MESSY CHURCH MATURITY

The Emergence of an Idea

Curiously, the first Messy Church was birthed in the same year that saw the publication of *Mission-shaped Church*. In 2004, the Church of England's General Synod commended the *Mission-shaped Church* report which was written as a follow-up to 1994's *Breaking New Ground* on church planting in the Church of England, encouraging the birth of fresh expressions of Church.[1] In this same year, in Cowplain near Portsmouth, Lucy Moore and a team of leaders at St Wilfrid's Church were thinking creatively about mission in their local context.[2] Few families attended St Wilfrid's on a Sunday morning so the leaders organised a monthly weekday gathering after school with a hot meal for local families. Sixty people came to this gathering and families kept coming back.[3]

Through Lucy Moore's existing work for The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), the idea of providing a midweek gathering for families was shared more widely and gained some momentum. By 2006, the first book was published by BRF - *Messy Church: Fresh ideas for building a Christ-centred community* - which offered practical advice for Messy Church gatherings. It also included in the opening chapters a vision for what Messy Church was intended to be.[4] It was a way for new people to experience Christian community and to provide something for families, not just children.[5]

Arriving too late to be noted as a type of fresh of expression of Church in *Mission-shaped Church*[6], Messy Church was first mentioned in the context of wider fresh expressions of Church resource material in 2006. The Fresh Expressions team produced a DVD of case studies to inspire local churches and the Messy Church story in Cowplain was offered as example of how church can be done contextually for families.[7] In the same year, Margaret Withers in *Mission-shaped Children* used the Cowplain example as a case study of all-age worship where a church has listened to the needs of the parents as well as children.[8]

What was Messy Church?

To what extent Messy Church should be thought of as a fresh expression of Church was debated much at that time. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of mission overseas, *Mission-shaped Church* added its voice to those arguing for a cross-cultural approach to mission here at home, recognising the increasing gap between mainstream culture and churchgoing. Considering this, the report argued for the methodological principles of 'dying to live' and 'double listening' in church planting.[9] Using these two instincts, context should be allowed to shape what expression of Church needs to grow, and the preferences of the planting team must be set aside to allow this to happen. Furthermore, *Mission-shaped Church* warned that any approach that invested too heavily in

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[1] Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church* report (GS 1523, 2004).
[2] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 11.
[3] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 12.
[4] Moore, *Messy Church* (BRF, 2011).
[5] Moore, *Messy Church* (BRF, 2011).
[6] Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church* report (GS 1523, 2004), chapter 4, p. 43.
[7] *expressions: the dvd – 1* (CHP, 2006).
[8] Withers, *Mission-shaped Children* (CHP, 2010), p. 82.
[9] Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church* report (GS 1523, 2004) - dying to live, p. 92; double listening, p. 104.

cloning a particular form and style of church might suffer the same failure rate as church plants of the late '80s and early '90s which often failed to survive or thrive.[10]

However, the Messy Church model seemed to challenge these assumptions. Why was an 'off-the-shelf' resource proving so popular? Was it a short-term fad or something that would have longevity? Despite the flood of books published on fresh expressions of Church around this time, few included Messy Church in their discussions and reflections. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Anabaptist writer Stuart Murray did not mention Messy Church in his books *Changing Mission*, *Church After Christendom* or *Planting Churches* on cross-cultural church planting.[11] Messy Church came too late for fresh expressions of Church observer Michael Moynagh's *emergingchurch.intro*.[12] It was also surprisingly omitted from discussion in his 2012 book *Church for Every Context*.[13] Steve Hollinghurst in *Mission-shaped Evangelism* did not include it[14], although it was mentioned briefly in Mark Earey's *Beyond Common Worship* in relation to the need for simpler Eucharistic liturgies and as an example of a fresh expression of Church trying to think seriously about worship for those unfamiliar with it.[15]

The exclusion of the Messy Church idea in mainstream literature at the time is perhaps not surprising given the more widely-held uncertainty over what should or should not be counted as a fresh expression of Church. The Fresh Expressions self-registering database was a good example of such confusion.[16] In 2008, Steven Croft attempted to bring clarity to this confusion by presenting a framework to understand the diversity of initiatives developing. In a chapter of *Mission-shaped Questions*, entitled 'Fresh Expressions in a mixed economy church: a perspective'[17], Croft offered four categories of fresh expressions of Church along a spectrum. Messy Church was mentioned as an example of one of these categories: a new mission initiative to create a new community within a single parish/circuit. In this nomenclature, Messy Church was recognised as something new but birthed within a parish, so it could be resourced by either clergy or laity of that parish.

Promoting Messy Church Values

For those who bought the first *Messy Church* book written by Lucy Moore and took care to read the opening chapters, it was clear about ecclesial intention. Messy Church was intended to be a valid worshipping community in its own right and not merely as a feeder into Sunday church.[18] More than an entertainment or activity, the model was working with deeper values than one might have first realised. Recognising how all-age worship can be done very badly[19], Messy Church offered a counter-cultural transformation of life through the clearly identifiable values: celebration, hospitality, creativity, all-age and Christ-centred.

The Bible Reading Fellowship were able to promote this vision of Messy Church through their own channels. They aimed to make practical resources accessible to practitioners by maintaining a website[20], appointing regional co-ordinators, organising training events and publishing further

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[10] Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church* report (GS 1523, 2004), p. 20.
[11] Murray: *Changing Mission* (CTBI, 2006); *Church After Christendom* (Authentic, 2005); *Planting Churches* (Paternoster, 2009).
[12] Moynagh, *emergingchurch.intro* (Monarch, 2004).
[13] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (SCM, 2013).
[14] Hollinghurst, *Mission-shaped Evangelism* (Canterbury, 2009).
[15] Earey, *Beyond Common Worship* (SCM, 2013), p. 18 and p. 45.
[16] The Fresh Expressions team operated a self-registering online database from 2005. However, Church Army's Research Unit considered that the integrity of this quantitative material was seriously compromised in that the bar for inclusion was low.
[17] Croft (ed.), *Mission-shaped Questions* (CHP, 2008) – chapter 1, 'Fresh expressions in a mixed economy church: a perspective', S. Croft.
[18] Moore, *Messy Church* (BRF, 2011).
[19] Moore, *All-Age Worship* (BRF, 2016).
[20] http://www.messychurch.org.uk/

books. This was an alternative resourcing stream to the kind of book-writing that had, up until then, made theological college reading lists or been a platform for conference speaking. In 2009, Moore's second Messy Church book, *Messy Church 2: Ideal for all ages,* re-emphasised the core values and stressed the importance of working to deepen these values. The book also offered further practical help in suggesting outlines for themed sessions, in recognition that many leaders were time-poor.[21]

Despite the quarterly booklet *Encounters on the Edge* from Church Army's Research Unit featuring examples of fresh expressions of Church for children and families, Messy Church did not get a mention until 2009. However, in 2010 George Lings made it a theme of a booklet. In *Encounters on the Edge no. 46: Messy Church - Ideal for all ages?*[22], Lings noted 300 examples registering on the self-registering Messy Church website, plus the 24 regional co-ordinators across England, Wales and Scotland, and called it 'a national phenomenon'. Lings judged that this was by now the most easily adopted type of fresh expression of Church and one that provided 'a low threshold for outsiders to cross'.[23] Lings warned against the danger of leaders focusing only on the activities rather than understanding the deeper values at work. He concluded that Messy Church was easy to do badly and hard to do well. Messy Church was easier to begin than to sustain and it was easier to attract attenders than build disciples.[24]

Contextual Creativity

By the third Messy Church book, the considerable variation in application of the model in local contexts was evident.[25] Some Messy Churches were not only midweek after school, but Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon. A few examples met weekly or fortnightly rather than monthly. Some were simplifying the hot meal to sandwiches if a church had no kitchen. Some were opting for a different public name if Messy Church was problematic in their context. In this third book, Moore encouraged leaders to be inventive, responsive and reflective to their contexts while remaining faithful to core values. In all this diversity, Moore and her team had to wrestle with the question: what counted as a Messy Church? Was it only those things that operated with the values? But values can be slippery. How much control could they exercise over the brand if they wanted this to be a 'ground-up movement'?[26]

Some of the more general fresh expressions of Church literature began to include discussion of Messy Church by 2012. In *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church,* a Messy Church case study was included as an example of what can spring up from the fringes of a traditional church.[27] In *Fresh! An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry,* it was mentioned, albeit in passing, as a particularly popular form of fresh expression.[28] While critics of fresh expressions of Church such as Percy[29], Hull[30], Davison and Milbank[31] had not mentioned Messy

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[21] Moore, *Messy Church 2* (BRF, 2012).

[22] Lings, *Encounters on the Edge no. 46: Messy Church – Ideal for all ages?* (Church Army, 2010).

[23] Lings, *Encounters on the Edge no. 46: Messy Church – Ideal for all ages?* (Church Army, 2010), p. 3.

[24] Lings, *Encounters on the Edge no. 46: Messy Church – Ideal for all ages?* (Church Army, 2010), pp. 32-34.

[25] Moore, *Messy Church 3* (BRF, 2012).

[26] In Lings, *Encounters on the Edge no. 46: Messy Church – Ideal for all ages?* (Church Army, 2010), p. 12, Lings describes BRF's emotional journey of choosing between top-down control and ground-up creativity.

[27] *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church – Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (SCM, 2012), pp. 51-54.

[28] Goodhew, Roberts, Volland, *Fresh! An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry* (SCM, 2013), p. 83.

[29] Nelstrop (ed.), Percy (ed.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* (Canterbury, 2008) – chapter 3, 'Old tricks for new dogs? A critique of fresh expressions', M. Percy.

[30] Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A theological response* (SCM, 2006). S. Croft (ed.), *Mission-shaped Questions* (CHP, 2008) – chapter 10, 'mission-shaped and kingdom focused?', J.M. Hull.

[31] Davison, Millbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (SCM, 2013).

Church, John Walker discussed it in some depth in *Testing Fresh Expressions*. He noted that two examples of Messy Church he was in touch with *did* connect with non-churchgoers but saw Messy Church as 'community service provision rather than church'.[32] Some have since questioned whether these two examples were fair case studies to examine, given that they weren't adhering fully to the Messy Church values at the time.

Asking Deeper Questions

In 2013, *Messy Church Theology*[33] was published, containing a collection of reflections from contributing authors, attempting to engage with theological issues around Messy Church. The opening chapters acknowledged the breadth of understanding and practice behind the model, making clear that not all Messy Churches were fresh expressions of Church. Its popularity was noted as a model that gave people the confidence to start something missional, but it was judged that people shouldn't be too quick to call it church. Important diagnostic questions included: What about the long-term intentions? How is it engaging with parents? What is Messy Church for its team of leaders and volunteers, and what about sacramental provision?[34]

Contributions from guest authors illustrated breadth of a different kind - how far the Messy Church idea had travelled internationally. Judy Paulsen in Oshawa, Canada, reflected on research she had conducted in her Messy Church about discipleship. Tracking changes in attenders' believing, behaving and belonging, she noted developments in behaving and belonging, but very little change in the beliefs of the parents.[35] She concluded that discipleship would take time and be an untidy process as attenders connected into a wider church context. John Drane's chapter also addressed discipleship issues. Like Paulsen, he suggested that, as with St Peter, discipleship isn't a linear process,[36] and he posed the question: should discipleship always rest in the domain of the individual and cerebral? What about expressing discipleship in more holistic ways – through mutuality, interaction and playfulness?[37]

Bob Hopkins' chapter continued with this question of whether discipleship could only occur in the cerebral dimension. As well as formal and non-formal ways of learning, Hopkins noted the extent to which effective learning also occurs through socialisation (through observation, not instruction).[38] But Hopkins observed that this kind of discipleship takes longer and it requires that the team and volunteers commit to being on a journey of discipleship too. Paul Moore reminded us that Messy Churches face the same challenges as parish churches in keeping teenagers and their families engaged. He argued that the task of discipleship was an even greater challenge for Messy Churches; as Messy Churches tend to attract a greater number of attenders from non-churched backgrounds, walking with people on a journey to faith will take longer.[39]

Bob Jackson's chapter in *Messy Church Theology* explored the parallels between Messy Church and the Sunday school movement. He noted that the rise of Messy Church took everyone by surprise

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[32] Walker, Testing Fresh Expressions (Routledge, 2014), p. 204.
[33] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013).
[34] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 2, 'When is Messy Church "not church"?', Hollinghurst, p. 47.
[35] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 4, 'Does Messy Church make disciples?', Paulsen, p. 82.
[36] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 6, 'Messy disciples', Drane, p. 117.
[37] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 6, 'Messy disciples', Drane, p. 121.
[38] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 11, 'Some frameworks to explore Messy Church and discipleship', Hopkins, p. 234.
[39] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 12, 'Growing, maturing, ripening: what might an older Messy Church look like?', Moore, p. 247.

and argued that part of its success was its double listening at the beginning of the process.[40] But he went on to ask hard questions: Is Messy Church intended for the whole of life? Are people being converted? Are they being discipled? Do Messy Churches prepare people for a transition into another form of church? Without repeating the mistake of the Sunday school movement that assumed discipleship was about children acquiring knowledge, how could Messy Church work intentionally at discipleship?

George Lings' chapter on the DNA of Messy Church emphasised the importance of Messy Church values and explored the reproducibility of these values, as DNA, in related but different initiatives such as sweaty church and trashy church.[41] Though small in number, these similar but different initiatives are a healthy outworking of non-identical reproduction. Writing from Victoria in Australia, Beth Barnett's chapter gave us a first glimpse of ongoing questions about maturity – should we strive to mature Messy Church under a certain model or let it happen naturally? Is our western interpretation of maturity the only or best way to think of ecclesial maturity? Is independence the only way to interpret maturity? Might it be better for Messy Churches to be part of large church organisations to remain firmly rooted in our Christian tradition, and work for interdependence rather than independence?[42] Lings, in the final chapter, also explored theological themes like Creation and Fall, the now and not yet kingdom, the stages in salvation and sanctification, and why mess might be expected.[43]

Developing Discipleship

In 2013, Paul Moore's book *Making Disciples in Messy Church* gathered up some of the leads offered in *Messy Church Theology* and explored them further. He repeated his observation that the deeper you dig with the discipleship question, the more you realise the challenges for all kinds of churches. He reflected on the Gray matrix, taking the Engel scale and adding extra dimensions of 'open', 'closed' and 'Holy Spirit in their lives'.[44] He posed the question: what do we need to be putting into place to enable people to reach the 'Growing in Christ' quadrant? As well as explaining the formal, non-formal and socialisation styles of learning, aired by Hopkins, he reflected an understanding of discipleship as a model of apprenticeship[45] and explored 'the child' as a true model of discipleship, with more of a natural capacity for eagerness, curiosity and humility.[46]

Moore also unpacked a number of passages in the Bible that might help us in our understanding of discipleship. One of these is the way John's Gospel expresses discipleship as love in action[47], and Moore offered some examples of how Messy Church offers opportunities to show love. Furthermore, he drew on Lings' thinking about 'seven sacred spaces' and explored what they

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[40] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 7, 'From Sunday school to Messy Church: a new movement for our age?', Jackson, p. 152.

[41] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 8, 'What is the DNA of Messy Church?, Lings, p. 168. See also Lings, *Encounters on the Edge no. 56: Sweaty Church – Church for Kinaesthetic Learners* (Church Army, 2012), and Lings, *Snapshots - Stories From the Edge, Issue 2: Surprises in a normal setting* (Church Army PDF bulletin, 2014), http://www.churcharmy.org/Snapshots.

[42] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 9, 'Messy maturity: paradox, contradiction or perfect match?', Barnett, p. 178.

[43] Lings (ed.), *Messy Church Theology* (BRF, 2013) – chapter 13, 'Why me might expect mess, not merely tolerate it', Lings.

[44] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 25.

[45] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 117: investing in your team - inviting not-yet Christians onto team helps community feel, but also builds trust and gives opportunity for people to learn informally/through socialisation.

[46] This connects with the spirituality of the child in the work of both Rebecca Nye and Jerome Berryman, although the two of them have different ways of working with these values.

[47] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 66.

might have to offer[48], as the values and shape of Messy Church gatherings do offer a variety of spaces and functions. For example, can we look for God moments and sacred moments in a variety of spaces, not just chapel/worship?

Moore examined and applied Catholic catechesis theory and practice to offer ways forward for the way it combines practical and intellectual approaches in the context of being a counter-cultural community learning to be apprentices of Jesus. His penultimate chapter explored issues around faith at home, highlighting the reality that for several generations, because of Sunday school and other dedicated church groups, even churchgoing parents have been deskilled in nurturing faith at home.[49] Messy Churches can help parents take small steps in praying, discussing issues and reading the Bible with their children at home, but Messy Church does not claim to have all the answers to what is a considerably wider challenge.

Quantitative Research

In 2013, quantitative research on fresh expressions of Church in eleven dioceses in the Church of England, conducted by Church Army's Research Unit, was published.[50] This illustrated the proliferation of Messy Churches, but also the diversity among those with such a label. The process of data collection involved sifting those Messy Churches that were working with the intention to be fresh expressions of Church, and those who were only intended to be a stepping stone onwards, or a bridge back, to an existing church. Church Army's Research Unit also excluded those Messy Churches who met less than monthly.[51]

This research into all kinds of fresh expressions of Church was extended and updated between 2014-2016 by taking records from a further ten dioceses. In the first tranche, 47% of Messy Churches examined met the indicators of what be counted as a fresh expression of Church, but only 39% in the second tranche. 360 examples were recorded across the 21 dioceses, although only 305 of these were 'pure' Messy Church. 55 others drew upon some of its values but were predominantly something else, such as café church, school-based church or child-focused church.

Chapter 6 of the resulting overall report, *The Day of Small Things,* examined the 14 most common kinds of fresh expression of Church in order to determine any overlaps and in what ways they were distinct from each other. Its summary, in relation to Messy Church, was as follows:

> This is the most common type (33% of included cases), more than twice as common as café churches and towards three times as common as church plants. Messy Churches score highly in drawing the non-churched, less than average for the de-churched and among the lowest for drawing existing Christians. They mainly start to provide diversity of ways of being church and to contact unreached people groups, attracting only slightly more children than adults. Most start-up teams are of 3-12 people, but they are the most likely to choose the rarer size of 13-19. They have a high net growth ratio, but having reached a certain size, nearly half will plateau. 89% remain within the sending parish, dominantly draw from the neighbourhood, and 87% meet monthly.

> Three quarters of the leaders are female, mainly lay and more than average lay-lay. 73% have a local leadership team and most are taking some steps towards self-financing. However, 1/5th have taken no steps towards any three-self maturity goals. In terms of 'the word', 79% have some form of talk, but a higher emphasis falls on

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[48] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), pp. 84-85.
[49] Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church* (BRF, 2013), p. 112.
[50] *Church Growth Research Project: An Analysis of fresh expressions of Church* Report (Church Army, 2013).
[51] This is on the basis that anything that meets less than monthly will struggle to feel like a distinct worshipping congregation or community.

storytelling and creative activities. Very few have small groups. They are the least likely among the 14 types to have held a Communion and 2nd least likely to have had a Baptism. They lag behind other types too in providing steps in discipleship, though 66% have done something. They are also below the average for the three most popular routes in evangelism (building relationships, inviting people to their fxC or to other events), yet over half of them are doing these. The chief take-up is from the central tradition as its most popular choice, and by the evangelical tradition. The mortality rate is second lowest at 4.4%.[52]

These two paragraphs summarise the high and consistent missional effect of those Messy Churches intending to be fresh expressions of Church, but they also highlight some ecclesial frailties. Chapter 8 of the report demonstrated that their predominant monthly frequency was not injurious to missional effectiveness, but it clearly slowed down all the factors that marked progress in ecclesial maturity. Ways forward in disciple-making and ecclesial maturity were noted as areas for development and these are what, in part, prompted this current piece of research.

Continuing Research

The findings of *The Day of Small Things* quantitative research might imply that development had stalled or got stuck over issues of ecclesial maturity and discipleship in Messy Church. Quite the contrary - whilst this four-year quantitative research project was taking place, more and more voices were contributing to the discussion of how Messy Church could develop deeper discipleship. Earlier, in 2014, *Being Church, Doing Life* by Michael Moynagh took note of the 'mushrooming' phenomenon of Messy Church[53] and offered some practical ideas on developing discipleship, drawing on existing material from Bob and Mary Hopkins and Paul Moore.

The Bible Reading Fellowship continued to develop their own thinking and practice. In 2015, *Messy Family Fun* and *Messy Prayer: Developing the prayer life of your Messy Church* was published. Work was also commissioned to explore what happens when children reach teenagehood in Messy Church. Some helpful case study work was shared on the Messy Church website of an example in Bristol where teenagers were an active part of the leadership team. A day led by Messy Church teenagers for Messy Church teenagers was piloted there under a BRF banner.

Examination of Messy Church work in deprived areas was also shared on the website, in a paper called *Can Messy Church Work Anywhere?*[54] Martyn Payne gathered data from a small sample of Messy Churches in deprived contexts through interviews and observation, noting similar challenges faced in these contexts. He noted that, within the value of hospitality, the challenge is for helpers and attenders to develop a shared life together; helpers need to accept hospitality from Messy Church attenders who may have less materially but lots to give in all sorts of ways. Growing genuine friendship is the goal. There is the continual need to think about how the values are interpreted in context; venue, leadership and worship should all be determined by what works best locally.

In 2016, *Messy Hospitality* and *Messy Togetherness* were both published by BRF. The former traced the New Testament emphasis on, and practice of, hospitality, and tracked how this value can and should be present in each stage of a Messy Church event, from planning, through welcome, to the meal and farewell. Amanda Dawn Aspland also completed her doctoral thesis in 2016, exploring

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[52] Lings, *The Day of Small Things* (Church Army, 2016), p. 124.
[53] Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life* (Monarch, 2014), p. 102.
[54] Payne, *Can Messy Church Work Anywhere?* (Messy Church PDF report, 2014): http://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/can-messy-church-work-anywhere-social-deprivation-report (accessed 17/02/2017).

discipleship at Messy Church.[55] Funded through York St John University, Aspland gathered survey data from a sample of 260 helpers and 203 adults from 41 different Messy Churches. Acknowledging the potential for response bias in only working with those examples that offered to take part, survey data showed a profile of adult involvement in Messy Church and asked questions about what they were looking to get out of Messy Church.

Aspland noted the encouraging proportion of attenders from non-churched backgrounds and explored an unexpected trend for helpers and attenders to have a Myers-Briggs SJ combination (Sensing/Judging) - a tendency for order and duty. Such values seem a little at odds with the aims of Messy Church. The high SJ scores among attenders suggested the routine and well-structured aspects of Messy Church were a draw[56] and perhaps Messy Church wasn't as messy as the name suggests. Aspland concluded that to develop 'Christian becoming' (her term for discipleship), leaders needed to be reflective practitioners and cultivate 'I-Thou' values (using Buber terminology) in all relationships, continuing to learn from all involved about how values and discipleship deepen. If the SJ trend in this sample did reflect a wider reality in Messy Church, it might be a factor in the aforementioned ecclesial frailty of the quantitative fresh expressions of Church research findings. Leaders might be reluctant to look forward and think about long-term strategy and planning for sustainability; generally speaking, SJs tend to focus more on the present.

Messy Church held its first international conference in the UK in May 2016. One of the speakers was George Lings, then director of Church Army's Research Unit but now retired. Videos of his two keynote sessions have been preserved on YouTube. In the first, called 'Finding the way',[57] he considered the connections between the seven sacred spaces of monastic tradition[58] and Messy Church experience and practice. In the second, called 'Showing the way',[59] he acknowledged the impact that Messy Church is making around the world.

BRF launched a series of Messy Mini Books by Lucy Moore in 2016, which are still being added to. With titles such as *Family Prayer Time: on the journey together*[60] and *Family Jesus Time: Going on the faith adventure*,[61] both published in 2018, it is clear that Messy Mini Books' aim is to help families grow in faith together at home, in between Messy Church meetings. The Messy Church site has a page with the same aim: 'Encouraging families to live out faith in the home'.[62]

Michael Moynagh's follow-up to *Being Church, Doing Life* was published in 2017. Called *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology,* it contained a number of references to Messy Church and Lucy Moore's story. Moynagh expressed his hope that, in the long-term, people will begin to explore becoming disciples of Jesus and that more mature worship will develop,[63] but he also posed these questions: Will some Messy Churches plateau if meeting just once a month? Will monthly patterns alone be enough for individuals to grow more deeply in discipleship?[64] Ireland and Booker's earlier book *Making New Disciples* explored the same kinds of issues but from a more positive perspective; whilst acknowledging that monthly patterns have some limitations, they pointed out that Messy Church gatherings are designed to have a celebratory dynamic that

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[55] Aspland, 'Unless you become like a child: Psychological type and Christian becoming at Messy Church' (PhD with The University of Leeds, York St John University, Faculty of Education and Theology, April 2016).

[56] Aspland, 'Unless you become like a child: Psychological type and Christian becoming at Messy Church' (PhD with The University of Leeds, York St John University, Faculty of Education and Theology, April 2016), p. 205.

[57] https://youtu.be/wKaY2JPlrlk

[58] cell, chapel, chapter, cloister, garden, refectory, library

[59] https://youtu.be/DRpWPHZaPj4

[60] Moore, *Family Prayer Time: on the journey together* (BRF, 2018)

[61] Moore, *Family Jesus Time: Going on the faith adventure* (BRF, 2018)

[62] https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/encouraging-families-live-out-faith-home

[63] Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology* (SCM, 2017), p. 50.

[64] Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology* (SCM, 2017), p. 60.

wouldn't feel quite right if they happened weekly. Also, the energy and excitement often expressed by practitioners that this is a model that 'works' in introducing new people to the Christian faith shouldn't be overlooked.[65]

2017 also saw BRF publish *Being Messy, Being Church,* edited by Ian Paul. Like *Messy Church Theology*, this was a collection of essays from contributors thinking more deeply about a number of important aspects of Messy Church's development as church. In Stephen Kuhrt's chapter 'Messy Church and the challenge of making disciples', he advised caution in the face of a growing sense of impatience around progress in discipleship.[66] He drew on the wisdom of Vincent Donovan; growing disciples is less about newcomers becoming Christians like us and more about us travelling with them to a place that neither they nor we have been to before. Though their evolution as a fresh expression of Church type has been a relatively slow process, it would appear that the same fundamental truth in cross-cultural mission is just as relevant to Messy Church as it is to all other types.

In 2018, the BRF team gave a soft launch to their Discipleship Pilot, inviting teams to experiment with one of fifteen ideas to grow disciples. This is still underway. As Ireland and Booker comment, there will most certainly be more books to be written as practitioners continue to grapple with discipleship in Messy Church. Indeed, this very literature review has been written for a two-year project researching the deeper effects of Messy Church. See *churcharmy.org/playfullyserious* for findings.

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[65] Ireland and Booker, *Making New Disciples* (SPCK, 2015), pp. 130-135.
[66] Kuhrt in Paul (ed.), *Being Messy, Being Church* (BRF, 2017), p. 158.