



## Outdoor suggestions for July's Messy Church session: Zac's up the tree

By Jane Butler

Summer is coming and there are lots of opportunities to take your Messy Church outdoors! Here are some extra ideas to use alongside the sessions and inspiration in [Get Messy!](#) One or two activities may be all you need for an outside session.

You'll find the Messy Church Goes Wild logo [here](#) and risk assessment [here](#).

### Activity time

#### 1 Activities from Get Messy!

The following magazine activities will work well outside:

- Activity 1: how would YOU feel?
  - Collect the natural materials needed from the outside space you are using. (Please don't pick wild or planted flowers from public gardens or parks and do not break bits off living plants.) Rather than glue your face to a piece of paper, make your collage on the ground.
- Activity 2: what's your story?
  - Rather than laying a table, why not set out a picnic blanket? Provide some post-it notes for people to add their questions to picnic/camping plates. (You could also combine this with activity 10: sensory play.)
- Activity 3: instead of build a tree, climb a tree!
  - You will need: tape measure; trees to climb
  - Note: risk assess this very carefully. Check the trees for loose branches, rotten areas and sharp bits. Falling off a tree carries a high risk of injury, so this is not suitable for under-13s and those of limited mobility.
  - What to do: challenge (sensitively) participants to choose a tree to climb and see who can safely climb the highest. For those who would prefer to keep their feet on the ground,

challenge them to look for the tallest tree and estimate its height. If you have small children, then they might (be helped to) climb a parent so that they are high up and don't feel left out.

- Activity 4: kaleidoscope!
  - Make a nature kaleidoscope. You can find inspiration, ideas and instructions [online](#).
- Activity 7: exclusion/inclusion game
  - Play this outside with 'rules' that can be followed outdoors.

## 2 Changing over time

**You will need:** a tree stump or tree trunk slices

**What to do:** set out the tree trunk slices or gather around a tree stump. Explain that the rings in the trunk represent each year of growth for the tree. Challenge participants to count the rings and try to work out how old the tree was. Show them the thinner and wider rings and talk about the way that the circumstances around the tree at that time affect the way it grows – those rings tell a story. What about Zacchaeus? How did his encounter with Jesus change him? What about us? How do we grow and change over time? Take a look at some members of the group of different ages, how do we change over time?

## 3 Bug hotels

**You will need:** some cardboard (e.g. an empty cereal box); colouring pens/pencils/crayons; natural materials; bamboo; twine

**What to do:** decorate your cardboard to make it as brightly coloured as possible because many bugs are attracted to bright colours. Collect natural objects that can be rolled up inside your cardboard such as sticks, dried leaves, bark, bamboo canes, hay and little pine cones. A variety of materials is good because they provide habitats for different bugs. Roll up tightly making sure the decoration is on the outside. Tie the twine around the top and wrap it around the whole roll. Tie in a knot at the other end to secure.

These individual bug hotels can be taken home and placed in gardens – don't forget to encourage people to revisit them to see which creatures might have moved in!

If your Messy Church has access to some grounds, could you work together to build a multistorey minibeast mansion? Search the internet for larger scale bug hotel building plans (e.g. [wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org) and [woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk)) using wooden pallets, bricks and natural materials.

Talk about how Jesus went for tea at Zacchaeus' house. Jesus accepted his hospitality and Jesus was well-known for being hospitable towards others who were often excluded. Sometimes our actions make our green spaces inhospitable for the smallest inhabitants of planet earth. Creating a bug hotel is a way of showing hospitality to some of God's smallest creations. God cares for us all, no matter how small.

## Celebration

Gather together and open with a prayer. You could use this one from the Messy Adventures:



The group could use simple actions like [BSL ones](#) to go with their responses as they say them.

**In faith:** touch your forehead and bring the side of your hand down onto your other hand in a chopping action

**And hope:** cross your fingers on both hands

**And love:** cross your hands over your heart

Leader: We've come together on this patch of earth

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together under this sky

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the creatures we can see and those we can't

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the people we can see and those we can't

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: Creator God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, we've come together in your name

All: *In faith and hope and love. Amen*

Invite everyone to **share what they've enjoyed** about the activity/activities.

The celebration (including the prayer) on p. 22 of *Get Messy!* will work well outdoors.

You could finish by saying the [Lord's Prayer](#) and the [Messy Grace](#).