

Church History

Overview:

“To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son’s Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is “the world reconciled”. She is that bark which “on the full sail of the Lord’s cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, #838

This course endeavors to engage the students in learning how the message of Jesus and his Church existed in different societies and cultures over the past twenty centuries. During this course, students will be asked to stretch their awareness, deepen their consciousness, and to look at the Church through history with the “eyes of faith”.

The study of the Church through history:

- points out the two dimensions of the Church that cannot be separated: Jesus Christ is present to people so that he can be present through people.
- shows how the Church is in history, and also transcends history.
- Examines how the Church is a visible community and a spiritual community.

Things to remember when talking with teens about history:

1. Honor your child’s opinions, learning, and experiences.
2. Listen actively to them; make eye contact to show your interest.
3. Remember what learning history was like for you when you were their age. Do not use a lack of interest as an excuse; try to engage them.
4. Make your responses and inquiries real; teenagers are very good at sensing false interest.

Topics/Objectives Covered:

Week One: The students will understand how Christ and his Church fulfill and continue the story of the relationship that God first established with the Jewish people and they will be able to explain how the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, took shape despite persecution.

Week Two: The students will be able to describe how Western Europe united in Christendom and the roles feudalism and the crusades played in the Middle Ages as well as understanding the effects the Renaissance had on European society.

Week Three: The students will be able to understand how the Protestant Reformation caused a split in Western Christianity and how the Enlightenment challenged the Church.

Week Four: The students will be able to explain the effects of Vatican Council II and to understand the roles Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI played in bringing the Church into a new Millennium.

Church History: Church of the Apostles & The Church Enters the Empire

Week 1:

Objectives for that week: By the end of this lesson, the teens should know and be able to:

- Explore the early Church's Jewish roots
- Consider why the Church proclaims trust in God, salvation through Jesus, and personal and social conversion
- Discover how the Church grew into a diverse, hope-filled community centered on Christ.
- See how the Holy Spirit guided the Church in clarifying statements of belief and the canon of Scripture
- Consider how, during its first three hundred years, leaders emerged who guided and shaped the Church

Questions to ask:

- How does the Church's equal treatment of rich and poor reveal the work of God from her earliest times through the present?
- What new understanding came to the followers of Jesus as a result of the first Christian Pentecost?
- Why is Peter referred to as the "rock" or foundation of the Church?
- What words would you describe someone your age that stands up for his or her beliefs?
- What is the difference between orthodoxy and heresy?
- Who is the first Christian martyr?

Faith Activity:

- When we "get inside Scripture", it helps us appreciate that the events recorded happened to real people in a real world. Scripture tells us of mostly unknown people, who played an important role in the early Church. Imagine your way into the lives of the following people from the bible and create a brief story about each of them:
 - Lydia, the lady of purple cloth (Acts 16:14-15, 40)
 - Eutychus, a young man who fell for the Gospel in a big way (Acts 20:7-12)
- Jesus and some of his closest followers would have been viewed as landless peasants in a culture where owning land was one of the primary marks of wealth and power. Think about a group of people who tend to lack power and wealth and who demonstrate characteristics that might be labeled 'lower class' in today's society. What spiritual insights could some members of this group offer as a result of their unique experience?
- Since 1900 millions of Christians have been murdered for their faith, as they have throughout history. Research a modern-day martyr. (Ex. Oscar Romero, Jean Donovan, Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford)

Church History:

Week 2: The Middle Ages and The Road to the Renaissance

Objectives for that week: By the end of this lesson, the teens should know and be able to:

- Understand how feudalism provided a structure for society and Church to meet the needs of Western Europe
- Discover how the people of the Middle Ages expressed their faith, and learn about key theologians such as Thomas Aquinas
- See how Christian-Muslim tensions and renewed heresies led to a series of crusades
- Learn about the Renaissance with its renewed creative and artistic activity

Questions to ask:

- If you wanted to introduce someone from a different religion to the beauty and meaningfulness of Catholic worship, to what type of service would you bring him or her? Why?
- Why is it important for Christians to have access to the holy places of our faith?
- What are some ways simplifying your life would help you focus on following Jesus' example and being the person he calls you to be?
- The Catholic Church continues to be a community that transcends national loyalties. Apart from the religious value, why is it beneficial to belong to an organization that spans the globe?
- What is a Jubilee year? When was the most recent jubilee year held?

Faith Activity:

- For an introduction to icons and an explanation on how they are painted, check wikipedia or other online source (youtube has videos on the process). Make a visit to the Greek Orthodox Church on East Washington St. during Greekfest every summer. It is beautiful and a local artist paints every icon by hand.
- Describe the difference between reason and faith in the life of someone you admire. Then think about the connection between the two in your own life. How can reason be a help in experiencing and living your faith?
- Write a report on the use of relics in Catholic spirituality. Address the following questions: (What would you describe as an appropriate attitude towards relics? What would you consider to be a misuse of relics? Is there still a place for relics in today's spirituality?)
- Describe activities offered by the Catholic Church that are aimed at helping you experience God's presence in your life. What do these experiences tell you about God?

Church History: The Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment

Week 3:

Objectives for that week: By the end of this lesson, the teens should know and be able to:

- See how controversy led to a split within Western Christianity
- Learn that the Council of Trent clarified Catholic teaching and initiated reforms
- See how the Enlightenment presented new challenges for members of the Catholic Church.
- Learn about dedicated Catholics who gave themselves to new ways of living the Christians life.

Questions to ask:

- Why do you think it is important to pray for those who have died?
- What ‘holy things’ do you hope to be remembered for once you are gone?
- What action of Martin Luther led the way to the Reformation? What was he protesting?
- What position on Christianity did most Enlightenment thinkers hold?
- What can science offer the Catholic Church? What can the Catholic Church offer science?

Faith Activity:

- Christ continues to call each of us to conversion, to turn from what keeps us from following him and to be transformed by grace. What things need to change in your life to change or “cleanse” yourself – priorities, actions, feelings, thoughts, actions, relationships – so that you can better accept and share God’s love.
- Identify one practice or belief currently being debated in the Church. Describe your understanding of the teachings and questions you have about the teaching. Find out what the official teaching of the Church is (check the catechism) and then talk about why you think the Church holds this teaching.
- List the priests who have been part of your sacramental celebration of your life. Find their address through a diocesan directory and write them a thank-you note for representing Christ to you through the sacraments.
- Write a paragraph describing how science and technology can either enhance or inhibit the mission of the church.
- List three habits that you personally could develop that would help you in your spiritual life. Explain why these habits would be particularly beneficial for you.

Church History: The Church of Vatican Council II & The Gospel of Life

Week 4:

Objectives for that week: By the end of this lesson, the teens should know and be able to:

- See why Pope John XXIII called for a council to renew and update the Catholic Church
- Explore the message and teachings that came from the council.
- See how Pope John Paul II guided the Church as it entered the 21st century
- Understand that throughout the world, Church members continue to proclaim Christ's message
- Realize that you can make a mark in the Church of the present and future

Questions to ask:

- What four developments in the post-war world led the Church to examine its role in the world?
- In what sense was Vatican Council II greater than the documents it produced?
- What four aims for the council did Pope Paul VI identify?
- Name three characteristics that made Pope John Paul II unique among modern popes.
- What two controversial issues the US Bishops write pastoral letters about during the 1980s?

Faith Activity:

- One result of Vatican II was the change to the three rites of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. What other sacraments have had changes in the way in which they are celebrated since Vatican II? How do these changes affect the experience of the sacraments?
- Interview someone over the age of sixty and ask that person to describe the Church and Church practices brought about by Vatican Council II. Compare them to Church practices today.
- Obtain a book that contains the writings of Mother Teresa. Explain how three of Mother Teresa's message can be applied to your life.