

# Witnesses to the Faith

Keep these ideas in mind as you study **Unit 1, Session 3**.

During Nero's time, Christians lived under close scrutiny. They were considered atheists because they did not celebrate the festivals of the local gods.

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Discrimination against Christians caused conditions that led to the first Christian heroes, or martyrs. The Greek word for *martyr* means "witness."

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A charism is a special gift of the Holy Spirit given for the service of others, the good of the world, and particularly for the building up of the Church. Martyrdom was seen as a charism in the early Church.

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Martyrs can pray for the needs of others because they are intercessors. Martyrs have direct access to God because they live in heaven with Christ.

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The Communion of Saints is the community of all those living and dead who believe in Jesus and follow his teachings. Martyrs are members of the Communion of Saints.

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Christians commemorate and honor martyrs. Martyrs' locks of hair or bone fragments taken from their original burial sites and housed in churches or basilicas are called relics. Martyrs' grave sites became shrines, and their names were given to Christian children.

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The Apostles appointed Stephen to serve as one of the first deacons. Witnesses falsely testified that Stephen had defied or disrespected God, which is known as blasphemy. He was stoned to death and became the first martyr.

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The Sanhedrin was the Jewish court that ruled on matters of faith and practice among the Jews.

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Perpetua, a young noblewoman, was a catechumen, an adult who is being formed in the Christian faith through the example of the community. She was a martyr for her faith.

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By dying for their faith, Saints Stephen, Polycarp, Perpetua, and Felicity provide examples of how to respond to God's gift of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

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