



# VATICAN II

*Celebrating 50 Years*

## An Introduction

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*This session is about an hour in length and is designed to introduce the study of the Second Vatican Council. This presentation may be accompanied by PowerPoint slides and handouts, both provided.*

**Opening Prayer** (see PowerPoint **Slides 2 &3**)

### **Welcome**

**Welcome to the first session of our course on Vatican Council II. Our goal is to recall the history of the Council and through input and discussion, discover how much the documents promulgated by the Council relate to the daily experiences of our lives.**

**The challenge for each of us is to acquaint or re-acquaint ourselves with the principal documents and recognize how they continue to influence us as Church — as people of God.**

***Session Outline:*** (PowerPoint Slide 4)

**Remembering the Pre-Vatican II Church**  
**Images of Church: “Before and After” the council**  
**Make-up of the Council**  
**Definition of a Council**  
**How the Council came about**  
**Composition of Vatican Council II**  
**Historical background for council**  
**Overview of four Council sessions**

**Pope Benedict XVI, during the last year of his pontificate, proclaimed a *Year of Faith* to again remind Catholics of our gift and responsibility. It began on October 11, 2012 and will continue to November 24, 2013. The *Year of Faith***

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is not merely occasioned by the celebration of anniversaries of certain milestones in the history of the modern Church. Pope Benedict has encouraged the church to use these anniversaries to focus our attention on the preservation of the faith precisely by adherence to the Second Vatican Council and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

A previous *Year of Faith* was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1967, commemorating the 19<sup>th</sup> centenary of the martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul. The 1967 *Year of Faith* called upon the church to recall the supreme act of witness by these two saints so that their martyrdom might inspire our present day church to collectively and individually make a sincere profession of faith.

We are taking this opportunity to spend some time looking again at Vatican II on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the way in which the resulting documents have affected our lives.

### Remembering the Council (PowerPoint Slide 5)

**Paired Activity:** [7 minutes]: Since this session begins with remembering, those of you who remember what it was like before Vatican II are asked to share preferably with someone who did not experience that period of the church. Allow 5 minutes for the paired sharing, and then 2 minutes for reporting back to the whole group things that his/her neighbor shared.

Anyone 60 years of age or younger, really has little or no experience of how it was before Vatican Council II. The Mass was in Latin, the priest had his back to the people at Mass, no one was allowed in the sanctuary except the priest and altar boys, there were no parish councils, our communion fast was from midnight, and much more.

Fifty years ago, Catholic bishops, cardinals and other Church leaders met in Vatican City for an historic Ecumenical Council. Angelo Roncalli was elected pope in 1958 at the age of 83. He took the name John XXIII and was viewed as an interim pope by the electors. Much to the surprise of Vatican officials, he called for a council and set the tone for it by his open, humble style. He wanted to open windows, bring new energy to the church and make some adaptations so the church could meet present day needs. He insisted that the

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purpose of the council was to revitalize the church and open it to reform, and not to proclaim warnings and condemnations.

In his opening speech to the council, Pope John affirmed that the church prefers “the medicine of mercy rather than of severity”. The same church, he adds, was to show herself “the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness towards the brethren who are separated from her.” There would be no condemnations, no anathemas.

It was as if the church said at the start of Vatican II, “Come, let us sit down together and count our plusses, the common values we share. It’s a rough world out there. We must be together and face all these problems together.”

### Pre-Vatican II image of the church

On newsprint draw a large triangle or pyramid covering the entire surface of the sheet. Place God at the very top of the pyramid. In the church of their youth, ask the participants who was the most important person after God. Help them organize: the pope, cardinals, archbishops & bishops, Monsignors and priests, religious men, religious women, lay men, lay women. **Allow 5 minutes** for this activity.

### PowerPoint Slide 6

Outside the pyramid were those who were not true believers, or who did not belong to the church, i.e. Jews, Protestants, atheists, those affiliated with non-Christian religions. It was a very hierarchical, male-dominated society, structured around power gained through ordination. Two castes existed—the clergy and the lay—those who were active and those who were passive. The closer you were able to get to the top of the pyramid, the holier you were considered, with the more desirable life-style, pleasing to God.

The church viewed as a pyramid:

- a top down ecclesiology;
- in order to be “closer to God” we contact those above us on the pyramid;
- ordained ministry and religious life were considered “higher” states of life” than the married state;
- ordination was viewed as an extra-special sacrament;
- men were treated as superior to women;

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- a very structured line of command;
- the system was clear and orderly -- everyone had their place and role.

Vatican II looked at this structure and image of church and found it greatly wanting. In two key documents on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the council forged a whole new, yet old, image and vision of church.

### Diagram:

The best image to use is that of a circle with Jesus in the center, Father above and Spirit below. Around the circle are all the people of God—pope, women, priests, men, bishops, Christian churches. Jesus is the model whom the church (those listed around the circle) is to imitate.

### PowerPoint Slide 7

Jesus becomes the ultimate criterion for living the Christian life. Baptism is the key sacrament, for it is in baptism that we take on the mind and heart of Christ and become members of a community which promises to model Jesus in its everyday life.

Community building, support and celebration are essential to this vision of church. Gifts are called forth and discerned for the building up of the kingdom.

### Implications of the church viewed as a circle—Vatican II image of the church:

- The focus is on Jesus; the key point is that through Scripture we have direct access to God through Jesus, who becomes the ultimate criterion for living the Christian life;
- Jesus' focus directs us to the reality of the Spirit guiding the church;
- the church promotes the dignity and freedom of each of its members, the essential equality of all;
- Baptism is key to this equality; we take on the mind and heart of Jesus;
- the Spirit of Jesus nourishes our gifts and talents for use within the church and world;
- the focus on community is essential to church;
- the church community is called to be a sign of God's saving presence in Jesus;
- the call to be church is a call to be concerned for all of creation;

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- all are co-workers in making God's saving presence in Jesus a reality in our world;
- talents and gifts are discerned and how we can best use them in community and the world;
- members challenge one another as Jesus challenged the disciples;
- members are called to be people who share and respond to needs of the community; call forth one another's gifts;
- members are involved in making decisions for the benefit and growth of the entire community;
- all the baptized are called to be involved in shaping identity and mission of the church.

The changes brought some fear and bewilderment to those who were older, though also a recognition that the church does change. Life changes. New inventions appeared—jet plane, radio, TV. Try to imagine your world without them today. We were flooded with fast-breaking news, assertions, rumors, revelations, gossip, discoveries, and entertainment at the touch of a dial. (Today add blue ray, iPads, smart phones, and computers.) There was the Vietnam War, Civil Rights struggles here and abroad . . . we know that we live in a changing world.

It's important to understand what gave rise to this Council. It rests in the whole history of the Church. Pope John XXIII was an historian by trade. He taught history in the local seminary as a young priest. Vatican II did not happen in a vacuum. Vatican II cannot be fully grasped without first understanding something of the history of councils.

Pope John XXIII insisted that the purpose of the council was to revitalize the Church and open it to reform, and not to proclaim warnings and condemnations. He was a strong advocate for Christian unity and for world peace.

Pope John XXIII died between the first and second session of the Council. Pope Paul VI saw the Council through to its completion.

There have been 20 councils held before Vatican II.

What is an Ecumenical Council? PowerPoint Slide 8

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**By definition it is an assembly of the college of bishops, under the presidency of the pope and convened by him.**

**A council has supreme authority in matters pertaining to faith, morals, worship and discipline.**

**While Vatican II was in session from 1962-1965, the Church marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Like Vatican II, a main purpose for that 16<sup>th</sup> century council had been church reform.**

**Vatican II was neither the shortest council in duration (Lateran III lasted 14 days in 1179), nor the longest (Trent went on for 18 years, with three sessions). Vatican II held four sessions in four years; only the Council of Constance (1414-1418) had more sessions. It squeezed in 45 sessions during its four-year existence.**

**The 2,860 council fathers in attendance made Vatican II the largest-attended council, surpassing the Fourth Lateran Council (November 11-30, 1215) which had 2,283 representatives from the Catholic world.**

**How did the council come about? PowerPoint Slide 9**

**John XXIII had the inspiration—“a flash of heavenly light”—to call a council on January 20, 1959. According to his own journal, John was in his private apartment, talking with his Secretary of State, when suddenly and unexpectedly, he exclaimed that there would be a council.**

**On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII presided over the prayers for the Week of Christian Unity celebrated annually from January 18-25. After the ceremony, in a short speech, he made an announcement that came as a thunderbolt -- his decision to call an ecumenical council to promote the unity of all Christian communities. Between the announcement of the council on January 25 and its opening on October 1, 1962, there were three years and eight months.**

**A great deal of preparation was needed. The Roman Curia, under the leadership of Cardinal Alfredo Octaviani, was given the task of organizing the council. Twelve committees were set up to deal with different aspects of the church such as sacraments, clergy, bishops, religious orders. These**

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committees produced 70 decrees and four dogmatic constitutions. The papers prepared were legal and organizational—most of which were not acceptable to Pope John and were returned to the committees.

Praise for the council came from other countries and leaders of other churches. It was an historic event.

Pope John intended Vatican II to be an open debate, but there was tension between the bishops and the Roman curia. Vatican officials were on the defensive. There was no obvious crisis, and they wondered if a council was necessary. Some officials gave the pope the “cold shoulder”.

Questions arose about whether it would be a new council or a continuation of Vatican Council I which had been suspended in 1869 for political reasons and never reconvened. The Pope said it would be a new council.

**Who made up this Council?** PowerPoint Slide 10

All seven continents including Antarctica were represented at the Council. Twenty-five hundred bishops gathered in St. Peter’s Basilica—like a huge football stadium. It was not only a “watershed” event for the Roman Catholic Church, but one of the most significant religious events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It had a profound influence upon every aspect of the faith and life of the church and has been the cause of inspiration and conflict.

**Who convenes a council?**

An ecumenical council is convened by the pope, even though in the early days of the church, emperors convened councils.

**How did “councils” come about?**

The early Christian community cut its ties with the Jewish community and was at a loss as to their direction. Many communities had been spread throughout the Mediterranean world. There was no centralized authority or structure, so the Christian faith was expressed in as many different ways as there were Christian churches. Some scholars think it is best to speak of early Christianities since there was no unifying plan.



**The Church as we know it today, with its hierarchy and structure, wasn't "shaped up" in the first few centuries. But signs of organization arose.**

**In the middle of the second century, there was some evidence of bishops and priests attempting communication and establishment of common practices and structure.**

**The community became more structured around a council (similar to civic structures with which the people were familiar.)**

**Ministries were named:**

- **Bishop/Episcopus—overseer of the council;**
- **Presbyters—elders (usually used in the plural because they formed the council);**
- **Deacons—administrators who tended to the needs of the community (office of service);**
- **Widows—had a hospitality role**
- **College of bishops—bishops shared letters, visits to one another, referred concerns/issues to each other, always focusing on preserving the original teaching.**

**Apostolic succession can be considered from the view of a continuous practice of "laying on of hands" from the apostles to our current bishops.**

**The story of early Christianity is the story of emerging Catholicity, a broad consensus in matters of faith and order, from a wide variety of churches. The early Christians struggled to be faithful to Christ.**

**The infant church faced the question of acculturation and adaptation at the very dawning of Christianity. While the gospel message is the same for all nations, it needs to be adapted and applied to a particular culture and the pastoral needs of a people.**

**The Council of Jerusalem in the year 49 was convened to settle the conflict between the Jews and Gentiles where Paul was convinced it was not necessary to become a Jew first in order to accept the Gospel of Christ. But some of his fellow apostles disagreed. The dispute threatened to destroy the unity of the church.**

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Paul attempted to settle this conflict by proclaiming to the Galatians (3:28): “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” The Council of Jerusalem accepted Paul’s principle of the universality of salvation.

This was one of the first and most bitter struggles that the Christian church faced in its early years.

Later Councils were called to decide questions of faith, morals and discipline and to establish church teachings such as the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the humanity of Jesus, the goodness of the created world. Once these teachings were accepted by the councils they became doctrines of the church.

Those not willing to accept the teachings of the church were considered heretics.

As stated earlier, Vatican II was not called to refute a teaching, but rather a moment of formation and reformation for the Catholic Church. It was to be a pastoral response to the contemporary needs of the modern world. Pope John XXIII prayed, “Renew in our days, O Lord, your wonders, as in a new Pentecost.”

### How many sessions made up Vatican Council II?

There were four sessions of Vatican Council II. There was an immense amount of discussion, prayer, study and argument that went into four years. For more than 2000 church leaders to come to almost unanimous agreement on such a huge range of topics is tangible proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

First Session (Sept.-Dec., 1962) 2540 bishops took part. Over 8000 suggestions were submitted for consideration. (PowerPoint Slide 11)

**Decision:** The council adjourned after the first few minutes. Pope John said there was not enough representation on the commissions. The original commissions were dominated by a traditionalist mentality. The concern of the council was to be for the whole church.

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During the nine-month interval before the next session, Pope John died. Cardinal Giovanni Montini (Italy) was elected to the papacy June 21, 1963 and became Pope Paul VI.

### PowerPoint Slide 12

**Second Session** (Sept. 29-Dec. 4, 1963) Pope Paul VI in his opening talk begged the pardon of non-Catholics for any fault Catholics may have for the divided state of Christianity, and expressed willingness of Catholics to forgive any injuries done to them.

#### Decisions:

- Increased the membership of each commission
- Included Mary in the document on the church rather than giving her a separate document. This emphasized her relationship to the body of the faithful.
- Approved the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* by vote of 2,147 to 4.
- Passed the Document on *Decree on the Means of Social Communication*
- There was a strong criticism of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

During the interval before the next session, Pope Paul VI announced women auditors, both lay and religious, had been invited.

### PowerPoint Slide 13

**Third and Fourth Sessions** (Sept. 14-Nov. 21, 1964 and Sept. 14-Dec. 8, 1965)

The Conciliar bishops produced sixteen documents on internal church reform and the church's relations with the rest of the world. It isn't possible to treat all 16 documents in any depth. We will focus on the four Constitutions primarily—like the pillars of the church. These touch on almost all areas and aspects of the Catholic Church and its life and mission in the world. In volume they surpass any previous council of the Church.

Fourteen of the Council's sixteen documents were thoroughly discussed, revised and finally approved. These documents are the most important concrete fruit of the council, though they are not of the same value.

### Pillars of the Church PowerPoint Slide 14

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The four constitutions are more authoritative as constitutions touch upon doctrinal material which pertains to the very essence of the church.

**Four Constitutions:** The teachings of these documents, theologically speaking, are the most important.

- *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* is considered by most theologians as the most important or foundational document of the Council. Calling Christ the “light of nations,” the council desires to shed the radiance of Christ, who brightens the face of the Church, upon all.
- *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* deals with God’s revelation through sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, which together “make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church” (10).
- *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was the first document to be discussed in the Council and the first promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1963. The document sought to undertake “the reform and promotion of the liturgy” (1).
- *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* was the last document to be completed by the Council and the lengthiest of all 16 documents. It deals with the Church’s relationship with the world and all human activity, which are viewed as essentially sacred and good, though able to be abused and used for evil ends.

### **HANDOUT 1:** List of the Vatican II Documents

There are nine Post-conciliar Documents called Decrees flowing from the Constitutions. Decrees and declarations are directed at practical questions or specific pastoral concerns.

- *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*
- *Decree on Ministry and Life of Priests*
- *Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life*
- *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*
- *Decree on the Training of Priests*
- *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*
- *Decree on Ecumenism*
- *Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches*
- *Decree on the Mass Media*

**In addition there are three Declarations**

- *Declaration on Christian Education*
- *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*
- *Declaration on Religious Liberty*

These last two are important. The former indicates that “[God’s] providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humankind” and that “the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” (1-2). Pope Paul VI described the Declaration on *Religious Liberty* as “one of the major texts of the Council.”

**Some high points of the documents:**

- **Liturgy:** increased the participation of the laity, and reclaimed Right of Christian Initiation of Adults
- **Lay Ministry:** expanded the role of laymen and women.
- **Ecumenism:** clergy and laity have become involved in increased dialogue with other Christians and non-Christians.
- **Religious life:** profound changes, especially women religious as seen in the introduction of new constitutions for their communities.
- **Collegiality:** increased sense of shared authority among bishops and between bishops and pope; development of national conferences of bishops.

**There were some unique qualities of the Second Vatican Council:**

- It was the first truly ecumenical council. Every continent was represented and, thanks to Benedict XV, native bishops had been named throughout the world so that many cultures were also represented.
- It was a council about the church (not about Christology or dogmatic theology).
- The number of delegates greatly exceeded the number attending any previous council of the church. Vatican I had 737 bishops in attendance. At Vatican II there were 2,600 bishops. The number increases to over 3,000 when the theologians and observers are added.
- Sixty-three non-Catholics and fifty-two lay people were present as observers.

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- It was the first council to use electricity, telephones, and typewriters.
- It was not called to confront a heresy or an attack on doctrine.

Each of the next four sessions will deal with one of the four major Constitutions and some of the Decrees and Declarations. We'll begin with the first that was approved by the Council, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

(Though this is the opening prayer at the council, we will use it as a prayer to close this first session on Vatican II, since the documents will be studied individually in the following sessions and we can understand the sense in which the council was begun.)

**Handout 2: Closing Prayer** which was the Opening Prayer at the Vatican Council in 1962:

We stand before you, Holy Spirit,  
conscious of our sinfulness,  
but aware that we gather in your name.

Come to us, remain with us,  
and enlighten our hearts.  
Give us light and strength to know your will,  
to make it our own, and to live it in our lives.

Guide us by your wisdom,  
support us by your power,  
for you are God, sharing the  
glory of Father and Son.

You desire justice for all:  
enable us to uphold the rights of others;  
do not allow us to be misled by ignorance  
or corrupted by fear or favour.

Unite us to yourself in the bond of love  
and keep us faithful to all that is true.

As we gather in your name may we temper justice with love,

**so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants.**

**You live and reign with the Father and the Son, One God, forever and ever. Amen.**