

Worshiping with the Christian Year

A Primer

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This primer on the Christian year was written by Rev. Howard Vanderwell, a retired Christian Reformed pastor who serves on the staff of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. He wrote this material primarily for people who know something of the Christian Year, yet have questions about it, and wonder what the benefits might be of considering it more seriously. Recognizing that those who regularly observe the Christian Year are convinced there are great faith-forming benefits for the worship life of the congregation, Vanderwell describes the Christian Year in an accessible way. As a Reformed pastor, he includes some examples from his own tradition, but the primer will be valuable to those in any Christian tradition.

Introduction

The usher brought me to my seat for worship. I'd never worshiped with this congregation before so I was interested in whatever information I could find that would prepare me. When I opened the worship bulletin the first words I read were, "The Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time." (It was July.) And I thought: "What in the world is that? What is Ordinary Time? And why is it the fourteenth Sunday of it?" I'd never heard of that kind of thing before!

While some are accustomed to observing the Christian Year, others are not. Those who are not may ask those questions today. Churches and their worship planners generally fall into one of three categories.

In some churches, worshiping with the Christian Year is very common. All their worship is scheduled by the liturgical calendar, and the readings for each week come directly from the Revised Common Lectionary, a three year cycle of scripture readings for each week of the year. In their worship planning efforts, they always know weeks ahead of time just what season they will be observing, what the theme will be, and the list of readings from which they will choose.

But others have not heard about all this. And seem not to be very interested at all. They wonder about the terminology used, the titles of the seasons, and when they hear about the Lectionary it seems like a strait-jacket to them. Worshiping with the Christian Year somehow seems ancient, foreign, and they quickly claim "it's too high church!" So, unfortunately, they resist it completely.

And in between those two scenarios are churches who have made a beginning and observe some of the liturgical seasons. But they live and plan their worship with more questions than answers. They know about Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, at least to some degree. They may use the colors of each season. But they are not sure about the background, the purpose, and the intent of each season. And they don't know what it is that links them all together. To them, the Christian Year is several special seasons, with all the other Sundays unrelated and available for whatever theme they may choose. They seem to have little idea of the overall rhythm of it all. The pastor and worship planners may personally have some knowledge of this but it never shows up publicly to shape the awareness of the congregation. And, frankly, those who do the planning aren't sure if there really are any benefits to considering it more seriously.

This material is written primarily for this third group – people who know some of the Christian Year, yet have questions about it, and wonder what the benefits might be of considering it more seriously. Those who regularly observe the Christian Year are convinced there are great faith-forming benefits for the worship life of the congregation.

Benefits

Wise and blessed is the congregation that organizes its worship according to the Christian Year. Once they do so, they discover there are many rich benefits for the congregation.

- 1.** As worship planners, they find their task is easier and their worship has a healthy rhythm. They know weeks (and months) ahead of time which season they will be observing, what the theme will be, and which passages of scripture could be in focus. As a result, musicians will have ample time to plan and rehearse their selections of music, and the planning team doesn't feel they have to start with a blank slate from week to week.
- 2.** The congregation has a safeguard against the secular and cultural calendar. While it may be interesting, and even seem relevant, to follow the pattern of Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day, and all the rest, the spiritual and formative aspects of worship can be short-changed. How much better to structure the year around the themes of salvation and the redemptive work of Christ so that spiritual themes are regularly in focus.
- 3.** Pastors will find it helpful in planning ahead for their season of preaching. While advance planning of preaching is always wise, some find it rather difficult. But when the Christian Year is in view, the pastor has guidance for designing messages months in advance. No longer is it necessary to look at an empty calendar and wonder what to preach about. Now the preacher can see the rhythm of the Christian Year and find excellent guidance in planning messages. And other worship planners, particularly musicians, will be delighted to have such a plan in hand. There are many published resources for preaching, music, and the other arts that are based on the Christian Year.
- 4.** Congregations will experience unity with the church around the world in new ways. When we are aware we are marking Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, etc. with other churches around the world, we sense our oneness.
- 5.** Faith will be formed well by worship that is built around the Christian Year. Our worship will contain deeper content. Every year will include the cycle of preparation – birth – ministry – suffering – death – resurrection – ascension – the Holy Spirit. Then we can experience worship that is Christocentric, or Christ-centered, year round; such worship will surely aid in forming deep faith.
- 6.** The sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper, will be enriched by the various seasons of the Christian Year. A service of Holy Communion doesn't have to have the same spirit/mood every time. The Lord's Supper during Advent will be marked by deep longing and anticipation. During Holy Week it will center on the agony of our suffering Savior. In Eastertide it will proclaim the victory to be celebrated. And in Pentecost season we can gather around the Table in full awareness of the dynamic work of God's Holy Spirit. Sacramental times will take on a new and richer spirit.

Christ is Central

The centrality of Christ is at the heart of our faith in all of its respects. Paul wrote to the Colossians,

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:17-20)

It is no wonder then that he wrote to the Philippians, “I want to know Christ....” (Philippians 3:10) And when we step into the revelations given to John, we see the church of all ages joining the angels around the Lamb who was slain and they proclaim, “*Worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*” (Revelation 5:12)

Wise is the church, therefore, which thirsts for worship that is centered on Christ and his work year round.

The following chart (See Exhibit A) will help us to catch a glimpse of the full range of the work of Christ for our redemption. We are shown the four phases of the existence and activity of Christ. The first column represents the activity of Christ in each phase. The second column contains some sample scripture passages where his activity is recorded. These passages are only representative; many more could be added. The third column includes some references to the historic Reformed confessions which reference each portion of Christ’s work. Finally, the fourth column indicates the observance of the Christian Year that focuses on this part of the Work of Christ.

Exhibit A

The Doctrine of Christ and the Observance of the Christian Year

Phase 1 – Christ’s Pre-Incarnation Existence

<i>Activity of Christ</i>	<i>Sample Key Passages</i>	<i>Sample Confessional References</i>	<i>Christian Year/Season</i>
Within Trinity	John 1:1-8 Philippians 2:6	Belgic Confession 8, 9 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 24-25	
Creation	Colossians 1:16		
Preparation and Prophecy	Isaiah 9:6,7 Luke 1:5-56	Belgic Confession 10,18 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 29-36 Westminster Confession VIII, 2	Advent

Phase 2 – Christ’s Incarnation and Humiliation

<i>Activity of Christ</i>	<i>Sample Key Passages</i>	<i>Sample Confessional References</i>	<i>Christian Year/Season</i>
Birth	Luke 2:1-21	Belgic Confession 18, 19 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 35-36 Westminster Confession VIII, 3	Christmas
Early Years with Baptism and Transfiguration	Matthew 2:1-23 Matthew 3:13-17 Luke 2:39-52 Matthew 17:1-13	Belgic Confession 19	Epiphany
Public Ministry	Matthew 3-20 Mark 1-10 Luke 4-19 John 1-11		
Formal Presentation of Christ to Israel	Matthew 21 Mark 11 Luke 19 John 12		Passion/ Palm Sunday
Suffering, Death and Burial	Matthew 24-27 Mark 12-15 Luke 20-23 John 13-19 Philippians 2:7,8	Belgic Confession 20, 21 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 37-44 Canons of Dordt II, 2-5, 8 Westminster Confession VIII, 4 Westminster Confession XV, 1-6	Ash Wednesday Lent Maundy Thursday Good Friday

Phase 3 – Christ’s Exaltation

<i>Activity of Christ</i>	<i>Sample Key Passages</i>	<i>Sample Confessional References</i>	<i>Christian Year/Season</i>
Resurrection	Matthew 28 Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20	Heidelberg Catechism Q. 45 Westminster Confession VIII, 4-5, 8 Westminster Confession XIII, 3	Christmas
Post-Resurrection Appearances	Matthew 28 Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20-21 I Corinthians 15:1-11		Epiphany
Ascension	Mark 16:19,20 Luke 24:50-53 Acts 1:6-11	Belgic Confession 26 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 46-52	
Sending of the Holy Spirit	John 15:16 John 16:5-16 Acts 2:29-36	Belgic Confession 11 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 49, 51, 53 Canons of Dordt III/IV, 51, 53	Passion/ Palm Sunday

Reign of Christ	Philippians 2:9-11 Colossians 1:15-20	Belgic Confession 26, 37 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 50-52 Westminster Confession VIII, 7-8 Westminster Confession XX, 4 Westminster Confession XXXIII, 1-3	Ash Wednesday Lent Maundy Thursday Good Friday
Union with the Believer	John 15:1-17 Romans 6	Belgic Confession 24 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 32 Canons of Dordt V, 1-15	

Phase 4 – Christ’s Parousia/Return

<i>Activity of Christ</i>	<i>Sample Key Passages</i>	<i>Sample Confessional References</i>	<i>Christian Year/Season</i>
Appearance	Matthew 24:30-31 Matthew 25:30 I Thessalonians 4:13-14	Belgic Confession 37 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 52, 57	
Judgment Day	Matthew 25:31-45 Luke 21:5-38	Belgic Confession 37 Heidelberg Catechism Q. 52	
Eternal Reign	Philippians 2:9-11 Revelation 5 Revelation 19	Heidelberg Catechism Q. 58	

Each worship planning team will consider how to integrate these observances into their worship services, but for now it is important to note how closely the Christian Year is patterned after the work and ministry of Christ in our salvation.

Key Seasons

It is helpful to identify the key seasons that are generally associated with the Christian Year. Some of these are well-known and understood. Some are fairly unfamiliar. The descriptions of these seasons are taken from *The Worship Sourcebook* (TWS, 2nd edition, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources, Baker Books, 2013). If your congregation has become comfortable with the Christian Year, they will likely be aware of this information. However, if you are in the process of teaching your congregation more about the Christian Year, having these descriptions in mind is vitally important. (Exhibit B at the end summarizes this information as a teaching tool for the use of worship planners.)

Advent (four Sundays before Christmas Day)

“The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God’s actions—past, present, and future. In Advent we hear the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming as communications to us—people who wait for the second coming. In Advent we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way Advent highlights for us the larger story of God’s redemptive plan.”

"A deliberate tension must be built into our practice of the Advent season. Christ has come, and yet not all things have reached completion. While we remember Israel's waiting and hoping and we give thanks for Christ's birth, we also anticipate his second coming at the end of time. For this reason Advent began as a penitential season, a time for discipline and intentional repentance in the confident expectation and hope of Christ's coming again." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 427)

Christmas (December 25, often the twelve days of Christmas through January 6)

"At Christmas, we remember and celebrate the nativity of Christ and the mystery of the incarnation. Whereas during Advent we anticipate the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, at Christmas we identify with the angels who proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest"; with the shepherds, who were afraid but nevertheless offered worship; and with Mary, who pondered the meaning of these events in her heart (Luke 2:13-20)." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 471)

Epiphany (January 6, often celebrated as a season up to the beginning of Lent)

"Often the content of our Christmas celebration is shaped by what we do with the weeks following Christmas. Churches that observe Christmas as a stand-alone event may find it difficult to get past the sentimentality of being a cute, mild-natured baby in the manger. But the incarnation involves much more than the drama of Christmas itself; it brings a vision of God's glory to the nations of the world.

"Our word epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning 'manifestation or appearance,' and in church history this word has become closely associated with the revelation of Christ in connection with the visit of the Magi. Epiphany has been observed throughout much of the Western church as occurring on January 6, but because most churches do not mark Epiphany with a midweek service, the celebration of this special day is often associated with the nearest Sunday. In recent years many churches have worked to recover a full celebration that begins at Christmas and ends at Epiphany twelve days later.

"In the traditional celebration of the Christian Year, the Sundays after Epiphany do not constitute a special season in the same way as do Advent and Lent. However, some congregations do celebrate this period as 'Epiphany season,' focusing on the teaching and healing ministry of Christ." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 499)

Lent (Generally six weeks before Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, and ending at sunset on Thursday of Holy Week)

"The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are at the heart of the Christian gospel, and Good Friday and Easter are two of the most significant celebrations of the Christian Year. Lent is a season of preparation and repentance during which we anticipate Good Friday and Easter. Just as we carefully prepare for big events in our personal lives, such as a wedding or commencement, Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus' passion and celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

"The practice of a forty-day preparation period began in the Christian church during the third and fourth centuries. The number forty carries biblical significance based on the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness and Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness. The forty days of Lent begin on Ash Wednesday and continue through holy week, not counting Sundays (which are reserved for celebratory worship). In practice, many congregations choose to focus Sunday worship on the themes of repentance and renewal." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 557)

Easter (Easter Sunday)

"All the hopes and expectations of Christians are realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, making Easter the most celebrative day of the church year."

"Some traditions begin their Easter celebration with an Easter Vigil service, either late Saturday evening or very early Sunday morning. The vigil recapitulates the biblical theme of redemption history through readings, helping worshipers see the powerful sweep of God's actions throughout history. In this way it provides the entrance into Easter."

"The Easter morning service is a time of joy, celebration, and renewal. Even churches that do not customarily follow the church year celebrate this day as the culmination of all that the gospel is about." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 631)

Eastertide (Fifty days after Easter, including Ascension Day, ending on Pentecost Sunday)

"Because the good news of Easter can hardly be contained in a single day's celebration, Easter is only the first of fifty days of Eastertide, the "Great Fifty Days" that lead up to Pentecost. This season is designed for extended celebration, for exploring the ramifications of Easter for the redemption of all creation, and for joyful Christian living." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 632)

Pentecost (Pentecost Sunday, 50 days after Easter)

"Ten days after the ascension of Christ and fifty days after his resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was an established Jewish festival also known as the Feast of Weeks, which drew people from many nations back to Jerusalem (Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:16).

"Pentecost symbolizes a new beginning. It celebrates the unleashing of the Holy Spirit on the world and the empowering of the church to reach the world with the gospel. In celebrating Pentecost, the church expresses its gratitude for the faithfulness of Christ in fulfilling his promise to send "another counselor" (John 14:16); celebrates the work of the Spirit in renewing all of creation; professes its confidence and security in knowing the Spirit's power is available for its mission; and grows in awareness of the immensity of its calling to reach the world with the gospel." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 693)

All of the Christian Year is built on these seven pillars. Even a quick glance through them makes it very clear how the redemptive work of Christ shapes the entire worshiping year.

Ordinary/Growing Time

In addition to the seven pillars of key seasons, the Christian Year, as practiced in many churches, includes some other times that are not connected to the Christmas and Easter cycles.

Ordinary Time (sometimes called Growing Time) can be found in two locations on the calendar – one shorter, the other longer. The first and shorter one is formed by those Sundays between the end of Epiphany and the beginning of Lent, linking the two. The longer one is located between the end of Pentecost Day (if not celebrated as a season) and the beginning of Advent, providing linkage that leads to the beginning of the

entire cycle again. This latter is the longest period of all the Church Year, encompassing, at times, up to six months. The intent in these weeks is to focus on the impact of Christ's ministry and work on our lives, and to encourage us in the life of discipleship to which he calls us and for which the Spirit empowers us. What this means is that we spend nearly six months dealing with many dimensions of sanctification after we have focused on the entire ministry of Christ and have marked the entrance of the Holy Spirit to carry on his work in our hearts.

We find that some churches also observe three other special Sundays.

- Trinity Sunday "...focuses explicitly on the mystery, power, and beauty of the Triune God." (TWS, 2nd edition, p. 719) Churches that mark this often do so the Sunday after Pentecost Sunday.
- The Unity of the Church Sunday will focus on the world-wide oneness of the church to counter the fracturing of the body of Christ today. Though there is no specific day on the calendar designated Unity of the Church Sunday, two possibilities are most likely. Pentecost Sunday is one such possibility, when the power of the Holy Spirit draws all people together in Christ, and the solidarity of oneness in Christ is in view. World Communion Sunday, normally in October, is another and aims to draw the world-wide body of Christ to the Lord's Table as a testimony of oneness.
- Christ the King Sunday is usually scheduled at the conclusion of the Church Year, just before Advent begins again. This Sunday places the emphasis on Christ's cosmic reign over the world, his call to all to bow before him, and his call to his Church for devoted Christian living.

An Annual Cycle

If you have followed all this carefully, then you will recognize that we are looking at an annual cycle that begins with Advent, moves through Pentecost, and for the remainder of the year is Ordinary or Growing Time. At that point the cycle begins again.

A congregation of worshipers will be richly blessed in covering the entire life and ministry of Christ during each calendar year. We can be assured, then, that our worship is thoroughly Christocentric! This congregation will worship around a balanced diet of preparation, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. We are assured that none of these phases will be overlooked or short-changed. In such a congregation, the beginning of a new year is located at the beginning of Advent, four weeks before Christmas, and ends with Christ the King Sunday a year later. The cycle can be visualized as you find it in Exhibit C below.

For these reasons many congregations today which have not previously observed the Christian Year are finding it wise and resourceful to do so, and discovering blessings they had not anticipated.

Implications for Worship Planners & Preachers

Preachers usually find the Christian Year to be a useful tool in planning their preaching schedule. Though many preachers find it difficult to plan as far ahead as their musicians and worship planners wish they would, the Christian Year provides the structure and direction that aids them. The scripture passages listed in the *Revised Common Lectionary* (including an Old Testament passage, a psalm, a reading from the Epistles, and one from the Gospel for each Sunday) provide further help in planning the service. (For more information see <http://www.commontexts.org/>)

With a commitment to consider the entire life and ministry of Christ each year, the preacher is freed from the fear of overemphasizing some truths and neglecting others. She/he is sure to cover all the major truths of Christology which the gospel includes. And when it's time to plan a preaching season, the preacher can set out eight blocks in a schedule sheet. Though they will be of widely different lengths, the blocks can easily identify separate seasons that each requires its own theme:

1. Advent – the season of anticipation.
2. Christmas – the day or season of celebration.
3. Epiphany – the day or season of Christ's manifestation.
4. Lent – the season of preparation for Christ's suffering and death.
5. Easter – the day of celebration.
6. Eastertide – the season of marking the reign of Christ.
7. Pentecost – the day or season focusing on the Spirit's work.
8. Ordinary/Growing Time – the time for growth in discipleship.

As preachers and worship planners enter their work of planning, they are wise to identify clearly such matters as the theme for each season expressed in one succinct statement, the theme of sermon series that will be scheduled for each season, special events that will take place, and the elements of music ministry that are to be included. We find then that our planning work readily takes shape when the seasons are before us.

These charts for each season should remain in the planning materials for each member of the staff and planning team for the entire year. At any given moment, each member of the planning team can catch a clear view of the overall scheme of God's acts throughout the year.

Teaching a Congregation to Love the Christian Year

It's one thing for the preacher and for the planning team to be committed to the Christian Year; but it's quite another thing for the members of the congregation to understand it all and find their worship enriched by it. Worshipers who have been raised in a congregation that has always followed the Christian Year will generally begin with a good understanding of the different seasons. They have experienced them annually; they've heard them explained; they have seen the colors change; and they expect that worship will reflect the Christian Year. However, worshipers who have grown up in a church that did not practice the Christian Year, or perhaps were not raised in any church, may find it all very puzzling. With such folks the church has a large educational task; however, it will have to be done incrementally. They won't learn, love, and find comfort with the Christian Year in the first twelve months! A wise pastor and worship planning team will find ways to gradually increase their understanding and appreciation for the nuances of the Christian Year.

We suggest that some of the following efforts may be helpful:

- 1. Thoughtful explanations.** At the beginning of each season, provide an explanation of the new season, its purpose and theme, and what they can expect to find. Perhaps the worship leader can do this during the liturgy, or the pastor can make a brief explanation as he or she begins the first sermon of the new season. But the changing of the colors in the worship space will immediately communicate that a new season has begun. An explanation in the church bulletin or newsletter will be helpful.
- 2. Consider the children.** Teaching and informing children makes a healthy investment in future worshipers. Young children are generally quicker to sense and accept the importance of the seasons. In their classes, or children's worship sessions, they can be informed of what to look for and what it means. Many churches, in their Children and Worship program, have a wooden "clock" with liturgical colors and a "dial" which can be moved forward one week, forming them at an early age to know the seasons and the colors. When the pastor has a children's message, the children can be told to look for the new colors that they see.
- 3. Visuals in the worship space.** Different colors, of course, are associated with each season. (For information on this see <http://www.crivoice.org/colorsof.html>) The worship space will be marked by these colors and as they change, a signal will be given that we enter a new season. Other visuals are necessary too, which depict the themes of each season – candles, lights, star, manger, cross, etc. all will serve as reminders for the meaning of this new season. See Exhibit B for the colors.
- 4. Patterns of liturgy.** Some congregations will open each service in Advent with the same Call to Worship, song, or greeting. The same pattern of confession and assurance may continue through the Lenten season. Repeated affirmations of Christ's victory will reinforce the message of Eastertide. Bright red, the color of Pentecost, will remind each worshiper of the work of the Holy Spirit. Many variations can be used, but patterns which are repeated aid worshipers in understanding the seasons.
- 5. Seasonal scripture readings.** Sometimes churches include too few scripture readings in favor of other worship elements. The posture of worshipers can also reinforce this awareness, such as standing for the Gospel reading in Advent and/or Lent. Worship will be fed well in a congregation in which multiple scripture passages are read in each service, and where those passages reflect the theme of the season. Following, or at least consulting, the Revised Common Lectionary will be a valuable help to preachers and worship leaders. When the Word of God speaks clearly about the theme of the season, worshipers will be healthily formed.
- 6. Educational efforts.** Most congregations hold instructional classes for children, youth and new members. While it is vitally important that key Christian truths are taught well, it is also crucial that the truths about Christian Worship are taught. And when the truths about worship are taught, the cycle of the Christian Year can be part of it. In this way each generation will be formed by a thoughtful understanding of the Christian Year. Such a setting allows the pastor or worship leader to provide a greater explanation, and to answer questions that arise in the minds of parishioners.
- 7. Study sessions.** Elders, Worship Committee members, and Worship Planning Teams are most directly responsible for the worship life of the congregation. A congregation will be served well, therefore, if one or more of these groups are involved regularly in a short time of study of worship and the seasons of the Christian Year. How beneficial for a meeting to begin with 20-30 minutes of study and discussion about the Christian Year and how it celebrates the whole ministry of Christ! The Worship Sourcebook includes a teaching section with each season that can easily be copied and used as a basis for study, if you own the book which comes with a CD version.

An annual observance of the rhythm of the life and ministry of Christ through the Christian Year will enrich the congregation and aid in forming their faith.

Exhibit B

The Christian Year at a Glance

<i>Season</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Emphasis</i>	<i>Message</i>	<i>Colors</i>
Advent	The four Sundays before Christmas day.	Readiness through a patient waiting for the coming of Christ — in Bethlehem, in our hearts, and at the end of history.	We examine and prepare our hearts, that we may be renewed in repentance, patience, and anticipation to welcome the coming of Christ.	Purple or Blue
Christmas	December 25, or through January 5	The prophecies have been fulfilled; the Messiah is born; the Savior of the world has arrived.	Express your joy, give thanks to God, and embrace God's presence in Jesus Christ.	White or Gold
Epiphany	January 6, or the season until Lent (see below)	The manifestation of Jesus as the Savior, to the Jews and to the whole world.	We welcome Jesus as the light of God, and his manifestation to the world.	White
After Epiphany (Ordinary Time)	The period after January 6 until the beginning of Lent.	A journey with Christ in his ministry as he manifests himself as the Son of God.	Growing with a new commitment to display the life of Christ through our own witness.	Green
Lent	Begins on Ash Wednesday, six and a half weeks before Easter — includes Palm Sunday and ends at sunset on Maundy Thursday.	A time to travel with Christ through his suffering and preparation for death; though under attack, he continues to the cross.	A time for self-examination, repentance, and renewal through our identification with the journey of Jesus. Often a time for prayer, meditation, fasting, and almsgiving.	Purple or Blue
The Great Triduum	"The three great days" — includes the period beginning on Maundy Thursday evening and continuing through Easter.	The most critical time in the history of salvation. The church recalls in its worship the events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Paschal Vigil of Saturday.	These "three great days" are a time for fasting and prayer, reflection on the suffering and death of Jesus, and a commitment to live in the pattern of his death and resurrection.	Purple or Blue (or Red as an alternative for Holy Week)
Easter	Easter Sunday	The most crucial event of the Christian Year! A celebration of the great saving event of Jesus' resurrection, giving victory over sin and death.	We celebrate Jesus' victory and are called to Christian spirituality of dying to sin and rising to the life of the Spirit.	White or Gold

Eastertide	Extends for fifty days after Easter, includes Ascension Day and ends on Pentecost.	The continued ministry of Christ after his resurrection gives credence to his resurrection and ascension, and is a time for us to reflect on his reign as the Sovereign Lord.	We reflect on the implications of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and commit ourselves to live as those who are "risen with Christ", living under his reign.	White or Gold
Pentecost	Pentecost Sunday, 50 days after Easter, or the season (see below)	The powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church for witness and service.	We are called to walk with the Spirit and participate in the growth and spread of the Christian Church in the world.	Red
After Pentecost (Ordinary Time) (Growing time)	From Pentecost Sunday to the beginning of Advent — about a six-month period — ending on Christ the King Sunday.	Through the finished work of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Christ enters the world with the Gospel and experiences both growth and trials.	We embrace the teachings of the church, dig deeper into the truths of God's saving events in history, and grow in our obedience and service.	Green
Christ the King Sunday	The last Sunday before the beginning of Advent.	It points to the ultimate reign of Christ over all peoples and nations of the world.	We are to bow before Christ as the cosmic Lord of history and invite him to take up residence in our hearts and lives.	White or Gold

Adapted from *Ancient-Future Time* by Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), by Howard Vanderwell and Norma deWaal Malefyt, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Exhibit C *The Christian Year Cycle*

