SOFTWARE & TECH

United Church Of Christ Liturgical Calendar 2015

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Journey Through the Year: Understanding the United Church of Christ Liturgical Calendar 2015

The rhythm of the Christian year is a sacred heartbeat, and for congregations within the United Church of Christ (UCC), the liturgical calendar provides a framework for worship, reflection, and mission. While the UCC is known for its strong emphasis on local church autonomy and covenantal relationships rather than hierarchical mandates, the liturgical calendar serves as a unifying guide, connecting individual congregations to the global body of Christ. Exploring the United Church of Christ liturgical calendar for 2015 offers more than just a list of dates; it provides a lens through which to understand how a progressive, covenantal denomination engages with ancient traditions while facing contemporary challenges. This article will walk you through the seasons, special observances, and unique emphases that shaped worship in UCC congregations during 2015, illustrating how this calendar functions as a spiritual roadmap for the year.

The Theological Foundation of Liturgical Time in the UCC

To appreciate the specifics of the 2015 calendar, it is important to understand how the UCC approaches liturgical time. The denomination, formed in 1957 from the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, carries a deep respect for both Reformed theology and congregational polity. This heritage means the liturgical calendar is not imposed from above but is instead a widely adopted resource. The UCC encourages the use of the **Revised Common Lectionary**, a three-year cycle of Scripture readings that many mainline Protestant denominations share. For 2015, this meant congregations across the UCC were reading from the same Gospel passages, psalms, and Old Testament texts each Sunday, fostering a sense of connection even amid diverse worship styles.

The liturgical calendar itself follows a familiar pattern: a cycle of anticipation (Advent), celebration (Christmas), revelation (Epiphany), penitence (Lent), triumph (Easter), and empowerment (Pentecost). However, the UCC infuses this cycle with a distinct social justice consciousness. In 2015, this was particularly evident as congregations wrestled with pressing issues such as racial justice, environmental stewardship, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. The liturgical calendar provided the theological scaffolding for this work, grounding activism in the story of God's redemption.

A Season-by-Season Walk Through 2015

The liturgical year does not align neatly with the calendar year. The year 2015 began in the middle of the Christmas season and concluded in the early weeks of Advent. Here is a detailed breakdown of the flow of worship from the United Church of Christ perspective during 2015.

Technically, the liturgical year for the season of Advent began on November 30, 2014. By January 1, 2015, UCC

congregations were still immersed in the twelve days of Christmas, a season that runs from December 25 to January 5. In many UCC churches, this period was marked by a focus on the incarnation not just as a historical event but as a present reality. Sermons often explored themes of God dwelling among us, with a particular emphasis on welcoming the stranger—a theme that resonated deeply with UCC commitments to immigrant rights and refugee resettlement during that period.

The **United Church of Christ liturgical calendar 2015**designated the First Sunday of Christmas (December 28, 2014) and the Sunday after Christmas (January 4, 2015) as times for reflecting on the mystery of the Word made flesh. Many congregations used these Sundays to hold contemplative services, often featuring the lighting of the Christ candle and the singing of familiar carols that speak of peace and justice.

Epiphany, celebrated on January 6, 2015, marks the arrival of the Magi and the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles. In the UCC, this season, which stretches from early January through the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (which fell on February 18, 2015), is often a time for focusing on mission and evangelism in its broadest sense. For many UCC congregations in 2015, Epiphany was a season to consider the **light of Christ** shining into dark places. This was the year following the Ferguson protests, and many churches used the Epiphany texts about light to address systemic racism.

The Season after Epiphany in 2015 included the Baptism of the Lord Sunday (January 11) and Transfiguration Sunday (February 15). These two Sundays bookend the season with powerful theophany narratives. UCC worship resources for 2015 often connected Jesus' baptism to the congregation's own baptismal covenant, emphasizing God's affirming love for all people, regardless of identity.

Ash Wednesday arrived early in 2015, on February 18. For UCC congregations, Lent is not primarily about individual self-denial but about collective spiritual formation and justice-seeking. The 2015 Lenten season was a time for many churches to engage in the **One Great Hour of Sharing**offering, which supports UCC disaster relief, development, and refugee programs. The theme of "giving up" was often reframed as "taking up"—taking up a practice of advocacy, a commitment to simpler living, or a discipline of daily prayer for the world.

The Sundays in Lent followed the Revised Common Lectionary (Year B, with Gospel readings primarily from Mark). These texts, with their urgent call to discipleship, were used to challenge congregations to consider what it means to follow Jesus into the world's pain. The 2015 UCC liturgical calendar included the traditional Passion/Palm Sunday on March 29, Maundy Thursday on April 2, and Good Friday on April 3. Many UCC churches held ecumenical services for Good Friday, often participating in community-wide Stations of the Cross events that highlighted contemporary issues of injustice.

Easter Sunday in 2015 was celebrated on April 5. The UCC's Easter proclamation is one of radical hope, emphasizing that the resurrection is a victory over all forces of death—not just physical death, but the death-dealing forces of oppression, hatred, and despair. The Easter season in 2015 was a time of baptisms and confirmations in many congregations, with new members being welcomed into the covenant community.

Ascension Day fell on May 14, 2015. While not always widely observed in every local church, it marks the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry. The UCC liturgical resources often frame Ascension as a moment of commissioning: Jesus leaves his disciples with the promise of the Spirit and the task of being witnesses. Pentecost followed on May 24, 2015. This is a major festival in the UCC calendar, often celebrated with red paraments, readings from Acts 2, and a focus on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. In 2015, many UCC congregations used Pentecost as a day to recommit to speaking the truth in love across cultural and linguistic divides, honoring the diversity of gifts in the church.

The long season after Pentecost, often called Ordinary Time, stretched from late May through November 29, 2015. For the UCC, this is not a time of lesser importance but rather a season for faithful, everyday discipleship. The green paraments symbolize growth in the Christian life. During the summer and fall of 2015, UCC congregations continued to follow the lectionary, exploring the stories of the Old Testament prophets and the

Gospel of Mark.

This period included several significant UCC special Sundays. **World Communion Sunday** fell on October 4, 2015. This is a deeply meaningful day in the UCC, which has strong ecumenical commitments. Congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper alongside Christians around the globe. The **Neighbors in Need**offering was also received in October, supporting the UCC's ministries of justice and compassion.

Another important day in the 2015 calendar was **Reign of Christ Sunday**(also known as Christ the King Sunday), observed on November 22. This Sunday marks the end of the liturgical year, celebrating Christ's sovereignty over all of life. UCC preachers often use this day to challenge earthly powers and to proclaim the upside-down kingdom where the first are last and the last are first.

The liturgical year for 2016 began on November 29, 2015, with the First Sunday of Advent. This marked the start of Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary, which features the Gospel of Luke. For UCC congregations, Advent 2015 was a time of hopeful waiting, often intertwined with advocacy for climate justice and peace. The themes of watching and waiting took on a concrete edge as the world prepared for the Paris Climate Agreement.

Special Emphases and Observances Unique to the UCC in 2015

Beyond the standard seasons, the United Church of Christ liturgical calendar 2015 incorporated several special emphases that reflect the denomination's character.

- Covenant Sunday: Traditionally the first Sunday in January (January 4, 2015), this day invites congregations to renew their covenant with God and with one another. In the UCC, covenant theology is central. Churches often use this Sunday to reaffirm their commitment to being a united and uniting church.
- Peace with Justice Sunday: While the date can vary, many UCC congregations observe this in the Pentecost season. In 2015, it was a time for focusing on nonviolence, restorative justice, and the church's witness for peace in a violent world.
- All Saints Sunday: Observed on November 1, 2015 (or the first Sunday in November), this is a profoundly meaningful day in the UCC. Congregations read the names of members who have died in the past year, light candles, and celebrate the communion of saints. This observance connects local churches to the great cloud of witnesses across time.

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