

Report of the Guildford Messy Church Working Party

4/1/17



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Guildford Messy Church Working Party Report

Following the Church Army Research Unit's (CARU's) report, Fresh Expressions of Church in Guildford Diocese, published in April 2015, a working party was set up at the request of the Director of the Parish Development and Evangelism Team, to examine issues pertaining to Messy Church raised in the CARU report, and any other issues that might assist in the healthy development of Messy Church in this Diocese.

After one initial meeting with Lucy Moore in September 2015, the working party met 5 times between October 2015 and November 2016.

Members of the Working Party

Jo Birkby, children's and families worker in the Parish of Knaphill and Brookwood

Fiona Simon, incumbent of the Parish of New Haw

Emma Shaw, Messy Church Regional Coordinator, and Children and Families Worker in the Parish of St Nicolas' Guildford

Stephen Cox, Diocesan Local Mission Advisor

Alison Hendy, Diocesan Children and Families Ministry Adviser

David Welch, Diocesan Youth Adviser

Part 1. Some Findings from the CARU Report

32 out of 77 (42%) fresh expressions of Church in Guildford Diocese are from the Messy Church stable¹. In other dioceses this proportion is usually between a third and a quarter. This finding is the principal reason for the convening of this working party. Moreover, this proportion is increasing in Guildford. They comprise half of the fresh expressions of church started between 2006-12, and two thirds of those established from 2013.²

Despite being considerably more effective than our more familiar ways of being church at reaching non-Christians, Guildford's fresh expressions of church (including Messy Church) do markedly less well than fresh expressions in all other dioceses hitherto surveyed, at reaching the non-churched and the de-churched, and have a higher proportion of 'already Christians' in their numbers.³

Guildford

Christian	De-Churched	Non-Churched
41.7%	27.2%	31.1%

Other Dioceses (rounded)

25%	35%	40%
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¹ Church Army Research Unit's report, 'Fresh Expressions of Church in Guildford Diocese' p.1, available at <http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/about/pde/church-health-growth/fresh-expressions>

² CARU Report, p.7

³ CARU Report, p.2

Nevertheless, Messy Church does markedly better than other forms of fresh expression in this Diocese at reaching the non-churched, the group that most churches find hardest to reach, and it does *marginally* better at reaching non-worshippers overall.⁴

	Christian	De-Churched	Non-Churched
9 Church Plants	39.6%	41.3%	19.1%
12 Multiple Congregations	41.9%	38.2%	19.8%
32 Messy Churches	37.1%	20.5%	42.4%

The preponderance of Messy Church means that we have a high proportion of children (compared to other dioceses)⁵ in our fresh expressions of church. This means that we have a particular challenge to think through our long-term strategy of what should happen when those children reach secondary school age.⁶

Messy Church is fairly resource and labour-intensive. The CARU report identified this as one reason for the high (& growing) proportion of Guildford fresh expressions of church that meet monthly.⁷ This raises questions about our ability to create community and to grow disciples.⁸ The report comments *'monthly can be both a splendid place to start but a weak end point'*.⁹ *'What can occur between meetings then becomes all the more crucial.'*¹⁰

The report comments that compared to other fresh expressions of church, Guildford Messy Churches have taken fewer steps in developing discipleship.

Other issues concerning Messy Church that are raised in the report, though without extensive exploration, are:

- *'We sometimes sensed we met a higher degree of what may be consumerism operating in some attendance patterns. An example was people belonging to different fxC¹¹, in different villages, operating on differing days of the week in order to keep their children entertained.'*¹²

⁴ CARU Report, p.2

⁵ CARU Report, p.1

⁶ CARU Report, p.9

⁷ CARU Report, p.4

⁸ to qualify as a fresh expression of church under the criteria established for the CARU Report involves meeting at least monthly. Therefore a number of fresh expressions, chiefly Messy Churches that meet less often, were excluded from this analysis.

⁹ CARU Report, p.4

¹⁰ CARU Report, p.9

¹¹ fxc = fresh expression of church

¹² CARU Report, p.2

- Relatively few fresh expressions of church of any kind (5) had gone on to further reproduction (church or congregation planting), which might partly explain the 35.7% of fresh expressions that grew for a while, but then began to decline, (a higher proportion than in other dioceses).¹³
- We have a higher proportion of paid leaders than any other diocese, and a lower proportion of volunteer leaders.¹⁴
- Messy Church has a high proportion (84%) of female leaders, (not least employed children and families workers).¹⁵
- Messy Churches *'exhibit markedly less frequent sacramental practice'* than other fresh expressions of church.¹⁶
- Guildford Messy Churches *'score high on steps towards self-financing and self-governing'*.¹⁷

As noted above, fresh expressions of church in this Diocese are not as successful as those elsewhere at reaching the non-churched. The report observes, *'We do also see some signs that indicate undue reliance on traditional church practice which in turn affects choices in starting and running fxC. 82% meet on church premises and 48% on a Sunday; 47% of the fxC are variants on Sunday worship (the all age, multiple congregation and traditional church plant examples). In addition we do not know whether the preponderance of Messy Churches imply franchise thinking or a wise choice in context. The danger is that ironically the riches of human and financial resources across the Diocese may inhibit it from thinking and acting more radically in mission.'*¹⁸

There are two main challenges embedded here.

- 1). Could we be even more effective at reaching non-Christians, and particularly the non-churched, by being a little less tied to church premises and Sundays, and could other Sunday based non-Messy Church all age services learn something from Messy Church about being a little more thought through, and a great deal more non-churchgoer friendly.
- 2). Is the off-the-peg nature of Messy Church sometimes too obvious an answer, thus preventing us from thinking a little more radically about how to grow church. Typically a fresh expression of church begins with a people first journey, seeing faith gradually brought to birth in a small group or community of people from which the culture and practices of what then becomes church emerge. Fresh expressions of church thus typically begin with people, not with events. If we are to be as effective as we need to be in reaching the non-churched, perhaps we should pause before reaching for off-the-peg solutions in order to discern whether a different approach is needed in our situation and for our unreached population.

This is in no way to criticise Messy Church. It is a superb franchise that gives confidence to practitioners, and is considerably more effective at reaching outsiders than all other forms of fresh expression of church currently operating in Guildford. However, it is also part of a picture of a diocese that is being considerably less radical than many others in establishing new forms of church, and is consequently less effective than others at reaching the unchurched. We need both Messy Church and more forms of fresh expression that begin with a people first journey.

¹³ CARU Report, p.8

¹⁴ CARU Report, p.5

¹⁵ CARU Report, p.7

¹⁶ CARU Report, p.7

¹⁷ CARU Report, p.7

¹⁸ CARU Report, p.9

The CARU Report observes *‘we do suggest that the Diocese may wish to consider how it both encourages what already is, but also promotes a diversity of fresh expressions of church wider than this type’*.¹⁹

¹⁹ CARU Report, p.7

Part 2. The Deliberations of the Working Party

1). Is Messy Church the Right Way Forward in Our Context?

In the light of the fact that Guildford fresh expressions of church tend to be relatively less successful at reaching the un-churched, we need to first ask whether Messy Church is the right way forward for the group we want to reach.

The CARU statement that, *'We do not know whether the preponderance of Messy Churches imply franchise thinking or a wise choice in context,'* raises a question we would be wise to consciously address before embarking upon a new Messy Church. We do not wish to inhibit the establishment of new Messy Churches, particularly as they are so effective in reaching the un-churched. However prayerful discernment and consideration of all the possibilities is needed.

- 1. *In the light of all the evidence of its effectiveness we commend Messy Church to the Diocese, and welcome the number of Messy Churches that have been established.***
- 2. *Nevertheless we encourage greater diversity. Before reaching for an off the peg solution, we recommend careful and prayerful discernment whether a more experimental, people first fresh expression of church might be more successful in the local context for reaching the demographic you have in mind.***

For the rest of this report we now proceed on the (not automatic) assumption that the church still feels led to establish a Messy Church.

2). Setting Up a Messy Church

It is extremely important to clearly establish aims, expectations and ethos at the outset, both in the sending church, and in the Messy Church team. Both groups need to give the same answer to the question 'why are you doing it?'.

Perhaps the most fundamental question is, 'are you aiming to be a bridge group into existing congregations, or to be a new congregation?'. The working party felt strongly and unanimously that the second of these was usually far more effective. Messy Church as a bridge, rather than a congregation in its own right, can trivialise Messy Church. Much of what it should be doing to develop discipleship, prayer, and service is often not bothered with when people think that this can be done later in 'real' church. Lucy Moore said "Messy Church then becomes just fun, a bit of bait."

Failure to be clear about this at the outset can seriously undermine support in the sending church. We have all heard the comment (often on PCC's) that Messy Church is not working because we never see any of them at 'church'. More than one Messy Church leader has been tempted to respond that traditional church is not working because we rarely see any of them at our church.

There is the world of difference between a congregation and an event. If it is to be a congregation this raises the further question of how we will form community? This becomes especially pressing if Messy Church happens monthly or less frequently.

Who is it for? Messy Church is aimed at all ages, *not* just children, and does not try to be exclusive. It is therefore open to all (for example older helpers are often an enormous blessing). We therefore need to be clear about our intention to include children with their parents and carers, and without losing that clarity, to think hard about how we can be as diverse and welcoming as possible. It needs clarity, persistence and skill to maintain a clear focus and target with no excluding barriers. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is to have this clear at the outset.

It would help to ask of each session ‘how will we be intentionally intergenerational?’ Ask yourself ‘what is in it for men, children, older children, teenagers, mums, older people, etc.’ (list here all the groups you might wish to include)?

a) Prayer

We address this in more detail later in the report, but it is obviously very important that the birth of a new Messy Church grows out of and is rooted in prayer.

b) Leadership

A high proportion of our Messy Churches are led by a paid worker. Whilst this can be helpful, the working party thought that it was by no means essential. Most important is to have a committed person with vision who has the time to build relationships. Passion and vision are key. If it is just another responsibility in someone’s portfolio, paid or not, it doesn’t work as well. If we do not have such a person now, can we grow them?

c) Owning The Vision

Messy Church is for those who want to explore Christianity creatively. There is a vast array of training and resources available from Messy Church nationally to assist with this. The working party felt that it was of the utmost importance to access these, and that the most common cause of failure for Messy Churches was failing to do so. We therefore recommend in the strongest possible terms that all Messy Churches should register with the national organisation, should use the resources and access the training. Currently only about one third (nationally) do this. We heard some horror stories of Messy Churches that had never really grasped the point or the methodology. Several had said that they wanted to trial Messy Church first, and then would register and train if it seemed worth it. The tragedy is that this almost guarantees failure. Thus there are a number of churches around that think they have tried Messy Church and found it wanting, when in fact they have done no such thing. It seems to us that the ones who don’t register are the least confident, and therefore are most in need of training and advice.

The fact that Messy Church is a franchise provides a template that gives people confidence, and saves busy people time. It seems to enable sustained creativity and imagination over a long period of time.

A perception that can stop people from registering is that the national Messy Church organisation will want to impose something like an OFSTED upon them. This is emphatically not the case. Messy Church registration is about support, not monitoring or control.

Training can be accessed at various levels, from books and materials to be used in one's own time, to local support from the diocesan children and families adviser and the Messy Church regional coordinator, to nationally sponsored training events.

The Regional Messy Church Coordinator²⁰ can often put churches in touch with others looking for similar training if they want to organise something locally.

We recommend that Messy Church registration, and realistic use of some kind of consultancy/training/training materials should be a condition for any successful grant to the Diocesan Growth Fund.

Where more than one church has been involved in setting up a Messy Church careful preparation will be needed before the first session even opens, to ensure that the team gels and is functioning as one. Often the only way that a big enough team can be recruited in the first place is by more than one church operating together. In such a case it is important to have someone sufficiently motivated to drive Messy Church in each participating church, or one church will make all the running.

Sometimes the dynamics can be difficult if a large and a small church join together. We heard a cautionary tale from another diocese of how this had not worked. There needs to be great sensitivity and mutual trust in such circumstances.

d) One team not two

It helps to blur the boundaries between the originating team and subsequent joiners as soon as practically possible.

For this to be successful it needs to be in the intentions and in the DNA of the founding team before the doors are open for the first time.

Some people seem to live their lives in 'doing unto' mode. It can be really hard to break out of this. We heard a story of a new attender volunteering to the kitchen team only to get the response "no, no, we're alright." Clearly that team had not grasped the ethos of Messy Church. Neither had they grasped the nature of the task, which was to grow people and make disciples, not just to put on an event.

One symptom of this attitude is when some members start referring to others as 'guests' or 'visitors'. Language matters.

The sooner everyone who wants to is involved in helping somehow, the better. Serving together builds community, grows disciples and shapes faith.

Ways of breaking down the 'them and us' mentality include:

- Send one email to everyone, not a separate email for 'team' and 'invitees'.
- Remember that many (in Messy Church it seems most) want to help.
- Allow people to help long before they are ready to call themselves Christians.
- Break down all idea of team/not team. Make it Messy.

²⁰ currently Emma Shaw (childrenandfamiliesworker@gmail.com)

- It's a lot easier to ask someone you know well, and know will do it. A lot can't cope with the uncertainty involved in relying on relative newcomers. We need to put up with it. It's not just to get a job done, there is a deeper purpose.
- Use Messy Church official registration form for newcomers. It asks if there is any way they could help.
- Thoroughly train those from the planting congregation in the ethos and purpose of Messy Church, then repeat this for everyone very frequently.

These steps taken together should go a long way towards counterbalancing the 'consumerism' noted by the CARU report above.

e) Where?

The CARU report drew attention to the preponderance of fresh expressions of Church in Guildford meeting on church premises, and linked this to the comparatively low inclusion of the un-churched (compared to other dioceses). It might therefore be worth thinking from the outset how Messy Church can meet on secular premises (perhaps in a community hall?).

Sometimes the obvious solution might be to meet in a local school, though this is not widespread in the Diocese. However there are plenty of cases where collaboration and synergy with a local school are key factors in setting up a successful Messy Church. Undoubtedly Messy Church tends to work well when there is already a strong link with the church school. Much recruitment happened through Messy Church parents, carers and children in school and at the school gates. Some of the most fruitful witnessing in our Diocese seems to happen in this unselfconscious way.

Despite this some on the working party felt that there are some good reasons for not meeting on school premises. There is a danger of it being seen as just another after-school activity and therefore of its church identity not being recognised. If it happens immediately after school there is a danger, because parents do not have to take their children, that it comes to be regarded as a children's activity and parents do not participate.

Members of the working party felt that church halls are not a barrier to participation by the non-churched *if* they are already used widely by the community and by people who are used to going into them. Some members of the working party felt that church buildings make some people nervous about what they kids might do (causing damage, behaving inappropriately et cetera). Others felt that meeting within the church building can be very helpful in breaking down stereotypes about church.

Nevertheless, the facts remain that our Guildford Messy Churches are not reaching those with little or no church contact or background quite as effectively as is the case in other dioceses, and we are somewhat more church premises based than those other dioceses. This issue deserves careful consideration despite the cost implications of using secular premises.

f) Where Messy Church is established by more than one local congregation

Where Messy Church has been established by more than one local congregation (whether ecumenically or not) the issue of operating from more than one premises sometimes arises.

Experience has shown that this need not be a problem if the two premises are geographically close, so that if people go to the wrong venue it is only a very short walk to the correct one. However we heard a number of stories where there had been problems where the two venues were some way apart, either geographically or culturally. If this issue arises it needs extremely careful thinking through.

There are no easy answers here, and like all fresh expressions of church, the decision must be made according to context.

g) Other important issues to consider at the outset

It should go without saying, but reference should be made to **diocesan child protection and safeguarding policies** from the very beginning, local policies drawn up, and all such policies adhered to.

Messy Church does not usually start with the **sacraments**, but there comes a time when the celebration of sacraments is appropriate as the church matures. The working party feels that Messy Churches would do well from the outset to aspire to be sacramental as they mature. As this will raise issues that affect other churches (in ecumenically established Messy Churches), the sending church, and the parish clergy, it can be very helpful if these issues are anticipated in the planning stage.

Clergy do not have to be at Messy Church every time, but they do need to thoroughly understand the ethos, own the vision, and give permission for it to operate in unconventional ways. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that clergy are involved in the planning and vision development stage. Thereafter regular communication is vital. Good policies will only work where there are strong healthy relationships established between stakeholders, and where communication is regular and open.

- 3. Establish clearly at the outset your aims, values and intentions. In particular be clear and communicate whether you are trying to be a bridge group, or a new congregation.***
- 4. We recommend aiming to be a new congregation as being usually more fruitful than aiming to be a bridge group.***
- 5. Be very clear about your core target group, and then ask specific questions of every session concerning how you will be as inter-generational and inclusive as possible around that core.***
- 6. We regard it as essential that there is a clear shared understanding of these aims, values and intentions worked out between the sending congregation and the Messy Church team.***
- 7. We strongly recommend registration with national Messy Church, use of the training they offer, and establishing links with other Messy Churches locally.***
- 8. Blur the boundaries between the originating team and subsequent joiners as soon as practically possible, and as much as possible function as one team, not two. Involve the most recent joiners in serving as soon as possible.***

- 9. *We recommend thinking carefully at the outset whether a secular venue might be more attractive to the un-churched. It might not be, but we recommend that the question is at least seriously asked before proceeding.***

3) Prayer

There is a vital task in ensuring that Messy Church is surrounded with prayer. How do we keep it in the prayers of the sending church who do not necessarily see what happens week by week (and vice versa)? How do we encourage prayer as faith dawns month by month in the attenders? It is worth thinking about making someone responsible for keeping an eye on this aspect. Everyone on the working party stressed how important it is to have a culture of prayer within both Messy Church *and* the congregation that first planted it. We heard from one group “we don’t do anything without praying first.” We would encourage such an attitude.

However it has not always been found easy to encourage prayer. One leader shared with us how persistence, and sharing of information, repeatedly and in various ways, have been crucial. For example a special Messy Church prayer information pack has been produced particularly for house bound supporters to keep them in touch and praying. All spoke of the need to share information persistently and regularly with the wider church. For example one planting church does not yet include Messy Church families in its directory, which the Sunday congregation members use to pray for one another, and many of the congregation still know nothing in detail about Messy Church. Meanwhile that same Messy Church is using photo boards in the Sunday congregation, and is constantly talking about what happened in Messy Church so that the whole church congregation might become aware over time.

Some spoke of inviting people to come and see, or particularly to come and help with a one-off activity. This has been a most helpful way of generating support, informed interest and prayer. Such people often became the strongest advocates for Messy Church even if they did not become a regular part of it. Many first-time visitors spoke of their amazement, and how their preconceptions were overturned. St Nicolas, Guildford makes a policy of inviting five people per month to come and see. One member of the working party said “keep on keeping on about prayer and about why you are doing it. Say the same thing over and over again. I expect them to pray because Messy Church is part of the church community, even if it’s not their thing and they aren’t going to come.”

Another leader spoke of how prayer is woven into every Messy Church session. Prayer is part of the Messy Church culture, and this needs establishing from the outset.

- 10. *Develop strategies for encouraging prayer in both the originating congregation and the Messy Church***

- 11. *Appoint someone from Messy Church with the specific role of encouraging prayer***

4) Being Clear That Messy Church *Is* Church

We have already referred to the importance of being clear at the outset whether Messy Church is aiming to be church, or a bridge group into church, and how the latter, whilst not necessarily always the wrong option, nevertheless sells short the vision of Messy Church, and tends to stifle potential. In our experience there are a number of Messy Churches in our Diocese that are not clear about this, often those that have failed to register or receive training. Lack of clarity about this tends to stifle development, and to sow the seeds of misunderstanding and frustration.

If Messy Church is to be a church, or congregation in its own right, this raises a number of practical questions.

a) To which congregation do you primarily belong?

If Messy Church is really church, do Messy Church people have to belong to the main Sunday congregation also? In practice this is mainly an issue for those who were part of the initial team from the planting congregation. Sometimes the pressure is felt from the rest of the church. Is this right? Does it stop Messy Church members giving adequate time to Messy Church and does it therefore overburden them?

Sometimes the pressure comes from within the members themselves. Maybe they do not find themselves sufficiently fed or supported by Messy Church and need the original Sunday congregation for spiritual nourishment. However, if this is the case, is it realistic to expect those being reached by Messy Church to find sufficient spiritual nourishment and fellowship if the originating members cannot find it themselves? Moreover, if the originating members can go back to the sending church for that nourishment, will they ever really be impelled to develop Messy Church to the point where it can be spiritually sustaining?

In practice these issues raise their heads more as a Messy Church matures. At first, there will probably not be a Messy Eucharist, for example, and it may be that Messy Church will only meet monthly or two monthly with little or nothing in between. There will probably therefore be some need for the originating team to worship with their original congregation. However it will be easier to face these questions as they arise if they have at least been asked and addressed at the outset.

If Messy Church is to be church it needs to develop into a fellowship or community. However there are only so many relationships that any of us have time or energy to sustain. If, for some, that time or energy is taken by the sending congregation will Messy Church ever be able to develop fully into a community? Therefore if the originating team still attend their original congregation, we should also ask whether they should be free from responsibilities there? We felt there is an important question here that needs to be faced by the originating congregation and by the potential Messy Church team right from the outset. There is a cost to any kind of church planting, both for the sending church and for the team members, and it needs to be faced and embraced joyfully.

We feel that we should not be dogmatic about this. We should neither say that Messy Church leaders must not belong to their original congregation, but nor must we pressurise them to keep

attending. It is about Messy Church team, church leaders, and their original congregation and PCC understanding where their main commitment is, and it is about ensuring that all of the above challenging questions are adequately faced.

b) Re-imagining church

It can be extremely difficult for people who have only known one way of being church, to imagine that anything other than their familiar Sunday congregation, or something like it, can possibly be church. A key question is therefore 'How do we help people to re-imagine church?'

Some of the suggestions for getting people to come along to see (in the section, above, on Prayer) might be helpful here. In order to re-imagine anything people tend to need stories or experience, not just explanations. The Fresh Expressions website has innumerable video stories of all sizes and shapes of fresh expressions of church. Exposure to these can achieve a very great deal in helping people envision church differently. The effect is cumulative. See one such video, and one can treat it as an exception, pick holes in it, or simply be mystified. See half a dozen, and one's perceptions gradually begin to change. This kind of preparatory work can be done before a Messy Church is first established.

c) Building community

We have already said that in order to build a congregation Messy Church needs to build a community. For most churches, running Messy Church more frequently than monthly is to take on an unsustainable workload, but monthly is not enough to build either community or discipleship. Therefore finding other ways of bridging the gap by building community and developing discipleship between monthly sessions must be the way forward. There is more about this below in the section on Discipleship. Sometimes small groups have been found to be helpful. Do these groups have to be all age like Messy Church? A core value of Messy Church is to be all age. Therefore it is good to function as an all age gathering whenever we can. Working party members felt, however, that we should not be rigid or legalistic about this. There are adult discipleship issues that sometimes need to be addressed by adults. Surely we can have age or gender specific groups that spring out of Messy Church that follow a similar ethos and are related to the main Messy Church meetings. Such groups ideally need to be set up with Messy Church in mind. Trying to include Messy Church members in home groups or seekers groups initially set up with the traditional congregation in mind, has not always been experienced as effective.

Some have filled the monthly gaps with some occasional ad hoc sessions, e.g. a 'Questions Children Ask' session that Brookwood ran for parents, or a 'Messy Parenting' or 'Developing Faith in the Home' session. The need for equipping parents to share faith in the home was clearly identified by

the 'Anecdote to Evidence' research²¹, and is one of the current goals for Guildford's Children's and Families Adviser.

Other examples of events between Messy Church sessions that might build community have been:

- two barbecue and bouncy castle sessions per year, with the whole church invited, but at heart it has a Messy Church feel and is run by Messy Church. These have been effective in attracting men.
- other one-off social activities
- Facebook and social media have been helpful in building community and nurturing discipleship between sessions
- "we invite them to everything the church is doing. They run Puppet Church, Cafe Church and Youth Cafe, and Messy Church members tend to come who would never dream of coming to church on Sunday morning"

Other possibilities to explore might be:

- Intergenerational cell groups
- Simple all age 35 minute service in the gaps
- Monthly rhythms, e.g.
 - Messy Church Celebration
 - Prayer
 - Food and fellowship
 - Bible exploration

d) Sacraments

The CARU Report notes that compared to other forms of fresh expression of church in Guildford, Messy Churches 'exhibit markedly less frequent sacramental practice'²².

If Messy Church really is church, it will be aspiring to become sacramental from the outset, even if it takes a while to get there. This raises a number of sensitive issues that need thoroughly talking through at the earliest possible stage.

Who will celebrate the sacraments? It is no good planning this in isolation and then presenting the clergy with a *fait accompli* that they are required to service.

Will those in the original congregation, particularly those who have not yet understood that Messy Church is church, feel threatened as the sacraments begin to be celebrated there? Again, strong relationships, communication and openhearted consultation are the keys.

The sacraments in ecumenical churches raise particular issues, and again these will need much trust and open- hearted consultation. The fact that Messy Church is a church or congregation does not mean it can go it alone.

²¹ <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/FromAnecdoteToEvidence1.0.pdf> p.25

²² CARU Report p.7

How will we prepare people? Just as in traditional congregations, this needs careful thought. Because the ethos and the attenders are different from traditional church, Messy Church may well need its own baptism and confirmation preparation unless the parish wide provision is particularly geared to the culture and needs of the unchurched. Such preparation can offer wonderful evangelistic opportunities and ways of building community between Messy Church sessions.

We need to think how we present communion and explain it in order to cope with the implicit exclusion of those who, as yet, are 'just looking'. This is not an insurmountable problem, and sensitively handled can again become a witnessing opportunity. Because of the high proportion of those not yet ready for commitment and faith in most Messy Churches, the Eucharist should probably be a regular but not necessarily frequent event, but surely every Messy Church will mature to the point where the Eucharist should be a key part of its programme. The fact that these issues can be tricky does not justify never venturing down this road.

At present Guildford Diocesan policy for churches that have permission to admit children to communion before confirmation, is that the lower age limit is seven years old. This *might* be thought to be problematic for introducing the Eucharist at Messy Church, and perhaps needs further exploration?

What would a Messy Funeral look like? None of us had experienced this, but surely it is only a matter of time before someone is asked to conduct one, so this is worth thinking about in advance.

Several of us have had moving experiences of Messy Church baptism and Holy Communion in Guildford²³. We were told of a wonderful Messy Holy Communion with Bishop Christopher in Brookwood, that was described as "full of a wonderful stillness and sense of mystery."

Sacraments in an unfamiliar setting often speak more loudly and clearly. Sacraments in Messy Church say clearly that this *is* church.

e) **3 selfs sustainability**

By three selfs sustainability is meant potential and progress to grow towards being

- self-financing
- self-governing
- and self-reproducing,²⁴

all marks of a maturing church or congregation.

The CARU report indicated encouraging progress in these areas among Guildford fresh expressions of church. *'Taking some steps in local leadership was the most common at 77%. 66% had begun the journey down the road of covering costs themselves and 39% of cases had in some senses seen reproduction – mainly of indigenous leaders, but also a couple of ordinands and one Church Army evangelist. In around five cases a further fxC²⁵ elsewhere has resulted, and a further few have hopes*

²³ an account of a Messy Baptism at Christchurch, Ottershaw, can be found at <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/story/messy-baptism-christ-church-ottershaw>

²⁴ CARU Report, p.6

²⁵ Fresh expression of church

*of this. The low number thinking this has long been the Achilles heel of both planting and fresh expressions of Church and only change here will begin to make a real difference. Yet positively only 8% had taken no steps down this road to 3 fold responsibility which is a relief and encouragement.*²⁶

We heard encouraging news from Knaphill and Brookwood. At the time of our third working party meeting they had just started to use the Messy Church registration form which asks people whether they want to give towards or serve the work, whilst making it plain there is no obligation to do so. By the time of our fourth meeting this has produced substantial contributions from new people, more than Messy Church needs, and they have agreed to some of it being passed on to support Cafe Church, (to which many Messy Church members move on as their children grow older). This Messy Church is not just contributing generously, but being missional about it and seeking to bless others. It was simply achieved with the registration form, and no teaching about giving or other campaign. The registration form was not given out the first time people came through the door, so that a question about whether they wanted to contribute was not the first thing they received. The forms were given out after a few gatherings as people became settled and regular.

The question naturally arises whether there is any inherent tension between the values of hospitality that are at the heart of Messy Church, and charging for, or encouraging giving at, Messy Church.

We were unanimous in feeling that charging people to attend, or charging for food or refreshments (or anything else) undermines this ethos of hospitality seriously, and should not be done. However learning to give is an important part of Christian discipleship and therefore has to be part of Messy Church.

At St Nicolas, a signposted piggy bank for contributions is placed well away from the food serving area so that it does not look like payment for services rendered. These contributions are split between Messy Church and various charities that the participants agree together. This is then presented in the worship time just like any regular church offering. A notice says 'Messy Church is free but some of you have asked to make donations.'

A conversation is needed with the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser about appropriate stewardship for Messy Church.

There are encouraging signs in these stories of Messy Church is becoming 'self-governing'. This does not mean becoming completely independent from the rest of the parish, but it does mean maturing into taking some responsibility. In both of the examples above this has been done relatively informally, and we would hesitate to recommend formal governance structures for Messy Church, which might end up changing the ethos substantially, and absorbing an inordinate amount of time.

Developing ministry, service and leadership in Messy Church is something that most Messy Churches seem particularly good at. We will look further at this in the section on discipleship below.

There is some evidence that Messy Churches tend to grow quite rapidly and then plateau. They also tend to develop leadership from among their new members much more rapidly than do traditional

²⁶ CARU Report, p.6

congregations. Surely both of these factors point to the need and opportunity for Messy Churches to give rise to new Messy Church congregations, (or other kinds of fresh expression, like the cafe church mentioned above). There is no reason why a Messy Church should not become a planting church in its own right, and we would encourage this possibility to be considered right from the planning stage. This will need something of a culture and expectation change.

- 12. *The Messy Church team and the original congregation need to have examined, and be clear about where Messy Church members' main congregational commitment lies.***
- 13. *We recommend working intentionally at building community in the period between main Messy Church gatherings, particularly where they happen monthly or less frequently.***
- 14. *Be clear at the outset about how you intend to become sacramental as and when your Messy Church sufficiently matures. Consult thoroughly with all stakeholders about this.***
- 15. *Messy Churches should normally aspire to be self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing in due course.***
- 16. *We recommend that it should become normal for Messy Church teams to work with their parish stewardship team or the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser.***

5) Is Messy Church Developing Discipleship?

A weakness in developing discipleship is a criticism that has often been levelled at Messy Church. The CARU Report commented that compared to other fresh expressions of church in Guildford 'far fewer have taken steps in discipleship'²⁷.

How true is this? Obviously the truth varies from place to place. However, the observations of this working party have convinced us that, on the whole, Messy Church probably does better than inherited modes of church in this area. The speed with which visitors are integrated into the serving and praying work of Messy Church is often impressive, and it looks as though many of them are beginning to learn what it is to be a disciple quite unselfconsciously. They often learn about being worshippers from sharing in the planning of worship from an early stage.

It is important that we are intentional about making disciples as we involve joiners in helping. Are we trying 'to get the job done', or to make disciples. This will alter how we involve people. What is at stake is exemplified by the story of the kitchen helpers on p.8.

Likewise, planning meetings are potentially community and discipleship building, and could be used and regarded as such, and not just used to plan. They could be held around a meal, and would include prayer, for example. They could be thrown open to all Messy Church participants, not just a core team. Saving time by sending out an email with the craft requirements to the helpers can miss the point.

²⁷ CARU Report, p.7

If the learning around the craft tables is well structured, or, as in some places, questions or notes are left on the meal table to stimulate discussion, then the sort of interaction that promotes discipleship often takes place. Learning that does not promote sharing and personal interaction (like some sermons) can leave a gap between the teaching, and the application to the individual circumstances of the hearer. With careful thought and structuring this gap can be somewhat closed at Messy Church.

We would thus, in part, beg to differ from the CARU report on this issue. The culture, values and structure of Messy Church are inherently more likely to produce discipleship than are most inherited mode churches. Measuring specific activities intended to grow discipleship rather than examining the discipling tendencies of Messy Church as a whole rather misses this.

Nevertheless, Messy Church like any church, would benefit from always being intentional, thoughtful and innovative about discipleship development. In particular it would do well to introduce people to some of the spiritual disciplines at appropriate stages. These vary across traditions, and this is not the place to go into them. Spiritual disciplines are a key to enabling discipleship values and character to go deep, and provide a way for people to 'feed themselves' should they move away and find something like Messy Church is not available for a while.

Some areas of discipleship Messy Church can potentially score particularly well in, such as equipping parents to bring up their children christianly. Parenting classes on the back of Messy Church are an obvious way forward here. We have already seen how a session on 'Questions Children Ask' was used between the monthly Messy Church sessions in one place. We have already noted (above in the section on 'Building Community') the great need for equipping parents to share and develop faith in the home. Several members of the working party felt that this was one of the key aims of Messy Church. To this end examples of good practice include take-home sheets for parents to share with their children (Messy Take Away), and encouraging the use of the Messy Church grace at home.

What Messy Church will always struggle to address in its all age sessions are those discipleship issues that adults alone face. Issues of sexual ethics, being a Christian in the workplace, marriage, transitioning through the various stages of faith of mid and later life, and plenty of others, do not lend themselves to being dealt with in an all age setting. What was said in the section on 'Building Community' (above) about discipleship related small groups, applies at this point (particularly what was said about small groups not having to be all age to fit within the local Messy Church community).

BRF offers training days in Messy Discipleship, and these would be worth seriously considering.

One parish has a Messy Church lending library to develop faith and discipleship, often geared to family issues, and this is well used.

People can be connected between sessions through social media, which can build community and discipleship, especially if discipleship related threads are encouraged.

Activities that will build discipleship can become an ideal way of filling the gap between monthly Messy Church sessions, thus building community at the same time as developing discipleship.

The key thing is to be intentional about growing discipleship (and building community) and not to drift into assuming that the main aim is to put on the monthly (or whatever) Messy Church sessions. There is a greater goal.

17. The working party wishes to affirm the extent to which Messy Churches already develop discipleship.

18. We recommend developing additional intentional ways of building discipleship in between Messy Church sessions.

19. It is important to remember at all times that the task before us is to grow disciples, not just to put on an event.

6) Witness and Evangelism

Any congregation faces three main issues around faith sharing.

- 1). Do members invite, and having been invited, do attenders find what they attend inviting?
- 2). Can people safely and without feeling under pressure, ask and discuss the questions they have, and do the Christians feel confident talking about their faith?
- 3). Can we help people to see, at the appropriate point, that there is a real choice to be made concerning whether to follow Jesus, and can we help them to make that choice?

Messy Church participants (children and parents) seem to talk about Messy Church and to invite others in an unselfconscious way that is dynamic and attractive. One of us had the experience of attending a Messy Church, and asking 14 parents and carers “what brought you along in the first place?” In every single case the answer was either a conversation between their children and other children who attended, or a conversation with other parents at the school gates. If this level of effective invitation was happening in our traditional churches, the church scene in Guildford would be transformed almost overnight.

It seems the answer to the both parts of the first question (above) is ‘yes’.

Moreover, the exploratory and participative way in which faith is discussed and learned during the craft activities, and sometimes over the meal, means that Messy Church participants are, on the whole, given far more opportunity to talk about their faith than many traditional church members.

In addition, the ‘Talking Jesus’ research²⁸ shows that the lower we go down the age scale the more likely we are to feel free to talk about Jesus. The average age at Messy Church is, of course, much lower than the average age of the typical Sunday congregation.

It seems then that the answer to the second question above is also substantially ‘yes’.

²⁸ <http://www.talkingjesus.org/research/talking-jesus-booklet.cfm> p.16

For all these reasons Messy Church has a great deal going for it when it comes to witness and faith sharing. It is important that we build upon this, and that any initiatives we take in this area do not make people self-conscious about that which many of them are now doing naturally.

Messy Church chimes with the culture of our time because of its emphasis upon exploring together and journeying. Presenting faith as a take it or leave it package, offered from a position of authority, is no longer likely to commend itself to most people. However, can the usually appropriate emphasis on exploring and journeying obscure the fact that the journey has a destination, that there is a choice to be made? That choice, of course, is whether to become a disciple of Jesus.

Some urgent thought needs to be given to how we help people come to the point of decision, without putting up barriers or hurdles or seeming to impose an entrance test. The most promising line of action would probably be the running of Christian seeker or nurture groups, geared particularly to Messy Church members and holding to Messy values. Such a Messy Church enquirers group would ideally be inter-generational. A good opportunity for such inter-generational learning might be the preparation when baptism, and then Holy Communion is introduced into Messy Church.

Perhaps also, occasionally but regularly, the Messy Church activities, worship and teaching could be used sensitively to help people to know how to make the choice to be a disciple of Jesus. We say occasionally because it would be easy, if there were undue pressure, for it to feel like an entrance test, to feel excluding, or to be perceived as a withdrawal of permission for ongoing exploration.

It would be very helpful if those Messy Church members with the skills for leading people into a discipleship relationship with Jesus could be identified and encouraged to use those skills at the appropriate time.

Thus the answer to our third question above, 'Can we help people to see, at the appropriate point, that there is a real choice to be made whether to follow Jesus?' is, 'yes, we can', but it needs skill and intentionality. We wonder whether people are always helped to see that there is a choice to be made, and helped to know how to make it, and that therefore some people may leave Messy Church as their children grow older, feeling they have tried Christianity and found that it didn't really work, when in fact they have done no such thing. If they have not made the choice for Jesus it could be argued that they have not really tried Christianity at all.

Like the issue of fostering discipleship, this is not a particular problem of Messy Church, but it needs addressing in a 'Messy' way. As one Guildford vicar put it recently (not about Messy Church) 'we're getting good at making fans of Jesus, but not always so good at making disciples'.

20. We wish to commend and encourage the effectiveness of many Messy Church congregations in inviting, welcoming and including new members.

21. We wish to commend and encourage the way in which most Messy Churches facilitate the active exploration and discussion of faith by Christians and seekers together.

22. We commend the two qualities above to inherited mode churches as something they could valuably observe and learn from.

23. We question whether the necessary and healthy emphasis on discovery and journey in faith sharing, always enables people to see that there is a choice to be made whether to follow Jesus. It would be worthwhile for our congregations to develop the skills to signpost such choices and to help people to make them.

7) Sustaining a Healthy Messy Church

Messy Church is fairly labour-intensive. Therefore everything that was said about the importance of enabling new attenders to serve, and about blurring the distinction between the founding team, and those subsequently reached, is important for sustainability as well as for effectiveness in making disciples.²⁹ Where this is not taken seriously Messy Church teams can become worn out and depleted. Where it is taken seriously they become self-sustaining.

Staying fresh and engaged demands someone with passion to be the driver. A team of reluctant volunteers, with no one holding the vision would find it a very different story.

Once someone with vision and passion is in the driving seat, where leadership is shared, Messy Church training and networking opportunities are grasped, and Messy Church resources are used, staleness and lack of inspiration is less of a problem.

Local Messy Meet Ups were particularly commended as a good way of maintaining passion and a flow of fresh ideas.³⁰

a) Be specific and intentional about whom you are serving

Messy Church is not just for mothers and children. It is for the wider family. 'It takes a whole community to raise a child'. It is therefore genuinely for everyone. One gathering that consistently attracts more men than women ask themselves before every event 'what have we got for under 3's, under 7's, teenagers, dads, older people etc.?'

Several people told us that it is not difficult to attract men to Messy Church, but it needs some specific thought.

For example:- After school is not a good time for most men.

Thought needs to be given to planning activities that engage dads e.g. building something, or a barbecue.

Men thrive when given a role. It doesn't have to be glamorous, and might be clearing up. We heard of one Messy Church where the entire kitchen staff was made up of men.

²⁹ See 'One Team Not Two' above

³⁰ Contact the Regional Messy Church Coordinator, Emma Shaw (childrenandfamiliesworker@gmail.com) or Guildford Diocesan Children's and Families Adviser, Alison Hendy (Alison.Hendy@cofeguildford.org.uk) to find out about these.

It sometimes needs some focus to ensure that everyone is involved. We have heard of occasions where children get involved in the activities, and the adults who bring them tend to hang back. This needs helpers with the gift of getting the parents involved, people who can say in a way that is invitational and warm, “why don’t you get involved alongside little Tom”. They need permission/invitation. (Incidentally the same often applies to the meal). They are initially not sure that this is for them.

Strategies are also needed to keep both adults and children involved when their attention wanders, or when, perhaps, they come late. Ideas that have been used include ‘Walk through the Story’ (an imaginative outline of the story laid out on the floor, that people can wander through as one of the activities), or an outline of the story on the craft tables, or questions relating to the activities and the story on all the tables, including the meal table. The idea is that people can join in even if they arrive halfway through. It’s often said therefore ‘you can’t be late for Messy Church’.

It is important here to grasp that Messy Church is designed to explore the same truths from a variety of different angles in mutually reinforcing circles. It is not a linear progression from A-Z. Therefore people can slot in at any point.

b) Sustaining growth

The CARU report noted that a high proportion of fresh expressions of church in our Diocese shrink after initial growth (35.7%). This is a higher proportion than happens elsewhere.³¹ The report notes that *‘We cannot tell from this small set what factors have determined which fxC expand, which plateau and which shrink. It would be prudent for the Diocese to find out.’*

It has been beyond our scope to conduct detailed research into this. Nevertheless our discussions suggest that growth limiting factors we have encountered include:

- Limitations on the physical size of the building. Brookwood’s example of establishing a cafe church which some Messy Church members could move on to, is one way of dealing with this.
- Volunteer capacity. Where a culture of involving visitors to Messy Church in serving reasonably quickly is not established, the initial team tends to become exhausted and depleted.
- An absence of clarity of intention and vision at the outset, particularly about whether Messy Church is to be a congregation in its own right, tends to undermine progress.
- Failure to access training or mentoring tends to be fatal. Registration with national Messy Church tends to be key here.
- Very few of our fresh expressions, including Messy Church, go on to plant other congregations. Nationally this has been found to be important in sustaining growth. Congregations reach a natural size, beyond which it is very difficult to grow. Planting a fresh congregation is often the easiest way to renew growth in the planting congregation as well as in the new one. This could be very important in Guildford

³¹ CARU Report, p.8

where an above average proportion of our fresh expressions of church have grown for a while, but then plateaued or declined.

We did note that frequently Messy Church members who move have been instrumental in starting new Messy Churches in the places they move to, and those who visit a Messy Church out of their area are often then instrumental in starting one in their home area.

- Unless there is a viable strategy for holding children and their families at 11+, Messy Church tends to have a built-in shelf life. It is important to recognise the cyclical nature of working with children. Often a cohort makes its way out of the top age bracket, and it can take a while to establish a new group coming up from the younger end, unless care has been taken to reach the whole age range in a sustained way.
 - The lack of a clear evangelistic strategy offering an opportunity to choose to be a disciple of Jesus tends to be self-limiting.
 - The common pattern of Messy Churches that meet monthly or less frequently, means that if other ways are not found to build community by providing other meeting points, it is hard to establish the sense of community and of relationships that tend to hold people in the long term.
 - where there is no (longer a) leader with vision and passion for Messy Church
- c) **Prayer** is obviously fundamental to staying fresh and sustainable. The times when we unconsciously assume that we can cope without God are probably the most dangerous. This might be a good time to go back to the section on 'Prayer' above.

24. As you seek to reach the whole 'extended family', then be intentional about specifically involving as wide a cross-section of people as possible in achieving that aim.

25. Try to select or develop visionary leaders for whom Messy Church is a passion, not just one more job.

26. Identify, if possible well in advance, what will be your growth limiting factors, and put strategies in place to overcome them.

8) What Happens at 11+?

There is a challenge to keeping children involved as they grow older, and especially as they grow into their secondary school and teenage years.

Many traditional congregations feel that this problem is almost insurmountable. However all members of the working party stressed that this is an easily overcome challenge for Messy Church, with a bit of imagination and effort. Once again intentionality is the key.

We heard of two children at Brookwood who initially came from a completely unchurched background, and have stayed with Messy Church well into teenage years, and are now actively involved in helping in various ways, and are as enthusiastic and committed as ever. It has been important to keep them involved through serving and being part of the team. The younger children who attend relate to the teenagers really well.

Whilst serving is probably the key, it is not the only way. If everybody stayed, Messy Church would grow too big to be manageable, so Brookwood also started Cafe Church as something to grow them on to. This is totally intergenerational, and both those too old and too young for Messy Church attend Cafe Church. Therefore people just do not fall through the gaps.

Similarly we heard of a 'Family Church' run at the same time as Messy Church (in this case 4PM on a Sunday) that is linked to and follows on from Messy Church. Older children and teenagers do get involved in it.

Whatever the structures, the quality of relationships was felt to be most important. If relationships are strong, then Messy Church members are likely to make an easy transition to the next step. Involving them in helping out at intergenerational holiday clubs has sometimes been quite a help in establishing and strengthening such relationships across the congregations.

We wondered whether youth workers (of whom Guildford Diocese has quite a number) could be helped to seize the opportunities presented by Messy Church. The Diocesan Youth Officer believes he could assist in this.

27. It is important to have strategies in place so that children (and their families) are not lost as secondary school age is approached

9) Messy Church and Its Potential Impact on Inherited Ways of Being Church

Many congregations are aware that they are growing older, and have a huge challenge before them in reaching younger generations. Most do not need persuading that this is the task, but they find it hard to imagine ways of doing it. Going to see a different way of doing things in operation is probably the best way to feed imagination, and with so many Messy Churches in this Diocese, no one has to travel very far to do this. A combination of existing church members becoming aware of Messy Church, and of those schooled in Messy Church coming to traditional congregations as they grow older, is likely to have a profound effect upon the culture of our more traditional congregations over time.

What are the values of Messy Church that could make a difference to more traditional church?

Messy Churches is in tune with most people's style of learning these days, active, participative and non-hierarchical.

At a time when the wider church is becoming increasingly concerned about the need for intentional discipling, Messy Church at its best teaches and models discipleship. It gets people praying, assists

parents and carers in nurturing their children in faith, provides all kinds of support for doing discipleship as a family, and involves people in service right from the start.

In many more traditional congregations it is necessary to be a member for some time before being allowed to take an active part. If members have enjoyed a year or two of passive membership, no wonder it is then sometimes difficult to persuade them later to take a more active role.

Messy Church is genuinely intergenerational. We need to learn from this and copy this on Sundays. As one person said when visiting their Messy Church, “this is what it should be like. Do we really have to go back to pews next week?”

There are good reasons why some (not all) older people really struggle with all age worship (audibility, dexterity for craft activities, sensitivity to noise etc.) There are ways of catering for such needs in more formal services, and the last thing any of us want to suggest is that such provision ceases. The problem is when this is the normal way of catering, when most of our efforts go into it, and it is only appropriate for a small proportion of today’s population.

Large numbers of people are emerging from a first contact with the Christian faith through Messy Church and other fresh expressions. By the nature of things some of these people will end up eventually in traditional Sunday morning church, and their expectations will be different from those of previous generations. For those of us used to inherited mode of church, learning some of our culture and values from Messy Church and other fresh expressions of church, is becoming increasingly urgent.

28. We recommend that more traditional modes of being church actively learn from the culture and values of Messy Church, which are becoming more and more important for congregations seeking to reach their communities for Jesus Christ.

10) What kind of central Diocesan provision could support or enable Messy Church?

a) Safeguarding

One essential service already provided by the Diocese is safeguarding. It should go without saying, but needs to be stressed again, that appropriate safeguarding policies should ALWAYS be adhered to. See <http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/about/safeguarding-inclusion> for details.

b) Training

Something our Diocese probably does not need to do is to start providing much in the way of local training. Messy Church resources are plentiful, varied and easily accessible. The members of the working party felt that there is no point in duplicating these.

There is a role, however, in promoting sharing of experience between local Messy Church teams, either at Messy Meet Ups, or by promoting local informal contacts. This is already happening and is

very much within the scope of the Diocesan Children's and Families' Adviser and of the Regional Messy Church Coordinator.

The only need for training from the Diocese that we can see, are around whether Messy Church or some other form of fresh expression of church is needed (see recommendation 2) or where particular local factors are encountered. There might, for example, be some point holding a number of workshops to examine the findings of this report, not least in the light of the number of Messy Churches that start without registering or adequately accessing any training.

We strongly recommend that any grant from the Diocesan Growth Fund towards Messy Church should require registration with the Messy Church movement and the use of some kind of consultancy or training.

Messy Church thrives on the efforts and leadership of volunteers who are often un-licensed in any formal sense. Nationally this is a rapidly growing factor in the leadership of fresh expressions of church of all kinds. In 2012 these unlicensed volunteers were 44.4% of the total number of leaders, and in 2014, 46% of the total in Guildford. The CARU research has shown no significant difference in effectiveness, measured by growth rates, of churches led by licensed or unlicensed leaders. However it would be easy for excessive regulation to choke off this emerging supply of new lay leaders, upon which the whole fresh expressions of church movement depends.

*'The wider Church may need the difficult combination of humility to learn from them, as well as wisdom to give them the kind of support, training and recognition that does not lead to any unintended emasculation of their essential contribution.'*³²

What has made a significant difference in other dioceses, is not formal training, but rather the availability of consultancy support, *'Our comment from our work on the first 11 dioceses surveyed is that there is a strong positive correlation between ongoing consultancy provided and sustained numerical growth.'*³³ Whilst this was written in relation to fresh expressions of church in general, there is no reason to suppose that it does not apply equally to Messy Church. The offer of such support is a key part of the role of the Diocesan Children's and Families Adviser, and of the Regional Messy Church Coordinator. The recent appointment of a Fresh Expressions Adviser in the Diocese to offer consultancy and to build networks of support should bring a significant contribution in this area.

c) Sharing Stories

As noted above, positive stories convince best, stirring up not just good ideas but also feeding the imagination. We need to find ways of sharing such stories with inherited church as well as with others involved in Messy Church. We would encourage Guildford Messy Churches to post such stories online with the national Messy Church website,³⁴ and the Guildford 'Tried and Tested' website³⁵. The latter is probably more likely to be accessed 'accidentally' by churches that might not

³² Church Growth Research Project, Report on Strand 3b CARU 2012, p.61

³³ CARU Report, p.5

³⁴ <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/events-stories>

³⁵ www.parishtriedandtested.wordpress.com

have thought to look on the national website, but might be convinced by stumbling across a story from a near neighbour.

d) Under 7's at Holy Communion

We said (above) that 'at present Guildford Diocesan policy for churches that have permission to admit children to communion before confirmation, is that the lower age limit is seven years old. This *might* be thought to be problematic for introducing the Eucharist at Messy Church, and perhaps needs further exploration?' In the light of this we would request a further look at this policy in the light of the growing sacramental needs of Messy Churches.

e) Stewardship

We recommend appropriate consultation between the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser and Messy Church practitioners in order to develop an appropriate approach to stewardship on the part of Messy Churches, and that thereafter making use of the stewardship adviser's services should be as normal for Messy Churches as for other congregations.

f) Youth

We recommend that The Diocesan Youth Advisor encourages conversation with and among youth workers about how to pick up on the work of Messy Church as children approach secondary school age.

- 29. We recommend that grants for Messy Churches from the Diocesan Growth Fund should be conditional upon registration with the national network, and upon training or consultancy being used.**
- 30. Such is the extent and quality of national Messy Church training, that the Diocese should beware of duplicating it. At a diocesan level we should focus on assisting with whether Messy Church is the most appropriate contextual choice (recommendation 2), on consultancy, mentoring and the facilitation of networks, or on training offered in partnership with Messy Church nationally.**
- 31. It might be worth revisiting the rule restricting the admission of children to communion to over sevens, to enable Messy Churches to develop their sacramental identity. We would welcome feedback from Messy Churches concerning whether such a restriction has been experienced as helpful or unhelpful.**
- 32. We encourage the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser to take the lead in developing appropriate stewardship support for Messy Churches.**
- 33. We encourage the Diocesan Youth Adviser continue to encourage youth workers to think constructively how they can build upon the work being done in Messy Churches.**

Summary of Recommendations

1). Is Messy Church the Right Way Forward in Our Context? P6

1. *In the light of all the evidence of its effectiveness we commend Messy Church to the Diocese, and welcome the number of Messy Churches that have been established.*
2. *Nevertheless we encourage greater diversity. Before reaching for an off the peg solution, we recommend careful and prayerful discernment whether a more experimental, people first fresh expression of church might be more successful in the local context for reaching the demographic you have in mind.*

2). Setting Up a Messy Church p6ff

3. *Establish clearly at the outset your aims, values and intentions. In particular be clear and communicate whether you are trying to be a bridge group, or a new congregation.*
4. *We recommend aiming to be a new congregation as being usually more fruitful than aiming to be a bridge group.*
5. *Be very clear about your core target group, and then ask specific questions of every session concerning how you will be as inter-generational and inclusive as possible around that core.*
6. *We regard it as essential that there is a clear shared understanding of these aims, values and intentions worked out between the sending congregation and the Messy Church team.*
7. *We strongly recommend registration with national Messy Church, use of the training they offer, and establishing links with other Messy Churches locally.*
8. *Blur the boundaries between the originating team and subsequent joiners as soon as practically possible, and as much as possible function as one team, not two. Involve the most recent joiners in serving as soon as possible.*
9. *We recommend thinking carefully at the outset whether a secular venue might be more attractive to the un-churched. It might not be, but we recommend that the question is at least seriously asked before proceeding.*

3) Prayer p.11ff

10. *Develop strategies for encouraging prayer in both the originating congregation and the Messy Church*
11. *Appoint someone from Messy Church with the specific role of encouraging prayer*

4) Being Clear That Messy Church Is Church p.12ff

- 12. The Messy Church team and the original congregation need to have examined, and be clear about where Messy Church members' main congregational commitment lies.***
- 13. We recommend working intentionally at building community in the period between main Messy Church gatherings, particularly where they happen monthly or less frequently.***
- 14. Be clear at the outset about how you intend to become sacramental as and when your Messy Church sufficiently matures. Consult thoroughly with all stakeholders about this.***
- 15. Messy Churches should normally aspire to be self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing in due course.***
- 16. We recommend that it should become normal for Messy Church teams to work with their parish stewardship team or the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser.***

5) Is Messy Church Developing Discipleship? P.17ff

- 17. The working party wishes to affirm the extent to which Messy Churches already develop discipleship.***
- 18. We recommend developing additional intentional ways of building discipleship in between Messy Church sessions.***
- 19. It is important to remember at all times that the task before us is to grow disciples, not just to put on an event.***

6) Witness and Evangelism p.19ff

- 20. We wish to commend and encourage the effectiveness of many Messy Church congregations in inviting, welcoming and including new members.***
- 21. We wish to commend and encourage the way in which most Messy Churches facilitate the active exploration and discussion of faith by Christians and seekers together.***
- 22. We commend the two qualities above to inherited mode churches as something they could valuably observe and learn from.***
- 23. We question whether the necessary and healthy emphasis on discovery and journey in faith sharing, always enables people to see that there is a choice to be made whether to follow Jesus. It would be worthwhile for our congregations to develop the skills to signpost such choices and to help people to make them.***

7) Sustaining a Healthy Messy Church p.21ff

- 24. As you seek to reach the whole 'extended family', then be intentional about specifically involving as wide a cross-section of people as possible in achieving that aim.*
- 25. Try to select or develop visionary leaders for whom Messy Church is a passion, not just one more job.*
- 26. Identify, if possible well in advance, what will be your growth limiting factors, and put strategies in place to overcome them.*

8) What Happens at 11+? p.23ff

- 27. It is important to have strategies in place so that children (and their families) are not lost as secondary school age is approached*

9) Messy Church and Its Potential Impact on Inherited Ways of Being Church p.24ff

- 28. We recommend that more traditional modes of being church actively learn from the culture and values of Messy Church, which are becoming more and more important for congregations seeking to reach their communities for Jesus Christ.*

10) What kind of central Diocesan provision could support or enable Messy Church? P.25ff

- 29. We recommend that grants for Messy Churches from the Diocesan Growth Fund should be conditional upon registration with the national network, and upon training or consultancy being used.*
- 30. Such is the extent and quality of national Messy Church training, that the Diocese should beware of duplicating it. At a diocesan level we should focus on assisting with whether Messy Church is the most appropriate contextual choice (recommendation 2), on consultancy, mentoring and the facilitation of networks, or on training offered in partnership with Messy Church nationally.*
- 31. It might be worth revisiting the rule restricting the admission of children to communion to over sevens, to enable Messy Churches to develop their sacramental identity. We would welcome feedback from Messy Churches concerning whether such a restriction has been experienced as helpful or unhelpful.*
- 32. We encourage the Diocesan Stewardship Adviser to take the lead in developing appropriate stewardship support for Messy Churches.*

33. We encourage the Diocesan Youth Adviser continue to encourage youth workers to think constructively how they can build upon the work being done in Messy Churches.