

ORDINARY TIME

What is Ordinary Time?

The highest days and holidays of the Church Year, Christmas and Easter, are preceded by times of preparation, Advent and Lent, and followed by further celebration, Epiphany and the Sundays of Easter.

We love weekends and birthdays, high days and holidays, festivals and parties. But it would be impossible to sustain such heights throughout the year. We need the green and growing season of Ordinary Time to make the most of the celebration, just as we need weekdays to work and weekends to relax and have fun.

There are two periods of Ordinary Time in our Church calendar. One is after Candlemas (also called the Presentation of Christ in the Temple), which marks the end of Christmas and the Incarnation cycle. This season of Ordinary Time can be as short as one Sunday, depending on when Easter is, and therefore when Lent starts. The second is after the Day of Pentecost: Ordinary Time begins again, but this time it lasts for months, right up until November when we remember All Saints and then start to prepare for Advent.

Ordinary Time before Lent

If there are as many as five Sundays before Lent, the first three have no particular theme. The Second Sunday before Lent has a creation theme in the appointed readings, collect and post communion prayer. The Sunday next before Lent focuses on the Transfiguration, and is the last bit of green and growing time until early summer.

Ordinary Time after Trinity

If Ordinary Time after Easter goes on for so many weeks, is it boring? Well, it's not all green! Of course all Sundays reflect the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, even in Ordinary Time. But some Sundays are marked out as particularly special.

Trinity Sunday

The first Sunday of Ordinary Time is Trinity Sunday, which provides a particular occasion to reflect on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our worship reflects the faithful and unchanging nature of God, his holiness and the mystery of his being. It is often the Sunday that preachers avoid, because the Trinity is such a difficult concept to understand without recourse to shamrock leaves and eggs! Nevertheless it is an excellent opportunity to explore the faith and additional ideas for sermons and other worship resources can be found quite easily on the internet, especially for all-age services.

Festivals

Festivals falling on Sundays, or transferred from another day of the week, include saints' days, and other celebrations like Corpus Christi (the day of thanksgiving for the institution of Holy Communion) and Bible Sunday (usually the last Sunday after Trinity). There may also be local celebrations like a Dedication Festival or Harvest Thanksgiving, and flower festivals and church fairs. In fact, if you wanted to, you could probably find something different to celebrate every Sunday of the year!

Ordinary but Special

If the Church thinks that marking time is important, so important that we have our own calendar and colours, readings and set prayers

to help us journey through it, then Ordinary Time is as holy as seasonal time. And although we love to celebrate the festivals, they would not be special unless we had the contrast of marking and experiencing the everyday, the Ordinary Time.

- ? With so many special Sundays promoted (Education Sunday and Sea Sunday to name but two) how do we choose which to mark in our services? Are there any which are particularly relevant in our community?

The Lectionary

The *Common Worship* lectionary gives us our Sunday and weekday readings, and helps us move from one season to the next. It is the map that helps us navigate the Christian story, so that we don't miss parts of the Bible out. Our lectionary is based on the one used by other Christian denominations, and especially in Ordinary Time it is likely that the reading we are using in church on Sunday is the same as the one they are using in the Roman Catholic and maybe the Methodist church down the road.

Two sets of readings are included in the lectionary for Ordinary Time after Trinity, continuous and related. 'Continuous' readings give an Old Testament reading and Psalm that are entirely independent of the New Testament and Gospel readings. The 'related' readings try to link the Old Testament, Psalm and Gospel, although in some cases it can be a challenge to find the reasoning for relating them! Only one system should be used in any one year.

- ? Might your church use the 'continuous' readings and grab the chance to have a sermon series on some Old Testament stories?

Creating your own lectionary

Although there is lectionary provision for Ordinary Time, following the set readings is optional at this time of year. Some churches use their own scheme of readings in Ordinary Time, allowing congregations to concentrate on a particular theme or book of the Bible, or a pertinent issue for them.

It might, for example, be an opportunity to preach on the Church Year or the Eucharist, using leaflets from the Durham Diocesan Liturgical Committee.

New Patterns for Worship includes 46 other sample modules of readings. These are cycles of readings, each 3 to 8 weeks long, following themes or books of the Bible. Preaching a sermon series on hymns would be an interesting project, and other ideas for modules can be found on the internet.

- ? What themes could be followed in your church during Ordinary Time?

All-age Worship

Ordinary Time is a green and growing season – we use green for the Church colours in vestments and hangings, and maybe even for banners and service booklets. If your church uses Godly Play, you may have changed the colours beneath the Holy Family to reflect that. Children often recognise change instinctively, but the changing colours are an ideal opportunity for teaching about the Church Year.

It may also be that Junior Church or Sunday School does not run through the holidays, and this means more all-age services. This could be an ideal time to experiment with new ways of communicating. Although each service takes much more planning, they can involve more

people and give some responsibility for the service to the children and young people.

Perhaps several people might give sermons in interactive form, or take part in an interview; drama could be used; the congregation might try using prayer stations or a labyrinth. Music can also be used creatively – there may be teenagers in the congregation who would be willing and able to lead the worship of the church one Sunday.

- ? Who could be a 'new voice' in your Ordinary Time services?

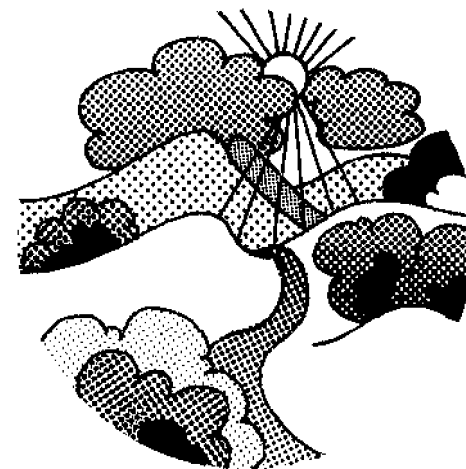
Godly Play lends itself perfectly to Ordinary Time, with its three components of Sacred Stories, Parables and Liturgical Stories. Based on a careful telling of scriptural stories, and using figures and creative activities, it invites us to wonder and find our own answers to questions of faith. Resources are available from the North East Learning Resources Centre. Godly Play North regularly holds introductory and training courses in the region.

You could try experimenting with musical settings for the Psalms or learning a new setting for the Eucharist. There are resources in Carter House, and on the web. Musical help can be sought from the Music Wing of the Diocesan Liturgical Committee.

Resources

See the resources leaflet in this series. In addition resources for celebrations like Harvest and saints' days can be found in *Times and Seasons*, or from any specific organisation hoping to elicit support, prayer and funds, or from the internet. But choose resources from the web with care – there is some awful material there, as well as some gems.

The Christian Year



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