

Christ with Us Now and Always

Eighth Grade Student Textbook

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Updated Second Edition

First Edition Author

John R. Harty

Educational and Theological Advisors

Most Reverend John M. LeVoir

Reverend Richard M. Hogan †

Mary Jo Smith

Revision Authors

Reverend Paul A. LaFontaine, M.A. †

Mary Jo Smith

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UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

LESSON 1: THE GOSPELS

Friends. Everyone wants to have them, and everyone needs them. Friends are people we like and who like us. Friends are loyal. They stick by us even in the toughest of times, and we stick by them. Friends are people we enjoy being with. We share our time and secrets with them, and they share with us. Often friends share the same values. Friends are people who care about us and love us, and we feel the same way toward them. We forgive our friends when they hurt us, and we help them whenever we can.

Think about one of your friends. On the lines below list one way that your friend has



1. shown you kindness

2. been loyal to you

3. shared something with you

4. forgiven you

5. helped you

God's Friends

Saint Luke, one of the four Gospel writers, wanted to do more than write a narrative of Jesus' life, Death, and Resurrection. He wanted to finish the story by telling what happened on earth when Jesus returned to his Father in heaven. Luke's continued story is known as the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts, Luke talks about the beginning of Jesus' Church. Luke addresses his writing to a person he calls "Theophilus". The Greek word *theophilus* means "friend of God". In writing to Theophilus, Luke writes to all people who want to be God's friends.

Jesus returned to heaven when his public life on earth was ended. However, he chose to be with us forever in a new and exciting way. Jesus is always with us through the Church. "The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men"

UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

(CCC 771).¹ As a friend stays loyal to us, helps us, and forgives us, so Jesus through the Church shows us these same signs of friendship.

On the lines below, write examples of ways in which the Church shows us loyalty, shares with us, and forgives us.

1. Loyalty _____

2. Sharing _____

3. Forgiveness _____

A true friendship has to be a two-way street. What we receive from a friend we should give back in return. This mutual loyalty, sharing, and forgiveness keeps the relationship alive and healthy.

 **Learn more about how the sacraments help us maintain our friendship with Christ by reading *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1468 and YOUCAT 219.**

List some ways you can be loyal to the Church, share with the Church, and show forgiveness to other members of the Church.

1. Loyalty _____

2. Sharing _____

3. Forgiveness _____

UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

LESSON 2: YOU ARE TO BE MY WITNESSES

Jesus' public life ended at his Crucifixion and Death. On Easter Sunday he rose from his tomb, conquering sin and death forever. For forty days afterward, he appeared at different times to his Apostles and other followers. Eventually, however, the time came for Jesus to return to his home in heaven.

Read Acts 1:1–10 and then answer the following questions.

1. Whom did Jesus promise to send to his Apostles? _____

2. What instructions did Jesus give the Apostles? _____

After these final instructions, Jesus ascended to heaven and the Apostles were left alone. They began the walk back to Jerusalem, where they would wait for Jesus to fulfill his promises to them.



In Jerusalem, the Apostles were staying in an “upper room”. Perhaps this was the same place the Apostles had rented for the Passover meal, or it may have been a room in the house of the Gospel writer Mark. The Apostles; Jesus’ mother, Mary; and other followers of Christ were gathered in prayer there for nine days. During this time Peter made his first decision as new leader of the Apostles: to replace Judas and bring the number of Apostles back to twelve.



UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

List from memory as many of the twelve Apostles as you can:

Read Acts 1:21–26. Answer the following questions.

1. Who was chosen as the new Apostle? _____
2. What requirements did this new Apostle have to fulfill? _____

Luke tells us that the new replacement for Judas was chosen after all the Apostles in the upper room had spent time in prayer. Write a paragraph about a time when you prayed before making an important decision.

 Learn more about the authority of the Church by reading CCC 553 and YOUCAT 13.

UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

LESSON 3: PENTECOST—THE CHURCH IS BORN

The birthday of the Church took place on a day that marked the great Jewish feast of Pentecost. On this day the people of Israel gave thanks to God for the wheat harvest and for the law that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Many people came from surrounding areas to celebrate together in Jerusalem. The time was just right for an event of great importance. As the disciples gathered together, the Holy Spirit was sent to them. Jesus had kept his promise! **Read Acts 2:1–4** to find out what took place.

The Holy Spirit made himself known by two signs: a strong, violent wind and tongues of fire. Wind and fire have been recognized as signs of God’s presence since ancient times.

Read the following Scripture passages and summarize them in a sentence or phrase:

Exodus 3:2–4 _____

Exodus 13:21–22 _____

Exodus 19:18 _____

Jerusalem was crowded with visitors at the time of Pentecost. It is no wonder that many people heard the noise in and around the house where the Apostles were. The visitors gathered to find out what had caused the noise. As they came closer and began to mingle with the Apostles, the visitors were both amazed and puzzled. **Read Acts 2:5–11**, and find out why.



UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

Write a paragraph describing what happened.

The Holy Spirit had given to those in the upper room the marvelous gift of tongues. This is just the first sign we have of the change God had brought about in his followers to help them in their work of spreading the Gospel. This gift probably worked in one of two ways: the Apostles were able to speak in foreign languages whenever they needed to, or they spoke in their own language, and everyone listening heard them in his native tongue.

How would this gift of tongues help the Apostles to spread the Word of God?

Peter, in his role as leader of the infant Church, now began to speak to the crowd that had gathered. He boldly told the people that Jesus was the Messiah for whom they had been waiting. With newfound courage, he claimed to be a witness, along with the other Apostles, to Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. When the crowd understood that they had cooperated in Jesus' Death, they asked Peter what they should do.

Read Acts 2:14–47 to find Peter's answer to them.

About three thousand people were baptized that day. The Church was starting to grow by leaps and bounds. Jesus' Church had been born on the feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had come to the first Christians in a very special way and would continue to be with them through good and bad times. Every day new people would come to join the Apostles in proclaiming their faith in the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus Christ.

UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

Review Questions

1. What does the word *theophilus* mean?

2. List the twelve Apostles.

3. How did the Holy Spirit affect and change the Apostles?



UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

LESSON 4: GIVING IN CHRIST

By his example, Jesus taught us to give to others. We can give of ourselves by giving of our time, talents, and treasure for the good of others. Giving benefits both the one who gives and the one who receives.

Explain how, in the following situations, giving might benefit both the giver and the receiver.

Giving up some of your free time to help your younger brother or sister with homework.

This helps your brother or sister by _____

This helps you by _____

Giving up some of your time to help an older person with yard work, errands, or housework.

This helps the older person by _____

This helps you by _____

Giving money to a favorite charity.

This helps the charity by _____

This helps you by _____



UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

Who do you think benefits the most in any act of giving, the giver or the receiver? Why do you think so?

The Church was born on Pentecost. The mission of the Church is to reveal Christ to the world. One day, shortly after the Holy Spirit came to the Apostles, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. They crossed the court of the Gentiles. This was one of the outer parts of the temple, where the money changers had their tables and the merchants sold the animals used for sacrifices. As the two disciples came to the “Beautiful Gate” (the entrance to the part of the temple reserved for Jewish believers), they saw a crippled man begging for money. Peter and John immediately felt compassion for the lame man and wanted to help him. Being poor, however, they had no money to give him.

Read Acts 3:4–10 to see what happened, and summarize the passage on the lines below.



UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

*Peter and John, representing the Church, chose to think and act as Christ did when he walked on earth. **Read** the following passages in Scripture: **Mark 2:1–12, Mark 3:1–6, and John 5:1–9.** Write a paragraph describing how Jesus healed the suffering people during his public life.*

Jesus is alive and active on the earth today through his Church. Who makes up the Church today? You might answer this by thinking first of the pope, the bishops, priests, sisters, and other religious. One important person you may not have thought of is you! You are a very important part of Jesus' Church along with all baptized people who follow the Holy Father and believe what the Church teaches. Also, there are those of other Christian denominations who are in a certain way united to the Catholic Church. "Those 'who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church'" (CCC 838).¹ When you choose to give of yourself in love to others, you are choosing to act as Jesus would act. Jesus comes to others through you. In a special way, you are Christ to other people.

In Acts 3:4–10, we read that Peter and John did not have any money to give to a crippled man who was begging. They could have just shrugged their shoulders and walked away. However, the love they had for Christ and the love they had for the beggar spurred them to think of another way to help him. In giving the man the ability to walk, they showed him Christ's merciful love.

Sometimes we too cannot help people in the way they want to be helped. Perhaps we already have made a commitment to help someone else, or we may not have enough money to donate or to lend to someone in need. However, if we try to think of alternative ways to help those in need, we are choosing to act as Christ acted.

See how many different ways you can solve the following problems. List your solutions on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1. There is a special collection in church for a cancer hospice in your town, but you have no money with you.**
- 2. Mr. Dvorak, a sixty-five-year-old man who lives next door, asks you to mow his lawn today. But your team is scheduled to play an important game, and you are a starter on the team.**
- 3. On a Saturday afternoon, your sister asks you to help her address and mail her wedding invitations. But you have just been hired to work at the local fast-food restaurant, and Saturday is your first day on the job.**



Learn more about the importance of works of mercy by reading CCC 2447 and YOUCAT 449.

UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

LESSON 5: HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

The period of Church history starting shortly after the Death of Jesus (ca. A.D. 30) and ending approximately A.D. 60 has been called by many historians “The Golden Age of Christianity”. It was a time in the Church’s life when people tried to live Christ’s example of giving and sharing to the highest degree. Not since then has Christianity seen such an all-out commitment by almost all its members to a life of total sharing of property, money, and time.

The early Christians lived in communities. These communities were groups of people that had common ownership of certain pieces of property. In other words, anyone in the community could use these goods when they needed them, as long as they respected the rights of others and caused no damage. An example of this idea today might be a town- or city-owned park, or swimming pool, or library. Anyone living in that town or city would be entitled to use its facilities. The people of the early Church acted in much the same manner, with one difference: they shared everything they owned. Clothes, money, houses—everything they owned was either shared with or given outright to others.

Read Acts 2:44–45 and Acts 4:32–37 to see how Saint Luke describes the sharing actions of the early Church members. In Acts 4:36–37 we read about a farmer named Barnabas who sold his field and gave the money to the Apostles so that they could distribute the money to the poor.

Read Luke 10:29–37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and write a paragraph describing how we can be “good Samaritans” today.



Learn more about communion in charity by reading CCC 953 and YOUCAT 146.

LESSON 6: LACK OF GIVING—LACK OF LOVE

The early days of Christianity were not all trouble free. As the Church carried out her mission of spreading Christ’s message throughout the world, people from different backgrounds joined the new faith. One of the first Christian groups was composed of Jewish converts who spoke Hebrew. A second group was composed of Jewish converts who spoke Greek. To us living in the world today, this seems to be no big problem. Between these two groups living more than two thousand years ago, however, their different languages and backgrounds soon became a source of prejudice and discrimination.

UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

Define “prejudice” and “discrimination” in your own words.

Because we are all created in God’s image, we each reflect God in our own way. When we show prejudice or discrimination toward someone, we choose not to see that person as someone who is created in the image of God. Prejudice is a judgment about another person that is usually made before all the facts are known. Often this type of judgment leads one person to distrust or dislike another or to act unjustly toward another (discrimination). Prejudice and discrimination are a refusal to love in a Christlike way. This always hurts both people, because it is a failure to act as a person who is created in the image of God should act.

Read Acts 6:1–2. Answer the following questions.

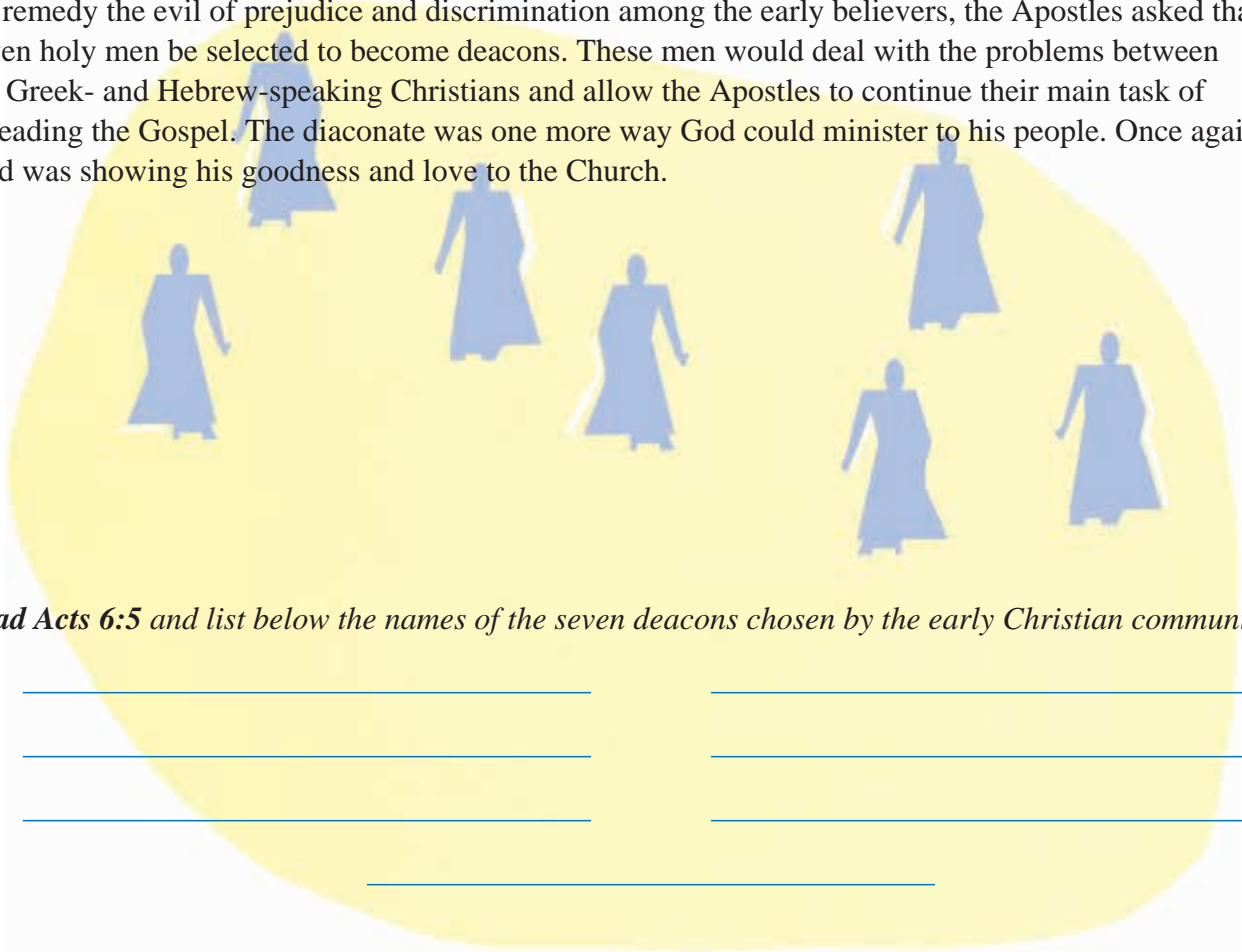
How did the prejudice and discrimination shown toward the Greek-speaking Christians hurt them?

How did this prejudice and discrimination cause problems for the Apostles?

How did this prejudice and discrimination hurt the Christian community as a whole?

UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

To remedy the evil of prejudice and discrimination among the early believers, the Apostles asked that seven holy men be selected to become deacons. These men would deal with the problems between the Greek- and Hebrew-speaking Christians and allow the Apostles to continue their main task of spreading the Gospel. The diaconate was one more way God could minister to his people. Once again God was showing his goodness and love to the Church.



Read Acts 6:5 and list below the names of the seven deacons chosen by the early Christian community:

The names of the seven men show that they all came from a Greek-speaking background. The Church was making sure that the early Christians would form a community where all would feel welcome. The Word of God and the love shown by his Church are for all people for all time.

 **Learn more about the dignity of the human person by reading CCC 1930 and YOUCAT 280.**

UNIT 2: THE INFANT CHURCH

Review Questions

1. What did Peter and John give the crippled man begging at the “Beautiful Gate”?

2. Who makes up the Church today?

3. What period of time was the “Golden Age of Christianity”?

4. What was an example of prejudice among the early Christians?

UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Vocabulary

Sanhedrin: the Jewish court of law in Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus, it was the highest religious and legal authority among the Jewish people.

Saul: Saint Paul's Jewish name

LESSON 7: STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

“Greater Love Has No Man than This, That a Man Lay Down His Life for His Friends” (John 15:13)

★ To learn more about martyrdom read *CCC 2473* and *YOUCAT 454*.

The first person to give his life for Christ was Stephen, one of the seven deacons the Apostles had appointed to help them. Stephen was a very courageous and religious man. He wanted to do more than assist the Christian community—he wanted to share with everyone his faith and his love for Christ. Soon, however, his words angered certain Jewish people. They were afraid that, by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, Stephen was showing disrespect for the great temple in Jerusalem, the Old Jewish Law, and Moses.

Eventually, these people bribed others to say that Stephen had talked disrespectfully about the temple and the law of Moses. The stage was now set to have Stephen arrested and put on trial.

Stephen was brought before a Jewish court called the Sanhedrin, where he gave a long speech in his defense. Because of his great love for Jesus, Stephen was more concerned with teaching the people about Christ than with saving himself. He tried to show the people that, just as their ancestors ages ago had rejected God's will by rejecting the words of Moses and the prophets, now they were rejecting God's will as revealed through Jesus the Messiah.

Stephen, in this speech, mentioned three famous Old Testament figures: Abraham, Joseph, and Moses.



UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Write any facts you may remember about these men:



Abraham



Joseph



Moses

UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Stephen ended his speech by saying that, even though some of these leaders had been rejected, God had brought good out of their situations. God had brought a great victory out of Jesus' Death, too. When Stephen mentioned Jesus in this way, the Sanhedrin knew that Stephen believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. This was more than they could stand!

Read Acts 7:54–60 and summarize the passage on the lines below.

Thus Stephen became the first of a long line of those who willingly showed the highest form of friendship for Jesus, giving their lives for him.

LESSON 8: PAUL—FROM PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS TO GREAT CHRISTIAN SAINT

As we read in the Book of Acts, “the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul” (7:58) while they were stoning Stephen. This meant that Saul approved of the killing. What do we know about this man?

First, we know that Saul was a Pharisee. Pharisees believed that all Jews should obey the law of Moses very carefully. Saul believed that Christians were threatening to throw away this law completely. Because of this belief, it was quite easy for him to think that killing Stephen and the other Christians was the correct thing to do.

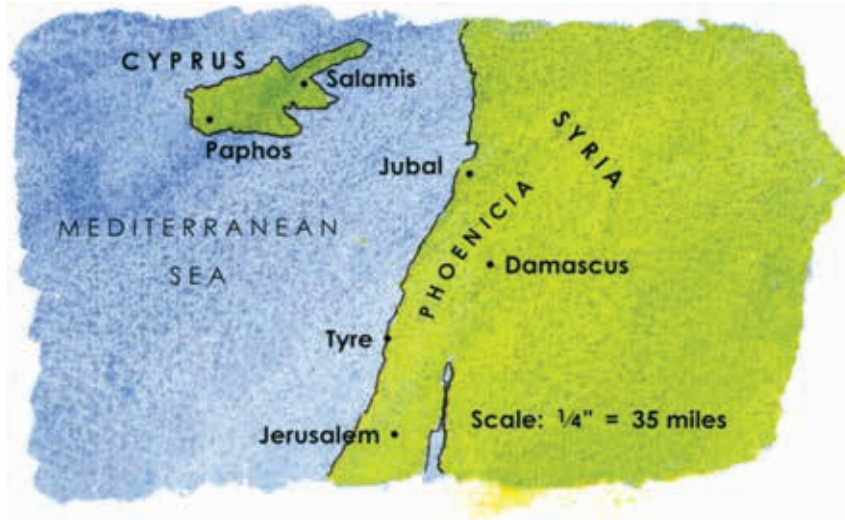
Second, we know that Saul's hometown, Tarsus, was an important trade center. As a boy, Saul must have seen and met people from many lands and cultures. An understanding of these cultures was useful to Saul when he became a missionary for Christ.

Third, we know that Saul was a Roman citizen, a great privilege in the days of the Roman Empire. Having this privilege helped him during his missionary travels for Christ.

About the year 36, a local persecution against the Christians broke out in Jerusalem. Saul was one of the main persecutors and took very seriously his task of rounding up the followers of Christ. Saul and the other persecutors thought Jesus' message was a threat to Jewish beliefs that had to be crushed with force. He knew that certain followers of Jesus were living in Damascus, and so he obtained official permission from the high priest in Jerusalem to arrest these people.

UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Find Damascus on the map below. How far is it from Jerusalem?



It was Jesus himself who met Saul on the road to Damascus. **Read Acts 9:3–9** and find out what happened. Write Jesus' words to Saul on the lines below and explain in your own words what they mean:



UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

If you had to be led by the hand as Saul was, how would you feel?

What thoughts do you think were going through Saul's mind?

Why do you think God allowed Saul to be blind for three days?

★ To learn more about the importance of sharing the faith read *CCC* 850 or *YOUCAT* 11–12.

While Saul sat in darkness waiting for direction from the Lord, a Christian named Ananias, who lived in Damascus, had a vision. He was told by Christ to go to Saul and to cure him. (Read Acts 9:10–12.) But Ananias already knew who Saul was, and he also knew that Saul had come to Damascus to arrest all the Christians there.

If you had been the one whom the Lord had told to go and find Saul, what would your reaction have been?



UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Read Acts 9:13–14. What was Ananias' reaction to God's call?

Was it like yours?

Read Acts 9:17–25 and answer the following questions.

1. What did Ananias do for Saul?

2. Why were people surprised to hear Saul preaching about Christ?

3. Why did some people become angry with Saul (Acts 9:22–23)?

4. How did Saul escape from Damascus?

5. Who helped Saul meet Christians in Jerusalem?

UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL



THE MISSION TERRITORY OF SAINT PAUL

Moved by God's grace, Paul converted and turned toward the Lord. After his encounter with Jesus, he repented and stopped his sinful life. By the merits of Jesus, he was justified as he accepted forgiveness, sanctification, and rebirth from God on high.

These events we have just examined in Saul's life probably took place around the year 36. By about 45 or 46, after spending much time in prayer, in doing good works, and in the study of Christ under the guidance of his good friend Barnabas, Saul was ready to start spreading the Good News of Christ to distant lands. He made three different missionary trips. It was during his first trip that he changed his name to Paul. Finally, Paul traveled to Rome. There he suffered a martyr's death for the sake of Jesus Christ, whom he had persecuted so many years before.

UNIT 3: TWO GREAT SERVANTS OF CHRIST— SAINT STEPHEN AND SAINT PAUL

Review Questions

1. Who was the first person to sacrifice his life for Jesus? What was the office for which he was ordained by the Apostles?

2. On the road to Damascus, what question did Jesus ask Saul?

3. What did Ananias do for Saul?
