

Messy Church - “Church, but not as you know it”

It's 5:00 p.m. on the second Sunday of the month at Northfield Community Church and the church building is filled activity, noises, laughter, delicious smells of dinner cooking. There is an adult sitting on the floor showing children how to hammer nails into boards, a few teens and a family are building a large tower out of clean recycled materials, two toddlers are pushing cars around in the small tent. There is a table full of people decorating bags for a food collection for the local food pantry. On a table in the corner there is a contest going on to see who can build the highest tower of marshmallows and toothpicks. This mess of people young and old, tools and building materials, crayons and glue, toothpicks, and marshmallows, wiggles and laughter, play and prayer celebrates this community that comes together to explore and worship our creative and loving God. This is Messy Church at NCC!

Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration, and hospitality. It's church for people at all stages of their faith journey and of any age, with its aim to introduce Jesus and to give an opportunity to encounter and grow closer to Jesus. Messy Church models and promotes healthy ways of growing as a family: a nuclear family, an extended family, and a global and local church family. Messy Church includes four parts: a welcome, a creative time to explore the biblical theme, a meal, and a celebration time of worship. This time of worship should celebrate an aspect of God based on the theme picked up in the activity time. Most Messy Churches meet once a month, at a time that is welcoming, especially to those who might not have a church home of their own. Messy Church is fun!

The five core values of Messy Church are: **1) Christ-centered:** Messy Church is a church that helps people encounter Jesus as Lord and Savior. **2) All-age:** Messy Church is for adults and children to enjoy together. Every element aims to be relevant and accessible to all ages. **3) Creativity:** Messy Church reflects the creativity of God in its imaginative hand-on approach to being church together. **4) Hospitality:** Messy Church is outward-facing, welcoming everybody to enjoy the hospitality and unconditional love of God. It is about hospitality, expressed most evidently by eating together. **5) Celebration:** Messy Church reflects a God of joy who wants his people to have life in all its fullness. (<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/our-values>)

Messy Church started in 2004 at an Anglican church near Portsmouth, UK, and has grown into an international movement operating across a wide range of Christian denominations and traditions. Today, Messy Church has spread to at least over 4,000 registered Messy Churches in 30 different countries. Over 500,000 throughout the world worship monthly at Messy Church. Messy Church is part of the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF).

This past June, Northfield Community Church completed its 6th year of Messy Church. The pandemic changed the look of Messy Church last year as we moved to “Messy Church in a Bag” and then “Messy Church Live on Zoom.” NCC is looking forward to beginning the 7th year in September (hopefully in person). Messy Church has been such a blessing to NCC by providing a way to share God's love with families in the surrounding community, bringing people from our two worship services together, and connecting in new ways with families in the congregation. But to me, the best outcome was totally unexpected. Because of Messy Church I have seen NCC's congregation reconnecting and strengthening. People of all ages are meeting and loving each other; laughing and sharing and praying with each other. Some seem to have found a new connection to NCC through Messy Church, either by attending or volunteering. Messy Church is growing because families are inviting other families from their schools or neighborhoods to come to Messy Church. Messy Church is an exciting, fun way to reach out to your community and reach in to your congregation with God's love and the love of community.

To find out more about Messy Church check out: <https://www.messychurch.org.uk/> and Messy Church USA <https://messychurchusa.org/> .

Registration is now open for (RE)START MESSY, a massive day of training on October 23, 2021. This in-person one-day training will be held at six regional locations across the USA to give your teams all you need

to either start for the first time or to restart your local Messy Church. Locations for the (RE)START MESSY trainings are: Ashburn, Virginia; Summerville, South Carolina (Near Charleston); Northfield, Illinois (Suburb of Chicago); Huntington Beach, California; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Seattle, Washington. For more information on (RE)START MESSY and to register visit <https://messychurchusa.org/restart-the-mess/>.

Ronda Bower has been the Pastoral Associate of Family and Educational Ministries at Northfield Community Church in Northfield, IL, for 15 years. Ronda serves as a Messy Church USA Board of Director, an Ambassador, and on the Prayer and Encouragement Team for Messy Church USA.

