

For ordinary churches on ordinary Sundays

A hush descends. People are on the edge of their seats in anticipation. The public reading of scripture is about to begin. It should be a highlight of the Sunday gathering: the scriptures, read aloud.

The reader should feel confident, focussed on delivering the message, not worrying about long words or complex syntax. The congregation should be eager to hear, not resigned to assuming that the text will be incomprehensible.

And this is where SSRA begins, with a focus always on this one specific context, of ordinary churches, on ordinary Sundays, reaching for the divine.

SSRA aims to encourage more confident participation in the public reading of scripture by more readers, and to encourage a greater appreciation of the public reading of scripture by more hearers.

Each reading will take about 90 seconds, on average. It doesn't ask a lot – and it delivers so much.

The scriptures are right at the heart of the life of the church. And when the church gathers each Sunday morning, the public reading of the scriptures from the lectern can be a highlight of the hour. As each reading is about to begin, the reader should be feeling confident – rather than nervous or inadequate – and people should be on the edge of their seats in anticipation. All of this should be possible in ordinary churches on ordinary Sundays. The scriptures have the content. It just needs a readable text, in a good translation, well laid out on the page. Ideally the text will have been notified – and accessible – in advance. SSRA is a package, in print and online, to help make this possible – in ordinary churches, on ordinary Sundays.

The benefits of a lectionary are many. The selection of texts and verses is not there to limit the use of scripture, but to expand it. A preacher or service-leader can include any text or passage of scripture they wish, but the lectionary helps establish and maintain familiarity with more than 400 key passages of scripture – something that few other approaches to scripture can offer; and all for the investment of just five minutes of the Sunday gathering each week.

Over the last fifty years, churches have tried one, two and four year cycles of readings, but this three-year cycle has now been adopted by virtually every major denomination, with its simple pattern, in each year of the cycle, of a main programme for the year, pausing for the fifteen Sundays of the Easter series, kept in real time from Lent 1 to Trinity Sunday, plus a Christmas series from Advent 1 to the Epiphany. Three readings is not too many – because in the Easter series and the Christmas series, the three work together to develop a theme; and through the main programme for the year, the gospel and epistle readings are continuous from week to week, and the Old Testament reading each Sunday helps illustrate the gospel reading for the day.

This widespread adoption of the three-year lectionary across the world has produced a flourishing ecosystem of thousands of lectionary-based resources over the last fifty years, in print and now online, many published weekly, others with huge archives, others in print and worth using year after year, for sermons, prayers, children's work and more – all assembled around the scriptures for the day, resourcing busy clergy and lay-led congregations, in ordinary local churches on ordinary Sundays, in union with the church throughout the world.

And for busy clergy, and lay-led congregations, SSRA takes all the hard work out of finding, choosing, printing and distributing the Sunday morning scripture readings. A congregation, parish, or benefice that adopts SSRA can refer everyone who needs to know the readings to the ssra.uk website, where they can see the readings for the day, and browse through the readings for the year. The website works on any device with a web browser, including laptops, smartphones, desktops, and tablets. Individual pages can be printed directly from the website as required. Or anyone can have their own copy of the complete lectionary at home in a paperback edition.

SSRA longs to refresh the use of the lectionary where it continues, revive it where it has been lost, and perhaps even introduce it where it has never been known – in ordinary churches, on ordinary Sundays.

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