

Theological & Education Foundation

The Vision of *Seasons of the Spirit*[™]

Among Christians today, there is a hunger for:

- » spiritual renewal.
- » vital and meaningful worship.
- » competence in biblical and theological knowledge.
- » connection between worship and education, faith formation and discipleship.
- » life shaped by the pattern of Christ, as celebrated in the Christian year and the lectionary.
- » ecumenical partnership in the faith community.
- » courageous witness in the world.
- » committed service in the name of Christ.

Therefore, *Seasons of the Spirit* is intended to be a distinct gift to congregations. This resource:

1. Invites us to explore meaning and mystery in the Bible through the lectionary.
2. Encourages us to experience the transforming power of Christ as together worship, sacraments, and education work in our lives.
3. Calls us into the ecumenical, global, and inclusive heart of the church where these resources are grounded and shaped.
4. Nurtures faith by engaging the imagination through the Bible, tradition, science, technology, and the arts.
5. Engages responsibly and creatively the contemporary teaching and learning environment of Christian congregations and parishes.
6. Sends us into the contemporary world—its current events, issues, knowledge, and discoveries—an arena to test, share, and live out our faith.

Seasons of the Spirit invites us to explore meaning and mystery in the Bible through the lectionary.

The Word of God is living and active. – Hebrews 4:12

Through the Bible, the Spirit leads us to know God, Jesus Christ, and God's call to live lives of faith, love, and justice. The Bible contains meaning and mystery beyond the printed words. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to engage continually in biblical exploration in community. We learn from biblical scholarship and value the insights and experiences of people of diverse cultures and life situations and all ages and eras.

The lectionary provides an organized, holistic exploration of Scripture, linking education and worship and calling us to service. Through the yearly cycle of readings, we are drawn into the story of God's creation of all things; God's calling and forming a people; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and the witness of the early church in the world.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. provide worship and learning experiences based on the Bible as guided by the lectionary.
2. offer opportunities to explore Scripture from a variety of perspectives by including materials from many cultures and life situations.
3. provide biblical background materials that include current scholarship.
4. explore the rich and varied literary forms of the Bible.
5. encourage children, youth, and adults to enter imaginatively into Scripture, experiencing the message that transcends the printed words.
6. invite congregations and individuals to discern God's message for this time.
7. help us to live out the wisdom of the Bible in our own lives.

Seasons of the Spirit encourages us to experience the transforming power of Christ as together worship, sacraments, and education work in our lives.

Worship in spirit and truth. – John 4:24

Through worship, liturgy, sacraments, and acts of witness and service, we encounter the living God in community. Together we study and explore the meaning of these experiences as does the church in every time and place. The rhythms of the church both mirror and reshape the rhythms of our own lives and God works redemptively in and through our life experiences.

The lectionary, in both its historical use in worship and its use in curriculum, invites us to integrate education and worship. It encourages bonds among all ages and expands ministry beyond traditional Sunday morning settings to include experiences at church, at home, at work, at school, and in the world.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. use the lectionary as a common structure to integrate education and worship for people of all ages.
2. include sacraments, prayer, meditation, proclamation, and the arts as essential content and methods for learning.
3. facilitate dialogue among learners of all ages.
4. provide opportunities for continued exploration at home and in other settings.
5. encourage the celebration of the church year in the gathered community and at home.
6. provide a liturgical rhythm to learning and knowing with our hearts and minds.

Seasons of the Spirit calls us into the ecumenical, global, and inclusive heart of the church where these resources are grounded and shaped.

So that they may be one. – John 17:22

God calls us into the body of Christ, the church. This church is, at the same time, both one and many. It is one, in that all who respond to Christ's claim are members of that body. It is also diverse, encompassing persons of various nations, denominations, ages, abilities, cultures, ethnicities, genders, orientations, and economic and social situations. When the church honours and regards both its oneness and its diversity—living with the tension—it expresses the reign of God.

We are enriched in our understanding of the faith and strengthened for witness and service in the world as we listen to the voices and receive the gifts of all God's people.

We are all both teachers and learners. Therefore, it is important that these resources be shaped by ongoing interaction between resource users and developers.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. make use of the Revised Common Lectionary in consultation with other lectionaries in ecumenical use.
2. be developed in a varied international and ecumenical community.
3. be committed to the use of inclusive language and images.
4. provide a variety of teaching/learning experiences, sensitive to different ages, abilities, cultures, global perspectives, and styles of learning.
5. receive the stories of those who are marginalized and those whose voices have not been heard.
6. include expressions of the arts from various cultures and communities.
7. provide opportunities for cross-generational worship and learning for all ages.
8. recognize and celebrate the important ministry of children and youth as well as adults.
9. encourage feedback and the submission of ideas and materials through face-to-face events and various forms of communication technology.
10. assist denominations to integrate denominationally specific materials.

Seasons of the Spirit nurtures faith by engaging the imagination through the Bible, tradition, science, technology, and the arts.

So God created... – Genesis 1:27

From the beginning God has been active, creating and revealing God's self in the world. Humanity, created in God's image, has opportunities to respond by exercising stewardship of the creation and through faithful acts of human creativity. When these opportunities express God's truth, love, justice, and shalom, then God's reign is revealed. Throughout history, God's reign is known in tradition when social, religious, political, and cultural actions and practices are redemptive. God's reign is disclosed through life-enriching scientific discovery and through many forms of the arts that express truth, beauty, and the spirit of humanity and of God. Even when we squander these opportunities, rebel against God's will, misuse human knowledge, and use the arts to distort the truth, God's reign continues to be revealed.

We can participate once again in God's creative and revealing moments. Through faith and by imaginatively experiencing the story of the Exodus, we too cross the sea. Through baptism, we enter the water with Jesus and become one of his own. Examining the mysteries of the universe, we discover the expansive power of God. Engaging the arts, we encounter God in deep and unexpected ways.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. enable us to experience the Bible and traditions so that we engage both head and heart.
2. assist clergy, parents, leaders, and teachers to encourage the theological imagination of congregations, learners, and families.
3. provide visual and other creative arts to form a pool of images for all to draw upon.
4. suggest ways to discern how God is revealed or denied in science, technology, and the arts.
5. invite discussion about current scientific explorations.
6. encourage us to question and explore tradition and the arts.
7. use technology as a resource for teaching and learning.

Seasons of the Spirit engages responsibly and creatively the contemporary teaching and learning environment of Christian congregations and parishes.

Go therefore and make disciples... teaching them. –
Matthew 28:19–20

The educational task of the Christian community radiates throughout every aspect of its life. Education is strongly linked to worship and service, witness and ministries of compassion, the biblical account and the church's story, Sabbath and the rhythms of daily life. God's people are commanded to teach the faith "when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Every Christian is, in a deep sense, a teacher of the faith, called into the world to make disciples, teaching through word and deed the way of Christ. Thus, the Christian community needs educational resources that are faithful, comprehensive, and alert to the many places where and the many persons through whom education occurs in the church's life.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. constitute a comprehensive curriculum—that is, a systematic program connecting the practices of faith in church, home, and community—energizing us to lives of discipleship.
2. build upon the structural strengths of the lectionary in order to provide for all ages an organized and cumulative approach to teaching and learning the Christian faith.
3. intentionally connect education with other dimensions of the church's life and practices: worship, hospitality, guidance, witness, stewardship of God's creation, and ministries of compassion and justice.
4. be designed to be used in educational settings both formal and informal, traditional and non-traditional.
5. recognize the limited economic resources of many congregations and parishes.
6. employ a wide variety of teaching methods and learning styles.
7. provide the strong, clear, practical, wise, and loving support needed to equip persons with many different gifts and levels of experience for the ministry of teaching.
8. offer support and training that develop and nurture lay and clergy leadership for holistic educational ministry.

Seasons of the Spirit sends us into the contemporary world—its current events, issues, knowledge, and discoveries—as an arena to test, share, and live out our faith.

For God so loved the world... – John 3:16

The constantly changing world in which we live each day is filled with the active presence of God. Jesus Christ was born into the world, lived passionately in the world, and gave his life on behalf of it. Christ continues to reveal God's love for the world. Following Christ's example, we have both the opportunity and challenge to seek God in the world and to respond to the cries of those in need.

God is present now, in our time. God may be known when and where we least expect it—in friend and stranger, joy and sorrow, comfort and challenge. God is among those who are marginalized, the suffering, and those in crisis. As we are formed in faith, God urges us to engage in the world by naming and confronting the powers of sin and death that seek to thwart Christ's way of compassion and justice. God calls us to accept the cost and joy of discipleship and prayerfully examine what it means to live faithfully today.

Therefore, these resources will:

1. help us identify ways God acts in the world.
2. invite questioning as we approach the Bible and our contemporary world.
3. regard the needs of seekers and believers inside and outside the church.
4. encourage us to find meaning for our lives and the lives of our communities.
5. receive the stories of those who are marginalized and those whose voices have not been heard.
6. employ current biblical scholarship and contemporary educational theory and practice.
7. use technology and other tools to be as current as possible.
8. equip us to be faithful, global disciples by lifting up worldwide economic, political, and social issues.
9. explore and learn from the stories of children, youth, and adults from around the world.
10. provide ways to identify local concerns and to be responsive to them.
11. look to images and forms outside our traditional religious context to discern God's revelation.
12. enable us to develop strategies for action in the world.
13. foster care for the earth.