

Dear Friends,

This last month I was privileged to attend the first international Messy Church conference. There were 220 delegates from 12 countries representing a wide range of denominations attending the conference, all eager to share how they do Messy Church in their context.

There was so much packed into the conference that I hardly know where to begin. I think some people may have thought that we were there to learn how to make even more things that can be covered in glitter; that couldn't have been further from the truth. The conference was rich in deep theological reflection. Workshops included conversations on the Messy Church values, Messy and traditional church: ways to be church together, valuing the spirituality of older people through messy church, encouraging faith at home, Messy Church and men, worship songs that work with all ages and Messy discipleship. All of these interspersed with times of reflection together, two Messy Church sessions and two seminars lead by George Lings. I have written a more detailed report on the conference and if you would like a copy please ask me.

One of the things that challenged me during the conference was the reminder that Messy Church has as part of its DNA five core values: all age, hospitality, creative, celebration and Christ centred. And George Lings reminded us that these are the things that are important and that what we do whether it be craft activity, what food we have or what songs we sing are all underpinned by these five values. The five values are more important than what we do. I was challenged not to do things at Messy Church because this is what we've always done; our values are more important than our structure.

There was an interesting conversation about what Messy Church is asking traditional Church, what traditional Church is asking Messy Church and what common ground do we share. We were reminded that the Church is the body of Christ and one part of the body cannot say to the other part I don't need you.

For me the key thing that came out of the conference was the need to develop disciples, not only in Messy Church but in all forms of Church. How do we do that in Messy Church has been a question asked a lot recently but I also want to ask traditional church how do we make disciples? As I've reflected upon this question and talked it over with others it seems to me that our relationships are so important.

Last Sunday I was blessed to be able to Baptise my grandson, it was so special and I was able to go to the do afterwards! When we have a baptism in church the church is usually full of people from the "missing generation" that we are so keen to engage with and last Sunday was no exception. Can I just say a massive thank you to everyone who made than feel so welcome and point out that the "missing generation" had their eyes opened as to how different church was to the church of their imaginations and sometime experience?

The thing is, though, I spent time with these young people during the rest of the day and as a result of my being with them I had so many conversations about God, faith and religion that I was quite taken aback. Conversations that would never have taken place otherwise. Conversations that would never have happened if I hadn't gone into their world, conversations that would never have happened if I hadn't been released by Crossens to spend the day with them and not have to rush back to do an evening service.

It seems to me that if our relationships are to be one of the ways that we grow disciples we should be asking ourselves how does the church equip and release us to be able to invest our time and energy in our relationships?

Yours in Christ

*Rev Jan*