

# PRESS RELEASE

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## A Voyage of Discovery:

## Deepening discipleship in Messy Churches and beyond

Significant new research from the respected Church Army Research Unit (CARU) confirms the effectiveness of Messy Church in deepening the faith, confidence and commitment of its leaders and members. The findings are reported in *A Voyage of Discovery: Deepening discipleship in Messy Churches and beyond*, published today, and, as the title suggests, have a relevance far beyond Messy Church.

The research was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council to develop the positive findings of an earlier report, *Playfully Serious* (February 2019), which established Messy Church's effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus. The Archbishops' Council's Evangelism and Discipleship team worked together with CARU and the Messy Church team at BRF to develop the methodology, based on the Participatory Action Research model, carry out the research and report on the findings. The work was supported by the Strategic Development Fund and the project leads were Claire Dalpra (CARU), Naomi Maynard (CARU), Lucy Moore (BRF/Church of England Evangelism and Discipleship) and Nick Shepherd (Church of England Evangelism and Discipleship).

### Focus of the research and approach

The question for this new research was: how can Messy Church best make disciples? An innovative framework was created for articulating the concept of discipleship. Six approaches to making and growing disciples were proposed. For three of these approaches, the focus was the families who are members of the Messy Churches, and for three other approaches, the focus was the teams running them. The six approaches explored were: for families – Messy basics, Social action and Messy extras; and for teams – Maturing teams, Peer mentoring and Young leaders. Three dioceses were invited to participate in the research. The dioceses of Bristol, Durham and Hereford brought together a total of 24 Messy Churches to take part, of which 21 completed the research.

### Key findings

As the project leaders write, 'This research has felt like the start of a much longer journey, where we'll be sharing stories for some time to come. The type of research we've used cautions us against moving from specific findings to general conclusions too hastily. Insights generated from the experience of local leaders are particular to each context. However, there are plenty of gems uncovered so far which we want to celebrate and share.'

#### For more information, please contact:

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BRF's vision is to enable people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and to see more people equipped to exercise their gifts in leadership and ministry. BRF ministries include Anna Chaplaincy, Living Faith, Messy Church and Parenting for Faith. Find out more at [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk).



If we want Messy Churches to be churches that make disciples and grow deeper in discipleship, there are some clear actions to take:

- Be a community of reflective practice. Make space for reflection in every aspect of church.
- Value quality, not just quantity. Value the significance of the small and the single.
- Journey together. We found there's something profound and effective about togetherness.
- More than anything, decide to be disciples and to make disciples. Because we are church. That simple act of deciding to be on a lifelong journey with others to follow Jesus is the one action that will lead to greater depth.
- (And cake. Eat lots of cake.)

### **Sharing the treasure – Messy Church and beyond**

This is the first research of its kind, trialling and evaluating different deeper discipleship approaches among churches across a wide range of traditions and contexts and making the findings freely available. The cycle of learning in this research takes us on from *Playfully Serious* and is designed to continue beyond the end of the formal research period, as Messy Churches continue to explore and build on these approaches.

What has been discovered about Messy Church could stay within Messy Church, but the project leaders hope that these findings can be shared widely and freely, that the initiatives they inspire will also be shared, and that this virtuous cycle of generosity will enrich all churches, not just Messy ones.

'In 2021, we stand at the shoreline of a new seascape, as the effects of the pandemic ebb away. It's a chance to explore new ways of being church. Our hope is that this research will be part of bringing life in all its fullness to Jesus' church in her old and new forms.'

### **Key audiences**

*The Voyage of Discovery* makes fascinating, challenging and inspiring reading for anyone with an interest in deepening discipleship, but it is aimed particularly at Messy Church leaders, church leaders and members of leadership teams and PCCs, and those in strategic regional and national positions across the denominations.

### **For more information**

Key findings and resulting recommendations from the research are published in May 2021 in a downloadable PDF. Click [here](#) for full details.

*'We have put Jesus into the middle so that rather than craft with a bit of Jesus, it has become more about Jesus with a bit of craft.'*

*'When... you're doing Messy Church and you've had it, you know, you're absolutely worn out and it's ten to six on a Sunday night and you're still clearing up glitter... you have to share that blessing of leadership... the joy that comes when someone comes back to say, "that was brill" or "I've still got glitter in the car two weeks later".'*

For more information about Messy Church click [here](#). For information and to order *Messy Discipleship: Messy Church perspectives on growing faith* click [here](#).



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