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*Fresh ideas for building a Christ-centred community*

**Lucy Moore**

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# Introduction

St Wilfrid's is an Anglican church in a suburban area of Portsmouth. It's an area that has to fight for any sense of community as the old village has been swallowed up in housing estates. There are many elderly people in the area and many young families. By and large it's a pretty comfortable area, neither massively well off nor deeply impoverished. The church has fantastic facilities, thanks to the vision and commitment to growth of the previous incumbent and congregations: two halls, kitchen, toilets and church all interlinked, with a car park and small garden. On a Sunday there are four services: a quiet 8 o'clock Communion, a traditional 9.30 Communion, an informal service at 11.15 with a small Junior Church, and an evening service. There used to be an annual holiday club for children, but when that stopped there was only the small Thursday night children's group that could be seen as any sort of opportunity for children in the parish to encounter God.

We sat down and thought hard about the direction we should head in, and what we came up with was Messy Church. This first part of the book looks at what it is and how it works, and suggests how you might go about thinking through the issues for your own situation.

Messy Church came out of the frustration of knowing that we had good premises, good leaders, some good ideas, but few children and families turning up on a Sunday. The realization that we simply weren't connecting was the starting point. I hope it will be a model as much in its many mistakes as in its successes. It's not meant to be a showcase perfect model to be copied slavishly (heaven forbid), but an example to learn from.

I also hope that the book will get your creative juices flowing and help you as you think about who the messy edges are in your church, and how you might reach them.

## FRESH EXPRESSIONS

This is a book that starts to explore a particular ‘fresh expression’ of church. Fresh Expressions is a movement within the churches that seeks to show how churches are being church in different ways for different people and situations. You’ll find inspiration and challenges in the growing directory of imaginative churches on their website: [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk).

It’s been very frustrating to write this book, as new developments keep occurring in the Fresh Expressions movement—and even within Messy Church. Every month we come up with new ideas to try out and there’s no way the book will be able to keep pace with them all. But it’s a start, and arguably an appropriately messy one.

**What defines a fresh expression of church? A fresh expression of church is intended as a community or congregation which is already (or has the potential to grow into) a church in its own right. It is not intended to be a halfway house or stepping stone for someone joining a Sunday morning congregation.**

FRESH EXPRESSIONS WEBSITE

Is what we do a fresh expression of church, or is Messy Church just a club? It would be far easier to run a craft club! Far easier to swim with the cultural tide and avoid reminding people that they’re more than material beings, that there’s a personal God who loves them just as they are and wants them to get to know him better. Far easier not to make space for an encounter with God through worship as well as through creativity and friendship. Oh yes, far, far easier not to try to devise acts of worship that appeal to all ages, but merely to sink into a secular ‘educational club’ mode where our main aim is to develop fine motor skills and table manners. It would also be so much easier to get our hands on external funding if we didn’t mention God!

Our vision, though, has always been to use the wonderful tools of

## Messy Church

creativity and food as a way of helping people come close to God and to each other. We don't want to hide behind a misleading name: we call it Messy Church up front, so that people have no illusions that it's just a social club. In our particular area, at this particular point in history, this is a fresh expression of church that is right for us.

THEMATIC PROGRAMMES  
FOR SUMMER TERM

# God's family, our family

Old Testament stories about families



# Abraham and Sarah

## AIM

To see that we all belong to the same family of believers, which started with the story of Abraham and Sarah and God's promise to them.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND (Genesis 12–21)

This is a huge, epic story but we've simplified it down to a few elements. God calls Abram to go on a journey with him. His wife Sarai can't have children and this makes them very sad. On the journey, God promises Abram that he will have more children than there are stars in the sky or grains of sand in the desert. As a sign of that promise, God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah.

God's promise comes true when Sarah finally does have a baby, called Isaac, when she's very old. The great-great-great-(lots of greats)-grandchildren of this family are the members of God's family here today, so we are all members of the same family—God's family of believers. God's promise starts with small things but can become incredibly massive.

## FOOD

### Pasta plus

Serve up the pasta and peas from the kitchen. Have bowls of sauce and bowls of grated cheese on the tables to be dished up there by

parents or teenagers. It takes too long to put everything on a plate in the kitchen and to get it out to people hot.

## ACTIVITIES

### Printing stars

**You will need:** Craft sponges (from Early Learning Centre or similar), waxy potatoes (washed and dried), pots of poster paint in different colours, dark paper or card

Use the sponges or potatoes cut into star shapes with at least three colours of paint. Print the stars on to dark paper or card.

#### Talk about

During this activity, talk about how many stars you can see in the night sky and encourage everyone to count them tonight.

### 'Sand' bottles

**You will need:** A variety of different-coloured beads or coloured 'sands' made from salt and powder poster paint (see below), clear plastic bottles

Use a variety of different-coloured beads or coloured 'sands' to fill clear plastic bottles with layers of different colours. Seal them tightly!

You can make 'sand' with salt and poster paint. For sand colour, add a teaspoon of yellow and half a teaspoon of red paint to a 1 kg bag of salt.

### Talk about

During this activity, talk about counting the grains of sand in the bottles and how the numbers just go on and on. Ask what the biggest number is that they can think of. Marvel together at the idea of infinity.

## Family cards

**You will need:** Mediumweight white or coloured card, stickers, punches, coloured scraps and so on, PVA glue, scissors, coloured pens or pencils

Design a card to give to someone you love in your family, maybe living near you or maybe far away. Use stickers, punches and coloured scraps to make it look beautiful.

### Talk about

Talk about the way families go back and back and back in time, from parents to grandparents and great-grandparents to even further back. Expect to hear lots about elderly relatives! Talk about how one day the children might be parents or grandparents or great-grandparents themselves! Family stretches out across time.

## Warhammer workshop

**You will need:** Warhammer models (encourage the children to bring in their collections), enamel paints in different colours, small brushes, jars of cleaner, kitchen paper

Have fun painting the models together!

### **Talk about**

Talk about the fun of collecting things, looking after our collections and seeing them grow.

## **Watercolour faces**

**You will need:** Watercolour paints in different colours, watercolour paper, paintbrushes, jars of clean water, kitchen paper

Use watercolours to paint a face on a small piece of watercolour paper.

### **Talk about**

Talk about the different colours that go into making the whole picture, just like different people go into making up a whole family.

## **Journeys**

**You will need:** Prepared outlines of cars, trains, camels, horses and caravans (drawn in thick marker pen on paper), poster paints in different colours, paint brushes, jars of clean water, kitchen paper

Using your prepared outlines, invite everyone to paint their family on a journey using one of these means of transport. Encourage them to add extended family, church family and friends.

### **Talk about**

Talk about journeys that families have to make sometimes. Has anyone made a journey with his or her family recently? How was it? How did they manage when they all wanted to go in different directions?

## Star mobiles

**You will need:** Cardboard star shapes, glitter and glitter glue, shiny gift ribbon, wire coathangers

Decorate cardboard star shapes with glitter and glitter glue, and hang them on shiny gift ribbon from a wire coathanger.

### Talk about

Talk about the stars in the sky that are there even in the day when we can't see them. Each one of them is different.

## Star sticking

**You will need:** Sheets of dark paper, tubes of shiny silver stars, PVA glue, silver or gold pens

On dark paper, use shiny silver stars to create your own constellation, and give it a name.

### Talk about

Talk about the patterns the stars make in the sky and how people have seen animals, birds and heroes in the constellations.

## Sand tray

**You will need:** A sandpit or sandtray filled with silver sand, seaside buckets, scoops and spoons

Have a sandpit or sandtray to play in, with buckets, scoops and spoons.

### Talk about

Talk about the desert and how it's always changing as the wind blows on it. Talk about the seaside and making sandcastles and sandpies.

## Ziggurat sandwiches

**You will need:** Slices of thin white bread, various sandwich fillings, table knives, paper plates

Have slices of thin white bread, ready cut into different-sized squares, and various sandwich fillings: jam, cheese, ham, yeast extract, lettuce, chocolate spread, sandwich spread and so on. Make ziggurats by sandwiching the squares of bread together in ever-decreasing sizes with different fillings until you have made a pyramid-shaped edifice. You may or may not want to eat it...

### Talk about

Talk about the ancient city of Ur, where people worshipped nature gods in buildings called ziggurats, and how Abraham met the true God not in a building but out in the desert.

## CELEBRATION

### Setting up the church or worship space

**You will need:** Large cardboard stars, PowerPoint loaded with digital pictures of finished artwork (optional), samples of artwork from each activity station, small bowl of silver sand

Put large cardboard stars out on the floor and hang more wherever possible. If you are using PowerPoint, have this ready to display photos of artwork as everyone comes in.

## Song selection

I reach up high (*Kidsource 1*, 171)

Any kind of weather (Doug Horley, *Humungous Song Book*, 2)

Faith as small as a mustard seed (Doug Horley, *Humungous Song Book*, 15)

Have we made our God too small? (Doug Horley, *Humungous Song Book*, 23)

## Talk

Looking at the artwork, I see lots of sand and lots of stars. It reminds me of a story.

*Use pictures loaded into PowerPoint or samples of artwork from each activity station to tell the story.*

There was a man called Abraham. He was very old and he was married to Sarah. They were very sad because they had no children.

But one night, out in the desert, God made Abraham a special promise. God said to Abraham, 'Look up and count the stars—if you can. That's how many people there will be in your family one day...'

*Show PowerPoint image or artwork sample of stars.*

'... Think of the sand on the seashore. How many grains can you count?

I'll bless you and give you such a large family that one day they'll be as many as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore.'

*Pick up the bowl of sand and let the sand run through your fingers into the bowl.*

God kept his promise. We're Abraham's family, because we're God's family—the Christian family of faith. We've millions of brothers and sisters of all ages and colours in every land all over the world.

### **Prayer response**

Encourage everyone to think of something to thank God for. Ask them to put up their hand to say what that thing is. As people give their response, repeat it and invite everyone to say, 'Lord God, we thank you.'

### **Final blessing**

*Lord, thank you that we are one big family of your people throughout the world and throughout history. Help us to live as one family, loving each other through thick and thin. Amen*

### **Messy Grace**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Hold out your hands as if expecting a present*)

And the love of God (*Put your hands on your heart*)

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (*Hold hands*)

Be with us all now and for ever. Amen! (*Raise hands together on the word 'Amen'*)

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