

1ST MILLENNIUM

2ND MILLENNIUM

1ST CENTURY

**33 | Jesus begins his public ministry** and invites all he encounters to “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

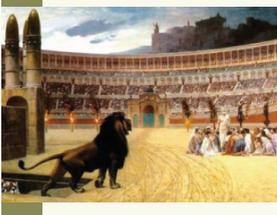


**50-65 | Letters of Saint Paul** refer to distinct groupings in the Early Church, including groups of celibate women and men dedicated to prayer and charity.

**251-356 | Saint Anthony the Great** heads the gospel call to sell all he has, serve the poor, and live a life of asceticism. He takes up residence in the Egyptian desert to live in solitude and prayer. His story inspires other men and women to live as hermits, from the Greek *cremeites*, meaning “desert dwellers.”

*I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, “What can get through from such snares?” Then I heard a voice saying to me, “Humility.”*  
—SAINT ANTHONY

**313 | Persecution of Christians ends** as Roman Emperor Constantine issues the “Edict of Toleration.” Christians seek ways other than martyrdom to give completely to the faith.



**292-348 | Pachomius, a contemporary of Saint Anthony,** creates a model for a cenobitic, or common, way of life based on the early Christian communities sharing goods in common and praying together. The first true monastery is established in Tabenna, Egypt.

*The human being is an animal who has received the vocation to become God.* —SAINT BASIL

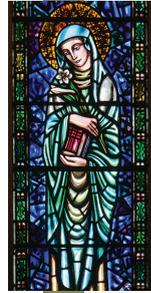
**329-379 | Saint Basil** establishes large communities of monks in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). As bishop of Cesarea, Basil has his monks engage in the apostolic work of teaching and pastoral care.

**347-420 | Saint Jerome,** scholar and Bible translator, moves to Bethlehem where he sets up and lives in a monastery. One of many men and women religious who have been named doctors of the church for their contributions to theology and spiritual practice.



**354-430 | Saint Augustine of Hippo** writes rules for monks and nuns during his early years as a bishop in North Africa and founds monasteries focused on prayer, reading, and manual labor. Shapes Christian philosophy and theology for the ages.

**400-500 | Surge of monastic communities.** In 470



**Saint Brigid** establishes Kildare Abbey in Ireland, a monastery for monks and nuns.

**480-547 | Saint Benedict of Nursia** founds monasteries and writes his

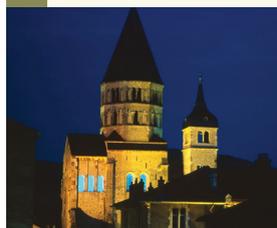
rule for monks still used today. Benedict’s twin sister, Saint Scholastica, heads a community of women. She is later named the patron saint of nuns.

*Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, because he will say: “I was a stranger and you took me in” (Matt. 25:35).*  
—From the RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

**500-600 | Living in community becomes the dominant form of religious life** and spreads to France, Germany, and Italy.

**500-1600 | In Europe, Monasteries** maintain the literature of the ancient world, and Christian scripture is preserved. Larger monasteries are centers of cultural and economic activity, harboring schools, hospitals, guest houses, and farms.

**910 | Benedictine Abbey of Cluny** in central France spearheads reform of the medieval church and produces leaders who become bishops and popes.



**1050-1150 | Camaldolese and Carthusian hermit and contemplative**

monks are founded by Saint Romuald (in Italy) and Saint Bruno (in the French Alps). Both continue to this day.

*He who prays and labors lifts his heart to God with his hands.*  
—SAINT BERNARD

11TH CENTURY

**1098-1300 | Cistercian order** (Trappists) greatly increases in number and influence with the help of French monk **Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.** The first Cistercian monastery for women is established in Dijon, France in 1125.

12TH CENTURY

**1121-1134 | Saint Norbert** combines a monastic regimen with parish work,



foreshadowing the coming of the mendicant, or begging, orders and their service in cities. A double monastery of canons and nuns is established at Prémontré, France. The

Norbertine Third Order, or lay association—is the first of its kind—is founded. Often referred to as associates, tertiaries, lay associates, or secular tertiaries, such associations continue today.



**1150-1244 | Mendicant orders emerge.** In contrast with the previous emphasis on contemplative life and stability, members are free to travel to preach the gospel and respond to the needs of the poor. The four major mendicant orders are the Carmelites (1150), Franciscans (1209), Dominicans (1216), and Augustinians (1244).

13TH CENTURY

HIGH MIDDLE AGES Great Schism, Crusades, Peak of Holy Roman Empire

EARLY CHURCH Apostles, Martyrs, Desert Fathers & Mothers

2ND CENTURY

3RD CENTURY

4TH CENTURY

5TH CENTURY

6TH CENTURY

7TH CENTURY

8TH CENTURY

9TH CENTURY

10TH CENTURY



**1209 | Saint Francis of Assisi** founds a new order. In 1212 **Saint Clare** joins him and establishes a community for women (**Poor Clares**). She is the first woman to write rules for monastic life. Over the centuries diverse Franciscan men's and women's communities emerge, with members exercising influence as teachers and evangelizers and promoting piety practices, such as the Christmas crèche, Angelus, and Stations of the Cross.



**1242 | Saint Thomas Aquinas** joins the Dominicans in 1242. Among the greatest theologians, study of his

works is required for those seeking ordination or entrance in religious life.

*Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.*  
—SAINT CATHERINE

14TH CENTURY

**1368 | Catherine of Siena** enters public life after years spent in solitude as a tertiary Dominican. She champions spiritual reform and church unity and has the ear of the pope. Named a doctor of the church—one of four women so designated.

15TH CENTURY

**1517 | Augustinian priest Martin Luther** proposes his *95 Theses* for church reform in Wittenberg, Germany, resulting in his excommunication and

RENAISSANCE & REFORMATION Sacred Art Flourishes; Rise of Humanism, Counter Reforms

16TH CENTURY

symbolically beginning the Protestant Reformation and its accompanying social and religious upheaval.

**1534-85 | Saint Teresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross**, influential mystics and writers, begin their reform of the Carmelite order in Spain.



**1540 | Jesuits** are founded by **Saint Ignatius of Loyola**. Their efforts in education and mission continue to wield global influence. Missionary activities of Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians expand globally.

*Every way of preparing ... to find the Divine Will ... for the salvation of the soul is called a Spiritual Exercise.*

—From Ignatian SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

17TH CENTURY

**1545-63 | Council of Trent** encourages renewal of religious orders and new forms of religious life.



**1540-1850 | Founding and growth of apostolic religious communities** that emphasize serving the needs of the poor, especially through education and medical care. With **Saint Vincent de Paul**, **Saint Louise de Marillac** forms the first community of

ENLIGHTENMENT Rationalism, Reaction & Revival

18TH CENTURY

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION Catholic Social Teachings

non-cloistered sisters (1633). Many religious institutes are founded to meet social needs in the wake of the French Revolution and other European conflicts.



**1809 | Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton** founds the first apostolic community of women in the United States in 1809.

19TH CENTURY

**1890-1965 | Servant of God Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange** establishes the first African-American



women's religious community in 1891; **Charles Uncles** is the first black man ordained in the U.S. and founds the Josephite order in 1893. *Rerum*

*Novarum* (1891), the foundational document for Catholic social teaching, calls on clergy, religious, and laity to advocate for justice and social equality. With 180,000 religious women and 42,000 religious men by 1965, U.S. religious reach their peak.

20TH CENTURY

**1947 | Pope Pius XII** encourages the formation of secular institutes, a distinct form of consecrated life that vows poverty, obedience, and chastity without communal life.

**1962-65 | Second Vatican Council** convenes bishops worldwide to address calls to reform the church. Religious communities are urged to return to their

AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE Accountability, Transformation, Human Dignity

21ST CENTURY

original charism, or guiding spirit, as well as to respond to the needs of the times. All aspects of Catholic life, including consecrated life, experience significant change.

*The purpose of the religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels (chastity, poverty, and obedience).*

—PERFECTAE CARITATIS

**2009 | Ground-breaking Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life** (NRVC/CARA) sets benchmarks for the new millennium. The 2020 follow-up study confirms that after a steep decline in the late 20th century, entries to religious life remain steady.

**2013-23 | Pope Francis**, a Jesuit, draws attention to religious life when he is elected in 2013. He is one of 34 religious institute members to become pope. The church designates 2015 as the **Year of Consecrated**



**Life**, and in 2018 Francis convenes an international synod of bishops on "Young people, the faith, and vocational discernment." The 2023 **World Youth Day** marks the 15th international gathering of youth, lay ministers, clergy, and religious first convened by **Saint John Paul II** in 1986.

**Ongoing |** In response to God's call, people continue to discern religious vocations, enter religious life, and found new religious communities.