

A Lectionary Blueprint

by Jana Norman-Richardson

The lectionary, which is a selection of Bible readings from the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, could be compared to a blueprint for a building. Sketched within the frame (the lectionary for an entire church year) are the various rooms – one for each liturgical season.

The purpose of this workshop is to demonstrate how a congregation might build from the lectionary blueprint through the year by putting the stories and concepts together. By the last Sunday after Pentecost the "structure" is complete. Like a well-proportioned house, the year's lessons stand together to provide an overall picture of the Bible, the church year, and the Christian story.

The Inviting Word resources are lectionary based. The following workshop is designed to help "lay out the plans" for year three for *The Inviting Word* congregation education leaders.

You will need:

- ! Six Bibles
- ! Colored cloths or construction paper in the following colors, if possible: green, purple, blue, white, and gold
- ! Table(s) for display areas
- ! Index cards
- ! Newsprint and marker
- ! Butcher paper
- ! Tape
- ! *The Inviting Word* poster from *The Inviting Word* catalog
- ! Small slips of paper (one for each participant)
- ! Six leader's guides (any age level)
- ! Paper and pencils or pens

Get ready

Prior to the workshop, make a learning arrangement on a table. Place colored cloths or colored construction paper on the table in the following order: purple or blue (Advent), white (Christmas), green (Epiphany), purple (Lent), white or gold (Easter), and green (Pentecost).

Using the poster from *The Inviting Word*, Year Three catalog, open the Bibles to the focus scripture for the first lesson in each season and place them on the respective colored cloth or paper. Next to the Bibles place the leader's guides open to the introduction sections for each season. Label index cards with the lesson titles and focus scripture locations and add them to the display. If you don't have colored paper or cloth, you could use green, purple, blue, gold, and black markers (black markers on white paper could be used for Epiphany and Easter) to label the index cards in seasonal colors.

Divide the slips of paper into six groups. Write one season name on all the slips in one group: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. If you anticipate fewer than six participants, label some groups with two or more seasons. Arrange chairs in a row or half-circle facing the table(s).

Greet participants

As people arrive, give them one of the paper slips and invite them to view the Bible display before moving to the seating area.

When the whole group is gathered, briefly define the lectionary as a blueprint by which we build worship services and study. Explain that *The Inviting Word* resources are lectionary based, which means that there are specific Bible readings outlined for each Sunday of the church year and that these readings are laid out in a three-year cycle.

Take a minute to talk about each season within the church year. Describe the order, the liturgical colors, and the biblical focus as noted here (for a more complete description refer to the leader's guide seasonal dividers):

Advent (liturgical color: blue or purple): Advent, which is the first season of the church year, is four Sundays long. The scripture readings for this season focus on John the Baptizer, the prophecies of the first and second coming of Christ, and on Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Christmas (liturgical color: white and/or gold): The season of Christmas is twelve days long, beginning on December 25 and ending on January 5. The scripture lessons are about the birth and early days of Jesus.

Epiphany (liturgical color: white and/or gold for the first and second Sunday of the season; green for the remaining Sundays): The season of Epiphany begins on January 6, which is the Festival of Epiphany. The scripture focus is on Jesus as he made God manifest, as the light that came into the world.

Lent (liturgical color: purple): Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts until Holy Week. All of the readings of this season focus on the ministry of Jesus as the events that led up to his trial and death.

Easter (liturgical color: white and/or gold): The Easter season begins with Easter Sunday, which follows Holy Week, and ends forty days later on the day of Ascension. All of the Easter readings are from the scriptures that describe the days after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost and the season that follows (liturgical color: green): The season following Pentecost begins on the first Sunday after Ascension with Pentecost Sunday (color: red), the next Sunday is Trinity Sunday (color: white). The season following Pentecost is the longest in the church year. The scriptures for the season deal with God active in the world of the past and present, Christian principles and beliefs, and how the stories of the Hebrew Scripture and Jesus reinforce these concepts.

Ask the group to talk about the possible benefits of using this approach for planning worship and learning experiences. Summarize their responses on the newsprint. If not previously suggested, add "flow through the Bible, the church year, and the Christian story" to the newsprint. Explain that today's workshop will highlight this flow as reflected in the focus scriptures chosen for *The Inviting Word*, year three.

Engage the Word

Show *The Inviting Word*, year three poster, noting that although the church year starts with Advent 1, *The Inviting Word*, year three begins during the season following Pentecost (in the fall since most church school years begin in September). Review the colors and names of the seasons and note how the focus scriptures relate to the seasons.

Ask participants to go to the Bible display and find the season written on their paper slips. Give each seasonal group a piece of paper and pencil or pen. Ask them to take the open Bible, the leader's guide, and the index card for their season to an area where they can work together to answer the following questions:

- ! What are some ways that the key readings relate to the season?
- ! What are some ways the key readings within this season relate to one another?
- ! What are some ways the first focus scripture introduces the season?

Suggest that one group member could read the focus scripture out loud and another talk about key points about the season from the leader's guide. Groups also may use the leader's guides to discover the key stories and concepts of their seasons. If possible during this time, refer the groups to *The Inviting Word*, year three as an overview. Highlight any special days and colors within the seasons, such as Good Friday in Lent (black).

After sufficient time, call the groups back together. Ask them to bring their responses, the Bibles, and the index cards.

If time permits, have the groups read their focus scriptures, lesson titles, and answers to the questions. (If time is limited, ask for a summary of the passage along with the lesson title and answers.) Ask the groups to report in the church year order of seasons (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost).

Review the findings

Roll out butcher paper and write the season names in order across the top, spaced fairly widely apart. Ask a member of each group to tape their index card and answer sheet onto the butcher paper under their season's heading.

Once the chart is created, discuss the observations participants have about the flow of the lessons. You might ask the following questions:

- ! What seems to determine the order of the readings within the season?
- ! In what ways do they follow the concepts and stories of the church year?
- ! In what ways do they give an overall picture of faith or the Christian story?
- ! What might people discover about God after studying and worshiping with these lessons?
- ! How might these scripture readings shape your congregation during each season?

Close with prayer

Ask the group to stand and join you in a word of prayer. You may wish to say a prayer from the heart or use the following:

Creating and sustaining God, fill us with the anticipation to receive your Word. Open our hearts to your eternal message of love, hope, compassion, and joy. Let us never stop seeking your truth. In the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

Thank the participants and invite them to move past the flow chart as they leave and note the flow of *The Inviting Word*, year three.