

Get messy at church!

SURELY it's what every family would want church to be like.

'Messy Church' is a mixture of games, art and craft, food, worship - and quite a lot of mess. The monthly after-school event at St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain, draws together more than 60 children and their families for a new way of finding out about faith.

They learn not by listening to adults telling them what to think, but by choosing which activities to do and discovering for themselves.

It starts at the end of the school day. Children dash into the church hall to have a go at games and colouring laid out for them. They are met by volunteers who have painted their names - messily - onto t-shirts. Parents chat with each other over coffee.

When everyone is there, Messy Church starts properly. Around the



hall are 10 or more tables, each of which features a different art or craft activity related to the theme, and each with a leader to help all-comers. For Easter, this includes everything from creating a goblet for the Last Supper to making

Maundy money pouches, from creating an Easter garden to cooking chocolate nests for Easter eggs.

Children, parents, grandparents or childminders choose which activities they want to do and learn through cutting, pasting, creating and cooking. The vicar takes digital photos of what's happening, to be displayed later. By the time they've finished, everyone may be covered in paint, glue or dirt as they show their parents exquisite items of craft.

Then there's tea. A hot meal is an important part of Messy Church as it expresses the church's hospitality and means parents don't have to go home and cook.

For Easter, the meal involves food that symbolises a Passover meal, including lamb, horseradish sauce and



Top left: children learn how to create an Easter garden at Messy Church; above: Hannah Harding, six, paints an Easter scene

unleavened bread. Children are encouraged to ask the traditional questions that reveal the Jewish origins of the meal.

Finally, there's a short act of worship in the church itself, including songs, prayers and a short epilogue. It's a formula that has seen them featured on a new C of E website that details new ways of 'being Church' - www.freshexpressions.org - and echoes many of our diocese's Kairos principles.

Organiser Lucy Moore said: "Many children and adults just love being messy, so that's a real attraction for them! We take a lot of care thinking about activities that will be fun, but that will also have a point

to them. And they learn so much more by actually doing these things rather than being told about them."

Emma Wells, 12, said: "I think it's really good because it gives children the opportunity to learn about God. Each Messy Church has a different theme, and the moral is explained at the end."

And mum Lesley Woodgate, said: "They love meeting their friends here, and the activities are fantastic. They really learn from them."

Messy Church happens on the final Thursday of each month, between 3.30pm and 5.45pm. The next dates are: May 26, June 23 and July 21.



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CROSS RHYTHMS

Religion and politics

YOU will now be right in the middle of a general election campaign, through television, the press, and much else. I'm sometimes told that religion and politics don't mix. But they do, because one of the charges that brought Jesus of Nazareth to an early death was that of sedition - against the Roman Emperor.

I have two pieces of advice to offer you as you consider how you might vote.

The first is the general point that we use words so much that we have lost the ability to trust them. Just think of the number of words that appear on the internet - as well as the number of words that are already being hurled by politicians at each other, with point-scoring, statistics, and who will promise to what by when.

But have we become so mesmerised by words that we no longer believe each other ourselves? "Oh, you would

the last word

by Bishop Kenneth



say that" is a way of shrugging off even the most profound statement. If we stop trusting anything anyone says, we might as well give up on any kind of deep communication with each other. And that would be to deny the Christian gospel - which has to use words, alongside our symbols, our music, our art - and our day-to-day discipleship.

The second piece of advice concerns politicians themselves. To what extent are they appealing to our greed, our desire for an easy life, our natural desire to keep every-

thing to ourselves? Or to what extent are they appealing to the needs of others, for social and moral justice?

We can pat ourselves on the back for all the money that has been raised to help countries in the Far East devastated by the tsunami. But what about the homeless, what about the functionally illiterate, what about heightening awareness about the way the world is squandering its natural resources beyond what can be sustainable in the future? To my mind, it is these - and not our greed - that are the real gospel issues.



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