

## Messy Togetherness: Messy Church

by Casey Cross

I think most of us would agree that life is messy. Faith is messy. Things never go as smoothly as we plan. Being a Christ follower doesn't automatically make life easy and full of all you could possibly ask for. Embracing the messiness of reality is a fundamental understanding of Messy Church, as well as our Lutheran theology. Martin Luther says, "Call a thing what it actually is." This frees us to name a mess when we see it, to be honest about how good or bad a situation might be, and to know we are welcome just as we are.

The beginnings of Messy Church in the UK were sparked 2004 with just these kinds of conversations – calling a thing what it actually was. They realized the traditional services were fine for established Christians but weren't attracting new people. So, they had some humbling conversations. These were conversations about looking honestly at the gifts and limitations of congregation members, wondering together about how to do something "to give local families more opportunities to come to church together and stay in church together." These early conversations sound a lot like what we at Hope have been considering, as we muse over the rapid growth in our area, as well as how we are living our faith together "beyond Sunday."

When you think of what makes church, church, what do you think? I think it's fair to say that church is where we experience the love of God through the proclamation of the Good News of Christ, our relationships, service, prayer, and fellowship. The shape of Messy Church is grounded by similar elements. A summary of the five values of Messy Church are as follows. Which most stands out to you? Which resonates with the ways you have encountered Christ in your life; specifically, during Sunday worship?

1. Being *Christ-centered*: Every moment is an opportunity and invitation for people to come closer to Jesus.
2. Being *hospitable*: In the space we create during Messy Church, we live the challenge of being both God's guests and welcoming hosts.
3. Allowing space for *creativity*: We experience the Holy Spirit come to life within us and among us as we get our hands into the stuff of our faith and play together.
4. *Celebrating*: We express the joy of the life-giving love of Jesus with songs, stories, and prayers.
5. Being *intergenerational*: We are a community where the old feel as treasured as the young, where the children and teenagers feel as valued as the adults. We truly live as members of the Body of Christ, honoring each and every part, just as we are.

Living Messy Church is a way we experience the Kingdom of God in our midst. When imagining the Kingdom of God, many of us assume perfection. In reality, we most experience God's Kingdom in the mess of our lives, where God's grace breaks through it all to heal and reconcile us. Through the grace of God we are made whole, not perfect. With the very name of Messy Church, we are reminded that life is not perfect and the gift of grace can be found in plain sight. This is what we live together every month on the third Wednesday at 6 pm. Please consider Messy Church as another worship service option for you and your family. It may be just the gift of grace you have been searching for in the midst of the mess of life.