

# LIFE Talk • October 7, 2026

“...THAT THEY MAY BE ONE.” JOHN 17:21

---



**THEME •** Church History: The Good, The Bad & The Ugly

**LIFE TALK •** The Early Church and Medieval Church

How did the Christian Church become what it is today? Our presenter takes us back to the beginnings of Christianity, exploring the people, movements, triumphs, controversies, and challenges that shaped the Church from 100 to 1350 AD. This engaging look at our history will help us better understand where we came from and how it shapes our faith today.

**PRESENTER •** Dr. Jennifer Wojciechowski



Dr. Jennifer Wojciechowski is an associate professor of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and she has been teaching at Luther since 2019. Prior to this, she taught in the religion department at Augsburg University. She's the associate editor of the journal Word & World. She is the author of Women and the Christian Story: A Global History (2022), Tending the Garden: A History of Christian Mysticism (2025), and co-author of the upcoming A World History of Christianity (Baker Academic, forthcoming).

Watch replay videos or access online LIFEU brochure at [saintandrews.org/lifeu](https://saintandrews.org/lifeu)

Email Sue Lennartson to learn about or join a LIFE Group at [slennartson@saintandrews.org](mailto:slennartson@saintandrews.org)

# LIFE Group Sheet

"...THAT THEY MAY BE ONE." JOHN 17:21

---



## GETTING STARTED

Share in a spiritual practice, discuss an igniter question, and/or begin with prayer.

*Creator God, thank you for the opportunity to gather with each person here, to grow in faith and knowledge together, and for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Bless our time, our conversation, and how we care for one another. Amen.*

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Briefly share (in pairs or 3s) your initial reaction to what you heard in the LIFE Talk. What stood out to you? What is stirring inside of you? What are you thinking, feeling, or wondering about?

## DIGGING DEEPER

- Martyrdom was an important theme in the early church, and something most western Christians cannot relate to very well. How do you think the illegal nature of Christianity impacted Christian life and spirituality?
- If there were to be an ecumenical council today, in which church leaders (across different denominations) could come together to discuss today's pressing issues, what do you think would be discussed?
- While monasticism does not have much of a role in modern Protestantism, it has a very prominent and important role in church history. Are there aspects of monasticism that could be helpful in your faith practices today?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Offer a prayer to draw your time to a close, using one of your own or the one below.

*God of wisdom and beauty, thank you for this time together. Help us as we live out our faith this week and share what we have learned. Make us instruments of your peace and healing love, as we grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus. In Christ's holy name we pray, Amen.*

900 Stillwater Road • Mahtomedi, MN 55115

[saintandrews.org](http://saintandrews.org)

651.426.3261



## **Week 1 Handout: Early and Medieval Christianity**

Dr. Jennifer Wojciechowski

### **Historical Eras Covered**

Antiquity: to 500

Early Medieval: 500–1000

High Medieval: 1000–1350

### **Antiquity Major Figures:**

- Clement of Rome (c. 35–c. 99): bishop of Rome and writer of "First Clement."
- Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 108): bishop and letter writer.
- Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69–155): bishop and martyr.
- Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165): theologian and martyr.
- Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 202): theologian and martyr.
- Perpetua (d. c. 203): martyr.
- Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225): theologian, coined the term: one substance, three persons.
- Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254): theologian and martyr.
- Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339): historian.
- St. Anthony of the Desert (c. 251–356): leader in monasticism.
- Athanasius (c. 296–373): great defender of Nicene Orthodoxy.
- The Cappadocians (4<sup>th</sup> century): instrumental for Trinitarian theology.
- John Chrysostom (347–407): Patriarch of Constantinople and great preacher.
- Ambrose of Milan (374–397): bishop and scholar
- Marcella of Rome (325–410): leader in monasticism.
- Melania the Elder (c. 350–c. 410): leader in monasticism.
- Jerome (d. c. 420): translator of the Vulgate.
- Augustine of Hippo (354–430): bishop and theologian.
- John Cassian (c. 360–435): brought desert monasticism to the west.

### **Medieval Major Figures:**

- Benedict (c. 480–c. 550): wrote the Rule of Benedict.
- Gregory the Great (540–604): pope and important leader.
- Boniface (c. 675–754): great evangelist of Germany.
- Charlemagne (748–814): first Holy Roman Emperor.
- Peter Lombard (c. 1000–1160): theologian.
- Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109): theologian and archbishop of Canterbury.
- Peter Abelard (1079–1142): theologian.
- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1154): theologian, mystic, monastic leader.
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179): visionary and monastic leader.
- Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226): founder of the Franciscan Order.
- Dominic de Guzman (1170–1221): Founder of the Dominican Order.
- Bonaventure (1221–1274): leader of the Franciscans, scholastic theologian, and mystic.
- Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): the most important theologian of the Middle Ages.
- Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373): mystic.
- Julian of Norwich (1343–after 1416): mystic.
- Catherine of Siena (1347–1380): mystic.

### **A Further Reading List (general histories):**

Matthew Gabriele and David M. Perry, *The Bright Ages: A New History of Medieval Europe* (Harper, 2021).

Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought in One Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014).

Justo Gonzáles, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (HaperOne).

Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (New York: Orbis, 2001).

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (Viking, 2009).

Mark Noll, David Komline, and Han-Luen Kantzer Komline, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002)

Douglas Jacobson, *Global Gospel: Introduction to Christianity on Five Continents* (Baker Academic, 2015).

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*. Third edition (Penguin Books, 2015).

Jennifer Wojciechowski, *Women and the Christian Story: A Global History* (Fortress, 2022).