

BELIEVING...

Monasteries are established throughout the Christian world.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, some people began to view Baptism as a way to gain social status and advantages within the empire. Others, however, resisted this trend, knowing that in Baptism they received grace and began a new life in Christ. Some even began to set themselves apart from society in order to live their lives of faith more fully.

At first these people lived alone as hermits, often in desert regions. Then, in about the year 300, **Anthony of Egypt (251–356)** brought together a group of these solitary hermits to live in community, supporting each other in leading holy lives. Thus, monasticism began. **Monastic life is a life dedicated to prayer, work, study, and the needs of society.**

Eventually, systems of “rules” began to govern each **monastery, or place where monks or nuns live, to guide the lives of those in the monastic life.**

Monastic life

Many men and women continue to live the monastic life, following a “rule of life” within a community of monks or nuns. They are very important to the Church, offering their lives, prayer, and work to God for all of us.

Monks and nuns may be contemplative, meaning that they remain within their monasteries, dedicated to prayer, work, and study. They often support themselves by their own labor, which may include farmwork or manufacturing goods such as candy, cake, wine, and bread.

Some monks and nuns support their communities through sculpture, religious paintings, and icons. Some may also teach in schools and colleges or may work in nursing, social work, and parish ministry.

Find out more about specific monastic communities and the way they follow the rules of their founders.



Basil the Great (329–379), who lived in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, was a **great theologian whose writings helped to defeat the Arians at the Council of Constantinople in 381.** Basil was also a holy monk who developed a great “rule of life” for monks, calling them to a life dedicated to serving God in other people, especially those who were poor. Under Basil’s rule the monks vowed, or promised, to practice poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are called the **evangelical counsels.** The monks also followed a daily routine of community prayer, manual labor, contemplation, and service to those in need.

Benedict of Nursia (480–550) lived in the western part of the Roman Empire. He founded a monastery at Monte Cassino, Italy, around 529. **His sister, Scholastica (480–543), founded a nearby monastery for nuns.** Building on the work of Basil, **Benedict wrote a rule for his monks and for Scholastica’s nuns.** **Benedict lived by the motto *Ora et labora*, or “Pray and work,” and his “rule” named seven specific times each day for community prayer.**

In the Benedictine system each monastery was independent, with monks following the rules of their abbot, and nuns of their abbess. Under good and saintly leaders this worked very well, but this was not always the case. Thus, in the tenth century a movement to reorganize, or reform, monastic life began at the French monastery of Cluny. The abbot here directed his monks to a life of prayer centered on Benedict’s original rule. Other monasteries soon decided to do the same. Later an even more demanding reform was led by **Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), who founded the Cistercian order.** **His monks followed an extremely strict rule of prayer, manual labor, and simple living.** Soon thousands of monasteries became centers of prayer and service to others. The holy lives of the monks and nuns inspired many positive changes in both the Church and the world.

Activity With your group brainstorm some “rules of life” that would help you to serve God and others.

Faith Words

monastic life
monastery
evangelical counsels

The Church brings the good news to pagan tribes.

Though monasteries were growing and flourishing, the Roman Empire was showing signs of weakening, even signs of beginning to collapse. The empire did not have the strength of leadership that it once had, and there was widespread corruption. Much of this came from the immoral ways in which leaders were behaving.

From the fifth century onward, tribes from outside the empire began to invade Roman territories. The Romans called these invaders "barbarians" because of their lack of education and culture. Fierce Germanic tribes—Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, and Huns—came across the Danube and the Rhine rivers, which marked the borders of the empire. Armies of Franks and Vikings also came to plunder and conquer what had been Roman provinces. The western part of the empire collapsed and the eastern part of the empire barely survived.

With these invasions came much uncertainty. Standards of housing, security, and healthcare declined, and food was often scarce. Death was never far away. Many schools and centers of learning across the Roman world were destroyed or abandoned. For a while it looked as if civilization itself might be wiped out. The invading tribes also brought with them the practice of paganism. And because the Church and the empire had long been so closely linked, the invasions threatened the Christian faith. Thus, Christian leaders like Pope Gregory the Great reached out to the pagan tribes and began the work of their conversion. Gregory made treaties with their leaders and sent Christian missionaries to their homelands.

Gregory also helped to reform the Church. He contributed to canon law, a grouping of laws that would be used to govern the Church and would provide for



Sixth century Gospel manuscript sent by Pope Gregory the Great to spread the good news

good order in ecclesial, or Church, governance. Gregory was involved in the development of the Gregorian Sacramentary, a book that would guide the celebration of Mass and the other sacraments for many centuries to come. And his name is associated with the beginnings of Church music. Throughout the ages, the beautiful music that has been chanted at the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical and traditional celebrations is called, in Gregory's honor, Gregorian chant.

Throughout the years of the barbarian inva-

sions, there were monasteries scattered across the occupied countryside. The pagan invaders were impressed by the kindness and virtue of the monks and nuns. Soon the invaders and their leaders wanted to know more about the faith that inspired these holy men and women. One of these leaders was Clovis, King of the Franks

(466–511). The Franks lived in a Roman province called Gaul, known today as France. Clovis converted to Christianity and laid the foundation for a new Christian empire in what was the western part of the known world. Later, in the ninth century, two Greek brothers, Cyril (827–869) and Methodius (825–884), brought the good news of Jesus Christ to the territory from which many of the invading tribes had come. Thus, by the year 1000, most of what had been "barbarian" Europe was Christian.

“Pray and work.”

motto of the Order of Saint Benedict

Faith Word
ecclesial

Activity Role-play the parts of a Christian missionary and an invader as the missionary tries to convert the invader to Christianity.

BELIEVING...

Charlemagne strengthens the Church.

How does the Church strengthen the world today?

Like Constantine some five hundred years earlier, the Emperor Charlemagne became a major figure in the history of the Church. Over several centuries the Franks had gradually conquered all of what had been the western part of the Roman Empire. In Rome, on Christmas Day, 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, the leader of the Franks, as Holy Roman Emperor. Charlemagne immediately began a reform of both the Church and the state. In fact, he did not distinguish between the two but saw politics and religion as the two halves that formed his Holy Roman Empire.



Portrait bust of Charlemagne

Historians suspect that Charlemagne realized that Christianity could bind his empire together. Working through combined Church and civil courts, Charlemagne launched a program of reform that included the defense of Christian doctrine, a reorganization of the Church's hierarchy, or governing body, and the strict observance of all of the Church's rules and practices.

Charlemagne's most lasting contribution was to education. He decreed that all monasteries should open schools to everyone, not just to those studying to become monks and nuns. He also encouraged monastic libraries to preserve and copy ancient manuscripts. And he appointed a monk named Alcuin from England to set up a school of religious studies at his palace at Aachen, in modern-day Germany—reestablishing the importance of Christian scholarship.

The "family of God" is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father's plan" (CCC, 759). And by the end

of the first thousand years, or millennium, many monasteries and cathedral schools provided education and preserved ancient culture. Charlemagne had reformed and strengthened the position of the Church's bishops and had enabled the pope to have greater power and status. In fact, it was commonly assumed that the pope, who crowned the emperor, was the true ruler of the Roman Empire—having power over both spiritual and worldly affairs. This close partnership between Church and state affected all parts of life and faith.

Activity Imagine that you are trying to strengthen the Church and the role of faith in society. Name some of the things that you would do.

Forms of prayer

The spirituality of our ancestors in faith can help us to realize that our whole lives can be offered as prayer. But we still need to set aside specific times for prayer. These times include gathering with our parish community to celebrate the Eucharist and the other sacraments, as well as time for personal prayer.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, each of us can offer God our prayer. In our prayers of blessing we dedicate someone or something to God or ask that something be made holy in God's name. Because God has blessed us, we can ask God to bless other people and things. In prayers of petition we ask something of God, usually for ourselves. Often these are prayers in which we ask God for forgiveness. Prayers of intercession are also types of prayers of petition. In prayers of intercession we ask God for something on behalf of another person, group of people, or the world. In prayers of thanksgiving we show God our gratitude for all he has given us. We show our gratitude for the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. We do this most especially every time we join in the greatest prayer of the Church, the Eucharist. In prayers of praise we give glory to God simply for being God.

Using one of the forms of prayer described, pray to God for the Church.

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

The Church encounters division.

Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, great armies of Muslims, followers of the prophet Muhammad (570–632), arose in Arabia. These armies conquered much of the Middle East, including the holy sites in Jerusalem. These Muslim invaders began to be seen as a serious threat to Christianity. They conquered the Christian areas of Northern Africa and, by the end of the eighth century, conquered Spain, which had also been a Christian land. Spain then remained under Muslim rule for almost another eight hundred years.

At the same time, there was a deepening division in the Church in the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. Up until this time, all those who had followed Christ in the Church shared the same creed, the same canon of Scripture, the same respect for the teachings of the Church councils, the same sacraments, and the same moral code and were united under the same pope. But the growing cultural and political differences between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire clouded this unity in faith. And in 1054 a division, or schism, took place in Catholicism, separating the Church in the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. In the earliest days of the Church, there had been no official “Eastern” or “Western” (Roman) Church. But due to this schism, the Church in the western part of the empire would grow into what we know today as the Roman

Catholic Church, remaining under the leadership of the pope, or the Roman pontiff.

The Eastern Churches that chose to remain in union with or were later reunited with the Roman Catholic pope and bishops would be called the Eastern Catholic Churches. They are Churches because each Church follows its own ancient tradition, retaining its own bishops, language, and

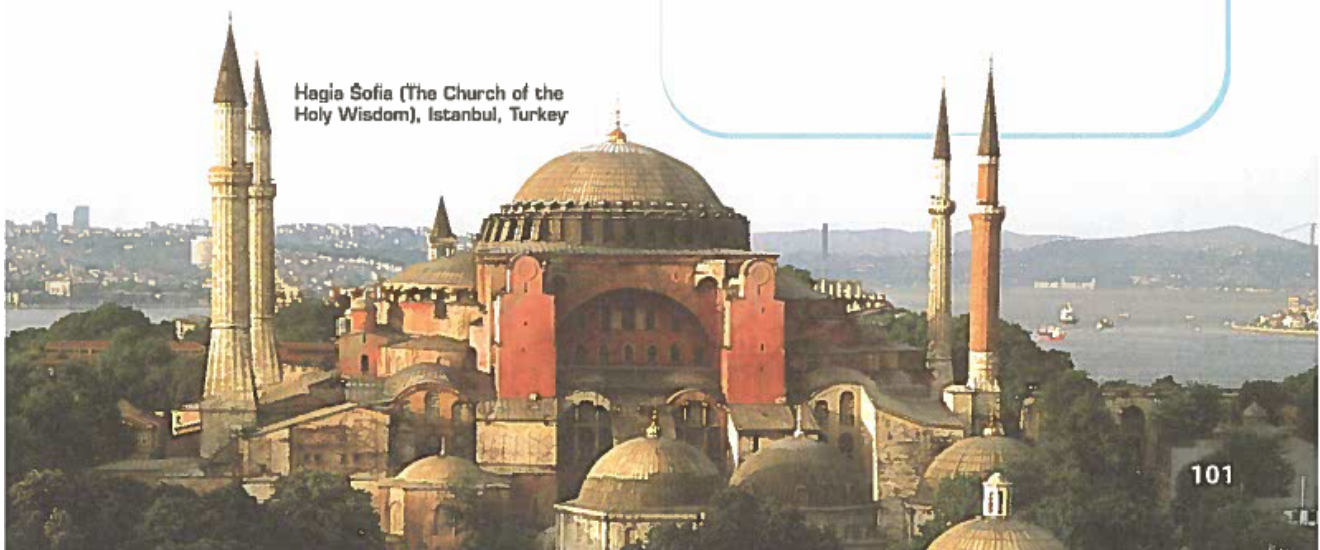
liturgical customs. So, the Catholic Church today consists of twenty-two Churches: the Roman Catholic Church and twenty-one Eastern Catholic Churches.

The Church in the eastern part of the empire, choosing not to accept the pope's leadership, would grow into what we know today as the Eastern Orthodox Church. Due to the differences that created tensions between the Churches of the East and the Church in Rome, the schism has lasted to this day. Yet one of the greatest hopes of the pope and the whole Church today is unity with the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The “family of God” is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father's plan”
(CCC, 759).

Activity Write a prayer for the unity of the Catholic Church.

Hagia Sofia (The Church of the Holy Wisdom), Istanbul, Turkey



RESPONDING...

Recognizing Our Faith

Recall the question at the beginning of this chapter: *What helps me to focus on what's important?* Reflect on what your answer to this question was at the beginning of this chapter and what your answer is now. In what ways do these answers differ? What might your answer be ten years from now, and what might be important to you then? List your ideas here.

Living Our Faith

When during this coming week will you make time to focus on the important things in life?

Saint Columba

Saint Columba (A.D. 521–597) was an Irish monk, abbot, and missionary. After founding monasteries in Ireland, in the counties of Derry, Durrow, and Kells, he and twelve companions sailed to the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland, in order to spread the Gospel. There they founded an influ-

ential center of monastic life. Saint Columba was also a poet and a scribe. Copying manuscripts was important work for monks, as it preserved the libraries of the ancient world that otherwise might have been destroyed or lost. It is said that Columba was always praying, reading, or copying manuscripts and was personally responsible for copying more than three hundred books. Three of his poems (written in Latin) survive. His feast day is June 9.

Today, there is still a monastic community living on the island of Iona—an ecumenical community of laypeople. The community strives to seek new ways of living the Gospel of Jesus in today's world, while drawing on the heritage of Saint Columba and Irish monastic life.

A prayer that Columba wrote asks God to grant us a love that may never die. In what ways can you focus on the importance of love in your own life?

Partners in FAITH



@ For additional ideas and activities, visit www.weliveourfaith.com.

Putting Faith to Work

Talk about what you have learned in this chapter:



We understand the religious and political forces at work in the world in A.D. 476–1054.



We treasure and focus on the enduring values lived by the faithful people of the early Middle Ages.

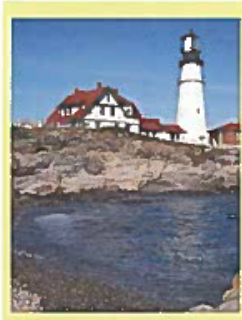


We reach out to all in service and love, focusing on what's really important in this life.

Decide on ways to live out what you have learned.



ENCOUNTERING GOD'S WORD



In the prologue to his rule, Saint Benedict quotes these words of Jesus:

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock”

(Matthew 7:24–25).



READ the quotation from Scripture.



REFLECT on the following question:
How can Jesus' words help us in our daily lives?



SHARE your reflections with a partner.



DECIDE to pray, before every reading of the Gospel, “Lord, what do you want me to hear?” This can help you to focus on what's important.

Circle the letter of the correct answer.

- B wrote a rule for monks and lived by the motto *Ora et labora* (“Pray and work”).
a. Basil the Great **b. Benedict of Nursia** c. Charlemagne d. Bernard of Clairvaux
- A is associated with the beginnings of Church music.
a. Pope Gregory the Great b. Scholastica c. Anthony of Egypt d. Clovis
- C brought together a group of solitary hermits, thus beginning monastic life.
a. Basil the Great b. Benedict of Nursia **c. Anthony of Egypt** d. Scholastica
- In 1054 a division, or schism, took place in Catholicism, separating the Church in the B parts of the Roman Empire.
a. northern and southern **b. eastern and western** c. southern and western d. northern and eastern

Write the letter of the answer that best defines each term.

- B monastic life a. of or relating to the Church
- D evangelical counsels b. a life dedicated to prayer, work, study, and the needs of society
- A ecclesial c. a place where monks or nuns live
- C monastery d. poverty, chastity, and obedience
e. a division

9–10. **ESSAY:** What was Charlemagne's most lasting contribution to the Church?

Charlemagne's most lasting contribution was to education. He decreed that all monasteries should be open schools to everyone, not just to those studying to become monks and nuns. He also encouraged monastic libraries to preserve and copy ancient manuscripts. And he appointed a monk named Alcuin from England to set up a school of religious studies at his palace at Aachen, in modern-day Germany - reestablishing the importance of Christian scholarship (p.100).