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The Church Grows: A.D. 50–A.D. 400

2

FAITH FOCUS

Why did the Gospel spread so widely during the first three centuries?

FAITH VOCABULARY

Gentile	Council of Jerusalem
presbyters	Deposit of Faith
apologists	heresies
apostolic succession	

What clubs or organizations do you belong to? What do you know about their history and development?

Have you ever been a member of a newly formed club or organization? Initially, there are just a few people with a lot of spirit. As the organization grows it draws up rules, forms a governing body, attracts new members, and becomes a visible part of your community. Something similar happened to the Church in her first four hundred years. By the end of the fourth century, the structure of the visible institution of the Church that we know today began to emerge.

What do you know about the events and people that were part of the story of the Church in the first four centuries of her existence?

Ruins at Corinth on the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece.

*And every day the Lord added to
their number those who were being saved.*

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 2:47

Make Disciples of All Nations



The Stoning of St. Stephen, oil on panel, Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669), Dutch painter.

Jesus commanded the Apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Look at the map on this page. Where would you choose to go to fulfill Jesus’ command? The Acts of the Apostles records the phenomenal spread of the Christian faith. Within a single generation, Jesus’ followers carried his message to every corner of the Roman Empire.

The Earliest Disciples of Christ

The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews. At first they were welcomed as followers of a renowned Jewish teacher, or rabbi. Because of their commitment to proclaiming and boldly living their faith in Jesus, the

Son of God and Messiah, these followers of Jesus were eventually cut off from the Jewish community.

The stoning death of Saint Stephen is one example of the ever-widening distance that began to separate the earliest followers of Jesus from their fellow Jews. (See Acts of the Apostles 6:8–15, 7:54–60.) Tension continued to rise until about A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. Around that time the leaders of the Jewish community formally banned all Jews who believed in Jesus from entering any Jewish synagogue.

Saint Paul’s Mission to the Gentiles

Shortly after the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, the story of the **Gentile** believers in Jesus was also unfolding. In Sacred Scripture a Gentile is anyone who is not Jewish. In the New Testament, the story of the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ centers around the missionary work of Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.





Apostles Peter and Paul from an early fourth-century bas-relief sculpture fragment.

Saul the Pharisee was a zealous Jewish leader and persecutor of the followers of Jesus. (See Acts of the Apostles 8:1–3.) As he was traveling to the city of Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem Saul became a believer in Jesus. (See Acts of the Apostles 9:1–25.) After his conversion Saul began to use his Roman name, Paul. The zeal Paul once used to persecute the followers of Christ he now used to baptize, preach, and teach about Jesus, and make disciples of all nations.

The Council of Jerusalem

Saint Paul's mission to the Gentiles proved to be both successful and controversial. The Apostles Peter and James the Greater, and other leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, objected to Saint Paul's inclusion of Gentiles among the followers of Jesus without their first becoming Jews. They gathered with Saint Paul at the **Council of Jerusalem** (ca. 51), the first council of the

Church, to discuss and settle the controversy over the Gentiles. (See Acts of the Apostles 15:1–21.)

The Council of Jerusalem was a turning point for the Church. The Council's decision to allow Gentile converts into the Church without their first becoming Jews opened the door to the vast growth of the Church in the years to come. Eventually the Church would become predominantly Gentile in makeup and become totally distinct from Judaism.

The Council of Jerusalem is one example of how leaders of the Church struggled to settle their differences and understand the mission Christ gave the Apostles. This council and other historical events testify that the earliest leadership of the Church clearly rested on the shoulders of the Apostles and the **presbyters**. Presbyters were early Church leaders chosen by the Apostles to be their co-workers who governed the Church with them.

Why was the Council in Jerusalem a turning point in the life of the Church?

ca. 30–33	Death, Resurrection, Ascension of Jesus
ca. 40–60	Missionary Journeys of Saint Paul the Apostle
ca. 51	Council of Jerusalem
64	Persecution of Emperor Nero
ca. 65	†Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul
70	Destruction of Temple in Jerusalem by Romans
98	Persecution of Trajan
ca. 100	†Martyrdom of Saint Clement of Rome
ca. 110	†Saint John the Evangelist
ca. 165	†Martyrdom of Saint Justin

Note: The symbol † on the timeline indicates the year of the death of the person or persons.

FAITH CONNECTION

Think about the opportunities you have had to pass on the teachings of the Apostles to others. Choose one of those opportunities. How did you respond to that opportunity? How might you respond to that opportunity now?



Saint Paul the Apostle preaching to the Athenians, nineteenth century, artist unknown.

Good friends, even the best of friends, sometimes have serious disagreements. Some of these disagreements are based on the sincere search for the truth. Others are based on opinions that are erroneous. The New Testament contains many examples of the efforts of Saint Paul and other leaders of the Church to settle disagreements and correct false teachings about the faith of the Church.

Proclaiming the Gospel

By the end of the first century, a structure within the Church was clearly emerging. After the death of the last Apostle, which tradition identifies as Saint John the

Evangelist, leadership roles and other forms of ministry were in place that would characterize the shape of the Church for the future.

The roles and responsibilities of bishops, priests, and deacons were recognized and clarified. The bishop of Rome was recognized as being the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle whom Jesus made the visible foundation of the Church. (See Matthew 16:18.) He was clearly acknowledged as the leader of all other bishops and the pastor of the whole Church.

The Deposit of Faith

The **Deposit of Faith** is the heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The faithful handing on of this Deposit of Faith from the time of the Apostles is one of the most sacred trusts of the Church. In writing to Saint Timothy, Saint Paul exhorts him, "Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us" (2 Timothy 1:14).

The letters of Saint Paul are among the earliest writings in the New Testament. They indicate that fulfilling the responsibility and office of truthfully and authentically passing on the teaching of the Apostles was a constant struggle. Saint Paul himself constantly addressed opinions contrary to the teachings of the Apostles and the Church and clarified those teachings.

Why is the faithful handing on of the Deposit of Faith a sacred trust and essential work of the Church?

Did you Know...

The *First Apology* of Saint Justin reveals that the order of Mass today is very similar to the way it was celebrated in the second century. Saint Justin wrote that on Sunday Christians gather in one place, the Scriptures are read, a homily is preached, donations for the poor are collected, bread and wine and water are brought forth, the celebrant prays and gives thanks, the people respond "Amen," and Holy Communion is distributed.

Groups celebrate their values and beliefs in many ways. The Church celebrates her faith and shares in the life and saving work of Christ in the liturgy. "In the liturgy . . . [Christ's] mystery of salvation is made present . . . by the power of his Holy Spirit" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1111).

Christian Worship

Much of the way the Church celebrates her liturgy today has its roots in Jewish rituals. The mission to the Gentiles, however, introduced a number of changes in the rituals of Christian worship.

Orders

Bishops, helped by priests, their co-workers, and by deacons, are ordained to authentically teach the faith, celebrate divine worship, and guide the faithful in living the Gospel. From the time of the Apostles onward bishops, priests, and deacons have been ordained, or consecrated, to serve the Church by the laying on of hands.

Christian Initiation

The process of initiating new members into the Church gradually developed in the first three centuries. These rituals always involved a period of preparation, a formal questioning to establish the presence of faith, and



Early Christians worshipping in the catacombs of Saint Calixtus, below Rome.

the use of the Trinitarian formula in Baptism. Laying on of hands and anointing with oil were also used in the rite of Christian initiation.

Eucharist

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Paschal Mystery, the work of our Salvation. The rites used in the celebration of Mass today also took shape in the days of the early Church. Saint Justin Martyr's (d. 165) *First Apology* (c. 148–155) describes the celebration of Mass at that time as amazingly similar to the way we celebrate the Mass today.

What is the connection between the rites used in the liturgy of the Church today with those used in the early Church?

FAITH CONNECTION

Describe how you take part in the liturgical life of the Church.

OUR CHURCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Religious sisters distributing clothing to flood victims in Chandipur, eastern India.

Within a few years after the Council of Jerusalem, local Churches sprang up throughout the lands around the Mediterranean. As the Church grew, some Christians, as early as the second century, joined together and formed communities to support one another in living the Gospel. Among the earliest of these communities were those that formed in Egypt around Saint Anthony of the Desert (c. 251–356). Eventually these communities took on the two basic forms which exist in the Church today, namely, contemplative life and apostolic life.

Religious Communities

Today members of religious communities, or the consecrated life, live the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to a rule of life approved by the Church. Members make

special promises or vows to follow the example of poverty, obedience, and chastity lived by Jesus Christ.

Contemplative Life

Members of contemplative communities commit themselves primarily to silence and prayer. Centering their day around the prayerful praise of God, they live a solitary life within community. Some contemplatives are cloistered. This means that they never leave the places where they live.

Apostolic Life

Members of apostolic religious communities support one another in the work of proclaiming the Gospel and serving others by living the Works of Mercy. Religious brothers and sisters, priests, and deacons work in hospitals and places that help the sick and elderly. They teach in parishes, schools, and universities. Others are active in social issues, working to build a just society for all. Members of other religious communities proclaim the Gospel as missionaries.


How is both prayer and service part of the way you live the Gospel? How is your parish a community that lives the Gospel?



Franciscan friars praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

WHAT DIFFERENCE

Does Faith Make in My Life?



In this chapter you learned about some of the major challenges and some of the heroes of the early Church. The first Christians met in homes in the towns and villages in which they lived. It was there that particular churches, or local communities of followers of Jesus, were first formed.

Eventually the Church spread far and wide in fulfillment of Christ's command, "Make disciples of all nations."

A team, in some ways, is a community. Imagine a team where one half of the members play by rules different than those set for the game and really do not care about the team, or are not willing to give of their time and energy and are not ready to accept their role and responsibility as team members. How can such a team be alive and well?

To be an active, responsible, and faithful member of a community, you must be willing to:

- ◆ believe in and promote the purpose of the group.
- ◆ be willing to make a difference in the group.
- ◆ be other-centered and not think only of your own needs and wants.



Living in Community

A community is a group of unified individuals who work together for a specific purpose or goal. All the members of a community profess and adhere to certain values, work together with a strong spirit of cooperation, and follow certain rules. Members must be willing to contribute to the group and accept and fulfill certain roles and responsibilities.



- ◇ care about and be compassionate toward others.
- ◇ give generously of your time and energy to the group.
- ◇ participate and be an active, vibrant member of the group.

The Church Community

You belong to the Catholic Church. How would you describe the type of Church member that you are?

- ◇ Are you a responsible member, an active participant?
- ◇ How well do you follow the teachings of Jesus as handed on by the Catholic Church?
 - ◇ How willing are you to spread the Gospel?

There is an adage that says "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link."

The truth expressed by this adage applies to all the members of the Church.

All the faithful are called to give witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit works through all the baptized, giving each one the grace to share in the mission of the Church on earth. You have the vocation and receive the grace to actively participate in the life and work of the Church each day wherever you are.

Faith Decision

- Choose three of the six points listed on pages 26 and 27 that describe an active and responsible member of a community.

- Discuss in a small group how you can use the skills described in the points you chose to help you be an active, responsible, and faithful member of your parish.

This week I will choose to be an active and responsible member of my parish and work to spread the Gospel by

PRAY and REVIEW

Proclaim the Gospel

Leader: God our Father, in your loving wisdom you have spread the kingdom of Jesus to encompass the globe. May your Church reveal your love for the whole world to see. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Reader 1: A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.
Proclaim Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47.
The word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**
Silently reflect on the reading.

Reader 2: Keep your Church faithful to her mission of building the Kingdom of God and transforming the world into your family.

All: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader 3: May your Church be a holy people and a sign of unity and holiness to all.

All: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader 4: May your Church be a force for justice, charity, and peace in the world.

All: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Leader: Eternal Father, guide your Church through your Holy Spirit. Help her be strong in faith so that she may preach the Gospel of your Son to people everywhere.

All: Amen.

FAITH VOCABULARY

Define each of these terms:

1. Gentile
2. Council of Jerusalem
3. presbyters
4. Deposit of Faith
5. apologists
6. heresies
7. apostolic succession

MAIN IDEAS

Choose either (a) or (b) from each set of items. Write a brief paragraph to answer each of your choices.

1. (a) Explain the controversy that was settled at the Council of Jerusalem.
(b) Describe the mission of Saint Paul the Apostle.
2. (a) Summarize both the role of bishops and the role of the Councils of Nicaea I and Constantinople I in the Church.
(b) Describe worship in the early Church.

CRITICAL THINKING

Using what you have learned in this chapter, briefly explain this statement:

By virtue of their prophetic mission, lay people “are called . . . to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind” [GS 43§4] (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 942).

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Family prayer is a vital part of the daily life of a Christian. How do we pray each day as a family?

For more ideas on ways your family can live your faith, visit the “Faith First for Families” page at www.FaithFirst.com. Also check out “Make a Difference” on the Teen Center.



UNIT ONE

REVIEW REVIEW

A. The Best Response

Read each statement and circle the best answer.

1. What is the Great Commission?
 - A. another name for the Council of Jerusalem
 - B. the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
 - C. Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations
 - D. God the Father's sending of his Son into the world to inaugurate the Church

2. What major decision did the Apostles make at the Council of Jerusalem?
 - A. They declared that the Holy Spirit was the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.
 - B. They changed the name of Saul to Paul and sent him on a missionary journey.
 - C. They acknowledged that the bishop of Rome was the leader of all other bishops.
 - D. They decided to allow Gentile converts into the community of believers in Jesus Christ.

3. Heroic people who give their lives for their faith in Christ are called _____.
 - A. martyrs
 - B. apologists
 - C. Mendicants
 - D. heralds

4. He reminded Emperor Theodosius that the emperor was not above the Church but within it.
 - A. Saint Ambrose
 - B. Saint Augustine of Hippo
 - C. Pope Saint Sylvester I
 - D. Pope Saint Leo the Great

5. Which abbot was said to carry the twelfth century on his shoulders?
 - A. Saint Columba
 - B. Saint Thomas Aquinas
 - C. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux
 - D. Pope Innocent III

UNIT ONE

REVIEW REVIEW

B. Matching Words and Phrases

Match the faith terms in column A with the descriptions in column B.

Column A

- _____ 1. Gentile
- _____ 2. Council of Nicaea I
- _____ 3. papacy
- _____ 4. Apostles
- _____ 5. mystic
- _____ 6. apologists
- _____ 7. Council of Jerusalem
- _____ 8. Mendicants
- _____ 9. monasticism
- _____ 10. Scholastics

Column B

- a. the name of the position of leadership of the Pope
- b. the first council of the Church
- c. twelve men chosen by Jesus to accompany him and take part in his mission
- d. a style of communal living with an emphasis on prayer, fasting, work, and learning
- e. one who experiences a close union or communication with God
- f. often referred to by Scripture as anyone who is not Jewish
- g. a group of individuals whose name is derived from the Latin word meaning "to beg"
- h. theologians, called schoolmen, who used reason to explain the teachings of the Church
- i. Christian writers who wrote about their faith for nonbelievers or defended their faith against accusations
- j. a gathering of Church leaders held in 325 that discussed and taught Church doctrine

C. What I Have Learned

Using what you have learned in unit 1, write a reflection about each of the following statements:

1. Faithfully guarding and handing on the Deposit of Faith is one of the most sacred trusts of the Church.

2. In the first era of the Church, many believers perceived the greatest threat to the Church to be the culture of paganism that surrounded her.

D. A Scripture Story

On a separate sheet of paper do the following:

Recall the Gospel story of Jesus commissioning Peter by the Sea of Tiberias. In a group or on your own, put yourself in Peter's place and develop a script telling how Peter responds to Jesus.