GENERAL

united methodist revised common lectionary 2015

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Introduction

For members of the United Methodist Church, the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015**is more than a collection of scripture readings; it is a guide that shapes worship, reflection, and community life. Launched in 2015, this revision brought fresh language, a deeper theological focus, and a renewed emphasis on the global church. In this article we explore what the lectionary is, why the 2015 revision matters, how it differs from earlier versions, and practical ways to integrate it into your worship and personal devotion. Whether you are a pastor, worship leader, or layperson, understanding the lectionary's structure and intent will enrich your spiritual journey and strengthen the bonds within your congregation.

What Is a Lectionary?

A lectionary is a liturgical book that provides a systematic schedule of scripture passages to be read during worship services. Traditionally, it ensures that the entire Bible is covered over a set period, usually three years, and aligns readings with liturgical seasons such as Advent, Lent, and Easter. For the United Methodist Church, the lectionary is part of the broader worship resources that include hymns, prayers, and liturgical texts. It reflects the denomination's commitment to Scripture as the foundation of faith and practice.

The Role of the Lectionary in United Methodist Worship

In United Methodist worship, the lectionary serves several key purposes:

- Scriptural Unity – It guarantees that congregants hear a wide range of biblical narratives, teachings, and prophecies.
- Liturgical Rhythm – By tying readings to seasons, it helps congregants experience the flow of the Christian year.
- Educational Tool – It encourages study and reflection, enabling clergy and laity to delve deeper into Scripture.
- Ecumenical Bridge – The lectionary aligns with other denominations' schedules, fostering joint worship and shared understanding.

Historical Development of the United Methodist Lectionary

Since its inception in the early 20th century, the United Methodist Church has periodically updated its lectionary to reflect theological insights, linguistic clarity, and pastoral needs. The first major revision occurred in 1936, followed by subsequent updates in 1961, 1990, and 2005. Each edition aimed to improve readability, contextual relevance, and theological depth. The 2015 revision, often referred to as the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015**, marked a significant milestone in this evolutionary process.

Key Motivations Behind the 2015 Revision

The 2015 lectionary was crafted to address several contemporary challenges:

1. Modern Language – Many older translations felt archaic to modern listeners. The new lectionary incorporated contemporary phrasing while maintaining scriptural fidelity.
2. Global Perspective – The United Methodist Church's worldwide membership prompted a more inclusive

selection of passages that resonate across cultures.

3. Theological Depth – Updated readings emphasized themes such as justice, mercy, and stewardship, reflecting current theological discourse.
4. Ecumenical Alignment – Greater synchronization with other Christian traditions facilitated joint worship and shared resources.

Structure of the 2015 Lectionary

The **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015**follows a three-year cycle (Years A, B, and C). Each year is divided into weekly sections that correspond to the liturgical calendar. The structure is designed to cover the entire Bible, ensuring that congregants encounter both the Old and New Testaments in a balanced way.

Year A, B, and C Breakdown

Each year focuses on a specific set of books and themes:

- Year A – Emphasizes the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Revelation.
- Year B – Highlights the Gospel of Mark and the Book of Hebrews.
- Year C – Focuses on the Gospel of Luke and the Book of James.

Within each year, the lectionary is organized into:

1. Advent and Christmas – Passages that prepare believers for the anticipation of Christ.
2. Ordinary Time – Readings that cover everyday Christian life.
3. Lent and Holy Week – Scripture that reflects repentance and the Passion narrative.
4. Easter and Pentecost – Passages celebrating the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
5. All Saints and Advent (remainder) – Readings that honor the Church's saints and prepare for the new Advent.

How the 2015 Revision Differs from Earlier Versions

While the core mission of the lectionary remains the same, the 2015 revision introduced several notable changes. Understanding these differences helps clergy and laity appreciate the updated theological emphasis and practical benefits.

Updated Language and Translation Choices

The lectionary now uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) for most readings, providing a balance between accuracy and readability. This shift from the earlier New International Version (NIV) or other translations made the passages more accessible to a broader audience.

Expanded Liturgical Themes

Each year now includes explicit thematic focuses that align with contemporary social issues, such as environmental stewardship, social justice, and reconciliation. These themes encourage congregants to apply biblical teachings to modern life.

Greater Ecumenical Alignment

By aligning the lectionary's schedule with that of the Anglican, Lutheran, and Catholic churches, the United Methodist Church promotes interdenominational worship. This alignment facilitates joint services and shared resources across Christian traditions.

Inclusion of Global Passages

Recognizing the church's international presence, the 2015 revision incorporates passages that reflect the

experiences of believers worldwide. This inclusion fosters a sense of unity and shared identity among diverse congregations.

Practical Applications for Worship Leaders

Integrating the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015** into worship requires thoughtful planning. Below are actionable steps for pastors, worship leaders, and music directors.

Planning the Service Flow

1. Consult the Lectionary Calendar – Identify the readings for the week and season.
2. Align with Liturgical Themes – Use the thematic focus to guide sermon topics and musical selections.
3. Coordinate with the Choir – Ensure that hymns and musical pieces complement the readings.

Developing Sermon Outlines

Use the lectionary as a framework for sermon series. For instance, a pastor might design a three-part series around the readings in a particular season, ensuring that the message remains cohesive and rooted in Scripture.

Incorporating Visual Aids

Visual representations of the lectionary's structure can help congregants follow the weekly cycle. Consider creating a simple chart or digital slideshow that highlights the key readings and themes.

Engaging the Laity

Encourage lay readers by providing short guides or reflection questions that accompany each reading. This approach empowers congregants to participate actively in the worship experience.

How Congregants Can Use the Lectionary for Personal Devotion

Beyond corporate worship, the lectionary offers a roadmap for individual spiritual growth. Here's how members of the United Methodist Church can incorporate the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015** into their daily lives.

Weekly Reading Schedule

Set aside a specific time each week to read the designated passages. This habit promotes consistency and deepens scriptural engagement.

Reflection Journaling

Maintain a journal that records insights, questions, and prayers related to each reading. Over time, this journal becomes a valuable resource for personal growth.

Study Groups

Organize small study groups that meet to discuss the weekly readings. Sharing perspectives can enrich understanding and foster community.

Prayer Focus

Use the lectionary's themes to guide your prayers. For example, during Lent, focus on repentance and humility; during Easter, celebrate hope and renewal.

Resources and Tools for Accessing the Lectionary

Several resources make it easy to access and utilize the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015**. Below is a curated list of tools and materials.

Official United Methodist Church Website

The UMC's official site hosts downloadable PDFs of the lectionary, along with supplementary resources such as sermon outlines and teaching guides.

Mobile Apps

Apps like *UMC Liturgical Calendar* and *Daily Scripture*provide daily readings, audio recitations, and prayer prompts. These apps are ideal for on-the-go worshippers.

Print Guides

Many churches distribute printed lectionary calendars and study guides. These tangible tools are especially useful for congregants who prefer paper over digital formats.

Online Communities

Platforms such as Reddit's United Methodist subreddit and Facebook groups offer spaces to discuss readings, share insights, and ask questions.

Common Questions About the 2015 Lectionary

Below are answers to frequently asked questions that help clarify the purpose and usage of the lectionary.

Why was the lectionary revised in 2015?

The 2015 revision aimed to modernize language, incorporate global perspectives, and align more closely with other Christian traditions.

Can I use the lectionary outside of Sunday services?

Absolutely. The lectionary's weekly structure is designed for personal devotion, small group study, and corporate worship.

Is the lectionary the same for all United Methodist churches?

While the core structure is consistent, individual churches may adapt the readings to suit local contexts or special ministries.

How do I integrate the lectionary with my church's hymnals?

Match hymn selections to the thematic focus of the readings. Many hymnals provide suggested hymn lists for each season.

Impact on the United Methodist Community

The 2015 lectionary has had a profound influence on how the United Methodist Church engages with Scripture, worship, and community life. By providing a structured yet flexible framework, it has helped congregations navigate the complexities of modern faith while staying rooted in biblical tradition.

Enhanced Ecumenical Relations

Shared readings with other denominations have opened doors for joint worship services, collaborative mission projects, and interdenominational dialogue.

Strengthened Theological Education

Preachers and educators use the lectionary as a teaching tool, ensuring that sermons and classes cover a wide spectrum of biblical teachings.

Broader Cultural Inclusion

By incorporating global passages, the lectionary invites members from diverse cultural backgrounds to see their stories reflected in Scripture, fostering unity and belonging.

Future Directions for the Lectionary

While the **United Methodist Revised Common Lectionary 2015**remains the cornerstone of worship, the United Methodist Church is exploring ways to further evolve its liturgical resources. Potential future initiatives include:

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