

Experimental June at St. Luke's

Introduction

During June 2015 St. Luke's replaced their normal 10:30am Sunday services with a series of three services all trying to do church differently. These were titled: *Messy Church* (7th June), *Multi-media Church* (14th June) and *Café Church* (21st June).

At the end of each service, those attending were asked to fill in a simple questionnaire. This asked them for to give the service a score from 1 to 10, under three headings:

- a. **Deeper:** This style of service helps me grow deeper in my faith.
- b. **Together:** It helps to strengthen my Christian relationships.
- c. **Wider:** I would be happy inviting non-churchgoing friends to this.

Where: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = about the same as a 'normal service'; 10 = strongly agree.

They were also asked what aspects of the service they thought were particularly helpful and in what ways they thought the service could be improved.

Finally, there was a question concerning how often they thought the particular style of service should be repeated:

- Never
- At another time of week. When?
- Occasionally on Sunday mornings
- Once a month on Sunday mornings
- Every Sunday morning

Introducing the Services:

Messy Church

When people arrived we asked them to wait near the entrance rather than sitting in their normal seats. They were given a card explaining what was going to happen. From 10:30-11:00am people were allowed to choose from a list of 10 activities that were scattered around the sides of the church. These varied from a chocolate fountain to poetry writing and growing cress to measuring your own height. They were all designed to illustrate some aspect of the main teaching point.

Then from 11:00-11:30am we joined together for a short All Age celebration, which included singing a dramatic reading and short children's talks as well as reading out some of the prayers that had been written on scrolls during the first part of the service.

This was the only service of the three where the children remained in the service the whole time.

Multi-Media Church

In some ways this was the most similar to a normal Sunday service with people spending all of the time sitting in pews. However, there were a number of significant changes made.

We showed a couple of Christian music videos; one before the service when the singing group normally sing a song to the congregation and one after the last talk. Instead of using the recorded music on our electronic keyboard, we played Christian music tracks downloaded from iTunes, for the congregation to sing along to. The prayers were done as a creative Powerpoint as was a poem for reflection and a video was shown that intertwined quotes from Psalm 19, with music and pictures from nature. Finally, the other main difference was that the sermon was split in three with these other elements and singing in between.

Café Church

When people arrived they were offered a coffee or tea and a bacon roll. There were also biscuits available on tables that had been set up in the chancel area to seat just under 100 people. People were then encouraged to sit at the tables, and there was a quiz for children and a quiz for adults to do as they chatted for the first 10 minutes.

People remained at the tables throughout the service. The singing, liturgy and sermon were all consistent with a normal Holy Communion service at St. Luke's. However, we also had a couple of testimonies from those who were to be confirmed in the following week and an exercise on the Bible reading for people to do on sheets before the sermon.

Key Results from the Surveys

The table below shows how many response forms we had for each service. You will see that there was a very high level of response. The percentage of adults at Messy Church doing so was 86%, Multi-Media Church was 77% and Café Church was 66%.

Number of forms by Age Group:					Attendance		
	0-18	18-50	50-70	70+	Total:	0-16	16+
Messy Church	5	17	14	6	42	24	43
Multi-media Church	6	15	17	11	49	25	56
Café Church	7	19	10	8	44	37	67
Average	6	17	13.7	8.3	45.0	28.7	55.3
% of adults:		44%	35%	21%			

Scores: Deeper, Together, Wider

Looking at the average scores from 1-10 we had the following results:

Mean Averages	Deeper	Together	Wider	Median Averages	Deeper	Together	Wider
	Messy Church	5.9	7.3		7.0	Messy Church	5
Multi-media Church	6.4	6.2	6.7	Multi-media Church	7	6	8
Café Church	6.2	7.5	7.4	Café Church	6	8	8

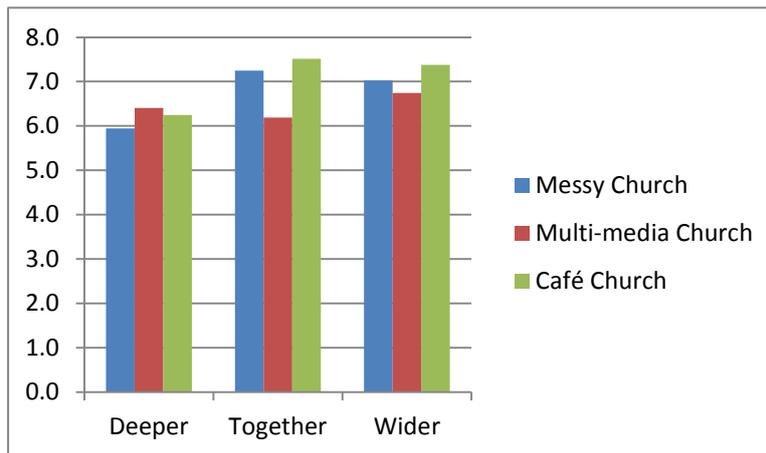


Chart showing the average scores out of 10 from the questionnaires for each service under, 'Deeper', 'Wider', Higher'

All of these questions had at least one person give a score of 10 and at least one person a score of 1 (except for Café Church, where the lowest score for 'together' was 3). To see how widespread the opinion was we can look at the standard deviation of the scores:

Standard Deviation

	Deeper	Together	Wider
Messy Church	2.5	2.3	2.6
Multi-media Church	2.7	2.8	2.9
Café Church	2.2	1.8	2.8

From this you will see that there was more of a consensus on Café Church for *deeper* and especially *together*. The biggest disagreement was whether Café Church was a good event to bring friends along to.

What can be concluded from these results? In theory people were meant to score a 5 if they thought that the service was about the same as a normal service. Taking the scores at face value would suggest that all of these services were better in all of these areas than normal. However, we need to be extremely wary about this conclusion as very few people said that we should have any of these services every week! It may well be that most people did not take the advice about 5 being the same as a normal service at all seriously when filling in the questionnaire. Perhaps since the multi-media church score for *together* was about 6 when that service had the same level of interaction as a normal Sunday service, we should take 6 as being around about the same score as would be given for a normal Sunday service.

The scores for *deeper* were all around '6' suggesting that on the whole people did not feel that these services were much better at growing your faith than a normal service. The multi-media service scored marginally better here, although there was a greater amount of disagreement on this than with the other services. It may be that some of the elements used for the multi-media service are of value to some in helping their faith grow deeper.

The scores for *together* are perhaps the most startling. As noted above you would expect the 'multi-media' service to score about the same as a normal Sunday service, but it is clear that people generally felt the other two services both helped create a better sense of togetherness than normal. Indeed, with Café Church there was the most agreement on this point.

The scores for *wider* are high for all the services and particularly for Café Church. It seems that these different style services may be a more natural event to bring friends or family along to.

Was there a different point of view for different ages? **The next page shows a breakdown of these scores into separate age groups.**

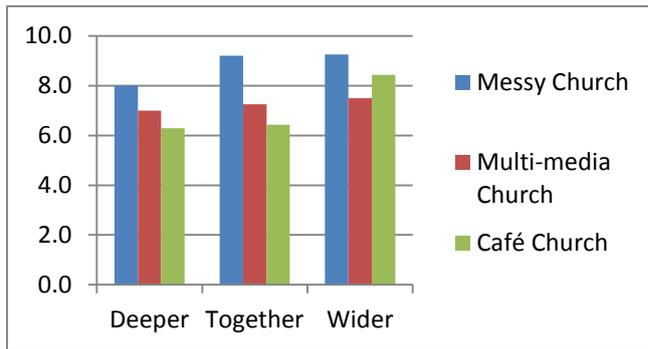
The 0-18 year olds clearly had a preference for Messy Church, but as this was the only service they were in for the whole time and it is a more child focussed service this is perhaps not that unsurprising. They also scored Café Church particularly high on *wider*.

The 18-50 year olds clearly scored highest on Café Church, especially in the categories of *together* and *wider*.

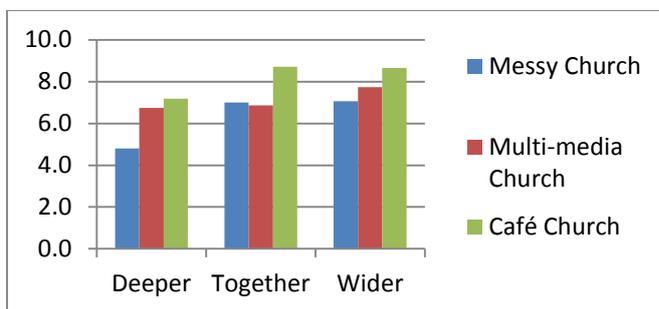
There was a less clear conclusion from the 50-70 year olds, although this group seemed to find the multi-media church most helpful when it came to going *deeper* and surprisingly scored messy church highest on going *wider*.

The 70+ year olds scored all services generally low. In particular for *wider* with no score much above 4. However, they seem to see both messy church and café church being helpful for *together* and scored Messy Church surprisingly high for *deeper*.

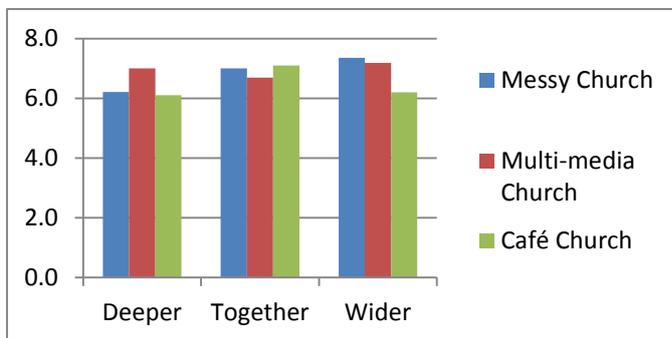
0-18 year olds.



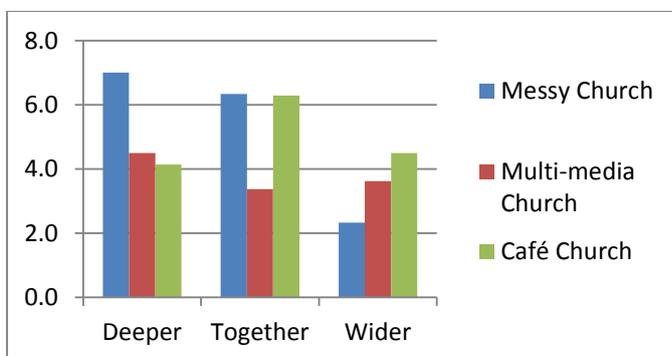
18-50 year olds



50-70 year olds



70+ year olds



What was helpful? What could be improved?

These questions provide a more qualitative response to the services. Clearly there were a wide range of views expressed, but there were some common themes.

Messy Church

Of the 42 respondents 9 particularly mentioned the activities at the start of messy church as being a positive. The under 18s tended to mention particular activities that they enjoyed most:

“bobbing for apples”

“getting an apple”

“chocolate fountain as it helped people to bond”

Whilst others liked the interactive way that the activities worked with the overall teaching:

“themed activities”

“lots of fun to do an learn”

“interactive aspect”

“How the activities relate to growth of the church and Christianity.”

“activities to teach us and the children”

6 respondents commented on the fact that this was a good style service for children:

“good for younger population”

“good for children of all ages”

“children participation”

“boys enjoyed messy church”

“I feel the children may benefit”

2 people enjoyed the change from the normal:

“nice to do something different”

“fun and different”

One person clearly enjoyed the dramatic reading in the service: “acting out the scriptures” and a couple of people enjoyed the fact that prayers written in the first part of the service were read out in the main part of the service:

“Reading out the prayers written in activity time.”

“writing prayers and having them read out”

Although one person asked, “Where are the prayers?”

There were a number of positive comments about the creativity and simplicity of the teaching:

“Creative ways of illustrating points.”

“I liked the simplicity of the message. Also visual things to hold onto - being fruitful and rooted in Jesus. Hands - togetherness. Good for all ages - can all gain together.”

“one simple message”

“children learning about God in a creative fun way”

“the explanation towards the end, to draw all the activities together”

“got to speak to people that normally rush off”

“socialising”

These comments may help to explain the relatively high score given for *deeper* by some respondents on Messy Church. Perhaps most unexpected, though, was the number of positive comments about the opportunity and space that the service provided for people to talk to each other:

- “talk one to one with everyone”
- “being able to talk at the beginning of church”
- “Able to chat to more people”
- “Able to chat to more people”
- “time during the beginning of the service to talk”
- “helpful to meet people”
- “instigated talking to others”
- “for everyone to meet each other children and adults”
- “chatting to friends”

When it came to what could be improved, a few made some positive comments:

- “no improvement needed”
- “done well - good range of activities”
- “messy church more often!”

whilst others made some basically negative comments:

- “most things”
- “I do prefer a normal service”

In the main, though the comments were constructive. A number suggested having refreshments available at the start or through the first part of the service:

- “coffee the go”
- “coffee when arriving.”
- “tea or coffee at the start”
- “Coffee to begin”
- “refreshments available all the time”

There were some comments asking for more for the adults:

- “more adult based activity”
- “it was more for the kids I think”

Others wanted improvement in the teaching:

- “more depth in sermon”
- “activity leaders to be more forthright in putting forward their message”

The most common comment for improvement, however, was that it was too short or rushed:

- “a bit longer”
- “it went too quickly. After service activities?”
- “longer time”
- “more time, too rushed”
- “needs time”
- “need time to think”

But which part was too rushed? There were two comments that conflicted in answering this question. The first wanting more time for the first part of the service and the second wanting less!

“maybe have 45 mins messy & 30 mins service”

“children not so long in church the first half”

There were a couple of unique (and possibly cryptic) responses:

“crowd control”

“calmer music”

But, more positively a couple called to better promote this style of service if done again in the future:

“advertise so more people attend”

“more people attend”

In conclusion the key themes to emerge are:

1. The interactive teaching is helpful, especially for children, but perhaps a little more needs to be provided for adults.
2. It needs to be given more time.
3. It gives people the opportunity to talk more together, but, perhaps to help this, refreshments should be provided from the start.

Multi-media Church

In response to what was helpful about multi-media church there were a couple of negative responses:

“was a bit lost as to what we should do”

“far too distracting”

However, a couple of others also enjoyed the difference:

“lovely to have a change”

“service was different to usual, loved it!!!”

There were two main aspects of the service that drew positive comments. Firstly, having the congregational singing backed up with the artists singing on their tracks was well received:

“songs made our faith stronger”

“singing more up to date songs”

“upbeat music”

“music”

“the hymns”

“children enjoyed the different music”

“worship more uplifting due to music tracks, singing along with more gusto”

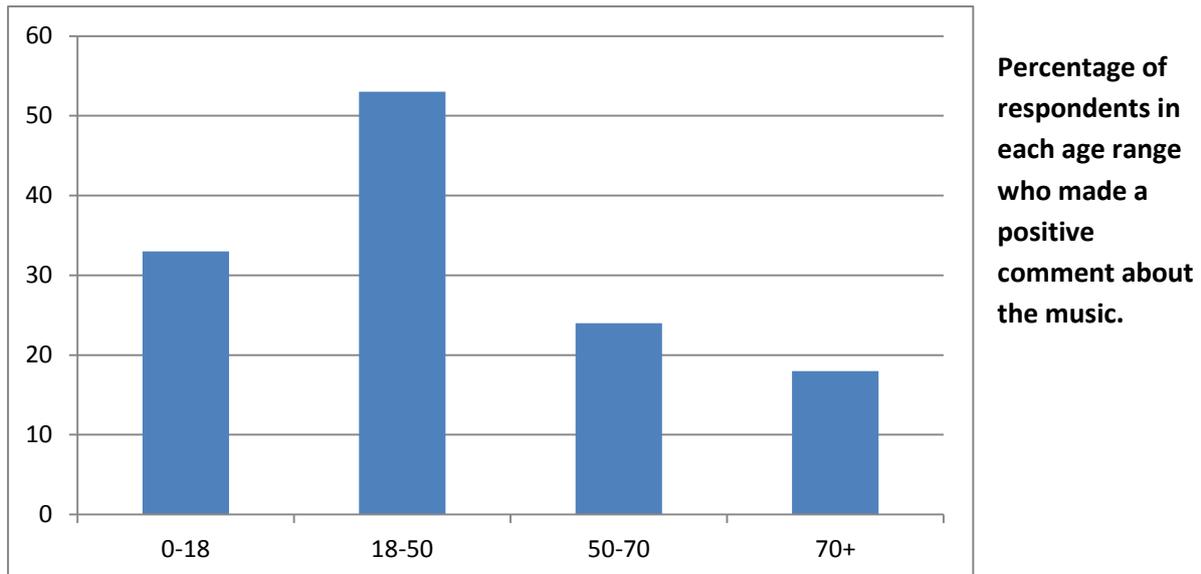
“background music”

“music & background singing playing whilst we were singing”

“I liked the songs”

“lively music”
 “music items”
 “the singing”
 “music was great!!”
 “singing was great with the back ground music”

This was a big theme with over 30% of the respondents mentioning the music in a positive light. How did this break down in terms of age categories? The chart below shows the percentage of respondents in each category that made a positive comment about the music:

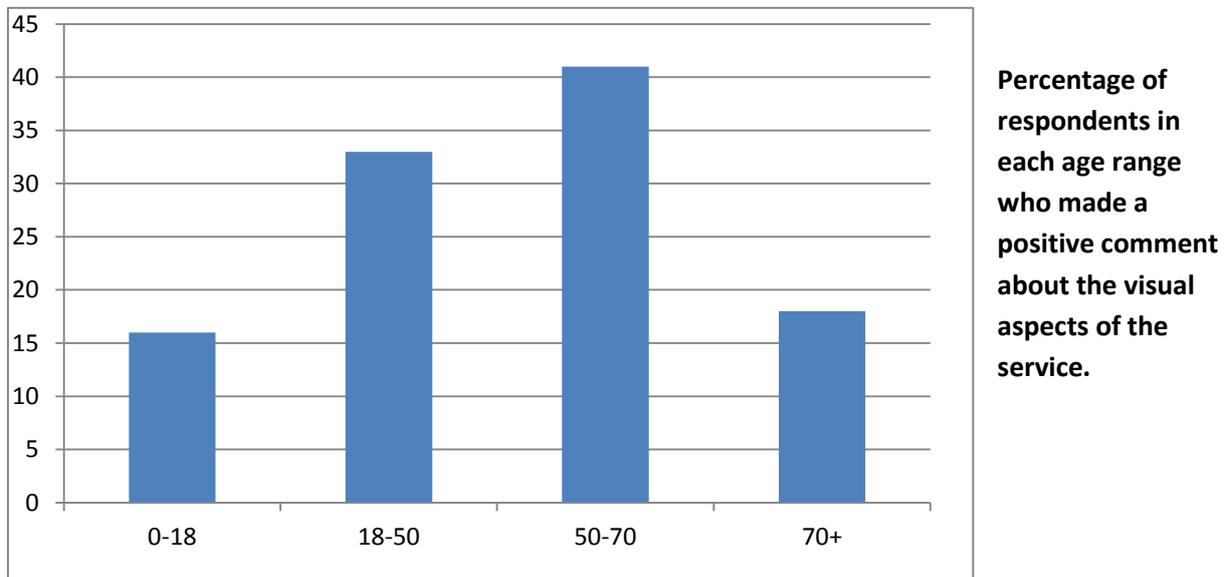


Clearly, this was felt much more strongly by the younger age range, but certainly not uniquely so!

The second set of positive comments were to do with the use of videos and presentations:

“powerpoint presentations”
 “powerpoint, something to look at”
 “the reflective period was helpful”
 “powerpoints, videos and children showing work”
 “visual aids helped focus on the points, gave an up to date feel”
 “the visual aspect”
 “more detailed power point presentation”
 “prayers, input with reading, children with instruments. Makes your thoughts more concentrated”
 “Pictures on screen helpful”
 “songs, watching them.”
 “videos a powerful way to enforce gods work”
 “videos helped illustrate talk points”
 “some well chosen video clips”
 “videos”
 “visual aids”

Again over 30% of the respondents said something positive about the visual elements of the service. When we do a similar age analysis, we have the following chart that shows the percentage of respondents in each category that made a positive comment about the visual element in the service:



Interestingly, the visual aspect seemed to be more positively responded to in the 50-70 age range.

There were also a small number of positive comments about seeing what the children had done in Sunday Club:

- “showing what the children had been doing”
- “seeing what the children had done”
- “allowing children some chance of expression”
- “children showing work”

As well as a couple of identical positive comments about the children having flags and instruments to use during the singing of the songs:

- “Children flags and instruments” (x2)

Finally, there were a few who liked the idea of breaking the sermon up into smaller chunks. With one exception these were all from the over 50s. The exception was from someone under 18.

- “Short break in sermon”
- “sermon delivered in 3 short sessions”
- “dividing the sermon into sections”
- “sermon talks encourage us in goodness”
- “the talks”

When asked what could be improved about the service, 8 out of the 49 people said, “nothing”. However, one person said they “prefer an ordinary service”, whilst another said, “parts were too mechanical” and another that there should be, “more people involved rather than "equipment"” Someone else suggested that “the heating should be on”!

Against the 15 positive comments about the music, one person requested “not to have backing singers on the tape”, whilst three people made comments about the volume levels:

- “volume checks for hearing aids, more people upfront singing playing”
- “little too loud”
- “video music too loud”

There were also some comments suggesting that there needed to be more work to improve the experience of singing along with the music tracks:

- “editing songs so service runs smoother”
- “practice make smoother”
- “musical prompts need fine tuning”
- “singing more in line with music”
- “fade out music instead of pausing”
- “a little more practice”

It is worth pointing out that for various reasons the singing group were not able to meet and practice with the new tracks that week, so there is plenty of room for improving on this!

There were a number of specific suggestions that the music videos would have been better if they had had subtitles:

- “subtitles for music videos”
- “show videos with lyrics on them”
- “subtitles with songs”
- “watch videos for all songs with subtitles”
- “words with music videos”

In conclusion the responses were very positive for this service, with two strong points coming across:

1. Singing along to music tracks along with the artist was positively received, but there needed to be some fine tuning in terms of volume levels and leading of the singing.
2. The visual elements of the service were well received, but would be improved with the addition of subtitles to the music videos.

Café Church

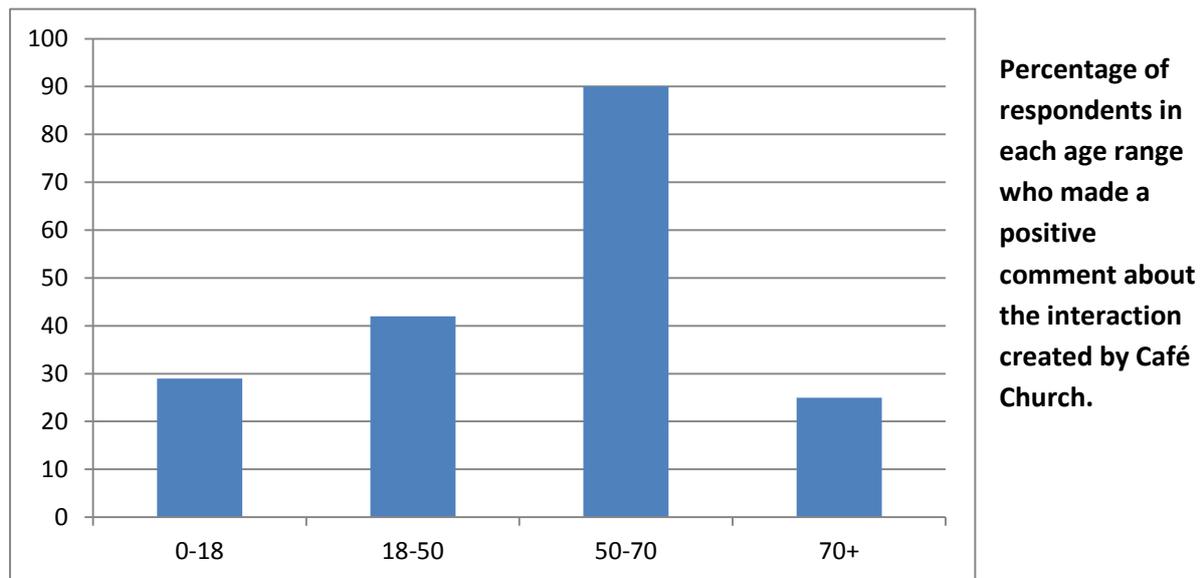
Before giving an analysis of the responses to Café Church it is worth noting that a few people stayed away, because they felt that combining café church with a communion service was inappropriate. As they stayed away their thoughts are not recorded in the feedback forms, but need to be noted here.

The responses to the question, “What aspects to this service do you think were particularly helpful?” were remarkably uniform and reflect the high score for *together* that the quantitative analysis picked up. Nearly half of the respondents mentioned the greater interaction with other church members as the main helpful feature:

- “relaxed atmosphere congregating with others”
- “congregation participation - reading and group talks”
- “the quizzes because brings us together”
- “everyone together, sitting at tables, learning together”
- “being able to mix with others”
- “sitting around tables discussions”

“time at the beginning to meet together”
 “encouraging communication between congregation”
 “intimacy and togetherness as we were closer”
 “sitting, eating and being able to chat”
 “sitting together rather than scattered around church”
 “sense of togetherness, not spread out round church”
 “fellowship”
 “more interaction between congregation”
 “Encourages conversations”
 “food, sitting at tables, relaxed, like mixing with other people”
 “the get together with everyone”
 “fellowship easier than in pews”
 “the togetherness”
 “much closer together as a Christian family”
 “meeting new people”

How does this positive response to the interaction created by café church break down into age bands? The following chart shows us:



Note that although the percentage for those in the 18-50 range is only half that of the 50-70 range, it is still 42%, which is a very high proportion choosing to make this their positive comment.

Apart from the interaction created by café church no other category of comment received more than a few responses. However, they are still worth noting.

A couple of people enjoyed the testimonies given by two of the confirmation candidates:

“individual testimonies”
 “testimonies”

One person liked the, “reading and group talks”, whilst another “the bible reading and sermon”. This probably refers to the exercise of marking up a Bible passage before hearing the sermon.

A couple of people enjoyed praying around tables:

“Praying around tables”

“individual praying at tables”

Whilst others appreciated receiving communion around tables:

“nice way to take communion”

“communion around tables”

The fact that there were activities for children was appreciated by a couple:

“colouring and games for children”

“closer to action, children more respectful”

As was the food:

“food”

“bacon and songs”

“biscuits”

“sharing food”

and the informal atmosphere:

“the informality”

“very enjoyable, relaxing”

“the quiz and café type atmosphere”

“seating format”

“relaxed atmosphere congregating with others”

In terms of what could be improved there were two key themes. Firstly, with those who did not come, but against the couple who said they enjoyed having communion at tables, there were a number who suggested not combining café church and communion:

“possibly without communion”

“not on communion”

“communion held on a different occasion”

“without communion”

“not being a communion service”

“avoid HC and end by 11.15”

This last comment also reflects the issue of timing (although I wonder if they meant 11:45am, when we normally finish a communion service). The combination of communion and café church, especially with eating at the start of the service did make it a late finish. A couple of other comments reflected concerns about this:

“timing”

“start earlier to allow time for breakfast”

Linked into this were also suggestions to improve the distribution of food:

“quicker service of bacon rolls”

“more biscuits”

“more bacon”

as well as one person who commented on the fact that they had already had breakfast:

“I want food at the beginning, I’ve had breakfast!!”

Secondly, however, the main issue of concern was the squash that was created by trying to squeeze enough seating for 100 people at tables into the chancel area:

“squashed”

“put tables somewhere else, too crowded”

“tables could be more spaced out”

“difficult to get up to sing”

“different location? More space”

“space”

“better wheelchair access”

“tables down side of church, too crowded at front”

“more space”

“too tight space”

“table chair arrangements”

“more space needed”

This was a big concern with nearly 27% of respondents mentioning it.

Finally, in contrast to the couple of people who liked the way we did the reading one person seemed to feel it was unhelpful:

“passage difficult and unhelpful”

So, what are the key points that come across with regards to Café Church:

1. There was an overwhelming sense that sitting together at tables helped to create much more good interaction between church members.
2. A significant group felt that this is best done with a non-communion service.
3. Serious thought needs to be given as to how to avoid having the tables and chairs too squashed.

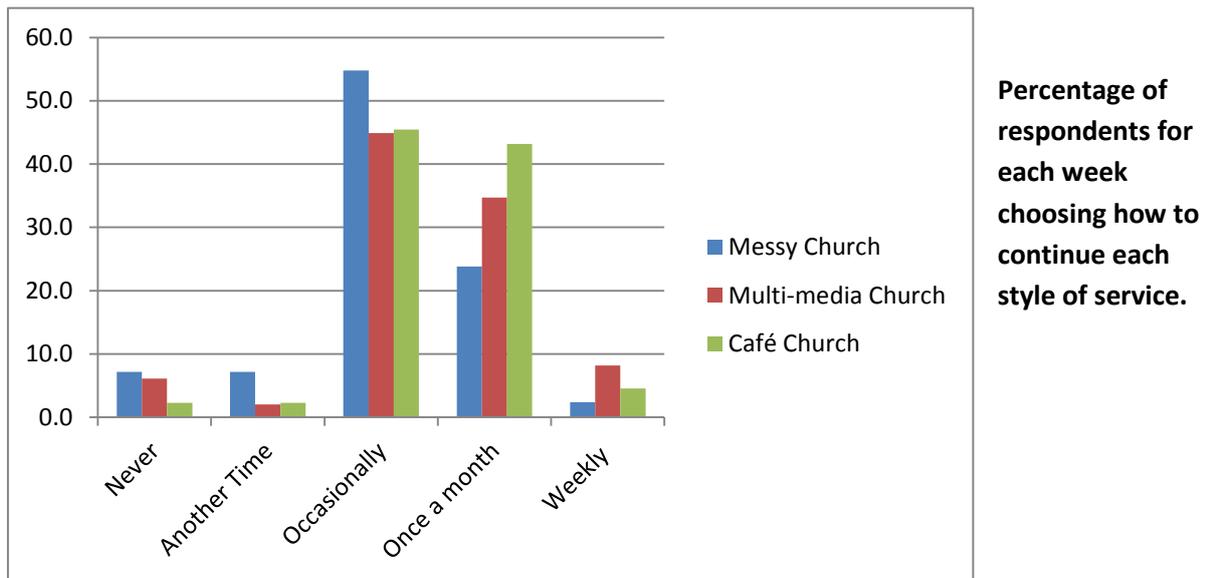
How best to continue these styles of service?

The last question on the sheet asked people to choose how it might be best to continue this style of service. Occasionally people responded with more than one answer. In this case in analysing the data I have counted it as the less frequent answer.

The % of respondents for each week choosing each suggestion is:

	Never	Another Time	Occasionally	Once a month	Weekly
Messy Church	7.1	7.1	54.8	23.8	2.4
Multi-media Church	6.1	2.0	44.9	34.7	8.2
Café Church	2.3	2.3	45.5	43.2	4.5

These figures are illustrated in this chart:



Clearly, people have answered this question fairly cautiously! No more than a few were willing to suggest that we never do a service like this again or that we should do any of them every week. Perhaps there is greatest call to have a café church more regularly, and less of a call for messy church, with multi-media church somewhere in between, but there is not a lot in it!

Review Meeting on 12th July 2015

In order to further discuss the services in the light of all this feedback we held a meeting attended by 20 members of St. Luke's on 12th July 2015. This threw up a few further issues and idea and enabled us to discuss the most appropriate way to adapt our services in the future in line with one of our aims for 2015/16: A better Sunday: To explore improving our Sunday Services.

Firstly we considered what might be gained and lost, if we switched to doing each of these services every week. It was felt that if we were to do Messy Church each week, there would be a stronger sense of 'togetherness' and we might be more effective at reaching families. On the downside we would probably not be encouraged to grow deeper in our faith and the effort to put this on every week might well create an unbearable strain on everyone! When it came to Café Church again people felt there would be a gain, particularly with togetherness and possibly with going wider if there was more space. However, they also felt we might lose out on going deeper. Multi-media

church received a number of positive comments – including a sense that some of the reflective presentations helped people to go deeper, and the better music gave people a greater sense of singing together. The music also helped to connect people with the wider church. They also felt that the use of video and more contemporary music would be more accessible and attractive for newer people. There were concerns expressed, however, that multi-media church ended up being a bit less personal.

We then considered in more detail each of the services in turn. It was suggested that if Messy Church was done on a Sunday again that it began with everyone together and a proper introduction before splitting off for the activities and that there was less time given to the activities. Also the main part of the service needed to be less rushed.

For Multi-media church, it was felt that the idea of singing along to tracks was good and should be done again as an occasional thing in a normal Sunday service. There was some discussion about involving the children at the end of the service. This was felt to be a good idea, but it needed a bit more time and to be set up a bit more clearly with the Sunday Club leaders. It was also felt that ‘video’ or ‘presentation’ elements in services should be included more regularly, possibly even videoing someone for an interview occasionally. However, trying to do all the elements in one go as we did for multi-media church felt too crowded.

When it came to Café Church people felt it would be better to let people know about the food beforehand and possibly even start at an earlier time so that food and sharing could be done in the half-hour before the service.

It was suggested that there may be a way to combine elements of Café Church and Messy Church into one service.

Finally, we discussed what might be the best pattern of services over a two month period in the future. There was a general consensus around the following points:

1. To have one ‘special service a term (two month period)’ along the lines of Café Church or Messy Church.
2. Seek to use creative multi-media as an element in services more regularly.
3. Involve the children more at the beginning of the service by encouraging them up to the front with instruments or streamers during the first hymn as well as Children’s songs.
4. Make the feedback from the children at the end of the service a more regular feature.

Conclusion

The whole process undergone for ‘experimental June’ was on the whole a positive one and engaged a wide member of church attenders in discussions about the best way to do church. The conclusions above have also given us a clear way forward as we seek to improve Church on a Sunday morning.

Paul Worledge, July 2015