



## Can we meet as Messy Church again?

### Don't panic!

Post-lockdown, we're all wondering if or when we can start meeting face to face as Messy Churches. The situation is changing so fast and there are Messy Churches in so many different contexts that it's very hard to interpret the guidelines for every place and for every stage of the pandemic. For simplicity, this short document refers to the situation in England. **Please comply with your own church's regulations and the current government [Covid:19 guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](#).**

This is offered as a Messy friend's careful thoughts after considering the current restrictions. It isn't trying to dictate what you must do. It's trying to make life a little easier for those of us who want to continue with best practice for both worship and safety by providing a suggested way forward.

Messy Church is an **act of worship**, not a school, children's activity or toddler group, so comes under the guidance provided for **acts of worship**. Key factors to consider are maintaining social distance, minimum contact between people; minimum contact with materials / equipment; hand hygiene. A risk assessment must be completed. (Please see end of this document for an example). Basically, we want everyone to run the least possible risk of coming into contact with the virus.

As always with any Messy Church, the assumption is that there are no unaccompanied children. The Messy Church values of being Christ-centred, creative, hospitable, celebratory and for all ages apply more than ever in what we do and the way we do it. Part of hospitality is providing a safe space and that must be our priority.

### A suggested Messy Church pattern

- A short welcome and introduction to the Bible theme.
- Half an hour of 1-3 Bible-based activities
- A story and prayer (no song)
- See below for a detailed walk-through of Covid-secure considerations at each stage of this suggested approach. (Please note, normal considerations such as safeguarding, tripping or choke hazards are not included.)
- Can be inside or outside
- Set out either tables and chairs, picnic rugs, taped-off zones, tents or 'sheep pens' made from church furniture. Have at least 2m between the closest points of these spaces (for example, 2m from a chair at one table to the nearest chair at the next table) and allocate a household to one space, having all the materials and equipment they require in a container within that space\*.
- The number of households you can welcome is dependent on the size of your space and current government guidelines.
- The household group stays in its own allocated spot for the whole service.

- Meals are a vital part of Messy Church, but it is not possible to include food at the moment. Even if households brought their own food, or if you provided wrapped snacks, the team would need to clear up afterwards, which puts the team at greater risk. (Think dribble, licked fingers.) Forget about food for now. Yes, it's very sad. We'll have extra cake when it's all over.

*\*(In each instance, the 'household base' could represent something relevant to the story, like a boat, an oasis, a cave or a house: 'Don't step out of your boat, whatever you do!' One activity might be to build your household den / decorate your space in the theme of the day, while everyone arrives.)*

### If it's still not possible to meet in your situation

- It's very important that your team is confident about being safe. THERE IS NO RUSH to get back together face to face. God can manage perfectly well without us and understands.
- Relax and be positive. Perhaps your team needs a rest and a chance to start afresh some months down the line, with even more purpose and direction when the time is right.
- Remember God wants us to do what we can, not what we can't.
- What is appropriate and possible for one church may not be so for another.
- The vital thing is to stay connected with your families and team members and let them know you care.

If you can't meet yet, here are some of the great ways Messy Church teams have been staying in contact:

- Phoning or texting families or team members to see how they are and offer prayer, pastoral or practical support.
- Providing 'Messy Church in a Bag', either delivered to the door or collected from a central spot with good safety measures.
- Doing Messy Church online via Facebook, YouTube or Zoom.
- Emailing families and individuals the ['Messy Church at home' sessions](#).
- Checking the [Covid-19 section](#) of the Messy Church website for ideas and resources.
- Listening to the regular Facebook Live half hours on the [Messy Church BRF Facebook page](#) Wednesdays at 9am or 8pm to connect with other leaders.

### Safety walk through a face-to-face Messy Church

#### The weeks before

1. Have you planned a sensible (short) length of time for your Messy Church?
2. Have you calculated how many households you can fit in your building or outdoor space safely?
3. Have you invited households to book in, so you know numbers beforehand?
4. Have you asked for up to date details from team and households of names, mobile, email for track and trace? And permission to keep these for the requisite amount of time?
5. Have you invited households to arrive at slightly staggered times to avoid congestion?
6. Have you worked out the optimum number of team members you need and given those people one designated role per person and a role description? (We suggest: Leader, Loomeister, Welcomer outside, Welcomer inside, Host, Runner, Shepherd, Celebration leader)
7. Have vulnerable team members been invited to pray at home rather than attend?
8. Have safety measures and a copy of the risk assessment been sent out to team members and households beforehand?
9. Have you decided the contingency plan if somebody breaks a rule and puts themselves or others at risk?
10. Have you selected activities that don't break out of the segregated space, drip, ooze or explode and are not edible?

## Setting up

1. Is signage in place clearly showing the precautions everyone should take?
2. Has each team member sanitised their hands as they arrive?
3. Has the leader given a safety briefing to the whole team?
4. Does each team member know how vital their role is in keeping people safe?
5. Has someone been allocated solely to sanitise the toilet and handwashing facilities?
6. Has every table and chair either been sanitised or left untouched for 72 hours?
7. Has all the equipment and material either been sanitised or left untouched for 72 hours?
8. Has every table got everything that group needs, including printed instructions, so there is no requirement for sharing between tables?
9. Has a system been set up outside to ensure households are distanced if they arrive at the same time? (taped markers, signage, team member)
10. If your space is very large, have you provided a 'We need help!' sign on a pole for each table to summon help without needing to shout?
11. Has the microphone been sanitised?
12. Have enough microphones been set up so nobody needs to share them?
13. Have you provided a container for each household to put their equipment in at the end?
14. Have you provided a rubbish bag for each household to clear all their waste into and tie up securely?
15. If you're playing background music, is just one person touching the equipment? Are they non-singalong tunes?

## Arrivals

1. Is the Outside Welcomer in place outside the door in good time?
2. Has the Inside Welcomer ensured every person has sanitised their hands as they come in and explained the basic rules while hands are being sanitised?
3. Is the Host in place to guide each household to their table?

## During

1. Is the Runner alert to the needs of the households (such as craft items needed)?
2. Is the Loomester alert to when the toilet / basin have been used?
3. Is the Shepherd prepared to deal with love, humour and uncompromising firmness with anyone breaking the rules?
4. Is the Celebration leader aware that there must be no moving, passing of objects, singing, calling or whispering from one group to another during the Celebration?

## Departures

1. Have you explained to each household that they should leave their containers and rubbish on their table?
2. Have you prepared a system for households to leave one by one to avoid congestion?

## Clearing up

1. Have you planned to store the containers of used equipment for 72 hours before you re-use the equipment or sort out the containers?
2. Have you sanitised each table and chair if they are to be used within 72 hours?

3. Has the Loomeister sanitised the toilet and handwashing facilities?
4. During clear-up, when the team is relaxing, is the Shepherd still enforcing social distancing?
5. Have you made clear to everyone who has worked so hard that you still can't give each other a hug?

## Role descriptions with regard to being Covid-secure

Each team member should take on only one role

### **Leader: The 'go to' person**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Coordinate the Messy Church from preparation through to clearing up
- Be ultimately responsible for making sure all the safety measures are taken
- Give the safety briefing

### **Loomeister**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Keep the toilet and handwashing facilities sanitised
- Keep cleaning products in a safe place
- Sanitise facilities before the start, between each use and at the end

### **Welcomer (outside)**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Be outside the door before the Messy Church begins
- Ensure people arriving maintain safe social distancing
- Check the track and trace contact details are correct
- Remind people of the basic safety procedures
- Keep people outside until it's safe for them to move inside
- Remain outside until the last household has arrived

### **Welcomer (inside)**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Be at the door until all households have arrived
- Be responsible for each person sanitising their hands as they enter
- Remind people of the basic safety procedures
- Pass the household group on to the Host

### **Host**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Take the household to their designated space
- Show them the instructions and materials and invite them to begin while people are coming in
- Explain that if they are missing anything or need to move from that space, to summon the Runner
- Throughout, work with the Shepherd to ensure distancing is maintained

### **Runner**

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Be alert to watch for any household who need help
- Respond to requests for help appropriately and apply to Leader if in doubt

### Shepherd

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Be involved in creating robust contingency plans for dealing with infringements of rules
- Responsible for reacting with grace, humour and firmness to any person on the point of breaking the rules or actually breaking them
- Knowing the households expected, being alert to any likely flashpoints
- Preventing or pre-empting any rule-breaking wherever possible
- Have a suitably amusing distancing pole (a tickling stick / shepherd's crook / pool noodle or similar) to keep people apart in a fun way without inviting them to push boundaries

### Celebration leader

- Take every measure to self-protect and protect others
- Self-check for coronavirus symptoms before the Messy Church
- Once everyone is seated, give a short welcome, prayer, safety reminder and introduction to the story
- Play suitable (non-singalong) ambient music during the opening part of Messy Church if required
- Be the sole operator of laptop, projector, sound equipment and other technical equipment
- Lead the Celebration in such a way that keeps people distanced

## Messy Church Covid-aware Sample Risk Assessment

Name of Messy Church	.....	Date of risk assessment	.....	Name of person completing this risk assessment	.....
		Date of Messy Church	.....		

Hazard identified? Risks from it?	Who is at risk?	How are the risks already controlled? What extra controls are needed?	What has changed that needs to be thought about and controlled?
<i>Hazard – something that may cause harm or damage</i> <i>Risk – the chance of it happening</i>	<i>Older people, vulnerable people, adults, teenagers, children, team members, households</i>	<i>Ways of making the activity safer by removing or reducing the risk from it.</i>	<i>Keep checking throughout the activity in case you need to change it or stop it.</i>
<b>Suggestions:</b>			
Maintaining social distancing at ARRIVAL and DEPARTURE. Higher risk of infection spread if social distancing not maintained		Plan for a staggered arrival and departure. Book a place in advance.	

		<p>Mark out safe queueing distances for groups arriving at the same time.</p> <p>Team member to meet outside and enforce distancing if necessary.</p> <p>Consider limiting group sizes.</p> <p>Ensure up to date details of all household members for use in 'track and trace'.</p> <p>Clearly mark/allocate household activity space.</p> <p>Determine best way to communicate which space is for each household.</p>	
<p>Maintaining social distancing during ACTIVITY.</p> <p>High risk of infection spread if social distancing not maintained</p>		<p>Ensure households stay within their household boundary.</p> <p>If households are to receive activity equipment / materials/ bags/boxes, ensure items have been sanitised.</p> <p>Communicate to households the expectation of keeping items within their boundary.</p> <p>Allocate team member to ensuring people stay within their boundary all through.</p>	
<p>Hygiene of all ages present.</p> <p>Higher risk of infection spread if proper hand washing not carried out.</p>		<p>Communicate sanitisation procedure to team and households prior to arrival.</p> <p>Communicate sanitisation procedure to households before entry.</p> <p>Provide hand sanitiser/hand washing for all on arrival, departure and during as required.</p>	
<p>Hygiene of any toilets.</p> <p>Higher risk of infection spread if hygiene not carried out.</p>		<p>Allocate team member to toilet hygiene.</p> <p>Any toilet facilities to be cleaned before and after</p>	

		<p>sessions and during (after each use).</p> <p>Safe storage of cleaning products to be considered.</p> <p>Deep cleaning of facilities on a regular basis.</p>	
<p>Hygiene of activity equipment. High risk of infection spread if hygiene not carried out.</p>		<p>Setting up team to sanitise hands before touching tables, chairs or equipment.</p> <p>Sanitise activity equipment before use.</p> <p>Limit volume of equipment used.</p> <p>If using microphones, use different microphone for each person. Sanitise before and after use.</p>	
<p>Use of outdoor spaces. Uneven ground, trees, family unfriendly plants/bushes. Access to space less controlled, cannot be cleaned. Space may be used by others who have not been alerted to the safety procedures</p>		<p>Choose location appropriate to activity.</p> <p>If possible, close off space to non-Messy Church users.</p> <p>If not possible, allocate team member to deal with any safety issues from non-Messy Church arrivals</p> <p>Brief the team on boundaries.</p> <p>Check location often ahead of session.</p> <p>Hand washing for all participants to be made available.</p>	

Every blessing, as you prayerfully work out how best to serve the households in your community.