

Living in Christ

The Church

Christ in the World Today

Second Edition

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and Joanna Dailey

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Introduction

You are about to begin your study of the Church. In many ways, studying this subject will be similar to studying any other subject: you will learn new vocabulary, become familiar with some famous people in the Church, and be introduced to some new concepts and ways of thinking.

But in other ways, this study will be unique, because the subject matter is unique. The Church is unlike any other reality on earth, because she is both within history and beyond it. She is both human and divine. In the Church, we meet God.

This study will engage not only your brain but also your heart and your spirit: in other words, your whole self. You will be challenged mentally to understand teachings about the nature of the Church and to gain a sense of how she has been present in the world throughout history. You also will be challenged to pray more deeply with the Church and to become a more committed and active member of the Church. After all, you are a holistic person, made up of body, mind, and spirit. This study will help you to broaden and deepen all aspects of yourself.

In writing this book, the editors and I have expanded our knowledge about the Church, thought in new ways about the Church, and grown in our own commitment to, and love for, her. I invite you to share in that experience.

Sincerely,
Martin C. Albl

Unit 1

The Church: Christ's Continued Presence and Work in the World

When you hear the word *Church*, what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of a building where Christians worship, or maybe you picture the assembly of people gathered for worship. You may have learned that the Church is sometimes referred to as the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ. All these associations are correct.

In this course, you will learn about the Church as the continuation of Christ's presence and work in the world. The Father always planned the Church, and his Son, Jesus Christ, instituted the Church through his teachings, sacrificial death, and Resurrection. Christ and his Church are forever united as one. Christ is the Head and we are the members of the one Body of Christ, the Church.

After Jesus' mission was accomplished on earth, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church at Pentecost to help the Apostles understand what Christ had taught them. Empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles embarked on the universal mission of the Church by working to spread the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean world. The early Christians suffered persecution and even martyrdom as a result of their faith, but Christ's love and the Holy Spirit helped them to persevere in sharing and celebrating the truth of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives each of us special gifts, called charisms, that empower us to help build up the Church in every time and place.

The enduring understandings and essential questions represent core concepts and questions that are explored throughout this unit. By studying the content of each chapter, you will gain a more complete understanding of the following:

Enduring Understandings

1. God calls all people to live in a special relationship with him through the Church established by Jesus Christ.
2. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the Church's mission.
3. The Apostles and early disciples began to spread the Good News throughout the world.

Essential Questions

1. Why did Jesus Christ establish the Church?
2. What is the mission of the Holy Spirit in the Church today?
3. How can we help build the Church?

The Origin of the Church

Introduction

Where did the Church come from? Who founded it? As we begin our study of the Church, it makes sense to start by considering these basic questions. The Church was always part of the Father's plan. It was instituted by his Son, Jesus Christ, and is given life by the Holy Spirit.

The word *Church* refers to the assembly of people whom God calls together to be in a special relationship with him. The Church was part of God's saving plan from all eternity. It is both the means of our salvation and the goal of God's plan. All people who are saved will be gathered into the perfected Church at the end of time.

God formed a special relationship with Israel, his Chosen People. That relationship foreshadowed his subsequent relationship with the Church. God's covenants with Israel prepared the way for the New Covenant established through Jesus' death and Resurrection.

Jesus' gift of the Eucharist and his saving death on the cross gave birth to the Church. Jesus inaugurated the Church by preaching about the Kingdom of God, healing people in mind and body, and calling people to be part of his family. Jesus also established a structure for the Church, based on the leadership of the Apostles, especially Peter. This structure will last until the Kingdom is fulfilled.

Article 1: The Meaning of Church

Let's begin by clarifying the meaning of the word *church*. In everyday English, we use the word *church* to refer to different realities, such as a building (“the big church downtown”), a parish (“I’m a member of Saint Mary’s Church”), a Christian ecclesial community (“the Lutheran Church”), and the Catholic Church. To understand how these meanings of *church* are related, it is helpful to see how the earliest Christians understood and used this word.

The books of the New Testament were originally written in Greek. In these books, the Greek word *ekklesia* corresponds to the English word *church*. *Ekklesia* is related to the Greek verb *ek-ka-lein*, which means “to call out.” Thus it refers to the convocation or assembly of people whom God calls together to be in a special relationship with him. The Greek texts of the Old Testament also use the word *ekklesia* to refer to the people of Israel, an assembly chosen by God. The first Christians purposely applied the term *ekklesia* to themselves to show that they were heirs of the assembly of Israel.

In the **Church**, God calls people together from all over the earth. The word *Church* has three meanings for Catholics, all of which involve God’s call:

- the entire community of God’s People around the world
- the local community, which is known as a **diocese** or an archdiocese, such as the Diocese of Winona or the Archdiocese of Chicago
- the community assembled for **liturgy**, especially the Mass—for example, the people who gather at a parish at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist

We cannot separate these meanings from one another. The Church is all the people God gathers in the world, but she exists concretely in local communities and is made real in the assembly that gathers for liturgy, especially to celebrate the Eucharist. As the [*Catechism of the*](#)



Church

The term *Church* has three inseparable meanings: (1) the entire People of God throughout the world; (2) the diocese, which is also known as the local Church; (3) the assembly of believers gathered for the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. In the Nicene Creed, the Church is recognized as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic—traits that together are referred to as “Marks of the Church.”

diocese

Also known as a “particular” or “local” Church, the regional community of believers, who commonly gather in parishes, under the leadership of a bishop. At times, a diocese is determined not on the basis of geography but on the basis of language or rite.



liturgy

The Church's official, public, communal prayer. It is God's work, in which the People of God participate. The Church's most important liturgy is the Eucharist, or the Mass.

Catholic Church (CCC) explains, "She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body" (752).



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The hierarchy of bishops and cardinals come from a wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, and backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the Church.



Live It!

Living the Three Meanings of *Church*

You have many opportunities to live out each of the three meanings of the word *Church*:

1. Develop a better sense of the universal nature of the Church. You might learn about Catholic customs in other countries or pray for Catholics in other nations, especially those suffering persecution. You might also have an opportunity to attend World Youth Day.
2. Get involved with your local diocese. Attend diocesan events for teens. If your diocese has a youth board, consider serving as a member.
3. Participate fully in the liturgies at your parish and school. Look for opportunities to serve in particular liturgical ministries, such as singing in the choir or lecturing.

The Father Planned the Church from the Beginning

Calling together human beings is central to the Father's plan of salvation, because he wishes to gather us as his own people in order to save us. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who is himself fully God, established the Church when he proclaimed and ushered in the **Kingdom of God**.

Even before the Church was instituted, the Father's eternal plan to call together a holy people had long been taking shape in history. We can see the clearest preparation for the Church in the Father's call to the people of Israel to enter into a covenant relationship with him. God desires that the whole human race, rather than simply one people, may come together as one Church. From all eternity, God planned to form a Church as a way to fulfill that plan.

If everyone were to come together as one Church, how might the world be different?

Article 2: Old Testament Images of the Church

Have you ever wondered why more than half of the Bible is composed of books that were written before the time of Christ? The reason is that the Old Testament has enormous value. Together with the New Testament, it hands on God's Revelation and makes known to us his plan of salvation from the beginning of time. The Old Testament records the history of salvation from Creation through God's covenant with the Israelites.

In describing his Church, Jesus often drew on Old Testament images. For example, the Psalms depict Israel as God's flock of sheep (see [77:21](#)). Jesus likewise referred to his followers as his "little flock" ([Luke 12:32](#)). Isaiah also compared Israel to a vineyard (see [chapter 5](#)). Accordingly, Jesus called himself the vine and his disciples the branches (see [John 15:5](#)).



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How does celebrating the Eucharist in our local parish reflect the three meanings of the word *Church*?



Kingdom of God

The culmination or goal of God's plan of salvation, the Kingdom of God is announced by the Gospel and present in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom is the reign or rule of God over the hearts of people and, as a consequence of that, the development of a new social order based on unconditional love. The fullness of God's Kingdom will not be realized until the end of time. Also called the Reign of God or the Kingdom of Heaven.



Fathers of the Church (Church Fathers)

During the early centuries of the Church, those teachers whose writings extended the Tradition of the Apostles and who continue to be important for the Church's teachings.

foreshadow

To represent or prefigure a person before his or her life or an event before it occurs.

Following Christ's example, the early Christians often compared the Church to Israel's Temple. They called themselves "living stones" who form a "spiritual house" ([1 Peter 2:5](#)). They described their community as "the temple of God" ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#), [2 Corinthians 6:16](#)) with Christ as the cornerstone (see [1 Peter 2:7](#), [Matthew 21:42](#)).

Another Old Testament image was dear to the **Church Fathers**: the prefiguring of the Church in Noah's ark. Many Fathers of the Church pointed out that the ark saved humankind from the waters of the Flood, whereas the Church saves all of humanity from sin.

God's Covenants with Israel

As these images from the Old Testament begin to show, the community of Israel **foreshadowed** the Church. Just as God chooses to save us as part of the Church, so too did he call Israel as a nation to be his Chosen People as part of his larger plan of salvation.

Pray It!

Praying the Psalms

Jews and Christians continue to share the custom of praying the Psalms. Pray the following passage from [Psalm 139](#), especially at times when you may struggle with your self-worth:

You formed my inmost being;
 you knit me in my mother's womb.
 I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
 wonderful are your works!
 My very self you know.
 My bones are not hidden from you,
 When I was being made in secret,
 Fashioned in the depths of the earth.
 Your eyes saw me unformed;
 in your book all are written down;
 my days were shaped, before one came to be.

(Verses 13–16)

God called Abraham to leave his own country, promising that Abraham would father a great nation, Israel (see [Genesis 12:2](#)). Later God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him land for himself and his descendants (see [chapter 15](#)). Still later God entered into a covenant with his people through Moses at Mount Sinai. As the people's part of the Sinai Covenant, God gave Israel his Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. Through these covenants God established a special relationship with Israel as his Holy People.



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When the Israelites turned away from God, Moses interceded with God on their behalf. How does this foreshadow Jesus' role as our Savior?

Universal Implications of God's Call to Israel

God's special relationship with Israel was not just about Israel—it had a deeper meaning for the rest of the world as well. The prophets of Israel proclaimed a future when all nations would gather together with Israel in true worship (see [Isaiah 2:2–5](#), [Micah 4:1–4](#)). The gathering of the people of Israel foreshadowed the future gathering of all nations into one People of God.

The Israelites, however, were not always faithful to their covenant with God. For example, many Israelites frequently strayed from the one true God to worship false gods. Through the prophets of Israel, God continually called the Israelites to return to their covenant with him. The prophet Jeremiah even spoke of God's plan for a New Covenant between God and his people (see [Jeremiah 31:31–34](#)).

The perfect fulfillment of the Sinai Covenant, the Law, is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. As a Jew he was born under the Law of Sinai. But by taking the people's sins upon himself through his self-sacrifice on the cross,

he transformed the Law engraved on stone and engraved it upon his own heart. He became the “covenant for the people” ([Isaiah 42:6](#)), God’s Servant who brings justice. In fulfilling the Law of Sinai, however, Jesus did not abolish it. Instead he revealed its true meaning. Jesus thus initiated the New Covenant at the Last Supper: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” ([Luke 22:20](#)).

What are some examples of “false gods” that people worship today?

Article 3: Christ Instituted the Church

When you think of people instituting an organization or corporation, you may think of a ceremony in which men and women dressed in business suits and hard hats use shovels to break ground on a new structure. Jesus did not institute the Church in this way. Let’s look more closely at how Jesus did institute the Church.

Primary Sources

Vatican II Teaching on the Church’s Relation to the Jewish People

In its [Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions](#) (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965), Vatican Council II affirmed that God loves the Jewish people and decries all oppression of Jews. Many Jews have suffered unjust treatment because the sins of the Jews involved in Jesus’ death were wrongly extended to include all Jewish people, even those in different times and places.

Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle. . . . Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. (4)

Jesus Preached the Kingdom of God

At the time appointed by God, Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of the Father, became man and lived among us on earth. He took on human nature without losing his divine nature. The mystery of the union of the divine and human natures in one Divine Person is called the **Incarnation**.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus inaugurated the Church through his preaching: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand” ([Mark 1:15](#); see also [CCC, 763](#)). Jesus drew on the hope announced by Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets, who looked forward to a coming age when God’s will would be done on earth: “Then the eyes of the blind shall see, / and the ears of the deaf be opened” ([Isaiah 35:5](#)).

Jesus’ message was intended for all people. Yet in a special way, Jesus directed his message to the poor and proclaimed that all nations will be judged on how well they take care of people who are hungry and thirsty (see [Matthew 25:31–46](#)). Jesus also directed his message toward sinners, calling them to repentance and assuring them of the Father’s great mercy. Jesus’ message often took the form of parables, which challenged listeners to make the radical choice to truly follow him.

Jesus’ listeners learned about the Kingdom from his actions as well as from his words. His miracles, including his healing of the sick, were signs that the Kingdom had already begun on earth.

Jesus Sent Disciples

To help Jesus establish the Kingdom of God, the Father gathered people to become his first followers. Jesus sent out these disciples to preach the Kingdom and to make disciples of the nations, calling all people to join Christ’s Church. This group of followers, his disciples,



Incarnation

From the Latin, meaning “to become flesh,” referring to the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God, becoming man. In the Incarnation, Jesus Christ became truly man while remaining truly God.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God. How does the Gospel message continue to be taught today?

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grace

The free and undeserved gift that God gives us to empower us to respond to his call and to live as his adopted sons and daughters. Grace restores our loving communion with the Holy Trinity, lost through sin.

bishop

One who has received the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and is a successor to the Apostles.

became the Church—Jesus' true family, and the seeds of the Kingdom on earth. The Church is thus a sign, as well as the actual beginning, of that perfect peace and happiness that all of us desire: the Reign of God mysteriously present in the world.

Jesus Gave Himself Fully for the Church

Jesus established the Church primarily through the saving gift of himself, which was fulfilled on the cross. He anticipated this gift when he instituted the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, when he said, "This is my body" ([Luke 22:19](#)), he expressed his complete self-giving in handing over his life for the sake of humanity. By participating in the Eucharist today, in a mystical way we share in Christ's sacrifice and also in the **grace** that his sacrifice gives the Church. The Sacrament of the Eucharist also deepens the unity of the People of God and enables us to share in the divine life.

Jesus Created the Structure of the Church

Have you ever wondered why the Church is governed by the Pope and **bishops**? Jesus set up this structure himself. He appointed the Twelve Apostles as the leaders of the

Did You Know?

Whom Does Jesus Call?



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When Jesus gathered followers to help him proclaim and establish the Kingdom, he did not call the most talented and powerful. Rather, he chose ordinary fishermen (see [Mark 1:16–20](#)) and even a tax collector (see [2:13–17](#))—a person despised by most Israelites. Jesus' choices are consistent with Saint Paul's reminder that "God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong" ([1 Corinthians 1:27](#)). God's call comes to everyone, even (or perhaps especially) to those who think they may not be worthy.

community gathered around him (see [Mark 3:14–19](#)), and he gave Peter a special role as the head of the Church (see [Matthew 16:18–19](#), [Luke 22:31](#)).

To build the Church and to proclaim the faith, Christ sent out his Apostles into the world and gave them a share in his own mission. To them, and to those who have succeeded them, he granted the power and authority to act in his place. The bishops are the Apostles' successors, and the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, is the successor of Peter. In their authoritative roles as leaders, together the Pope and bishops form the hierarchy of the Church. The structure and hierarchy of the Church



Faith in Action

Saint Stephen: The First Martyr



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*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even.*

This familiar Christmas carol refers to the feast of the first martyr of the Church, Saint Stephen the Deacon. Because he was the first to lose his life for Christ, he was given

the feast day of December 26, the first day after the birth of Jesus. This carol tells us that King Wenceslas (a historical tenth-century duke of Bohemia) was looking out his castle window on December 26.

Because Stephen stood up for the truth, he was stoned to death. Indeed, a young man named Saul (who later converted and became the great Apostle Paul) watched over the cloaks of those who stoned this first martyr of the Church (see [Acts of the Apostles 7:58](#)).

The acts of the Apostles says clearly that Saint Stephen died as Christ died. Stephen's last words, addressed to Jesus, echoed Jesus' own words to the Father: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" ([Acts 7:59](#); see [Luke 23:46](#)). Stephen also echoed Jesus' prayer for forgiveness for his persecutors: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" ([Acts 7:60](#); see [Luke 23:34](#)). As the first martyr, Saint Stephen was the model for every other Christian martyr to follow. His death reminds us that although we should never seek martyrdom for its own sake, it is sometimes asked of those who have pledged to follow Christ.

established by Christ continues to this day and will remain until the Kingdom is fully established at the end of time.

Jesus' choice of Twelve Apostles mirrored the Twelve Tribes of Israel, God's Chosen People. This aspect of Jesus' inauguration of the Church recalls the Jewish hope that someday the Twelve Tribes, scattered in exile, will be gathered together again.

Chapter Review

1. What are three meanings of the word *Church* in Christian usage?
2. What is the Church's role in the Father's plan to save us?
3. Why was God's covenant with Israel significant for the rest of the world?
4. How is Jesus the perfect fulfillment of the Sinai Covenant?
5. How did Jesus establish the Church through his preaching?
6. How is Jesus' self-giving on the cross related to his establishment of the Church?

The Holy Spirit and the Church

Introduction

In this chapter, we will study the Holy Spirit's action in the Church. First we will learn about the Holy Spirit, the Third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity. Although we can trace the workings of the Holy Spirit throughout Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit was not fully revealed until Pentecost, after Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. The Holy Spirit and Christ are inseparable in their mission.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the account of Pentecost takes us back to the day when Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Church. We celebrate Pentecost every year to commemorate this Revelation of the Church, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit animates, sanctifies, and builds the Church. [Saint Paul](#) described a new kind of life according to the Holy Spirit: a life that is full of love and joy instead of selfishness, conflict, and a blind focus on short-term pleasure. The Holy Spirit's role in this new life includes teaching us to pray.

The Holy Spirit confers special graces on the Church. These special graces are known as charisms. Charisms include extraordinary gifts, such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healing, but also more ordinary gifts, such as teaching and being a leader.



Trinity

From the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold,” referring to the central mystery of the Christian faith that God exists as a communion of three distinct and interrelated Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to human reason alone and is known through Divine Revelation only.

Two symbols of the Holy Spirit are a dove and fire. What might these symbolize about the Holy Spirit?



Article 4: Introducing the Holy Spirit

As you have become familiar with the Old Testament and the Gospels, you have come to know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Third Divine Person in the **Trinity**. The Holy Spirit first appears in the Book of Genesis. The first account of Creation tells us that the Holy Spirit was present in the form of a mighty wind that swept over the waters (see [1:2](#)). Throughout the Old Testament, we see that the Holy Spirit was present and participated with the Father and the Son in the work of salvation. However, we witness the Holy Spirit's greatest participation in the work of salvation when we read the New Testament, beginning with accounts of the Incarnation (see [Luke 1:27–35](#)). The Holy Spirit was fully revealed at **Pentecost**, when he descended upon the Apostles, with Mary present among them (see [Acts 2:1–4](#)).

The Holy Spirit and Christ

Although the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ have shared a common mission since the beginning of time, the Holy Spirit was fully revealed to us when he was poured out on the Church by Jesus at Pentecost. During his earthly ministry, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit in his conversations with his Apostles and in some public settings, but he did not fully reveal the Holy Spirit to us until after his death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

The mission of Jesus and the mission of the Holy Spirit are united and inseparable. Whenever God sends his Son, he also sends his Spirit. Yet the missions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also distinct. Jesus' mission as the incarnate Son of God was to save us by reconciling us with God. The Holy Spirit's mission is to continually sanctify, or make holy, the Church.

The Holy Spirit's Mission

Although Revelation and salvation are the common work of the three Divine Persons, the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the Church's mission. Over time the Holy Spirit has revealed the mission of Christ. The Church continues Christ's path. Because Christ shared the Good News with the poor, the Church must also do so. Following Christ means sharing in his poverty, obedience, service, and self-sacrifice, and even in his willingness to sacrifice his life.

Where does the Holy Spirit lead the Church? Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church carries out her mission to bring all people into union with the Trinity. Because we live in harmony with one another only when we are in union with God, the Church is also a means to create unity among human beings. This unity has begun, but it will not be complete until sometime in the future. The Church is a sign and instrument of the full realization of this unity: that final and eternal



Pentecost

The fiftieth day following Easter, which commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the early Apostles and disciples.



Live It! Being Open to the Spirit

How can you be more open to the activity of the Holy Spirit in your own life? Consider the following suggestions:

- Make time for quiet reflection and prayer. If you are constantly busy, you may have a hard time hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit within you. Many people find it helpful to set aside a specific prayer time in the morning. Spending an hour in Eucharistic Adoration on a weekly basis is another great way to hear the Holy Spirit.
- Join or form a prayer group or Bible study group. Many groups read and discuss the readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass. The Holy Spirit often guides participants into a deeper understanding of the Scriptures.
- Discover or develop particular gifts that the Holy Spirit has shared with you. Volunteer opportunities often provide a chance to discover or develop talents and abilities. A trusted adult can also help you to discern your own particular gifts.



Gentile

A non-Jewish person. In Sacred Scripture, the Gentiles were the uncircumcised, those who did not honor the God of the Torah. Saint Paul and other evangelists reached out to the Gentiles, baptizing them into the family of God.

Communion

Refers to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. In general, your companionship and union with Jesus and other baptized Christians in the Church. This union has its origin and high point in the celebration of the Eucharist. In this sense, the deepest vocation of the Church is Communion.

perfection in which people will truly be one in union with the Trinity.

An important step in this mission occurred when the Holy Spirit revealed the Church to the world at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles and other disciples to share the Good News with Jews and **Gentiles**.

Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in the Church?

Article 5: Pentecost: The Church Revealed to the World

Whenever we pick up a newspaper, watch the news on television, or surf the Internet, we cannot avoid reports of violent conflicts. However, God made human beings to live in harmony with him and with one another. The Church, revealed on Pentecost, is a means to achieve this harmony, which we also call **communion**.

The Day of Pentecost

After Jesus' Ascension his followers gathered in Jerusalem (see [Acts 1:15](#)) at the time of the Feast of Weeks, a Jewish festival. The Feast of Weeks was also known as Pentecost, from the Greek for "fiftieth," because the festival is celebrated fifty days after Passover.

The account in the Acts of the Apostles tells us that "a noise like a strong, driving wind" suddenly filled the house where Jesus' Apostles were gathered. "Tongues as of fire" rested on each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit ([2:2,3](#)). The Apostles began to preach in different languages. As they went out into the city, around them gathered a crowd of Jews from Egypt, Rome, modern-day Turkey and Iraq, Palestine, and many other places, all of whom were in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival. Miraculously, each person heard the message of the Apostles in her or his own language. This multilingual chorus caused some bystanders to think the Apostles were drunk (see [Acts 2:13](#)). Peter, the Apostles'

leader, proclaimed to the crowd that these events were fulfilling Old Testament prophecies (see [2:14–32](#)), especially the prophet Joel’s words:

“It will come to pass in the last days,” God says,
 “that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh.
 Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
 your young men shall see visions,
 your old men shall dream dreams.”

([Acts 2:17](#); see also [Joel 3:1](#))

Peter explained that the glorified Jesus himself was pouring the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and enabling them to speak in such a miraculous way that they could be understood by all who heard them (see [Acts 2:33](#)). Peter instructed his listeners to repent and be baptized so that their sins would be forgiven and so that they too would receive the Holy Spirit. Three thousand people were baptized that day (see [2:37–41](#)).

Do you remember the account of the Tower of Babel, described in the Book of Genesis (see [11:1–9](#))? At one time the whole world spoke one language. Genesis tells us that some people wished to build a tower up to the sky, in order to “make a name” for themselves ([11:4](#)). To confound their plans, God scattered these people throughout the earth, confusing their languages so they could no longer communicate. At Pentecost, however, we see a great contrast: the Holy Spirit enabled people who spoke many different languages to hear the same message. At the Tower of Babel, God put up barriers to understanding; at Pentecost he broke them down.

How does the Pentecost account in the Acts of the Apostles help us to understand more about the Church?

In the account of the Tower of Babel, God confused the speech of humanity. Why does he reverse this in the preaching of the Apostles at Pentecost?



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Article 6: The Meaning of Pentecost

We sometimes call Pentecost the birthday of the Church. This can be misleading though, because we don't mean that the Church began on Pentecost. Remember that the Father planned the Church from all eternity, and his Son instituted the Church before the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles. The Church was born primarily from Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated when he instituted the Eucharist, and fulfilled in his death on the cross.

A child's day of birth can help us to understand something important about the revelation of the Church at Pentecost. When a child is born, we see the baby with our eyes for the first time, but the child has been prepared for several months within her or his mother. In a similar yet greater way, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost revealed the Church to the world for the first time. The Church was not a new entity, however, as she had been in God's plan long before the world was created.

On Pentecost, God as the Trinity was fully revealed for the first time. Jews who followed Jesus at the time of Pentecost already worshipped God the Father—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They also believed that Jesus was the Divine Son of God the Father. The action of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost made these Jewish followers aware of their encounter with the Third Divine Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. For the first time in salvation history, God fully revealed himself as the Blessed Trinity. This mystery of the Trinity—one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the central mystery of our faith. God alone can make this mystery known to us.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit broke through into our world in a new way. How did the action of the Holy Spirit make the Blessed Trinity known to us?



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The Age of the Church

In God's plan of salvation, Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church's mission on earth, when the Apostles were able to begin their work of **evangelization** and to baptize in Jesus' name. Christ was no longer present on earth in the same way as before his death and Resurrection. By sending us his Holy Spirit, Christ now lives and acts in the world through his Church. In this way, Jesus has fulfilled his promise to his disciples: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

The Church celebrates Pentecost fifty days after Easter. During the Easter season, we celebrate the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus and the



evangelization, evangelist

The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ through words and witness. An evangelist is one who actively works to spread the Gospel message of salvation.

Pray It!

"Come, Holy Spirit"

The chant "Come, Holy Spirit" (in the original Latin, "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*") dates from the Middle Ages. Use this prayer now to ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
 And from your celestial home
 Shed a ray of light divine!
 Come, Father of the poor!
 Come, source of all our store!
 Come, within our bosoms shine.
 You, of comforters the best;
 You, the soul's most welcome guest;
 Sweet refreshment here below;
 In our labor, rest most sweet;
 Grateful coolness in the heat;
 Solace in the midst of woe.
 O most blessed Light divine,
 Shine within these hearts of yours,
 And our inmost being fill!
 Where you are not, we have naught,

Nothing good in deed or thought,
 Nothing free from taint of ill.
 Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
 On our dryness pour your dew;
 Wash the stains of guilt away:
 Bend the stubborn heart and will;
 Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
 Guide the steps that go astray.
 On the faithful, who adore
 And confess you, evermore
 In your sevenfold gift descend;
 Give them virtue's sure reward;
 Give them your salvation, Lord;
 Give them joys that never end.
 Amen.
 Alleluia.

(Pentecost Sequence, *Lectionary for Mass*)



animate

To give life to.

sanctify

To make holy; sanctification is the process of responding to God's grace and becoming closer to God.

redemption he won for us. Pentecost marks the end of the Easter season in the liturgical year. You may have noticed that the priest celebrating the Mass on Pentecost wears red vestments. Can you guess why? Red symbolizes the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. A second special component of the Pentecost liturgy is the singing or recitation of "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*," or "Come, Holy Spirit," a Latin sequence that dates from the twelfth century. (See the "Come, Holy Spirit" sidebar for the text of this sequence.)

What is an example of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit from your own life?

Article 7: The Holy Spirit Builds, Animates, and Sanctifies the Church

We hear phrases such as "school spirit" or the "spirit of teamwork." These phrases refer to a kind of energy or atmosphere within a group that we can't see but that we know is real and active. When this energy brings people together, strengthens their relationships, and deepens their ability to share in a common mission for the sake of others, it gives us a glimpse of the Holy Spirit's way of working in the world.

The Holy Spirit, given to the Church's members by Christ, builds, **animates**, and **sanctifies** the Church. These three elements of the Holy Spirit's mission are evidence of the Holy Spirit's energy.

The Holy Spirit Builds the Church

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit's power to build the Church was made known. Once the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, more than three thousand people were baptized.

After Jesus told his followers they would receive the Holy Spirit, he also told them what to do next: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" ([Acts 1:8](#)). The

mission of the Church is to bring people into communion with the Trinity. The Holy Spirit builds individuals' faith lives, builds community, and builds the Church by calling new members.

The Holy Spirit Animates the Church

The Holy Spirit animates or gives life to the Church. Saint Augustine of Hippo said that what the soul is to the human body, so the Holy Spirit is to the **Body of Christ**, the Church. Before his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples, "You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you" ([Acts 1:8](#)). At Pentecost, tongues of fire, symbolizing the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit, rested on the disciples. This power took a group of followers who had been huddling behind closed doors out of fear (see [John 20:19](#)) and converted them into bold missionaries who went into the world to proclaim their faith in the Risen Christ.

The Holy Spirit Sanctifies the Church

The Church is sanctified or made holy by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works to increase the holiness of the Church and her members through the Sacraments, through the **virtues** by which we live a moral life, and by the many gifts the Holy Spirit gives to each person. Church members first receive the Holy Spirit through Baptism, the first Sacrament of Christian Initiation. Baptism brings each person into the Body of Christ. Saint Paul wrote, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#)).

What are some things you can do to strengthen your commitment to do good?

Article 8: Images of the Holy Spirit

We know that the Holy Spirit works in the world to bring us together, to strengthen our relationships, and to unite us in a common mission. But because we cannot experience the Holy Spirit with our five senses, it can be helpful



Body of Christ

A term that when capitalized designates Jesus' Body in the Eucharist, or the entire Church, which is also referred to as the Mystical Body of Christ.

virtue

A habitual and firm disposition to do good.



Sacred Tradition

Tradition comes from the Latin *tradere*, meaning “to hand on.” Sacred Tradition refers to the process of passing on the Gospel message. It began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in Sacred Scripture, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

to look at some images or symbols that describe the work of the Holy Spirit in Sacred Scripture and **Sacred Tradition**. Important images of the Holy Spirit include wind, fire, and a dove.

Breath and Wind

In Greek, the language of the New Testament, the word for Spirit is *pneuma*. This word can also mean “wind” or “breath.” In Hebrew, the primary language of the Old Testament, the word *ruach* has these same meanings.

The Scripture writers took full advantage of this range of meaning. In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, “Receive the holy Spirit” (20:22). This recalls God’s action in [Genesis 2:7](#): “The Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” And as we have already seen, the Acts of the Apostles tells us that there was “a noise like a strong driving wind” when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost (2:2).

As Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” ([John 3:8](#)).

Fire

Just as the Holy Spirit often appears as wind or breath throughout Sacred Scripture, we also glimpse the Holy Spirit in examples of fire in both the Old and New Testaments. You may recall the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses in the Book of Exodus (see [3:2](#)). Later the Book of Exodus tells us the Lord led the Israelites through the wilderness, showing them the way by sending a pillar of flame during the night and a pillar of cloud during the day (perhaps another example of the Holy Spirit as wind) (see [13:21](#)). If we return to the Pentecost account,



we read that the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples in the form of “tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them” ([Acts 2:3](#)).

The Dove

In addition to images involving wind and fire, Sacred Scripture often portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove, an image frequently echoed in Christian art. When Jesus was baptized, Luke tells us, “the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove” ([3:22](#)). In his poem “God’s Grandeur,” the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) followed Luke’s example by using the image of the dove to describe the Holy Spirit (called the Holy Ghost here):

And though the last lights off the black West
went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward,
springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings.



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What other images have you encountered that describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the world?

Article 9: Life According to the Holy Spirit

Sometimes people go through dramatic changes in their lives. Let’s say Lauren, who has always been somewhat rude and inconsiderate, suddenly becomes much nicer and thoughtful. You might think to yourself, “It’s like Lauren is a different or new person!” The Gifts of the Holy Spirit bring about this kind of startling change in a person’s life.

Life When We Ignore the Holy Spirit

We may know about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, but we have the free will to ignore him or, as [Saint Paul](#) said, to live “according to the flesh” ([Romans 8:4](#)). The Apostle Paul contrasted a life lived according to the flesh with a holy life lived according to the power of the Holy Spirit. The person who lives according to the flesh focuses on immediate gratification of his or her own needs. As a result, this person’s life will be filled, as Paul said, with hatred, jealousy, lack of self-control, and selfishness. According to Paul, someone who focuses only on immediate gratification and pleasure may well abuse alcohol and be sexually promiscuous (see [Galatians 5:19–21](#)). The person who ignores the Holy Spirit is so focused on meeting his or her own immediate desires that he or she has no time to consider other people.

Life When We Live in the Holy Spirit

Saint Paul contrasted this selfish life with a life “according to the Spirit” ([Romans 8:4](#)). He spoke of the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)). Those who live according to the Spirit focus not on themselves but rather on the needs and well-being of others.

Saint Paul said, “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” ([Romans 5:5](#)). This life in the Holy Spirit is a kind of sneak preview of our life in Heaven, where we will share in the perfect love and happiness of the Trinity. Think of people who are filled with the Spirit—they radiate calm and joy even during tough times.

The Holy Spirit allows us to deepen our relationship with himself, the Father, and the Son,

The Holy Spirit helps teach us how to pray. The next time you pray, begin by asking the Holy Spirit to guide you.



showing us that we are “children of God” ([Romans 8:16](#)), and thus we can cry out, “Abba, Father” ([8:15](#), [Galatians 4:6](#)).

The Teaching of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has an important teaching role in the Church. Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit “will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you. . . . When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth” ([John 14:26,16:13](#)). The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the truths of faith.

The Holy Spirit especially teaches us to pray. Do you ever feel that you would like to pray, or even that you should pray, but you don’t know what to say? Ask the Holy Spirit for help. The Apostle Paul tells us, “The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings” ([Romans 8:26](#)). When we don’t know how to pray, it’s good to know that we can call on the Holy Spirit, the “master of prayer,” to help us ([CCC, 741](#)).

The Holy Spirit, as the master of prayer, not only intercedes for us but also instructs us in our prayer life, inspiring us to express new forms of the five basic types of prayer: blessing, **petition**, **intercessions**, thanksgiving, and praise. The Holy Spirit has been teaching people to pray for thousands of years. The Holy Spirit operates through Sacred Tradition, the living transmission of God’s truth to us. The Holy Spirit is like a well of living water within the heart of a person who prays, but the Holy Spirit also points the praying person to the source of the living water, Jesus Christ. From the medieval Gregorian chants to the latest praise and worship songs, from the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass to our own spontaneous prayers before we fall asleep at night, the Holy Spirit is endlessly creative in our prayer lives.

What kind of prayer have you found particularly powerful or meaningful?



petition

A prayer form in which one asks God for help and forgiveness.

intercession

A prayer on behalf of another person or group.



charism

A special grace of the Holy Spirit given to an individual Christian or community, commonly for the benefit and building up of the entire Church.

Article 10: Charisms: The Holy Spirit's Special Graces for the Church

The Holy Spirit gives various special graces, called **charisms**, to the members of the Church for the benefit of the whole Church and, through the Church, the whole world. As Saint Paul wrote, “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit” ([1 Corinthians 12:7](#)).

Saint Paul's Description of the Charisms

Saint Paul listed several examples of charisms in his First Letter to the Corinthians: the expression of knowledge and wisdom, faith, healing abilities, the ability to do great deeds, prophecy, “discernment of spirits,” and the ability to speak in tongues ([12:8–10](#)).

Did You Know?

Gifts of the Holy Spirit



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The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are different than the charisms given by the Holy Spirit. These gifts help us to deepen our faith and grow closer to God. The essential meaning of each gift is given below, yet, because each of us receives these gifts in our own individual way, they may have a slightly different effect for each of us:

Wisdom This gift enables us to see the world, and our own situation, as God sees it. We can see the Holy Spirit at work, and we can see where our decisions can contribute to God's designs.

Understanding This gift helps us to find the meaning of God's truth and its significance for our own lives. This gift helps us to root

our lives in truth and honesty.

Right Judgment (Counsel) This gift helps us to know the difference between right and wrong, and between something good and something better. It helps us to know and live God's loving will for us.

Courage (Fortitude) This gift helps us to live out the saying “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Every life has its challenges and obstacles. This gift of the Holy Spirit helps us to face them, go through them, and keep on track towards God.

Knowledge This gift, closely related to the gifts of wisdom and understanding, helps us to understand the meaning of God's Revelation, particularly the Good News of Jesus Christ. Through the gift of knowledge, we strive to learn more about God by studying Scripture Sacred Tradition.

Reverence (Piety) This gift gives us a deep sense of respect for God, honoring him with humility, trust, and love. This gift also helps us to love and respect the Church as the Body of Christ on earth.

Wonder and Awe (Fear of the Lord) This gift makes us aware of God's greatness, love, and power, sometimes to the point of being overwhelmed. This awareness may fill us with joy or bring us to our knees when we recognize that God himself is with us and in us.

These charisms should not be confused, however, with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are seven dispositions or tendencies, not specific skills. The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, based on [Isaiah 11:2](#), are Wisdom, Understanding, Right Judgment (Counsel), Courage (Fortitude), Knowledge, Reverence (Piety), and Wonder and Awe (Fear of the Lord).

Ordinary and Extraordinary Charisms

There are ordinary charisms and extraordinary charisms, and both kinds are important. Ordinary charisms are those simple and humble graces that build up the Church, contribute to human good, and respond to the needs of the world. These charisms are spiritual graces. Often they build on natural talents. On any given day, you can see ordinary charisms at work all around you. A teacher may be graced with wisdom to touch the hearts of students in a deep way. A nurse or doctor may be graced with compassion. A friend may be graced with a special concern for immigrants and may use a talent for learning languages to help these newcomers.

Some of the Holy Spirit's special graces are extraordinary, involving spiritual powers beyond normal human abilities. A person's extraordinary charism of healing, for example, might be visible to others through a miraculous cure that has no scientific explanation. Some people have the charism of prophecy, or the charism of speaking in tongues and interpreting those who speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues is the special graces of praying in a spiritual language; no one else can understand it except someone with the charism of interpreting tongues (see [1 Corinthians 14:2,14](#)).

Charisms of Leadership

Sometimes we describe political leaders or other leaders as charismatic, meaning they possess a certain power of personality or speaking ability that draws people to them. The Church too has charisms of leadership, but these are special graces of the Holy Spirit that enable a leader to provide benefit to the whole Church. In his discussion



infallibility

The gift given by the Holy Spirit to the Church whereby the pastors of the Church, the Pope and the bishops in union with him, can definitively proclaim a doctrine of faith and morals without error.

of charisms, Saint Paul wrote that God has designated believers to be, for example, Apostles, prophets, teachers, administrators, and assistants (see [1 Corinthians 12:28](#)).

Founders of religious orders or congregations often have specific charisms that their followers also pursue. [Saint Benedict of Nursia's](#) charism of combining work and prayer has inspired the spiritual life of vowed Benedictines and their associates for centuries. [Saint Francis of Assisi's](#) charism of embracing a life of poverty and simplicity has similarly inspired thousands to follow in his footsteps.

As leaders and teachers of the Church, the Pope and the bishops in union with him have the charism of



Faith in Action

Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate



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In 1893, the order of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate was established in Texas. This was the first community of religious women established in that state. One Sunday Margaret Mary Healy-Murphy heard the priest read a letter from the bishops of the United States asking people to reach out to African American people who did not have many opportunities for an education.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, she discerned that the Holy Spirit was calling her to serve and educate African American children who were poor. She built a church and a small schoolhouse, naming them for [Saint Peter Claver](#), the Jesuit saint known for helping slaves in Colombia. When she had trouble recruiting volunteers, she established a religious community with the help of the local bishop. She gathered a group of young women who dedicated their lives to serving those living in poverty.

After Saint Peter Claver Academy closed in 1971, the sisters established the Healy-Murphy Center, an alternative school for young people at risk, such as teenage mothers and those who have not been successful in traditional high school settings. The sisters also opened day care centers for the teens' children. In addition to their work at the Healy-Murphy Center, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate now minister in seven dioceses in Texas, five in Louisiana, two in Mississippi, and one in Mexico. (From the website for the Healy-Murphy Center)

infallibility, so that the Church may always avoid error in her teaching on faith and morals. Infallibility extends to all of Divine Revelation. The Pope, as supreme pastor and teacher, uses this gift when he defines a **doctrine** as infallible. The most recent infallible teaching was Pope Pius XII's proclamation of the **Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** in 1950. Another example of the Church's infallibility occurs when the bishops, together with the Pope, agree on a teaching that all Catholics must believe because it has been divinely revealed. We see this kind of agreement especially in an **Ecumenical Council**.

The Church Needs All Charisms

The Holy Spirit gives special graces to every member of the Church, no matter how humble, because each person can help to build up the Church. Some have a musical charism. Others have the charism of leadership or coaching, and yet others have the charism of patient listening and the ability to give wise advice. As a young person, you may already know some



doctrine

An official, authoritative teaching of the Church based on the Revelation of God.

Each of us has gifts we can contribute to the building up of the Church. These gifts may be obvious, such as musical abilities, or subtle, such as being a good listener. What gifts do you possess that you can share with the Church?



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Primary Sources

A Challenge from Pope Benedict XVI to Youth

How can you embrace the power of the Holy Spirit to know how best to serve the world? Pope Benedict XVI delivered this challenge to young people like you at the 2008 World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia:

Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the “power” which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?



Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The dogma that recognizes that the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken directly to Heaven after her life on earth had ended.

Ecumenical Council

A gathering of the Church's bishops from around the world convened by the Pope or approved by him to address pressing issues in the Church.

of your particular charisms. You will discover more as you grow up.

Chapter Review

1. What does it mean to say that the works of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are inseparable?
2. Where does the Holy Spirit lead the Church?
3. Describe the events of Pentecost.
4. What did Peter say would happen to those people who repented and were baptized on the day of Pentecost?
5. Why is it appropriate to say that the Church was revealed rather than born on Pentecost?
6. Why was Pentecost the Revelation of the Holy Trinity as well as the Church?
7. What are the three important elements of the Holy Spirit's mission with regard to the Church?
8. Describe three images we often associate with the Holy Spirit.
9. How did the Holy Spirit transform Jesus' disciples?
10. Contrast a life lived ignoring the Holy Spirit with one lived in the Holy Spirit.
11. How does the Holy Spirit help us to pray?
12. What is the subtle difference between a charism and a gift of the Holy Spirit?
13. Describe two examples of founders of religious orders whose charisms are still followed by members of those orders today.

The Work of the Early Church

Introduction

Sent by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles participated in the universal mission of the Church by spreading the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean world. Before he died, Jesus commissioned his Apostles to share in his mission of preaching the Good News and healing. After his Ascension he sent the Holy Spirit to be with them and guide them. Christ's love and the presence of the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles and other disciples the motivation and energy to share the truth of Christ with those they encountered.

[Saint Paul](#), sometimes called the Apostle to the Gentiles, preached to both Jews and Gentiles in ways both groups could understand. Paul preached to Jews by focusing on the Old Testament and its prophecies of a Messiah. He similarly spoke to Gentiles in terms they were accustomed to. For example, he quoted from Greek poets when he shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with Greek communities.

Still, neither the Jews in Jerusalem nor the Romans always welcomed the Gospel message, and their hostility led to the persecution of Christians and even martyrdom. The early martyrs inspired others to be strong in their faith. But persecution and suffering are not unique to the early Church in the Roman Empire. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition reveal that there will be a final trial or tribulation at the end of the world.

Article 11: The Church Continues Christ's Mission

When we first receive good news—we pass a difficult test, we hear that a sick friend is getting better—our first inclination is to share that news. In a similar but even greater way, the early Apostles were motivated to share the Good News about Jesus with everyone. This is how the early Church continued Christ's mission.

The Mission of the Apostles

In the early Church, the mission of the Apostles actually began during their time with Jesus, before his death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Jesus proclaimed the Good News and healed people, and he sent the Apostles out to do the same (see [Matthew 10:5–15](#)). After his Resurrection, Christ made it clear that the Apostles' mission was universal, meaning it was for everyone:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. ([Matthew 28:19–20](#))

Jesus gave the Apostles an important charge when he commissioned them to “make disciples of all nations.” It is no wonder then that the Church spread rapidly in communities throughout the Mediterranean.

Primary Sources

Pope Saint John Paul II on Mission

In his encyclical [Redemptoris Missio](#), Pope Saint John Paul II tells the Church about her own mission:

Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time. (92)

The Spread of Christianity

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that within a few years of Jesus' death and Resurrection, the Apostles and disciples had proclaimed the faith from Jerusalem to Samaria, Damascus, Phoenicia, and Antioch (see [chapters 8–11](#)). Saint Paul traveled to various cities in Asia Minor and Greece and had made plans to travel as far as Spain before he was executed in Rome. Other historical evidence shows that the Church also spread south into Egypt and farther into eastern Syria just a few years after Jesus' Ascension.

Why did the Apostles and early disciples travel so far and work so hard to spread the Good News? The universal love of God, who desires that all be saved, motivated and energized them to travel throughout the known world to share the truth of the Gospel with all who would listen. Saint Paul said, "The love of Christ impels us" ([2 Corinthians 5:14](#)). The Church needed to be missionary so she could share the truth that many people already longed for.

The Holy Spirit and the Apostles' Mission

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find accounts of Pentecost and how the Holy Spirit was involved in every aspect of the missionary spread of Christianity. The Holy Spirit came to repentant sinners who were baptized and helped the Church to make decisions, such as assigning Paul and Barnabas to a certain task (see [13:2](#)), ruling on what laws Gentile converts to Jesus must follow (see [15:28](#)), and guiding Paul and Timothy to preach only in certain areas (see [16:6–7](#)).

Yet the Holy Spirit was not working alone. The Church's mission is **Trinitarian**. This means that the work of the Church is the work of the three Divine Persons in the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. According to the Father's eternal plan, the Church continues the mission of the Son with the help of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of the Apostles' mission



Trinitarian

Of or relating to the Trinity or the doctrine of the Trinity.



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By modern standards Paul did not travel very far, but through these journeys Paul established and supported numerous churches that led to the spread of Christianity throughout the known world.

was to cooperate with the Holy Trinity's plan by inviting people to share in the communion between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

**What helps you to feel connected with the Church?
How is this an example of the Holy Spirit at work?**

Article 12: How Did the Early Church Spread the Gospel?

How do you learn best? A good teacher knows that all students do not learn in the same way. Some students learn best by reading silently, others by listening to a lecture, still others by discussing the content. Like any good teacher, the Church recognizes that she must adapt her way of spreading the Gospel to reach diverse audiences and the great variety of learners, or disciples, on earth. In fact, in the New Testament, the Greek word for *disciple* is *mathetes*, which literally means “learner.”

Saint Paul Preached to Both Jews and Gentiles

Although he was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles at his **conversion**, [Saint Paul](#) preached to Gentiles and Jews alike. In his missionary work, Paul always tried to communicate the Gospel to his audience in a way they would best understand. Paul himself was comfortable in the cultural worlds of both Jews and Gentiles. Though he was a devout Jew who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, Paul was born and raised in the **Hellenistic** city of Tarsus in modern-day Turkey and wrote in an excellent Greek style.

When preaching to a Jewish audience, Paul focused primarily on the Old Testament. He reminded his fellow Jews that the Hebrew Scriptures prophesy about a Messiah, and he connected these prophecies to the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus (see [Acts 13:16–43](#)). But when Paul spoke to a Gentile audience, he changed his approach. When he preached to Greeks in Athens, for example, he began by relating the Good News in a context more familiar to the Greeks. He said that among the many altars the Greeks had set up to worship various gods, such as Zeus and Apollo, he had noticed one altar dedicated to an “unknown God.” This unknown God,



conversion

A change of heart, turning away from sin and toward God.

Hellenistic

Of or relating to Greek history, culture, or art after Alexander the Great.



Live It!

How Do You Preach the Gospel?

There is no single way to spread the Gospel today. The Holy Spirit gifts some people with the skills and personality to speak boldly and publicly about their faith, while other people witness to the truth and power of their faith through simple, humble lives of serving others.

Many types of witnesses have allowed Christ to transform their lives. Once that true inward transformation has begun, the outward effects cannot be hidden, whether proclaimed from the rooftops or quietly lived out among friends and family. What special gifts and skills do you have? How can you use them to spread the Gospel?



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Today the Good News of Jesus Christ continues to be shared through preaching, much like Paul did on his journeys. Think about preachers you have heard. What makes someone an effective preacher?

Paul proclaimed, was the one true God who had created all things. Paul then quoted from Greek poets to further support his points, knowing that the Athenians weren't familiar with the Old Testament (see [Acts 17:16–34](#)).

Paul summed up his own methods in this way, referring to the Gentiles when he spoke of those outside the law: “To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews. . . . To those outside the law I became like one outside the law . . . to win over those outside the law” ([1 Corinthians 9:20–21](#)).

Paul Used Familiar Imagery to Reach His Audience

Jesus, who preached in rural Galilee, used images familiar to his audience, such as a farmer sowing seed and fishermen using nets. Following Christ's example, Paul used images suitable to his audiences. For example, when he spoke to audiences in large urban areas, he taught with images that included athletes competing in a stadium (see [1 Corinthians 9:24](#)), military armor and weapons (see [Ephesians 6:10–17](#)), musical instruments such as gongs and cymbals (see [1 Corinthians 13:1](#)), and temples (see [1 Corinthians 6:19](#)).

Paul's ways of presenting the faith changed with his audience, but he never changed the truths of the faith. Effective evangelization includes a presentation that is appropriate for those who are learning or listening, but it does not distort the message.

How Did Christianity Spread So Quickly?

The Apostles and disciples spread the Christian message in the regions surrounding the Mediterranean as far east as Armenia, southwest into northern Africa and

modern-day Ethiopia, and through much of what we know today as Europe. In addition to preaching in ways people could understand, what other factors explain this remarkable spread of Christianity? Certainly, expanding the Church's mission to reach out to Gentiles increased the Apostles' potential audience for evangelization. Paul's ability to speak Greek allowed him to explain important Christian truths to people from Greco-Roman cultures so they could understand the faith. This outreach also attracted more intellectual and well-educated believers in addition to those who were perhaps less educated. We begin to see how the Church was able to spread the Good News to people from a range of religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.



Faith in Action

Saint Francis Xavier: Patron of Foreign Missions



© Bartolomé Estebán Murillo (Spanish, 1618–1682), Saint Francis Xavier, c. 1670, Oil on canvas, 85 5/16 x 63 7/8 in. (216.7 x 162.3 cm), The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.3, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT

Saint Francis Xavier was born to a noble family of the Kingdom of Navarre, in modern-day Spain. Giving up a promising career as a professor of philosophy, he joined [Saint Ignatius of Loyola](#) to become one of the original members of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits.

Leaving Europe in 1541, Francis spent the rest of his life as a missionary in Mozambique, India, southeastern Asia, and Japan. He baptized and taught the basics of the faith to thousands of people. He even hoped to evangelize China, but he died on an island just off the mainland.

Francis preferred to live and work among the poor, often ministering to the sick in addition to his preaching. Like Saint Paul, he changed his methods of presenting the faith to suit his audience. He taught people at their level of understanding—for example, he taught catechism to children using

rhyiming verses set to popular tunes. He also became welcome in the courts of rulers and engaged in theological and philosophical discussions with those more educated. His ministry was accompanied at times by miraculous signs, including the gift of healing.

What about the Roman Empire? The Roman Empire's persecution of early Christians is well known, but we must remember that certain strengths of the Roman Empire also greatly helped the Church to carry out her mission. The empire was large and unified and had a good road system for travel. It also provided a certain level of protection from bandits and other threats. Missionaries were able to take the Good News throughout lands controlled by the empire, including southern Europe, parts of the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean, and northern Africa. Later centuries brought Christianity to northern Europe and the British Isles along with Roman conquerors. By the fourth century, according



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to scholars' estimates, approximately 10 percent of the people in the Roman Empire were Christian. Later in the same century, the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which finally granted tolerant support of Christianity throughout the empire, ending centuries of official persecution. But even persecution and martyrdom played a role in helping to spread the Good News.

What factors in our society today make it easy to witness to the Good News of Christ? What factors make it difficult?

Article 13: Persecution and Martyrdom

Let's face it. Being a serious disciple of Christ is not always easy and often not popular. Refusing to attend parties where underage drinking is going on, for example, can alienate you from some of your peers. Resisting the temptation to have sexual relations before Marriage can potentially clash with friends' values. Living out your faith as a teen might at times lead to suffering, mockery, and loss of popularity. Yet the Church calls all of us to be

witnesses to the truth of Christ, both in our words and in our deeds, whether this is popular or not.

Persecution of the Church by Jewish and Roman Authorities

Early Christians witnessed to the truth of Christ, and some suffered persecution from both Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. Jewish leaders did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They considered claims of Jesus' divinity to be blasphemous, because they believed that only God could be fully divine. Because of this charge of **blasphemy**, Paul, a devout Pharisee, sought to destroy the Church (see [Galatians 1:13](#)) before his conversion to Christianity.

Roman authorities persecuted the Church because early Christians often refused to offer sacrifices to the emperor, a religious duty required of everyone who lived in the Roman Empire. Christians regarded this requirement as idolatry. Roman authorities, however, interpreted their refusal as disloyalty to the



blasphemy

Speaking, acting, or thinking about God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the saints in a way that is irreverent, mocking, or offensive.

Blasphemy is a sin against the Second Commandment.

This stained-glass image depicts the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna. Take a moment and read his prayer. Why do you think he is giving thanks to God for being martyred?

Pray It!



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A Martyr's Prayer

Around the year 150, when he was eighty-six years old, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna was burned at the stake for refusing to deny his Christian beliefs and worship the Roman Emperor. The following excerpt is from his beautiful prayer before he was executed. Pray it whenever you need reassurance that God's grace is at work in your own life:

I bless you for having judged me worthy from this day and this hour to be counted among your martyrs. . . . You have kept your promise, God of faithfulness and truth. For this reason and for everything, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him, who is with you and the Holy Spirit, may glory be given to you, now and in the ages to come. Amen.¹ (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 2474)

Early Christians often faced persecution and death for practicing and sharing their faith. What obstacles do you face in practicing your faith and sharing it with others?



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martyr

A person who suffers death because of his or her beliefs. The Church has canonized many Christian martyrs as saints.

emperor, a crime punishable by death. Despite the threats of execution, many Christians still refused to compromise their faith in Christ, some suffering the ultimate consequence.

Martyrs of the Early Church

The highest form of Christian witness is giving up one's life for the sake of Christ. The Greek word *martyr* reveals this connection: it literally means “witness” and is also the basis for our English word **martyr**.

In chapter 1, “The Origin of the Church,” you read about Saint Stephen the Deacon, the first martyr of the Christian faith. After Jesus’ Ascension the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem put Stephen on trial for blasphemy (see [Acts 6:8–7:60](#)). At the trial an enraged crowd dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. Saint Stephen witnessed to his faith to the end, saying as he died: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. . . . Lord, do not hold this sin against them” ([7:59–60](#)).

After Stephen’s death a general persecution of the Jerusalem Church broke out, causing many Christians to flee (see [Acts 8:1](#)). Later King Herod had James, one of the Twelve, killed, and he also had Peter arrested (see

[12:1–3](#)). Eventually both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome for their faith.

We may find it hard to believe this today, but the followers of Jesus often accepted their suffering with joy. [Saint Ignatius of Antioch](#), awaiting his execution in Rome, wrote: “It is better for me to die [in order to unite myself] to Christ Jesus than to reign over the ends of the earth. . . . My birth is approaching”² ([CCC, 2474](#)). The early Christian martyrs were honored to die for Christ. They knew that by sharing in his suffering and death, they would also share in his glorious Resurrection.

Far from destroying the Church, persecution produced brave martyrs whose examples encouraged other Christians to remain steadfast in their faith. As

Did You Know?

The Church’s Role within History



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We can see the mysterious aspects of the Church only with the eyes of faith. We cannot fully comprehend these mysteries, but the Church’s accomplishments throughout history are visible signs of this divine reality of salvation. Consider these examples:

- Like Jesus the healer, the Church has always been active in health care. The early Church played a central role in developing hospitals. Today there are 624 Catholic hospitals in the United States alone.
- Monasteries played a major role in preserving knowledge throughout the late ancient and medieval periods, studying and copying not only Scripture and Church writers but also works of classical philosophy and literature.
- In the Middle Ages, the Church was a great patron of the arts. Pope Julius II, for example, commissioned Michelangelo’s great paintings in the Sistine Chapel.

These are only a few of the outward manifestations of the hidden sources of healing, knowledge, and creativity that lie within the mystery of the Church.

Tertullian, a Church Father, wrote, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians”³ ([CCC, 852](#)).

The Church's Final Trial

Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition teach us that in the last days of the world, before Christ's Second Coming, the Church will undergo a final persecution (see [Matthew 24:3–28](#)). No one, however, knows the precise events and timing of the end times except the Father. Even the Son himself does not know the exact date and hour (see [Mark 13:32](#)). One scriptural prediction tells us that the antichrist, a false messiah, will set himself up in the place of God and will deceive many (see [2 Thessalonians 2:3–12](#)).

What might an antichrist really be like? We see previews of the antichrist's deception when any *earthly* power tries to claim the *ultimate* power and authority of God. Examples include the Nazi party's claim that the “master race” in Germany was the key to history's meaning, and the Marxist claim that a proper economic system can eventually lead to a Heaven on earth.

We must resist these human claims to have ultimate answers. We know that God alone has the answers, and we also know that God's love is more than enough to support us, even during times of suffering and persecution.

Chapter Review

1. Why did the Apostles and early disciples travel so far and work so hard to spread the Good News?
2. What are three ways the Holy Spirit was involved in the missionary spread of Christianity?
3. Explain how Paul's preaching to the Jews differed from his preaching to the Gentiles.
4. Explain how Paul made his message more understandable to an urban audience.
5. Why did Jewish leaders persecute the early Christians? Why did the Roman Empire do so?
6. Identify some early martyrs of the Church, and describe their attitude toward martyrdom.