

*Seasons of the Spirit*TM ...

in tune with the changing church!

The church is changing. We can see it with our eyes and we often sense it deep within our spirits. While change is seldom easy, at *Seasons of the Spirit* we know that all change carries within it the seeds of opportunity and the possibility of new life.

Nine years ago, the *Seasons of the Spirit* development team made a twofold commitment: to *listen* to feedback from congregations and to pay attention to emerging trends in congregational life. For the past nine years this practice of *listening* and *learning* has helped *Seasons of the Spirit* respond to the needs of faith communities of all types.

As *Seasons of the Spirit* moves into its tenth year, our determination to respond to the needs of congregations by offering outstanding, quality resources is as strong as ever.

SeasonsFUSION

Beginning with the 2011-2012 year, we are introducing a brand new resource called SeasonsFUSION.

The name SeasonsFUSION is important because it says much about the resource and about the need it is designed to address.

Take the word FUSION. Today, congregations are looking for and experimenting with new ways of being church, new ways of sharing community together. Messy Church and other Fresh Expressions “churches,” as well as progressive, emerging and emergent communities represent just a few of the ways people are experimenting with new patterns of worship and faith formation, new ways of creating and engaging local communities of support and nurture.

Although many of the forms are different, most vital communities share a commitment to practice their faith and faith traditions. In fact, ideally, a congregation *is* a “community of practice.” Practices such as worship, reflection, hospitality or welcome, justice, contemplation, service, and imagination are key to the vitality, authentic faith, identity, and growth of many of today’s most vibrant congregations.

And so we created SeasonsFUSION in response to congregations who are looking for resources that integrate or *fuse* worship, faith formation, and service, and that enable them to practice their faith in life-giving ways.

As the successor to the Congregational Life component of *Seasons of the Spirit*, SeasonsFUSION will be a one-pack congregational resource containing 52 weeks of new material each year.

While congregations of all types will benefit from using SeasonsFUSION, including those who provide age-level faith formation programs, SeasonsFUSION will especially appeal to congregations who seek to integrate children and young people more fully into the life of the faith community.

Clearly, the word FUSION says a lot about the new resource. But so does the word Seasons. Although we have created SeasonsFUSION in response to an emerging vision of congregational life, we knew it had to be part of the *Seasons of the Spirit* family of resources.

Core values

SeasonsFUSION embodies the core values that underlie *Seasons of the Spirit* and that are spelled out in our Theological Education Foundation Statement. (You can find the full statement at www.seasonsonline.ca under the “About” tab.)

While many of these values operate in the background and may not be obvious, two in particular stand out and will continue to identify SeasonsFUSION as a member of the *Seasons of the Spirit* family. The first is our commitment to following the semi-continuous stream of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The second is our commitment to the arts in faith formation.

Engaging the imaginative spirit through the arts

From the very beginning, the arts have been central to the vision of *Seasons of the Spirit*. Over the years, we have witnessed again and again the power of the arts to engage the hearts and minds of young and old alike.

Because we believe the arts are so important, so foundational to *Seasons of the Spirit*, SeasonsFUSION will continue to offer congregations ways to engage the arts with carefully chosen music, visual art images, poetry, prose and the literary genius of the sacred scriptures/stories themselves.

Grassroots and international

Though less obvious, “grassroots,” “international,” and “community” are three words that describe another set of values central to the vision of *Seasons of the Spirit*. With SeasonsFUSION these values are finding new expression and new life.

SeasonsFUSION is created by practitioners who are passionate about their ministries. Quarterly development events have been and will continue to be held in local church communities in North America, Australia, and, in the future, the United Kingdom. At each development event, members from the local host congregation meet with editors to discuss the lectionary passages, brainstorm themes, and share suggestions for worship and practice from their own experiences.

In other words, SeasonsFUSION resources are created by international and ecumenical communities of engaged congregational members, worship and Christian education leaders and practitioners. The outcome of these events will be both familiar and

excitingly fresh. For each season of the church year, SeasonsFUSION will include the following:

- Commentary on the readings for the day and questions to help people reflect on the Word
- worship outlines, including prayers
- learning practices/educational activities
- contemporary stories; poetry, prose, multi-faith and Saints' days
- articles
- art posters and music
- planning resources
- resources for faith formation in the home

But the importance of the words “grassroots,” “international,” and “community” doesn't stop with the creation of SeasonsFUSION. We understand that they will be equally important to those who will use SeasonsFUSION.

Every day, more and more people are realizing the critical importance of communities as sounding boards, as places that spark creativity, and as invaluable sources of support. As much as we need solid quality resources, we need our friends, neighbours, and colleagues in the faith.

The thing about communities these days is that they are both local and global, physical and virtual. We learn, share, and grow with friends, “neighbours,” and faith partners who may live across the street, or halfway around the world.

To help congregations and SeasonsFUSION users connect with each other, we will offer interactive blogs and use other forms of social media that will enable the sharing of experiences and ideas.

SeasonsENCORE

Of course, we know that not all congregations are the same. Like people, congregations come in all shapes and sizes, with different personalities and needs. While some congregations are experimenting with integrating children and youth into worship, others will want to offer age-level faith formation programs.

SeasonsENCORE is the new name we have given to the age-level resources within the *Seasons of the Spirit* resource family. Once again, the name is important.

When audiences invite an encore after a performance, it is because they appreciate the beauty, value, and goodness of the experience they have just participated in and they want more of the same. That same desire inspires the creative impulse behind SeasonsENCORE.

SeasonsENCORE resources will be based on the same *Seasons of the Spirit* age-level divisions (Ages 3-5, 6-8, 8-11, 12-14, 15-18, and adult) and follow the same weekly session flow that congregations around the world have come to appreciate so much.

What's more, SeasonsENCORE will make best use of the innovative work that has gone into creating the nine-year archive of *Seasons of the Spirit* materials.

Shared content

Because many congregations will want to use *both* SeasonsFUSION and SeasonsENCORE resources, SeasonsFUSION and SeasonsENCORE will share the same focus passages from the semi-continuous stream of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. They will also share the 52 weeks of new biblical commentary, articles, art posters, and music resources, as well as access to interactive blogs and other forms of community enhancing social media.

Every *Seasons of the Spirit* user will also have access to free online resources in the Library & Action Zone, SpiritSightings and SpiritScreenings postings, as well as paid MP3 music recordings and story downloads, resources for Christian education coordinators, and now, for the first time, sheet music downloads and downloadable art for projection from the popular *Lectionary Story Bible* series.

A Season of Creation

In response to the growing concern in Christian communities about the ecological crises and the way human beings are treating Earth, SeasonsFUSION and SeasonsENCORE will include a four-week Season of Creation, beginning September 2011.

New to *Seasons of the Spirit*, this season has been observed by many for the past 11 years. While the Season of Creation has its own set of lectionary readings, the readings are designed to provide a three-year cycle that broadly corresponds to the pattern or plan of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, with each year centred on one of the synoptic gospels: Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B), and Luke (Year C).

The readings for the Season of Creation invite congregations to join with all members of Earth's community to "Celebrate Earth as a sacred planet filled with God's vibrant presence" (from Season of Creation charter). The Sundays of the first year in the Season of Creation focus on the forests, land, wilderness/outback, and rivers.

Easy on the earth can mean easy on the pocketbook

It's important theologically, socially, and environmentally to celebrate the earth and the inherent sacredness of all life. But we need to do more than that just celebrate in our worship and education practices. We need to take action.

That's why, as we designed *Seasons of the Spirit* for the 2011-2012 year and beyond, we made a commitment to reduce our consumption of resources and our production of waste wherever possible.

One way we are doing this is by providing more optional purchases. These optional purchases mean that congregations only order (and pay for) what they actually use, which in turn means we can reduce waste by producing only the quantities we actually need.

Ultimately, the cost savings will flow back to congregations because we will be able to hold down the price of the core resource.

Another way we will conserve resources and reduce waste is by offering more resources online. Examples include the Season-at-a-Glance chart and a new resource booklet filled with crafts, patterns, recipes, and more.

Three-way delivery

Finally, as we move into future, *Seasons of the Spirit* will continue to be available in three ways: in print, on disk, and via the web. We call this “three-way delivery” and it means that each congregation can choose the delivery option that is right for it. It can also choose a combination of delivery methods, according to its needs. So, for example, one congregation might choose to access all of its resource via the web, while another congregation might choose to access SeasonsFUSION via the web, but have its SeasonsENCORE age-level resources delivered in print or disk format. The possibilities are many and the choice is yours.

A vision of the future

Put all of this together and it’s easy to see that Seasons of the Spirit isn’t just another curriculum. It’s a vision of the future!

Check us out

If you would like to learn more about *Seasons of the Spirit*, visit www.seasonsonline.ca. You’ll find articles and free samples as well as *Seasons of the Spirit* subscription prices.

If you’d like to know about SeasonsFUSION in particular, just click on the FUSION tab on the www.seasonsonline.ca home page. You can also visit the Seasons of the Spirit Facebook page and follow emerging developments on Twitter (@seasonsonline).

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