

The Revised Common Lectionary

Consultation on Common Texts

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) was published in 1992 by the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT), a forum for consultation on worship renewal among many Christian churches in the United States and Canada. This lectionary for Sundays and festivals is a revision of the CCT's first lectionary proposal, the Common Lectionary (1983), based on two three-year cycles of testing and extensive feedback from the churches.

For additional information on the RCL, see commontexts.org. Consult *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005) for brief reading descriptors and complete indexes to both the Sunday/festival and daily reading citations.

This document contains the introduction and interpretive material from the printed text of *The Revised Common Lectionary* (1992). The RCL tables of readings for years A, B, and C are posted in separate documents on the commontexts.org site. Errata from the printed edition are corrected in these documents.

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INTRODUCTION

I. What Is a Lectionary?

1. A lectionary is a collection of readings or selections from the Scriptures, arranged and intended for proclamation during the worship of the People of God.
2. Lectionaries (tables of readings) were known and used in the fourth century, where major churches arranged the Scripture readings according to a schedule which follows the calendar of the church's year. Early lectionaries usually involved continuous reading, with each Sunday's texts picking up where they left off on the previous Sunday. This practice of assigning particular readings to each Sunday and festival has continued down through the history of the Christian Church. A constant pattern, however, seems to be that the later additions of special days and feasts tended to obscure the simplicity of the original Sunday texts, so that after every few centuries, the calendar needed to be simplified and pruned in order to manifest its earlier clarity.
3. Important examples of lectionaries are the Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* of 1969, the *Common Lectionary* of 1983, and the *Revised Common Lectionary* of 1992. The two versions of the Common Lectionary are based on and derived from the Lectionary for Mass.

Types of lectionaries

4. Lectionaries come in two basic forms:
 - a. *A simple table of readings*, which gives the liturgical day or date, and the Scripture references for the texts to be proclaimed. In this case, readings are usually proclaimed from a pulpit Bible. The Revised Common Lectionary is a modern example of such a table.
 - b. *A full-text edition*, which fleshes out the references by reprinting the specific texts from a particular translation of the Bible. Examples of this are the Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*, containing the Sunday and weekday texts, and the lectionary books of the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist Churches in the United States and Canada.

II. How to Use a Lectionary

5. A lectionary may be used in several ways:
 - a. To provide whole churches or denominations with a uniform and common pattern of biblical proclamation.

- b. As a guide for clergy, preachers, church members, musicians, and Sunday school teachers, that shows them which texts are to be read on a given Sunday.
 - c. As a guide and resource for clergy from different local churches who wish to work and pray together as they share their resources and insights while preparing for their preaching.
 - d. As a resource for those who produce ecumenical preaching aids, commentaries, Sunday school curricula, and other devotional aids.
 - e. As a guide to individuals and groups who wish to read, study, and pray the Bible in tune with the church's prayer and preaching. Some local churches print the references to the following Sunday's readings in their bulletins and encourage people to come prepared for the next week's celebration; the psalm reference might also be included to encourage reflection on the first reading.
6. The lectionary also shows us the relationship of the readings of one Sunday with those that come before and after it. Within each of the major seasons of Lent, Easter, Advent, and Christmas-Epiphany, the flow of the season is reflected in all the Scripture texts, taken together as a set for each Sunday.

III. The Table of Readings

Finding the correct year

7. The lectionary for Sundays and major festivals is arranged in a three-year cycle. The years are known as Year A, the year of Matthew; Year B, the year of Mark; and Year C, the year of Luke.
8. The First Sunday of Advent 1992 begins a new cycle of readings: they are selected from year A, the year of Matthew, and continue until the final Sunday of the liturgical year. Then a new year begins in Advent 1993, year B, the year of Mark. Year A always begins on the First Sunday of Advent in years which can be evenly divided by three (e.g., 1992, 1995, etc.).

<i>Year</i>	<i>First Sunday of Advent</i>	<i>Easter</i>
A	November 29, 1992	April 11, 1993
B	November 28, 1993	April 3, 1994
C	November 27, 1994	April 16, 1995
A	December 3, 1995	April 7, 1996
B	December 1, 1996	March 30, 1997
C	November 30, 1997	April 12, 1998
A	November 29, 1998	April 4, 1999
B	November 28, 1999	April 23, 2000
C	December 3, 2000	April 15, 2001
A	December 2, 2001	March 31, 2002
B	December 1, 2002	April 20, 2003
C	November 30, 2003	April 11, 2004
A	November 28, 2004	March 27, 2005
B	November 27, 2005	April 16, 2006
C	December 3, 2006	April 8, 2007
A	December 2, 2007	March 23, 2008
B	November 30, 2008	April 12, 2009
C	November 29, 2009	April 4, 2010
A	November 28, 2010	April 24, 2011
B	November 27, 2011	April 8, 2012
C	December 2, 2012	March 31, 2013
A	December 1, 2013	April 20, 2014
B	November 30, 2014	April 5, 2015
C	November 29, 2015	March 27, 2016
A	November 27, 2016	April 16, 2017
B	December 3, 2017	April 1, 2018
C	December 2, 2018	April 21, 2019
A	December 1, 2019	April 12, 2020
B	November 29, 2020	April 4, 2021
C	November 28, 2021	April 17, 2022

9. At the national and international levels, individual denominations usually issue annual calendars based on the calendar of the Common Lectionary.

Versification

10. The numbering of verses in this table of readings follows that used in the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible [NRSV]; adaptations may be necessary if other versions of the Bible are used.

Relationship of the gospel and first reading

11. From the First Sunday of Advent to Trinity Sunday of each year, the Old Testament reading is closely related to the gospel reading for the day. From the first Sunday after Trinity Sunday to Christ the King, provision has been made for two patterns of reading the Old Testament from Proper 4 [Ordinary 9] to Proper 29 [Ordinary 34].

a. Provision of a pattern of paired [complementary] readings in which the Old Testament and gospel readings are closely related. For example, in year A, Proper 6 [Ordinary 11], Exodus 19:2-8a and its response, Psalm 100, are used in conjunction with Romans 5:1-8 and Matthew 9:35—10:8.

b. Provision of a pattern of semicontinuous Old Testament readings, such as found in year A, Propers 7 and 8 [Ordinary 12 and 13], where Genesis 21:8-21, on one Sunday, is followed by Genesis 22:1-14 the next Sunday.

For all these Sundays between Pentecost and Advent, churches and denominations may determine which of these patterns better serves their needs. Some denominations will accept one or both patterns for all their congregations; others may choose to let local liturgy planners determine which of these two patterns better serves their needs. The Revised Common Lectionary does not propose one set as more favored than the other, but the use of the two patterns should not be mixed.

Deuterocanonical (Apocrypha) readings

12. In all places where a reading from the deuterocanonical books (The Apocrypha) is listed, an alternate reading from the canonical Scriptures has also been provided.

Responsorial psalm

13. The psalm is a congregational response and meditation on the first reading, and is not intended as another reading. Where a choice of first readings is given, especially in the Sundays after Pentecost, the corresponding psalm or canticle should also be used.

Hallel psalms

14. Fifteen psalms (104—106, 111—113, 115—117, 135, 146—150) begin and/or end with the Hebrew “Hallelujah” (“Alleluia”; NRSV translation, “Praise the Lord”). These Hallel psalms play a particular role in Jewish liturgy, especially in the feast of the Passover. Whenever a portion of a Hallel psalm is appointed by the Revised Common Lectionary, the versification indicates that it is desirable to include the “Hallelujah” (“Alleluia”) or “Praise the Lord” that begins and/or ends the psalm. It may also be used as a refrain after each verse or set of verses.

Introducing readings

15. In the opening verses of readings, when a pulpit Bible is used, the reader should omit initial conjunctions that refer only to what has preceded, and substitute nouns for pronouns when the person referred to is not otherwise clear. The reader may also preface the reading with an introduction, such as “N. said (to N).”

Length

16. When appropriate, readings may be shortened or lengthened, with discretion. Suggested longer readings are indicated by the verses in parentheses.

Two numbering systems

17. Users should follow one of the two numbering systems provided for the propers. The Arabic numbers without brackets begin on the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany. This method gives fixed monthly dates (with a six-day cycle) for each set of readings. The bracketed numbers [Sundays in Ordinary Time] refer to the systems used by the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of Canada [also the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada]. The differing numbers do not indicate differing readings.

18. To assist all denominations, the dates between which the readings may occur (on the Sundays after Pentecost) are also provided.

IV. Using the Revised Common Lectionary

19. The Revised Common Lectionary and its earlier edition of 1983 continue the pattern of the Roman Catholic Lectionary for Mass of 1969. The 1992 revision follows the basic calendar of the Western church, provides for a three-year cycle of three readings, and allows the sequence of gospel readings each year to lead God's people to a deeper knowledge of Christ and faith in him. It is the paschal mystery of the saving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that is proclaimed through the lectionary readings and the preaching of the Church.

20. Except for occasional changes, the Revised Common Lectionary accepts the *cornerstone* of the Roman lectionary: the semicontinuous reading of the three synoptic gospels over a three-year period. This pattern connects the first reading with the gospel for the Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost. The Old Testament passage is perceived as a parallel, a contrast, or as a type leading to its fulfillment in the gospel. The Revised Common Lectionary provides two approaches to the first reading for the Sundays after Pentecost: one set of Old Testament readings continues the Roman lectionary pattern, while the other offers a series of semicontinuous passages, allowing a larger variety of particular Old Testament themes to be presented.

Calendar

21. Lectionary tables and calendars are always interconnected. At the heart of the particular way each calendar sets out its selected readings is a very basic view about our faith and our Christian way of life. The Revised Common Lectionary has taken the present Western calendar for Sundays, has simplified it to a certain extent by moving away from some recurring annual festivals with their distinctive themes, and has returned to a pattern of continuous or semicontinuous reading in one system for successive Lord's Days after Pentecost.

22. The Revised Common Lectionary calendar contains both festival Sundays around the celebrations of Easter and Christmas, and the ordinary Sundays following the feasts of Epiphany and Pentecost. These are described in the following notes.

A three-year cycle of Sunday readings

23. The lectionary provides a three-year plan or pattern for the Sunday readings. Each year is centered on one of the synoptic gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew, year B is the year of Mark, and year C is the year of Luke. John is read each year, especially in the times around Christmas, Lent, and Easter, and also in the year of Mark, whose gospel is shorter than the others. The three synoptic evangelists have particular insights into Christ. Each year, we allow one of these gospels to lead us to Christ by a semicontinuous reading during the Sundays in Ordinary Time. Passages and parables that are unique to one evangelist are normally included as part of the Sunday readings.

Easter cycle

24. The Revised Common Lectionary, along with its Roman parent, emphatically relates the gospels for the Sundays of Lent with the Easter proclamation. This is particularly true in year A, where the baptismal emphasis is strong. These Sundays relate closely to the primary Lenten theme, preparation for the joy of Easter, rather than to a penitential note. On the Sunday before Easter, known as Palm or Passion Sunday, it is recommended that both the story of the palm procession and the passion narrative be used. For some Christians, this marks a significant reform of liturgical praxis in providing a balanced experience and understanding of the whole event of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

25. A final concern in relation to the Easter cycle has to do with the disuse of the Hebrew Scriptures during the season of Easter in the Roman lectionary (a practice mentioned by Augustine in the fifth century). Following the liturgical tradition of the Ambrosian and Hispanic rites in the West and also that of the majority of the Churches in the East, the Roman lectionary of 1969 does not use the Old Testament during the Great Fifty Days from Easter to Pentecost. Nevertheless, the Roman rite has included extensive Old Testament readings in the vigils for Easter and Pentecost. The Revised Common Lectionary has, however, provided alternate Old Testament readings for those feasts and rubrics that provide for the unvarying use on those festivals of crucial readings from the Acts of the Apostles as the second reading.

26. As Acts becomes the first reading on these great Sundays, the apostolic reading (epistle) is taken from 1 Peter, the letters of John, and the book of Revelation. The purpose of this selection is to complement the Acts narrative of the formation and growth of the resurrection community with a theological commentary on the character of its inner life, namely, its mutual love, and its life of praise in anticipation of the fulfillment of the kingdom.

Christmas cycle

27. The structure of the Christmas cycle presumes an Advent that is basically eschatological (looking forward to the return or second coming of the Lord Jesus and the realization of the reign of God) more than a season of preparation for Christmas (which recalls his first coming among us). In the readings, Isaiah is prominent, along with Jeremiah, Malachi, Zephaniah, Micah, and 2 Samuel. The gospels of the first Sunday in each year are all apocalyptic; those on the second and third Sundays refer to the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent the annunciation of the birth of Christ is proclaimed.

28. On the Epiphany, the gospel of the sages from the East is read. The Sunday after the Epiphany has the Baptism of the Lord as its theme. The rubrics of the Revised Common Lectionary make provision to ensure the celebration of the Lord's baptism when the Epiphany is celebrated on the Sunday after January 6. The Revised Common Lectionary leaves the last Sunday after Epiphany, the Sunday before Lent begins, open to different centuries-old traditions: provision has been made for reading the Transfiguration gospel either on the last Sunday after Epiphany or on the Second Sunday of Lent. The underlying issue here is whether or not the Sundays after Epiphany are regarded as a season with an Epiphany theme (the manifestation or revelation of God), or simply, as in the Roman calendar, the beginning of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, which will resume their sequence after Pentecost.

Sundays during the year

29. The Revised Common Lectionary adopts the plan used in the Roman calendar, whereby "Ordinary Time" is the period outside the seasons of Lent and Easter, Advent and Christmas. The 33 or 34 Sundays that fall in the periods after the Baptism of the Lord and after Pentecost form a distinct sequence and are guided by the gospel of the year.

30. In the Roman lectionary, the readings for the Sundays in Ordinary Time do not form a complete set, as they do during the Easter and Christmas cycles. The operative principle of selection is a semicontinuous pattern of readings from the synoptic gospels week by week; the more ancient lectionaries also tended to use continuous or semicontinuous readings. Although the Roman lectionary works this way with the New Testament and gospel readings, it chooses the Old Testament passage for its close relationship with the gospel of the day (see Luke 24:26-27, 44-47; John 5:39; Acts 28:23). During the Sundays after the Epiphany, the Revised Common Lectionary continues this pattern.

31. It is at this point that the Revised Common Lectionary begins to vary from the Roman pattern: two distinct systems are offered for the Sundays after Pentecost (Propers 4–29 [Ordinary/Lectionary 9–34]). While system 2 continues the Roman pattern, system 1 applies the semicontinuous method to the first reading as well (in a sense, carrying out the logic of the Roman model more consistently than it has done itself).

32. The principle of the continuous reading of biblical books functions in other ways as well. Just as the ordinary Sundays are the occasion for reading the synoptic gospels over three successive years, so also are these same gospels used largely for the festival Sundays and seasons, although there the fourth gospel will also be found. Similarly, over the three-year cycle of the lectionary, those same Sundays will provide worshipers with most of the important texts of the Pauline corpus. In some seasons, certain books are read intensively, such as Isaiah in Advent and the letters of John and Peter, Revelation, and Acts in the season of Easter. The significance of this principle is that the biblical books are read in such a way as to permit them to contextualize themselves. Surely this is a matter of some importance, especially in terms of homiletical assumptions.

Using the lectionary in worship

33. The Roman lectionary is, as its official title indicates, a "Lectionary for Mass." Both the gospel-oriented character of the Roman lectionary and the comparative brevity of its readings show that it is intended for use in a liturgy of the word within the celebration of the eucharist.

34. The Revised Common Lectionary is intended for a wider ecumenical audience and will be used in many churches whose worship on the Lord's Day is at times celebrated as a complete liturgy of the word without a eucharist. In such cases the use of the lectionary will be more directly homiletical, but this is not inconsistent with its purpose.

35. In preparing this revision of the Common Lectionary, the task force was conscious of this agenda for preaching, and of the need for the three readings and the psalm to carry the weight of an entire service of the word, as distinguished from a celebration of "word and sacrament." Accordingly, many readings for the Sundays after Pentecost have been lengthened. And of course, this was at least a part of the decision to replace the Old Testament readings of the Roman lectionary in Ordinary Time with a further semicontinuous track in each of the three years. This reflects a longstanding and greatly loved tradition in Protestant churches of preaching that focuses entirely on

the Old Testament or the epistle, the same being true in the Anglican tradition of Morning Prayer with a sermon.

36. The weekly use of an appointed psalm is helpful. Sometimes the psalm has been regarded simply as another Old Testament reading (often said responsively). The Common Lectionary has enabled churches to recover the practice of sung psalmody on a weekly basis, as an inspection of the Presbyterian and United Methodist hymnals in the United States will show.

37. Another benefit of the arrangement of the three readings, especially in Ordinary Time, is to provide those who must plan ahead for worship—preachers, musicians, and graphic artists—with a rich prospectus well in advance so that those biblical motifs can find their way into hymns, anthems, banners, vestments, and paraments, as well as sermons. Such a use may seem to promote thematic celebrations, but that is already true by intent even of the Roman system during the major seasons of the year. In the Revised Common Lectionary on the Sundays after Pentecost, the sequence of three separate “tracks” of semicontinuous readings acts as a certain restraint on such a tendency.

38. The sequence of readings for Ordinary Time, however, especially in the Common Lectionary, provides perhaps the most important emphasis on Christian worship: the primacy of the Lord’s Day. As the ancient cornerstone of the Christian calendar, it stands forth particularly in the way in which the Lord’s word is proclaimed Sunday by Sunday. The Common Lectionary and its revision have strengthened this important recovery of the way in which the community of Christ thinks of itself “in time” and also in anticipation of the fulfillment of time at the end of its sequence of Lord’s Days, namely, the *Day of the Lord!*

Fourth gospel

39. Although it is not given a year of its own, the gospel of John is used during the major seasons, the so-called “festal” days of the year. Some see the inner outline of this gospel as an attempt to provide a Christian understanding of the great festivals of the Jewish calendar; it is certainly not a sequential, chronological narration as much as it is a liturgical, theological exposition of the paschal mystery. Others would understand the gospel of John as being catechetical or mystagogical, since it examines what it means to be the community of Jesus Christ; in this interpretation, the symbolism of the Jewish feasts is seen as illustrative. The Revised Common Lectionary seeks to read the four gospels during the liturgy in a manner that respects their own varied literary structures.

Use of the Old Testament

40. The Revised Common Lectionary diverges considerably from the assumptions regarding the use of the Old Testament contained in its denominational predecessors. The 1978 Washington consultation that began the process that resulted in the Common Lectionary (1983) raised serious questions about the Roman lectionary’s “typological” use of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. This raises what is, in a way, the enduring theological issue with which Paul struggled throughout his ministry and epistles, that of the relationship of the Christian community to its Jewish parentage. Related questions have to do with Jesus as Messiah, the Church as the New Israel, and the authority of the Old Testament in the Christian Church today.

41. In the second century, Marcion questioned the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Church. From time to time throughout Christian history, there have been people who have echoed this position. Today’s Christian Church fully accepts the Jewish Scriptures—our Old Testament—as the word of God, recognized by Jesus and the apostles and the early Christians. We have to admit, however, that throughout the centuries, many Western Eucharistic lectionaries have not included Old Testament readings for Sunday eucharist. A much better balance is being achieved in today’s lectionaries.

42. The Consultation on Common Texts undertook to address this biblical-liturgical problem. The dimensions of the task may be described in terms of a number of options that should probably be avoided. One extreme would be, as in the past practice of the West, to ignore the Old Testament on Sunday by leaving it only to the daily office. Another error, in the estimation of many, would be to read it only as a kind of completed or fulfilled prophecy that has been “superseded” by the New Testament Church and its writings, rather than reading and exegeting it as Scripture in its own right, rite, and historical context. However, it is surely not theologically permissible to read the Old Testament at eucharistic worship, or Christian worship in general, as though there were no linkage with Christian belief and prayer. If so, then how should that linkage be symbolized and expressed?

43. The Consultation on Common Texts in 1983 revised the Roman lectionary’s handling of the Sundays after Pentecost (in Ordinary Time) in order to provide an alternative to the week-by-week correlation of gospel reading and Old Testament passage. It did this by way of a broader concept of correlation having to do with the Old Testament concerns of the three synoptic gospels. It was decided to play out the logic of semicontinuous reading in

terms of the Old Testament lessons as well as the second readings taken from the New Testament.

44. When the Consultation on Common Texts turned to an extensive evaluation of its 1983 edition in preparation for a revised edition, it was this aspect of its work that created the greatest interest and drew the most careful correspondence. Some critics wondered about the desirability of long narrative passages, which seemed to them to be pushing the liturgy of the word in the direction of didacticism and Bible study. On the other hand, those who had long used the Old Testament narratives and the prophetic voices as basic to their social stance found the Common Lectionary a great improvement and encouragement.

Alternative series of first readings

45. Several of the member churches of the CCT, notably the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal Churches, have followed the tradition of relating the first lesson closely to the gospel reading for the day. The Common Lectionary (1983) had largely departed from this practice, as already noted, in the Sundays after Pentecost. The Revised Common Lectionary has provided an alternate set of first readings for the Sundays after Pentecost, to meet the desire of these traditions that the eucharistic liturgy and its readings be unified around the paschal mystery as it is proclaimed in the gospel reading. In almost every case, these readings have been selected from the options presently available in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran lectionaries. This series of thematic [complementary] readings shares equal status with the broader thematic semicontinuous series of readings.

46. As the decline of biblical literacy proceeds apace, among adults as well as young Christians, the return to a greater selection of readings from the Bible may be the most important gift of these Roman and Common systems for the public proclamation of the word of God. At last we have recovered a liturgical way to lead the faithful followers of Christ through his birth, baptism, ministry, death, and resurrection, which is precisely what the sacraments have also sought to do. The paschal mystery begins, in its earthly way, at Bethlehem, and traces its ways through the events of God's acts of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the story the synoptic gospels tell.

V. Introducing the Three Years

Year A

47. Year A focuses on the gospel of Matthew. The gospel readings from the season of Advent through the Sundays after the Epiphany tell of the coming of Christ and his manifestation especially through his preaching. Most of the first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel passage, are from the prophet Isaiah. The second readings include selections mainly from Romans and 1 Corinthians. The season also features some traditional propers, such as John 1 on Christmas Day. Churches may conclude the period after Epiphany with a reading on the Transfiguration, unless this gospel text is to be proclaimed on the Second Sunday in Lent.

48. From Ash Wednesday through Pentecost of year A, we continue to focus on Matthew. Many of the gospel readings, however, are traditional selections from the gospel of John, including the here great initiatory texts of John 4, 9, and 11 on Lent 3, 4, and 5, and the discourses of John during the season of Easter. During the season of Lent, the first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel, include important narratives of faith. During the season of Easter, the first readings are from Acts. The second readings highlight Romans and the initiatory exhortations in 1 Peter.

49. During the Sundays after Pentecost, the gospel readings move forward through the gospel of Matthew. One set of Old Testament lessons is a semicontinuous series of readings that focus on the major Genesis narratives, the covenant with Moses, and the establishment of Israel in the promised land. The other set of readings is selected from throughout the Hebrew Scriptures for their relationship with the gospel of the day. The second readings are taken from Romans, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians. The final Sundays after Pentecost focus on eschatological themes and the reign of Christ.

Year B

50. Year B focuses on the gospel of Mark. The gospel readings from the season of Advent through the Sundays after the Epiphany tell of the coming of Christ and his ministry. The first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel passage, are selected from throughout the Old Testament. The second readings include selections mainly drawn from the two letters to the Corinthians.

51. From Ash Wednesday through Pentecost of year B, we add readings from John and Luke to the readings from Mark. During the season of Lent, the first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel, include important narratives of faith. During the season of Easter, the first readings are from Acts. The second readings are a semicontinuous selection from 1 John.

52. During the Sundays after Pentecost, the gospel readings move forward through the gospel of Mark, with five

Sundays from John 6 to supplement the list. One set of Old Testament lessons is a series of semicontinuous readings that focus on the Davidic covenant and Wisdom literature. The other set of readings is selected from throughout the Hebrew Scriptures for their relationship with the gospel of the day. The second readings are semicontinuous selections from 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, James, and Hebrews. The final Sundays after Pentecost focus on eschatological themes and the reign of Christ.

Year C

53. Year C focuses on the gospel of Luke. The gospel readings from the season of Advent through the Sundays after the Epiphany tell of the coming of Christ and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel passage, are selected from throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The second readings include semicontinuous readings from 1 Corinthians.

54. From Ash Wednesday through Pentecost of year C, we add several readings from John to the readings from Luke. During the season of Lent, the first readings, chosen to illuminate the gospel, include both narrative and prophetic passages. During the season of Easter, the first readings are from Acts. The second readings are semicontinuous selections from the book of Revelation.

55. During the Sundays after Pentecost, the gospel readings move forward through the gospel of Luke. One set of Old Testament lessons is a series of semicontinuous readings of the prophetic proclamation, chosen in chronological order and highlighting Jeremiah. The other set of readings is selected from throughout the Hebrew Scriptures for their relationship with the gospel of the day. The second readings are semicontinuous selections, chosen mainly from Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and 2 Thessalonians. The final Sundays after Pentecost focus on eschatological themes and the reign of Christ.

Holy Week

56. For all three years, the readings appointed for Holy Week focus on the last days of Jesus' life in the flesh (see Hebrews 5:7). The readings appointed for the Easter Vigil, following ancient tradition, include narratives and poems from the Old Testament that describe the history of salvation and the Christian passage from death to life in baptism.

TITLES OF SUNDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS

The following is a list of the Sundays and Special Days included in the Revised Common Lectionary. Each Church may then choose how to name each set of Sundays and Special Days, and whether or not to include all of these days in its own lectionary.

SEASON OF ADVENT

First Sunday of Advent	Sunday between November 27 and December 3
Second Sunday of Advent	Sunday between December 4 and December 10
Third Sunday of Advent	Sunday between December 11 and December 17
Fourth Sunday of Advent	Sunday between December 18 and December 24

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

Nativity of the Lord	December 25
Christmas Day	
First Sunday after Christmas Day	Sunday between December 26 and January 1
New Year's Day	January 1
<i>or</i> Holy Name of Jesus (Mary, Mother of God)	January 1
Second Sunday after Christmas Day	Sunday between January 2 and January 5

SEASON OF EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)*

Epiphany of the Lord	January 6 or first Sunday in January
First Sunday after the Epiphany [Ordinary 1] (Baptism of the Lord)	Sunday between January 7 and January 13
Second Sunday after the Epiphany [Ordinary 2]	Sunday between January 14 and January 20
Third Sunday after the Epiphany [Ordinary 3]	Sunday between January 21 and January 27
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany [Ordinary 4] (except when this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany)	Sunday between January 28 and February 3
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany [Ordinary 5] (except when this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany)	Sunday between February 4 and February 10
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany [Proper 1, Ordinary 6] (except when this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany)	Sunday between February 11 and February 17
Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany [Proper 2, Ordinary 7] (except when this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany)	Sunday between February 18 and February 24
Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany [Proper 3, Ordinary 8] (except when this is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany)	Sunday between February 25 and February 29
Ninth Sunday after the Epiphany [Proper 4, Ordinary 9] (for Churches that do not observe the Last Sunday after the Epiphany with Transfiguration readings)	Sunday between March 1 and March 7
Last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday)	

SEASON OF LENT

Ash Wednesday	
First Sunday in Lent	
Second Sunday in Lent	
Third Sunday in Lent	
Fourth Sunday in Lent	
Fifth Sunday in Lent	
Sixth Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday <i>or</i> Palm Sunday)	

Holy Week

Monday of Holy Week
Tuesday of Holy Week
Wednesday of Holy Week
Holy Thursday
Good Friday
Holy Saturday

SEASON OF EASTER

Resurrection of the Lord
Easter Vigil
Easter Day
Easter Evening
Second Sunday of Easter
Third Sunday of Easter
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Ascension of the Lord
(fortieth day, sixth Thursday of Easter)
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Day of Pentecost

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)*

Trinity Sunday
(First Sunday after Pentecost)
Proper 3 [Ordinary 8]—Proper 28 [Ordinary 33]
(Second through Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost)
Proper 29 [Ordinary 34] Sunday between November 20 and November 26
Reign of Christ *or* Christ the King
(Last Sunday after Pentecost)

SPECIAL DAYS

Presentation of the Lord	February 2
Annunciation of the Lord	March 25
Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth	May 31
Holy Cross	September 14
All Saints	November 1 or the first Sunday in November
Thanksgiving Day	Second Monday in October (Canada) Fourth Thursday in November (U.S.A.)

*Note: Since Easter is a moveable feast, it can occur as early as March 22 and as late as April 25. When Easter is early, it encroaches on the Sundays after the Epiphany, reducing their number, as necessary, from as many as nine to as few as four. In similar fashion, the date of Easter determines the number of Sunday Propers after Pentecost. When Easter is as early as March 22, the numbered Proper for the Sunday following Trinity Sunday is Proper 3 [Ordinary 8].

The Propers in [brackets] indicate the Proper numbering system that counts Sundays in Ordinary Time beginning with the First Sunday after the Epiphany. This system is used by (among others) The Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and the Roman Catholic Church.

THE STORY OF THE COMMON LECTIONARY

I. The 1969 Lectionary and Other Lectionaries

In 1963, the Second Vatican Council called the Roman Catholic church to promote a “warm and living love of Scripture” among its members. A greater number and a wider variety of Scripture texts were to be read during the liturgy, and preaching was to be more scriptural. The teaching of the word of God was seen as the primary duty of the clergy. In response to these decisions, the Catholic Church produced in 1969, after several years of international consultations, an extensive table of readings for many celebrations: Sundays, weekdays, feast days, sacraments, other rites of the Church, and other occasions. On each Lord’s Day, there are three readings: the first one is usually from the Old Testament, the second from the epistles, and the third from one of the gospels. After the first reading, a brief excerpt from a psalm is sung or prayed as a response to the proclamation.

In many countries, the selected passages are printed in a special book, called a lectionary or book of readings. The table of readings issued in 1969 is now used in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world in some 400 languages. A fuller introduction and a few additional texts were added to the lectionary in 1981.

Other lectionaries

Within less than year of the issuing of the Roman Lectionary for Mass in 1969, the value of this table of Sunday readings was recognized by other churches in the United States and Canada. The process of appropriation began with the publication in 1970 of *The Worshipbook—Services*, a service book jointly produced by three Presbyterian churches in the United States. Soon after, the Episcopal and Lutheran churches in the United States included the table of readings in preliminary studies, which led to its inclusion in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) and *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978). The Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A. adopted the Presbyterian version for voluntary use.

The proliferation of versions of the original Roman table of Sunday readings was both ecumenically encouraging and also dismaying. Each of the five versions differed slightly from the others. Attempts by local clergy to meet for sermon planning were hampered by the different texts and arrangements, and published materials were confronted by multiple options. There was an increasing demand for some standardization.

In 1974 the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) published a consensus edition in pamphlet form. At that time, COCU represented nine Protestant denominations in the United States.

Developing a common ecumenical lectionary

Early in 1978, in Washington, D.C., at a meeting sponsored by the Consultation on Common Texts, it was agreed that consensus was needed on the list of Sunday readings. Furthermore, they felt that there was a need to revise the manner in which the Old Testament readings were chosen in the Roman lectionary in order to provide a more representative presentation of the Jewish Scriptures. It was also suggested that in some cases the Old Testament reading be aligned with the epistle reading.

The Consultation on Common Texts set up a working group, the North American Committee on Calendar and Lectionary, composed of pastors and scholars from Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and United Methodist churches. The working principles of this group were described in this way.

- a. The basic calendar and structure of three readings presupposed by the Roman lectionary are assumed.
- b. The gospel pericopes (readings) are assumed with only minor textual rearrangement to accommodate churches that use a Bible for liturgical use rather than a lectionary book.
- c. The New Testament pericopes are largely accepted, with some lengthening of pericopes and minor textual rearrangement to include textual material such as apostolic and personal greetings and local ecclesial issues.
- d. The typological choice of Old Testament pericopes has been addressed in that this has been the area of most serious criticism from Catholic and Protestant scholars and pastors. In response, the committee has proposed a revision of the Roman table for a number of Sundays of the year (Ordinary Time) in each of the three cycles. The lessons are still typologically controlled by the gospel, but in a broader way than Sunday by Sunday, in order to make possible semicontinuous reading of some significant Old Testament narratives.

The finished work of this committee was published in 1983 as the Consultation’s proposal to the churches of North America. This book, titled *Common Lectionary* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1983), contained an introduction, the tables of readings, and some explanation of the specific choices, and it showed how it had moved toward a consensus among the variety of versions published in the 1970s.

II. Critiques of the 1983 Lectionary

It was always understood by the Consultation on Common Texts that the 1983 table of readings was for experimental use, and criticisms were invited. After two three-year cycles of testing, the Consultation appointed a task force to examine the tables, to listen to critiques from many levels and many groups, and to take them into account. Hundreds of individuals and dozens of churches submitted helpful criticisms. All of these have been carefully noted, evaluated, and considered by the task force in its process of revision.

The critiques received were generally in of five different areas: a) the use of Scripture; b) the place of women in the lectionary; c) problems of the common calendar; d) the need for a cycle of first readings more directly linked to the gospel of the day in the Sundays after Pentecost; and e) sensitivity to the way some Scripture texts are heard by Christian congregations today.

Use of Scripture

Many people asked whether the canon of Scripture had been given appropriate treatment in the Common Lectionary (1983). For example, much criticism was received of the handling of the Old Testament prophets.

In the revision, the task force examined the whole of the prophetic message, and as a result, in place of the canonical order of the prophets (followed essentially in year C), presented the prophets chronologically in the Sundays after Pentecost. The ministry of Elijah and Elisha as recounted in the books of Kings is given less space, while the ministry and teaching of Jeremiah has become central to the cycle.

Among the important critiques of the use of Scripture was that of the Episcopal Church. The concern of that church was to reconcile the slight differences in the current Old Testament readings among the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches. The critique did not approve of the treatment of the Old Testament in the 1983 Common Lectionary. It spoke of: 1) the notion of relating the Old Testament and gospel as proclaiming the paschal mystery on the Lord's Day; 2) the pastoral confusion caused to congregations in our churches by three unrelated readings; and 3) the pastoral problems of three lengthy readings and a psalm in churches where all are read. Some Lutherans and Roman Catholics also identified with this critique.

The use of the psalter was also frequently criticized. In its revision, the task force affirmed that the psalm (or a scriptural canticle) should be chosen as the liturgical response to the first reading, and that it should fit harmoniously within the general tenor of the celebration. In selecting the psalms, the task force sought to respect the breadth and diversity of the psalter, and to use some scriptural canticles where appropriate. The more familiar psalms are repeated occasionally. An attempt was made to respect the integrity of the content of the psalm itself; where length precluded the use of the whole, the selection of verses seeks to reflect the movement of the psalm. On occasion a possible fuller reading of the psalm is indicated through the use of brackets. In the Revised Common Lectionary, 105 psalms and ten canticles are included.

The publication in 1990 of the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. made it necessary to examine the versification of all the readings in the Common Lectionary. For example, the song of Mary (Magnificat) in the *Revised Standard Version* began at Luke 1:46b. In the NRSV it begins at 1:47. [After the publication of the RCL in 1992, this instance was determined to be an erratum in NRSV, corrected in later printings; thus the citation in this document begins the canticle at Luke 1:46b.]

Some criticism was made of the beginning and ending of specific readings in the 1983 Common Lectionary. As a result, the task force looked carefully at all readings in the light of the NRSV, and made numerous minor adjustments. For example, the 1983 edition gave Philippians 2:9-13 as the versification of the ancient kenotic hymn, while the present edition gives 2:5-11 as the more appropriate versification.

Place of women in the lectionary

A major critique of the 1983 lectionary by many men and women concerned the place of women in the readings. The task force recognized the significant, if often overlooked, role played by women in the biblical story. As a consequence, the Revised Common Lectionary has added a number of readings that make this more evident: for example, the promise of God to Sarah for her faithfulness, the contribution of the Hebrew midwives to the saving of the children of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, the encounter of the Syro-Phoenician woman with Jesus, and the apostolic ministry of Lydia.

A number of omissions were drawn to the attention of the CCT. The task force examined these and searched for others. For example, the story of Hagar and her infant, Ishmael (Genesis 21:8-21), is included in year A.

Problems of the common calendar

A number of minor issues surfaced with regard to the calendar. The 1992 lectionary has recognized the need to add readings for a Ninth Sunday after the Epiphany, as well as for Holy Saturday.

First reading more closely linked to gospel

A number of respondents to the 1983 edition were concerned to develop more fully the reading of the Old Testament Scriptures in relation to the gospel, as already noted.

Sensitivity to Scripture passages

Both users and students of the 1983 lectionary have made the observation that problems are sometimes created because Scripture texts, when taken out of their cultural and religious context in the Ancient Near East, may be misunderstood by late-twentieth-century congregations. In particular, the Revised Common Lectionary has paid attention to the tragic history of the abuse of biblical materials to support anti-Semitism by Christians. The need to avoid such abuse is one of the basic principles of this lectionary.

III. Worldwide Interest in Lectionary Renewal

In 1967, the Joint Liturgical Group in Great Britain developed a two-year thematic lectionary, which has been widely adopted. In 1990, they produced *A Four Year Lectionary*, which is an exploration of the possibility of having a year of John as well as the three synoptic years. In this lectionary, rather than having a theme, the readings are said to be merely “linked.”

The English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) has endorsed the Common Lectionary as the most promising version of an international ecumenical lectionary. Representatives of ELLC have worked as members of the task force preparing this Revised Common Lectionary. ELLC includes ecumenical associations of Churches from Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, the United States, and Wales.

Worldwide groupings of various denominations that represent several language groups have also begun to show interest in lectionary renewal. There is known to be considerable interest in and use of the *Common Lectionary* among Methodist and Presbyterians in Korea. In 1989, the ELLC asked the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to consider becoming involved in a worldwide, multinational, and ecumenical dialogue on lectionary renewal and reform, based on the original concept presented in the *Roman Lectionary for Mass* of 1969, as modified in the *Common Lectionary*.

MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE ON THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

The task force that prepared the Revised Common Lectionary was appointed by the Consultation on Common Texts in November of 1986. The membership has involved persons whose Churches and liturgical conferences actively use the Common Lectionary, have tested the Common Lectionary, or have a serious interest in adopting the Revised Common Lectionary for use. The members of the task force included:

The Reverend Dr. Neil Alexander, Professor of Worship at The General Seminary in New York City, representative of the Lutheran Churches (1986–1987).

The Reverend Dr. Horace T. Allen Jr., Professor of Worship and Preaching at Boston University School of Theology, representative of the English Language Liturgical Consultation, member of the committee that created the 1983 Common Lectionary, and representative of The Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

The Reverend Robert J. Brooks, the Presiding Bishop's Staff Officer of The Episcopal Church: Washington Office, member of the Standing Liturgical Commission (1985–1988), and representative of The Episcopal Church.

The Reverend Dr. Thomas D. Dipko, Bishop of the Ohio Area of the United Church of Christ, and representative of The United Church of Christ.

The Reverend John Fitzsimmons, Chairperson of the Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Roman Catholic, and representative of the English Language Liturgical Consultation, beginning in 1990.

The Reverend Paul Gibson, Liturgical Officer of the Anglican Church of Canada, chair of the Consultation on Common Texts (1986–1989), and representative of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Dr. Fred Graham, Consultant on Congregational Worship and representative of The United Church of Canada, beginning in 1988.

The Reverend Canon Dr. Donald Gray, Canon of Westminster, Church of England, Chairman of the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain, and representative of the English Language Liturgical Consultation.

The Reverend Dr. Gerald Hobbs, Professor of Church History, Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver, British Columbia, The United Church of Canada, Standing Consultant with particular focus on the psalms, beginning in 1989.

The Reverend Canon Dr. David R. Holeton, Professor in Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto, and representative of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Reverend Thomas A. Langford III, Assistant General Secretary of the Section on Worship of The United Methodist Church, chair of the Task Force on the Revised Common Lectionary, and representative of The United Methodist Church.

The Reverend Edward Matthews, past Secretary of the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Roman Catholic, member of the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain, member of the Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, and representative of the English Language Liturgical Consultation (1988–1989).

The Reverend Dr. Fred McNally, Consultant on Congregational Worship and representative of The United Church of Canada (1988–1989).

Dr. Gail Ramshaw, Professor of Religion at LaSalle University and representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1987–1992).