



people attending non-traditional church gathering

Graham Lacdao

The Church of England is to fund new research to help deepen the faith of families and children attending ‘Messy Churches’ – non-traditional church gatherings that attract tens of thousands of worshippers across the country.

A grant of £100,000 has been awarded to the Church of England’s Evangelism and Discipleship Team to study deepening the discipleship of Messy Church congregations. The study will be focused on Messy Churches in Bristol, Durham and Hereford dioceses.

The Messy Church movement was set up by the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) 15 years ago, offering mainly families and children food, activities such as arts, crafts and sports and worship. The movement has spread across the world, with churches meeting on Saturdays and weekdays as well as Sundays.

Insights from the work will be used to help inform the ongoing work of developing new forms of church gatherings – known as ‘Fresh Expressions’ – in the Church of England.

A recent Church of England background paper found that 50,000 people attend 2,000 Messy Churches in Anglican churches who do not normally engage with their church.

The Church Army published research earlier this year showing that one in five – or 21% - of Messy Churches had held baptisms and 13% reported child or adult confirmations.

Lucy Moore, Messy Church Founder and team leader, said: “We’re looking forward to working together with the pioneering teams in each diocese to find out what approaches make the most difference in coming closer to Christ, walking in his way and growing the kingdom of heaven.

“It’s an unmissable opportunity for local teams to benefit from expert advice and take part in something of international significance.”

Heather Cracknell, The Church of England’s Head of Development for Fresh Expressions, said: “Messy Church has proved an excellent way to strengthen parish mission by reaching those that traditional church finds it hard to connect with.

“It is also a great way for people who wouldn’t call themselves pioneers to start something new, with confidence in the materials they can draw on and the supportive community they can be part of. And how encouraging the research findings are: so many people discovering faith with their families.”

Tim Ling, Church Army’s Director of Learning and Development, said: “We are excited to be partnering with the Church of England and BRF on this important project, which builds on the outcomes of our previous Playfully Serious research.

“The action research process we are facilitating will help local Messy Church leaders consider how best to deepen discipleship and generate valuable new insights for the wider Church.”

Notes to editors

The Archbishops’ Council Evangelism and Discipleship Team has received funding from the Strategic Investment Board to support disciple-making in Messy Church.

The funding enables Bible Reading Fellowship’s Messy Church team to work with the Evangelism and Discipleship team and three Church of England dioceses to invest in and investigate, deepening Messy Church discipleship. The projects will use an action research project approach to test and develop ways of working developed and evaluated by the Church Army Research Unit.

To read the Church Army research on Messy Churches, see churcharmy.org/PlayfullySerious.

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