

July is Messy Month

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The last few weeks have seen good conversation here about children, worship and Sunday school. Will Willimon [discussed the dilemma](#) of the children's sermon, and Debra Bendis [wondered about Sunday school](#) and burnout. Many readers responded with ways that their churches have creatively engaged children.

In

England, a similar but distinct conversation has been going on for more than five years. A small Anglican church near Portsmouth launched an initiative called [Messy Church](#).

Messy Church is an attempt to create a community-centered environment in a church whose main ritual—mass—has come to seem strange, dull, long and not conducive to families. During Messy Church, which is often incorporated into Sunday worship, the sanctuary is organized into round tables instead of pews. Heaps of craft supplies accompany lectionary stories. Communion includes food beyond bread and wine. In all of this, liturgy—the work of the people—takes on different meaning.

Messy

Church is different from both church and Sunday school in important ways. Critical to its success, founders believe, is the participation of people of all ages. Messy Church should have people, married and single, old and young at the tables. A successful Messy Church will have traditional stories coming alive through creation, celebration and food. Organizers believe that people who want to incorporate Messy Church into their own communities should do so by listening carefully to the needs of their own people and being creative and flexible in its execution. Messy Church, they say, should remain church—a sacred community—and not become a craft club for children.

July is designated as Messy Month. Are there ways your church could get messy?