



Our Work with Children

Welcome to our second pew sheet extra where today we are looking at some aspects of our work with children in St Mary's. Our toddler group (Little Ted) and the Godzone service with the school are well established but last year we embarked on Messy Church to try to engage with an age group between toddlers and teenagers. Antonia Chapman-Jones has been very heavily involved with Messy Church and has shared a few of her thoughts with us now Messy Church has completed its first full year.

Messy Church

Messy Church first began in June 2014. The idea of running a Messy Church at St. Mary's was one that had been tossed around for some time. However there never seemed the opportunity to launch it and run it successfully. Finally, a team was gathered and plans put in place.

Our first service ran in October of 2014. Around 20 children attended, with various family members. The service was a great success with fun, messy activities, a story, a mini drama, an action song and a shared tea. Many people asked when the next one was scheduled, with one mother asking 'Can you run this every week?!' We had a fabulous time and were left feeling exhilarated. The session was a huge success and we had fulfilled our purpose and primary aim of reaching out to children and sharing God's word in a fun and accessible way.

Unfortunately, the success of the first few services was not consistent and we have seen numbers fluctuate. One service (the start of which coincided with a heavy snow storm) had only five children attend. On average we have had between 12-15 children at the services. Many of them are now 'regular' attendees, while some are new each time, and they are always very excited to start getting messy. Our largest number of children attending was 30, all accompanied by adults. It was a fabulous fun service and we all felt that we had made an impact on children's ministry at St. Mary's.

Organising a Messy Church is a big commitment, although it is a very rewarding one. Although we liaise with All Saints, we try to produce a service that has activities tailored to, and suitable for, our church and our volunteers. One of the main problems we initially faced was the food; while other churches have access to full kitchen facilities, St. Mary's is limited to a fridge and a boiler. This made the 'shared tea' a difficult conundrum at first. However the problem was surmounted when one of our team suggested a 'shared afternoon tea'. Now children (and adults) look forward to a selection of sandwiches, cakes, ice cream, jelly, fruit, biscuits and crisps.

Another issue we had was the committee who runs Messy Church. The sessions are run by volunteers who give up their time not just on the day, but sometimes weeks in advance, to begin preparation for each session. Unfortunately, people often have prior commitments and where other churches have big Messy Church groups, ours is comparatively small. This has meant that we have had to pull together, work as a team and multi-task. It's not always easy, but with help and guidance from John Lambert, and God, we manage.

Each session leaves us tired but feeling happy and fulfilled; we have reached out to children, taught them about God and his teachings, and shared the fellowship of our church. As long as there are children coming through the doors of St. Mary's then we consider Messy Church to have been a success; long may it continue.

Children in Church – Looking Forward

The growing number of children attending St Mary's has created a good deal of discussion in MDT and PCC over how we can welcome and accommodate them within the framework of our Sunday services.

The Worship committee has come forward with a proposal and PCC has adopted this as our Children's Policy looking forward. The following is the new plan for St Mary's.

We have an increasing number of children coming to our services. Bearing in mind the needs of the rest of the congregation, how can we best provide for them and nurture them in the Christian faith? That was the question before the PCC at its meeting on 18th September.

Here is the plan the PCC adopted for the immediate future:-

- Kath Snowdon will take on the role of leading the work.
- She will get together a team to help her
- The area at the back of the church opposite the entrance door will be transformed so that:
 - it is fully carpeted to reduce noise and properly edged where the carpet meets the floor
 - the wall will be boarded to allow the children's work to be pinned or glued to it
 - it will have suitable and attractive tables and chairs
- When it is particularly important to minimise noise, the children will go into the vestry for stories and prayers.
- The rows of chairs near the vestry and toilet will be reduced so as to leave ample space for access to those facilities.
- Occasionally there will be services which are particularly children-friendly, led by those who enjoy doing so.
- Sometimes at 'ordinary' services the children will be invited to play percussive 'instruments' or wave flags or be involved in the talk or otherwise have something specific to do.
- Provision will be made to meet the cost of the work.