

# Messy Ramblings: stories from rural Messy Churches



## County Durham

*Anne Offler, Durham Messy Church Regional Coordinator*

Messy Church gatherings in rural contexts are mostly small but perfectly formed, with an amazing sense of community!

Making a meal is a real challenge so extra time needs to be spent enabling churches to understand why the meal is important and how it builds hospitality, fellowship and friendship. In circumstances where only cake and tea are possible, churches are encouraged to ensure people sit down and spend time together as if they were having a big meal.

Children are more used to the natural world and content with everyday crafts and activities needing less 'high tech' stimulation. They seem more ready to help one another, which may reflect the fact that many rural schools have mixed-aged classes. One of the Dales schools has a total of 9 children aged 4-11, so supporting one another and working collaboratively is the norm.

Rural Messy Churches can often be quite ecumenical. In one Messy Church the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches work together and it is well supported by the Church Councils and congregations. There are also many Methodist/Anglican Messy Church partnership.

A Messy Church Nativity Sheep Trail was held in a couple of the Dales villages where a small number of shops, the library, craft centre, pub, church vestry and even the windows of some homes hosted knitted sheep. People of all ages were invited to hunt for the sheep and discover the real meaning of Christmas. The trail became a serious topic of conversation with the young and the old. A couple of elderly ladies were helped up from the pavement as they struggled to read the name of the sheep on a low windowsill in the butcher's shop! The trail brought the community together and all were invited to the carol service to celebrate.

## Herefordshire

*Kathy Bland, Herefordshire Messy Church Regional Coordinator*

I love arriving in a tiny village and finding that there is a thriving Messy Church. Our Messy Church congregations can be a significant percentage of the population in a small village. Some of our Herefordshire villages have a total population of under 300, so to have 20 people coming to Messy Church is big news. Messy Church can be the only family-friendly activity in a village, which means it can have a big impact in a small, rural community.

Our smaller Messy Churches can often manage to tell Godly Play style stories or to include a very reflective prayer activity more easily than larger ones. I went to a Messy Church where about 15 people very quietly shared bread and wine, passing it from one person to another. It was really powerful. Quiet listening can sometimes be a struggle for large Messy Churches, but in small gatherings we can hear God's voice clearly.

## **Cumbria**

*Syl Hunt, Cumbria Messy Church Regional Coordinator*

Living in a rural area is beautiful and can be very peaceful although the downside can be the road system. Families sometimes have to journey many miles to reach a Messy Church and it can be quite off-putting when there is no easy direct route or the weather is bad. It all adds to the feeling of isolation. This results in less frequent attendance for lots of families. It becomes harder and harder to build on friendships made at Messy Church. But we persevere and make sure that the welcome is warm each time they come.

One Messy Church here in Cumbria is a partnership between a group of four churches who share one vicar. The churches are some distance apart so they hold their Messy Church at one of the four churches each month. The families won't travel to the other churches, only the nearest, so consequently numbers can be low.

We keep in touch by email or send 'we missed you' cards and a short outline of what we did that month and include the take home idea. We let them know that they will always be welcome.

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