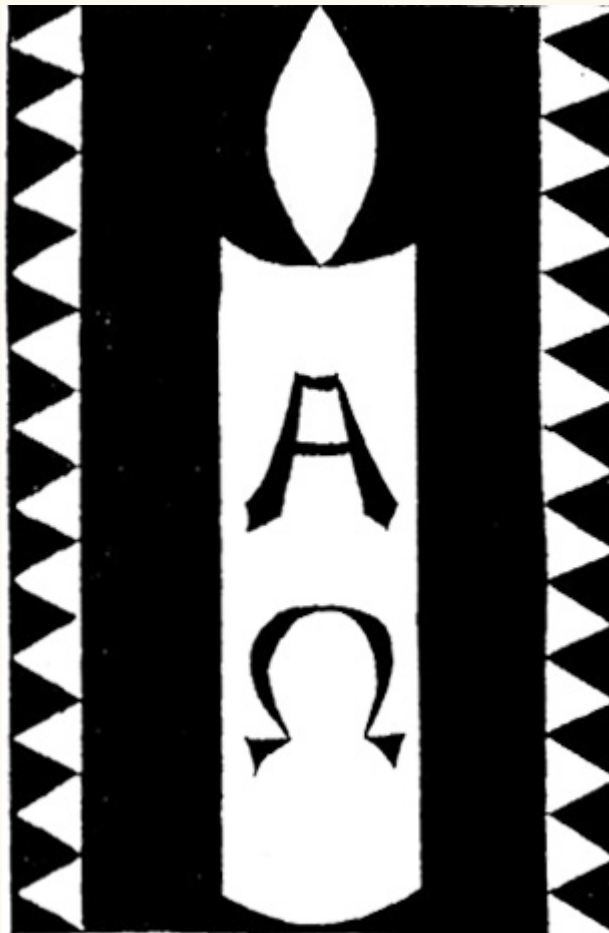


The Christian Year

Calendar and Lectionary



Guide 3: The Christian Year - Calendar and Lectionary

Adapted from a booklet produced by the Diocese of Pretoria in 1990

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The Christian Year

This booklet is one of a series of guides designed for the training of Anglican deacons, and seeks to explain the origins of the Christian Year and the support available in the Church's Calendar and Lectionary to travel it.

Introduction

This booklet has a two-fold purpose:

- To explain the general pattern of the Christian year and the meaning of its various observances.
- To give practical help in finding the readings and psalms for the day, that is, for the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer and for the Eucharist.

A copy of *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* and of the *Lectionary* for the current Church year are needed for the study of this booklet.

There are five sections:

1. The Christian Year as it is presented in *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*.
2. Calendar and Lectionary - a comparison of the calendars in the *Prayer Book* and the *Lectionary* published for each year by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and practical instruction on finding the lessons.
3. Finding the readings for services and the use of the *Lectionary*.
4. Saints' Days - the history and reasons for their observance.
5. More about the Christian Year. An introduction to customs and ceremonies connected with special days or seasons.

1 The Christian Year

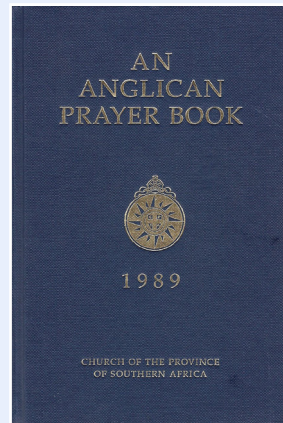
The Christian Year follows the following pattern in the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*.

The Church begins its year with Advent, a time when both Christ's birth at Bethlehem and His second coming in glory are anticipated.

From Christmas to Pentecost the church follows the events of his life as they occurred. The Gospels for the Sundays after Epiphany tell of his ministry, particularly the miracles.

At Septuagesima Sunday the church begins to prepare for Easter. Lent is linked with Jesus' temptation and forty days fast in the wilderness.

During Holy Week and beginning on Palm Sunday, the Church follows the last days of Christ, his death on Good Friday and Resurrection on Easter Day. The Sunday after Easter and to Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit



The original meaning of these terms:

Advent: from a Latin word meaning 'coming' or 'arrival' - a time of preparation for the birth of Christ

Christmas: Christ mass - the celebration of the birth of Jesus

Epiphany: from a Greek word for 'manifestation' or 'striking appearance' - the revelation of God to the world through Jesus, later celebrating the visit of the magi

Septuagesima: means 70 in Greek and refers to this Sunday being 70 days before Easter

Lent: from an old English word meaning spring (which is when Lent takes place in England)

Easter: from an old English word referring to the east and to a pagan feast held at dawn at this time of the year

Pentecost: from a Greek word referring to 50 days - 50 days after Passover when the Jews celebrated the wheat harvest

at Pentecost continues this cycle. Trinity Sunday (also the first Sunday after Pentecost) rounds off the first half of the year.

The rest of the year is divided into “Sundays after Pentecost”.

The *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* makes a distinction between “ordinary” times and those which are “extraordinary”, that is, the Christmas and Easter cycles.

All the other Sundays – those between Epiphany and Lent (numbers 1 to 9) and between Trinity and Advent (numbers 10 to 34) – are ordinary “Sundays of the Year” and are numbered 1 to 34.

The rest of the Sundays are associated with particular festivals. These parts represent “extraordinary time”, that is, the special seasons which commemorate the different parts of Jesus’ life. This means that the times from Advent to Epiphany and from Lent to Pentecost stand out as special seasons.

2 Calendar and Lectionary

From the early days of the Church, as the Church year developed its patterns it became necessary to work out a calendar. This was complicated because the date of Easter was calculated according to the Jewish calendar (which was a lunar calendar not a solar calendar) and shifted year by year by up to 5 weeks. Note that the Eastern and Western Churches built somewhat different calendars (for instance the Eastern Churches hold “Christmas” on the 6th of January!).

So, compiling the calendar was difficult. How did one fit the great seasons and festivals of the year (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost) into the calendar year when the date of Easter kept changing but Christmas was always on the same day? How did one fit in the day on which a saint was commemorated into this shifting calendar? So what we ended up was a quite complicated set of rule for the Church year calendar.

In the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* we have all those rules listed on pages 15 to 33. These rules apply to:

The **ordinary Sundays of the Year** (pages 17-18)

The **Great Festivals** (pages 18-19) of which at least 24 are on Sundays and 6 on weekdays

Festivals (pages 19-21) all of which are on set calendar days

Days of special devotion (such as fasting) (page 21 and also see pages 26 to 27 [Days of fasting and self-denial])

Commemorations and other special days (pages 22 to 26) which are calendar dates for the commemoration of saints and other special people.

Key dates 1988 - 2025 (pages 30 to 33) which are tables giving the dates for Ash Wednesday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost (nearest Sunday) and Advent Sunday.

[Note that the Key dates given in the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* only went up to the year 2025 and we now have to be reliant on the annual printed *Lectionary* for these. It had been planned that the *Prayer Book 1989* would be revised before 2026 but this process has not yet been concluded.]

Year	Lectionary Cycle	
	Sunday	Weekday
2025/2026	A	2
2026/2027	B	1
2027/2028	C	2
2028/2029	A	1
2029/2030	B	2
2030/2031	C	1

The Lectionary

In the latter part of every year the Anglican Church of Southern Africa publishes a *Lectionary* (both in printed and electronic format) which covers the period from Advent to the end of December of the next year.

It lists, for every day of the year, whether it is a special day or an ordinary one and provides the scripture readings for every day: for the Eucharist and Morning and Evening prayer. It also gives the liturgical colour of the day and the Collects for Sundays and all special days.

Clearly, the *Lectionary* is a great time saving device. You just turn to the date in the *Lectionary* and there is the information you need.

3 Finding the readings for services and the use of the Lectionary

Using the An Anglican Prayer Book 1989

Finding the correct readings for a particular day, whether a Sunday or a weekday is a somewhat complicated task if using the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* alone.

The **Sunday readings** follow a three year cycle: A or B or C. So you have to know which of the three annual cycles you are in. The year 2025 was in cycle C, so 2026 is in cycle A again.

Each important **Great Festivals and Festivals** (whether on Sundays or weekdays) has its own Collect, Old Testament reading, Psalm, Epistle and Gospel.

These readings also follow the three year cycle: A or B or C. These readings (and some whole special services) will be found at:

Advent to Epiphany (pages 149 to 160)

Ash Wednesday to Easter (pages 161 to 230)

Easter to Corpus Christi (pages 231 to 246)

Readings for **Commemorations and other special days** do not have a three year cycle:

Festivals and Commemorations (pages 290 to 316)

Various Occasions (pages 324 to 335)

The readings for **Ordinary Sundays** follow the three year cycle (pages 247 to 289).

No readings are given for the weekdays.

A person wanting to find readings for the Daily Offices or for a weekday Eucharist can either re-use the Sunday Collect and readings or construct their own set of readings.



Lectionary

Advent 2025 – December 2026

Year A

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Using the Lectionary

The *Lectionary* is very simple to use. Each day provides the readings for the Eucharist, Morning and Evening Prayer, the liturgical colour for the day, sometimes a Proper Preface (pages 134 to 139 in the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* for use by celebrants in the Eucharistic Prayer), and for Sundays the Canticle and Collect.

The Sunday readings use the three year cycle (A, B, C) and the weekday readings use a two year cycle (1, 2).

The Lectionary includes an introductory section About the Lectionary, introductions to each season of the Church Year, the day by day listing (of readings, canticles, proper prefaces, common collects, and the liturgical colour for the day.), List of Common Readings, Additional Collects, and Special Days and Seasons of Prayer, Collects for Season of Creation, and Key Dates 2023 - 2025.

Here is a sample page for the first week of Advent 2026:

Season of Advent (next Church year): 29 Nov 2026 to 23 Dec 2026			November 2026	
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT 29 NOV 2026 (Purple) First Sunday in Advent (APB p 149); Canticle 2,16,18; PP 1 This Advent Sunday marks the beginning of Eucharistic Cycle B. Almighty Father, your Son came to us in humility as our saviour and at the last day he will come again in glory as our judge: give us grace to turn away from darkness to the light of Christ that we will be ready to welcome him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. Principal Readings Isaiah 64:1-9 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37 Morning Prayer Psalm 82 Isaiah 1:1-9 2 Peter 3:1-10 Seasonal Sunday Evening Prayer Psalm 80:1-7 Micah 2:1-13 Matthew 24:15-31	MON 30 NOV (Purple) PP 1 ✠ ST ANDREW, APOSTLE Canticle 2; PP 19; Collect: APB p 315 Eucharist Zechariah 8:20-23 Psalm 47 Romans 10:8b-18 John 1:35-42 Morning Prayer Psalm 34 Ezekiel 47:1-12 John 12:20-32 Evening Prayer Psalms 96,100 Isaiah 55:1-5 Matthew 4:18-22 ... or continuous readings Eucharist Isaiah 2:1-5 Psalm 122 Matthew 8:5-13 Morning Prayer Psalms 1, 2, 3 Isaiah 1:10-20 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Evening Prayer Psalms 4, 5, 6 Amos 2:6-16 Luke 20:1-8	TUE 1 DEC (White) PP 1 ✠ Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon and Religious, 1637 PP 20; Collect: CC 6 APB p 322, Common 6 ... or continuous readings ✠ World AIDS Day Eucharist Isaiah 11:1-10 Psalm 72:1-8 Luke 10:21-24 Morning Prayer Psalms 7, 8 Isaiah 1:21-31 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Evening Prayer Psalm 9 Amos 3:1-11 Luke 20:9-18 WED 2 DEC (Purple) PP 1 Eucharist Isaiah 25:6-9 Psalm 23 Matthew 15:29-39 Morning Prayer Psalms 10, 11 Isaiah 2:1-11 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20	Evening Prayer Psalms 12, 13, 14 Amos 3:12—4:5 Luke 20:19-26 THU 3 DEC (White) PP 1 ✠ Francis Xavier, Priest and Missionary to the East, 1552 PP 20; Collect: CC 4 APB p 321, Common 4 ... or continuous readings Eucharist Isaiah 26:1-6 Psalm 118:19-24 Matthew 7:21-27 Morning Prayer Psalms 15, 16 Isaiah 2:12-22 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 Evening Prayer Psalm 17 Amos 4:6-13 Luke 20:27-40 FRI 4 DEC (White) PP 1 ✠ John of Damascus, Teacher of the Faith, c.760 PP 20; Collect: CC 3 APB p 320, Common 3 ... or continuous readings	Eucharist Isaiah 29:17-24 Psalm 27:1-5,16-17 Matthew 9:27-31 Morning Prayer Psalm 18:1-31 Isaiah 3:1-15 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Evening Prayer Psalm 18:32-52 Amos 5:1-17 Luke 20:41—21:4 SAT 5 DEC (White) ✠ Peter Masiza, Priest 1907 PP 20; Collect: See Additional Collects Eucharist Proverbs 2:1-8 Psalm 135:1-6 Matthew 24:42-47 ... or continuous readings Eucharist Isaiah 30:19-26 Psalm 147:1-11 Matthew 9:35—10:1,5-8 Morning Prayer Psalms 19, 20, 21 Isaiah 4:2-6 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Evening Prayer Psalm 22 Amos 5:18-27 Luke 21:5-19

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Looking at the first column (FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT), note that it refers to the relevant page in the Prayer Book (APB 149), a choice of Canticles, and the Proper Preface (PP 1). The liturgical colour is also shown (Purple).

Looking at the third column, a commemoration of Nicholas Ferrar, note the changed liturgical colour (White) and the inclusion of a Common Collect (CC 6 APB p 322, Common 6).

4 Saint's days - the history and reasons for their observance

The earliest festivals of saints were those of the martyrs who had died rather than renounce their faith. The day of the martyr's death was remembered as his or her heavenly birthday. On that day Christians assembled at the tomb of the saint for the Eucharist. Originally these celebrations had purely local support, but after the end of the persecution in 313 AD not only martyrs but also bishops, rulers who had encouraged the spread of Christianity, and holy monks and nuns, began to be honoured in the same way on a much larger scale. Each diocese had its own calendar, which was no longer confined to local saints. The festivals of apostles were kept everywhere and there were several days kept in honour of Mary.

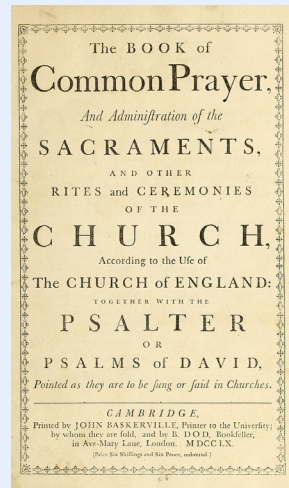
This practice of the veneration of holy men and women arose spontaneously at first. Later the Roman Church introduced a process of canonization whereby a person was declared a saint after a strict examination of his or her life. A distinction was also made between asking for the prayers of the saints and praying for the rest of the departed.

Often people, misunderstanding the significance of the saints, thought they should pray to one or more of their favourite saints in order to win God's favour. The Reformers reacted against this practice by forbidding both prayers to the saints and prayers for the dead. The justification for this was that the former practice weakened belief in Christ as the one Mediator between God and humanity. Many Protestants no longer kept any festivals in honour of the saints, although the Swedish Lutherans retained some and so did the Anglicans – the festivals of apostles were public holidays in England until the end of the eighteenth century. The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* restored another sixty saints, days but did not provide prayers or readings for them.

The Roman Catholic Calendar was revised in 1570, when the number of Saints' Days was reduced to 130, and made uniform for all Roman Catholics. However, canonizations continued, so the number steadily increased. Another revision in 1969 drastically cut down the number of saints to be commemorated everywhere and tried to make this a representative selection of all parts of the world. Others were only commemorated locally.

Anglicans also recognised that it was important to remember people who had lived particularly holy lives, in the centuries after the Reformation. In the last few years various Anglican provinces have revised their calendars to include these people. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa has made point of including missionaries and martyrs of Africa. This is a much simpler process than canonization, as new names can be voted on by the Provincial Synod. The emphasis is on thanking God for these heroes of the faith and taking them as examples of Godly lives.

Special collects for a number of martyr bishops, martyrs, teachers of the faith, missionaries, monks and nuns, priests and other saints are provided for on pages 290 to 316 of *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*. Beside the name of each saint is a symbol (e.g. CC1), which refers you to the "Common Collects" (on pages 319 to 323) and tells you what kind of saint the person is, and provides the appropriate Collect.



The Book of Common Prayer of 1662, the final official version in the Church of England, though there have been many subsequent revisions in England and other countries.

For example on page 291 for the 10th of January there is the name William Laud and next to it the symbol CC1 which refers you to the Common Collect for a martyr bishop on page 319. No readings are given. [However, if you look at 10 January in the *Lectionary* you will find readings.]

The *Lectionary* contains all these saints' days as well as a number of additional ones not found in the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*.

5 More about the Christian Year: an introduction to customs and ceremonies connected with special days or seasons

In this section we provide an introduction to customs and ceremonies connected with special days or seasons.

An excellent source of information on the customs and ceremonies of the Church Year is to be found in Andrew-John Bethke's book *Celebrating the Seasons: Themes and Symbols of the Christian Year* published in 2021 by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

Advent

Advent is a time of preparation, of waiting in hope, as well as being the beginning of the Church Year. The lighting of five special candles: one for each of four Sundays of Advent and the last one on Christmas Day signify the coming of the light of Christ into the world.

Christmas

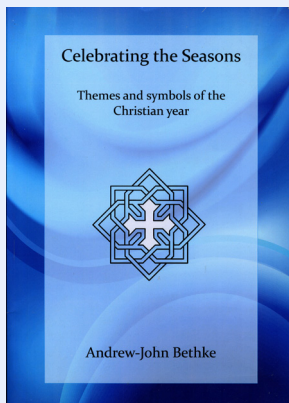
The Christmas feast begins often begins with the midnight Eucharist on Christmas Eve, sometimes there may be an earlier Christmas carol service. Often there is a Christmas Crib as a model of the stable at Bethlehem. The parish priest may bless the crib at special service designed for families and young children on Christmas Eve or during one of the main Eucharistic services on Christmas Day.

Epiphany

This season about the showing forth of Christ to the world, one of the showings forth being the visit of the magi. Many congregations place the figures of the wise men in the crib at this time. Christian legend has made them kings, each from a different part of the world with the kings representing all the nations coming to Christ.

The Presentation of our Lord in the Temple is kept on 2 February (see Luke 2: 22-38). The aged Simeon recognises the baby Jesus as the promised Saviour and speaks of him as a light of revelation to the Gentiles. This reference to the Light may explain the old custom of having a procession during which all the congregation carries candles (hence this feast day was also known as Candlemass).

Epiphany is also the season when we commemorate the baptism of Jesus.



Lent

During Lent the Church prepares for Easter by repentance, prayer and fasting. The *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* gives two obligatory “Fast Days,” Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days the amount of food eaten is reduced. The weekdays of Lent, like Fridays throughout the year, are “Days of self-denial”. The *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* suggests ways of keeping them, but it is left to the individual to decide what to do. Fasting at other times is voluntary, and is undertaken by those who find that fasting helps prayer. Some ought not to fast at all, particularly the sick, pregnant women, the very old and very young.

The liturgical colour for Lent is purple. “Glory to God in the highest” (page 104 number 5) is omitted from the Eucharist and the Ten Commandments (page 140) are read on Sundays. Flowers are traditionally not used during Lent (or during Holy Week).

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday when ashes (made from the palm crosses of the previous year) are blessed as a sign of repentance and used to mark worshippers’ foreheads with a cross, either at the Eucharist or other service or outside the regular services. The ceremony may be postponed until the following Sunday, if no priest is available before then.

Holy Week and Easter

The **Palm Sunday** service has two parts.

The first is the procession with palms which commemorates our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem and is joyful. The second is the Eucharist with the reading of the Passion story. Red vestments are worn (as also on Good Friday) in celebration of the victory won on the Cross.

The Palm Sunday procession. If possible, the congregation should assemble in a place outside the church. The procession begins after the blessing of the palms and the reading of the gospel account of Palm Sunday. The procession returns to the church.

The Passion Story. The Gospel for the day is read from Matthew, Mark or Luke. This can be done dramatically, with a narrator reading the words of Christ and another reader (or readers) taking other speakers. The congregation take the part of the crowd at the trial of Jesus. It can come as a shock to have to shout “Crucify Him!”, but it can be a reminder that our sins crucify him too.

Maundy (or Holy) Thursday

Clergy in the Diocese are invited to attend a **Chrism Eucharist** in the morning, when the Bishop blesses the oils to be used in the coming year (for confirmation and the anointing of the sick) and the clergy renew their ordination vows.

The main service is the evening Eucharist in commemoration of the Last Supper. It is a joyful service with white vestments. It may include the Feet Washing. Twelve people sit on chairs in front of the congregation and the priest/deacon washes their feet and dries them (and should be attended by a server with basin and towel). The symbolism is obvious: by washing his disciples feet Jesus set an example of loving service to others.

In some churches it is the custom for the priest to consecrate extra hosts for the communion of people on Good Friday. These are placed in a portable tabernacle (locked box). At the end of the Eucharist the priest takes the reserved sacrament to the an “altar of repose” such as in a side chapel and candles are left burning beside this altar.

The main altar is then stripped, cloths and candles being removed to the vestry, the carpet rolled up (if there is one) and the sanctuary left completely bare. This commemorates the scattering of the disciples at Jesus’ arrest and the stripping of our Lord’s body at the crucifixion. While the stripping is going on, the congregation recite Psalm 22.

Many congregations observe a one hour or even an all night prayer vigil – this is in response to Jesus’ request to Peter, James and John to pray with him.

Good Friday

As the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* explains, the main Liturgy falls into four parts: the Readings, which include the Passion story from John’s gospel; special intercessions for the whole world; the Adoration of Christ crucified symbolised by the cross which is displayed and sometimes kissed by the people; Communion from the reserved sacrament. This service may be held alone or followed by or joined to the so-called Three Hours Service (of sermons, readings and prayers), held from noon till 3 pm, the hours when Jesus hung upon the cross.

Holy Saturday and Easter Eve

On Holy Saturday the church is thoroughly cleaned, the altar prepared with clean cloths and new candles and a stand set up for the paschal candle. This and the sanctuary can be decorated with flowers as a symbol of joy. There is no Eucharist until the Easter Vigil.

The **Easter Vigil** service can begin on Saturday evening at dusk, late at night, or it can begin in the very early morning so that the Eucharist is celebrated at sunrise.

The Easter Vigil falls into three parts:

- The Service of Light, when the new fire is blessed and the Paschal Candle lit. The candle needs to be thick enough to be used all through Eastertide and at baptisms and funerals throughout the year. The priest will mark it with the date, a cross and the letters “Alpha” and “Omega”.
- The Liturgy of the Word.
- The Eucharist, which includes any baptisms and the renewal of baptism vows.

People can be given the opportunity to renew their baptismal vows at any service on Easter Day.

Full details of the Holy Week and Easter Vigil services are found on pages 172 to 230 of the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*.

Eastertide lasts for fifty days, ending with the Feast of Pentecost. After the last service on that day the Paschal candle is removed to the sanctuary. It can be placed by the font and lit for baptisms during the year.

Ordinary Sundays of the Year follow on from Pentecost and Trinity Sunday (the Sunday after Pentecost) (there were also from four to nine such Ordinary Sundays after Epiphany and before Lent).

Some self-test exercises

1. Using the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, find the readings for a Sunday of the Year that falls between 31 July and 6 August and find what the liturgical colour for that Sunday is.
2. Using the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, find the Readings and Collect for the commemoration of the Martyrs of Mbokotwana, 1880 which takes place in November.
3. Using the *Lectionary*, find the Liturgical Colour, Proper Preface and the Collect for the Martyrs of Uganda commemorated on the 3rd of June.

Answers to self-test exercises

1. Using the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, find the readings for a Sunday of the Year that falls between 31 July and 6 August and find what the liturgical colour for that Sunday is.

You find the correct page in the Sundays of the Year section, it is pages 269 to 270. Then you have to work out what the readings year cycle it is [For example in 2026 it is Year A] - so now you have the readings. At the top of the page on the right is the letter G - that is for Green, the liturgical colour of this Sunday.

2. Using the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, find the Readings and Collect for the commemoration of the Martyrs of Mbokotwana, 1880 which takes place in November.

You look in the Festivals and Commemorations section and look for November (pages 312 to 315) and find the Martyrs of Mbokotwana on page 314.

It reads: 3 The martyrs of Mbokotwana, 1880 CC2 so from this you know the date (3 November) and to use Common Collect 2 (which you will find on pages 319 to 320).

3. Using the *Lectionary*, find the Liturgical Colour, Proper Preface and the Collect for the Martyrs of Uganda commemorated on the 3rd of June.

You turn to the page that has 3 June on it. The liturgical colour is red, Proper Preface 20 is used (which you find on page 138 of *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*) and the Collect is found in the Additional Collects which you find in the latter pages of the *Lectionary*.

