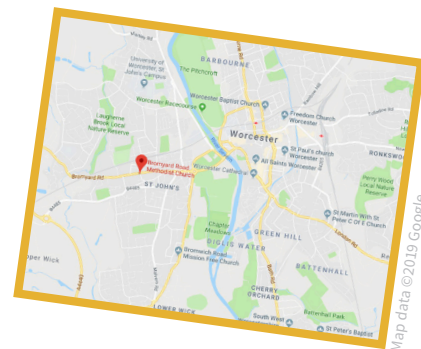


HELEN LAIRD's story



Helen Laird is Messy Church Regional Coordinator for Worcestershire. She has been involved with Messy Church for many years, coordinated a Messy Church at her own church, inspired others to set them up and has written for the *Get Messy!* magazine. Helen has been a children's and family worker for over ten years and is currently employed by the Diocese of Worcester as a Mission Enabler. Her home church is **Bromyard Road Methodist Church** in Worcester. Helen sees important connections between **HOLY HABITS** and Messy Church.



THE STORY begins...

'After we'd been doing Messy Church for a while, we began to think about discipleship, and there must have been something in the air because around the same time, Lucy Moore started highlighting discipleship in Messy Church publications and events. So we went on that journey in the church. I and the Messy Church leader went to one of Lucy Moore's discipleship hub meetings to think through some of the questions. Then I wrote a dissertation for my degree in church youth work called "Messy Church, Messy Future", and I helped Lucy Moore with a couple of her Messy Church discipleship presentations.'

Then Helen changed jobs, and went to work as Mission Enabler for a Methodist District.

'In that time I met Andrew Roberts and the original *Holy Habits* book came out. The first time I read it, because of my passion for Messy Church, it was just so obvious to me: all the links across from Holy Habits to Messy Church. I talked to Andrew about it at the time and told him there's a link here. He said yes, that's worth thinking about – but then you get busy and things slip down the to-do list.'

Shortly afterwards Helen changed jobs again, this time going to work for the Anglican diocese of Worcester and stepping out of her home church for a while.

'Then in January 2019, Messy Church's Jane Leadbetter wrote about being a Messy Church Regional Coordinator, and I just knew this was something I could do as a volunteer, alongside my paid work for the diocese. I'd helped set up several Messy Churches so it was a natural progression. And then Andrew Roberts got me up on stage at the Messy

Church International Conference, to talk about the links between Messy Church and Holy Habits. Thank you very much, Andrew!

'When I first read *Holy Habits*, it was really obvious to me that this was all about discipleship and, of course, this was the journey we were on with Messy Church. The fact that we were both trying to do the same thing just jumped out at me.

It's very simple: if we all acted out these ten habits in our everyday lives, 24/7, we would make disciples because people would just see Jesus Christ shining out of us.

'To me, it's very simple: if we all acted out these ten habits in our everyday lives, 24/7, we would make disciples because people would just see Jesus Christ shining out of us. People would be going: "What is it about that person? Why are they always generous? Why are they always serving others? Why are they always calm?" There would be something to see.

'The ten habits fit in so well with the Messy Church approach and the overarching theme of discipleship. We could use the holy habits as a kind of benchmark for Messy Church, asking ourselves: where are we on each of these practices?

'Previously, we were using Holy Habits in Messy Church on an informal basis, because Holy Habits didn't yet exist in its current form, but now in our Café Church we're using Holy Habits intentionally. If we were setting up Messy Church now, we'd integrate the two much more deliberately right from the start.

'We have Café Church once a month. It's our main 10.30 Sunday morning worship service, in place of traditional worship. We used to split the church and have both, but people said they didn't want to split, so now everyone comes to Café Church. The first time we did Breaking Bread, we didn't have Communion, but we had different cakes and we reflected on breaking bread and being together. Everyone had a bread roll to take away so that they could go and find someone else to break bread with – at least, that was what we hoped would happen. Then the following month we did Breaking Bread again, and this time we did have Communion.

'We've also done Biblical Teaching twice. The first time we asked ourselves: how often do you read the Bible? How often should you read the Bible? If you're in need, where do you go for help in the Bible? We highlighted lots of online Bible resources, we introduced people to daily Bible reading notes, and then the second time, the minister talked about how to interpret what the Bible has to say about climate change.

'The Café Church is all age; we have a band playing – it's a great atmosphere. We get about 80 people so it's a bit of squash in the church hall, sitting at round tables. It's absolutely all ages, and we don't have any children's teaching that week. Each month we put something in the newsletter about the habit we're looking at that month. We post it to loads of people, not just the people who are in church. Andrew Roberts launched the first one with us. He came to our first Breaking Bread session.



Photo by Andrew Roberts

'Breaking Bread' – Holy Habits at Bromyard Road Methodist Church Café Church



'One really important aspect of Holy Habits is that it's about enabling everyone to practise the habits and to be blessed as well as to bless in the process. That's an important lesson for the churches to learn, and particularly for those of us in leadership – the model is too often one in which we're there to serve, to meet other people's needs, and the importance of enabling everyone to serve each other and to give is missed. That can be well meaning, if misguided, but it can also be a way of keeping control, and that's against the whole ethos of both Holy Habits and Messy Church.

'We're going to do Prayer next and then in August we're going to revisit all the habits we've done, because we don't want it to be a case of "Oh, we've done that habit!" and moving on.' **HH**

We could use the Holy Habits as a kind of benchmark for Messy Church, asking ourselves: where are we on each of these practices?

We hope you've enjoyed this HOLY HABITS story!