



MARYLAND
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

The Basilica of the Assumption – A Symbol of Freedom

Objective: Students will learn about the significance of the Basilica of the Assumption and the early development of the Catholic Church in Maryland.

Grade Level: 4

Archdiocese of Baltimore Social Studies Standards:

Grade 4:

SS.4.5.4: Demonstrate an understanding of the origin & early growth of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Estimated Time:

Two 45-minute class sessions

Advance Preparation:

- Obtain an overhead projector
- Obtain a wall map of the United States
- Copy the following handouts:
 - [*Basilica Facts—Did You Know???*](#)
 - [*Who's Who?*](#)
 - [*North and South Elevation, Design 1*](#)
 - [*Baltimore Cathedral*](#)
 - [*The Catholic Church During the Time of John Carroll*](#)
 - [*Test Your Knowledge!*](#)
- Make transparencies of the portraits of [Benjamin Henry Latrobe](#) and [John Carroll](#)

New Vocabulary:

- **Archbishop:** a bishop of the highest rank who leads an archdiocese.
- **Archdiocese:** churches under the leadership/power of an archbishop.
- **Bishop:** high-ranking member of the clergy who is in charge of a diocese.
- **Diocese:** churches under the leadership/power of a bishop.
- **Diplomatic Mission:** mission in which somebody travels as an official representative of one government to another to achieve a goal.
- **Louisiana Purchase:** territory of the western United States that was purchased from France on April 30, 1803. This land included the area between the Mississippi River, Rocky Mountains, Gulf of Mexico, and Canadian border.
- **Neoclassical:** style that uses elements of classical (Greek and Roman) art and architecture.

Background:

For information about the Basilica's history, go to: <http://www.baltimorebasilica.org/> .

Motivation:

- Generate a discussion about living conditions in the late 1700s versus today by discussing such topics as travel, food, clothing, housing, and trade. Have the students compare life in

the late 1700s with life today. How was it different? Just as things such as living conditions have changed since the late 1700s, the Catholic Church has also changed.

- Explain to students that today they will be learning about the establishment of the Catholic Church in the United States and the important role Baltimore played in its formation and growth. This knowledge will help students better understand the Church today and the history of Baltimore.
- Ask students if they can name some main religions in the United States. Ask if everyone in this country must belong to the same religion. Tell students that England had a law that said that all people must belong to the King's church – The Church of England (called the Episcopal Church today) – in order to hold public office. Ask students if they think this policy is fair.
- Tell students that Maryland was established by Lord Baltimore as a colony in which all Christian religions were tolerated, allowing Maryland Catholics to worship freely and hold public office. Catholicism continued to grow during the 1600s and 1700s, and by 1785, there were about 15,800 Catholics in Maryland.
- In 1789, the American priests elected John Carroll as the first Bishop, and he was confirmed by Pope Pius VI.

Procedure:

Part I: Reading for Information

- Distribute the handout, *The Catholic Church during the Time of John Carroll*, to students. Instruct students to read the information on the worksheet, and then go over the information as a class. As you are going through the information on the sheet, point out the following on a large wall map: the 13 original colonies, the Louisiana Purchase, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Bardstown, and Wheeling. Have the students compare the size of the Archdiocese of Baltimore with the Diocese of Baltimore in 1803. Point out roughly the areas that are covered by the Archdiocese of Baltimore today. Ask the students to think about how John Carroll's church is similar or different to the present-day Catholic church.
- Explain that one of the first things John Carroll decided to do as Bishop was to begin planning a Cathedral in Baltimore. The Baltimore Basilica was built between 1806 and 1821. It was the first Cathedral built in America after the adoption of the Constitution. The Basilica was constructed after the Revolution to celebrate the new right to worship openly.
- Distribute, discuss, and review the handout, *Who's Who*, with students. As you are discussing John Carroll and Benjamin Henry Latrobe, place their portraits on the overhead projector. As a class, analyze the portraits, paying particular attention to the background of John Carroll's portrait. Ask the students to identify the building in the background of the portrait.
- Distribute the handout, *Basilica Facts—Did You Know???*, to students and review the information as a group.
- Explain to the students that the development of the Catholic Church was happening at the same time as the Revolutionary War and the establishment of the new United States' under the Constitution. Explain that Benjamin Latrobe presented two different designs for the Basilica to Bishop John Carroll. Pass out the images, *Baltimore Cathedral by Benjamin Henry Latrobe* and *North and South Elevation, Design 1*. Explain that the building in *North and South Elevation, Design 1* looks very similar to traditional Gothic churches in Europe. Show students the picture, *Baltimore Cathedral by Benjamin Henry Latrobe*. Ask students to think about what this design reminds them of. (Dome of the U.S. Capitol) Ask the

students if they know which design Bishop Carroll chose and why. Explain that the Basilica and the Capitol were both designed by Latrobe, and they were built around the same time. Ask students to think about what the Capitol symbolizes. Explain that by building a cathedral that looked like the new American capital (the new symbol of American independence), Carroll was making a statement about the church in America being independent from its European past. He also wanted an architectural symbol that represented America rather than Europe.

- Distribute the worksheet, *Test Your Knowledge*. Instruct students to use the handouts they received to answer the questions. Go over the answers as a class.

Closure / Assessment:

- Instruct students to do one of the following assignments:
 - Have students pretend that they are John Carroll. Instruct them to write a letter to Benjamin Henry Latrobe explaining the need for a Basilica, as well as the ideas you want to convey through the architecture (ie: liberty, freedom, America). Students may need to conduct additional research on this topic.
 - Instruct students to role-play one of the following individuals: Benjamin Henry Latrobe, John Carroll, a person observing the construction of the Basilica, or Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Students may need to conduct additional research on this topic. Students should talk about their characters' reactions to the building of the Basilica.

Extensions:

- Have students research the significant architectural features of the Basilica.
- Plan a field trip to the Maryland Historical Society and take the *Calvert Legacy* tour. This tour teaches students about the role Catholics played in the founding of Maryland and in shaping the state and the nation. Call (410) 685-3750 x334 for more information.
- Plan a field trip to the Basilica. <http://www.baltimorebasilica.org/>