

# 1 Justin Martyr's First Apology, written to the emperor in Rome, written 155 AD

.Chapter 67. Weekly worship of the Christians

"And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the **wealthy** among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son **Jesus Christ**, and through the **Holy Ghost**. And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the **apostles** or the writings of the **prophets** are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these **good** things. Then we all rise together and **pray**, and, as we before said, when our **prayer** is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers **prayers** and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying **Amen**; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the **deacons**. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the **orphans** and **widows** and those who, through sickness or any other **cause**, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which **God**, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and **Jesus Christ** our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His **apostles** and **disciples**, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.

## 2 Functions of deaconesses

There can be no doubt that in their first institution the deaconesses were intended to discharge those same charitable offices, connected with the temporal well being of their poorer fellow Christians, which were performed for the men by the deacons. But in one particular, viz., the instruction and baptism of catechumens, their duties involved service of a more spiritual kind.

The universal prevalence of baptism by immersion and the anointing of the whole body which preceded it, rendered it a matter of propriety that in this ceremony the functions of the deacons should be discharged by women. The Didascalia Apostolorum (III, 12; see Funk, Didascalia, etc., I, 208) explicitly direct that the deaconesses are to perform this function. It is probable that this was the starting point for the intervention of women in many other ritual observances even in the sanctuary. The Apostolic Constitutions expressly attribute to them the duty of guarding the doors and maintaining order amongst those of their own sex in the church, and they also (II, c. 26) assign to them the office of acting as intermediaries between the clergy and the women of the congregation; but on the other hand, it is laid down (Const. Apost., VIII, 27) that "the deaconess gives no blessing, she fulfills no function of priest or deacon", and there can be no doubt that the extravagances permitted in some places, especially in the churches of Syria and Asia, were in contravention of the canons generally accepted. We hear of them presiding over assemblies of women, reading the Epistle and Gospel, distributing the Blessed Eucharist to nuns, lighting the candles, burning incense in the thuribles, adorning the sanctuary,

and anointing the sick (see Hefele-LeClercq, II, 448). All these things must be regarded as abuses which **ecclesiastical** legislation was not long in repressing.  
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### 3 Acts 2:42-47

#### New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds<sup>[a]</sup> to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home<sup>[b]</sup> and ate their food with glad and generous<sup>[c]</sup> hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

### 4 Evangelii Gaudium

27. I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As **John Paul II** once said to the Bishops of Oceania: "All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion".<sup>[25]</sup>

28. The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters".<sup>[26]</sup> This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.<sup>[27]</sup> In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.<sup>[28]</sup> It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.