

One pastor's experience with *Year D*

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Daniel Mayes is a Disciples of Christ pastor. He did his D.Min. at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, where Timothy Slemmons—creator of the Year D project, which I [wrote about for the Century](#)—was one of his advisors. Mayes's church, First Christian Church of Spencer, Iowa, has been using Year D in worship throughout the current liturgical year. I asked him a few questions about how it's gone.

Why did you decide to try *Year D*? Do you share some of Timothy Slemmons's criticisms of the Revised Common Lectionary?

When I was studying under Slemmons, he shared with us his idea for Year D. I recalled all the times I had taken particular notice of texts that are skipped over in the *RCL*. It was always a burning question in my mind: Why leave this part out?

Before you tried *Year D*, was your church following the *RCL*?

We normally use the *RCL*, but before this year we took the *lectio continua* route for two years and studied the entire gospel of John. We've almost completed *Year D*; next year we will return to the *RCL* for Year A.

Do you plan to use *Year D* again?

Yes, perhaps at the end of the next *RCL* cycle.

How many readings do you use each week? And how do you go about choosing among them for those weeks when *Year D* offers as many as eight or nine options?

I've usually gone with two readings, along with incorporating others into the call to worship and invocation. Choosing texts has required a bit of advance planning: looking five or six weeks into the future and studying those texts, then choosing which track to follow in order to provide a timely word for the congregation. I've always chosen the gospel reading first and then supplemented with either the

Hebrew Bible reading or the epistle, a decision based on thematic connections.

How did people in your church react to having the usual lectionary routine disrupted? Was it troubling, interesting, exciting to them? Did they even notice?

I don't think the congregation would have necessarily understood that I was using *Year D* if I hadn't told them. Those who follow the *RCL* in their personal devotions and study certainly noticed that I was not using it. They were, for the most part, receptive.

***Year D* focuses on texts the *RCL* omits—even on major holidays. Did you stick with *Year D* for Christmas and Easter?**

I did.

Were people startled to see the nativity and resurrection narratives displaced by other Gospel texts?

People were sort of surprised. But it went well—though it was not without work. The preaching task was to address the assigned texts knowing full well what the congregation came expecting to hear. So I crafted sermons that dealt with the texts at hand *in relationship* to the particular event in Jesus' life we were celebrating. That wasn't easy.

Also, this was a great opportunity to preach a new word to those people who may only attend at Christmas and Easter. For some, this may have been the only time they ever heard anything other than the nativity and resurrection narratives.

Any texts that especially stretched you as a preacher?

The whole experience has been stretching. It is one thing to have to grapple with texts that have translation issues or are troubling in other ways. It is a whole different thing to do this when there are not many homiletical resources available, as there are for *RCL* texts. Preaching *Year D* requires a deeper commitment to study and preparation and a willingness to develop more original liturgical resources. It also requires a bit more resourcefulness in choosing hymns and images for worship. So it stretched me not just as a preacher but also as a liturgist and worship designer.

How have people reacted to hearing readings and preaching from some of the stranger and lesser-known parts of the Bible?

They typically say things like, "That was interesting," or "I don't know that I had ever heard that before." A few times people have expressed surprise at things they didn't realize were in the Bible at all.

Any examples you remember?

Miriam's leprosy in Numbers 12. Psalm 109—as famous or infamous as this psalm may be, some had never heard it before, perhaps because it had been intentionally avoided. And *Year D* includes five weeks of Haggai, which many had never read or heard before.

Have you found that *Year D* has had an effect on people's knowledge or understanding of the Bible, or of its role in worship?

Yes, but this hasn't happened in worship so much as in education. Alongside using *Year D* in worship, I developed a Sunday school series that focuses on some of the more troubling texts from *Year D* and elsewhere. I think the class began to see some value in texts for corporate worship where they hadn't seen it before.

For example, this year our church was broken into and vandalized twice. There were tremendous feelings of violation among the congregation. Some of the texts we studied in class were those oft-troublesome imprecatory psalms. We studied them deeply and discussed their potential value in corporate and individual worship—and they became excellent tools for catharsis. There seemed to be a greater freedom to express raw emotion to God in prayer, and then to turn to the gospel and reconcile those feelings with the expression of God's incarnate love—expressed in Jesus' solidarity with us.