

Say it with color

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [November 3, 1999](#) issue

Crayola's recent announcement that it will change the name of its Indian red crayon to avoid misunderstandings about the color's origin (it comes from a reddish-brown pigment found in India) made me reflect about what color changes marketers might suggest to make the church more appealing. Let's imagine a memo from MegaMarket Church Consultants Inc. to your denomination's liturgical commissions:

Our market researchers advise you to change the colors of your vestments, altars, hangings and banners. When we tried out existing colors and names, we discovered that the unchurched react negatively to them. You must come up with something more positive. Here are some of our suggestions. Let's run through the year:

Black. The books say that this color symbolizes "death, mourning, sorrow, Good Friday." Whoever heard of a church being used to observe such things and prospering? We suggest that Good Friday be renamed "Spring TGIF Festival." *Substitute color suggestions: "Midnight," "Dusk," "Pebble."*

Purple. The books say: "Penitence. Royalty, Lent." Forget penitence. Royalty is fine: Princess Di still fascinates the Gen Xers, but we have to adapt some. Instead of calling the season Lent, how about "Return of the Lilacs"? *Substitute color suggestions: "Berry," "Eggplant," "Plumripe."*

Green. "Hope, life, nature, Epiphany, Trinity." Do you think any of the potential customers for your church can even spell "Epiphany"? Have you ever tried to explain "Trinity?" Trinity/shminity. Attract the New Agers with a "Summer Nurture Festival." *Substitute color suggestions: "Aspenleaf," "Jade," "Emerald," "Heath."*

Red. "Fire, blood, love, Pentecost." Mention Pentecost and they'll think Pentecostal and run for cover. Blood has been out for decades. Fire of Love? They'll go for that. Use on the Sunday nearest St. Valentine's—we mean Valentine's—Day. *Substitute color suggestions: "Flame," "Blush," "Coral."*

White. "Purity, joy, bright light of truth, Christmas, Easter." Postmoderns don't go much for that "truth" stuff, and "purity" makes them nervous. But joy? After two

beers they'll even sing "Ode to Joy." But white is a blah name. Let's make it more exciting.

Substitute color suggestions: "Platinum," "Champagne," "Seafoam," "Pearl," "Snowy."

Blue. "Heavenly love and truth. Advent." They won't sit still for Advent. They'll start singing Christmas carols the day after Halloween or Thanksgiving. But they like "heavenly love"-you know, angels and all that.

Substitute color suggestions: "Cobalt," "Lagoon," "Lapis lazuli."

The bottom line: Celebrate!