

God moves in mysterious ways

God moves in mysterious ways and nothing has made me more aware of this recently than the series of people and processes that have started us off in the direction of messy church in Staines. I can't help feeling there are several bad jokes lying in wait for anyone doing something messy in Staines but I will try and hold myself back. Among the joys I have experienced in this parish has been the carers and toddlers eucharist at St Mary's; various encounters with schools and my occasional appearances at heaven@11. I felt strongly that we should be working to do more that was on the margins of church and our families and children. I was interested in Godly Play style work with teenagers to explore more difficult stories and topics. At the same time Pamela Barrie was interested in the Messy Church work being done in Claygate which links with her professional experiences and interests and Carol Bartlett went back to her old church in Malden to look at the work they were doing there with young people. Janet Franck who runs the others Union group at St Peter's was interested in something that might link the older women who made up the majority of the MU group with the parents and children that either came to Heaven@11 or had some other connection with St Peter's around bible stories.

This idea was based on the hope they might come to enjoy and benefit from knowing each other and perhaps become interested in joining the MU or setting up a new group under the MU banner that would support the families in our churches. These three ideas came together at evening prayer at St Mary's and slowly over several months and the catalyst of Janet and Rachma talking in more detail while we were both on the Leading your Church into Growth conference we moved to where we are now. I also think the intentional use of the silent prayer time on Mondays at Christ Church to pray for growth and for ways of serving and encouraging younger people to be part of the parish life and to encounter Jesus Christ the living God for themselves was an important part of these three people realising that our separate interests and ideas might work even better if we came together on them. Further exploring and looking at these ideas helped us refine and strengthen our core interest which is to offer and experience of the gathering of God's people (that's what church' is) in a way that might be fun and enjoyable and attract people who might not feel so comfortable with coming on Sunday to a more traditional style of service (which is what people sometimes think 'Church' is).

Thanks to the decision of the PCC, the prayer balls (special thanks to the Bannisters and to Staines Prep here) raised money which will be used to underwrite our first session on Ash Wednesday on the theme of 'New Start'. Some of MU members are going to help with supper for those who come, there will be people helping with craft activities and worship. If you can come for part of it and would like to help we would love to hear from you. If you have some craft materials you don't need or would like to donate towards the cost of this and future sessions (eventually we would like to go monthly!). If you know a child who will bring a parent or carer

and who you think would like to come (Our primary age range is 4-8 but we know people will bring older and younger brothers and sisters) - let us know. We will be inviting some people directly but it will also be open to anyone until we have our 25 children this first time. We hope it will be fun for all of us involved and that for a few people it might be a special step in their spiritual journey (wherever they are going!) including those of us taking part as volunteers. God moves in mysterious ways - please keep praying for this initiative and I am sure we will see him perform wonders.

Messy Church

Messy Church has become quite a buzz word throughout the Parish in the last few months. It started just 3 months ago following about 6 months of discussion and prayer, as a Parish initiative drawing on Lucy Moore's books and Messy Churches elsewhere www.messychurch.org.uk and it has been good to see members of all 3 congregations becoming involved and showing enthusiasm and commitment, sharing their artistic skills, providing friendly practical support both before during and after the sessions, in a variety of ways all very important to the success of the mission.

So what exactly is Messy church? Well, briefly, it is an opening for us to offer a sense of belonging to those in our community who stand on the messy edge unsure about or unable through circumstance to commit to regular Sunday worship. It's a chance for people of all age groups to come together and express themselves creatively using God's gifts, as they explore the scripture stories and offer thanks and praise for those gifts. And also it is an opportunity to cement friendships and talk over the theme of the day over a common meal shared by all who attend.

Those people already involved with messy church will agree that helping people to see that Church can be fun is very rewarding. Introducing people to Jesus through friendship and God centred activity is worthwhile and an opportunity to grow in faith and help others to do the same.

We have met so far after school on either a Wednesday or Thursday, as these have been days when the hall has been available. Volunteers to help have been sufficient on each occasion but if we want to increase our capacity to see the community by involving more children and their parents/ carers then more people able to contribute are always welcome. We plan to hold the next Messy Church on Saturday 1st August and hope that this will allow working Mums and Dads to attend with the rest of the family.

Numbers have been below our planned capacity of 30 - so far between 12 and 19 children within the target age range of 4-8 but ever time has brought new people and we have been encouraged by the obvious enjoyment of those who have

attended and hope that word of mouth and personal invitations will soon make for more families being included. If you know of any one you think might like to attend please let one of us know and we will make sure they are invited to join us next time.

The experience of Messy church is new one for all of us. We have made mistakes but with each session we have gained a better sense of where we should be heading. It is early days but there is a real sense that God is working here. The Holy Spirit is with us helping us to bear fruit and through your prayers and God's grace it will be fruit that will last. It used to be said that children are the church of the future. Whoever said this is wrong. Children and their parents are the Church of today and as such need to be supported and encouraged in their faith in ways that are relevant to their lives. It is up to us as mature Christians to offer them this support through our prayers and our love.

You may be wondering in what way (including you!) can help. Well, there are a variety of ways in which you can become involved. You may like to help before the event by offering to make a cake, as Doreen Bryant has done so kindly for us these last 3 sessions or by preparing templates or a prototype of one of the 8 different craft activities offered each time, like Catherine Batt, Rob Franck, and several others have done.

Maybe you feel called to help on the day with one of the craft activities. You do not need to be a great artist to help in this way. Individual tasks are explained in full in writing and placed at each work station along with ideas on how to explain how your activity fits into the narrative of the day and simple prompts to encourage both children and adults to understand the significance of the story to the way they live today. Jessica Espley, Kirsty Burgoyne, Pauline Newman, Carol Bartlett, Alasdair and Graeme Barrie, along with others already mentioned have been valuable members of this team.

If you aren't tempted by the craft then maybe you would like to help in the kitchen. Comfort Oshikoyo leads the team here capably helped by Eleen Wakhani, Michael Busby, Betty Mitchell and Jenny Churn. This is a very important role as they are responsible for the welcoming cups of tea, coffee, juice and biscuits at the beginning of the session and the scrumptious tea at the other end. Of course there is always plenty of washing up to do at the end, so if you can only spare half an hour then this would be a great way to join us and feel that you were being really useful.

Others have helped by providing resources and practical advice both before and during the sessions. Beth Scott has been very generous in donating craft materials and Rosalyn Young spent time and effort making shakers for use during our Acts of Worship. Father Rod has been supportive of the initiative and has come along to meet with those attending, joining in both with the hall-based activities and the Act of Worship in the church.

A big thank you is extended to all those people that have helped so far to make the beginnings of a successful Messy Church. Thank you too to those who have recently offered their help. Sylvia Teed and Pam Wheatley have both offered to help for the first time in August and Richard Staples who has done so much.

If you feel you would like to help but don't want to be fixed to one particular team that is not a problem. Several of our taskforce have shown talents in more than one direction and have been engaged in a variety of different activity over the last 3 occasions that we have met. Even if you can only spare a short while it would be great to have you on board. If you are turning out your cupboards and drawers and come across no longer needed craft materials or fabric think of Messy Church and donate it to us, and look out in the weekly sheet for particular things that we may ask you to save for us to use for a particular activity

Finally, many of you will know that Pamela Barrie who is one of those who initiated Messy Church starts training for Ordination this September. She will, of course, continue to be a valuable member of the team but will not always be available for every session. We would all like to wish her the very best and assure her of our prayers as she moves forward.