

LESSON 1

THE CIRCLE OF THE CHURCH YEAR

LESSON NOTES

FOCUS: HOW THE CHURCH TELLS TIME

- **LITURGICAL ACTION**
- **CORE PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: FOCAL SHELVES**
- **PIECES: CIRCLE OF THE CHURCH YEAR WALL HANGING, CIRCLE OF THE CHURCH YEAR PRESENTATION SET**
- **UNDERLAY: USE A SOLID-COLORED RUG**

BACKGROUND

This lesson sets the context for the whole year. Each year, the Christian people move through a circle of memory and expectation to open themselves to the elusive presence of God. In the Godly Play classroom, we pay attention to this circle of movement each week.

This lesson uses the Circle of the Church Year presentation set (illustrated on p. 27), which includes a circular frame, fifty-two removable colored blocks and a gold cord or ribbon.

You'll also use the Circle of the Church Year wall hanging (illustrated on p. 24), which has colored cloth "blocks" for the Sundays of the year and a golden arrow that moves from Sunday to Sunday. From now on, begin each class by inviting a child to go to this wall hanging and move the golden arrow to the next Sunday. (Check the wall hanging before class to make sure that when the child moves the arrow to the next block, it will point to the right color.) This invites children to move through the Church's special kind of time, marked not by numbers but by blocks of color.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

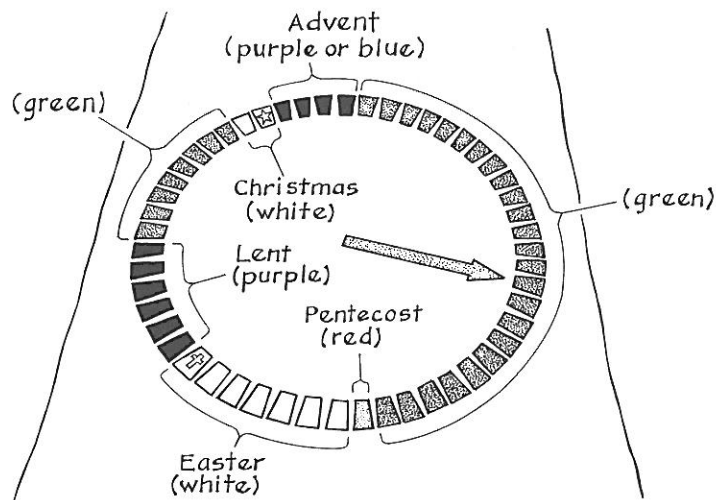
The Circle of the Church Year presentation set is a circle about one foot in diameter made from wood, poster board, foamcore or felt. Blocks made from the same material fit in a ring to mark each week of the liturgical year, as well as the day of Christmas.

Three arrow-shaped hands of this “clock” point to the three great times of the Church year. If you buy only one ready-made material, we recommend that it be this one. Accurately cutting out these blocks is a difficult job!

This material can either be kept inside a box or set plainly on the shelf. A box adds to the mystery; without a box, children can see the material better when they look around the room. Some sets, intended for older children, include inserts that fit inside the circle. These inserts are labeled with the names of the seasons, months, phases of the moon, etc., so a child can actually find the date of Easter for any given year.

You will use the gold cord or ribbon (about three feet long) to show how time can be “in a line.” this cord needs to be flexible and small enough to curl up inside your fist.

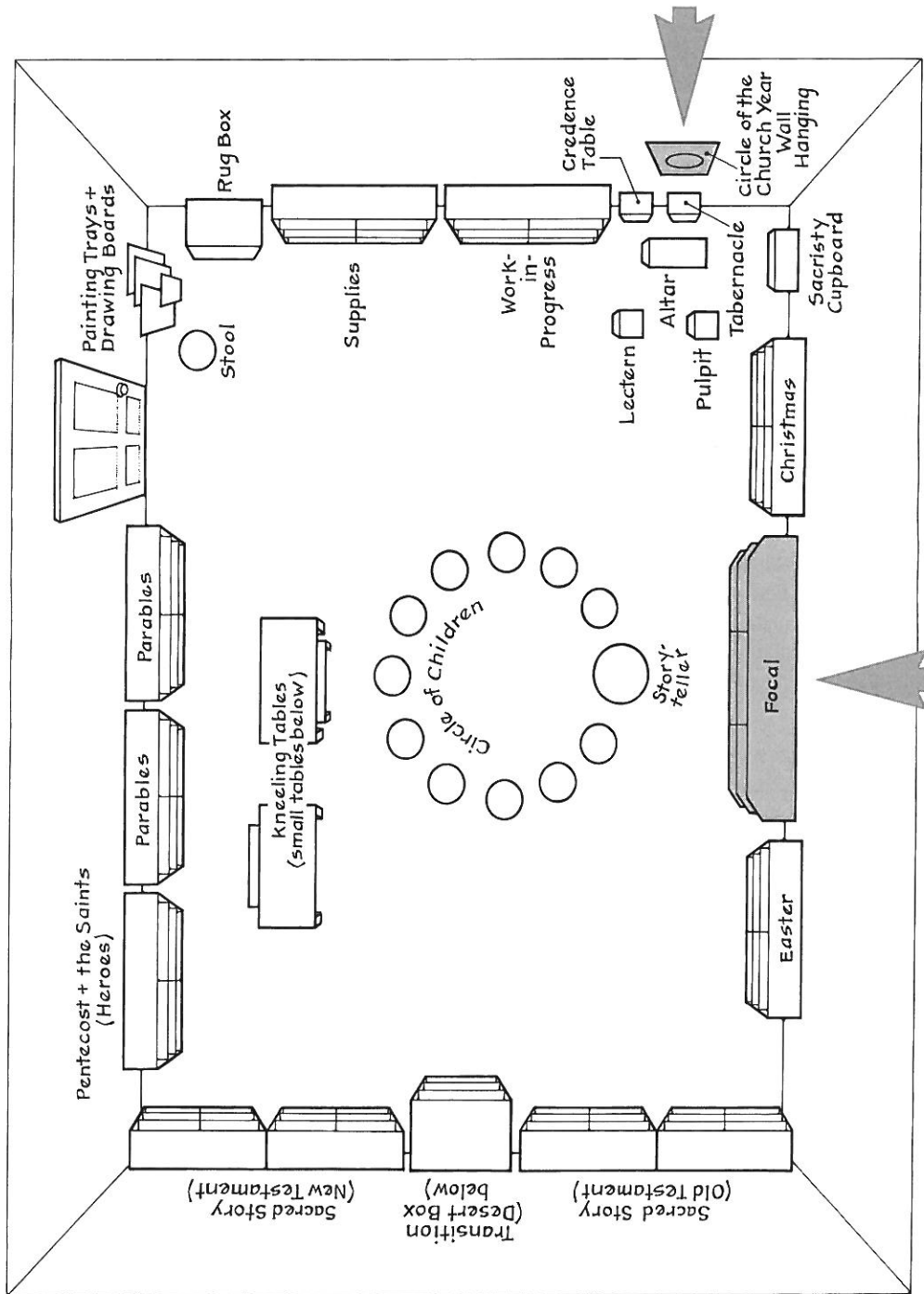
Traditions about the use of color for feast days or liturgical seasons vary greatly, even within denominations. As you order the material or prepare this lesson, please adjust as needed to match the colors actually used in your church.



CIRCLE OF THE CHURCH YEAR WALL HANGING

SPECIAL NOTES

Art Project: Although we rarely suggest specific art projects, children might enjoy making their own Circle of the Church Year to take home. Cut out two circles to match the inside and outside diameters of the presentation material’s circular slot. The children use these to trace their own circles. They then glue “blocks” made from construction paper between the two lines, using the wall hanging or presentation material for their guide. Finally, they attach the golden arrow to the center of the circle. The individual precut, colored blocks and the arrows and brads for attaching them are kept in their own clear plastic containers. All materials are kept together on a tray. Invite children to take their completed circles with them, so they can follow the Circle of the Church Year at home, the way they do in class.



WHERE TO FIND MATERIALS

MOVEMENTS

Get up from your position in the circle and carefully cross the room to the rug box. Pick up a rug with attentive care.

Bring the rug to the circle and roll it out just as carefully and lovingly as you would like the children to do. This is especially important for children younger than eight years old.

The Circle of the Church Year material is usually kept right behind the story teller, so why walk around the room? Reaching back and pulling it off the shelf isn't dramatic enough to catch the children's attention and help them remember where to find the story. Instead, get up and walk around the room until you come back to where the circle sits on its shelf.

Sit down in the circle with the rug in front of you. Place the material to your side. As you do so, pick up the gold cord and enclose it in your hand so that you can pull it out through a space between two fingers. Keep eye contact with the children as you hide the cord in your hand and begin the story.

Until now, the gold cord has been hidden. But now you show a small end of the cord extending between your fingers, and you suddenly notice it.

WORDS

Now watch carefully. Here is the rug you need for this lesson.

Watch where I go now to get the lesson.

Hm. It's not where the sacred stories are. It's not where the parables are. Ah, here it is! This is the lesson about the Circle of the Church Year.

Time, time, time. There are all kinds of time. There is a time to get up in the morning. There is a time to go to bed. There is a time to go to school and a time to come home. There is a time to work, and there is a time to play. But what is time?

Some people say that time is in a line, but I wonder what that would look like? Ah. Wait a minute. What is this?

MOVEMENTS

Pull out the cord slowly as you speak. Pull it all the way out from your fist slowly as you talk until it drops to the rug.

The end of the cord drops.

Pick up the cord and look at it.

Hold the two ends and look at them.

Tie the two ends (beginnings) together. Then put the circle of wooden blocks on the rug and place the golden circle of time around the circle of the material.

WORDS

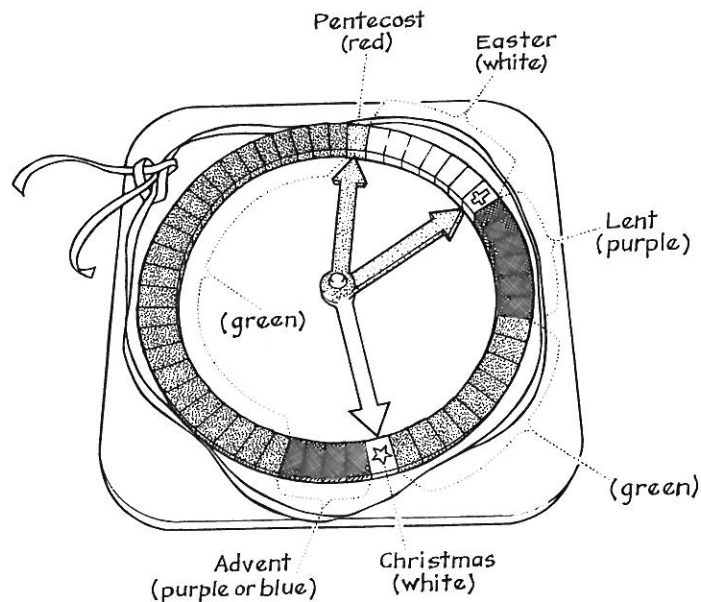
Time. Time in a line. This is time in a line. Look at this. Here is the beginning. It is the newest part. It is just being born. It is brand new. Now look.

Look. It is getting older. The part that was new is now getting old. I wonder how long time goes. Does it go forever? Could there ever be an ending?

It ended. Look at the ending.

The beginning that was so new at the beginning now is old. The ending is the new part now. We have a beginning that is like an ending and an ending that is like a beginning.

Do you know what the Church did? They tied the ending that was like a beginning, and the beginning that was like an ending together, so we would always remember that for every ending there is a beginning and for every beginning there is an ending.



CIRCLE OF THE CHURCH YEAR PRESENTATION SET (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

MOVEMENTS

Leave the golden cord on the material and begin to remove the blocks. Begin with the “three great times” (a white Christmas block, a white Easter block and a red Pentecost block). When you pick up the red Pentecost block, drop it briefly: it’s so hot! Remember to speak of the three great “times,” since Christmas is not always on a Sunday.

Sit back for a moment and look at the blocks for the three great times.

Place the four purple (or blue) blocks of Advent in a line to your right of the white block for Christmas. Place the six purple blocks for Lent in a line to your right of the white block for Easter.

Touch first the four blocks of Advent, then the six blocks of Lent.

Count out six more white Sunday blocks for the season of Easter and place them to your right of the red block for Pentecost.

Touch Pentecost again, but snatch your hand away because it’s still hot.

Now only green blocks are left in the circle. Begin to remove them in groups of three, and place them on the rug in groups of three. Refer to the diagram for correct placement. Pace yourself: you don’t want to rush, but you do want to get the blocks out before the children lose interest.

WORDS

Here are the three great times. This is Christmas. This is Easter. This is—ouch! That’s hot! This is Pentecost.

People can walk right through these mysteries each year, and not even know what’s there. We need time to get ready to come close to these mysteries.

Here are the times for getting ready. The time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Christmas is called “Advent.” The time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Easter is called “Lent.”

Look. The time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Easter is longer than the time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Christmas. This is because Easter is an even greater mystery than Christmas.

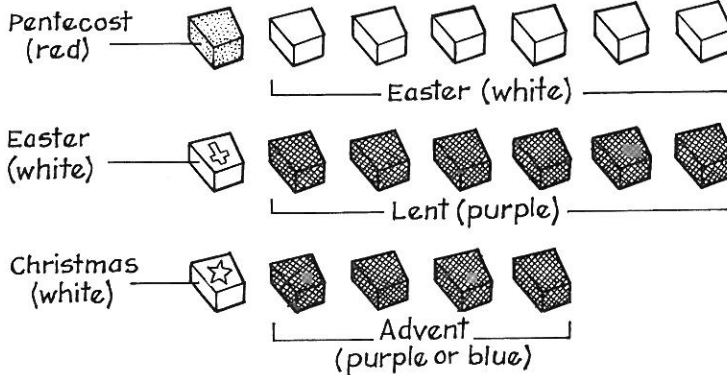
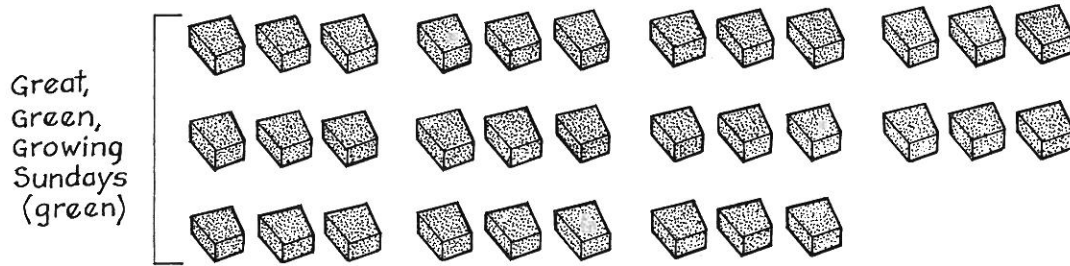
It is so great that it keeps on going. You can’t keep it in one Sunday. It overflows and goes on for six more Sundays. It makes a whole season!

The season of Easter is also a time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Pentecost. Ouch! It’s still hot.

Here are all of the great, green Sundays of the year.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



ALL THE BLOCKS OUT OF THE CIRCLE (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

Now let's see if we can build the circle of the year again. Watch carefully, because the Church tells time by colors as well as by clocks.

Place the white block for Christmas in the empty circle, then the white Easter block and finally the red Pentecost block.

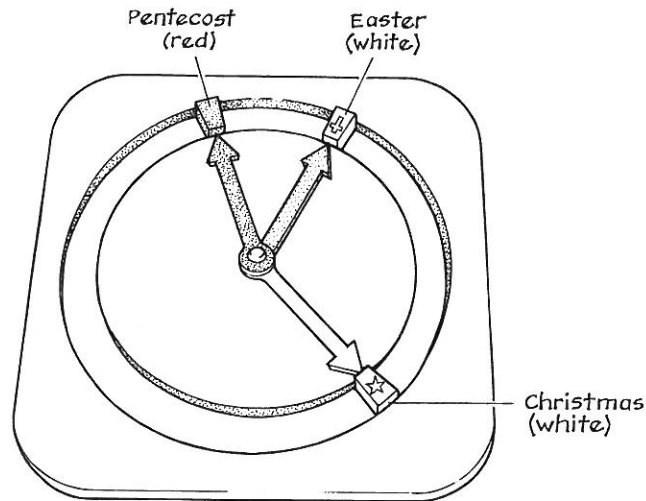
Here are the three great times.

Ouch, it's still hot.

Put the blocks in their approximate final spaces but slide them around to show that those places are not yet set.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



THE THREE GREAT TIMES IN THE CIRCLE (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

Place the four purple (or blue) blocks for Advent in front of the white Christmas block. Touch each block in turn as you count one, two, three, four.

■ The time for getting ready for the mystery of Christmas is called Advent. It is one, two, three, four weeks long. The Church year begins with the beginning of Advent.

Sometimes the color for getting ready for Christmas is purple. That's a serious color, the color of kings. Sometimes the color is blue. Do you know why? Because it's one of the colors for the Mother Mary. Without the Mother Mary, there would be no baby Jesus.

Place the six purple blocks for Lent in front of the white Easter block.

■ The time for getting ready for Easter is usually purple. Purple is the color of kings, and something is going to happen to Jesus, the King. But he was not the kind of king that people thought was coming. He was a different kind of king.

Touch each of the purple Lent blocks in turn as you count one, two, three, four, five, six.

■ Look, there are one, two, three, four, five, six weeks for getting ready for Easter. It is an even greater mystery than Christmas, so it takes longer to get ready to enter it.

Place the six white blocks for the season of Easter after the block for Easter itself. Touch each block as you count one, two, three, four, five, six.

■ Easter is so great a mystery that you can't keep it in only one Sunday. It keeps on going for one, two, three, four, five, six weeks.

During that time people met Jesus in a new way. He had died on the cross, and that was very sad. But they kept meeting him.

MOVEMENTS

Put your two hands over the circle like a blessing. Raise them together about 12".

Move one hand back down and touch the Pentecost block.

Begin to put the green blocks into the circle, three at a time. First place nine green blocks between the white Christmas block and the first purple block of Lent.

Next place the remaining green blocks, three at a time, between the red Pentecost block and the first purple block of Advent. Take your time and let the children's year unfold in their imaginations as you replace these great, green Sundays.

WORDS

Somehow Jesus was still with them, as he is still with us.

Then something wonderful happened. The Apostles went outside of Jerusalem with Jesus in this new way.

◆ There they saw him go up.

◆ And a few days later the Holy Spirit came down. The Church was born. The Apostles glowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their tongues were like fire when they spoke. They were more alive than they had ever been before. That's why the color of Pentecost is red like fire.

◆ First we will put in the great, green, growing Sundays between Christmas and the beginning of Lent. The most you can ever have here are nine, so we will put in nine green growing weeks here.

◆ Here are the rest of the great, green, growing Sundays. Do you know what the Sundays after Pentecost are called? They are called "the Sundays after Pentecost."

Here is the time when school is out. The summer comes and the days get longer and longer. You can play outside later. People go swimming. Some go to camp. Many go on vacation. Then summer comes to an end.

Now you begin to get ready for school. You need new clothes and books. School begins and you often have a new teacher. The days get shorter. School goes on and you get used to all the new things.

Now the days are really short. It gets dark very early. It looks as if the light is just about to go out. Right at that time, when the light seems to be coming to an end, we reach Advent. The year ends, and it begins again. It is time to get ready to enter the mystery of Christmas.

MOVEMENTS

These can be shown by the “clock hands” that extend from the middle of the circle to the Christmas, Easter and Pentecost blocks.

If you have inserts that fit inside the circle to label the seasons, you can name the seasons once again as you put the inserts in. These pieces should be cut to the exact length of each area’s name, so that older children can check their own work when using this material. If you don’t have these inserts, simply touch the blocks named.

Move your hand around the re-assembled circle.

Sit back and enjoy the whole circle of beautiful colors. Now it’s time to begin the wondering.

These last wondering questions are especially intended to prepare children for a visit to the sacristy, with its mysterious cupboards and wonderful drawers of colors. If possible, arrange for such a visit in the next week or so.

WORDS

Here are the three great times: Christmas. Easter. Pentecost.

Here are the times for getting ready. Advent. That’s four weeks. Lent. That’s six weeks. You can’t keep Easter to just one Sunday, so it keeps on for six more weeks. Those weeks are called the season of Easter, too. Here are the great, green, growing Sundays of the year.

It is all here. Everything we need. For every beginning there is an ending, and for every ending there is a beginning. It goes on and on, forever and ever.

I wonder which one of these colors you like best?

I wonder how the colors make you feel?

I wonder which color is the most important?

I wonder if you have ever seen these colors in the church?

Some of the colors in the church change, and some do not. I wonder where the ones are that change?

I wonder if you have ever come close to these colors in the church?

I wonder what happens in the church when you see these colors?

I wonder who changes the colors there?

I wonder where the colors go when you do not see them?

I wonder why the Church tells time with colors?

MOVEMENTS

Model how you want the children to put the materials away by walking carefully around the circle, carrying the materials with two hands. Return them to the shelf. Then carefully roll up the rug and return it to the rug box.

Begin helping the children decide on their responses. Today you can include the possibility of children making their own circles to take home. See the Special Notes (p. 24) for details.

You might also have a page from a calendar mounted on foamcore to lay beside the circle when you wonder why the Church tells time with colors.

WORDS

- Now watch carefully where I go to put this lesson away, so you will always know where to find it.