

Moravian Women's Association

Home and Overseas Paper - December/January 2012

Are you in the middle of your Christmas shopping, or battling with the January sales? In 2010, Jane Leadbetter, who is a Messy Church Team Member, was Christmas shopping in Liverpool.

"As I shuffled round the shops, I saw robins, snowmen, Christmas puddings, Father Christmases, snowflakes and reindeer. They were hanging, standing, lit up, wrapped in tinsel, large and small, but surely we were missing something. Where was Jesus? Why were we even shopping for presents? What is Christmas really all about? Was Liverpool city centre drifting down the Winterfest route? I was determined to bring Jesus back to the city centre for next Christmas and I had an idea."

With the local Mother's Union, she prepared a trail round the shops at Christmas time for children to follow by answering the questions on a quiz sheet.

Each participating shop had a sheep knitted by the Mothers' Union on display. Youngsters were given a leaflet which asked them to find the names of the sheep in each of the participating shops for the shepherd so that he could find his sheep to go and see baby Jesus. The leaflet also narrated the full traditional story of Christmas, and had a picture to colour in. Part of the leaflet could also be entered into a prize draw (donated by shops), and there was a special Nativity service at a Church in the city on a Saturday morning near to Christmas.

12 knitted sheep were placed in 12 stores, including Gap, John Lewis and Waterstones and from the start they caused quite a stir. Staff named them in various ways, including after their store founder or by holding in-store competitions. Some sheep 'wandered' around the store all through Advent.

God blessed the project in unexpected ways with prayer support and resources. When Jane returned in the New Year to collect the knitted sheep from the stores she realised how a humble sheep can capture people's imagination in a big way. Shop staff used health and safety excuses to stop her removing their sheep from the store. Staff cried and waved to their sheep as she left one store.

Jane said *"Who could have imagined that the anger I had experienced the previous year could turn into such joy as I realised that Jesus was baaack in town?"*

Jane's book *Messy Nativity* (**BRF** ISBN 978 0 85746 055 4 £4.99) explains how the project began and gives a step by step guide to how other Churches can organise their own Messy Nativity Advent Project, as well as the all-important knitting patterns.

Jane is a full-time Messy Church Team Member with responsibility for the north of England. She previously worked as the Church of England's Diocese of Liverpool Children's Work Adviser for 12 years.

Naomi Hancock



This article is written with permission from Jane Leadbetter.