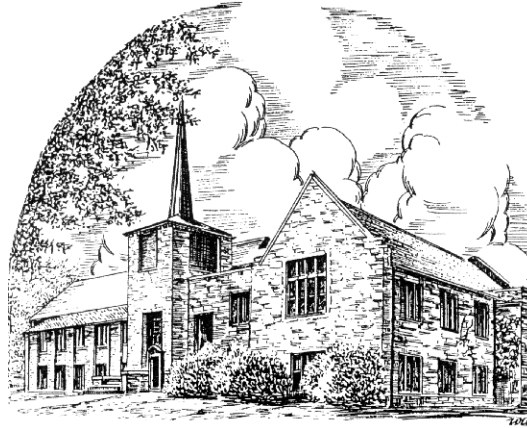


The early church might look as incomprehensible to the modern Christian as the modern church would look to the first Christians. Their efforts to articulate and spread the faith of Jesus Christ, however, laid the foundation for the modern church.

In some areas, such as house meetings, the early Christians resembled other groups in society. Issues such as defining their days for worship and sacred writings and developing a uniform leadership structure took on a special significance for the Christians. The early church also faced special problems in surviving a sometimes hostile environment and developing methods to promote unity.

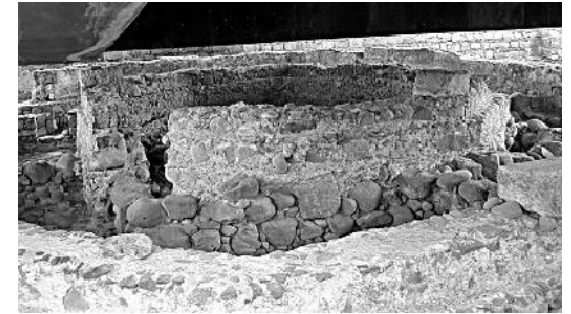


Roundy Memorial Baptist Church
1250 E. Hampton Road
White Fish Bay, WI 53217
(414) 332-4980



Sunday evenings from October 14
Time: 7:00 - 8:00

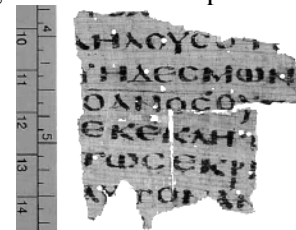
Lawrence Stewart received an M.Div. with an emphasis in Biblical Studies from Bethel Theological Seminary and took archaeology courses from Tel Aviv University while working on digs in Israel. He earned a Ph.D. in the field of Early Christianity from Brown University in 1993. Since moving to Wisconsin he has taught as adjunct faculty at UW Sheboygan, UW Fond du Lac, Carroll College, Marian College MAAP, and Cardinal Stritch University College of Business and Management



Foundation of a building in Capernaum traditionally identified as the house of Peter. The building shows evidence of Christian worship from an early period.

The First Christians

Popular imagination sometimes looks back on the first century as a golden age of the Christian faith and holds the image of the first few generations of Christians up as a model for emulation. That idea, however, may owe more to a sense of nostalgia than any understanding of how early Christians actually gathered to worship.



Scripture fragment from Oxyrhynchus Egypt.

Oct. 14 - 'Scripture' for the First Christians

Paul and the gospels urge readers to refer to the Scriptures at a time when no New Testament existed. For the first Christians the Scriptures were the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the first century debate continued in Judaism about what books should be considered sacred. In addition to the debate over closing the canon of Hebrew Scriptures the followers of Jesus began to identify some of their own writings as possessing special authority - the collection which became the New Testament. The followers of Jesus chose to copy and spread their writings by a very different process than we find employed in the copying of the Torah at the same time period.

Oct. 21 - House Churches and Officers

Many kinds of small groups met in homes during the Roman Empire. These groups served as a model for Christians coming together for worship in the early house churches. These non-Christian groups exhibit a variety of leadership patterns, and some of our early Christian literature reflects different forms also. In the belief that unity within the body of Christ was vital Christians moved to the creation of a leadership structure which would be common in all churches.

Oct. 28 - Sabbath or Lord's Day

The first followers of Jesus were all Jews, and many continued to worship on the

Sabbath. But Sunday, referred to as the Lord's Day, became a day of worship for some Christians as early as the first century. While Sunday worship eventually became standard practice the early Christian literature shows the topics of the regular day for worship and the date for observing holy days remained a topic of debate for centuries.



Coin of the Emperor Decius

Nov. 4 - Persecutions

Until the Emperor Decius in 250 no official, Empire-wide persecution of Christians took place. Before the mid-third century persecution happened less often than many Christians imagine. Nevertheless, sporadic persecutions flared in various parts of the Empire and the possibility of persecution represented an ever present threat even if they happened only rarely. Christians at the time held different ideas about how they should respond to the threat.

Nov. 11 - Councils

Paul urged unity within the body of Christ, but the controversy which swirled around him illustrates the difficulty of turning a good idea into a reality. The theory of unity

inspired early Christians to work towards the goal, but finding a mechanism to promote the idea proved difficult. Councils eventually provided the most effective means for Christians to promote their vision for a common body of faith.