

### CONTENTS

Messy Church—Creative Church.....	1
God's Bible Promises .....	1
Caring for Kids.....	2
Jesus wants all of me.....	2
Children's Declarations.....	3
In Synergy.....	3
Special Need Ministry.....	4
Ellen White on Children.....	4
Teens Devotional.....	5
Questions & Answers.....	5
Supporting Children.....	6
Education.....	7
Creative Worship Idea for Families.....	7
Kids & Science.....	8
Refugee Support Program.....	8
Turbocharge your CHM.....	9
Parent Happy Children.....	9
Activity Reports.....	10-15
Keep in Mind.....	15
Intergenerational Discipleship.....	16
Recommended Resources.....	16



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## Messy Church Creative Church

### Creative Church: going counterculture to be(ing) human

When Elsa Cozzi introduced me to Messy Church, “Creative Church” in Italian, I was very impressed; I was looking to some way to continue the Kids in Discipleship experience, giving some ideas to the churches that had lived KID in the Italian Union. So, we decided to launch it as a Global Mission Project; at the beginning I was in charge of everything but starting to expand the initiative, in dialogue with the EUD and the Italian Union we understood that a project manager was necessary to follow the details of this project because we wanted to offer a stable support to the pilot churches and be sure to not underestimate the potential of this evangelistic initiative. So we chose one of the CHM area coordinators that is also a KID trainer, Lina Cavalieri. You will find her feedback and testimony from p. 10.

Messy Church seemed to me a way of witnessing that revitalizing change that the Gospel can bring into our lives, in a language that is understandable for our time. Sometimes it seems to me, as a believer, that I'm not able to communicate in the place where I live, when I try to talk about what God has done for me. I would like to communicate and I do, but I wonder if the

message arrives. The world and the generations change quickly and the consumerist aspect of the society, in which we live, has an impact also on the way in which the individual and the family live religion and faith. In the past, religion was seen as a commitment and respect for authority, both the authority of God and the authority of the church leaders; today this is no longer the case. Biblical knowledge is no longer found only in the church, but, thanks to new technologies, it is accessible in one's private, received directly in one's own device. Sermons and Bible conferences broadcast in streaming can be viewed comfortably from bed, even on the day of rest. Yes, religion is always more about me and God, about what I need. We are used to this scheme even when we go shopping; we enter a supermarket and buy what we need from the shelves without having to ask anyone. We go into a shop to buy a pair of pants and we wander freely, choosing the size and bringing various items into the dressing room, without interfacing with the shopkeeper. Choose freely.

And yet, the Gospel is so necessary in our time! But how can we make contact with those families who are no longer used to go to church or listening to a long sermon? ▶

## God's Bible Promises for kids

For every problem God has an answer—  
for every hurt he has a cure.

*“God can do all things.”*

**Matthew 19:26**

Praying to God can be  
just like talking to a friend.

*“A real friend will be more loyal than a brother.”*

**Proverbs 18:24**

from: Daly, R., “God's Little Book of Bible Promises for Children”, Autumn House, Grantham, Great Britain, 2000

## CARING FOR KIDS



What do children truly need to grow up happy? To feel that they fit in and matter? To believe that they are loved? They need you—you and other caring adults to genuinely be there for them as they're growing up. They need to know you care, not just on special occasions, but *every day*.

How do you do that? By accepting, guiding, and loving them in simple, yet meaningful ways.

You don't need a lot of time and money; you don't have to be a parent, teacher, or coach. Sincerely showing children you care can make a difference, helping to bring out the best in them—and in you.

Be silly together.

Hang out together.

Make time.

Inspire their creativity.

Accept them as they are.

Become their advocate.

Appreciate their personality.

Talk openly with them.

Tolerate their interruptions.

Trust them.

Share a secret.

Write a chalk message on their sidewalk.

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Who do not know much of the Holy Book, not even the most famous biblical stories or their meaning? I think that Messy Church helps to create a bridge with the families of the postmodern world. Often these are families that live a stressful and busy life; often these are families marked by divorces and new marriages or by single parents who struggle to balance work and commitment to their children, to keep a meaningful dialogue with them. Messy Church, in a time in which families are increasingly delocalized and marked by loneliness, offers moments of sociability and support also in this sense, preparing situations in which the parent will not park his child to a church activity, but will live it with him. The parent will live a quality time that will contribute to reconnect with his child, taking care of the bond that unites him, knowing him better and making himself better known. This moment will be a moment of decompression for the parent, in which he will receive a positive message for his life and will enjoy human contact and acceptance. Messy Church is so many things, and is that too. Messy Church is also a livable project for a local church, as it takes place one Sunday a month and offers also to the organizers a moment of invigorating conviviality and creativity. Messy Church is a feasible project even for a church where there are no specially trained leaders or teachers, because children will live the event with their parents. Everyone can be involved, from teenagers, young people, adults and even the elderly. Personally, I saw in Messy Church an immense potential, both for the community that

organizes it and for those who participate. For the organizers it is a source of unity, allows moments of fellowship towards a common goal, sharing God's love by making one's talents available. It is a source of ever increasing growth and involvement, of consecration and rededication. It is a source of joy and a sense of accomplishment. Messy Church, with the moments of recreation it offers, can also be an occasion in which God will recreate and regenerate new forces in local church members, in a community that may have been in a slow moment.

For those who attend, Creative Church is the space to meet God in relationship with people, in a meeting, first of all lived together with one's child, with one's parent, and then knowing the people, the witnesses who have known Christ in their lives, from station to station, to the point of opening their hearts and preparing them to listen to the celebration and to prayer. Lunch together is a moment of wonder where even the food, as happened during the Jewish Passover and resumed in the Lord's Supper, has a spiritual meaning that allows me to grasp even more what I learned during the previous steps. By eating together friendships are cultivated and one feels part of a family, the family of God. Messy Church, through crafts and workshops, makes the participant feel the re-creating and regenerating voice of the Holy Spirit in the heart; it is a Church, simple but true. Try it! ♦

Mariarosa Cavalieri  
Italian Union

Children's Ministries Director



# JESUS

wants all of me

## Just the Way You Are

Would you prefer to be like someone else? Even though God created you very carefully, maybe you would like to be different in some aspect: voice, skin color, hair, body. Many people are never content with themselves.

But today I would like to invite you to think about things that make an im-

pact on people when you're with them: good mood, happy, kind, generous... If you can better yourself in any way, go ahead! But if you can't control what you want to change, just forget about it. Be happy with who you are and what you have, because you're important and very special just the way you are.

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."

Psalm 139:13

From: Ferreira de Oliveira, S. *Talking with God*. Editorial Safeliz, Madrid, Spain, 2015

## ALEXIS (5 YEARS)

With my money, I'm going to buy Daddy some hair.

From: [www.enfandises.com/en/bibliotheque/cat-39-dad/phrase-22025.html](http://www.enfandises.com/en/bibliotheque/cat-39-dad/phrase-22025.html)

### IN SYNERGY

# Hope in difficult times

Darkness was still surrounding the early morning. Silence and cold were everywhere. Suddenly the ground started to shake. Sounds of falling rocks filled the small village on the outskirts of Tirana. Tefta opened her eyes and started to call her youngest child. Screams, dust, and shouts filled the small house. The roof was gone.

Tefta is one of the thousands of people affected by the earthquake in Albania. Her home is destroyed but at least she and her eight children are alive. Like many other Roma families living close by, Tefta slept outside her home for two days and nights. Even before the earthquake, the houses of Roma settlement, where Tefta is part of, were in very bad condition. No matter how bad the houses were, they still provided a warm and safe place to them. The ADRA emergency team helped Tefta and her family members with clothes, food packages, mattresses and other aids to make their life easier. She was also invited to the community center together with other people living in this area. They were seeking solutions and best ways to



Photo: ADRA-Albania

provide humanitarian assistance. Tefta and other people from her village are more than willing to support coordination and equal distribution of the supplies.

During the delivery of aid, Tefta said to ADRA staff: **"So far, the only help we have received comes from ADRA and I don't find appropriate words to say how much we appreciate your support. Thank you!"**

The news that ADRA is building the camp with temporary shelters in their village, brought hope to Tefta, her family members and villagers.

ADRA supports the village and this particular Roma community for several years already. The main emphasis of ADRA's work was to enable access to education to many children, who were left outside of the education system in Albania. One of the focuses in the future will continue to be education, especially after the natural disaster that hit this European country just recently.

Education is an urgent priority in emergencies because it:

- saves lives and provides a safe space for children, where they are protected from physical harm, early marriage, prostitution, child labor and being recruited as child soldiers,
- provides space to teach new skills and values, such as peace, tolerance, nutrition, hygiene, health, conflict resolution ...
- brings routine, stability, structure and hope to children's lives, and improves psychosocial wellbeing.

"In 35 crisis-affected countries around



Photo: ADRA-Albania

the world, humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises have disrupted the education of 75 million children between the ages of 3 and 18. ... Education is crucial for both the protection and healthy development of girls and boys affected by crises. It can rebuild their lives, restore their sense of normality and safety, and provide them with important life skills. It helps children to be self-sufficient and to have more influence on issues that affect them. It is also one of the best tools to invest in their long-term future, and in the peace, stability and economic growth of their countries. Yet it is one of the most underfunded areas of humanitarian aid: only around 3% of global humanitarian funding is allocated to education."<sup>1</sup>

#### What can I do?

- Learn, read and talk to children about the importance of education, especially education during emergencies.
- Support ADRA and other organizations that are providing support during a disaster and are active in rebuilding the societies after the disasters

<sup>1</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/education-emergencies\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/education-emergencies_en)

Maja Ahac  
ADRA Eurpoe  
Advocacy Coordinator



## The children of a socially disadvantaged God

The increasing social differences in society, that can be observed (not only) in European countries, is reflected also in children's relationships. It is not uncommon that a child from a family with low socio-economic status is marginalized or even rejected in a group of peers. The other children can mock him for not having branded clothes, a new mobile phone, or such an expensive snack like his classmates. Often such an approach will eventually develop even into a dangerous kind of bullying.

Social disadvantages of children may also be caused by other reasons – e.g. different ethnic origin, different cultural or religious family background, language barrier (especially for immigrant children who do not know the language of their new country), dysfunctional family etc. Rejection of those “socially different” is often related to some values and rules of the major society, but also to the fear of differences and a lack of experience with the different individuals and groups.

Like people with disabilities, those with social disadvantages have also a protection in God who came to this planet as a socially disadvantaged little child. He was born under the strange circumstances (as his mother became pregnant before her wedding), there was no comfortable place in a good hotel for his mother and stepfather at



his birth, thus he came into the world in very poor conditions. Even as a child, he seemed to be different from his peers because he thought and behaved differently (perhaps a bit like an exceptionally gifted child). During his life, he never got rich, did not build a career, did not secure himself – and finally died as unjustly convicted among the criminals.

Have you ever wondered how cruel children can sometimes be to some of their peers? That's because they learn quickly from adults. Let us therefore teach our children what the Lord teach-

es us (see, for example, Psalm 82:2-4 or James 2:1-9). God makes no distinction between people, but he advocates for those who are vulnerable, humiliated and rejected by others – all the more so if they are children. Be careful that our families and our churches are places where social disadvantage is not deepened but rather compensated.

**Josef Slowik, PhD**  
University of West Bohemia  
Department of Pedagogy



Some parents—and some teachers as well—seem to forget that they themselves were once children. They are dignified, cold, and unsympathetic.... Their faces habitually wear a solemn, reproving expression. Childish mirth or waywardness, the restless activity of the young life, finds no excuse in their eyes. Trifling misdemeanors are treated as grave sins. Such discipline is not Christlike. Children thus trained fear their parents or teachers, but do not love them; they do not confide to them their childish experiences. Some of the most valuable qualities of mind and heart are chilled to death, as a tender plant before the wintry blast.

Child Guidance, p. 147



# Hunter to the Rescue



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## Incredi-Biblical

"If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness."

Isaiah 58:10

It hurt to watch, but Hunter's eyes were glued to the pictures on the TV news. People whose homes had been wiped out by the hurricane were dirty, hungry, and thirsty. They had no place to go and needed help.

Hunter went to his bedroom and pulled his money jar off the shelf. After counting the bills and loose change, he found he'd saved only \$9. *What good is \$9 when there's so much need?* he thought. He was going to slide the jar back onto the shelf when he remembered a story about another boy who didn't have much

to offer. But Jesus took his five loaves and two fish and used them to feed 5,000 people.

"God," Hunter prayed. "I have only \$9. Can you please do with it what you did to the loaves and fish?"

Putting the envelope in the mailbox, Hunter knew that he wouldn't learn what good the \$9 did until he got to heaven. But just knowing that he was giving a few thirsty, hungry people some relief made him glad he hadn't spent this few dollars on gum or car magazines.

God doesn't always look for someone who has the most money, the most talent, or the most resources. He just takes whatever we offer and does miracles with it. If you'd like to find out how you can help with world needs, visit <https://adra.org/>.

## Info Splat

The World Meteorological Organization gives hurricanes their names. Each name begins with a new letter in order of the alphabet; however, Q, U, X, Y, and Z are never used.

## React now!

Money isn't the only way you can help when disaster strikes. What other ways can you be God's hands in a crisis situation?

From: Bockmann, M. et al.: *Elasti-Brain. 365 Devotions to Stretch your Mind and Shape your Faith*. Review and Herald Publishing Ass., Hagerstown, MD, USA, 2008

## SECRETS FROM THE TREASURE CHEST



### Will a person who commits suicide be in heaven?

– Lindsey, 12

Keep in mind this simple truth: God is more interested in *why* we act than *how* we act. The Bible states, "*The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).

People take their own lives for many reasons. Some kill themselves because life has become more than they can handle. I only wish someone had introduced those people to their friend Jesus, who could help them face their challenges.

Some commit suicide because they're ashamed of something terrible they did. Jesus could help here, too, by offering forgiveness and teaching them

how to live with the results of their mistakes—even if that means prison.

Still others end their lives because they're afraid of dying of a painful illness they've contracted, such as AIDS or cancer. They'd rather die peacefully than in agony.

We can't judge whether a suicide is sin because we can't read thoughts and understand motives. But God can, and does. Lindsey, rest assured that our heavenly Father takes into account every aspect of this human tragedy and reserves a place for that person in heaven if at all possible.

If you're attempted to commit suicide, give God a chance to bring you hope and courage. Allow Jesus to place

answers in your mind. Be patient and listen for that still small voice that can turn despair into joy, and death into life eternal.



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From: Mills, C.: *Secrets from the Treasure Chest. Questions Kids ask about Life*. Review and Herald Publishing Ass., Hagerstown, MD, USA, 1996

# Substance Abuse

## Supporting Children

### Who Deal with Issues in the Home

#### The Basics

You can't help a child who lives with a substance abuser unless you're aware of the problem. Kids in your ministry may be giving you signs that things aren't going well at home. While the following problems can result from other causes, when you observe them in a child, it's important to consider that substance abuse, particularly parental substance abuse, may be a factor.

- **Look for warning signs in children that a family member (most notably a parent) is abusing substances:**
  - Emotional or social withdrawal
  - Discontinued or decreased attendance at church services and functions
  - Recent and noticeable change in behavior
  - Covering up for a family member or minimizing the use
  - Fear of the using family member
  - Problems at school: academic, social and/or behavioral
  - Looking disheveled, unkempt, or just inappropriate
  - Arriving at church or functions late (kids may be in charge of taking care of themselves)
  - Unexplained bruises or burns (injuries due to lack of supervision, or possible abuse by a substance-abusing family member)
  - Fluctuation of performance or participation levels, especially when children begin to worry about going home
  - Sophisticated knowledge of drinking or drug-use practices, or becoming uncomfortable when alcohol or drugs are discussed
  - Hints by friends, such as "Derek is upset because things aren't good at home"
  - Stomachaches, headaches, or other physical ailments with no apparent causes
  - Parents who are hard to reach, who miss appointments, or who don't show up for functions or to pick kids up

- **Recognize the effects of parental substance abuse in the family.** Children who live in homes where parental substance abuse is the norm suffer a wide range of negative behavioral effects. Often, caring adults aren't sure what to do, and so do nothing. Or they're afraid to get involved. Or they don't want to make matters worse. If you suspect that a child in your ministry is dealing with substance abuse in the home, you *must* get involved. Consider these facts:
  - There's a higher incidence of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts among children among substance-abusing parents.
  - Children of substance-abusing parents are more likely than others to become addicted to alcohol or drugs themselves.
  - In homes where a parent is abusing substances, physical and sexual abuse of children is more likely.
  - A child may suffer economic consequences if a parent loses a job because of drinking or drug use. The family may lose its home, car, or other possessions.

#### Care Tips

- **Be available.** If you sense that a child wants to talk about a troubling home situation, provide the opportunity. Be available to meet with the child after church, offer to share a soda or go for a walk, or even give the child your phone number. The goal is to let the child know that you're a caring adult who is trustworthy and consistent.
- **Pick up the child for church activities.** A child can feel isolated when living in a home with a substance abuser. Often, he or she can't rely on parents for rides to church or school functions. Help maintain the connection between the child and your church community by offering to drive him or her to and from activities.
- **Encourage the child to be a child.** Kids who live in homes with substance abusers are often so busy trying to make the home functional that they forget that they're just kids. Encourage the child to have fun and, hopefully in the process,

feel better about him- or herself. Help the child become involved in church, sports, or clubs. Encourage friendships between the child and other kids in your ministry, and set up relationship-building activities to foster those friendships.

#### What not to say

- **"Why doesn't he just quit?"** Addiction is a powerful force that often requires years of treatment and multiple relapses before a person is finally able to quit for good.
- **"It's not fair."** Yes, and victims of substance abuse will be the first to tell you so. These kids didn't ask for irresponsible parents. Be a friend who stays on the brighter side of life. Instead of focusing on negatives, help the child look for positives. Help the child discover his or her gifts and talents and find positive outlets for his or her feelings.
- **"I shared your situation as a prayer concern."** Unless specifically asked to do so, never share a child's personal story with anyone. However, if you learn of a situation that endangers a child or family member, take steps to intervene immediately. Learn the difference between keeping a confidence and keeping a harmful secret.

#### What to say

- **"I'm here for you when you're ready."** Addiction can make people feel isolated. Letting all members of the family—including the addict, the spouse, and the children—know that you're there and willing to be part of their recovery can be very powerful.
- **"It's not your fault."** Repeat this often. Reassure kids that they're not responsible for their families' problem. They didn't cause the problems, and they can't cure the problems.
- **What do you think about...?"** Be a listener. Ask the child about favorite sports teams, favorite music, and favorite school subjects. Showing interest in the child as an individual will give him or her more confidence apart from family problems.





## Redeeming the time (9) – “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”

Here it is another mode of passing on to our children the most valuable principles they should be aware of and in loved with, in preparation for life and eternity.

Did God expect the Israelites to make a literal application of the command by posting certain passages of the law on their arms and foreheads? As at that time, there were a few copies of the Law available and the people were expected to read it only during the Festival of Tabernacles, God seems to have asked that the most powerfully persuasive and broad in scope passages, should literally be written on narrow pieces of parchment, to be worn about their wrists, or bound upon their foreheads.

These are called *tephillin* in Hebrew and *phylakterion* in Greek and consisted by small pockets manufactured from the skin of clean animals fastened by sewing them to leather bands and then tied with a strap to the forehead and to the left arm of males 13 years of age and above. The small container to be worn on the forehead had four

compartments, each holding a tiny parchment with one of the four passages: Exodus 13:2-10, 13:11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21. The phylacteries on the arm contained the same Bible verses but in one container, and were fasten on the inner part of it, close to the heart. According to the scholars, the phylacteries were worn by the Jews showing special reverence for their God, during the morning prayer<sup>1</sup>. Actually, God did not plan that his people should apply literally this command. A formal and legalistic understanding of this advice led the Jews to make a spectacle of their religiosity, to attract attention. The intended meaning of this authoritative instruction, however, and the primary thing designated, doubtless was that they should manifest conscientiousness in paying proper attention and employ all instrumentalities to keep God’s laws always in attention. Probably similar to the way we, in order to forestall the tendency to forget an important aspect or thing, tie something upon our hands, or put something before their eyes.

Jesus mentioned exclusively the mental attitude that this command is believable and should be accepted as true in the mind and heart, the intellect and emotions, and of the application of these principles to the life. Parents and teachers, the words of God are to be hold fast to the instrument of acting (the hand), to the organs of direction in walking and moving (the eyes), and on the chamber of thought and purpose (the forehead). The pervading meaning of this is that the children and pupils are constantly and everywhere to have these commandments of the Lord in view and in mind and to unswervingly observe them.

“As the word of God is meditated upon and practiced, the whole man will be ennobled. In righteous and merciful dealing, the hands will reveal, as a signet, the principles of God’s law. The eyes, directed toward a noble purpose, will be clear and true.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, page 560

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, 1898, p. 612

## CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS FOR BUSY FAMILIES

### Love was Here

#### Bible Connection

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3).

#### Things you need:

- Plain paper in a variety of colors
- Pencils, erasers, and scissors
- Marker pens

#### Worship activities

1. Fold each sheet of colored paper twice so it is four sheets thick. Make a heart-shaped template, draw around it on the top of the folded sheet, and cut four hearts at once. Repeat to make a stack of hearts.
2. Talk about the times when someone did something very kind and loving for you. What was it and how did it make you feel? How do you feel when you do something loving for someone else? What are the three

most loving things that the people in your family could do for you?

3. Divide the hearts among the family members and write the words "Love was here" on each one.
4. Decorate the heart shapes using marker pens.
5. Give each person a few hearts and put the rest in a basket.
6. Discuss what Jesus would do to show His love if He came into your home today and did some kind things.
7. Ask everyone to do loving things for each other and to leave a love heart close to the place where they did the loving thing, such as under a glass of water, on the pillow of a tidied bed, in the pocket of a freshly laundered pair of jeans, or in a lunch box.



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#### Prayer

Make a list of all things God has done to show His love for each of you. Thank Him for His loving kindness. Make a list of things you could each do to show love to each other. Pray that God will help you to do these loving things for each other.

## Experiment #9: The Un-Pop-Able Balloon

This experiment is a visual illustration of the difference that makes having Jesus in our lives. When we face difficulties or temptation and we try to succeed on our own, it is likely that we “burst”. However, if we are filled with Jesus, He will help us to endure.

**Materials:** 2 Balloons (bring a few more just in case), candle, lighter, water, earplugs (if desired).

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Safety warning:** 1) This experiment uses fire so it should be performed at safe distance from children and following appropriate safety precautions. 2) Warn your audience that you are going to pop a balloon and allow sufficient time to cover their ears if they wish to do so. 3) Although the balloon containing water is not supposed to burst, do the experiment on top of a basin or in a place that would not be ruined by water, just in case.

**Values:** The power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian/ Being “Filled” with Jesus/ Resilience

### Procedure (preparation):

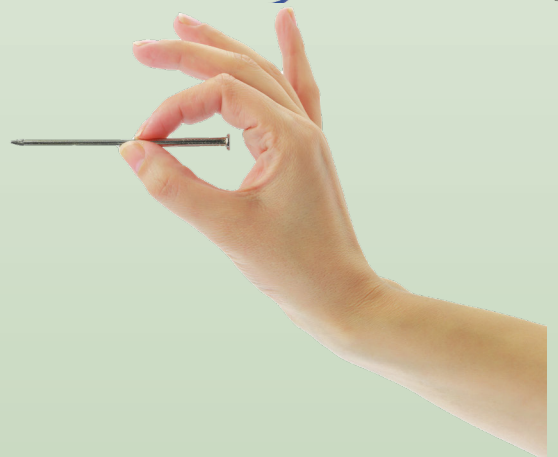
1. Inflate one balloon with air and tie off. Do not inflate to the maximum, just about half of its capacity.
2. Stretch the second balloon over a tap and put some water inside. Take it carefully and fill the rest with air until it has the same size than the first balloon. Tie off.
3. Light the candle and take the air-only balloon in your hand. Explain to the audience: *This balloon represents you and me. Sometimes in our lives we face problems and difficulties that makes us suffer. When we suffer we tend to get angry, even desperate, and it is possible that we cannot withstand so much pressure. This candle represents those problems, difficulties, injustices or temptations in our life. What will happen when the flame (the problems) touch the balloon (the person)?* Let people answer.
4. Hold the air-only balloon in the flame - it will pop, as expected. Do it slowly so people who want to cover their ears have time to do so.
5. Take the air-and-water-balloon in your hand. Tell the audience: *This balloon also represents you and me but the difference with the previous one is that, in this case, we decide not to face our problems alone. This balloon contains water that represents the Holy Spirit living inside us. Every morning we can pray God*

*for the Holy Spirit to fill us and to accompany us during the day. What happens when a person who has the Holy Spirit faces a hard problem or a temptation?*

6. Hold the air-and-water balloon in the flame for 1-2 seconds. Be careful that the flame only touches the part with water. It will not pop.
7. Show the audience the black spot at the base of the balloon (where it touched the flame). Tell them: *Christians have problems and difficulties just like other people and we are affected by them and suffer but Jesus will help us to endure and do not break.*

### The Science Behind the Experiment:

Water has a high capacity to absorb heat. The heat from the flame is transferred to the water inside the balloon so the rubber of the balloon does not reach enough temperature to melt or burst.



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# TURBOCHARGE

## your Children's Ministry

### Decisions

Have you ever noticed that no matter how hard you try, you can't please everyone? Have you ever noticed that no matter how good something is, someone will still be unhappy? Have you ever noticed that when God is blessing what you're doing, someone inevitably arrives to steal your joy, to distract your focus, to bring you down? Me too! So how do we react? Through years of dealing with thousands of families, I've identified the following truths:

**Be vigilant. The enemy is coming.** Satan knows how to hurt you. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul reminds us that we should not be outsmarted. Instead, we should be aware of the evil one's schemes. He strikes us where we're most vulnerable. Remember: People are not your enemy.

Not parents. Not other people in ministry. You have one enemy. *One.* Watch for him.

**Expect it: You can't please everyone.** For every leadership decision you make, expect someone to be unhappy. With the differences in personalities, tastes, experiences—and even convictions—it's impossible to please everyone. Don't try. In Galatians 1:10, Paul reminds us: We're not striving to win man's approval, but God's.

**Know two things: What's the rule? Why do we have it?** What's the rule in question? Is it for the individual child's protection? Is it for the safety of the other children in the room? Is it a requirement of your insurance carrier? Know your rules, and know why you

have them. Then when outside forces challenge your leadership, you can stand behind the rules with authority.

**Stand your ground.** Decide what matters. Then hold true to it. Commit. If it's valid, uphold it for everyone. But if you recognize that a rule is (or has become) unnecessary, don't carry on an unhealthy relationship with it. Move on. Change it for everyone. But in every case, be consistent.

**Always speak the truth in love.** Ephesians 4:15 instructs us to speak the truth in love. That's hard. It's hard to face conflict, especially because we can't control how others will react. But we're always responsible for how we act. God is love. We need to reflect that.

From: Hudson, D. & Werner, S.: *100 Best Ideas to Turbocharge your Children's Ministry*. (Chapter 92) Group Publishing, Loveland, Colorado, USA, 2013

## WAYS TO PARENT HAPPY CHILDREN

### Happy and confident: Skills for life (2)

#### What shall I teach?

Make a list of all the things you need to do to live your life well today. Use the samples below as ideas to get you started. You'll soon have quite a long list of skills you can pass on to your children to make their lives easier when they are older. Teach them to sew, cook and clean, and to do some basic home and car repairs. Remember that both genders need to learn all these basic life skills so they can be truly independent.

- Use money: bank, save, pay bills and stay in credit, and so on.
- Use timetables, maps, recipes and instruction manuals.
- Grow, buy and store food.
- Cook food using kitchen appliances and utensils, setting tables and serving food.
- Use phones, computers, and other

technical items that need know-how.

- Use the library, call an ambulance, make a doctor's appointment or visit the Accident and Emergency ward at hospital.
- Knit, sew and mend.
- Cycle and swim.
- Know the basic first aid, recognize household dangers and apply simple remedies.
- Clean, dust and tidy up around the house, and help with the laundry and the ironing.
- Plan ahead, use calendars, be organized and understand simple alphabetized filing.
- Have social skills, good manners, and be able to choose and wrap presents.
- Develop any special skills that may be unique to your family circumstances or location.



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- Wash and do simple maintenance on cars, bicycles and whatever else may be required.
- Look after pets and small children.
- Do certain household maintenance, including painting, unblocking wash basins and drains and hanging pictures.

From: Holford K.: *52 Ways to Parent Happy Children*. Autumn House Publications, Grantham, Lincolnshire, UK, 2016



# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church (MC) in the Italian Union

A few years ago the Messy Church (MC) project (in Italian: Creative Church) was launched in the Italian Union and as part of a special evangelistic program. We would like to share some experiences and testimonials of the people involved in it. We asked some of the persons, who are somehow involved in the project, to share their point of view and feelings about what Messy Church means for them. As Messy Church is one of the discipleship projects of Children's Ministries of the Inter-European Division, we asked Elsa Cozzi to share some ideas on the project.

### Messy Church

#### A church experience for post-modern families

Messy Church is a project born from the idea of a leader of the Anglican Church with the intention of reaching those children, and their families, who did not attend a religious community. The goal was to allow them to know God and Jesus through activities and offer them to live spirituality according the post-modern generation. In Italy, after the Kids In Discipleship project, it was pretty evident that there were the need to propose activities that could involve families and communities in a common evangelization project. Messy Church seems to be one good option.

The concept of the Messy Church proved

to be the right project to involve children and families in discovering God's message. It fits particularly to families living in today's society without particular ties with faith and religion. The fact that the program is aimed in particular to involve children, aged between 4 and 12, accompanied by at least one parent, allows to create a joyful and relaxed atmosphere and at the same time to present spiritual messages in a simple, original way. Parents and children are both welcomed and both can understand each part of the program. The program develop through a path organized into four specific moments: the **welcome** that allows participants to warm up the atmosphere and make them feel at ease; the time of **crafts with a specific theme** that involve not only children but also their

parents. Then, there is the **worship** that intentionally brings the participants closer to a spiritual message, connected to the practical activities carried out earlier. This celebration is engaging and appealing to allow children to take home a strong and impactful message. It all ends with a **meal**, consumed all together that somehow recalls the theme of the day. In short, the atmosphere of conviviality experienced during Messy Church is a truly special moment for super-stressed families with such hectic daily rhythms. It is certainly an oasis of peace and serenity for these families who find in this project a reason to stop and share a special and carefree time as a family.

Elsa Cozzi  
EUD CHM Director

### Messy Church, a project for our time

I first heard about Messy Church as I was attending a training course in Sicily, where the EUD CHM Director, Elsa Cozzi and Italian Union CHM director, Mariarosa Cavaliere, introduced it.

In 2018, the first children's congress in Sicily was organized and Elsa and Mariarosa suggested to develop it in the "shape" of a Messy Church event. More than 100 children attending with their families participated to that congress together with CHM leaders in a joyful and creative atmosphere, praising the Lord in an informal way, playing, creating, singing, and listening to the Word of God.

After this experience, when I was invited to the church of Latina, in the central area of Italy, in January 2019 and saw the project adapted to a very small community, I was intrigued and wondered how very few members (17) could be able to cope with a Messy Church program. In fact, the community of Latina was already running MC since 2018.

I was amazed by the working team led by Mariarosa and Daniele Calà, managed by the local leader Eva, and strongly and boldly supported by the Church Elder, Rosetta. All the members were working together, and I saw how this was a really interesting stimulus for the whole community. All the members felt they were supporting an

important element for the project. I felt harmony among them; when something was missing, at the last minute, a solution was immediately provided, and the desire to go beyond was very strong, avoiding to break a time of friendship and spiritual growth resulting from fellowship.

On Sunday morning, the program starts around 11 am in the premises of the Church, which is not a very large room. The Messy Church working team works hard and well to rearrange the room from its usual setting and welcome the participants in a Messy Church style.

Upon arrival, each child with his family is welcomed, invited to enjoy a calm down time, sharing a biscuit, a fruit or a juice, while receiving some information on what will be done all along the morning, and getting a personalized bag in which all the handcrafts they'll create will be kept. Once a small gate is opened, the participants can start the path to about 10 different creative activities. Each child can decide where to start and where to go. Families will approach activities tables, with didactic-creative material that will help children and parents to understand the spiritual theme of the day in a transversal, non-direct way.

During about an hour of activity, I have never seen any child get bored, but rather to

be anxious to visit all the different stations. At each station, a leader explains the activity and leads the family to ponder on a spiritual aspect that will be developed during the celebration part. After this hour of creative and fun activities, where each family learns to know better each other and to know God as the Father of the human family, it is time for celebration. It's a moment of worship that starts with songs and continues with a Christ-centered Bible story. During this part, the participants really connect to heaven and to each other. The joy is visible in the faces: people actively participate and sing praises to the Lord with joy and enthusiasm. After they realize what he has done for them, they also express their thankfulness during prayer time. I saw many parents moved during this celebration, their gratitude towards God who loves us was tangible. During every meeting, Messy Church reminds us that we are children of God, all belonging to His family.

This program happens in a very simple frame, because in this project nothing is difficult: everything is designed for those who are not used to be part of a church life, and no matter where they are in their faith journey.

The spiritual and friendly atmosphere continues with the mealtime setting around well decorated tables where each creative



# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church in the Italian Union

meal recalls the spiritual theme. The church elder, Rosetta and the pastor, Daniele, always do their best to prepare delicious and highly appreciated meals.

While sitting at the table people can talk and know each other better, stronger bonds of friendship can grow and bring our minds to the great banquet that God is preparing for us.

The harmony within the team is important. A month before, all team members share the different responsibilities and activities they will need to prepare for the next meeting. They especially consider the connection of the craft stations with the celebration time and make sure that it will be clear for children and parents. By doing this, the spiritual picture will be complete at the end of the meeting.

At the beginning of last summer, the Messy church team decided to have an outdoors meeting, nearby the Granieri lake in Nettuno. Several children invited their friends and classmates with their parents, but it also happened that some other people, seeing that an event was taking place,

asked if they could join with their children.

For the first time, there were 25 children with their parents and families attending. The topic was "I am precious". By attending each station, the participants understood how precious we are; despite prejudices and judgmental trends from the world in which we live, we are precious and deeply loved. Jesus gave His love to those who need it, because He knew how to love. They realized that we have to consider ourselves not according our external appearance or what we have, but based on the value God considers the most: our heart and our soul's predisposition. The activities were built around different biblical texts and, in the part that includes some dialogues, we tried to propose some ideas from which to start and carry on also at home during the up-coming week, encouraging the participants to make them become good practices for everyday life.

Being outdoors, we also had a time for games connected with the topic of the day. We decided to present the celebration with

a puppet theater. The story was about David, a little shepherd, being chosen as new king of the people of God.

The snacks offered recalled the fact that we are precious; we are children of God, and even if sin eclipses this certainty, God makes shine the splendor that is in us. The "mudded egg", prepared by Pastor Daniele helped by two teenagers, was perfect to show that: inside the hardened mud, which represents the hard experiences our life sometimes presents, there is something good, precious, surprising.

It was nice to see happy families, experiencing and learning more about Jesus.

It would be great that every church may live this experience. My wish is that the Messy Church project may become the best evangelistic and discipleship project of our time.

Lina Cavaliere

Project Manager for Messy Church, Italian Union





# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church in the Italian Union

### Interview Messy Church Latina

We interviewed the pastor of the Church of Latina, Daniele Calà, currently also director of the Central Area in Italy; the Church elder, Rosetta Patania, the local project manager, Eva Piazza, two members who are parents and local leaders, Anca Miller and Gigliola Fabrizi, and one of the children attending, Nataniel.

**Daniele Calà, pastor:** Latina is a Church that does not have many members and only few children. For some time we have been praying with the church elder and others to try to do something for them considering the local church strengths. Then came the proposal from the EUD, together with the Italian Union Children's Ministries Departments, to start the project as a pilot church. We were very happy to accept and we saw it as an answer to our prayers. In fact, we felt that either we had to do something for our children or, in the coming years, we would have run the risk to lose this church, also because children were suffering along with the whole church for being few and isolated.

This year, we have started for the second year of our Messy Church meetings, once a month, but the good news is that from November we will also start with the Pathfinder Club. We have children and families that will come, and this is already a result that makes me happy. I don't know what the future holds for us, but I know that for Latina, this activity will continue to have a dual significance, because it does good to the church and its members, and it is an outreach project. We certainly want to continue with Messy Church, because we see that this project achieves its goals.

I suggest to every church that has the characteristics and the possibility to start the Messy Church. Just try it or maybe come and visit us to see and live a Messy Church event, as the members of the church in Pesaro did a few months ago. Even receiving our brothers and sisters from Pesaro visiting us, brought us lots of blessings.

I am proud of the members of the Church of Latina who, in spite of the difficulties and challenges everyone has in his or her own life, brought this mission

into their heart. The whole church is engaged, from the oldest to the youngest, without exception; even Angelica, a sister who cannot come, encourages us from a distance with text messages and prayers. Each of them give their best.

**Rosetta, church elder:** In our small church, Messy Church arouses a lot of enthusiasm. When I think of what we experienced when we organize Messy Church, the first thing that comes to my mind is that it is a positive experience; certainly it creates commitment, unity and collaboration.

### Eva, Messy Church Leader of the church

*Q: What do you think about the presence of creativity in Messy Church?*

**A:** Creativity applied to the church is a new element for me. In fact, today, following the experience of this project, I consider it critical for several reasons: it draws the attention of children, actively involves them in crafts, and focuses a biblical topic through visual support. Creativity generates interest, enthusiasm, satisfaction in children and in their parents. It also supports the expressivity and qualities of the entire team that uses all their talents during the event.

*Q: Is there any testimony you would like to share?*

**A:** One of the experiences that I have been most impressed by is my son who, when we go to church for the usual services, asks me if on that day the Messy Church will take place, too; Messy Church has become for him a long awaited moment of joy and friendship. The light in his eyes is visible when he goes to Messy Church.

Another beautiful memory concerns one of the Messy Church events, when we choose to stay outdoors; more than 20 children attended, including some of my students; for the whole team it was a great satisfaction.

### Anca Miller and Gigliola Fabrizi are parents and team workers in Messy Church

*Q: Describe your mood at the end of a meeting of the Creative Church.*

**Anca:** Every time that Messy Church begins, I am always excited. It is an event

with lots of children, and I am a bit worried about the questions that children can ask during the different creative activities, attractive and amazing questions at the same time; but at the end of the day, seeing all the parents and children happy, I feel satisfied.

**Gigliola:** Messy Church needs an accurate preparation in which we have to be earnestly involved in the 2 or 3 weeks before the event. The craft stations we choose reveal a bit what we would like to deliver about the biblical message and at the end of the day, my feeling is to make the child recognize, through manual skills, how important and profound is what the Lord has done for us and how to rely on Him is important. I feel satisfied when this goal is achieved through various creative activities.

*Q: What about your child's mood?*

**Anca:** My son is always happy; every time the program ends, he asks me for the date of the next Messy Church. He is happy when we have to go to Church to prepare the event because he knows that all together we are preparing so many creative things for families and their children.

**Gigliola:** Children who attend are happy; in my specific case, my daughter participates with interest, she especially likes craft activities, she also invited some friends because she wanted to share these activities with them.

### Question to Nataniel, a child who participated to Messy Church

*Q: What do you like most about Messy Church?*

**Nataniel:** In Messy Church I like the craft stations the most because you do something and then you remember it. One of the stations that I liked the most was the tent station with the lights projected on the walls.

*Q: Did Messy Church make you know Jesus better?*

**Nataniel:** Yes, I knew Jesus better thanks to story time.

Interviews collected by  
Lina Cavaliere

Project Manager for Messy Church, Italian Union



# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church in the Italian Union

### Messy Church in Pesaro

#### The adventure begins for the second pilot Messy Church in Italy

In the Italian Union, we presented the Messy Church project in a couple of training courses organized by the Children's Ministries department, in Tuscany in 2018 and in Sicily. At the national training course in Tuscany, Elsa and Mariarosa described extensively the Messy Church project, and among those present were two leaders from the Pesaro Urbino church: Kelly Costa, current project coordinator, and Patrizia Perrone, wife of Gionatan Breci, pastor of the district. Both were impressed by the experiences and photos of the Messy Church of Latina, described by the family Arequipa. The enthusiasm turned into a desire to carry out this project, and passed from brothers to sisters, up to the pastor, Gionatan, who was also contacted by Elsa and Mariarosa. The church board of Pesaro decided to go and visit the pilot church, Latina, in March 2019. I was participating at that meeting too; I was already involved in Messy Church in Latina since January, to learn more about the dynamics of the project and I remember very well the interest to every activity carried out by the group who came from Pesaro. They were really involved and asked so many questions and details, they took lots of pictures; they even created a video to show to others back in their home church, because the whole community

had to get involved as a whole family and with one goal: to bring the Word of God and Jesus to each family in a funny and creative way, along with songs and prayers. Then we started a basic training for the church, explaining and clarifying the different steps of Messy Church: their values and goals. Since April, the whole church committed to understand the project, so finally on November 2, the first meeting of Messy Church took place in the municipal district of Pesaro. The premises were an explosion of creativity and colors, from the reception to the various activities, the celebration and the meal. The theme of this first meeting was "The true family"; every activity was connected to the spiritual theme of the family of God: we are all children of God, therefore princes and princesses. Every child decorated and colored beautiful crowns to highlight this fundamental concept. To discover that our lives are connected and saved by the blood shed by Jesus; to know that he decided to save us by giving his life, because he loves us and we are his family. Each of us has a family tree, but the family tree of God's family is immeasurable, and we belong to it. We are his children. How many beautiful things families have discovered together with their children! I was struck by the joy of parents in seeing their children radiant with joy because they were close to those they loved most, and together with them they were creating

something very beautiful. The celebration time was a sequence of joyful action songs, through which families internalized that it is beautiful to be part of the family of God.

Finally, the joy showed by the children in the prayers of thanksgiving to God for the beautiful afternoon lived together. *Dulcis in fundo*, a meal with many good and colorful dishes representing the family of God: from the family tree of fruit to the pizza in the shape of Italy, prepared with love by the Church elder, Oscar, who welcomed all the families, Italian and foreigners. The bread in shape of a house and a heart. The grandparents' face made of sugar dough and the homemade weaves that reveal the beauty of being different but united, as our families are; and God's family, which is bigger, unites us all. I was really happy when I saw that two children with special needs, together with their mothers, had also lots of fun. They felt welcomed and happily attended all along the different moments just as all other children. It was nice to see that Messy Church also meets their needs.

It is really pleasant to have a Church that, at least once a month, becomes creative for those who are not used to attend a traditional church and they want to be creative and praise God getting to know him better.

Lina Cavaliere

Project Manager for Messy Church, Italian Union





# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church in the Italian Union

### Interview Messy Church Pesaro

Interview with the pastor of the Church of Pesaro, Gionatan Brecci.

**Q: On Saturday, November 2, the community of Pesaro launched Messy Church. What prompted you as a community to start this project?**

A: The choice of Messy Church arises from the idea to put the church in motion under the intergenerational profile. The church group of Pesaro has about 30 members plus a dozen interested visitors and approximately 15 children. In today's society, families have little time to stay together or families are often composed of single parents and children. The members of the church group were looking for a way to help in this context by creating spaces for recreational time and spiritual reflection.

**Q: At the end of the Messy Church day, you certainly had some reflections, even on the theme you presented during the celebration. Do you want to share them with us?**

A: It was a simple but effective message for the participants. The message helped to create an atmosphere of familiarity with the theme of the day: "The real family".

Interview with the local coordinator, Kelly Costa

**Q: What did you like about the Messy Church project since you heard about it, what drove/prompt you to believe in it until its realization in your community?**

A: I liked Messy Church from the first time I heard about it, which was at the CHM training course in Poppi in 2017, then in 2018, the concept and the idea were developed and we were convinced that it was a feasible project for our community for many reasons:

- We have already so many children and they can share the invitation with their friends and schoolmates and we may have great results.
- Because we were looking for an evangelistic project but we couldn't find the right one.
- Being a mother, I know that in Pesaro there are many mothers who are looking for activities to do with their children, especially when it is cold outside, and it is pretty difficult to make outdoor activities.



**Q: After the first meeting, considering the different parts of Messy Church and the topic presented, what would you like to let those unfamiliar with this project know?**

A: I really like Messy Church because it seeks to involve parents and children in living intimate and special moments. It happens also to us as church members that we are not able to find the time to live such moments, even more this happened for families that don't have any knowledge of the gospel. With the Messy Church meetings, families can have the possibility to enjoy such good time. Then, it is really lovely to have the whole community involved, everybody can give his contribution and this definitely unites us more, all together with the same purpose: sharing the message of our Savior in a more pleasant way.



Interview for the church elder, Oscar Jimenez

**Q: In Pesaro, you just started the Messy Church project. What are your reflections after the first meeting?**

A: This first meeting exceeded my expectations; I was surprised by the participation of the church members and the feedback of the guests. There was a cheerful atmosphere.

**Q: What was the creative activity of your station about?**

A: The activity consisted in making the participants feel the sense of belonging and unity grounded on the person of Jesus, represented by an anchor, which is Jesus, and every member of the child's family was supposed to add a link to the chain that was firmly fixed to the anchor.

Interview with one of the activity station responsables, Patrizia Perrone:

**Q: Today families are super busy and everyone usually lives the day on their own: at work, at school, at the gym or doing some sports, often looking to the screens of their mobile phones, or tablets, or TV. What impression did you get when seeing parents participating to the creative activities, together with their children, during Messy Church?**

A: A really positive one, because seeing parents working together with their children, having fun and doing crafts was really



enjoyable. I noticed peacefulness either from the church families that participated with their children and also from the other families. Although we are involved in a digital world, children do not lose their handiness or creativity. The craft activity I was in charge of was very practical; it was nice to see that children keep their creative skills. This had a very positive effect on me.

**Q: Several families and their children attended your station. Do you remember any of their reflections?**

A: The aspect that struck me particularly was from a visiting family: The daughter was eagerly willing to finish the craft and her mother was in a hurry, was often looking to her watch because she was supposed to go back to work. Her husband was supposed to continue the activity in her place, but I saw that the daughter was saddened because that was her special time with her mom and she wanted to finish the craft with her. Finally, she ended it with her father obviously. Children like to do crafts activities with their parents, to enjoy the creative atmosphere with parents.

Another family with two children, one was the son and the other perhaps the niece. The mother was very cheerful and very happy and I heard her saying to the children: "You see in what a lovely place I brought you today and offered you such attractive activities?" Visiting families were pretty positive. I also considered the presence of families from the church; some of them are not coming every week. Seeing them working as a whole family, dad, mum and children, was delightful, because even the families of the church are not always attending, then seeing them engaged with their children to do the activities, was very positive. I saw a lot of wonder in the eyes of guest families once the creative activity was connected to the spiritual theme. Because usually a creative work is not associated with a biblical part, especially for those who are not used to attend a church. But in Messy Church this connection is well made and in the future it will certainly also be greatly appreciated.

Interview with three children

**Q: What did you like about Messy Church?**

S. S.: I enjoyed doing crafts and experiments with dad.



# ACTIVITY REPORT



## Messy Church in the Italian Union

P, son of Stella: I couldn't stop telling and showing all the craft I did!

A. B.: I liked doing crafts, the crown, the biscuits, the thank-you note with Dad because with him it is more difficult to spend time together as he is very busy. I liked the songs and when Dad showed my photos during the celebration.

Son of Liz: I enjoyed being with dad and mum and doing many things with them, it was a special moment.

### Q: What did you learn?

S.S.: I learned what blood is made of and how to make an anchor.

P.: I learned that even my classmates love God.

A.B.: That it's nice to do things in the family, because I've done so many things with dad.

Son of Liz: I was struck by the theme of blood; I learned that blood is made of red blood cells, white blood cells, plasma and platelets, etc. I also liked the family chain where I could write the name of my grandmother whom I didn't know because she died, but she is my grandmother anyway.

*Interview for the kitchen staff, Stella and Natalia:*

### Q: Every dish you prepared had a meaning connected to the spiritual theme. What message did children and parents receive through food?

A: The message that was delivered is that it is nice to be part of a family where equality and kindness are important ingredients. Even if we are different in skin, nationality, language and more, God loves us all in the same way and we are all part of His family. If we put our heart in our families with God in the middle, everything will be all right.

### Q: What did you feel when the participants were all sitting around the set table?

R: For me it was a great satisfaction seeing how the guests felt at ease, delighted by attractive and good food. My son was thrilled for such an interesting Sabbath afternoon.

*Interview with parents (Luda and Liz)*

### Q: How was it to experience Messy Church in all its moments together with your child?

Luda: I was happy for my children. I confess that before I was a little concerned because my firstborn son, Dany is a special need child, he is autistic. But I was wrong, he was enthusiastic, he was very involved, even in the previous days helping me to pre-

pare the activities. He also brought a friend that is autistic like him, and they had a great time, they can't wait for the next meeting.

Liz: I experienced a beautiful experience, the fact of living it together with our children surely makes everything very special because these days, when we always have to run around, it is not easy to dedicate time to live in a special way to our children.

### Q: What did your son appreciate the most in Messy Church?

Luda: He enjoyed every moment, especially being with so many other children.

Liz: My son lived those moments, peacefully and joyfully, he really enjoyed being together like a real family.



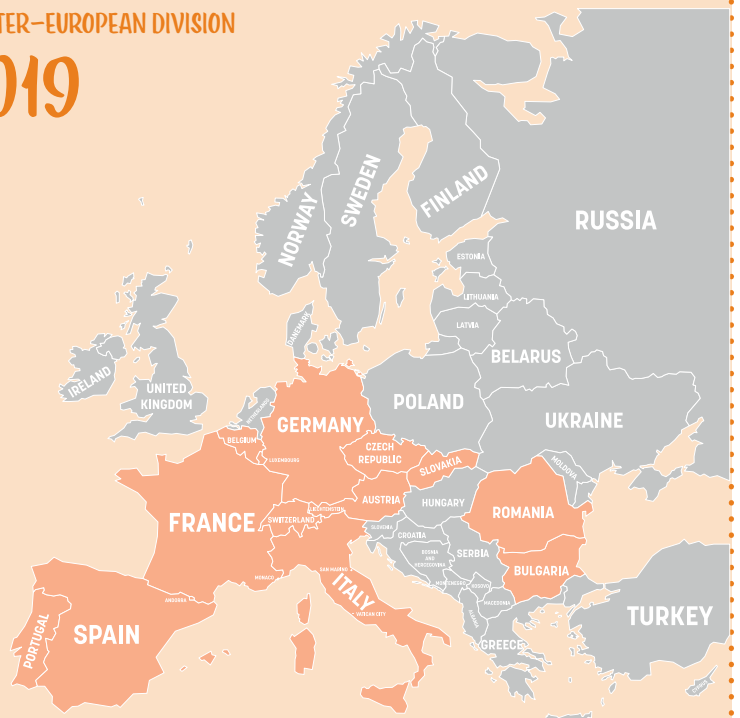
## Keep in Mind

EVENTS FROM THE INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION

# 2019



HELP US GET TO 1 MILLION SIGNATURES



# The Importance of Generational Connections (1)

‘Intergenerational’ seems to be the buzz word of the moment. There are large international research programmes in the secular world devoted to intergenerational issues and there’s even a dedicated journal of intergenerational relationships. It is now widely recognized, even outside the church, that good intergenerational connections are a source of hope for healthy societies and a peaceful world in the future.

The Christian church is ideally placed to rise to this intergenerational challenge. In a society in which extended families are geographically dispersed, childcare is outsourced, and child-free resorts and retirement villages are becoming more common, churches are one of the few natural intergenerational spaces left.

The vision of the Kingdom of God is one in which old and young live side by side in peace as part of a society where both genders and all races are also fully represented.(...)

This theological vision is not always reflected in church practice and the aspiration to be intergenerational usually remains just that – a good idea but not realised in the everyday of being church together. From the Enlightenment onwards and even through into our postmodern age churches have inherited and held fast to a model that divides congregations by age. This is even still the default in much of our training for church leaders.

There are exceptions, as is evidenced by a growing number of imaginative approaches to all-age services and in particular the welcome advent of Messy Church with its insistence that learning

and worship take place with everyone together the whole time.

The problem remains that any church that is large enough to mirror our increasingly segregated society tends to do so in the way it organises its worship, teaching, pastoral care and outreach. These churches appoint specialist ministry workers who focus on age-groups within the church and in some churches this even extends further to gender specific ministries. A typical Sunday morning for many churches involves consecutive services for large different congregations with age-stratified groups running in parallel for the purposes of teaching. The sending out of children and young people at the beginning of the service and receiving them back to ‘show and tell’ is a widely recognisable formula. This is however the antithesis of good intergenerational practice.

So why has the church embraced this model so wholeheartedly and continues to do so? From the mid-20th century onward, stage theories of faith development were proposed, notably by Goldman, Fowler and Eriksson and these were very influential, together with a wider educational policy that was rooted in the notion that chronological age was the marker of educational status. Unfortunately this educational model became superimposed onto our understanding of children’s spirituality and became a descriptor of their faith journeys, making the unhelpful correlation between age and spiritual maturity which fuelled generational separation for Christian nurture and discipleship.

It was fascinating at a conference not so long ago to hear the author of ‘Will

our children have faith?’, John Westerhoff, now in his eighties, express regret that he had ever written of faith development in these chronological and developmental terms. Instead he said that he would now talk of faith being the fruit of a meeting of generations and indeed that all ages need to discover how to become Christian together.

These stage theories of human development have had their day and now have at best only limited application. However their legacy lingers in church life. The truth is that spiritual awakening does not come with a linear progression into adulthood nor alongside people who are like us. This is quickly and easily called into question when we consider seriously Jesus’ teaching about children and in particular his insistence that adults need learn from children how to enter the Kingdom of God – there are also insights from other Biblical stories of children, such as that of young Samuel where it is the child who hears God more clearly than the aged priest.

So how can we address this, not just for the sake of children’s faith journeys but for all of us whatever our age? The first step must surely be to address the issue of how much intergenerational contact we encourage in church. This needs an intentional development of intergenerational programmes to harness the social and spiritual capital released when old and young come together. And for this there are already natural connections between generations which are often ignored in churches. (...)

*To be continued in the next issue.*

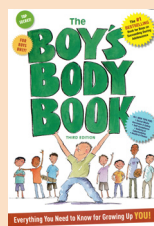
Excerpt from: <https://faithfullgeneration.com/231-2/>

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



### THE GIRL'S BODY BOOK Kelly Dunham

You're growing up! It's an exciting time with new freedoms, new friendships, even new clothes! But with everything that's changing—your body, your emotions, your relationships—you are bound to have questions. Don't worry, this book is here to help. We're ready to answer all your questions!



### THE BOY'S BODY BOOK Kelly Dunham

You update your gadgets, your look, and your fantasy sports teams, and now it's time to update your knowledge about the most important person in your life: You! Don't rely on what you hear in the locker room. Find out the truth about your changing body and all that goes with it in this book. You have questions? We have answers!



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