



Everywhere prayer!



What is Messy Church?

Messy Church enables people of all ages to belong to Christ together through their local church. It is a way of being church which is particularly suited to families, but welcoming to all. It meets at a time and on a day convenient for local families and is aimed at people who have never belonged to a church before.

You can expect:

- A warm welcome
- An hour of different hands-on activities with a Bible theme
- A short celebration with a story, songs and prayers
- A meal together
- A new session each month

Facts: Messy Church:

- gets 500,000 people involved each month
- takes place in more than 30 countries worldwide
- is found in a variety of Christian denominations
- is for people of all ages, from 0 to 100 years old

Messy Church values:

- Christ-centred
- Creativity
- Hospitality
- Celebration
- All-age

Want to start a Messy Church?

messychurch.org.uk/starting

Who is The Bible Reading Fellowship?

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is the home of Messy Church; it supports, resources and enables its work. BRF is passionate about making a difference through the Christian faith. We want to see lives and communities transformed through our creative programmes and resources for individuals, churches and schools. For more information on the work of BRF, visit brf.org.uk

Messy reflection

Do not worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

We all need to be challenged to pray more, to try out different ways of praying and to explore ways of praying that have been helpful for other Christians over the centuries. As we serve God in our work, at home and at church, we have ample opportunity to worry – or to practise passing everything to him in prayer and cultivating an attitude of thankfulness. Just as Jesus prayed to his loving Father both in the quiet, peaceful, happy times and in the desperate, painful times, both in cities and in the countryside, both with formal words and with spontaneous outbursts, so we can listen to God and speak to God everywhere.

If we are in the habit of prayer only when we're in a particular mood or place, this passage challenges us to an adventure in prayer wherever we are and whatever frame of mind we're in. Whether we are Messy families trying out Christian practices for the first time or old hands who have been praying for years, there's always another step to take to come closer to God and to make a difference in the places we find ourselves. More than anything, we need to demonstrate in our own lives what praying people are, do and say. This will help others have the confidence to pray or pray more.

Mealtime card

- When was the last time you prayed?
- Do you have a favourite prayer?
- Does anyone at your table say bedtime prayers?
- Why do you think God likes hearing our prayers?

Take-home idea

Have some attractive cards with the Lord's Prayer printed on them to give as a present to each family as they leave. Encourage everyone to say the prayer at bedtime or at breakfast this month.

Messy health check

How's the prayer time for your Messy Church team?



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How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session gives families a chance to try out different ways of praying, with the aim that they might then feel confident enough to keep doing them at home.

Messy team theme

- What are we worried about as we prepare this Messy Church session? Are we prepared to trust God with those worries?
- When has God answered one of your prayers? Can you share this story with families at Messy Church?
- What might the families who come to your Messy Church be worrying about? How many hidden worries do you think there are in your Messy congregation?
- What can you give thanks for today?

Question to start and end the session

So... how do you pray?

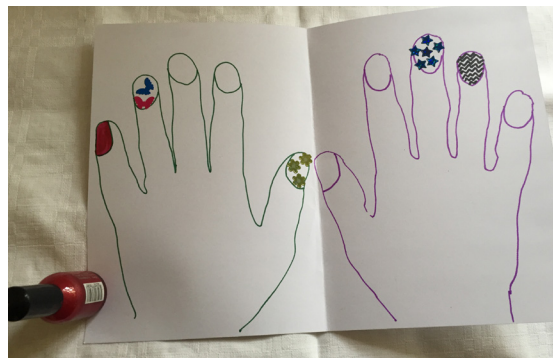
Activities

1. Prayer passports

You will need: A4 card; pens; felt-tip pens, coloured nail varnish, stickers, transfers or similar to decorate the nails

Take an A4 piece of card. On one side, draw round both your hands with all ten fingers (the more dexterous could do the same thing but with their feet and all ten toes). Draw in the fingernails or toenails on each finger or toe. Fold the card in two to make a prayer passport. For each activity you take part in today, decorate the nail of one finger or toe. You might offer a prize for anyone who can show they've taken part in all ten activities. Decorate one now for creating the passport.

Talk about how you use your hands when you pray. Some people put their hands together to help them concentrate; some lift them up to God; some lie with their hands flat on the floor; some use beads. How could people use their feet in prayer? How do you like to pray?



2. Prayer stars

You will need: star template made of thick card; paper; pencils; scissors; a shallow bowl of water; prepared star shapes (optional)

Draw round the star template and cut out your star. Draw or write a prayer in the centre. Perhaps you could pray for Jesus' light to shine on someone who feels a bit hopeless. Fold each point of the star over the centre with a good sharp crease. Now, with that person in your thoughts, place the folded star gently on the surface of the water and watch quietly as the star's points open up. It's as if that person is opening up to Jesus through your prayer. If you like, take some spare star shapes home to pray in the bath.

Talk about prayer being God's way of changing people's lives for the better.





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3. Junk wall

You will need: lots of old cardboard boxes; suitable ballistic weapons for your context such as foam or tennis balls (for higher walls) or elastic bands and dried peas or erasers (for smaller walls); a trebuchet (optional – see *Extreme Crafts for Messy Churches* (BRF, 2015) for a good design)

Make the wall of boxes as high as you can. Use the weapons to try to knock down the wall. If it doesn't work straight away, encourage persistence until it does.

Talk about the way some situations feel like walls or prisons that close in on us. But praying – sometimes praying for days, weeks, months or years – can break down those situations.



4. 'Thanxious' not anxious

You will need: shallow plates or bowls; full-fat milk; food colouring; droppers; washing-up liquid

Pour some milk into a bowl or shallow plate. Drop some colouring into the centre of the milk. This might stand for something you're worried about that sits there right at the centre of your life. Praying can put Jesus back at the centre and move the worries out to the edges: try thinking of three things you're thankful for and thanking God for them. What happens if you drop three drops of washing-up liquid into the centre of the colouring?

Talk about the science behind this. Talk about what Paul wrote: 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Philippians 4:6).



5. Popcorn prayers

You will need: a popcorn maker and popping corn
OR a microwave and microwaveable popcorn; containers

Explain that some prayers are very carefully worked out and beautifully worded. Some just pop out of our hearts like popped corn out of the machine/microwave. Have fun popping some corn and talking about the suddenness of it. The transformation of the hard kernel to fluffy popped corn is a little bit like prayer changing situations or hard hearts.

Talk about times you've prayed very sudden prayers. Sometimes just popping out one word is enough! As you share out the popped corn, pray a popcorn prayer each about what's on your heart at this moment. Invite people to pray popcorn prayers at work, school, the bus stop, in a shop and so on – wherever they are during the week.





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6. Prayer candle

You will need: used glass bottles; table candles; craft wire; wirecutters; decorations such as: artificial flowers and leaves, beads, glass nuggets, stickers, sequins, small toy cars, dinosaurs, animals; glue; glass paints and tiny brushes; Sharpies

Make a beautiful family candle holder to light when you have a meal together. Decide as a family whether to make one each or one together, and choose the decorations that you would enjoy seeing on your table. Encourage masculine designs as well as feminine ones. Have some examples ready-made: wire can be curled into coils, threaded with beads, hold a flower like a stalk or be wrapped around a car or animal to suspend it in mid-air around the bottle. Beads or nuggets can be glued on in patterns or randomly. Short thank-you prayers can be painted on or written on with a Sharpie. Stick a candle firmly in the top. If you're happy with the safety aspect, you could light the candles at the Messy meal and say a thank-you prayer together to model saying grace at mealtimes.

Talk about the way many Christians pray to God at the start or end of a meal.



7. Prayer lava lamp

You will need: small plastic bottles with lids and no labels; baby or vegetable oil; liquid food colouring; water; fizzing digestion tablets such as Alka Seltzer (make sure you keep these safe); sticky tape; attractive cards printed with words of praise to God, such as Creator God, Holy God, Loving God, Jesus, my friend, Jesus Christ Son of God, Wonderful God, Gentle God

Invite your participants to choose one of the praise cards and keep it ready to use in a minute. Fill the bottle about $\frac{1}{3}$ full of water, then top up with oil. Drop eight to ten drops of food colouring in. Watch the droplets make their way through the oil, then burst when they hit the water.

You could either make sure the bottles are left with you to dispose of or make sure carers/parents know they have non-swallowable liquid in and tape the lids on firmly to take home.

Give everyone a fizzing tablet to drop in their bottle and invite them to say the words on their card quietly or even silently to God as they watch the bubbles rise and fall.

Talk about the patterns they make: slow your participants down and help them to observe and be aware of what's happening in detail. Sometimes our heads are so busy, we need to slow down to listen and talk to God. Explain that sometimes when we pray, we can spend some time quietly saying the same thing – not so that God hears us better but so that we end up saying it from our heart, not just thoughtlessly.



8. Family prayer book

You will need: either marbling inks, shallow tray, water and stirrer OR shaving foam, liquid food colouring, squeegee window cleaner, stirrer and newspaper; glue; notebooks

Decorate a cover for a prayer notebook by marbling* a piece of paper of the right size. When it is dry, glue it on to the notebook and label it clearly with 'Family Prayer' (you could also add your family name). Invite families to draw or write bedtime prayers in the notebook for a month, then bring them back to talk about at your next Messy Church.

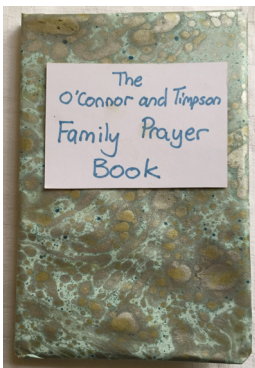


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*To marble with inks, float marbling inks on the surface of water, swirl them into each other then drop the paper on to the surface of the water. To marble with foam, squirt a thick layer of foam on to a newspaper and smooth it out a little. Drop food colouring on to it and swirl the colours together using a stirrer of some sort. Press the paper gently on to the surface, then peel off and squeegee the excess foam off the paper.

Talk about what you might add to your prayer book straight away.

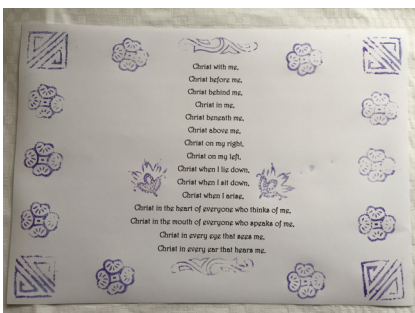


9. Prayer printing

You will need: cards with prayers on them (have a variety ranging from beautiful traditional prayers through to simple ones; leave a wide border around the words); erasers; cutting boards; highly supervised craft knives; ready-made stampers; inks

Invite people to choose their favourite prayer and create a border for it using the stampers and inks. For more responsible people, invite them to create their own stamper to decorate their chosen prayer, by cutting away the shape from an eraser. For others, have a range of stampers and inks.

Talk about when in the day they might pray this prayer this month, or whereabouts they might display it to remind them to pray it: maybe at home on the fridge, in the car or tucked into a school book.



10. Prayer popping

You will need: maps (of the world and/or your local area); bubble wrap; sticky tape

Tape the map to the tabletop, then tape the bubble wrap over the top. Invite people to come and pray for different places by popping the bubble wrap over the top of a place with their fingers. People might well stay and pray for a while: bubble wrap-popping is very relaxing. Give each person a piece of bubble wrap to take home and use in prayer there.

Talk about different things that can be turned into prayer. For example, they could practise praying and popping on the oceans – saying prayers for fish stocks and endangered species and other issues highlighted in programmes like *Blue Planet II*.



Celebration

If you have access to a projector and PowerPoint slideshow, it would be ideal to take photos in advance of scenes from your local area which your families will recognise: schools, preschools, office blocks, houses, parks, shops, countryside, sports ground, doctor's surgery, churches, beautiful scenery/sunset and so on. And a toilet. (Sorry. But it will lighten the mood and guarantee a giggle.) Turn these into PowerPoint slides with one scene on each slide. If you don't have access to a projector, print them out as large as you can and hold each photo up as you mention it.

Tell the story below, using the slides/photos to illustrate it as shown. (Change the details in bold to fit your own local landmarks).



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Fred was a worrier. He worried when he left his **home** in the morning.

He worried when he got to **school**.

He worried about his mum at **work**.

He worried about his sister at **preschool**.

He worried about his grandpa doing the **shopping**.

He worried when he went to the **doctor's**... and the **dentist's**... and the **vet's**.

He even worried on the **toilet**!

Fred's mum hated to see him worrying all the time. 'Look in the Bible!' she said to him one bedtime. 'Look what Paul says about worrying.' And in bed, Fred read: 'Don't worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Philippians 4:6).

He didn't understand every word, but he understood some of it. And Fred read in bed again: 'Don't worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Philippians 4:6).

'But surely God will only hear me when I'm in **church**,' he said. 'Or in **peaceful, beautiful places**. Not just anywhere. Not on the **toilet**!'

'Jesus talked to God everywhere,' said Fred's mum. 'On top of mountains... on his own... with his friends... even on the cross. Is there anywhere God *can't* hear us? God is everywhere. And he loves listening to us anywhere! What did that bit from the Bible say again?

And Fred read in bed: 'Don't worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Philippians 4:6).

'I wonder what difference it would make if you did that?' asked his mum.

'I wonder what difference it would make if you did that too?' asked Fred.

'Where shall we pray tomorrow?' asked his mum. 'At **home**? At **school**? At **preschool**? At **work**? At the **shops**? At the **doctor's**? The **dentist's**? The **vet's**? Or...'

'On the **toilet**!' said Fred.

Ask what difference Fred and his mum's prayers would make, even the toilet prayers. One thing they could be sure of is that God always listens when we talk to him. I wonder if YOU can talk to God in some of those places this coming week. And remember the bit from the Bible (*pretend to forget the words and see if anyone can help you*): 'Don't worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Philippians 4:6).

Today, we've all been talking to God in different ways in the activities. And now we're all together, we're going to pray the prayer that Jesus taught his friends: the Lord's Prayer. You could use the version with actions – check it out on YouTube (go to youtu.be/tOugEQpcc_k or search for 'Messy Church Lord's Prayer with actions').

Song suggestions

You could put on Christina Aguilera 'Makes me wanna pray' to enjoy dancing together.

'Build your kingdom here' – Rend Collective (ThankYou Music)
'O Lord, hear my prayer' – Jacques Berthier (Taizé)

Meal suggestion

Chicken in cook-in sauce with French bread and peas.