower petals (be mindful of what you take and from where); a basket or bag to gather them in; a space on the ground to create; a camera

(Gather the natural items yourself beforehand or have this stage as part of the activity.) Take the items from nature that you have gathered and create a heart or circle shape with them. Then use more items from nature to create a symbol or symbols of a person, group of people or pet that you are remembering. For example: to help remember a pet dog, you might make the shape of a ball or spell their name out. Then take a photo of the remembrance circle. If you make your circle in an area that can remain undisturbed, you can leave it as a memorial until it returns to the earth.

Talk about what you remember about the person or pet that is special to you. What do you miss about them? What can you carry forward in your life from their life?

3. Pass-it-on game

You will need: ping-pong balls (minimum of one for each person and for smaller teams two to three per person); small, lightweight, unbreakable plate (no larger than 17 cm diameter and rimless, one for each team)

Line up players in age order, from oldest to youngest. Give each person one to three ping-pong balls depending on the number of players. Have the oldest person hold the plate and place the ping pong ball(s) on top of the plate and pass it to the next person in line and they will add all their balls and pass it to the next person down the line. The goal is to keep all the balls on the plate as you pass them on. If you drop the balls, you must pick up all the balls, put them back on the plate and pass them backwards. As the team members do so, they take their balls and when it returns to the oldest person, begin again. This can be played as a race with two teams against each other or one team timed to see who has the fastest time.

Talk about what skills or things has someone passed down to you? Has it been valuable to know? What has Jesus passed down to us?

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4. Family history documentary

You will need: a camera; basic costume pieces (aprons, hats, scarves, tools, etc.); a copy of the Joseph story if needed

Have people act out a family history story, or what they think life was like for their ancestors. They could also act out the story of Joseph and his family. Film it and show it to the group.

Talk about whether you think life was more difficult for people who lived a long time ago or whether it was easier. Do you think Jesus did chores? How do you think Jesus helped his family? Why do you think he did or didn't?

5. Food family

You will need: sliced cucumber; cherry tomatoes; baby carrots; sliced bell peppers; pretzels; mini breadsticks; sticks of cheese (plus any other food that is easily accessible and in season); plates

Take the different foods and create a food family (people-shaped characters) on a plate. You could try and make them look like your family or another family!

Talk about whether anyone included Jesus as a member of their food family. Do you think of Jesus as part of your family? Why or why not?

6. Heritage photo frame

You will need: small picture frames (can be repurposed or purchased, or you could construct a basic frame from wide craft sticks); glue; paintbrushes; small container or plate for the glue; some of the following supplies which you are happy to be torn up – old books, sheet music, flat lace, newspapers, magazines, old letters, scrapbook paper, buttons, etc.

Paint a small amount of glue on the rim of the frame. Tear or cut pieces of material and supplies and glue on to the frame, wrapping around the sides of to cover all the surfaces with paper or other materials. When it is complete, if desired, you could coat the entire frame with PVA glue or Mod Podge to seal it. Take the frame home and put a picture of your family in it to remember your heritage.

Tip: If you use bigger pieces of paper, it covers the frame much quicker, so this would be better for smaller ones or people who like to try to complete as many activities as possible.

Talk about when you use an old thing to make something new, you honour your ancestors, but also take care of the

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planet. What are other ways you can do this? When we put a picture of our family in a frame and place it somewhere special, we honour them. How do you honour God as part of your family?

7. Bring it on game



You will need: unbreakable cups (many); wide craft sticks; a steady flat surface

Place four cups in a square no further apart than 5 cm. Lay craft sticks in a square on top of the cups. Place another four cups in a square on top of the sticks. Then another layer of sticks. Build a tower as high as possible before it falls.

Hint: There is a trick to this. Practise it before demonstrating it.

Talk about how taking care of family can be challenging. There are often difficulties that are inherited. What challenges are part of your family history or your current family? What hope does God offer us? Did Jesus inherit any family issues?

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8. We remember - light celebration

You will need: a room or area that can be made dark or very dark; balloons; glow bracelets or sticks (use two bracelets if the room cannot be made completely dark); sticky tape; permanent markers

Activate the glow bracelet or stick, blow up a balloon and insert the stick or bracelet into the balloon. You may lose a little air when doing this, so reinflate the balloon if necessary. Tie off the balloon. Write the name of a person or pet that you wish to remember on the balloon with permanent marker. Depending on how many people you have, you can allow people to do multiple balloons or write multiple people or pets on their balloons. Say a prayer of remembrance for them. Something like: 'God, thank you for the wisdom of Aunt Martha and the love of Rex my dog. We are grateful for your love too. Help us to remember them and you every day. Amen.'

Have someone help you or place some tape on the balloon and tape to the ceiling or high on the wall. You will need this activity for the celebration, so encourage as many participants as possible to do this activity.

Talk about how it can be hard sometimes to remember your family members or pets. How can you turn those memories into a positive thing? How does the story of Joseph help you remember to care for and honour your family?

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9. 'Remember me' lantern



You will need: pint or half-pint mason jars with rings (no lid required); acrylic paint markers; alcohol pads or cotton balls and rubbing alcohol; fine sand; LED tea light or regular tea light; twine or string

Clean the outside of your jar with alcohol to remove any dirt and make sure it's dry. Using the acrylic paint marker, make a pattern on your jar. You can also write the name of a loved one. Let it dry. Tie a piece of twine around the opening of the jar leaving one end about 20 cm. Repeat with a second piece of twine, leaving the long end on the opposite side of the jar. Put about 2.5 cm of sand on the bottom of the jar and place the candle inside. Put the ring of the lid on the jar. Tie the two ends of the twine together over the top to make a hanger.

Talk about how, in many places around the world, we remember people in our family that have come before us by lighting a candle on All Souls Day (the Saturday after Halloween). Do you remember your relatives in any way in your home? How do we remember Jesus?

10. 'We are woven together' paper braiding



You will need: strips of construction paper (cut no wider than 2.5 cm); glue or glue sticks; markers or crayons; sticky tape or a stapler

Glue two strips of one colour together at one end at a 90-degree angle. Rotate the point of the 90-degree angle so that it is at the top. Glue two more strips of another colour on top of the 90-degree angle strips, as in the photo provided. Fold paper at right angles starting on the left side, then the right side, left side, right side until you have completed a short braid. Glue additional strips of paper to each end to lengthen the braid. Continue to braid until the length can be folded around to make a crown. Write the words or help them to write the words 'God's family is stronger together' on the braid anywhere. Staple the ends together to make a crown. Take your crown to the celebration time.

Talk about how our lives are woven together with our family. Biological? Church? God's family? How can we help to make the lives of these family members better?

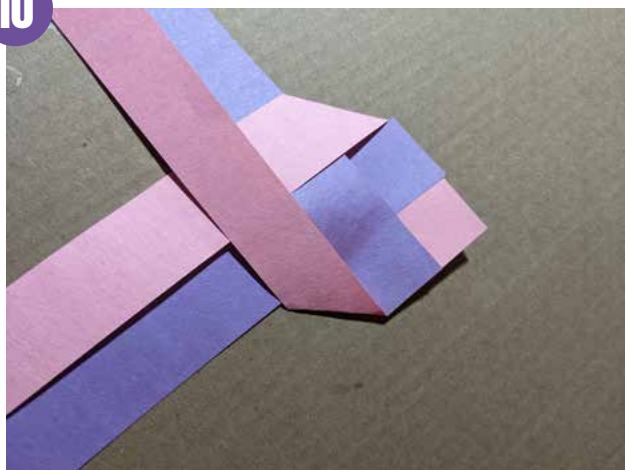
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Celebration

You will need: braided crowns (from activity 10); something to pop the balloons (from activity 8) if you want to pop them loudly or scissors if you want to pop them quietly

Lead everyone into the room where the balloon memorial lights are (you may need to do this in two groups if the room is small). Make sure everyone has their paper braid crown as they enter. Turn off the lights and behold the beauty. Sing or pray together in the light and remember those that came before.

Lights may be turned on or left off if desired at this point as we continue our activity.

As we gather here in this place where we remember those who came before, we remember the story of Joseph and how he cared and provided for his family. Joseph went before the Pharaoh, who respected Joseph, and introduced his father to him and asked that his family could make a home in this land. This story can be found in the Old Testament of the Bible in Genesis 37–47. It is a long and interesting story, but we have taken a small bit of the story that is all about caring for your family. Like Joseph, God cares for us and provides for us. Jesus is the only Son of God and came to earth to show us how to live and to care for each other. What a gift! Are there lessons we can learn from Jesus? Tell me something you remember Jesus doing (*give time for answers*).

Get the balloon that you made to honour your loved one (*allow time for this*).

And now we remember our loved ones; take a moment in the quiet to remember them. And then pop the balloon and take the light with you. Carry the light home and into your lives and, as you do, remember that all generations have things to offer and gifts to give. Remember to use your gifts and remember the greatest gift of all. Jesus, who came to us as an example of how to live, passed along many wise things to us. Now it is time for us to pass something along to someone else. Take your braided crown and trade with another person and as you do, say: 'I pass this on to you. Remember me and God when you see it.'

IMPORTANT NOTE: if you have people who might be alarmed by the loud popping sound of a balloon, you can pop a balloon quietly by cutting it with scissors near the area where it is tied. Decide based on your context.

Prayer

After trading braided crowns, lead into this prayer:

Loving Creator God, leader of our family, we thank you for giving us a family through you. We thank you for our ancestors and those who have come before us and given us their wisdom and shared their gifts with us. Help us to remember our brother Jesus and all who have come before us in our daily lives. Help us to use their wisdom to make the world a better place. Thank you, loving God. Amen.

Song suggestions

'Pass it on' – Kurt Kaiser

'Written on the palm of God's hand' – Fischy Music

'My life for you' – Yancy

'We remember' – Jason Walker and Mark Stuart

'We're all one' – iSingPop

Meal suggestion

One way to bring a family together is a potluck – have your Messy Church team all bring a dish that is near and dear to their family. Or serve the meal 'family style' at the table in large bowls and pass the bowls around and as you do remember that we are all one family – God's family!

Meals that are easy to serve family style: pasta, salad, bread or breadsticks, fried or roasted chicken, vegetables and bread rolls. Dessert ideas: ice cream sundae bar – with all the toppings or fresh warm cookies served family style to stay with the theme!

Session material: November

Fabulous new city for everyone

by Claire Dawe

Bible story

Zechariah 8:1–23 (GNT)

The Lord Almighty gave this message to Zechariah: ‘I have longed to help Jerusalem because of my deep love for her people, a love which has made me angry with her enemies. I will return to Jerusalem, my holy city, and live there. It will be known as the faithful city, and the hill of the Lord Almighty will be called the sacred hill. Once again old men and women, so old that they use canes when they walk, will be sitting in the city squares. And the streets will again be full of boys and girls playing.

‘This may seem impossible to those of the nation who are now left, but it’s not impossible for me. I will rescue my people from the lands where they have been taken, and will bring them back from east and west to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their God, ruling over them faithfully and justly.

‘Have courage! You are now hearing the same words the prophets spoke at the time the foundation was being laid for rebuilding my Temple. Before that time no one could afford to hire either men or animals, and no one was safe from enemies. I turned people against one another. But now I am treating the survivors of this nation differently. They will plant their crops in peace. Their vines will bear grapes, the earth will produce crops, and there will be plenty of rain. I will give all these blessings to the people of my nation who survive. People of Judah and Israel! In the past foreigners have cursed one another by saying, “May the same disasters fall on you that fell on Judah and Israel!” But I will save you, and then those foreigners will say to one another, “May you receive the same blessings that came to Judah and Israel!” So have courage and don’t be afraid.’

The Lord Almighty says, ‘When your ancestors made me angry, I planned disaster for them and did not change my mind, but carried out my plans. But now I am planning to bless the people of Jerusalem and Judah. So don’t be afraid. These are the things you should do: Speak the truth to one another.

In the courts give real justice – the kind that brings peace. Do not plan ways of harming one another. Do not give false testimony under oath. I hate lying, injustice, and violence.’

The Lord Almighty gave this message to Zechariah: ‘The fasts held in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become festivals of joy and gladness for the people of Judah. You must love truth and peace.’

The Lord Almighty says, ‘The time is coming when people from many cities will come to Jerusalem. Those from one city will say to those from another, “We are going to worship the Lord Almighty and pray for his blessing. Come with us!” Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord Almighty and to pray for his blessing. In those days ten foreigners will come to one Jew and say, “We want to share in your destiny, because we have heard that God is with you.”’

Pointers

- God is always present with God’s people and loves them.
- The new Jerusalem will be a city of peace and justice.
- All ages will live and rebuild together.
- People from all over will want to live in the city and be in the presence of God.
- There will be plenty to eat.
- It will take courage, but God is always present.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Jesus reiterates throughout the gospels that God provides – whether it is food, healing or forgiveness. God desires to be in relationship with us and provides our needs. Jesus uses stories to show people how this can apply to them. When we sit with others and listen to their stories, we can find encouragement for our own lives and situations. The First Nations Peoples in Australia have a tradition of yarnning circles where people sit around in a circle, often around a firepit, and share such stories and experiences. This keeps their culture alive and passes it on to the next generation, as well as passing on the wisdom of the elders.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Who have been the most important people in your life so far and why?
- If you built a city, what would it include?
- Can you share your earliest memory?

Take-home idea

Create a list of places where families can donate food to those in the community experiencing food poverty. Find out what is happening in your local area and see where you can help.

Question to start and end the session

So... how can we listen to the stories of others and learn from them?

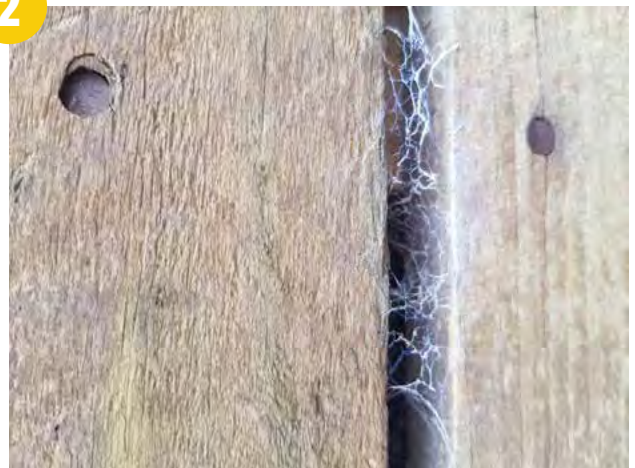
Social action

In Zechariah, the people are told by God they can plant their crops in peace and that they will grow. Food poverty is very real in our world. Does your community have a food bank or free pantry? Ask your Messy Church members to bring along non-perishable food items and donate them as a community. You could make this a regular offering.

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Activities

1. Plentiful garden



You will need: seeds or seedlings (seeds will be a cheaper option than seedlings); recycled pots or single-use containers with drainage holes in the base; compost; gloves; face masks (for some potting mixes); hand trowels

Carefully plant the seeds or seedlings in the pots or ground. Make sure they are placed somewhere so they get enough sun and water in order to grow.

(If you have an area for a vegetable garden, why not ask permission for a small Messy Church food garden?)

Talk about how we're told in Zechariah that the people will not need to worry about where their food is coming from as God will provide fertile earth and rain so the crops will grow. It takes hard work to create a vegetable garden. Is there someone in your Messy Church who grows their own food? How much time do they spend looking after their garden?

2. Walls



You will need: an outside wall or fence of some description

Take a careful look at the wall – it could be a brick wall, a drystone wall, a fence. What can you see making its home in the wall? It's important to use just your eyes, as you don't want to hurt any small creatures or be bitten by them. Look but don't touch. I wonder if you can see a spider web, or a tiny bug darting between the shadows. I wonder if there is lichen or moss growing on the wall. What does this tell you about creation?

Talk about our Creator God being the source of all life. All faiths and cultures through time have sacred stories about how the world and all creatures came to be. Did you know there are two tellings of the creation story in Genesis? Humans are called by God to care for the earth, not to abuse it or trample it. How might we care for the earth in our local community and globally? What are the steps we can take as individuals and as communities of faith?

3. Hopscotch

You will need: chalk; an outdoor paving space to draw a hopscotch (or a large sheet with a hopscotch drawn with a marker pen); pebbles

Instructions to play: players take turns to throw the pebble so it lands on each square in turn starting with the first. The player who threw the pebble then lands with one foot on the single square and both feet on the double square, but not landing on the square with the pebble. If someone is unable to hop, they can throw the pebble and have a partner for the jumping.

Talk about what the favourite games are of those in the group, both older and younger.

4. Build a city

You will need: Lego; boxes; anything else that can be used to build

Build a city together using the materials provided, just as the people rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. Work with others in a team and allow each group to add their own parts, whatever is important to them. Remember it is the process, not the finished result!

Note: this could also be run as a Messy Minecraft activity depending on your group and their skill-set. For more information, see banyuleuc.org.au/messy-church-facebook-live.

Talk about what you think is important for a city today and why? How might that be different to Zechariah's time? What might be the same? Why?

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5. Create a faith wall

You will need: wax crayons; paper; different surfaces for rubbings; scissors; a blank wall or window; information about the Western Wall in Jerusalem (optional)

Look around your space – inside and outside – and find different surfaces. It could be a wall, a plaque, a floor tile, leaves. Place the paper over the surface and gently rub the wax crayons over the surface so that it makes an impression. Cut the rubbings into bricks and create a wall of Jerusalem in your worship space. On each brick, write the name of someone who has guided you in faith/discipleship.

Talk about who you chose. How have they been a brick in your faith wall? The Western Wall in Jerusalem is all that is left of the temple after it was destroyed in 70AD. It is described as a prayer wall for all nations. Information is available online – jerusalem-insiders-guide.com. People write down their prayers on pieces of paper and leave them in the cracks of the wall. Churches around the world have prayer walls both inside and outside for people to add their own prayers.

6. Peace dove



You will need: card with dove outlines (download online); lots of recycled white bits and pieces to stick on it; glue; paper; pencils

Stick all the white things on to the dove. Once you've stuck something on, write down your own prayer for peace. Bring all the prayers to the celebration time.

Talk about how, around the world, nations remember those who have died in wars on special days, e.g. Remembrance Day in November, ANZAC Day in April in Australia and New Zealand. We all seek peace. Is there somewhere in the world that needs peace right now? This activity may need to be adapted depending on the ages of the participants. If you have any veterans or serving members of the armed forces in your faith community, ask if they would be willing to take part in this activity. They will have interesting reflections to share.

7. Prayers for others

You will need: large sheet of paper or cardboard; newspapers; scissors; glue

Create a prayer collage from the words in the newspapers. Avoid the temptation of cutting out whole articles. Cut out words and create your own phrases to spell out your thoughts and prayers.

Talk about how God knows what is on our hearts and

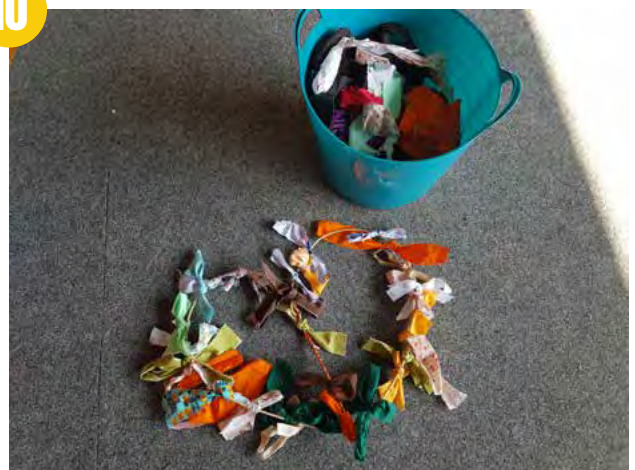
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therefore prayer is for humans. It is a time to be still and talk/listen with God. When we share with God in prayer, we are naming what is going on for us and bringing it to our own attention and awareness. Prayer is also a time when we make ourselves accountable to God to be his hands, feet, eyes and ears in the world. And we commit ourselves to action. As you create your prayer, what are you thinking about? Are you feeling a call from God to take action somehow?

8. North, south, east, west



You will need: a globe or world map (map apps will also work); local and national maps; compass

Where do you come from? Can you find your country, town and the church on the maps? Can you use the compass to work out if you are in the north, south, east or west? Are you north or south of the equator?

Talk about how Zechariah tells us that people came from all over the known world to Jerusalem to worship God. They came from the north, south, east and west. This message is very inclusive and has echoes of the Western Wall in Jerusalem which is known as a prayer wall for all nations.

9. 'Enough rain' science experiment

You will need: glass filled half-way with water; shaving cream; ten drops of blue food colouring mixed in a separate half a glass of water

This experiment is from the website sciencefun.org/kidszone/experiments/storm-in-a-glass. Take the glass filled half-way with water and then add a thick layer of shaving cream filling up to 3/4 of the glass. Add the food colouring very gradually until it starts to 'rain'.

Talk about how clouds hold water. The shaving foam is our cloud. It can hold a lot of water until it's so heavy it has to release some as rain (or snow or sleet). Zechariah tells us that in Jerusalem, the people will have enough rain to grow their food – no one will go hungry as there will not be floods or droughts. What happens to crops when there is either too much or too little rain? How does that impact food production?

10. Heart of remembrance



You will need: heart shape made from sticks, cane or wire; recycled fabric, yarn and ribbons

Create the heart shape – we used cane which we moulded into the heart shape. Tie on the scraps of fabric, yarn and ribbon to represent people who have died from the community and people's families.

Talk about the story of the person each member wants to remember as you tie on the scraps. Do this activity in small groups so you can give space for everyone to speak and respond.

Celebration

You will need: hearts of remembrance (from activity 10)

In some cultures, a different name is used for someone who has died and their photos are no longer shown. Be careful about any cultural sensitivities within your faith community and adapt the prayers and activities.

In Australia, we start with an acknowledgement of country. This is when we pay our respects to the original custodians of the land, the First Nations Peoples. Pray the prayer below, encouraging everyone to join in with the gestures.

Prayer:

We have come from the north, the south, the east and the west (*indicate the points of the compass*).

We have come to worship our God, creator of the universe and sustainer of all life (*make a big circles with arms*).

We have come to listen to each other (*cup hand over ear*) and, in that listening, we will hear the voice of God.

We are many individuals, (*sweep arm around to include all*) but we are one community of faith (*hold up one finger*), drawn together by God's grace (*draw arms in a circle inwards*), followers of Jesus.

Let us listen now as the Spirit moves among us and opens our ears to the good news (*hold up arms*).

Amen

Let's sing to each other now and acknowledge that God is in each one of us, that God has given us gifts and talents for God's glory.

Song: 'I see God in you' – India Arie

Today's sacred story: Our story today is from the book of Zechariah, which is right at the end of the Old Testament in the Bible. Zechariah was one of the twelve minor prophets. Some of the book is apocalyptic, like the book of Daniel or Revelation, with visions and dreams that need interpreting. But our chapter today is a pastoral telling of God's presence with his people and his love for them. Zechariah tells us that God is good and the future is full of hope.

Our story begins with the statement that God spoke to Zechariah and gave him a message. The message is that God loves the people, and that Jerusalem is going to rise again. The elders will walk with sticks and sit in the city squares while the children play in the streets, all generations together. Everyone will return to the city, so that no matter where they live now, they will return and be part of the rebuilding process. This is going to take courage, but there is a time coming when the people will plant their crops and their vines in fertile soil and there will be enough rain to make them grow. This means no one will go hungry. There will be peace and the people will be safe. Justice will reign through the courts so that people do not seek to harm each other. This peace will attract others from different lands and cultures to Jerusalem as they will see the way God's people live – in peace, with justice and walking with God.

Prayer

You could use the Taizé chant here 'Bless the Lord, my soul'; as a response to each prayer, or sing it at the beginning and the end in a round.

During our activities today, we have touched on each of the themes Zechariah shares in chapter 8.

Let's bring forward our dove of peace (*place in the middle if in a yawning circle, or at the front of the worship space*). God's desire is for all people to live in peace – peace within ourselves, with each other and with God. Does anyone want to share what they talked about as they created the dove?

God of peace, we struggle to find peace within our own hearts and between nations. Help us to find the courage to live peace-filled lives even when others pull us in different directions. Amen.

Now let's bring forward our heart. We have tied ribbons and fabric on to our heart to symbolise those who have died. These are people from our own families and from our communities. Although we no longer have them with us physically, we hold them in our hearts and we remember their stories. Does anyone want to share a short story about one of these people?

God of grace, you know our grief when we lose those we love. Help us to remember them and the lessons they taught us. Amen.

Finally let's bring our newspaper cutting prayers for others. Does anyone want to share something from the prayers here?

God of love, your care for us stretches to the north, the south, the east and the west. No one is beyond your reach. The world needs to feel your embrace right now. Help us to be your hands, feet, eyes and ears in this world. Help us to recognise where there is need and use the gifts you have given us to respond. Amen.

Let's sing together a song which describes how being a disciple of Jesus has ups and down, just as it did for the disciples, but that God is always with us.

Song: '10,000 reasons' – Matt Redman

Prayer seeking forgiveness: Following Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes we are tempted to look the other way, to take the easier road, to pretend we haven't heard. But we are called to be people of action. Quietly to yourselves, acknowledge now the times this week you have perhaps followed a different path rather than Jesus.

On our wall of faith, we have listed those who have supported us and encouraged us in faith, people who have shown us how to live as disciples of Jesus.

Friends, God is grace. God tells us we are forgiven, and we respond, thanks be to God (*said altogether with passion*)!

Blessing: Sing together 'May the feet of God walk with you' – Robin Mann.

Song suggestions

'I see God in you' – Heather Price (acknowledging all members of the community)

'10,000 reasons' – Matt Redman (discipleship journey with its ups and downs, but God is always present)

'Bless the Lord, my soul' – Taizé chant (to accompany prayers – can be used as a sung response or sung in a round)

'May the feet of God walk with you' – Robin Mann (blessing song)

Meal suggestion

Build a burger – prepare and serve the different 'bricks' for the burger following your church's food hygiene rules and allow everyone to build their own burger. They can then compare them at the table. 'Bricks' might include vegetarian burger patties, buns or rolls, salad, dressing or sauce and cheese slices, etc.

Session material: December

Christmas around the fire

by John White



Bible story

Luke 2:1–20 (NIV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Pointers

We are going to tell the story of Christmas over the course of the session by using creative symbolism and questions.

This session is designed to take place outside around a firepit. Remember to complete a risk assessment and make your team and guests aware of potential hazards. We suggest you station buckets of water near each firepit. You might need to check for permission from your venue or landowner.

If the weather is stormy, or you'd prefer to meet inside, consider creating a fake campfire out of sticks, using battery tealights to create a glow when you pretend to light the fire.

The activities can be done at any point during the session. You might like to start with the activities, giving people something to do while you wait for people to arrive or for it to get dark.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session is a creative and welcoming way to share the Christmas story of Jesus being born. A warm and welcoming space to invite those who don't usually attend church services or a Messy Church group.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Use the questions provided in the celebration.

Question to start and end the session

So... what do you know about the Christmas story?

Social action

This session helps us experience the warmth of a fire, reminding us of the warmth of a home. Find out what your local homeless charity or shelter is doing over the winter months and how your Messy Church can support them. For example, could you donate money or items that are needed, or you could volunteer for a 'soup kitchen'?

You could do one of these activities before the celebration time, sitting around the fires while you wait for it to be dark enough to light them. Encourage people to take these crafts home as a reminder of the gift of Jesus as the light of the world throughout the Christmas period.

1



2



Activities

1. Candle making



You will need: beeswax sheets for candle making (available at most craft stores or online); long wicks

In advance of the evening, cut the wick of the candle the length of each beeswax sheet.

Put the wick at the long edge of the sheet and roll it so the wick is in the middle of each candle sheet.

Talk about how Jesus is the light of the world. Take this candle home and light it each night in the run-up to Christmas to remind you of Jesus as the gift of the light of the world.

2. Christmas candle bags



You will need: paper lantern bags (available at most craft stores or online); tea lights; felt-tip pens; some stones for each bag

You will be creating take-home Christmas candle bags. Draw a beautiful creation scene with Jesus as part of it. Put a rock in the bottom of each bag to keep it upright in the wind. Place a tealight or electric tealight in each bag. Put all the bags in a row with a bit of spacing and light them. Let everyone appreciate the bags that have been created.

Talk about how Jesus is the light of the world. Take this candle bag home and light it each night in the run-up to Christmas to remind you of Jesus as the gift of the light of the world.

Celebration

Part I: Introduce creation

This first station is around the unlit fire. It should take about eight minutes.

Welcome to the Christmas around the fire. Tonight, under the stars, standing on this good earth, you are invited to join in the journey of the Christmas story. Tonight, we are going to think about the Christmas in creation – in the natural environment. We are in creation now, standing outside in this beautiful place.

Encourage people to look up at the stars.

Stop for a moment. Feel the air on your skin. Notice the vastness and majesty of the sky. How many of the stars or constellations do you know?

Pause to allow responses and for people to point out constellations if it's a clear night.

How much more is unknown? God, who created everything, who flung stars into space, became a baby. We look at the stars, in the same way the Magi did. They followed the star which led them to Jesus, the King of universe – born as a vulnerable baby in a stable. We look to the stars.

Encourage people to pick up a handful of soil or feel the grass.

We now look down – from the stars to the soil. Feel it. Rub it in your hands. Feel the soil. God's land. God's creation. God entered into creation in Jesus. The God of the universe made the heavens and the earth. The world itself is God's creation and miracle. God values this earth. God values creation and we get to look after it. God loves this place so much that he sent his Son Jesus into it. That means that you are also loved as part of this world.

Suggested questions:

- What place do you love the most in the world?
- Is there a place or a walk that you love to go to or do?
- How do you feel when you spend time in nature?

Part II: Christ coming into the world

This should take about ten minutes. Light the fire and pause for a while as the fire grows. Encourage people to appreciate the warmth and notice the difference it makes.

Does it feel better with the fire lit? Can you see each other better?

Look at the fire, and feel the warmth that it gives you. Now, look at your hands, the flesh, maybe with some dirt on them. This is what God is made of. Christ came into the world. The coming of Christ changed the earth. We think of how this fire has changed the atmosphere. Rather than just a cold beauty, there is a warmth that reminds us of home. The fire represents the warmth of home that Christ makes for us by coming to the earth.

Suggested questions:

- Can you imagine what it was like before the world was created?
- What would it look like to see the world created?
- Can you imagine the one who invented the stars coming to earth as a little baby?
- If you could ask Jesus any question, what would it be?

Part III: God's gifts

This should take about five minutes.

Jesus is a gift to all of us and to creation. As a sign of this gift, we have a gift for you today.

Hand out individually wrapped sweets or chocolates. Take your time and let people choose. Remind people to keep the wrappers and put them into the bin at home. They could eat them now or give it as a small gift to someone.

What is the best gift you have ever received? God has given us the greatest gift of all in Jesus. The gift that allows us to come home to God.

Suggested questions:

- How is Jesus a gift to this world?
- In what ways is Jesus a gift to you?

Part IV: Jesus, light of the world

This should take 10–15 minutes depending on the carols you choose.

A light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not understand it. The light which was God was in the world. Jesus is the light of the world. Concentrate on the fire. God doesn't love from afar. Feel the warmth of this fire and think of God's love for you. The light of Christ is not only contained within Jesus. Jesus is generous with the light.

Hand out sparklers. Take your time and wait for everyone to have one lit.

Jesus is the light of the world and the light within each of us.

Suggested questions:

- How can you carry the light of Jesus into your home, school and place of work from this fire?

Prayer

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may he make his face shine upon you and be merciful to you; may he turn his countenance toward you and give you his peace. Amen

Song suggestions

Any carols your group knows or enjoys. Some examples include: 'Hark the herald angels sing', 'Silent night', 'Joy to the world' and 'O little town of Bethlehem'.

Meal suggestion

End the session with a feast of mince pies, marshmallows and hot chocolate around the fire.

Celebration II



Celebration IV



Session material: January

All aboard!

by Sharon Sampson

Bible story

Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV)

‘Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Pointers

Surely this is our most important calling? Messy Church is not just a fun club, providing activities for families. We are called to spread the great news of Jesus Christ and help people form a relationship with him.

This session is an introduction to DiscipleShip with a focus on three ‘ships’:

- **Worship** – getting to know Christ through prayer, praise and hearing his stories from the Bible.
- **Fellowship** – going on the journey together with other Christians, asking questions, sharing thoughts, praying and supporting each other.
- **Stewardship** – looking after the world God has entrusted to us.

The last line ‘I am with you always to the very end of the age’ is possibly my favourite verse in the Bible. How amazing – to know that wherever we travel and whatever we go through, we are not alone. He is right by our side – in the boat with us. We can help people climb into the DiscipleShip and help them set sail on their journey with Christ. Encourage them to ask the tough questions and don’t pretend that you have all the answers. Tell them that it is okay to have questions and doubts. We still do. Encourage them to seek the answers through prayer, art, music, reading, home groups and different exploring faith courses. God can speak to us in infinite ways.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

My faith has grown through lots of different ways, through debating tough subjects with friends, reading biographies of amazing Christians, ignoring God in times of trouble and then turning to him at other times and seeing the difference, witnessing little miracles and singing my heart out to worship songs. It has taken me years to get to where I am now, and my faith has changed enormously and is still changing. Hopefully this session will help others’ faith grow by getting them to discuss some of the tough questions and by thinking about what discipleship means for them.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Where are you on your Christian journey?
- Have you set sail? Are you far out to sea? Are you nearing port?
- If you have not set sail, ask yourself what is stopping you?

Take-home idea

Learn a mealtime prayer and say it together at home and then thank God for something in your day. Some examples include: ‘As we lower our eyes and raise our jaws, we thank the good Lord for the use of our jaws’, or, ‘1, 2, 3, 4, 5, thank you God that I’m alive; 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, thank you for our food, Amen.’

Question to start and end the session

So... if Jesus appeared in person tomorrow, how far would you travel to meet him?

Social action

Fellowship – why not write a letter of encouragement to a persecuted Christian in another country? Open Doors has advice online on how to do this, for adults, youth and children.

Activities

1. Discipleship – mini stick ship



You will need: leaves; sticks; string; scissors; sticky tack; bowl of water or stream

Can you make a ship out of the natural materials around you? Then test it out on the water to see if it floats. If you are using a bowl of water, you could mark up some ports around the rim or islands ('Prayer', 'Praise', 'Bible').

Talk about how discipleship, or following Jesus, is like an adventure that we are all on, even those who have been Christians for years. Our boat can stop off at various ports along the way to help us on our journey. We might capsize a few times, just like the apostle Paul who travelled around the Mediterranean, but we can help each other to get back on board and keep going.



2. Worship – stained-glass window



You will need: wallpaper; masking tape; decorative materials such as paints and paintbrushes, crayons and stamps

Get two or three long strips of wallpaper with masking tape already taped across in the shape of a cross, then add more masking tape randomly to make a giant stained-glass window. Get people to use paints, crayons, stamps, etc. and all manner of implements to get creative like our Creator and decorate the paper. Then take off the masking tape at the end. Alternatively, you could make one per person, or take it outside and decorate it with mud, berries, grass, leaves and flowers.

Talk about our amazing Creator God as you paint. Ask God to speak to you through the creation. What can you see? What could he be trying to say to you?



3. Discipleship – pipe cleaner fish

You will need: pipe cleaners; beads

Thread some beads on to half a pipe cleaner, leaving space at each end. Bend the pipe cleaner around into an oval, then twist the ends together to make a tail.

Talk about how in Mark 1:17 Jesus said, 'Follow me... and I will send you out to fish for people.' Early Christians would use the fish symbol to indicate a Christian meeting place, when it was dangerous to meet up, like a secret code. Nowadays you can see it on the back of cars. What will you do with yours? Maybe attach it to your keyring or school bag.



4. Stewardship – orangutang spinner



You will need: printout of forest and orangutang on card (download online); string; sticky tape; glue sticks; coloured pens

Colour in the pictures. Fold 1 m of string in half and stick it, parallel, on to the back of the forest with 3 cm between each line of string. Fold the card over and stick it together. Holding the strings at the end, make circles in the air so the strings twist, then pull the strings. The paper should spin, putting the orangutan back into its forest.

Talk about how God has made the most amazing world for us and has called us to be stewards of it. We can help the orangutans by buying products which use sustainable palm oil so no more forests are destroyed.

4



5. Fellowship – secret police



You will need: Bibles; crosses; necklaces; icons; worship CDs; Jesus DVD; printed scripture passages; secret police hats/badges (optional)

To prepare, place or hide around your area the items listed above. In some countries, like North Korea, it is illegal to be a disciple of Jesus, so disciples must keep their faith secret. Wearing the secret police hats/badges if using, pretend to be the secret police. Can you find all the things around the room that give away that there are disciples here? (You could number each item and have clipboards and pens and prizes.)

Talk about being part of the body of Christ and about how 1 Corinthians 12:25–26 says, 'Its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.' We can support persecuted Christians through prayer and through giving to charities like Open Doors.

6



6. Cardboard ships

You will need: big cardboard boxes; scissors/ bread knives; chunky pens; paper (for flags); sticks (flag poles); tape; string

Get families to create a ship that they can stand or sit in, cutting port holes and decorating the outside. Make sure adults supervise the scissors/knives. They could paint or draw water along the bottom. They could make flags. They could sit in these ships for the worship time.

Talk about how discipleship includes looking after the world God created for us (**stewardship**), sharing our faith with others (**fellowship**) and spending time with him (**worship**). Which type of ship is yours?

7



7. Food craft – mini food ships



You will need: mini tomatoes; small peppers; hummus; toothpicks; cucumber slices for sails or pieces of wrap; raisins for people

Make a boat. Make sure to put yourself and Jesus in it as discipleship is about a journey with Jesus. You can add others too as it is easier to travel this journey with other Christians.

Talk about how far you would travel for Jesus. Think about the wise men who travelled hundreds of miles and for months or years, or Jackie Pullinger who got on a boat and asked God to tell her when to get off.

8. Fellowship – prayer station: the body of Christ

You will need: toilet rolls or bandages

Bandage someone's hand and arm while praying for those in Nigeria. For example: 'Dear God, please stop the armed bandits in Nigeria from hurting people. Protect Christians and churches from attack and pour your peace into their fearful hearts. Heal all those who are hurt and help them to feel your presence. Stir up the government and security forces to do more to protect people. Amen.'

Talk about how Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. Although around 100 million people (half the population) are Christian, there are extremist groups who have vowed to eliminate Christianity from the country and are targeting men and boys in particular. Although we may not be in Nigeria, we are all part of one big body of Christ, and they will get incredible strength from knowing that we care and are praying for them. See opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria for more information.

9. Worship – decoupage cross

You will need: large wooden cross; PVA glue in a container, decoupage paper (or tissue paper); brushes

Decorate the cross by tearing off bits of paper and gluing them on to the cross. Then use half PVA glue and half water and cover the whole thing in glue as a type of varnish.

Talk about how the first step to discipleship is belonging to a church family. We are not decorating our own individual crosses, but a large communal one which can serve as a centre piece to the celebration part of Messy Church. When we come back and see it, we will be reminded that we belong. This is our church.

10. Questions corner



You will need: big cushions; rug; questions written up on giant cards

Depending on your age range, you may also like a corner with tables and chairs.

Why did God create the world? Why does God allow suffering? Is reincarnation real? What is heaven like? Why did Jesus have to die? Hasn't science disproved the Bible? Why doesn't God answer my prayers? One of the best ways to journey further in your faith is by delving into these big questions with friends. We won't always be able to work out the answers, but that's okay. We are on a voyage of discovery.

Talk about how, if you enjoy this session, you might like to sign up for an exploring faith course such as Alpha.

8



9



Celebration

Before you start, make sure every family has a flag to wave with writing in big letters, either DISCIPLESHIP, WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP or STEWARDSHIP, preferably a fairly equal mix. You might also like to have a camel and wise man as a visual aid.

Did you notice that today's activities have all been about ships?

If you have your flags, can you wave them every time I say 'ship'?

Can you name the four **ships** we have looked at today? Yes: **discipleship**, **fellowship**, **worship** and **stewardship**. This time of year, we celebrate three men on another type of **ship**. A **ship** of the desert. Can anyone tell me what that **ship** is and who the men were? Here is a clue (*climb on an imaginary camel*). Yes! Camels and three wise men.

They were on a long, long journey, searching for Jesus and in many ways, we are also on a long, long, long journey searching for him too. Even those who have been Christians all their lives would tell you that they are still on a journey, but a journey WITH Jesus. He walks alongside us as we learn more about him. When Jesus walked the earth, he made up stories to help explain things, so this morning we have a made-up story for you. An interactive story where you can all join in.

This is the story about a tribe of Christians called the Wooga-Wooga. For this story, WE can be the Wooga-Wooga people and whenever we hear our name called, we go 'Awoogawooga'.

Now the Wooga-Wooga people liked exploring, so they lived in ships instead of houses. They loved Jesus and tried to use the Bible as their guidebook through life (*hold up a Bible*). They knew that the Bible says 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'

So, some of them called their **ships** **Worships** and whenever anyone heard that name, they would **worship** by saying 'Hallelujah'. Can anyone with a **Worship**, say 'Hallelujah' every time I mention **Worship**? Let's try. So some of the Wooga-Wooga lived on **Worships**.

Others remembered that Jesus told them to 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' so they called their **ships** the **Fellowships** and whenever they were mentioned, everyone turned to one another, shook hands and said, 'Can I help you?' Everyone in a **Fellowship**, can you do that? So the Wooga-Wooga lived on **Worships** and **Fellowships**.

Others remembered reading the Bible and learning how humankind was asked to look after 'the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and every living thing that moves on the Earth'. So, they called their **ships** **Stewardships** and whenever their name was mentioned, everyone scattered food into the sea for the fish to eat and said 'Glub-glub' (which is how the Wooga-Wooga said hello to the fish on their planet). So, the Wooga-Wooga lived on **Worships**, **Fellowships** and **Stewardships**.

Now the Wooga-Wooga travelled the oceans of their planet on their **ships** for many, many, many years. And the **ships** got old. And I'm sorry to say the Wooga-Wooga forgot what they were supposed to do. So, when the **Worship** was mentioned, they didn't say 'Hallelujah' really

loudly they just muttered 'lujah'. And when the **Fellowship** was mentioned, they didn't go, 'Can I help you?', but just scowled at each other. And when the **Stewardship** was mentioned, they didn't feed the fish and go 'Glub-glub', they just threw stones at the fish in the polluted seas.

But that's just a story, so what can we learn from it? We can have Jesus join us on our journey through life, supporting us, guiding us and loving us. And to help us be disciples, we have **Worship** – talking to him through prayer, celebrating our friendship through singing and reading all about him in the Bible. We also have **Fellowship**. It's much more fun to journey through life with friends who love Jesus too, like those around you today. And, we have **Stewardship**. We can take care of the amazing planet he has given us. We can put the orangutans back in the forests.

And like many journeys, there are bumps in the road, or in our case, the occasional **shipwreck**. When we get **shipwrecked**, we can turn away from Jesus and sometimes even blame him for what has happened, but we have a choice. We can choose to turn towards him instead, and he will reach out his hand and pull us up out of the water, just like he did to Peter. So, what will you choose to do? Will you climb aboard the **Discipleship**?

Prayer

Throw a blow-up earth balloon around the room, asking people to say the name of a country to pray for, or anything else they can think of. The catcher can say a simple prayer or the leader can do so from the front.

'Lord, help xxx – comfort/support/encourage them and let them feel your presence. Amen.'

Blessing

Write 2 Corinthians 13:14 on a number of boxes: Put 'Fellowship' in large letters in a different colour. Ask for volunteers to come up and help put the boxes in order. Then get everyone to read it together.

Song suggestions

'Kumbaya, my Lord' – in Afghanistan you have to keep your faith a secret, so disciples sing really quietly in case their neighbours hear and tell the police. Can we whisper the first three verses and then when we get to 'someone's singing Lord', sing it really loudly and celebrate that we can sing loudly in our country? Verses: someone's crying, someone's praying, someone's singing.

'One more step along the world I go' – Sydney Carter
'I want to walk with Jesus Christ' – Clive Symmonds

Meal suggestion

Sausages in finger rolls – like ships. Have toothpicks and sliced cheese sails. You could squirt ketchup or mustard in blobs like people. Bananas with drawn on portholes for dessert.

Session material: February

Learning to live together

by Arul Israel, Sonia Baidoo, May Dappa
and Aike Kennett-Brown

Bible story

Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Micah 6:8 (NIV)

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Mark 11:15–17 (NIV)

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers"'

Pointers

Racial Justice Sunday happens each February. It calls for all Christians to engage in racial justice, as it reflects God's heart for justice. Racism and racial discrimination are justice issues because they assume all are not equal before God and are not part of God's family, despite the Bible teaching us we are all wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13–14) in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

Even if your Messy Church does not have ethnic minorities in its congregation, this session helps people to consider their attitudes to people who are different, encourages

inclusion and raises awareness of racism in situations, places and spaces we inhabit in our local communities.

It's also worth remembering that diversity in a congregation does not always mean that everyone is treated equally or has an equal voice at the table. Paul reminds the Galatians (3:26–29) how followers of Jesus should relate to one another: treating other people as though they too are beloved children of God. This reinforces Jesus' command to 'love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:12).

Finally, we explore how Jesus dealt with injustice and institutional corruption when he turned over the tables in the temple (Mark 11:15–17). His demonstration would have been shocking, as it exposed a corrupt practice that had seeped into the temple culture for years. The following day, Jesus returned to the temple. Choosing to locate himself opposite the temple treasury, he continued to denounce the unfair temple tax system. What can we learn from Jesus' example?

It's important to remember that giving voice to the voiceless is not easy. It calls for the letting go of privilege, power and ego. Our role as servants of Jesus is to journey with the people in our Messy Church who we've been called to love. Through the building of relationships and ongoing conversations, we can lead people on a discipleship journey to a place where they can confidently say no to injustice, as we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session helps people go on a journey of understanding that everyone is beautiful and precious to God. All people are equal in God's eyes: there is no differentiation due to race, gender, sexuality or class. God's promise of eternal life is for everyone, through Christ. God wants us to join in with what God is doing, and each of us has a role and purpose. For example, we are commanded to love each other. This includes noticing and acting on injustice in our communities and churches.

Add value

Mealtime card

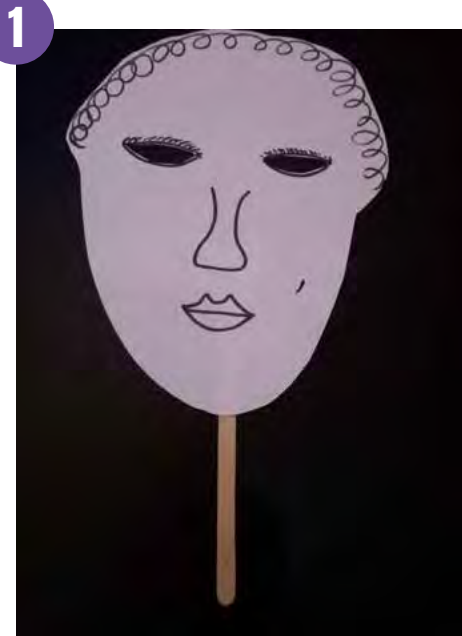
- Have you ever felt like an outsider and unwelcomed?
- How might a new person, perhaps someone new to this country or place, feel?
- Is choosing silence always a good idea? Discuss how silence can be unhelpful at times to fight against injustice.
- Share a time when you spoke up for someone and were a voice to the voiceless.

Question to start and end the session

So... have you ever felt different?

Social action

- Scan around your church. Are images that represent the ethnicity of Jesus and other Bible characters accurate?
- Use social media platforms to confidently display antiracism messages.
- Listen and hear stories from those who have experienced racism – break the silence. Don't question. Don't judge.
- Break out of your comfort zone and speak to someone you may never have properly spoken to before.
- Ask your church to be more inclusive in worship and activities. Request hymns, worship songs, liturgy and prayers from other cultures.
- Talk to a friend about Racial Justice Messy Church and all that you have learned.



Activities

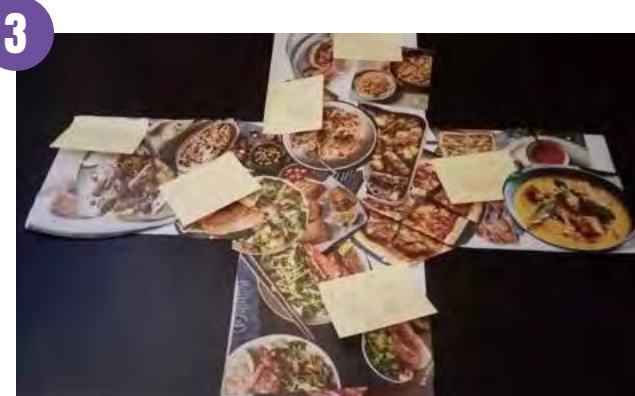
1. Created in his image



You will need: mirrors; pencils; A4-size card of brown, cream, white and beige colours; rubbers (optional); lolly stick; scissors; sticky tape

Use the mirror and pencil to draw an image of yourself or someone else if you prefer. Cut out the face and eyes. Stick the lolly stick behind the face and use it as a mask.

Talk about how God created diversity, yet at the same time, we are all a part of God's image. You could read Genesis 1:27 together.



2. Fearfully and wonderfully made



You will need: A4-size card; print-outs of images of a mother and baby from a variety of ethnic background (download online); glue sticks; hole punchers; long strings of knitting wool; colouring pencils (optional)

Draw an oval shape around the image and cut around it, colour in (optional) and stick on the card. Hole punch around the image and thread the wool through the holes.

Talk about how we are all known and loved by God, all are precious in God's eyes, even before we are born. Use Psalm 139:13–14 to guide you.

3. All one in Christ Jesus



You will need: a food/recipe magazine (free from supermarkets); scissors; glue; Post-it notes; a large paper with an outline of a cross

For this group collage, cut out a food image that you would normally eat in your culture and place on the cross. If you can't find one, draw an image of your favourite cultural food on a Post-it note and place on the cross. By the end of the session, the cross should be covered with food images of what everyone in your Messy Church likes to eat.

Talk about how it is easy to spot things that divide us and make us different, like the food we eat, or the way we speak or look, but we are all equal in God's eyes. Read Galatians 3:28. What foods do you like eating? Do you like trying new foods from different cultures? Describe a time when you felt different. Was it a positive or negative experience? Imagine you have just arrived from another country and you don't speak the language or wear the same style of clothes. You decide to try out Messy Church. What would help you feel welcome and able to join in?

4. The Lord's Prayer dance



You will need: a projector/laptop with Wi-Fi access to Arul's YouTube video on the Messy Church channel (youtu.be/BreKg1W5S_s); colourful clothes; material and ornaments from other cultures such as African prints or Indian sari

Use the colourful material and ornaments from other cultures to decorate the space. If you have someone who can bring in clothing from their own culture, people could try them on. Approach this sensitively.

The Lord's Prayer is known around the world and said in many different languages. Play the YouTube video of Arul, introducing how to dance the Lord's Prayer in an Indian style. Follow her dance lesson and see if you can copy her

moves. You might like to then use the dance during the celebration.

Alternatively, who in your Messy Church can say the Lord's Prayer in another language? Get them to teach others or create a large poster with the prayer written in different languages.

Talk about how God loves diversity, and he loves to hear our prayers in our heart language. Dance is also a form of language. What other forms/languages can you use to pray? Can you learn the BSL signs for this prayer (youtu.be/5lNr-nOEmyE)?

5. Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly



You will need: various items, objects and furniture to create an obstacle course either indoors or outdoors (clearly mark a start and finish point); blindfold; guiding stick

Blindfold a person, perhaps spin them and stand them at start. Ask them to get to the finish without any guidance. They are likely to struggle. See if anyone can help this blindfolded person. If so, how? Let them guide them/speak to them/walk alongside to help reach the finish.

Talk about how it felt to be blindfolded. People new to the church/community will find life harder due to obstacles in the way. Read Micah 6:8. How might God ask that we help this blindfolded person? (Walk beside them mercifully, justly remove obstacles, carefully guide them, reassure them). Do you notice anyone in your school or local community facing obstacles? Share how you might help them? What could you do to help as a family? As a Messy Church? What does God require of you?

6. A great multitude

You will need: sand tray; Revelation 7:9–10 verses printed; homemade playdough representing all the different skin colours; some tiny tools (optional); or use Lego/Playmobil people in place of playdough

Invite people to use playdough (or Lego) to make 'little people' to represent themselves and a friend from another ethnic background. Place them in the sand tray, filling it with as many people (all ethnicities and abilities, e.g. a blind person with guiding stick or someone in a wheelchair). Leave this on display for the other congregations at your church to see.

Alternatively, make a giant collage of people of different races and abilities to go with the Bible verse.

Talk about how God's kingdom includes every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb – read Revelation 7:9–10. In heaven,

we will all be united together in our worship of God. How can we reflect God's heavenly kingdom here on earth? In our community? In our church? In our friendship group? Do we intentionally welcome and embrace diversity?

7. The Lord's house



You will need: a table; some large sheets or blankets (to make two dens: a shop and a prayer space). For the shop: play money, play or real food, other small items and bowls to place them in. For the prayer den: Post-it notes for prayers, writing pens or pencils, a wooden cross and fairy lights to decorate

Make two dens; turn one into a shop and the second into a 'prayer den'. Give play money out to people at Messy Church, so that when they are ready, they can buy an item from the shop. Make sure the shopkeeper overcharges for all items bought, as it's a 'den of robbers!' Contrast this experience to entering the 'prayer den' and writing or drawing a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer to say sorry or a prayer of need to God. Here are some topics to you might like to pray about: friendships, racial justice, the climate crisis, forgiveness, schools and students, refugees, conflicts, for situations that don't seem fair, etc.

Talk about how Jesus challenged the corruption in the temple. Read Mark 11:15-17. It had become a political and economic powerhouse, making a few people wealthy and not a religious space that gave voice to the voiceless. Is there anyone voiceless at your Messy Church? In your local community? What does racial justice look like in Messy Church? In your local community? How could you or your Messy Church be antiracist?

8. Vine and branches



You will need: a box template or pillow box; scissors; sticky tape; PVA glue; small stickers; pens; eco-glitter; a bag of raisins or dried fruits

Cut around the box template (alternatively use a pillow box) and decorate it with images of branches, a tree, a heart, fruits such as grapes, eco-glitter, etc. Then glue the other flaps together, but before you stick the last (top) flap with a sticker, add some raisins inside. This box is to give to someone else, as a sign of love and friendship.

Talk about how the Bible says the family of God is like a vine, with Christians connected to Jesus and each other like branches, showing love to each other. Read John 15:4 and 12. Think of somebody different to you at school or in your neighbourhood. Who could you give the box to as a sign of friendship? Pray for God to give you the name of someone you could give this gift to and ask for the Holy Spirit to give you courage to pass the gift on.

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9. We are all one

You will need: a large piece of cardboard and or a roll of brown wrapping paper; scissors; cotton wool balls or wool for hair; PVA glue; Post-it notes; coloured pens; printed copies of 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

On the large piece of card or brown wrapping paper, draw around a child and cut it out – now you have the body of Christ (the church). Read together the Bible passage (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Invite people to draw on the outline or add Post-it notes or stick-on items (e.g. cotton wool balls or wool for hair). As they do this, ask the question: which part of the body of this Messy Church do you feel you are or could be?

Talk about how everyone has a part to play in the body of Christ (the church). We have different roles to play. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, evangelists, prophets, apostles, teachers and pastors are all mentioned. What other roles are there in Messy Church? Which part will you play? Which parts of the body of Christ might be missing at this Messy Church?

10. Make a percussion instrument



You will need: an assortment of items from your recycling bin (make sure they've been washed!), e.g. plastic milk bottles, elastic bands, empty tissue boxes, cardboard tubes, masking tape

Using the items provided, make a percussion instrument, such as a drum or something from another culture to play in the celebration. For example, you could make a lyre (type of harp) that David played in the Old Testament psalms.

Talk about how the church is global. The style of sung worship differs around the world and yet we are all part of Christ's kingdom.

Celebration

Find out what people have discovered through the activities about how God views each of us, our differences and our part in God's kingdom.

Messy Church news sketch based on Mark 11:15–17

Studio presenter: Hello, just yesterday we reported how Jesus brought Jerusalem to a standstill as he rode into the city on a colt. The crowds went crazy, spreading their cloaks on the ground, waving palm branches and shouting, 'Hosanna! In the highest heaven.' There are high expectations resting on this young prophet's shoulders, but has the pressure been too much? Today he was spotted in the temple courts overturning the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, preventing the sale of merchandise. Has Jesus gone rogue? We go live to the scene.

Messy Church news reporter: Hello, my names is _____. I'm reporting live from the temple courts in Jerusalem and it's in a state of disruption. Tables have been tossed to the side, there's temple coins scattered all over the ground and people scrabbling to pick them up. The air is thick with feathers, as doves have been released and have flown away. Let's speak to one of the moneychangers now. Excuse me, tell us what happened?

Moneychanger: I was just going about my business exchanging Roman denarius for temple coins – it's a big week for me with Passover in the next few days, so I've put the exchange rate up to reflect demand. Suddenly, Jesus strolls in with his disciples. He's looking angry and starts turning the tables over. Money starts flying everywhere, people are scrambling to pick it up – it's chaos!

News reporter: It certainly is chaos, let's speak now with Abigail and her family who are here to worship at the temple. Abigail, you watched it all happen. Why do you think Jesus has done this?

Abigail: We come to the temple for all the festivals. Each season the price of doves just keeps going up. We can't afford it anymore. It's rigged against poor people like us, while the moneychangers just get richer. The systems not fair. I heard Jesus say, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it "a den or robbers"'

News reporter: So, do you think Jesus was right to stop the selling of merchandise in the temple courts?

Abigail: Absolutely! It's time to change this injustice.

News reporter: But there are other ways to challenge this – through the temple committees and lobbying the high priests?

Abigail: It's all been tried before. They all profit from it, so they're not going to change!

News reporter: Thank you. There you have it – a corrupt system and an angry prophet. Who is in the right? This has been _____, reporting for Messy Church news, live from the temple courts, Jerusalem. Back to the studio.

Studio presenter: While we've been on air, a statement has come in from the chief priest. It reads: 'This outrageous disruption to temple life will not be tolerated. This system has served the temple for years and we see no reason for change. We do not accept the claim that the temple has become a "den of robbers"'. Who is in the right? Temple tradition or our radical rebel Jesus? Let's ask the newsroom.

Reporter asks up to three people (adults and children) to comment:

New reporter: Do you think it was right that Jesus turned over the tables in protest? Why or why not?

Studio presenter: We've heard some views around the newsroom. Now is your time to vote with the interactive button. (*You can do this with a show of hands or get people to stand on one side of the room or the other, or you could set up an online poll and vote using mobile phones!*) Was Jesus right to turn over the tables in protest of corrupt temple practices? YES or NO?

I wonder:

- Where do you see injustice in your community?
- How is God asking you to respond?

Prayer

Use this Examen prayer, counting the five steps on your fingers.

1. GIVE THANKS... for the diversity of God's creation, for each and every person made in God's image and all the gifts and talents we all have.
2. ASK FOR HELP... when you feel like you don't know what to do or what to say when you see injustice and racism.
3. REFLECT... on when and how you jump to conclusions or judge people without knowing their full story.

4. SAY SORRY... for the times when you have not spoken up or have gone along with others prejudices through ignorance or your own deliberate choice.

5. DECIDE... what you need to do to learn more and to stand with those that experience injustice and to speak out. Ask God to help you with this.

Amen.

Get everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer in their heart language (activity 4). Alternatively, use a Caribbean tune (youtu.be/QgP0jl5hghU) with Arul's Indian dance moves (activity 4).

Song suggestions

Find out what languages are spoken in your Messy Church and choose a simple chorus to sing in different languages or ask for song suggestions from those in your Messy Church who have a different cultural heritage. Encourage everyone to join in the music with their percussion instruments.

'Waymaker' – Sinach

'Spirit of the living God' – Mission Praise #613

'We are marching (Siyhamba)' – Mission Praise #954

'What a wonderful world' – Louis Armstrong

'He's got the whole world in his hands' – Mission Praise #225

Meal suggestion

Organise an international bring-and-share meal. Foods from around the world could include samosas and spring rolls, jollof rice, Chinese stir-fry, Mexican chilli, Cornish pasties and more.

Session material: March

Seeing is believing

by Crystal Goetz

Bible story

Luke 24:1–12 (CEB)

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

Pointers

The story of the empty tomb is one of sadness, joy and confusion all at once. The women went to the tomb in the early morning to mourn, but soon found out that they had reason to feel joyful. Then, when they told the story to the disciples, they were not believed. It was only when Peter saw for himself that he was willing to believe, although still very confused.

- The women who went to the tomb were the first to know that the prophecy of the Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus. We often question things too fantastic to believe. They believed it because they experienced it and were reminded that Jesus had told them that this would happen.

- The disciples, like all of us, question things we don't understand. In this story, we see Peter running off to see for himself that what the women said was true. He had many more questions when he returned than before he left.
- The two brightly clothed figures, who gave the women the news, helped them to wake up and realise the obvious: that Jesus was alive again. We assume these figures are angels due to their bright clothing. When the women heard the news from these two mystical figures, they knew they had one job; to spread the word.
- It can be difficult to believe without seeing, but Jesus tells us that we are blessed if we live by faith and believe without seeing.
- This story calls out many of the women who were there by name. These women were credible figures and yet, they were not believed. Testimonies of any women of the time were not considered reliable. Isn't it interesting to think that they were chosen to witness this event?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

How do you believe something that is unbelievable? The women at the tomb that morning must have thought they were crazy. I think most of us would think it was a dream. It was only when these women were reminded of their teacher's words that they snapped out of their confusion. Sometimes it is difficult for us to snap out of our confusion about our faith too. When Easter comes every year, we are reminded of the beautiful and amazing mystery that is the resurrection of Jesus. It helps us to snap out of our daze and remember that this was foretold for generations and that believers all over the world continue to tell this story to those who listen. We believe because we have faith and we tell the story with joy, just like the women told the disciples. Each time we tell the story our faith grows, as does our love for Jesus Christ.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Have you ever experienced an unbelievable event?
- Were you believed when you told your story to someone else?
- What unbelievable things do you hope are true?

Take-home idea

Create a labyrinth with rope or string around your garden and, while blindfolded, try to navigate the pathways. Do it several times and see if it gets easier the more you do it. What does it teach you about living by faith?

Question to start and end the session

So... how can we live by faith and believe without seeing?

Social action

Look into the Innocence Project (innocenceproject.org) and help people who have been wrongfully incarcerated tell their truth and be freed.

Activities

1. Leafy butterflies and insects



You will need: leaves of different sizes; forked twigs that are in proportion to the leaves; fine twine, raffia or dried grass; tiny conifer cones or rosehips; glue (optional); photos of butterflies and insects (optional)

You will need four leaves and a forked twig. Lay them out on the table or the ground in the shape of a butterfly, then tie the leaves on with the twine or raffia. Add a little dab of glue to secure them if desired. Place a conifer cone at the point of the twig where the fork begins, for the head. You can tie on or use glue depending on your patience or level of ability.

Talk about how a butterfly comes out of a cocoon when it has changed. What is your favourite kind of butterfly? Have you ever seen a butterfly come out of a cocoon? What do you think it has to do with Jesus?

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2. Now you see me, now you don't



You will need: branches, sheets, towels, cloth or clothing that will camouflage in your outdoor environment

Play a game of hide-and-seek. Everyone hides and they are found one by one. As they are found, have them go back to base. After everyone is found, have the finder count again for twice as long. The hiders will use the supplies or the environment around them to camouflage themselves so it's harder to find them the second time around. After counting, the finder will look again. Play several rounds so that a few have turns searching.

Talk about how it can be difficult to find something when we aren't sure exactly what we are looking for. Have you ever lost something? What and for how long was it lost? If you found it, how did you find it?

3. Cross card



You will need: printed cross templates (download online); stickers; pens, crayons, markers; decorations; scissors; coloured paper or design card

Cut the cross template out and fold on the dotted lines to make a folding card. Fold up from the bottom towards the centre twice and then fold the three upper squares inward to make a square. Colour and decorate each square of the cross either with the story or with things you like or know about Jesus. As you fold the cross after you have decorated, give thanks for the life of Jesus.

Talk about how Jesus had an amazing life, but his overcoming of death was beyond amazing. What other amazing things can you think of that Jesus did? What is your favourite Jesus story?

4. Empty tomb build

You will need: a small pop-up tent or a lightweight round table on its side; large roll paper, tablecloths or dark sheets; large piece of cardboard from a box cut into a circle (120–180 cm diameter)

Put up the tent or set up the round table. Cover the tent/table with paper, tablecloths, sheets, etc. to resemble a cave. Cut out the piece of cardboard in a circle shape to cover the door of the tent, so it can be 'rolled away'. You can use several smaller pieces taped together to make one larger piece. When it is built, it will be used for the celebration, but let people go in the tent and experience what it's like. Have them practise rolling the stone back and forth over the entrance of the tent for fun.

Talk about how people were buried in Jesus' time. How are they buried now? The door of the tomb was actually made of stone – how hard do you think it would have been to get it open?

5. Your eyes can fool you

You will need: hot glue gun; two mirrors glued together back-to-back (consider taping the edges of the mirrors if they are sharp); two pieces of dowel or two unsharpened pencils hot glued to the centre of each side of the mirrors

Using the dowels or pencils as handles, hold the mirrors slightly to one side, by grasping a dowel in each hand. Looking into one side of the mirror, slightly twist the hand holding the other side of the mirror. It might feel or look strange. What happened? When you look into the mirror and see the reflection of the opposite hand, your mind interprets the reflection as your left hand, the one that's moving. When the hand in the mirror doesn't move, however, the mind gets confused! When the brain sees something that doesn't make any sense, it interprets it the best way it can and fills in the blanks with details that are sometimes less than accurate.

Talk about how when the women went to the tomb, they were probably confused and sad. When they saw the two bright figures, how do you think their brains reacted to this? How would you have reacted? Have you ever seen something that your brain was confused by?

6. Clothespin tomb craft

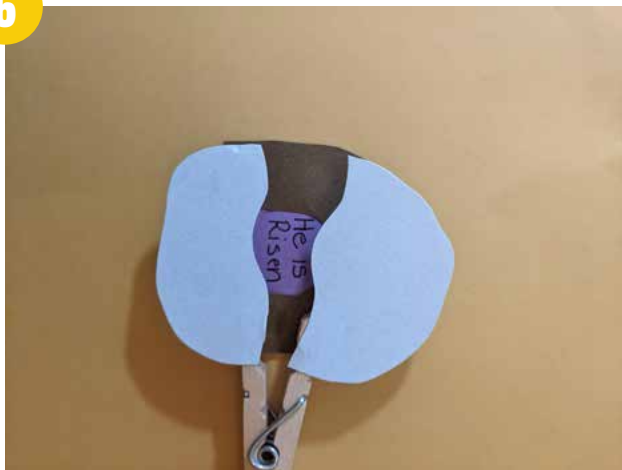


You will need: spring-loaded clothespin; grey card; brown card; purple card with the words 'He is risen' written or printed on, or white card coloured with crayons or markers; templates for project (download online); glue; markers or crayons (optional)

Cut the grey card into a rough round shape about 5 cm in diameter or use the stone-shaped template to cut the shape. Cut the brown card in the shape of a 'U' about 6 cm in diameter or use the tent-shaped template to cut piece. Glue the u-shaped piece of brown card to the back side of the clothes pin – only on the lower half of the clip. Cut the purple card into a 2.5 cm square. Write 'He is risen' on two lines, leaving room on either side to glue to the back of the brown card – or use the template pattern with words printed on it. Cut it into two pieces with a wavy cut. Then glue the top piece of the grey card on to the top of the clothespin and the bottom piece on to the bottom. Turn the clothespin over and glue the 'He is risen' paper on to the back of the tomb piece so that the words can be viewed when you squeeze the clothespin.

Talk about how the resurrection, like this little message, was a surprise to the women at the tomb. How would

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you have felt if you came prepared to face a terrible situation and all of sudden you felt happy? Have you ever had to change your mind from sad to happy? Was it easy? Confusing?

7. Easter grass sensory table

You will need: large shallow tub; Easter grass (preferably the shredded paper variety or just shredded paper); magnetic letters that spell out 'He is risen'; strong wand magnets

Fill the tub with Easter grass and as you do, layer the magnetic letters throughout the grass. Using the magnet, fish out the letters. For reading ages and up, encourage them to unscramble the message, while younger ages can just fish the letters out of the paper.

Talk about if you have trouble finding Jesus in our world sometimes. Where do you look? What draws you to Jesus?

8. Things change paint craft

You will need: various colours of liquid acrylic or tempura paints; super heavy paper or painting canvases; combs; towels or disposable towels (bamboo if possible)

Drop blobs of paint on the canvas/paper in any pattern you wish. Take a comb and drag through the paint, wiping the comb off occasionally if it gets too full of paint. Watch the art change as you comb through it. Put aside and let it dry.

Talk about how something small can change our world a lot. What has changed for you over the last year? Two years? How do you think the life of the disciples changed after hearing the news that Jesus was alive again?

9. Beautiful butterfly snack

You will need: mini bagels; cream cheese; food colouring; plastic sandwich bags for piping or knives; scissors; small pretzel sticks; sprinkles or coloured sugar

Cut each bagel in half width wise, then put one side away. Then cut the half in half again height wise. Flip the two edges round edges into the centre to appear like butterfly wings. Poke pretzel sticks into the top of each half to create antennae. Decorate bagels with cream cheese, by placing cream cheese and food colouring in a sandwich bag and squishing together to distribute the colour. Cut off the corner of the bag and squeeze the cream cheese out on to the bagel. Sprinkle the top with coloured sugar or sprinkles.

Talk about how butterflies are symbols of new life. How has being a part of Messy Church given you new life? Is there someone you want to share that with?

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10. Pass the word

You will need: paper towel or wrapping paper tubes; three ping-pong balls with the words 'Jesus', 'is' and 'alive' written on them

Put together a team. Each person in the team holds a tube to make a ball tunnel. You could stipulate that there must be at least one drop in elevation and one turn to make the tunnel challenging, but you can make it as long and as complicated as possible. Send the balls through in order to spell out 'Jesus is alive' to the last person. If the ball falls out of the tunnel or something gets stuck, start again. Now try it while singing, 'Jesus loves me' or while saying the Lord's Prayer. See if you can make it through the tunnel without getting stuck or dropping any balls.

Talk about it being hard to tell the story of Jesus to people who are not familiar with it. It's a story that's hard to believe. How can you make it easier? Even when it's hard, what makes you want to try?

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Celebration

You will need: head scarves for the women at the tomb; torches for the two bright figures at the tomb; simple hats or scarves for the disciples; the tent tomb we made earlier (activity 4)

Act out the story of that first Easter morning with the women as they discover their teacher, who they were mourning, is alive again. Start a few feet from the tomb as the cast members will have to walk to it and away from it several times.

Assign parts: narrator; several people to play the part of the women at the tomb (at least three would be good but the more the better); several people to play the disciples (there were eleven, but if you have fewer you really only need one that can get up and run to the tomb); two people to play the bright figures at the tomb (give them the flashlights and instruct them to shine them under their chins). Make sure everyone puts their props on!

Instruct each of the cast members to follow along with the story and act out what is read. Make sure that the door to the tent (the stone) has been rolled to the side and that the bright figures are hiding behind the tent.

Our story takes place early in the morning. It might be the break of dawn. Quiet and cool, maybe there was the smell of dampness in the air as there had been rain earlier. Several women walk slowly and sadly towards the tomb of their teacher Jesus, who was killed just two days before. They had to wait to tend to his body until after the sabbath, as was their custom. Sometimes it was hard to

observe the tradition of not working on the sabbath when something this important had to be done. Well, today was starting off in a very difficult way but it was about to get much more interesting.

The women approached the tomb. When they discovered the stone had been rolled away, they gasped in surprise (*they gasp*). 'Where is our Lord' they shouted (*repeat the words*).

All of a sudden... two bright figures appeared on either side of the empty tomb (*bright figures pop out from behind the tent shining their torches under their chins*).

The women gasped in surprise again (*they gasp again*).

The bright figures said together (*repeat in unison*), 'Why are you here? He is not here! Why do you look for the living among the dead?'

The women gasped and looked upwards, suddenly remembering that Jesus had told them that this would happen. They ran back to where the larger group was staying to tell them the story. They are excited and joyful (*act like they are excited and joyful*) that Jesus is alive again.

But the disciples doubted what they said and shook their heads in disbelief. The women were sad that this joyful thing, the thing they had all hoped for had happened, but no one believed it.

Then, Peter stood up and ran to the tomb and saw for himself what had happened. He was surprised, shocked, overjoyed and CONFUSED (*Peter scratches his head*)!

He returned to the group and said, 'I'm so confused' (*repeat the words*), but soon, Peter and everyone would have answers, because Jesus was waiting for them in Galilee. And this made them all very happy (*everyone cheer*).

Celebration leader can ask these questions:

- Why do you think the two bright figures are important in the story? The women saw them and heard from them what had happened, and they believed because they saw. How do you think the story would have been different if they hadn't been there? I think there would have been a lot of confusion and not many answers. But the women had been told that Jesus was alive, so they knew what had happened.
- How can we believe that Jesus rose from the grave? We need to believe without seeing. That is called faith and it's what we work on growing here at Messy Church. Is there something that you learned at Messy Church that helps your faith?

Prayer

Write prayers on pieces of paper or dictate them to someone if they can't write it themselves. Have each person scrunch or fold up their papers and throw their prayers into the tomb (the tent).

Jesus conquered the grave. Sometimes our troubles can seem overwhelming. Throw your prayers into the tomb. Picture them disappearing and rising to heaven, where God has them handled. Just like Jesus overcame death, Jesus can take on our troubles and win. If we give our troubles over to God, we win too. We don't have to see it to believe it. Let's pray together.

Almighty God! We thank you for taking our troubles and giving us love and grace in return. We ask that you hear our prayers today and embrace us with your grace. God be with us and keep us awake to the wonders of your love and the miracles and life of your Son Jesus, who came to show us how to live and how to take care of each other. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Invite people to take a photo of the tomb to remind them that their prayers are in good hands.

Song suggestions

'Happy day' – Jesus Culture

'He's alive, he's alive' – Yancy

'Lighting up the world' – iSingPop

'Christ arose' – Go Fish

Meal suggestion

Enjoy breakfast for dinner, as our story takes place in the hours of the early morning. A delicious breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, beans, toast, pancakes, marmalade or jam and tea or coffee with milk.

Session material: April

Peter's discipleship

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

Bible story

John 21:15–23 (NRSV)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'

Pointers

'Follow me' – words Jesus said to Peter quite a few times. Peter followed Jesus from the side of his fishing boat to all over the country, seeing and talking and wondering and being close to Jesus. He witnessed many things and was a trusted follower who was a little hurt in this passage when Jesus seems to question his dedication. Was Jesus

making sure that Peter was sincere, especially after Peter had denied him earlier? Maybe Jesus was helping Peter to be sure about his desire to continue to follow him as there was a big job waiting to be done. Peter was to have many adventures and trials of his own as he continued after Jesus' ascension to follow him and share his teaching with many people.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Jesus calls lots of different people to 'follow him', asking them to make choices that echo his teaching and to care for others with compassion. Peter's discipleship journey had times of happiness, joy, struggle and times when his faith was tested. In our discipleship, we will also face these times. Jesus knows and still asks us to 'follow him'.

Add value

Mealtime card

- What is the easiest choice and the most difficult choice you have made?
- How do we follow Jesus today?
- How do we care for others?

Take-home idea

Look at the ideas you have put in your discipleship diary (activity 5). Choose a challenge and complete it as a family. You might want to add more challenges or repeat some of them. Remember to write about each challenge you do.

Question to start and end the session

So... how closely are we following Jesus just now and how can we be closer to him?

Social action

Find something to do as a family to care for others who are struggling. You might know these people e.g. a local refugee family, or you might help people you don't know, such as by raising money to donate to WaterAid.

Activities

1. Challenging lollies



You will need: small lollipops with one to three stripes in either red, blue or green marked on the stick; tray of sand in which to stand the lollies; chart of activities (download online)

Choose a lolly and count the stripes on the stick. Check the activity chart to find your challenge, complete it and win your lolly.

1



Talk about what you were asked to do. Did you find it easy or challenging? Sometimes the tasks are fun and we really enjoy doing them, but sometimes they are more of a challenge. Peter's discipleship journey had some fun times and quite a few challenges. What do you think kept him going?

2. Feed the sheep



You will need: three large boxes covered in white paper with a sheep face and a hole for the mouth; points card stuck on each box (one to three); table tennis balls or similar; marker placed several steps from the boxes

Stack the boxes one on top of the other on a wall or table. Stand behind the marker and throw the balls into the mouths of the sheep. Add up your score and see if you can better it next time.

2



Talk about Peter's task to 'feed my sheep'. What do you think Jesus meant? How can we do this today?

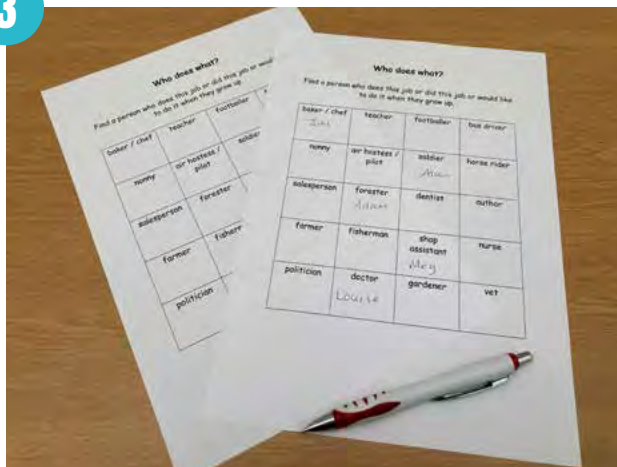
3. Who does what?



You will need: people bingo chart (download online); pen or pencil

Look at the jobs on the chart. Find someone who is a plumber or a baker, etc. and write their name in the box. Some people may have done this job in the past or decided this is what they would like to do when they grow up. Each box needs to have a different name in it.

3



Talk about the different jobs Peter did – a fisherman, a follower, a learner, a storyteller, a prisoner. What do you think he thought about all of his different jobs? What different jobs have you had so far?

4. Peter's discipleship story box



You will need: a tray; symbols of Peter's life, e.g. boat, fish, chains, sheep, mouth shape or megaphone, pencil and paper (symbol of learning), footstep (following), sword, cockerel, cross, rock, keys; cloth

Lay out all of the items on the tray and give a few minutes for them to be memorised. Cover up the items and secretly remove one of them. Reveal the tray and ask which one is missing. Ask what that item represented in Peter's life.

Talk about all of the things that happened to Peter, who was one of Jesus' disciples. Can you put the items in order to tell Peter's discipleship story?

4



5. Discipleship diary

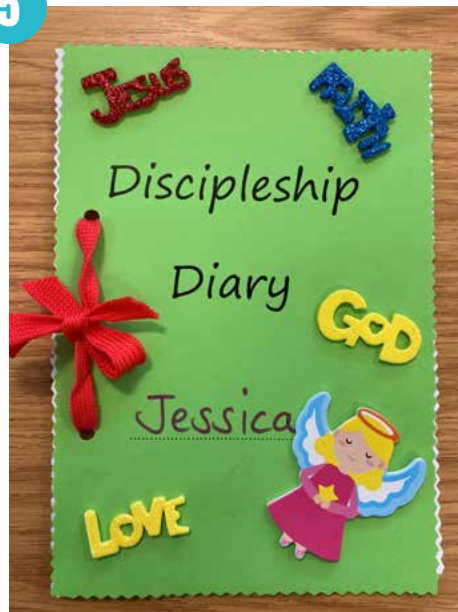


You will need: pieces of coloured A5 paper; zig zag scissors; two A5 pieces of card or funky foam for the cover; hole punch; string or ribbon; sticker with 'Discipleship Diary' printed on it; stickers with tasks printed on them, e.g. pray, help others, learn about Jesus, do a job at church, care for the community, care for the planet; pens

Take three or four sheets of coloured paper and use the zig zag scissors to cut around the edge. Punch a hole in the paper and in the two sheets of card or foam. Thread the string or ribbon through the holes to make a book. Put the 'Discipleship Diary' sticker on the front cover and one of the other stickers in the middle of each page (or write these in yourself). See the 'Take-home idea' to help you use the diary.

Talk about what we do today to be Jesus' disciples. What things can we do as a family to put in our diary?

5



6. Magazine cross

You will need: old magazines, cut into strips about 1 cm wide; card; PVA glue; scissors; glue spreader

Cut out a cross shape from the card for each person. Take a strip of magazine and roll it up into a swirl. Glue the swirl on to the card and repeat with lots of swirls until you have a cross shape. Leave to dry.

Talk about how Jesus is always with us on our discipleship journey. He proved his love for us when he died on the cross. Look at how all the magazine swirls make up a special and unique cross, each one is different, yet made up of the same stuff – just like us!

6



7. Stormy seas

You will need: small glass jar with screw lid; strong glue; water; glitter; baby oil; small fish toy or boat glued to the underside of the lid (kits can be purchased at Baker Ross, e.g. 'sea life colour in snow globe')

Make up the snow globe as per kit instructions or take the glass jar and almost fill with water. Add a few drops of baby oil and a sprinkle of glitter. Put some glue around

the inside of the lid and screw it on to the jar with the fish or boat inside. Ensure the lid is tightly fixed and sealed. Turn it over and shake to see the storm.

7



Talk about how the water in the jar makes a storm and then settles down. Sometimes Peter's life was a bit stormy when things didn't go very well. When do things feel stormy in our lives? What about things that seem to go very calmly?

8. Bead heart



You will need: jewellery wire; assorted buttons or beads; ribbon

Make a heart shape from a piece of wire, leaving some extra wire at the join to make a loop at the end. Thread the buttons or beads on to the heart shape until all the wire is covered. Use the extra wire at the join of the heart to make a loop so you can hang the heart on to some ribbon.

8



Talk about love being a special thing. In today's reading Jesus asked Simon Peter if he loved him – to which he replied, 'Yes, you know I love you.' It is important to tell those people who are special to us that we love them. Sometimes we can do this by making something special to remind them. Who do you love who you could give this heart to?

9. Banana sheep biscuit

You will need: digestive biscuits; bananas; blackberries; icing googly eyes; kiwi fruit; chocolate finger biscuits; plate

Cut the banana into slices and then cover the biscuit in the slices. Place a blackberry in the centre of the biscuit to be the sheep's head and place two icing eyes on top. Cut another blackberry into quarters and use two as ears, placing them one each side of the sheep's head and the other two as the sheep's feet. Cut the kiwi fruit up into small pieces and arrange at the bottom to represent grass. Make a 'fence' with the chocolate finger biscuits.

9



Talk about how Jesus told Peter to 'feed my lambs' and to 'tend my sheep' – did he really mean actual sheep? Or did he mean people?

10. Sheep headband



You will need: copy of the sheep headband printed on to card for each person (download online); cotton wool balls; PVA glue; glue spreader; scissors; black felt-tip pens; stapler or sticky tape

Cut out the pattern for the sheep headband. Glue the cotton wool balls to the sheep's body and draw on some eyes and maybe a nose. Attach the two ends with the stapler or sticky tape so that it fits securely on your head.

Talk about how sheep like to follow each other, maybe because it helps them feel like they belong, or feel more secure and happy. Jesus said we are to follow him – I wonder if this is to help us feel like we belong, feel more secure and happy. What do you think?

10



Celebration

Explain that you are going to play a game a little bit like 'Simon says' but it's called 'Follow me' – everyone does everything. Proceed with some easy actions e.g. 'raise arm', 'pat head' and progress to things like 'stand on one foot'. Walk over to one side of the space with the words 'follow me'. Move the group around the room with these instructions, eventually coming back to sit down again.

When Jesus told his followers to 'follow him', he didn't quite mean that they had to do the same things as he did when he raised his arm or jumped up and down or sat in one place or another. I wonder what he meant (*take some suggestions*). Jesus wanted his disciples to notice how he spoke to people and how he was kind to people. He wanted them to follow him, meaning to be like him in praying and trying to make wise choices.

When people were sad (*everyone makes a sad face*), Jesus helped them (*smile again*). When people were lost or had made poor choices (*scratch your head and look confused*), Jesus helped to put things right (*smile again*). When people were scared (*make a scared face*) or tired (*make a tired face*) or angry (*make an angry face*), he helped them because he cared (*smile again*). He asked his disciples to care for people just like he cared for people. That's what he meant by following him.

Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about us so much.

Thank you for noticing when we are sad or lonely, confused or angry, upset or just really under the weather.

Help us to care for our family and friends just like you care for us.

Help us to notice when they are sad or lonely, confused or angry, upset or just really under the weather.

Just as you help us, may we be like you and help them.

Amen.

Song suggestions

'I want to walk with Jesus Christ' – C. Simmonds

'I have decided to follow Jesus' – Lydia Walker

'I will follow' – Chris Tomlin

'My lighthouse' – Rend Collective

Meal suggestion

Jacket potatoes and an assortment of fillings such as cheese, beans and tuna. Fresh fruit kebabs.

Session material: May

God speaks my language

by Martyn Payne

Bible story

Acts 2:1–8, 12, 14 (NIV, abridged)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?'

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'

Pointers

God certainly knew how to draw a crowd! The dramatic wind and the mysterious flames excited people's curiosity, but then it needed inspired words that made sense for people. So, when God chose to speak to people that day, God's Spirit gifted the apostles with languages that people could understand.

Each of us is unique, with our own particular upbringing, way of understanding the world, culture and learned way of relating to others. At Pentecost, we see how God's Spirit takes all this into account so that each of us is able to make our own unique sense of God's love for us.

It was the Spirit who connected Peter's words with the people's hearts. This is the miracle of Pentecost that has happened again and again throughout history. And it can still happen today.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Pentecost is stage three in God's salvation plan to put the world back together again. First, God spoke through a particular nation and through its prophets. Then, God spoke through Christ Jesus, who was 'God with us'. Finally, God sent the Holy Spirit to be 'Christ in us', enabling us to become all that God originally created us to be. Pentecost is the moment we can experience not just God for us and God beside us, but also God within us. Each of us needs to experience being filled by the Spirit; and not just once, but again and again, because we leak! Pentecost also teaches us that this same Spirit can help us share our faith with our family and friends.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Can you say something in another language?
- Would you like to learn another language and, if so, why?
- Do you think that sometimes the church uses a language that people can't understand?

Question to start and end the session

So... what do you think would draw a crowd to listen to the story of Jesus nowadays? How do you think the Holy Spirit can help us today to talk about Jesus in a way that people can understand?

Social action

Find out if there are any people in your church or local community who have recently come from another part of the world and/or who speak another language. Some may be refugees or recent immigrants. How can you make them welcome? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you share God's love for those who come from a different background to your own.

Activities

1. Pentecost leaf painting

You will need: long thin leaves (such as eucalyptus or rowan leaves); yellow, red and orange poster paints; white card or paper; paintbrushes; glue sticks

Collect the leaves from outdoors and arrange them in flame-shaped bunches. Paint the individual leaves, yellow, red and orange. Glue these to the card or paper to represent the flames that appeared above the apostles' heads at Pentecost.

Talk about the Holy Spirit being like flames of fire. What might that tell us about the work of God's Spirit?

2. Google translate

You will need: a smartphone, laptop or tablet; the story of Pentecost in an easy-to-read version (e.g. *The Message* translation); paper; colouring pens

Work together as a group of young and old together to translate particular verses from Acts 2 into a variety of languages using a translation app. Write out the results on to paper in large letters which could be coloured and illustrated. Read out what each sentence sounds like to those who join the group, to see if they can guess what is being said. Retain these to be used as part of the celebration.

Talk about what it must have sounded like on the day of Pentecost when the disciples were speaking in many different languages.

3. Ripples

You will need: a body of water such as a paddling pool, or maybe an outdoor pond; a web of concentric circles like an archery target made out of string; some small stones; pen and paper; smartphone with a stopwatch function; map (optional)

What happened at Pentecost set off an ever-increasing ripple of gospel sharing around the Roman world. Have a go at lobbing small stones in the air so that they land in the centre of the pool, and then watch how the ripples spread outwards across the water surface. Try to count and record how many ripples there are, and how long it takes for each ripple to reach the edge of the pond or pool. Add a competition element to this by laying a web of concentric string circles over the surface and award points for where people land their stones.

Talk about how the story of Jesus spread around the world. Pentecost was the birth of the worldwide church. Some might like to check which countries were represented among the crowds on that festival day (see Acts 2:9–11) and find them on a map.

4. Tell the story – a mime activity

You will need: a printed list of the seven key points in Peter's sermon on that first Pentecost and elsewhere in Acts (these are: God loves you and has plan for your life; selfishness destroys you; Jesus' death rescues you; say sorry and put your faith in God; be baptised and receive the Holy Spirit; stay close to Christ by prayer, Bible reading and worshipping with others; pass the story on to others)

Look through the seven key points of his message and challenge the group to try and share this story in sign language – turn each point into a mime. Let the ideas come from the group rather than the activity leader.

Talk about what this message means for people today and which parts may be easier or harder to understand.

5. Paper windmills of light

You will need: crayons; paper; pencils; scissors; pushpins; thin pieces of dowelling or long pencils

Take your piece of paper and cut it into a perfect square. Divide the square on each side into seven vertical, equal bands and colour each one a different colour of the rainbow. Fold the paper diagonally so it turns into a triangle and crease it lightly. Repeat this for the opposite direction as well. You will then unfold and have a creased 'X' on the page. Cut along the creases about halfway to the middle of the paper. Be sure not to cut all the way. Bend one corner from each section into the middle. Make sure to bend and not fold. Once all four corners are in the middle, push a pin through them all into the pencil or dowelling, making sure the windmill blades can circulate freely. Blow into the windmill to watch the rainbow colours blend into white.

Talk about the Holy Spirit being like the wind which brings the light of the gospel to the rainbow of nations on this earth, while still allowing the individual colours to exist in their uniqueness.

1



6. A world of prayer

You will need: chunky paper arrows; pens, crayons or pencils; sticky fixits; a globe or world atlas; a battery-operated tea light

Place the tea light on Jerusalem in the country of Israel. This is where Pentecost happened. From there, the good news about Jesus spread out into the whole world. Invite young and old to place prayer arrows on to the map, pointing at countries or cities they know where there are Christians. Pray briefly that they will continue to pass the message on to others. Include places with which your church has links and maybe also mission partners you support.

Talk about the ways in which the story of Jesus has been passed on through written words, one-to-one conversations, social media and evangelists like Peter.

7. Around the fire



You will need: an outdoor fire pit or safe area in which to light a fire; packets of sparklers; sugar; plain flour; powdered coffee creamer; powdered aluminium or magnesium shavings; bucket of sand

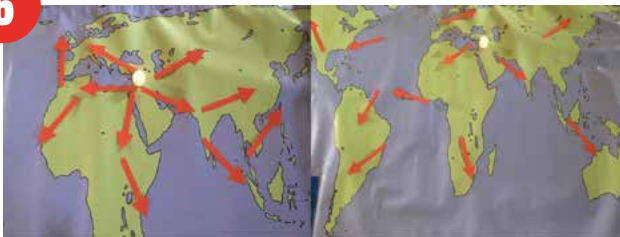
Light a fire pit or traditional outdoor fire, taking care to keep young children safe and keeping the fire well supervised. Once alight, talk about the flames of fire that appeared at Pentecost and then demonstrate using different materials the sorts of sparks and flashes that may have appeared above the disciples' heads. Use sugar (for small sparks), flour (for a flash flame), powdered coffee creamer (for sparkly flashes), aluminium or magnesium shavings (for silver sparks) for different effects (you may want to practise this beforehand). Finally, light the sparklers safely and invite the group to spell different words of praise in the air imitating the words that were heard at Pentecost. Dispose of the sparklers safely in a sand bucket.

Talk about the power of fire. Connect this to how, in the Bible, God appeared in the fire on Mount Sinai, as a flaming angel to Gideon, at the burning bush to Moses and in a chariot of fire to Elijah. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is described as 'having eyes like flames of fire'.

5



6



8



8. The wonders of God

You will need: the letters from two Scrabble sets; a large empty table space

On the day of Pentecost the crowds heard the disciples 'declaring the wonders of God'. I wonder what sort of things they were saying. Pour out the Scrabble letters on to the table and divide them into smaller piles for each of the people in the group. The idea is to create a Scrabble crossword of as many words as they can (possibly in a set time) that relate to the wonders of God.

Talk about the words that are chosen and how they can help to point to the love and greatness of God.

9. Empowered

You will need: as many battery-operated objects as you can (torches, toys, remote controls, digital cameras, cordless phones, clocks, tea lights, etc.); the batteries from your objects, taken out and all mixed together

The idea of this activity is to find the correct batteries to make the various objects work again. You might like to make it more difficult by hiding some batteries around the activity area.

Talk about how useless things become without the power to make them work. When the Spirit filled the disciples, suddenly they were given power to become like Jesus, to do the work of God and to represent him in the world.

10. Puzzled

You will need: a variety of simple child's jigsaws (ideally around 50 pieces) – if possible they should include people in the picture

At various points in today's story, the crowds are described as being, 'bewildered', 'amazed', 'perplexed' and 'puzzled'. Beforehand, mix together the puzzle pieces for two puzzles, then divide the pieces back into the two original boxes. Do this for as many puzzles as you think you will need. Challenge pairs of people to complete two jigsaws by negotiating appropriate transfers of pieces. It could become quite a bewildering and perplexing exercise!

Talk about how the crowds felt that day and what they thought was going on before Peter spoke. Maybe even at Messy Church, some people can be puzzled as to what is going on, until someone helps them to understand!

Celebration

Today's story is a celebration of a birthday. We're celebrating the birth of the church. Not the beginning of our Messy Church, but the beginning of all church – we are celebrating the birthday of the church with almost 2,000 candles on the cake! That's a lot of cake! Maybe you have made some things to help us celebrate.

Have you got some fiery pictures? (*from activity 1*) Some windmills? (*from activity 5*) Some words about God? (*from activity 8*) Some words in different languages? (*from activity 2*)

The day the church was born is called Pentecost. It is a colourful, powerful, amazing, noisy, supernatural and incredible festival!

Are you ready for the story of Pentecost? (*Invite everyone to join in with a short countdown.*)

5, 4, 3, 2, 1... let's get going.

In fact we are going to need several countdowns like that to explore this festival. So whenever I'm doing countdown numbers, do join in.

You see, the friends of Jesus had been doing a countdown ever since Easter morning when Jesus came back from the dead. It was a 40-day countdown. So here goes...

(*Count together*) 40, 39, 38, 37, 36... and during those days of the countdown, Jesus appeared to people again and again. There was no doubt about it, Jesus really was alive again, but he wasn't going to stay around. Jesus kept telling them that there was something else that they must wait for. They needed to count down towards this next stage of what God was going to do to rescue the world.

So they kept counting down: 30, 29, 28, 27, 26, 25...

In fact as the numbers came down towards zero, it got more and more mysterious. 20, 19, 18, 17... during the countdown, he kept telling them day after day to wait in Jerusalem – to wait for the promise from God; to wait to be clothed with power from on high. What did he mean? What was it all about?

10, 9, 8, 7, 6... And as they got closer and closer to zero, Jesus led them out of the city to a hill called the Mount of Olives. He gave them his last words, his final instructions before lift-off. He said: 'I want you to go into all the world, starting from where you are now, and I want you to share the message about God's love and God's forgiveness with everybody, everywhere.'

5, 4, 3...

Jesus said, just before he went, 'I will be with you until the very end.'

2, 1...

Lift-off! And Jesus was gone, and now they had to wait... to wait for that promise and to wait for that power from on high.

There was one more countdown to come, from ten to zero – ten days to Pentecost.

10, 9...

They went back to Jerusalem and each day gathered in one big upstairs room.

8, 7...

They were all there – the first disciples and the many others who had joined the group – in total, 120 people counting down to Pentecost.

6, 5, 4, 3...

The days were passing and they were waiting and wondering. No one knew what was going to happen next, but they trusted Jesus and what he told them. They waited and they read the scriptures and they talked together and they remembered.

2, 1...

And just then a wind began to blow, the building started to shake and it got noisier and noisier.

Zero and lift off!

The place they were staying was filled with gale-force winds and flames of fire! God was coming back into them with a mighty roar of power. They began to speak God's praise in all sorts of languages, heavenly and earthly.

God was speaking to people in a language they could understand. God, who had been beyond them and outside them as the almighty. God, who had come close and been beside them as Jesus. This God was now filling them and coming inside them as the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what Peter said to the crowd who gathered that day:

At this point you can invite a few families who have had a go at activity 4 to show their mimes for the different elements of Peter's Pentecost message.

The people in Jerusalem that day had come from many countries, but each one had heard the disciples speaking to them from God in their own language!

This is the beginning of the church. This is the birthday of the church. This is what Pentecost is all about and we are part of it, as we remember it and welcome God's Holy Spirit into us, right here, right now, wherever you are.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1... Now we have lift-off as the people of God. I wonder where God will launch you to, to bring life to those around you.

Because of the Holy Spirit in us, we can now talk to God as our Father, and we can walk with Jesus as our friend who is with us forever, and we can find ways to talk to other people in a language that can understand.

I wonder how God wants to speak to you and speak through you this coming week.

Prayer

You will need: A4 paper and pencils or crayons

Invite people to draw a big heart that fills the space on their paper. This is a picture of God's love. Suggest that they decorate or colour that heart in a unique way that they choose. Now invite everyone to fold the paper into a simple paper plane.

When everyone is ready, start a final countdown, explaining that on 'lift-off', each person should launch their plane upward at an angle, as a way of sharing God's love 'in their own language' (i.e. colouring and decoration) to someone else in the Messy congregation. Encourage people to catch or pick up someone else's plane. You might like to do this a few times, widening the circles of people who 'catch God's love.'

Before each countdown, call out this prayer:

Holy Spirit, help us to share God's love through Jesus with everybody, everywhere.

End each prayer with:

And everybody said, Amen.

Song suggestions

To the tune of London's burning: 'Spirit burning, Spirit burning, fell upon them, fell upon them. Praise God! Praise God! Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord.' You could try it as a round.

'Jesus send me the helper' – Kidsource

'All over the world' – Junior Praise

Meal suggestion

With whatever you serve, include a simple side salad that includes red and yellow items such as baby tomatoes, peppers, sweetcorn, radish or pomegranate seeds. Have fun arranging the coloured salad pieces as Pentecost flames. Similarly, any dessert could include red and yellow fruits to represent flames.

Session material: June

Shh! It's a secret

by Sharon Sampson

Bible story

Revelation 3:2 (NIV)

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die.

Pointers

God put this verse on Brother Andrew's heart in 1955. He smuggled Bibles to secret Christians behind the Iron Curtain in eastern European communist countries. They often had to share Bibles between dozens of believers and keep their faith a secret in the face of intense persecution. This one ordinary man went on to create the charity Open Doors, which now serves millions of persecuted Christians in over 70 countries around the world.

He said, 'The Bible is full of ordinary people, who went to impossible places and did wonderful things simply because they decided to obey God.'

Every week in church, we pray for God to intercede and change the bad things that are happening in the world, but he wants us to participate in that too, just like Brother Andrew did. He said, 'God may ask you to become part of the answer to your prayers. If that happens, rejoice, for then you will be participating in the greatest adventure imaginable!'

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

These stories will inspire people by showing them that ordinary people like them can do impossible things and go on amazing adventures with God by their side. They will also see that miracles are not just reserved for ancient biblical times, but God is at work doing miracles today. In some countries being a Christian can be almost too easy. We can get complacent or even bored. I find it interesting that Christians living under persecution often have the greatest faith and see the most miracles. We are not just here to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can learn from their example too.

This session is light on craft and heavy on activities so may suit some groups more than others.

Add value

Why not make your Messy Church look a little different this time? You could black out the windows, cover up crosses or other signs of Christianity (revealing them during the thank you prayers in the celebration). You could put up a large image of your country's leader, but also some fish symbols. Confiscate Bibles at the door. When people arrive, peep around the door and whisper, 'Quick, come in. Did anyone see you arrive?'

Mealtime card

- How many Bibles do you have at home?
- Can you memorise a Bible verse? How about Philippians 4:6-7 (GNT) – 'Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.'
- If we had to strip church back to the basics, what do we actually need to worship?
- Would you rather publicly say you weren't a Christian or lose your home?
- If your home was raided, could anyone tell that you are a Christian?

Question to start and end the session

So... how much do you value your freedom to worship?

Social action

Leave a painted stone or hidden scripture somewhere for a stranger to find.

Activities

1. Homemade cross



You will need: sticks; string; sticky tack or plasticine; glue gun; pegs; Lego

Make a cross out of sticks. For a bigger challenge, provide clothes pegs and a glue gun. If you are near a beach, make a cross out of items found on the shore. You could try pushing shells into wet sand. Lego is another alternative.

Talk about how some Christians live in countries where it is illegal to be a Christian. They cannot buy a cross, and it is dangerous to have one in the house. They might need to make a cross, use it in their worship and then take it apart again.

1



2. Encouragement wall



You will need: plain wallpaper (or you could just use sticky notes); coloured pens (if outdoors, find a plain wall and use chalk)

Write pieces of scripture up on a wall to encourage each other. Write some up as examples: John 16:33, Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 4:6-7. Add some smiley faces or other positive images. Some secret churches meet in toilets, so you could set this up in one of your toilets and stick them on the backs of toilet doors.

Talk about how in many countries there are not enough Bibles to go around, so believers memorise bits of the Bible and whisper them to each other as encouragement. Can you remember any phrases? How about part of the Lord's Prayer or a song?

2



3. Watch a video

You will need: TV or iPad

Set up a separate quiet area where people can sit and watch videos about persecuted Christians. Pick some from the Open Doors website or YouTube channel and be sure that they are suitable for all ages. You could have them running continuously or on an iPad with headphones.

Talk about the amazing charity Open Doors started by Brother Andrew, a very brave Christian from the Netherlands. He smuggled Bibles into countries where being a Christian was forbidden and Bibles were very hard to come by. Now it supports persecuted Christians all over the world and publishes a World Watch List of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.

3



4. Hidden scripture

You will need: old books; paper crosses; printed Bible verses (or have paper and pens available for people to write their own); scissors; sharp knives

Cut out holes inside the book (supervise carefully). Tuck your cross or scroll of scripture inside.

Talk about how secret Christians have to find places to hide their scripture. Inside an old book on a bookshelf is a pretty good hiding place.

4



5. Decipher

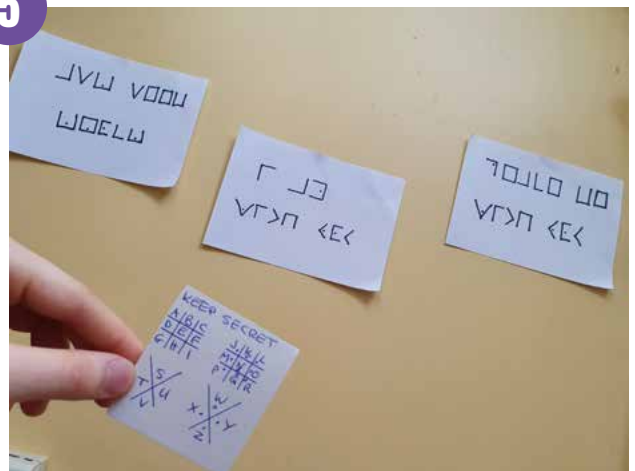


You will need: scripture in code; key card (download online); paper and pens

Write coded messages on the walls. Give people a key card so they can decipher the messages. Tell them to keep the key card secret and not to show it to anyone. See if they can write a message in code to pass to someone else.

Talk about how as a secret Christian you could use a code to send a message to a friend, as long as you had an agreed key.

5



6. Painted rocks



You will need: large smooth stones; permanent pens or paints and brushes

Decorate a stone and write short passages of scripture on the bottom. If you can't find large stones, you could simply paint a cross on a smaller one. This could also work well for smaller children.

Talk about how having scripture in your house or on your possession can be very dangerous in countries where being a Christian is forbidden. With these rocks, they can be hidden in the garden and looked at when tending your garden.

6



7. Storytelling

You will need: child and adult Bibles with bookmarks on key stories; small stickers; list of banned words and their replacements

Take turns trying to read from the Bible but replacing certain dangerous words: God (Dad), Jesus (Jo), disciples (friends), angel (light), Lord (Jo), Christ (Jo) and baptised (washed). You could use the story of the shepherds at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-20), Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13) or Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33). For more knowledgeable Christians, you could just ask them to recount the story, instead of reading it.

7



Give people a penalty of a sticker on their forehead for every forbidden word they say.

Talk about how as a secret Christian you never know who could be listening. Some words will give away that you are a Christian, so you have to be careful.

8. Fish food

You will need: sliced bread; hummus or cheese spread; cucumber; red pepper; olives; sweetcorn; salad leaves; paper plates

Make a fish out of food. Use cucumber for the scales and be creative with what you have!

Talk about how early followers of Jesus used a secret symbol of a fish. Why? Several of the disciples were fishermen, Jesus talked about becoming 'fishers of men' and told lots of stories about fish. Also, the Greek letters for 'fish', pronounced 'ICK-THOOS' became an acronym: 'Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour'.

8



9. Dirty job



You will need: dirty wellingtons or something else that needs cleaning; nailbrushes; buckets of water; towels

Can you clean the wellingtons with this little brush?

Talk about how in some countries like Pakistan, Christians get all the really dirty jobs as they are looked down upon. As you clean, pray that God will draw close to men, women and children who are suffering persecution for their faith.

9



10. Bible smuggling



You will need: car; Bibles; blindfold; timer; picnic basket; blanket; cushions; suitcase; printed-out prayer (see below)

One person has three minutes to hide as many Bibles as possible inside the car. Then get them to say Brother Andrew's prayer: 'Lord, in my luggage I have scripture that I want to take to your children across the border. When you were on earth, you made blind eyes see. Now I pray you make seeing eyes blind.' Finally, a second person is blindfolded and has three minutes to find them.

Talk about how Brother Andrew smuggled hundreds of Bibles inside his blue Volkswagen Beetle, into countries where owning a Bible was illegal. He prayed the prayer above. In all his years of smuggling he was never caught, and the prayer is still prayed by Open Doors staff today.

10



Celebration

Welcome everybody to our (*whisper*) Messy Church. Today we are thinking about all the (*whisper*) Christians around the world who must keep Jesus a secret, in case they get in trouble. Let's have a look at what life is like for them.

Drama

One person is sitting in a chair reading. Another comes to an imaginary door carrying a birthday present. They knock with special knock. The other person opens the door, looks around and then hurries them inside.

Host: What have you got there?

Guest: I thought if I got stopped and asked where I was going, I could say that I was coming to give you a birthday present.

Host: Great idea. Can I open it?

Guest: Of course.

(They open it to find some biscuits, and take one each.)

Guest: Let's worship. We haven't got much time.

(They cover up the picture of your country's leader and place two sticks on the floor in front of them in the shape of a crucifix.)

Host: Shall we read the story of Daniel again?

Guest: Yes!

(They open a book, take out a hidden piece of scripture and start to read.)

Host: 'The king should issue the following decree: For the next thirty days no one is to pray to any god or mortal except the king. Anyone who disobeys will be thrown into the lions' den' (Daniel 6:6-7, MSG).

Guest: Now skip to the end. Let's hear the best bit, after Daniel escapes the lions.

Host: 'King Darius published this proclamation to every race, colour, and creed on earth: Peace to you! Abundant peace! I decree that Daniel's God shall be worshipped in all parts of my kingdom. He is the living God, world without end. His kingdom never falls. His rule continues eternally. He is a saviour and rescuer. He performs astonishing miracles in heaven and on earth. He saved Daniel from the power of the lions' (Daniel 6:25-27, MSG).

Guest: Amen to that! Let's hope that one day, our leader will stop persecuting us too.

Host: Yes. Shall we sing?

(They start singing a song quietly. See song suggestions. During the song, there is a loud banging on the door by someone with a uniform style hat and jacket on, holding a threatening stick.)

Host: Coming!

(The guest quickly scatters the cross, hides the scripture and uncovers the picture of the national leader. The host opens the door.)

Host: Can I help you?

Police: I heard singing. Are you Christians? Are you holding an illegal gathering?

Guest: It is my friend's birthday. See, I brought this present. I was just singing 'Happy Birthday'. 'Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear [name], happy birthday to you!'

Police: Enough! Hmm. I will have to test these *(takes a biscuit)*. Alright, I will believe you this time, but a warning. I have my eye on you two *(he leaves)*.

Host: *(Looking up, hands clasped in prayer)* Thank you, thank you, thank you, for keeping us safe. And thank you [name] for bringing that birthday present.

(There is another knock on the door. The host opens it.)

Smuggler: Hi, are you [name]? I am from Open Doors. I have a 'birthday' present for you.

Host: Yes, I am. Thank you very much. *(Opens it to reveal a Bible. Both host and guest exclaim with joy.)* Thank you, thank you. Is this really for us? Our very own Bible?

Smuggler: It's my pleasure. Take comfort that there are many Christians around the world praying for you.

Guest: We are not alone? You don't know how much that means to us. Thank you so much.

Smuggler: I had better go. I have more deliveries to make. But first, let us bless each other.

Together: *(whispering)* The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

(They say their goodbyes and the guest and smuggler leave. Host clutches the Bible to their chest, smiling up at God, mouthing 'Thank you')

Prayer

(If people are comfortable, ask them to hold their wrists together as if they were tied.)

Father God, **sorry** that we take you and our freedom for granted.

(Hold hands out in prayer.)

Faithful God, **thank you** so much that we are free to worship, to sing loudly, to read our Bibles and to tell our friends and family about you.

(Finally, put your arms out in a hug position.)

Loving Father, **please** comfort and support all persecuted Christians around the world and help all the charities working to help them and bring them Bibles. Amen.

Song suggestions

'Shine, Jesus, shine' – Graham Kendrick

'Amazing grace' – Mission Praise #31

'When I needed a neighbour' – Sydney Carter

'Kumbaya' – traditional

'The Lord's my shepherd' – Mission Praise #660

Meal suggestion

Use the food craft above. Put out lots of items buffet style and some examples for people to follow. If you have time, you could bake some fish shaped biscuits for a desert.

Session material: July

The Olympics - running the race!

By Sally O'Hare and Jane Butler

Bible story

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Pointers

In Hebrews, the author reminds his readers of the great crowd of saints who surround them and encourage them. Who supports and encourages your Messy Church?

Perseverance is a huge part of any athlete's training. It's what means that you can get up day after day and do the same training routine, even when it's wet or cold or you're really tired! What have you had to persevere through as a Messy Church? Sometimes the only way to persevere is to fix your eyes on the goal, to imagine what that looks like. Athletes use a technique called visualisation, imagining themselves crossing the finishing line in first place or throwing the winning distance. They also use it to imagine how they might respond to different situations they may face in competition. This is a little bit like the writer to the Hebrews' advice to fix our eyes on Jesus and follow in his footsteps. What is your goal as a Messy Church? What might you need to work through to get there?

The epistles are letters from various apostles to new churches containing encouragements, warnings, corrections, challenges and lots of advice. The epistles were in fact the coaching conversations of their day! If you were writing to your Messy Church, what would you say?

This is one of the very few occasions the word 'pioneer' is used in the Bible. How do you react to the word 'pioneer'? What difference might it make to your Messy Church?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session helps us look for the hidden obstacles in our lives. It helps us to become aware of how our behaviour and our mistakes can trip us up in the spiritual race and provides a space to bring these into the open and work through them in our relationship with God. It suggests ways that we can regularly build prayer and spiritual disciplines into our daily lives.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Have you ever had to try really hard (persevere) at something in order to succeed? How did it feel before you were successful? How did it feel when you succeeded?
- What does it feel like to win? What does it feel like to lose?
- Who could you support to be a follower of Jesus?

Question to start and end the session

So... what's the hardest race you've been in? What helped you along the way?

Social action

Caring for others, ourselves and the world around us are good spiritual disciplines. Set yourself a kindness challenge; there are lots online or you could create one for your Messy Church. At your next Messy Church, share with each other what you did.

Activities

1. Obstacle course

You will need: stopwatch/smartphone with stopwatch; tables; chairs; items to create obstacles such as hoops, skipping ropes or blankets; small rucksack with weights in (tins of food work well)

Build an obstacle course and challenge people to see how quickly they can complete the course. Then ask them to try again but this time with the weighted rucksack (make sure the weight is appropriate to the size and age of the participant). How does this affect their time?

Talk about how different challenges in life can feel like a weight on our back affecting everything we do. Take a minute to talk to God about something that is weighing you down at the moment.

2. Map of faith



You will need: material with different textures; paper; glue; scissors

Using the different materials, create a map to show points on the discipleship journey. You might want to make high and low points and areas that are rough and areas that are smooth.

Talk about what has helped you to navigate the different points on your own journey. Look at the map you have created and think back to the times it represents.

3. Edible medals – taste of success

You will need: fruit slices; chocolate; bowls; plates; writing icing

Melt the chocolate in a bowl. Dip the fruit slices in and then allow them to dry on a plate. Use the writing icing to write on a number 1.

Talk about what it feels like to taste success. Would it be good if you succeeded at everything all of the time? We all need to acknowledge when we have moments of success. How do you like to celebrate good moments?

4. Cloud of witnesses mural

You will need: long piece of paper; people-shaped cut-outs; felt-tip pens; pencils; scissors; glue

Ask people to draw pictures of those who support them. Cut them out and glue them on to the long piece of paper.

1



5



6



Talk about how we all need support on our faith journey. Who are the people who have helped you on your journey? How have they helped you? How could you help other people?

7

5. Outdoor scavenged Olympic rings



You will need: twigs, leaves, flower petals (where they've fallen naturally), grass, etc.; pictures of the Olympic rings

Use the scavenged material to create the Olympic rings.

Talk about how part of the meaning behind the Olympic symbol is the coming together of nations from across the world. How does our stewardship of the environment impact nations all over the world?



6. Keeping in shape

You will need: sports equipment; stopwatch/smartphone with stopwatch

Depending on what equipment you have access to, prepare some physical challenges. For example, how many bean bags can you throw in the bucket? How many star jumps can you do in a minute? How long can you stand on one leg? Can you skip non-stop for 30 seconds? You could also ask people to suggest challenges for each other!

8



Talk about how today's Bible passage focuses on perseverance. Olympians and Paralympians show real perseverance in preparing for the games. They train for years! How can we persevere in keeping our faith in Jesus? Should we be training for our spiritual life? What 'exercises' might help?

7. Training plan



You will need: paper; pens/pencils; calendar print-outs (optional)

Either as an individual or a household group, make a calendar covering the time from this session to your next Messy Church service. You can divide the time into days or weeks. You might want to add in specific times to talk to God as a family.

9



Talk about how in the same way as Olympians and Paralympians training, we too are encouraged to keep 'fit' to follow Jesus. How can we do that? Spend time chatting to people around the table about what exercises you can do to keep your relationship with Jesus healthy and put these ideas on to your calendar to create a training plan.

8. Olympic prayers

You will need: five hula hoops; luggage tags; pens and pencils

Lay the five hula hoops on the floor in the shape of the Olympic rings. Write or draw a prayer on a tag and tie it to one of the rings.

Talk about how the Olympic values are respect, excellence, friendship, courage, determination, inspiration and equality. How do these values relate to our lives as followers of Jesus? How can these values inspire your prayers today?

9. Torch relay



You will need: sticks; scissors; something to secure what you find to the stick, e.g. string, ribbon, wool or pipe cleaners

Take your stick and secure whatever you're using to attach items to your stick at the bottom. Wind the string around your stick (not too tight) and secure it again at the top. You're ready to set off on your journey! If you have access to some outside space, why not take a walk around it with your stick and attach items you find (leaves, flowers, feathers, etc.) to your stick by tucking them inside the wraps of string. Alternatively, use your journey stick on your way home from Messy Church or on a walk during the month in between.

Talk about how the Olympic torch relay first appeared at the Berlin Summer Olympics in 1936. It is lit in Olympia, Greece, and is carried, as a relay, to the host city. It provides a link between the ancient and modern games, and its journey is intended to transmit a message of peace and friendship along its route. As you walk with your journey stick, pause as you collect an item and pray for peace and friendship in the parts of God's world where there is none.

10. Prayer relay

You will need: empty crisp tubes; paper; wrapping paper; pens

Take the empty tube and decorate the outside by covering it in wrapping paper or using a piece of plain paper and writing or drawing on it. Write or draw any prayer requests you may have on a sheet of paper and pop it inside the tube (you could have multiple requests on a single piece you roll up inside). Refer to the prayer in the celebration for what to do next!

Talk about how today's Bible reading mentions a 'cloud of witnesses' supporting us, and praying for one another is just one way to do that. Do you find it easier to pray for someone else rather than yourself? How can we pray for one another? What happens when we pray for others?

10



Celebration

Today's session was inspired by a letter written to the Hebrew people in the early church. It talks of throwing off everything that hinders us, running the race marked out for us with perseverance and keeping our eyes on Jesus. I wonder what was meant by that. We've also been thinking about the Olympics and Paralympics today, where there will be lots of running and races of all different kinds. Put your hand up if you've ever taken part in a race. Who here likes running? I need a volunteer to run a race for me.

(Select a volunteer.)

I'd like you to run one lap around the room/outdoor space.

(Ask the rest of the congregation to cheer on the runner!)

Brilliant! You're a very fast runner. I'm going to ask you to do that again but this time I'm going to ask you to carry this backpack which is weighed down with heavy items (as used in activity 1).

(Help them put the backpack on. Make sure it's weighed down appropriate to the size and age of your volunteer. Again, ask the congregation to cheer them on.)

How was that? More difficult this time?

Life is like a race God has marked out for us, but we all have sin and 'baggage' that makes it harder. Can anyone give me an example of the type of 'baggage' we might be talking about?

(Invite responses and remove items from your volunteer's backpack as they are called out. You may wish to have a few examples to start with, e.g. telling lies, being disrespectful, things from the past, etc.)

Jesus wants us to remove anything from our lives that stops us from fixing our eyes on him and from following him.

The letter also tells us we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. As well as competitors at the Olympics, who else is there?

(Invite people to answer.)

That's right, a great crowd of supporters, the athlete's coaches, their friends and family.

(Ask your volunteer.)

How did it feel when everyone here was cheering you on? Do you think it helped you finish the hard, weighted-down race because these people were encouraging you?

So who can encourage us when we are trying to follow Jesus?

(Invite people to answer.)

We don't have to run this race on our own. We have friends, parents, grandparents, teachers, ministers and everyone here at Messy Church trying to do the same, to help us. Jesus is cheering us on too! This race isn't about being the fastest or the strongest. If we train together and help each other to get rid of the weights we might be carrying, we will win in following Jesus.

Prayer

You may wish to take the prayer tubes created in activity 10 and offer the prayers contained in them to God. Ask people to take their tubes home and continue praying for the situations inside. Or you might want to pick one to put all the prayers in and have a volunteer take it home to pray for everyone's prayers. That volunteer can either keep it until the next Messy Church, or pass it on to someone else they see from Messy Church at school, work or just out and about locally. When it's returned, people may want to talk about answers to prayer and others may wish to add new prayers to it. It can then go home with another member of your Messy Church.

Loving God, surround us with the right people to support us. Help us to get rid of the baggage in our lives. Give us the strength to train every day to run the race of life. Remind us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and follow his example in all that we do. Amen.

Song suggestions

'My Lord is higher than a mountain' – Ishmael

'One more step' – Common Praise #548

'Jesus, all for Jesus' – Robin Mark

'May the mind of Christ my Saviour' – Mission Praise #463 (possibly just the verse that references Hebrews)

'All I have' – Matt Osgood

'Run the race' – Holly Starr

'Running the race' – Freedom Church

Meal suggestion

As well as being a gathering of athletes, the Olympics also provides a chance for people from different cultures from all over the world to share their unique heritage. Ask those who attend your Messy Church to bring a dish that is special to them to share with others.

Session material: August

Rediscovering God in creation

by Greg Ross and Sandy Brodine

Bible story

Romans 1:20 (NLT)

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Pointers

As the small church in Rome was rediscovering through the teaching of Paul, people have always known of God and encountered God, especially in the wonder of the creation in which we are blessed to live, but people have not always chosen to worship God and live in the ways of Jesus.

This deep truth of encountering God every day in creation has been part of the theology of the First Peoples in Australia and Torres Straight for tens of thousands of years. Local elders (First People's leaders) resonate deeply with the teaching of Paul in Romans 1 and teach their people the same lesson, saying there is no excuse for people not knowing God and of following the ways of Jesus.

As we continue to read Romans, we pick up Paul's delight to share the wonder of God's gift of Jesus and how life transforming living the way of Jesus is for all people.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This Messy Church session seeks to engage people's minds and hearts, imaginations and all their senses to take note of all the places they encounter God and then to worship God by living the ways of Jesus in every part of their lives.

Add value

Mealtime card

- Where is your favourite place where you know you are close to God?

- Share a memory of where you have been in nature that surprised you.
- What is something you and your household can do to protect or restore creation?

Question to start and end the session

So... where have you seen or heard something beautiful in creation this past week? How did that sight or sound make you feel?

Social action

Get involved in your local group which cleans up the rubbish and litter that falls of trucks and cars or that people throw out of their vehicles or deliberately dump – and clean up your local part of creation. If you and your household do not have a local clean-up organisation, you may like to get a few families from your neighbourhood or Messy Church together and, having done all your risk assessments and received permissions from your local church, arrange a clean-up and invite people to take part.

Activities

1. Creation mural



You will need: coloured Hessian or burlap; chalk or pencils; a collection of natural materials, such as seaweed, leaves, driftwood, shells, nuts, bottle tops, etc.; hot glue guns

If you are meeting outdoors, collect the natural materials that you want to use. Fix the Hessian or burlap to the table and then draw in pencil or tailors chalk the outline of what you want to make. Stick pieces of creation and recycled materials on to the fabric to complete the inspirational work of art.

You may want to play Stephen Fischbacher's song, 'Wonderful world', in the background as people are working.

Talk about how all these wonderful things from creation and things that have been recycled come together to make a reminder of how wonderful God and creation really is. Whoever makes creation like the creation we live in, is someone that we can truly believe in and follow.

2. Paul's boating travels

You will need: lots of cardboard boxes from your local electrical retailer or similar; cardboard tubes from materials or rolls of cloth; cardboard cut into strips; gaffer/duct tape or similar; large scissors or cutters that will be operated by an adult or responsible teen

Make a cardboard boat that people can stand in. Use large pieces to make the bow, stern, port and starboard sides of your 'boat', using sticky tape to join it together. You may also like to cut some long strips of cardboard that people could 'weave' together to make sides or shelters from the wind and sun for the passengers. You could use some of the tubes to make 'navigation' lights.

Talk about how people across the regions where Paul travelled (most often by boat) did not take notice of God, even though they were in the middle of a wonderful creation. The rest of Paul's letter tells them the good news of Jesus and how through Jesus all the sins of the past were washed away. This is what God does for us when we say sorry to those we hurt and we receive forgiveness and make a new start. How does it feel when someone says sorry for hurting you? And how does it feel to say sorry when you hurt people and they forgive you? Forgiving others and receiving forgiveness is what we pray every time we pray the Lord's Prayer.

3. Sensory prayer boxes



You will need: recyclable food containers such as cardboard or other recycled material boxes or plastic containers with lids that can be recycled; a list of things to find outdoors (optional – will depend on the season/place you are in); pens and paper

Reminder: DO NOT collect things that are wet or alive or smelly. Collect things from outside that make you wonder about God or remind you of God or someone you love. When all the things are collected, come back inside and take turns taking an object from your prayer box and giving thanks to God with words or a drawing or song.

You may also like to include some simple prayers that people can start to use in prayer and then a space for them to write or draw their own prayers.

Talk about how you felt as you went and collected your list of materials to go in your sensory prayer box. What surprised you about the things you found and collected?



Was anything missing from the list? Talk about where you feel inspired to pray and how easy it is to pray. Do you have a favourite place to pray or any special prayers you love to say?

4. Creative dance/movement



You will need: a purchased copy of the 'One Ohana' song by Marty Haugen and words to show on screen or in print for the celebration; one or two people to prepare and teach really simple movements or choreography for the chorus

Teach your choreography to your group and then have them lead everyone in the same movements for the celebration. The song 'One Ohana' can be viewed here: youtu.be/Cd3r73ay-mQ or purchased here: giamusic.com/store/search?elSearchTerm=one+ohana.

'Ohana' is the Hawaiian word for family, and Marty Haugen's song speaks of all creation being one family and how all creation sings in praise of God. The song also reminds us that we are part of God's creation and we are part of one great music that worships God. It is a brilliant song for reminding people of all ages that each of us can play our part in praising God and following Jesus.

Talk about the wonder of the message in the lyrics. As you teach the simple words of the chorus and then the actions and/or steps and then the tune, people will pick this up. If you are outdoors or can practise in a room which can see the outdoors, then the message from Romans 1:20 and the song will come together in a simply powerful way.

5. Sand sculpting

You will need: a beach or a sandpit with sand that can be moulded into shapes; printed words from Romans 1:20 (NLT)

Read the Bible verse aloud and think about what images come to mind. Take note of those first thoughts or inspirations, then create these in the sandpit with your hands.

Talk about why you have chosen to create the shapes you are making, how they inspire you or make you wonder about God or care for creation or follow Jesus. Wonder with each other; share stories of where you have seen the things you have made and how they made you feel. You may like to pray with everyone – thanking God for imagination, for creation and for the chance to be creative together.

6. Ice cream in a bag



You will need: 2 tsp sugar; 1 cup milk (or cream); 1 tsp vanilla essence; 6 tbsp rock salt (or table salt); 2 cups ice; 4-litre ziplock bag; 1-litre ziplock bags; gloves or tea towels; bowls or ice cream cones; fruit, crushed biscuits, sprinkles, choc chips (optional)

Place the milk (or cream), sugar and vanilla into the 1-litre ziplock bag and combine the ingredients. Be sure to zip up the bag securely. You may like to 'double bag' by putting the first bag inside a second and zipping that securely also. Take the 4-litre ziplock bag and add ice. Spoon in the salt over the top of the ice. Place the medium bag of ingredients inside the larger zip lock bag and zip up securely. Shake and massage the bag wearing gloves or covered with a tea towel for five to ten minutes until the mixture becomes the consistency of ice cream. Once ready, remove the medium bag and wipe clean of salt and water. Snip a corner of the bag and squeeze out ice cream into a bowl or cone and enjoy! Add toppings if using.

Talk about why this creates ice cream. When salt is added, it lowers the freezing point of the ice. So it takes more energy to be absorbed from the surrounding environment for the ice to melt. This effectively makes the ice colder than it normally is and freezes the ice cream mixture more efficiently. Larger crystals of salt, like rock salt or ice cream salt, take more time to dissolve in the water around the ice and allow for even more cooling of the ice cream. Knowing God changes who we are as people, just as the ice cream ingredients change when they come into contact with the ice that is below freezing point. How do you think God wants you to change as a result of knowing Jesus?

7. Make a 'lim-pet'

You will need: shells (or stones, large seed pods or gum nuts, depending on what is available in your local environment); paint; googly eyes; glue

Take a shell (or other natural item) and stick on some eyes and decorate to make your own special 'lim-pet'.

Talk about how limpets are special animals that live in shells who can stick to a rock through all kinds of storms. Your pet is a part of God's natural environment that will remind you not to be afraid! When you know God, Jesus will 'stick with you'... no matter what!

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8. Seascape collage

You will need: a large piece of paper or art paper roll; paint; coloured paper; origami paper; whatever art materials you have, e.g. foam, glitter pens, pipe cleaners, etc.; netted bags from fruit such as oranges

Make a large collage of the sea using whatever paint, coloured paper and art materials you have. Add the netted bags as fishing nets. Stick the collage to the front of your communion table or display prominently in your worship space for use during the prayer section of your celebration.

Either use the origami paper to make paper boats, or simply cut out boat and fish shapes. Don't add these to the collage yet (they will be used in the celebration prayer).

Talk about how many of Jesus' early followers were fishermen. He met them on the shores of Galilee. I wonder what they knew of God from the local environment. I wonder how they responded when Jesus suggested they could 'fish for people'! Pray for your local environment, and for people you know who do not yet know Jesus.

9. Make a sailing boat

You will need: corks; elastic bands; skewers; foam; scissors; big plastic box full of water (or another large container)

To make a sailboat, join three or more corks together with elastic bands. Make a sail with foam and attach to the cork boat using the skewer. Have a sailing race on the water!

Talk about how travelling on the sea or a lake by sailboat was a regular way to get from place to place in Paul's time. It was one of the ways people came to know about the world that God has made, but it could be a scary or dangerous way to travel. Have you ever been on the sea in a sailboat? Was it a fun or scary experience?

10. Sensory play: playdough



You will need: playdough; dried coloured pasta (you can colour pasta by putting dry pasta in a ziplock bag with white vinegar and food colour. Massage the pasta around in the bag and then put on a tray out in the sun to dry. This makes a safe, non-toxic sensory play element for children who are young enough that they put things in their mouths)

Make either sea creatures or other elements of God's world, depending on your local environment.

Talk about when we see God's world, we can know what God is like. What do you think God is like?

9



Celebration

Read the Bible verse and then invite people to share the ways they have responded to the wonder that God is revealed in all creation.

Invite people to:

- Share the creation mural and what inspired it (activity 1).
- Bring Paul's boat and tell a short story about the travels it went on through God's world (activity 2).
- Show the sensory prayer boxes and talk about the things that reminded them of God (activity 3).
- Share in the song 'One Ohana' led by the group (activity 4).
- Show pictures of the sand sculptures (activity 5).

10



Prayer

Use the origami boats/fish (activity 8) made during the session for your prayer time. Give each person present a boat or a fish and ask them to draw or write their prayer for God's world on to it. Stick the boats in the sea using blue tack or sticky tape, and the fish can be put inside the orange bag nets or in the sea. Pray for your local environment or any part of God's world, and for people you know who do not yet know Jesus.

Use the Lord's Prayer in the first language of your local first peoples. In South Western Australia, the local peoples are the Wardandi Peoples. The first peoples of the Tiwi Islands off the coast of Darwin have written a simple and singable version of the Lord's Prayer and its translation into English is wonderful: [youtube.com/watch?v=IEnTJLskrgk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEnTJLskrgk).

Song suggestions

- 'Wonderful world' – Fischy Music
- 'Wherever I go' – Robin Mann
- 'Rainbows after rain' – Heather Price
- 'One Ohana' – Marty Haugen
- 'You are beautiful' – Heather Price

Meal suggestion

If you are meeting outdoors: have a BBQ. Barbecue sausages or meat patties (burgers) with barbequed onions and then place on slices of bread or a bread roll with sauce, cheese, lettuce, tomato, beetroot, pineapple and coleslaw – all served on a recycled paper napkin or plate. For dessert, have a platter of fresh seasonal fruits or ice cream in cones with sprinkles or a chocolate topping. Perhaps eat the ice cream that you made in your bag!

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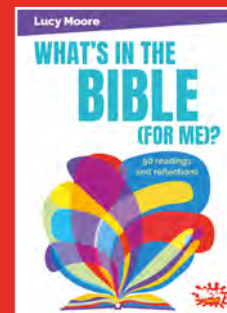
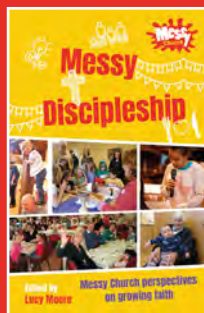
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