



Messy Remembrance

Introduction

On the Sunday nearest to 11 November, most churches hold a Service of Remembrance, marking the day when World War I ended. Nowadays, we also remember all those who have lost their lives fighting in subsequent wars, and a two-minute silence is kept at 11.00 am.

A Remembrance Day service is also an opportunity to explore important themes such as war and peace as well as remembering, and so there is a lot that children and their families can enjoy learning and experiencing together. The following outline for Messy Remembrance offers a programme for unpacking these big ideas thoughtfully and creatively.

Thankfully, most people in the average Messy congregation will have no direct experience of living through a war. Nevertheless, there could well be some older people at your Messy Church who still have childhood memories of bombings, for example, and you may also have children who have had or still have a parent involved in recent conflicts. For them, this Messy Remembrance can be a very poignant and emotional occasion. It is worth doing some research beforehand to see if you do have such people and perhaps talking with them well in advance about whether or how they might like to be involved.

For most of us, our awareness of war comes from the media, and even young children will have picked up some of this. In addition, the popularity of books such as *War Horse* (Egmont, 2007) and *Private Peaceful* (HarperCollins, 2004) by Michael Morpurgo will mean that issues of war and peace are important ones to touch on as part of your Messy Church, especially in this centenary year with all that will be talked about and seen on TV.

This material can be used at any time of the year, though probably not as an alternative to a traditional Remembrance Service proper with its usual formalities and silence. The following outline is set out as a typical Messy Church menu of ideas for activities and an outline for the celebration.

Finally, it is important to say that, although the theme of Messy Remembrance is a serious one, this does not mean that the usual fun and playfulness of Messy Church need to disappear. Some of the deepest things are learned only when

we are laughing and creating together. Children need the help of our all-togetherness to come to terms with big questions such as life and death, war and peace. This session plan is designed to facilitate good family talk about these issues, within the safe boundaries of a community of faith gathered around crafts, Bible stories, worship and a meal.

Bible link

Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You long for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

James 4:1–3 (MSG)

God blesses those people who make peace. They will be called his children!

Matthew 5:9 (CEV)

The letter of James is always thoroughly practical and shot through with God-inspired common sense. He knows how easily human beings fall out with each other and how the tendency to want our own way can be quickly magnified into personal feuds, community rivalries and ultimately all-out wars. The cultural and social causes of international warfare are of course complex, but James recognises that so often beneath it all lies human greed and selfishness. The history of the world is littered with wars and, whatever your opinion as to the best way to deal with this – be it as a pacifist or a believer in a just war – innocent people suffer and young soldiers are killed in action.

It is right that every death in war is remembered and not treated lightly. For this reason, the act of remembrance in November is still an important focus for national grief and a shared determination to work for peace. And as James writes, we should turn to God in prayer rather than be at each other's throats in hostility. As we often say to our children, it's not who started a quarrel that matters, but who will end it! And it seems that Jesus was saying something similar when he pronounced his blessing on those who choose to be peacemakers. For Christians the power and inspiration for this peace-making is the cross of Jesus; this is the only sure way to make a peace that lasts, both within us as individuals and between us as peoples.



BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE
+44 (0)1865 319700 | enquiries@brf.org.uk
brf.org.uk

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Messy Remembrance

Questions to think about as you prepare Messy Remembrance

- Why do people still get involved with wars when we know from history that innocent people are bound to be killed and also what a terrible legacy war can leave?
- Is James right? Are my feelings of anger towards someone really the beginnings of 'war'?
- How can it ever be right to go to war?
- What would happen if more people refused to fight in wars? Wouldn't we just be overrun by evil forces?
- In what ways do you think people in the armed forces are heroes?
- What are we remembering on Remembrance Day? What difference should this day make to each of us personally?
- What does being a peacemaker involve? What did it mean for Jesus?

Activities

1. Make your own poppy crosses

A poppy attached to a small wooden Christian cross is a bringing together of the remembrance symbol and the chief sign of the Christian faith. Jesus died on a cross, which for Christians means, among other things, that God understands and shares in the suffering of the world, including all the pain and bereavement that comes through war.

Create a paper chain of crosses by folding a length of paper into a fan or an 'accordion'. Draw a cross on the top piece, making sure that the left and right arms of the cross touch the folds at the sides. Now cut out the cross shape, but remember not to cut along the folds on the left and right edges. The crosses should be linked when the paper is unfolded. You can make as many crosses as you like depending on the number of folds you make. Now make poppies of the appropriate size cut from red paper to decorate the centres of the crosses.

For some poppy templates and instructions, go to: poppytime.com/poppy-craft-activities.htm or awm.gov.au/education/programs/prepost/PRIM_makePoppy.pdf

Talk about: What do you think about when you see a poppy?

Key verse:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13 (NIV)

When someone's death in a war has helped secure peace for others, then it has indeed been just this sort of ultimate sacrifice, in imitation of the great sacrifice that Jesus made to bring us peace with God.

2. Make a peace sculpture

In many towns and cities around the world, there are often monuments built to commemorate wars, including statues of soldiers and famous battles. What, however, would a statue to peace look like?

Prepare some homemade play dough and use this to shape a mini-sculpture on the theme of peace. Once it is finished, put it in a microwave for five minutes to harden and then invite families to come back and paint this as part two of this activity.

Here are some sculpture ideas: a dove, an olive branch, a candle, broken weapons. Or look at the following website with the Adinkra symbol from West Africa for peace, which literally means 'no one should bite another' – it looks bit like our messy splat! adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra/bink.htm

Talk about: What comes to your mind when you think of 'peace'?

Key verse:

Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

1 Peter 3:10–11 (NIV)

3. Build a bridge

Using a collection of cardboard boxes and other junk, challenge family groups to work together to build a bridge over an imaginary canyon or river. Making peace is often likened to building bridges between people. A good example from the Bible is Abigail, who made herself the peacemaker bridge between her foolish husband Nabal and an angry David. You can read about this in 1 Samuel 25.

Talk about: Have you ever had to act as a peacemaker?



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Key verse:

So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God.

Matthew 5:23–24 (CEV)

4. Make a peace crane

In Japan, children write their prayers and hopes for peace on paper cranes which they have made. This is the story behind this tradition:

Sadako was a young Japanese girl, badly affected by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of World War II. She was taken to hospital for treatment. The nurses encouraged her and the other children to accept the medicines by folding for them origami figures out of small square medicine wrappers. Sadako's favourite was the crane. An old Japanese legend stated that anyone who faithfully folded 1,000 cranes would have her wish fulfilled.

Sadako began folding cranes and her wish was of course that she would recover. However, when she sensed that she was not going to get better from the effects of the radiation, she changed her wish and prayed instead for peace between the countries of the world. With every crane that she folded, she whispered, 'I will write peace on your wings and you will fly all over the world.' She had folded 664 cranes when sadly she died.

The children of Japan learned of Sadako's wish and they too began folding cranes and every year on Hiroshima day (6 August), you can see thousands of paper cranes suspended from the tower in Hiroshima Peace Park.

Here is a link to instructions about how to fold a simple crane from a square of paper: origami-fun.com/origami-crane.html

Talk about: Why is it so hard for people in the world to be at peace with one another?

Key verse:

As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace.'

Luke 19:41–42 (NIV)

5. Make a peace wall

In the German city of Cologne, there is a 'peace wall' on which anyone can express his or her concerns about war. The wall consists of over 30,000 pieces of card bearing messages written by people from all over the world and suspended on lengths of string tied to nearby lampposts. The cardboard 'bricks' carry words for peace in different languages and express concerns about and prayers for world peace.

Set up your own huge cardboard peace wall and invite everyone to add their prayers and pictures about war and peace.

Here are some words for peace in different languages: *Shanti* (in Hindi), *Shalom* (in Hebrew), *Wa* (in Chinese), *Amani* (in Swahili), *Paix* (in French), *Pace* (in Romanian), *Salaam* (in Arabic), *Mir* (in Russian), *Aman* (in Urdu).

Or maybe some might like to create poems using the letters of PEACE. For example: Pain, Enemies, Anger, Casualties, Explosions. Or: People together, can End war, and Accept difference, Care for others and be Equal.

Talk about: What for you is the secret of making and finding peace?

Key verse:

[Jesus said:] 'I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid.'

John 14:27 (CEV)

6. Turn weapons into tools

In the Old Testament, there is a promise from God that one day weapons of war will be turned into tools for peace:

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

Micah 4:2–3 (NIV)

You will need to prepare lots of chenille wires beforehand by shaping them into swords or guns. From this pile on the table, invite the families who come to reshape them into something that can be used for peaceful purposes.



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This has really happened in recent years. When the civil war came to an end in Mozambique, churches in that country ran a project which was inspired by these words from Micah; it was called 'Swords into Ploughshares'. Weapons from the civil war were given up in return for useful tools and farm machinery.

Talk about: What would you say are essential tools for peace?

Key verse:

They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Micah 4:3 (NIV)

7. An oil and water experiment

Oil and water will not mix, however hard you shake them up. Try this with some dyed water and cooking oil. Opposites can be brought together if something else is added that reacts with both. In this case, try adding in some washing-up liquid. See this link for full instructions: sciencekids.co.nz/experiments/oilandwater.html

In war, people quickly take sides and often refuse to come together to solve their differences. Christians are called like Jesus to be peacemakers who break down those differences and bring people together again.

Talk about: What sorts of things cause people to distrust and come to hate each other?

Key verse:

[Jesus said:] 'Live at peace with each other.'

Mark 9:50 (CEV)

8. Edible poppies

Use the following ideas to create various forms of edible poppies on a paper plate.

- **Fruit poppies:** surround a black grape with slices from a large strawberry as the petals.
- **Vegetable poppies:** surround a black olive with slices of tomato as petals.
- **Sweet poppies:** surround a black Liquorice Allsort with royal icing dyed red as the petals.

Talk about why poppies are used for Remembrance in western countries. The poppy is a common sight in the war cemeteries of the world and also on war memorials and in churches, particularly in the month of November. The poppy has now

become a globally recognised symbol for remembering those who have died in wars. Scarlet corn poppies grow naturally in disturbed earth across western Europe and so it is not surprising that they should have been seen in the war-ravaged fields of northern France and Belgium during and after World War I. A Canadian poet, John McCrae, picked up on this connection is his poem 'Flanders Fields' in 1915:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

This quickly led on to the poppy's being adopted as a lasting symbol for those who had been killed. The Royal British Legion adopted it for their annual Poppy Appeal in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces from 1921 onwards.

Talk about: Do you know why the poppy is used as a symbol for Remembrance?

Key verse:

God brings wars to an end all over the world. He breaks the arrows, shatters the spears, and burns the shields.

Psalms 46:9 (CEV)

9. A cooperative game

You will need five paper cups. Turn them upside down and write the five letters of PEACE on the base of the cups – one letter on each cup. Mix the cups up so the word PEACE is no longer together nor the cups next to each other. Now tie a length of string for each person in the team playing the game to one elastic band. By working together to stretch the elastic band, pick up one cup at a time and reassemble them all to spell PEACE. Players are not allowed to touch the elastic band, each other or the cups! Take it a stage further and challenge them to build a pyramid of peace with the cups.

Working for peace takes a great deal of effort and concentration by all involved!

Talk about: Why is making peace harder than making war?

Key verse:

When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice.

James 3:18 (CEV)



Messy Remembrance

10. Messy Memos

Because we are so bad at remembering things, we have devised all sorts of ways to remind ourselves of dates like appointments and birthdays, and also for remembering the mistakes we have made in the past so we don't repeat them. We use alarms on phones, knots in a handkerchief, memos, Post-it notes and books of remembrance.

Using some cheap artist's canvasses, design and decorate your own Memo boards to put up at home. Cover one with patterned paper and then criss-cross it with colourful ribbon which will provide a net into which you can put and store important photos, souvenirs or notes. Fix string to the back with glue or tape to make it possible to hang this up.

Talk about: What are your most important memories?

Key verse:

[The Lord God says:] 'I will never forget you.'
Isaiah 49:15 (CEV)

Celebration ideas

Introduce the theme of remembering war and seeking peace by exploring the different ways we can experience peace:

- Ask everyone to make as loud a noise as possible and then, at a chosen signal, bring them to silence, to be completely quiet.
 - Ask everyone to move about randomly and then, at a given signal, become completely still.
 - Ask everyone to chat away and then to go silent when you put your finger up to your lips and say 'shh!'.
 - Ask everyone to stretch and give a great sigh of relief, as if enjoying a peaceful moment at the end of a long day.
 - Ask everyone to pretend to be peacefully asleep.
 - Ask everyone in pairs to mime at being bitter enemies and then, at a given signal, to link arms and be friends at peace again.
- a) Peace comes in different forms; the peace of silence, stillness, relief and rest; most importantly for the world, there is the peace between peoples who were once enemies... Peace rather than conflict. Remembrance Day and this centenary year since the end of World War I are all about remembering the past, so that we both

give thanks for the peace we now enjoy and also remain determined not to repeat the mistakes that brought such sadness and death to so many.

- b) The gift of memory is one of the things that make human beings so special. We can store and then (we hope) retrieve experiences from all parts of our lives. We can remember. We can remember words, feelings, places and smells from long ago. It is an amazing gift and one that God has given us because God remembers and we're made like God.

What is your earliest memory?

- c) With the gift of memory comes the reality that sometimes we forget as well. Maybe that's a gift too. And that's like God! God does remember but he also chooses to forget and that's something that we can do too because we are made like him.

What is it that God remembers, and what is it that God chooses to forget? What might that say to us in this Remembrance Year, when we deliberately choose to remember the sadness of war which for most people is something that they would want to forget?

- d) How good is your memory? Play a memory game. I'm going to show you a series of pictures coming one after the other. I'll name them as well and then we'll have a champion from each side of the church to see how many can be remembered!

(You will need to print off a set of pictures of a random selection of objects for this game.)

How did you do?

- e) Some of us can train our memories; we can become brain-smart! Some of us would like to upgrade our memories as we get older in the same way you upgrade a computer's memory. Others of us need reminders, on our phones or Post-it notes or knotted handkerchiefs or whatever. Memory is very useful to us... when it works.
- f) What does God remember and what does God choose to forget?

Introduce a Bible, ideally one that looks like a book, but is really a storage box, out of which you can take the following seven objects. Alternatively, just produce the objects and place them on the Bible.



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Let's go on a journey through the Bible and see some of the ways in which God remembers and what it means for us and some of the ways God forgets and what that can mean for us too.

- **Rainbow ribbon.** The story of Noah and the ark is in Genesis 8 and it's here that we read the wonderful words 'God remembered Noah' (v. 1, NIV). Noah was in a bad place, with the world washed away and just his family and the animals on the boat. Perhaps he thought God had forgotten him. But God remembered Noah and God remembers each one of us by name and knows exactly our situation even if we think we are forgotten. The rainbow is a reminder that God will never forget us. God always remembers us.
- **A small bottle.** I wonder what might go in here. (*Take ideas.*) What about tears? In Psalm 56, David writes, 'You have stored my tears in your bottle and counted each of them' (v. 8, CEV). In other words, God knows and remembers everything that's happened to us, particularly when we were in times of trouble and despair. Elsewhere, you can read that God remembered Rachel (see Genesis 30:22-23) and Hannah (see 1 Samuel 1:19) when they couldn't have any children, and God answered their prayers. In the same book, God remembered Abraham, who was distressed that his nephew had been captured in a war, and God came to help (see Genesis 14). God remembers us in our troubles. He knows exactly what's happening to us and so we can trust that God will rescue us and come close to us when we are facing trouble.
- **A journal.** There is another special book according to the Bible: a Book of Life where God records all that happens, so he can remember us. At the end of the Old Testament, there is a lovely promise in the book of Malachi where it says, 'All those who truly respected the Lord and honoured his name started discussing these things, and when God saw what was happening, he had their names written as a reminder in his book' (Malachi 3:16, CEV).

God knows and remembers all our prayers, our hopes and our longings – all the work we have tried to do faithfully for him, even though it often goes wrong. God will keep his promise and will not rub us out of this Book of Life.

So God remembers us by name; God remembers us in trouble; and God remembers all that we have done and

so we can trust him – his mercy, his faithfulness and his promises. But what does God forget?

- **Blank paper with ink spots all over it.** God doesn't really ever forget. God can't forget because he knows everything that ever was, is and will be. When the word 'forget' is used in the Bible regarding God, it means God chooses not to remember. The big thing that he chooses not to remember is the mess we make of our lives. He says so both in the Old and New Testaments and it's in Jeremiah 31, where God says, 'I will... forget the evil things they have done' (v. 34, CEV).
- **A cross.** It's because of this – because of the cross. It's a mystery, but because of what Jesus did on the cross by dying innocently, this can put right all the injustice of the world and in our lives and it can give us a fresh start.
- **Matzo bread.** To experience this fresh start (because God forgets our sins), we need to remember; to remember what Jesus has done. He gave a very simple way of doing that as we break bread and as a way of remembering that Jesus was broken and wants to be inside each one of us. Jesus says: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19, NIV).

So God remembers our name; remembers our troubles; remembers our hard work and faithfulness; and because of the cross, God chooses not to remember all the mess we make of our lives. But there's one more mystery about remembrance.

- **Jigsaw pieces.** The word 're-member' actually means to put back together again. A member is the part of something, like a member of a club, and to re-member is to put back together – to reassemble something. So remembering is putting back together something from long ago so we can see it now in our heads as a memory.

God promises to re-member us; to put us back together again. One of the reasons for calling Messy Church 'messy' is because all of us have messy lives and because we need putting back together again. On the cross, Jesus was asked by the thief at his side to 'remember me'. In other words, to put him back together again and make him into the person he was always meant to be.



Messy Remembrance

Remembrance is a big word

In a year when we remember the cost of war so that we will not forget and therefore be determined never to do the same again; in a year when we remember people from long ago who died to give us freedom and peace; in this year, we can also think of an even bigger remembrance – God’s remembrance of us. A God who remembers our name, remembers our troubles, remembers the hard work that we have done in his name, but who also chooses not to remember our sins because of the cross, so that he can re-member us – put us back together again.

Prayer

There is a recognised international prayer for peace. It is written out below with some suggested simple actions to accompany the words. These should help everyone to remember it.

Lead me... from death to life (*hands crossed over body and then hands raised above the head*)

... from falsehood to truth (*one hand close to the mouth, suggesting a malicious whisper, and then both hands with thumbs up next to the mouth suggesting the truth*)

... from despair to hope (*one hand on the forehead in despair and then the same hand shading the eyes, looking out to the future in hope*)

... from fear to trust (*two hands by the mouth expressing terror and then both hands open in front of the body expressing trust*)

... from hate to love (*one hand raised as a fist and then two hands over the heart*)

... from war to peace. (*one hand shaped like a gun and then two hands linked by the thumbs, palms inward, creating a dove of peace*)

Let peace fill... our heart (*the hands still as the dove of peace near to the heart*)

... our world (*hands as the dove of peace making a small circle away from the heart*)

... our universe. (*hands as a dove of peace making a much larger circle away from the body*)

Suggested songs

‘Peace is flowing like a river’ (Junior Praise)

‘Let there be peace shared among us’ (Junior Praise)

‘May you find peace’ (Fischy Music)

Here are some new words to the tune of ‘Remember you’re a Womble’(!), courtesy of Humph Baker:

*When the sun doesn’t shine
And it’s cloudy and grey;
Yet it’s just the beginning
Of a very special day;
And you’ve bought yourself a poppy
For Remembrance Day...*

(Chorus)

*Remember, remember, remember, remember,
remember, remember –
Remember to be thankful (echo)
Remember to be grateful
Remember to be prayerful
Remember to be thankful.
Remember, ’member, ’member
How much Jesus loves us all.*

*When it’s sad and lonely when
Your friends are away;
And all those we have loved
Can no longer stay.
’Cos it’s time for their souls
To go to heaven to pray...*

(Chorus)

For the tune, go to: [youtube.com/watch?v=kpvZoyo4TOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpvZoyo4TOk)

Extra idea

And finally, here is a suggestion that was sent to our website for an additional ongoing activity and for the meal:

We set up a pretend air raid shelter in one area of the hall and everyone enjoyed leaving their activities and hurrying to get in the shelter whenever a siren went; they then had to wait for the ‘all clear’ before emerging to continue their craft. We finished with wartime food – corned beef hash followed by bread and butter pudding.