

Vatican II: Ancient History or Continuing Roadmap for the Church?

By Leota Roesch

"Ecumenical councils like this, whenever they gather, are an occasion for the celebration once again of the unity between Christ and the Church. They lead to a more clear announcement of the truth, to guidance for people in everyday life, and to the strengthening of spiritual energy for goodness' sake. We now stand in the wake of 20 centuries of such history as we begin."¹



Purpose

This session for high school youth uses large and small group activities to help participants reflect on the gift and promise of the Second Vatican Council. This session will work well with groups of participants numbering from 10 to 30 high school youth.

Component: Catechesis

Session at a Glance

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| 7:00 p.m. | Welcome, Introduction to the Session, Opening Prayer |
| 7:08 p.m. | That was Then, This is Now – How We Got to Vatican II
<i>Extend the Session: Eyewitness to History and Dialogue about Vatican II (add 30 minutes)</i> |
| 7:18 p.m. | The Main Themes of Vatican II |
| 7:50 p.m. | Vatican II in Today's Church with a View to the Future |
| 8:15 p.m. | Closing Prayer |
| 8:25 p.m. | Announcements and Dismissal |
| 8:30 p.m. | Good Night! |

Extend the Session: Eyewitness to History and Dialogue about Vatican II (30 minutes)

Invite someone to visit with the participants about the beginning and early years of Vatican II. Invite a priest, sister, or layperson (in age: between 60-75 most probably) who remembers John XXIII's election as pope and call for a council; whose formation and training were in the early years of the Council; who ministered in the Church in those early years and for a number of years afterwards, etc. Look for someone whose enthusiasm for the Council still inspires his/her ministry and life.

¹ Address of Pope John XXIII at opening of the Second Vatican Council October 11, 1962 Paraphrase: Bill Huebsch, www.pastoralplanning.com.

Memory and Reflection (Part 1) (20 minutes)

Prepare your guest by proposing some questions to focus the sharing with the participants. Encourage him/her to bring pictures, etc.

- What was the Church like before Vatican II?
- What is your first memory of John XXIII and Vatican Council II?
- Where were you and how old were you when John XXIII called the Council?
- How would describe yours and your peers' feelings, expectations about the Council?
- What were the first changes you experienced after Vatican II?
- What caused the most excitement for you with the renewal brought by Vatican II?
- What has the Vatican Council done for the Catholic Church?
- What teaching of Vatican II do you think still needs to be implemented more fully?
- What is one thing you want younger and coming generations to know and remember about Vatican II?

Questions and Comments (Part 2) (10 minutes)

Invite participants to ask questions of the guest speaker and offer insights they gained from the talk.

Extend the Session: Audio/Video Options (30 minutes)

(Note to Leader: These options may serve as a prelude to the speaker's presentation (as described above).

(Option 1) **John XXIII: Pope of Peace** (2002, Ignatius Press, not rated, 200 minutes)
From a review: "Explore the life of Pope John XXIII through his childhood, entry into the priesthood, ascent through the ranks of the clergy and eventual tenure as Pope. With humor and compassion, he works to reform the Church and help the poor and oppressed. [This is a] thoughtful look at the pope as a man as well as a leader." Edward Asner stars in this docu-drama which can be purchased from Amazon or rented from Netflix. Some diocesan AV centers may have copies of this movie.)

While this whole DVD is entertaining and instructive, there is about an 8-10 minute segment that deals with John XXIII's calling of the Council. The clip may be found on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8c_z53ocFE. Watch this segment with the participants and engage them in discussion about the reasons and the process for calling the Council. Frame this discussion in light of this statement from Cardinal Edward Iris Cassidy (Australia), a former Vatican official:

"This was not just some ordinary meeting of some group of bishops or something like that. This was a Council, called by Pope John XXIII under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. ... It was a wonderful chance for the Church to come to terms with the tremendous change that had taken place after the Second World War and in so many different fields. There was a good bit of confusion afterwards, but that confusion does

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not take away from the great importance of the Council itself.” (From an interview with John Feister for American Catholic.org, November 2005)

(Option 2) Watch a video history of Vatican II (see suggestions on Resource 2) and engage the participants in a discussion about the Council. Discussions can take place in small groups with reports to the large group or within the large group if the group is not too large.

- Name one thing that surprises you about the Second Vatican Council.
- Name one thing that you learned about Vatican II that you did not know before.
- Name one thing that you see resulting from Vatican II in your own parish or diocese.
- Name one thing that you think the Second Vatican Council should have dealt with and why.

Materials Needed

- Nametags and markers
- **Resource 1, Session Leader Background Notes**
- **Resource 2, Possible Video/DVD Options to Extend the Session**
- **Resource 3, Opening Prayer: Vatican II’s Call to Holiness**, one for the prayer leader
- **Resource 4, Closing Prayer: Vatican II Calls Us to Be People of Peace**, one for the prayer leader
- **Handout 1, A Brief Look at Six Documents of Vatican II**, one for each participant, copy double-sided
- Environment for prayer focus: Bible, candle, nice cloth, etc. Consider including a picture or icon of John XXIII who was named “Blessed” by John Paul II and whose feast day is October 11. Search on the Internet for any one of a number of representations of John XXIII, if there is not a picture of Blessed John XXIII in your parish.
 - You may want to type out the following quote from John Paul II to place next to the picture: “Everyone remembers the image of Pope John’s smiling face and two outstretched arms embracing the whole world. How many people were won over by his simplicity of heart, combined with a broad experience of people and things! The breath of newness he brought certainly did not concern doctrine, but rather the way to explain it; his style of speaking and acting was new, as was his friendly approach to ordinary people and to the powerful of the world. It was in this spirit that he called the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, thereby turning a new page in the Church’s history. Christians heard themselves called to proclaim the Gospel with renewed courage and greater attentiveness to the signs of the times. The Council was a truly prophetic insight of this elderly Pontiff who, even amid many difficulties, opened a season of hope for Christians and for humanity.” (John Paul II)
- Newsprint [masking tape, if necessary] and markers placed strategically in the gathering space.

- Depending on the number of participants, hang one or two sheets of newsprint labeled “Before Vatican II”
- Hang one or two sheets of newsprint labeled “Since Vatican II”
- Hang another sheet of newsprint labeled “Our Parish”
- Hang another sheet of newsprint labeled “Vatican III”

Prepare in Advance

1. Prepare by reading/reviewing the background references cited in the **Facilitator Resource Page 1**.
2. Consider inviting a participant to be the prayer leader for the opening prayer. Invite a participant to proclaim the Scripture reading in the closing prayer.
3. Set up tables and chairs for small group work. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last-minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.
4. Prepare the prayer space using the materials mentioned above.

Session Outline

Welcome (3 minutes)

Welcome the participants as they arrive. Invite everyone to make a nametag. Introduce yourself and any other adults who will be assisting you. Ask them to turn off their cell phones, and then announce any other guidelines or rules that will govern the session.

Introduction (5 minutes)

Provide this introduction to tonight’s session:

Retired Archbishop Patricio F. Flores (San Antonio, TX) tells this story on himself: After he had spoken at San Fernando Cathedral, a woman came up to him and said, “Who is this ‘Betty Cantu’ you talked about all night?” The archbishop was puzzled and asked the woman in what context he had spoken this woman’s name. His conversation partner responded she didn’t know, but Betty Cantu was all he talked about all night. In a moment of dawning recognition, Archbishop Flores laughed and said he had been speaking about the great council of the Church, “Vatican II.”

This little story demonstrates that many people still do not understand the import and impact of this great ecumenical council of the 20th century. Today, there are even some who say it was irrelevant or that people don’t have to listen to what came out of the Council.

Finish the introduction using this quote from Bill Huebsch in his introduction to his “Prayers from Vatican II.”

Here we saw gathered in one place,
the many expressions of the people of God.
Here we heard expressed the desire for peace,
for justice,
for unity,
and for holiness
which are so basic to all humans.
Here the pope and bishops raised up the hopes of the world -
for a new day and a fresh spirit in the Church.
Indeed, this council has been called
"the Advent Liturgy of the new millennium."

Tonight, then, we are going to look at Vatican II to see how it has shaped the Church we believe in and how its work bears fruit in our age and in our lives.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Invite the participants to gather at the prayer space. Begin by leading the participants through a few breathing exercises in order to prepare them for prayer. Then, light the candle purposefully and, using **Resource 3, Vatican II's Call to Holiness**, lead the opening prayer. When the prayer is finished, ask the participants to return to their tables and chairs.

That was Then, This is Now – How We Got to Vatican II (15 minutes)

Pope John XXIII called for a Council in 1959; the first session of the Council began October 11 (his feast day), 1962; the last session of the Council closed in 1965. Ask the participants to think about three questions:

1. From what you know, heard, or have read, what is one thing you think could be said about the Church before Vatican II?
2. From what you have experienced, read, or know, what is one thing you think can be said of the Church since Vatican II?
3. Given your own experience of Church and how others perceive the Church, what do you think is one thing a Third Vatican Council might consider for the Church?

After about 3 - 4 minutes, invite the participants to write their responses *to the first two questions* on the newsprint hung around the room.

Just a month short of his 77th birthday, Angelo Cardinal Roncalli was elected Pope following the death of Pope Pius XII. He was considered by those who elected him to be a "transitional" Pope, a place-holder, until a worthy successor could be elected.

Apparently, John had other plans, and on January 25, 1959, just three months after his election, at a Mass at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, "Good Pope John" announced his intention to call an ecumenical council. He told the assembled cardinals that the idea was his alone, and he explained that he was motivated "solely by concern for the 'good of souls' and in order that the new pontificate may come to grips, in a clear and well-defined way, with the spiritual needs of the present time."

He surprised everyone with his opening speech to the Council on October 11, 1962. There he publicly disagreed with those “prophets of gloom” around him who saw in the modern world only “prevarication and ruin.” “Instead, Pope John believed, God is moving humanity to a new order of human relations. The Church needs *aggiornamento*—‘updating’—not because the Church feels threatened, but because of its great desire to share the joy of Christ. The pope pointed toward the renewal of the Church with the beautiful words, ‘It is now only dawn.’”²

In his opening speech to the Council Fathers, he said the idea for a council had come to him, “like a flash of heavenly light.” A few months earlier, while addressing a group of pilgrims from his former patriarchal see of Venice, he had referred to the idea as “an unexpected illumination.” This Council, as all Councils, must be looked on as the work of the Holy Spirit.

Previous Councils had been principally called to refute heresy and deal with major issues of doctrine, but John XXIII’s purpose in calling the world’s bishops together this time was different. To illustrate his intention to one particular cardinal, he walked over to the nearest window, thrust it open wide and said that the Church needs to let in some fresh air.

He would later expand on this idea, saying, “We are not to be museum keepers, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life.” In other words, John XXIII intended not to change major doctrines and teachings, but to update the way they were presented, thus honoring the Church as a dynamic, living, breathing entity. (McBrien)

He had previously spoken about this approach as looking at “the signs of the times” in order to meet today’s needs. He often used the Italian word *aggiornamento*, which means “a bringing up to date.” The image of the open window and the term *aggiornamento* have served as Vatican II’s signature symbols ever since.³

Pause here and refer to the “before” statements that participants wrote on the newsprint. It is hard to anticipate what they might have written, but the supposition is that most of what is written are perceived external differences such as Mass in Latin with the priest’s back to the people, nuns in habits, participation in devotions, a large Catholic school population with nuns serving as faculty, lack of shared dialogue or relationships with non-Catholics, etc. Move on to the “after” statements. Again, the comments may revolve around external (liturgical) changes. Note what the participants have written, then say:

John XXIII called the Council to update it—not to change or add to doctrine—but to read the signs of the times and bring the teaching of the Gospel and the Church to all peoples in the world so that the Church’s message would be heard and understood by them. This *aggiornamento* was to be the Church’s bringing the Gospel to the current world situation and to bring the current situation of the world into dialogue with the Church. This sounds very much like what Pope John Paul II called “the new evangelization.”

² “John XXIII Calls the Council” by Richard McBrien in *Essays in Theology*, January 20, 2009. <http://ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/john-xxiii-calls-council>

³ “Vatican II for Gen-Xers” by Renée LaReau in *St. Anthony Messenger Magazine*, November 2005. <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Nov2005/Feature2.asp>

The Pope and the Council Fathers and the theologians who worked with them during the years of the Council saw that *aggiornamento* would progress if there were a creative recovery of the Church's early tradition. This rediscovery of the riches of the Church's history and tradition was called *ressourcement*. Going forward by clearing out the accretions of time and reclaiming the "headwaters of the Christian tradition"⁴ was the road the Council chose under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Main Themes of Vatican II (30 minutes)

Continue providing information about Vatican II by introducing the main themes of the Council:

What did the 2000 plus bishops who gathered for the Council in the early 1960s need to go forward from?

Historically, the world was fighting the Cold War, and the nuclear holocaust of the world was a very real threat. Cultural changes brought on by many diverse currents were about to explode into anti-war protests, student demonstrations, a growing drug culture, women's liberation, the great need for an end to discrimination, and the universal call for civil rights.

The Church, meanwhile, needed to update its many institutions—hospitals, schools and colleges, etc.—while, at the same time, the numbers of priests and religious men and women, who had been the Church's workforce, began to decrease either due to a desire to minister outside of institutions or because the need for renewal in religious life was not keeping pace with that desire.

Ask the participants, in groups of two or three, to brainstorm how they think the bishops of the Council would deal with the issues facing the Church and the world. After 3 or 4 minutes, ask the small groups to share what they named with the larger group. Comment on their "solutions," especially those that ring true.

The Fathers of the Council didn't deal with all the issues facing the Church and world directly but through the four Constitutions and other Decrees that they wrote which were and still are being implemented.

Let us take a look at some of the documents that came from the Council and some of the themes from those documents that still are the basis of the continuing renewal of our Church.

Distribute a copy of **Handout 1, A Brief Look at Six Documents of Vatican II**, to each participant.

Note to Leader: An apostolic constitution is the highest level of decree issued by the Church. By their nature, apostolic constitutions are addressed to the public. Constitutions treat solemn matters of the Church, such as the promulgation of statutes or definitive teachings. The forms *Dogmatic Constitution* and *Pastoral Constitution* are titles sometimes used to be more descriptive as to the document's purpose.

⁴ Marcellino D'Ambrosio, *Communio* 18 (Winter 1991). ©1991 by *Communio International Catholic Review*

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (in Latin, *Lumen Gentium*) set a new focus for the Church. Here are some important points from this Constitution:

- The church is in Christ; it is a sacrament of Christ, a mystery (#1).
- It is the Body of Christ (#3, 7).
- It is the People of God, among whom the baptized are called as ministers (Ch 2).
- The role of the faithful is to be church in the world.
- The call to holiness is universal, and the way to holiness is love.

The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (in Latin, *Dei Verbum*) is a strong document stating that the Church continues to develop its understanding of what God has revealed to us.

- This document restored the Bible as the foundation of divine revelation.
- What the Church teaches is expressed in different words for different generations, but the eternal truths do not change.
- Christ is the fullness of God, but what the Gospel demands of us is still being revealed.
- Over time, there is growth in our understanding of what God desires (#8). This growth in understanding is expressed in our sacred Tradition. So Tradition and Scripture have a very close connection and flow from the same divine well.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (in Latin, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) is a major document reforming the Liturgy and was the first document approved by the Council. It "[s]ought to [1] give vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; [2] to adapt what is changeable to the needs of today, [3] to promote union among all who believe in Christ, and [4] to strengthen the church's mission of all humankind."⁵

- Established that the Mass (liturgy) is the source and summit of the Christian life.
- Established that some elements are changeable (language, books, prayers, music, persons, and places) and some aren't (Scripture, bread, wine, offertory, consecration, communion).
- Allowed for use of the vernacular (language of the people worshipping) in worship.
- Restored the Eucharist as an act rather than a static devotional object. This meant a down playing of devotions outside of Mass: rosary, benediction, etc.
- Restored the liturgy to first century rites.
- Established Baptism and Eucharist with primacy among the sacraments (#6).
- The full active conscious participation of all the faithful is the aim to be considered before all others (#11).
- Removed elements that are "out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy" (#21).
- Restored catechumenate and diaconate.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (in Latin, *Gaudium et Spes*) is a very important, historic document speaking to the church and to all people about the hopes and dreams of the human family.

- "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ." (Bill Huebsch)

⁵ Bill Huebsch. *Vatican II in Plain English*, Available at PastoralPlanning.com.

- We must look at and trust the signs of the times and understand the world in which we live.
- The church lives and acts in the world.
- We have an inborn hunger for God.

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: The first document in the history of ecumenical councils to address itself to anyone other than the church's own clergy.

- Declares that the laity have a ministry by virtue of their baptisms, not merely a sharing in the ministry of the ordained.

Declaration on The Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians (in Latin, *Nostra Aetate*) began as a statement only about our relations with the Jews but was widened to say that "the truth" is present outside the Body of Christ and is to be respected wherever it is found, mentioning in particular Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as Judaism.

- The Catholic Church encourages dialogue and opens itself to the contributions of these others.
- Most importantly, Jews cannot be blamed as a race for death of Jesus; they are loved by God and every form of persecution or discrimination is condemned.

These are some of the more important documents of the sixteen issued by the Vatican Council. What do you see in these documents that can be considered as important themes in our Church today?

Invite the participants to name themes of the Council by going through each document. List the themes they come up with on a piece of newsprint or on a board. The following are the main themes of the Council; as you share them with the participants, be sure to incorporate their wording where appropriate.

1. **Transformation of Ministry:** Lay men and women, cooperating with the gift of their baptism, become more involved in building up the Kingdom of God. Growing numbers are formed for ministry and coordinate most of the ministries of the Church.
2. **Liturgical Renewal:** A new dynamism in liturgy swept through the Church after Vatican II and brought new life to the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. New sacramental rites and the use of local languages encouraged more full and active participation.
3. **New Interest in Scripture:** More Catholics began reading the Bible – with more solid understanding – than at any other time in Church history. Growing numbers of lay women and men began to attend theology schools, leading and/or joining Bible study groups and reading an array of solid articles or books on the subject.
4. **Outreach to the Global Community:** One of the most important outcomes of Vatican II is that salvation is concerned not solely with saving souls but also with saving the whole person – body and soul. St. Irenaeus, often quoted at the time of the Second Vatican Council, captured this well: "The glory of God is the human person fully alive!" The Church, therefore, saw a growth of social justice. Since

1983, the U.S. bishops, for example, have issued statements on political and social issues. Church leaders continue to encourage and challenge Catholics to let their hearts be guided by the “social gospel.”

5. **Ecumenism.** A new spirit of ecumenism entered the Church at Vatican II. Meetings of priests, ministers, and rabbis as well as gatherings for prayer, dialogue, and fellowship on the part of the laity continue to nourish the seeds of Christian charity and unity.
6. **Collegiality.** An increased sense of shared authority or collegiality, among bishops and between them and the pope, was underscored by the Second Vatican Council. That sense of shared authority can be seen at the parish level with the ministry of pastoral councils.

Vatican II in Today’s Church with a View to the Future (25 minutes)

Now invite the participants to think about all the things that are going on in the parish and ask them to list these items on the newsprint that has been labeled “Our Parish.” Ask them to think about what they want to write before they go to the newsprint. Encourage them to think about EVERYTHING that goes on in their parish. After a few minutes of writing, call them back to their places for a discussion of what they have written. (If noticeably absent, please point out the role of women in today’s parish.) Point out that many, if not all, of these ministries were not available for the laity until the implementation of Vatican II.

What justifies John Paul II’s claim that “with the passing of the years, the Council documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance”?

“Behind the pope’s confidence, I think, was his sense that Vatican II offered large principles with lasting value. When we reflect on these larger themes, we see that there is virtually no area of Church life today that is not affected by the Council. If you’ve ever taken part in a Bible study, witnessed the Easter Vigil liturgy, served on a parish council or as a Eucharistic minister, attended a non-Catholic worship service, reflected on politics in light of your faith, read about a statement from the bishops’ conference, picked up the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, volunteered for a parish service project, been to a funeral...—if you’ve done any of these things, you’ve experienced the effects of the Second Vatican Council. The themes of the Council are what help explain to us as a Church where we are today. And, more important, they inspire us to where we can be tomorrow.”⁶

Vatican II was one of the great moments in the history of our Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church courageously looked at where it was and where the rest of the world was—saw there was a gap and looked to close it. Today we are more than 40 years, two generations, past its bright beginnings, and we are still challenged by the work of the Bishops and of the Gospel.

There are those who say that it is the third generation of people following the Council who will fully realize the spirit of the Council in the work of the Church. For now, our work as Catholics is to acquaint ourselves further with the Council’s vision and

⁶ *Treasures of Vatican II*, Edward Hahnenberg, Ph.D., American Catholic, September 2005.

teachings, and to work to make them a reality. While there most likely will not be a Vatican Council III in our near future, let us take a moment to consider if there is something coming out of Vatican II that still needs to be implemented for the continued growth of the Church.

Go to the newsprint labeled “Vatican III” and invite the participants to think of some things that the Church still needs to address. Invite contributions from the participants and write them on the newsprint sheet. Comment only as to clarify what is contributed and to connect it to what Vatican II teaches.

End with this from the closing “Message of the II Vatican Council to Youth”:

"Lastly, it is to you, young men and women of the world that the Council wishes to address its final message. For it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it.

For four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond the better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young. At the term of this imposing re-examination of life, she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her Council to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future." (December 7, 1965)

Even though the youth the Council Fathers spoke to in 1965 were those who are now your grandparents, perhaps, the message remains relevant and it is to you they speak today. The Church still looks to you with confidence and love.

Closing Prayer (6 minutes)

Using **Resource 4, Closing Prayer: Vatican II Calls Us to Be a People of Peace**, lead the closing prayer experience.

Closing Thoughts, Announcements, and Dismissal (4 minutes)

Make any needed announcements about upcoming activities. Thank the young people for their participation, and bid them goodnight, inviting them back for the next session.

Websites and links mentioned in this session were accessed successfully on November 27, 2010.

This session was written by [Leota Roesch](#), Director of Parish Faith Development and Sacramental Life, St. Bridget Parish, Mesa, Arizona. [Fr. Roy Shelly, Ph.D.](#), Director of Formation and Moderator of the Curia for the Diocese of Monterey, served as theological consultant on this session.

Resource 1

Session Leader Background Notes

1. *Vatican II in Plain English: The Constitutions*, Bill Huebsch, Ave Maria Press, 2008

This book presents the complete text and interesting background for all four Vatican II constitutions in “sense lines.” The specific documents are: *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, *The Dogmatic Constitutions on Divine Revelation*, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, and *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. (By making Vatican II material more readable, it can also be used for prayer and reflection. Brief summaries of all 16 Vatican II documents are also presented.) *If you have not read the four Constitutions of Vatican II, do so prior to the session. This is an excellent resource for “newcomers” to the written work of the Council.*

2. Called by Pope John XXIII in 1959, the Second Vatican Council became the world’s biggest meeting, with 2,500 bishops and priests in session at any one time at St. Peter’s in Rome discussing and voting on the future direction of the Roman Catholic Church.

Fr. Professor John O’Malley takes us into the debates and assesses the achievements of Vatican II. And Chairman of the Council of Christians and Jews – Victoria (Australia), William Clancy, comments on what Vatican II did for Christian-Jewish relations. (One hour audio download or transcript available at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/spiritofthings/stories/2009/2480986.htm>.)

3. *Modern Liturgy* interview with Bishop Remi J. De Roo – “Pilgrim of Vatican II” -

<http://www.rpinet.com/ml/2902deroo.html>.

4. University of Notre Dame, Institute for the Church, *The Council of Elders: Tapping the Wisdom of the Vatican II Archbishops; Summary of Interviews and Individual Transcripts* - <http://www.nd.edu/~icl/council-elders/summary-interviews.shtml>.

The Second Vatican Council: A Timeline⁷

1959

January 25: Pope John XXIII announces his intention of calling an ecumenical council

1960

June 5: Preparatory commissions and secretariats for the council set up by *motu proprio*, meaning under the pope’s personal authority

⁷ Based on a timeline compiled by Gary Macy, theology professor at the University of San Diego. *National Catholic Reporter*, October 4, 2002.

1961

December 25: The council is formally summoned by the apostolic constitution *Humanae Salutis*

1962

September 5: Norms and procedures of the council settled by the apostolic constitution *Appropinquante Concilio*

October 11-December 8: First session of the council meets

1963

June 3: Pope John XXIII dies

June 21: Pope Paul VI elected; announces to continue the council

September 29-December 4: Second session of the council meets

Issued on December 4:

[*Sacrosanctum Concilium*](#), Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
[*Inter Mirifica*](#), Decree on the Means of Social Communication

1964

January 4-6: Pope Paul VI meets Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in the Holy Land

May 17: Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions established

September 14-November 21: Third session of the council meets

Issued on November 21:

[*Lumen Gentium*](#), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
[*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*](#), Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite
[*Unitatis Redintegratio*](#), Decree on Ecumenism

1965

September 14- December 8: Fourth session of the council meets

September 15: Pope Paul VI issues an apostolic constitution, [*Apostolica Sollicitudo*](#), which formulates norms for a new episcopal synod, established to assist the pope in governing the church

Issued on October 28:

[*Christus Dominus*](#), Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church

[*Perfectae Caritatis*](#), Decree on Renewal of Religious Life

[*Optatam Totius*](#), Decree on Priestly Training

[*Gravissimum Educationis*](#), Declaration on Christian Education

[*Nostra Aetate*](#), Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

Issued on November 18:

[*Dei Verbum*](#), Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

[*Apostolicam Actuositatem*](#), Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity

December 4: Prayer Service for Promoting Christian Unity held at St. Paul Outside-the-Walls

Issued on December 7:

[*Dignitatis Humanae*](#), Declaration on Religious Freedom

[*Ad Gentes*](#), Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church

[*Presbyterorum Ordinis*](#), Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests

[*Gaudium et Spes*](#), Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

December 8: The Second Vatican Council is solemnly ended; extraordinary Jubilee Year proclaimed to familiarize the faithful with the teachings of the council

Resource 2

Possible Video/DVD Options to Extend the Session

Note: Many of these resources may be found in diocesan AV resource centers.

- 1. Genius of the Heart** (Tabor, available from RCL Benziger, <http://rclbooksandmore.stores.yahoo.net/faitrevvid1.html>)
Part 1 of a 5-video series, *The Faithful Revolution: Vatican II*, “Genius of the Heart” develops the history of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII, his death and legacy. It tells of the changing relationship with the mass media, the Church’s struggles with a changing world, and the eventual changes in the liturgy. (1 hour)
- 2. Inspired Awakening** (Tabor, available from RCL Benziger, <http://rclbooksandmore.stores.yahoo.net/faitrevvid1.html>)
In Part 2 of the same 5-video series, *The Faithful Revolution: Vatican II*, “Inspired Awakening” shows Pope Paul VI’s election and how he keeps “perfect continuity” with his predecessor as the “prophet of worldwide unity.” Vatican II has an impact on the Church and the entire world in three areas: Liturgy, Laity, and Ecumenism. (1 hour)
- 3. Vatican II in History** (Hallel Institute Videos, 1988, available at http://www.hallelvideos.com/cgi-bin/webc.cgi/store/st_main.html?p_catid=6)
Part of *The Vatican II Series*, this looks at the historical setting for the Second Vatican Council, its place among other Church Councils, and its significance in our own time are the main topics treated in this DVD. Historical footage, as well as eye-witness accounts, add to the viewer's understanding and appreciation.
- 4. Forty Years Later** (Hallel Institute Videos, available at http://www.hallelvideos.com/cgi-bin/webc.cgi/store/st_main.html?p_catid=6)
Forty years after the Council began its work in 1962, several theologians give their assessment of the far-reaching consequences of Vatican II's implementation. Part of *The Vatican II Series*.
- 5. Church Before and After Vatican II** (St. Anthony Messenger, 2002, available at <http://catalog.americancatholic.org/product.aspx?prodid=D5050&pcat=154>)
The Second Vatican Council issued 16 documents, which continue to shape every aspect of church life. In this five-part series on two DVDs, *The Vision of Vatican II for Today*, Fr. Michael Himes looks at the theological background of the council, some revolutionary teachings of the council itself and how they guide us today. As Catholicism faces new challenges, the seeds of reform and hope are right within our own traditions and the documents of Vatican II.
See especially, Part 4: The Church Before and After Vatican II (disc 2). Before the Council the Church had two missions: sanctification (performed by the clergy) and a social mission (performed by nuns and lay people). Fr. Michael Himes examines *Lumen Gentium* (Light of Nations) where both these missions are placed on equal ground, giving a profound impact on how we view the Church today. Guide included.

Resource 3

Opening Prayer Vatican II's Call to Holiness



Gather

Prayer Leader:

Let us take a moment of sacred silence to collect our thoughts and quiet our minds so that we can enter into our prayer. (Pause for a few moments.) Let us begin our prayer with that gesture that claims us for Christ and reminds us of his divinity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Council Fathers did away with a pyramidal view of the Church which placed the hierarchy (Pope, Bishops, clergy) at the pinnacle of the church with ordinary people at the bottom. Along with that, went the perception that, because of the state of life they had chosen, priests were holier than nuns and brothers who were holier than married couples who were holier than single people.

The Council reclaimed the theology of baptism which, not only makes us children of God, but through which the Holy Spirit gives us each the gifts and grace we need to be co-builders of the kingdom of God. We are a holy people of God who are all called to live out that call to holiness in whatever way God calls us.

Let us now listen to a reading from the Gospel of Matthew that reminds us what we are called to be.

Listen and Respond

Invite the reader to proclaim Matthew 5:13–16. Invite the participants to take some quiet time to reflect on the words proclaimed.

Go Forth

Prayer Leader:

Let us pray.

Chris, our brother and redeemer, you called your Church to be uniquely holy. By delivering yourself to death in fulfillment of the Father's will, you brought Her to perfection and holiness.

We, your people then are also called to holiness according to what your Apostle Paul wrote: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." May our lives show forth charity, kindness, care for the poor, witness to your Word, and unity in our Communion with you and your people.

We ask this of you who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.⁸ Amen.

⁸ Based on #39 of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

Resource 4

Closing Prayer Vatican II Calls Us to Be People of Peace



Gather

Prayer Leader:

Pope John XXIII and the Council Fathers saw the Church as being the key to the promotion of peace in a world torn apart by war and violence.

Gathering as God's family, we acknowledge that we are called to be peacemakers in today's world. May we enter into this time of prayer, acknowledging this and open to the Voice of God.

Prayer Leader: *(begin with the Sign of the Cross)*

"We believe, that peace comes, in the end, from love. Unless people willingly come together to share their talents and bright minds, peace cannot be achieved. Love goes beyond what justice can achieve. When we love our neighbor, even those who irritate us or alienate us, then we give peace its only chance. All of this loving attitude and behavior connect us to Christ who is the only one who can bring real peace."⁹

Listen

Invite the reader to proclaim 2 Corinthians 13:11-13. Ask the participants to listen how Paul's message reminds us of the lives we are to lead.

Respond

All: We believe "that peace is the result of justice. When society is rightly ordered, when people live as God intends, then peace reigns." (#78, Pastoral Constitution on the Church, *Gaudiam et Spes*)

Go Forth

Prayer Leader:

Before we leave this space tonight, take a brief moment in silence to resolve to be Peacemakers this week. Think of how you will make that resolution concrete.

Let us share a sign of peace with each other.

Go in Peace!

⁹ *Gaudiam et Spes*, #78, Bill Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English: The Constitutions*, Ave Maria Press, 2008.

Handout 1

A Brief Look at Six Documents of Vatican II

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (in Latin, *Lumen Gentium*) set a new focus for the Church. Here are some important points from this Constitution:

- The church is in Christ; it is a sacrament of Christ, a mystery (#1).
- It is the Body of Christ (#3, 7).
- It is the People of God, among whom the baptized are called as ministers (Ch 2).
- The role of the faithful is to be church in the world.
- The call to holiness is universal, and the way to holiness is love.

The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (in Latin, *Dei Verbum*) is a strong document stating that the Church continues to develop its understanding of what God has revealed to us.

- This document restored the Bible as the foundation of divine revelation.
- What the Church teaches is expressed in different words for different generations, but the eternal truths do not change.
- Christ is the fullness of God, but what the Gospel demands of us is still being revealed.
- Over time, there is growth in our understanding of what God desires (#8). This growth in understanding is expressed in our sacred Tradition. So Tradition and Scripture have a very close connection and flow from the same divine well.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (in Latin, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) is a major document reforming the Liturgy and was the first document approved by the Council.

- Established that the Mass (liturgy) is the source and summit of the Christian life.
- Established that some elements are changeable (language, books, prayers, music, persons, and places) and some aren't (Scripture, bread, wine, offertory, consecration, communion).
- Allowed for use of the vernacular (language of the people worshipping) in worship.
- Restored the Eucharist as an act rather than a static devotional object. This meant a down playing of devotions outside of Mass: rosary, benediction, etc.
- Restored the liturgy to first century rites.
- Established Baptism and Eucharist with primacy among the sacraments (#6).
- The full active conscious participation of all the faithful is the aim to be considered before all others (#11).
- Removed elements that are “out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy” (#21).
- Restored catechumenate and diaconate.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (in Latin, *Gaudium et Spes*) is a very important, historic document speaking to the church and to all people about the hopes and dreams of the human family.

- "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ." (Bill Huebsch)
- We must look at and trust the signs of the times and understand the world in which we live.
- The church lives and acts in the world.
- We have an inborn hunger for God.

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: The first document in the history of ecumenical councils to address itself to anyone other than the church's own clergy.

- Declares that the laity have a ministry by virtue of their baptisms, not merely a sharing in the ministry of the ordained.

Declaration on The Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians (in Latin, *Nostra Aetate*) began as a statement only about our relations with the Jews but was widened to say that "the truth" is present outside the Body of Christ and is to be respected wherever it is found, mentioning in particular Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as Judaism.

- The Catholic Church encourages dialogue and opens itself to the contributions of these others.
- Most importantly, Jews cannot be blamed as a race for death of Jesus; they are loved by God and every form of persecution or discrimination is condemned.