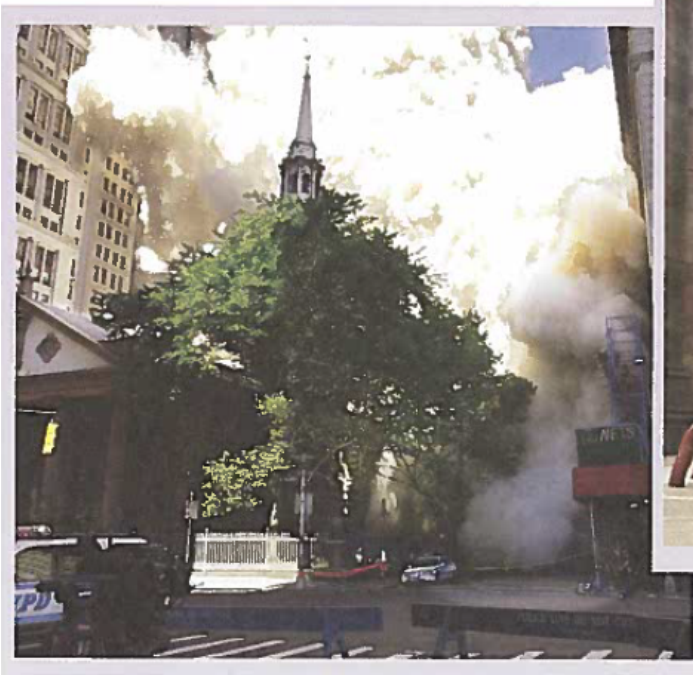


In the days after terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, New Yorkers remarked at how amazing it was that an old church directly across from the World Trade Center had survived the attacks on the Trade Center's twin towers. When the towers collapsed, sending debris all around the area, **St. Paul's Chapel—an Episcopal church built more than two hundred years ago and New York City's oldest public building still in active use**—remained relatively unharmed. What helped the church to withstand such a crisis?

**A seventy-year-old sycamore tree, it turned out, had shielded the church from the falling debris.** This deeply rooted tree took the brunt of the damage from the towers' collapse. As a result, the church remained intact . . . and became the site of an extraordinary volunteer relief effort to help people hurt by the attacks.

**Activity** List some things that can help to keep you "rooted in faith" when a crisis arises. Share your thoughts with your group.



A cloud of dust, debris, and smoke overwhelms St. Paul's Chapel after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.



Sculpture of *Trinity Root*, a sculpture of the tree that saved St. Paul's Chapel, by Steve Tobin (1957- )

“Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens,” wrote British novelist and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) in *The Lord of the Rings*.

## BELIEVING...

### The faith of the Church is shaken by the Black Death.

The years 1300–1500 A.D. are often called the **late Middle Ages**. Unlike the glorious age of faith before, this was a time of disease, disorder, and great change for the Church and the world. A deadly disease was spreading from south to north and from east to west—throughout all of Europe and beyond. **This highly contagious disease, or plague, was known as the Black Death; its victims became extremely ill and sometimes even looked bruised, or “black-and-blue.”** Those who contracted the plague died a painful death, and doctors were powerless against the disease. **Scientists today believe that most of those who died from the Black Death had contracted a form of what we now call the bubonic plague.** At the time, there was no vaccination to prevent the Black Death and no known cure for the disease.

Historians believe that the plague started in Asia and was spread by traders and armies, **transmitted by the fleas and rats that were on their ships or in their caravans.** Eventually the plague overran Europe, and within years there were so many deaths that it would **take about four hundred years to restore the world’s population to what it was before the plague began.** The economy was hard hit because so many working-class people died. Existing social structures—including feudalism—broke down completely. Poor laborers began to demand higher wages. Crops and animals were neglected, and some people did not even want to care for their own children, fearing they might catch the plague from them.

**In fact, people who were well were constantly worried, knowing that this illness could strike them at any time. As a result, people’s views on life and faith totally changed. They had seen so much death and wanted to enjoy what was left of life. Often, people even roamed the land, taking what they wanted and acting unjustly toward those who were poor, sick, or disabled. Even**



Medieval book cover depicting the Black Death, 1437

**faithful people despaired, taking out their anger on God and blaming him for all that was happening. As Catholics, we know that “faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life” (CCC, 324).** But this concept was difficult for people to understand or accept because of the devastation that was all around them. It would take time for people to see God’s plan and to reaffirm their faith.

Europe was in a time of crisis—the plague was raging, England and France were at war with each other, Germany was suffering under weak and ineffective rulers, and Muslim armies were advancing on Europe. By 1453 the Muslim Turks had taken over the great Christian capital of Constantinople, and by 1529 Muslim armies had conquered all of southeastern Europe—even attacking the Austrian city of Vienna, deep inside Europe, and raising fears that western Europe would be next.

**Activity** Identify ways that illnesses and hardships affect people’s faith today. How does the Church support people during these times?

## The Church faces setbacks in the understanding of the Catholic faith.

During the spread of the Black Death, priests visited and administered the sacraments to those dying of this horrible disease. Many of these priests also contracted the plague and died. Since so many people were dying, priests were constantly busy devoting their time to private Masses for the dead. Some priests grew rich by collecting fees for these Masses.

The devotion to the Christian faith that had grown during the Gregorian reform movement was falling away. The study of theology in the universities was disappearing. A major problem in the Church was that there was a lack of understanding of the real meaning of the Eucharist, which should be the center of every Christian's spiritual life. The Mass became an unclear and distant rite even to those who attended it faithfully. Moreover, the Mass was still in Latin, but, by this time, few laypeople spoke Latin. Only those who were highly educated could even understand it. Most Europeans spoke early versions of French, German, English, or other local languages. So, everyone except the very educated sat through Mass in silence. And it became common practice for even the most religious Christians to receive Holy Communion only a few times a year.

Many priests were poorly educated in the faith and thus could not teach the faith to others. Fewer and fewer priests preached on a regular basis or were able to provide religious instruction for all their parish members. As a result, when Catholics so desperately needed their faith, more and more of them did not even know the basics of Catholicism. And before long, many Catholics did not know the meaning of the Creed or the Ten Commandments and could not even pray the most common prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary.

During this era, the choices that were made and the events that took place caused Europe to lose the valued ideals of Christendom. And as Christendom began to

weaken, the once powerful papacy began to decline. Catholics should have been able to look to the pope and bishops for strength and guidance in these times of crises and change. But during the late Middle Ages, the Church's leadership, even the papacy itself, became one of the Church's many problems—proving that in every age, the choices that individuals make, and that groups or institutions make, affect society as a whole.

**“God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil.”**

(CCC, 324)

**Activity** In groups list ways that your parish helps people to understand the Catholic faith. Add to the list as you find new examples.



## Women of the Church

During this troubled era the work of two women provided hope: **Saint Catherine of Siena** (1347–1380) and **Blessed Julian of Norwich** (1342–approximately 1420).

**Catherine was known for her holiness and also for her wisdom. She called for Church reform and for**

**more faithful practice of the sacraments. Princes and bishops sought her advice, and she helped to negotiate peace in wartime. She is also credited with convincing Pope Gregory XI to return the papacy to Rome.** Catherine was named a saint in 1461. And in 1970, Pope Paul VI declared her a **Doctor of the Church**, a special honor given to saints whose writings help us to grow in our understanding of the Catholic faith.

**Julian of Norwich** was a holy woman who **became seriously ill in 1373. As she recovered, she began to have visions. She meditated on them and collected them in a book. This great work, Revelations of Divine Love, was the first book written in English by a woman.** In it Julian speaks of God's unconditional love for all people.

Pray that you too may be a sign of hope to others.

**CATHOLIC IDENTITY**

## BELIEVING...

### The Church's leadership suffers as a result of the Great Schism of the West.

Where do you go for strength and guidance in times of crisis?

The Catechism states, "The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful" (882). And, as the Bishop of Rome, the pope had always lived in Rome. But in 1305 a French cardinal was elected pope and became Pope Clement V. Rather than moving to Rome, Clement V lived in Avignon, a small city in southeastern France. During his papacy (1305–1314) he appointed mostly French cardinals, who, in turn, continued to elect French popes. All of these popes continued to reside in Avignon, and, though they were not bad or immoral men, they harmed the Church by appearing to place the papacy under the control of the French king, a civil ruler.

Pope Gregory XI finally moved the papacy back to Rome in 1377. Later that year, after Pope Gregory's death, the cardinals elected an Italian pope who took the name Urban VI. When Pope Urban VI proposed reforms that the cardinals disliked, they claimed that they had been forced by the Roman mob to vote for the Italian pope and that Urban VI, therefore, was not the true pope. These cardinals then held another election for a pope, selecting the nephew of the French king. This man, who took the name Clement VII, was an antipope—not the true pope. Clement VII, unable to seize Rome but recognized as pope by the king of France, returned to Avignon and established his own papal court. But Pope Urban VI, still in Rome, would not step down.

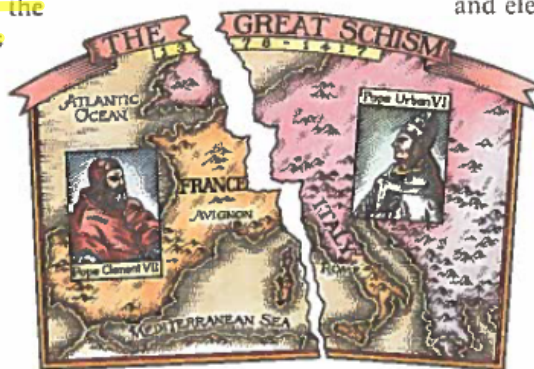
The cardinals had caused a schism in the Church: Two men were claiming to be pope. Across Europe,

everyone took sides—with both the pope and the antipope appointing bishops and abbots to various dioceses and monasteries. When Urban VI and Clement VII died, competing groups of cardinals elected two new popes, each one claiming to be the real pope. This situation within the Church was known as the Great Schism of the West. Finally, in 1409, the cardinals from both sides met at a council in Pisa, Italy. They dethroned both popes and elected another, who took the name Alexander V. But the two deposed popes refused to step aside. Now there were three rival popes, with Alexander V setting up his papacy in Pisa, Italy.

Eventually, under the influence of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, a general council of the Church met from 1414 to 1418 in the city of Constance, Switzerland. This council decided

to set aside all three rival popes. In 1417 a new pope was elected, Pope Martin V, who was accepted by the Western Church.

Thus, after almost forty years, the Great Schism of the West was over. The true lineage of the papacy was restored. But the power of the papacy had been weakened, and the advice and intervention of the popes would no longer be important to many civil leaders. Succeeding popes, only beginning to understand that civil governments were separate from Church governance, would have a difficult time carrying out much-needed reforms in the Church.



Great Schism of the West (1378–1417)

#### Faith Words

antipope  
Great Schism of the West

**Activity** Plan a prayer service to ask for God's blessing upon the Church and her leaders. Write your notes and ideas here.

## The Renaissance and humanism influence the life of the Church.

The transitional period between the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Modern Age is known as the **Renaissance**. The French word *renaissance* means "rebirth." This was a time of rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman cultures and revival of European culture.

During the Renaissance, the Church became a great patron of the arts—commissioning works of Christian art and architecture. Christian scholars again became interested in the culture of the ancient Christian world, reading Scripture in its original Hebrew and Greek forms and searching monastic libraries for the manuscripts of the Fathers of the Church. And many aspects of Renaissance philosophy were compatible with Christian faith.

One philosophy was called **humanism**. It placed an increased emphasis on the importance of the person. Many great Christian scholars began to devise a "Christian humanism," which helped the Church to rediscover the humanism that lies at the heart of the Gospel message. The Christian humanists emphasized again that

### Faith Words

Renaissance  
humanism

We have a duty to "build a better world based upon truth and justice"

(*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 55*).

everyone is made in God's own image and likeness. Christian humanism has become a lasting legacy. As noted in one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), we are "witnesses of the birth of a new humanism" and have a duty to "build a better world based upon truth and justice" (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 55*).

Christian humanists of the Renaissance period were concerned about the ignorance and corruption that they saw around them.

Many of the Renaissance popes seemed more interested in being patrons of the arts and living lives of luxury than in serving God and his people. And the **secular spirit of the Renaissance promoted individual choices and desires more than Christian morality**. Christian humanists hoped that a renewed clergy would improve the spirituality and the faith of the whole Church.

Yet, the thriving life of the Church during this era reminds us that even in the worst of times and with poor leadership, the Church survives. The Church, instituted by Christ, guided by the Spirit, and sustained by God's grace, always remains.

**Activity** Imagine what the world would be like if people took Christian humanism more seriously. On a separate sheet of paper, express your ideas in a poem.

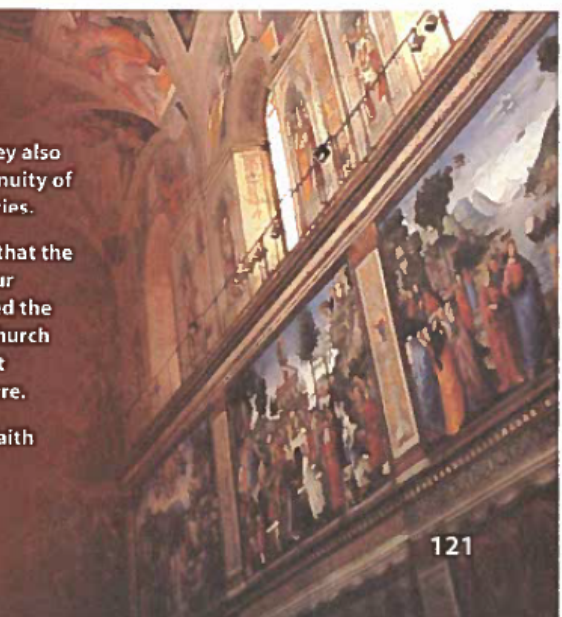
## Renaissance art

The interior of the Sistine Chapel in Rome gives an extraordinary example of Renaissance art. Two of its paintings show the Arch of Constantine, an arch built in the year 315 to commemorate the Emperor Constantine's triumph at the battle of the Milvian Bridge. The Renaissance artists and their papal patron wanted everyone who visited the Sistine Chapel to remember Constantine, the Roman emperor who gave Christians the right to worship openly and who

made Rome a Christian city. They also wanted to emphasize the continuity of papal authority over the centuries.

Such works of art clearly show that the Renaissance commemorated our ancestors in faith and celebrated the important role played by the Church in preserving some of the finest aspects of ancient art and culture.

What role does art play in our faith today?



## RESPONDING...

### Recognizing Our Faith

Recall the question at the beginning of this chapter: *How do I respond in times of crisis?* How did the Church respond to crises in the late Middle Ages? How does the Church respond to crises today? Display your findings on a poster.

### Living Our Faith

Find out how your parish or diocese helps people in times of crisis. What can you do to participate in these efforts?

### Diane Bowers



Managing a restaurant was Diane Bowers's dream career, and, at thirty-four, she was finally living it. But then she was diagnosed with fatal brain cancer, with only about five years to live. Anyone would find this diagnosis to be a major crisis—but for Bowers it was the beginning of a spiritual journey.

### Partners in FAITH

Bowers didn't always profess a specific faith. But restaurant customers regularly witnessed her kindness and hospitality. **One of them invited her to Sunday Mass, and Bowers was so moved by the worship experience that she decided to become Catholic.**

She then **became an active parishioner.** While still being treated for cancer, she also **took on the roles of catechist and pastoral council member.**

**When Bowers's mother became ill with cancer, she cared for her mother until her death. And when her own cancer spread and left her paralyzed on one side, Bowers shared her kindness with other patients at the care center where she spent her final months. Even after her death, Bowers's strength, courage, and faith in God lived on for all whose lives she touched.**

Think about someone coping with a crisis. How can you help them?

@\* For additional ideas and activities, visit [www.weliveourfaith.com](http://www.weliveourfaith.com).

## Putting Faith to Work

Talk about what you have learned in this chapter:



We recognize that the decisions of human beings affect society.



We appreciate that the Church endures because it was founded on Christ.



We continue the work of Christ as members of the Church—which, even with human problems and flaws, is sustained by grace.

Decide on ways to live out what you have learned.



## ENCOUNTERING GOD'S WORD



“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them. . . . He will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

(Revelation 21:3–4)

- ➔ **READ** the quotation from Scripture.
- ➔ **REFLECT** on these questions:  
How did God dwell with his people during the sufferings of the Black Death? during the confusing elections of the antipopes? How is God with you in times of crisis and confusion?
- ➔ **SHARE** your reflections with a partner.
- ➔ **DECIDE** to pray for God’s grace the next time you experience crisis or confusion in your life.

Define the following.

- humanism a philosophy that placed increased emphasis on the importance of the person
- Great Schism of the West two men claimed to be pope, and everyone took sides
- antipope not a true pope
- Black Death the highly contagious disease or plague of the late Middle Ages

Circle the letter of the correct answer.

- The French word b means “rebirth.”  
a. humanism      **b. renaissance**      c. plague      d. feudalism
- As the bishop of Rome, the pope had always lived in Rome. However, from 1305 to 1377 the pope lived in c.  
a. Constantinople      b. Florence      **c. Avignon**      d. Pisa
- The b of the Renaissance emphasized that everyone is made in God’s own image and likeness.  
a. antipopes      **b. Christian humanists**      c. civil leaders      d. civil governments
- In the late Middle Ages it became common practice for even the most religious Christians to receive Holy Communion d.  
a. daily      b. weekly      c. monthly      **d. a few times a year**

9–10. **ESSAY:** How did the Black Death affect the faith of Catholics of that time?

Some people began to take advantage of the situation and acted unjustly toward the poor, sick, or disabled. Others took out their anger on God and blamed Him for the Black Death. Many priests died and others grew wealthy by collecting fees for private Masses. It became common practice for even the most religious Christians to receive Holy Communion only a few times a year. (pp.118-119)