

How has Vatican II touched you?

The Second Vatican Council ended in 1965, more than 50 years ago. Its wisdom continues to renew the Church. This short course explores the council's four main documents—Constitutions on the Sacred Liturgy, the Church, Divine Revelation, and the Church in the Modern World. The renewal the Council began continues in our parishes and hearts.

Read the statements below. Check any that express ways the Council touches you. Write your own statement(s).

★ We live in the inexhaustible and dynamic mystery of God's creative love.

★ Our baptisms call us to holiness, to live Jesus' mission in the world.

★ The baptized form the Church, the people of God, Body of Christ, temple of the Spirit.

★ We practice full, active, conscious participation in liturgy and Church life.

★ We live in solidarity with the afflicted and act and advocate for the common good.

★ Conscience is primary, the ultimate sanctuary where we make decisions.

★ Christian tradition makes progress in our world through our spiritual experience, contemplation, and prayer.

★ We respect and learn from other religious traditions.

★ The Holy Spirit works among us. We listen to signs of the times.



Session 1

Cultivating the Wisdom of Vatican II

How do we cultivate the wisdom of Vatican II today? How can we keep its spirit alive? The council calls us to reclaim the Spirit-filled renewal the Council set in motion and to envision its evolving future in our lives and world.

Wisely the Council recognizes that baptism calls every Christian to holiness and to live the mission of Jesus in the world.

Wisely the Council empowers full, active, conscious participation in the liturgy.

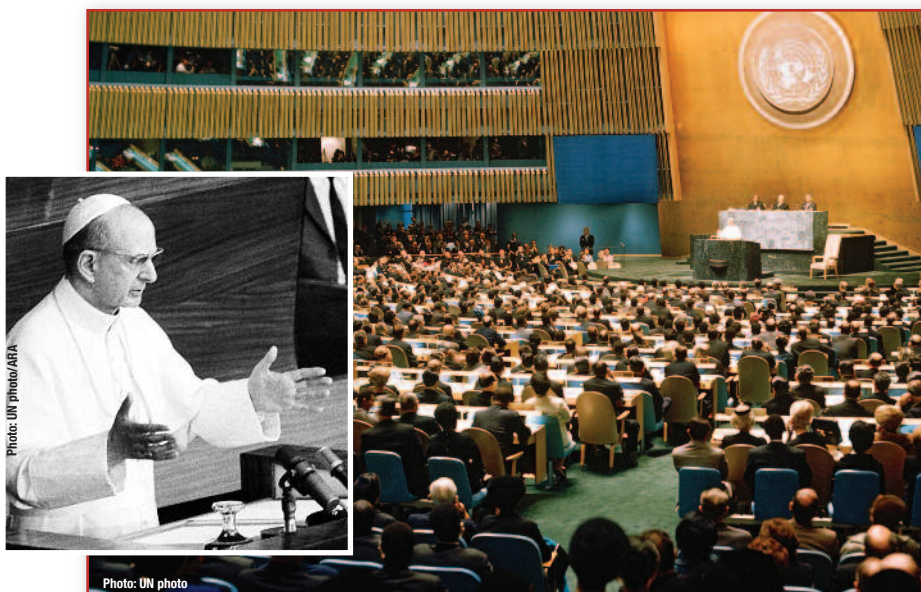
Wisely the Council affirms that Christian Tradition makes progress in the world not only through the teaching of the bishops who succeed the apostles but through the prayer and pondering in our hearts of every believer and through our experience of spiritual realities (*Dei Verbum* #8).

Wisely the Council insists, "The joys and sorrows, griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially the poor and afflicted, are the joys and sorrow, griefs and anx-



ieties of the followers of Christ" (Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* #1).

Church officials often label our world today as secular; indeed it is no longer holy and Roman as Europe was in medieval Christendom. Although political leaders ask God to bless America repeatedly in our public discourse, we value separation of Church and state in the United States. In our world 68% of the nations are democracies, while the Church preserves its monarchical structure.



Pope Paul VI at the United Nations, October, 1965



Throughout the 28-year papacy of John Paul II, the Church grew increasingly centralized, curtailing the collegiality among bishops that Vatican II envisioned. National bishops' conferences produced their own pastorals in the 1980s. The U.S. bishops wrote pastorals on economics and on peace; the Latin and Central American bishops meeting at Medellin and Puebla committed to an option for the poor. Today pastorals require members' unanimous approval and Rome's agreement (*1998, Apostolos Suos*). The Vatican today continues John Paul II's practice of appointing like-minded conservatives as bishops in dioceses throughout the world.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, many Catholics feel torn. They live in the tension between leaders reclaiming the Church of the past and laity wanting the renewal of Vatican II to go farther. Because the Church had changed little between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Second Vatican Council

(1962-65), going back to pre-council times returns the Church to the late Middle Ages.

The pray, pay, and obey Catholics of the 1950s have evolved into dream, dare, and do Catholics today. Since the Council ended on December 8, 1965, two generations have learned new science, critical thinking, and Catholic social teaching in our schools and universities. Many bring these skills and insights to serve our parish communities, to live the gospels, and continue Jesus' mission in the world. In the U.S. we work to give all people voice and rights; we elect our leaders; we participate in making policy and governance. As Vatican II taught us, we are the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ in the world. The Holy Spirit lives, breathes, and speaks in us as in our bishops.

Reflect

- What does the Second Vatican Council stand for in my experience?
- Why am I staying in the Church, or why am I leaving? What tests me?
- When I talk about the Church, who am I talking about? Do I include myself?
- Where do I meet God in my life?
- What are my longings? What stays alive in these longings?
- What do I do for myself to stay awake to God's presence within me, beyond me, among us?

Session 2

Full, Active, Conscious Participation

Centuries of silence precede the liturgical renewal of the 20th century and the changes at Vatican II that turned altars to face the people in worship. For centuries people usually practiced other devotions during the Latin Mass.

Renewal started in France. Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-75) feared individualism and established a Benedictine monastery at Solemnes to build community. He put Eucharist at the center of monastic life and generated the liturgical revival that flourished in the early 20th century.

Pius X (1905) urged frequent communion and lowered the age of first communion to seven, the age of reason. At a 1909 congress for lay Catholics, a Belgian monk named Dom Lambert Beauduin called for active participation of the laity in Church life, especially in the liturgy. Beauduin saw it as a powerful tool in the rebirth of society. He started a monthly publication called *Liturgical Life*.

The *Missa Recitata* (1922) restored dialogue to the Eucharistic liturgy in religious houses. The priest turned toward the people for the dialogue, and people loved it even though it was in Latin. In Brooklyn Father Stedman published a Latin/English missal (1932), which spread widely. As the whole Church began to use missals at Mass and respond in dialogue to the celebrant, people wondered why not pray in the vernacular.

Because the liturgical movement prepared the Church for renewal throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first document the Second Vatican Council passed (1963). Bishops voted 2162 to 46 to approve the document, which stresses that the Eucharist is the

font and summit of the Church's activity. The Church arises from our worship together. Eucharist is the work of people on behalf of their God and the work of Jesus for the redemption of all.

The paschal mystery, Jesus' passage from death to life, is the heart of Christian faith. Every Sunday celebrates Jesus' resurrection to new life. Baptism



immerses the Christian in Jesus' self-giving death and life-giving resurrection.

Baptism calls every Christian to holiness and makes us priests, prophets, and kings who share in the Church's mission and worship. Christ is present not only in the priest, the Word, and the Eucharistic species at Mass but also in the people who gather in Jesus' name.

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Council sets four goals for public worship and for its own work—

- "To impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful;"
- "To adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change;"
- "To foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ;"
- "To strengthen whatever can help to call all humankind into the Church's fold."

Reflect

- What vigor has the Council increased in your Christian life?
- What experiences of Catholic liturgy have most profoundly awakened you to the presence of God in your life?
- How do you actively, fully, consciously participate in public worship?
- Which changes among those listed below have helped you become a more active, conscious participant in worship?
- ☐ Celebrating Eucharist and other sacraments in English
- ☐ Richer scriptural fare on the table of the Word, a three-year cycle of readings that includes all four gospels
- ☐ Celebrating Jesus' resurrection and the promise of our own at funerals
- ☐ Multiple Eucharistic Prayers instead of one
- ☐ Altars that look like tables
- ☐ Priest and people face each other for dialog
- ☐ Restoration of the Prayer of the Faithful
- ☐ Communion in the hand
- ☐ Lay readers
- ☐ Sign of peace
- ☐ Communion under both species.
- ☐ People bringing gifts to the altar
- ☐ More circular church buildings that gather us around the altar
- ☐ Face to face Sacrament of Reconciliation
- ☐ New music
- ☐ Other
- What do you bring to your typical Sunday or holiday worship? What do you take away?

Session 3

We Are the Church, Sheep No Longer

Who doesn't grin when a chorus performing Handel's *Messiah* sings, "All we like sheep?" None of us think of ourselves as sheep. Few of us raise sheep or like them on Facebook. A little more than a century ago (1906), Pope Pius X wrote, "The one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors."

In its Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), Vatican II proclaims that we, the baptized, are the Church. The Church is not its buildings or hierarchy but first and foremost its people. Our baptisms call us to holiness and bind us in common faith. The Church is people, the People of God.

"Christ is the light of humanity," the constitution begins. The Church in Christ makes visible the possible unity of the human family. Together we are the primal sacrament, the sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among the human race (#1). The ties of love that grow among us cultivate the "sure seed of unity" that is the Holy Spirit alive in us, sighing in our hopes, rejoicing in our loves, fretting and regretting in our failures, discerning with us in our choices.

The Church exists in history and in the world as a community of real human beings who love and quarrel, share and hoard, help and hurt, befriend and snub, forgive and alienate. We are the *ecclesia*, those who gather in Jesus' name, *the assembly*. We are Church, called to live so all can see the light of Christ in us.

The Second Vatican Council makes this message clear. It purposely places the chapter on the People of God (chapter 2) before the chapter on the hierarchy (chapter 3), the laity (chapter 4), and religious (chapter 6). All baptized, confirmed, eucharist-sharing Christians are people of equal dignity in the Church.



"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society" (Chapter 5, #40).

To describe the Church, the Council goes to scripture for imagery. The Church is the People of God, a field, a vineyard, a sheepfold, a building whose cornerstone was once rejected, the household of God, the dwelling place of God, a temple, a bride, the Body of Christ.

As the People of God, the Church is a community. "At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to God," say the first words of chapter 2 on the People of God. It continues, "God has willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any bonds or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge God and serve God in holiness" (#9).

The Church is a mystery rooted in God, who made a covenant relationship with freed slaves that required them not only to worship God alone

but to respect each others' lives, reputations, marriages, property, elders. In becoming the people of the covenant, the Israelites became the original People of God, our forebearers in faith.

With Christ as head and his commandments to love God and neighbor as its law, Christians form a new People of God. The Church is us, pilgrims in history, each with a capacity for communion with God and with each other, each with the mission to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and its promise for us all.

Reflect

- What image best expresses the mystery of the Church for you?
- What is your importance in the Church? How do you act on who you are?
- What does being saved through our mutual bonds rather than simply as individuals ask of you?

Session 4

The Gospel Makes Progress

When John XXIII opens the Council October 11, 1962, he seeks to quiet the prophets of doom among Church leaders. He seeks to engage the world and serve its people. He wants a council that updates the Church and seeks unity, not one that repeats dogmas and condemns opponents.

Three words describe what the pope hopes for. The first word, *aggiornamento*, refers to updating the church, bringing it into the present, and addressing the signs of the times. The second word, *ressourcement*, means looking to sources in the past that help reclaim essentials. The third word is *development*, which means the Gospels and Church Traditions are dynamic; they make progress in the world. For example, the New Testament takes slavery for granted in society, but from the beginning many Christians free their slaves and over centuries move to abolish it.

Vatican II was like an earthquake after 400 years of little change. On October 11, 1962, 2,500 cardinals and bishops processed across St. Peter's Square through waving, clapping crowds, into St. Peter's Basilica, the huge church in Rome built over the tomb of the apostle Peter. They met every fall for four years.

A total of 2,860 bishops participated in the council over the four years. They came from 116 countries: 36% from Europe, 34% from the Americas, 20% from Asia and Oceania, 10% from Africa.

Members of the curia, the Vatican administrative bureaucracy, headed each of the ten commissions that Pope John directed to prepare proposals for the council. They consulted the bishops of the world, collated their input, and created pro-



posals and questions to discuss, all in Latin.

As its first order of business, the council planned to elect 16 members to each commission. The curia supplied a list of bishops to elect. At this early point many bishops didn't know one another and hadn't chatted over cappuccinos or dinner. A wise cardinal called for a 48-hour break, so the bishops could caucus in language groups, learn from one another who could contribute to commissions among their own, and select from a wider slate of candidates. Consequently, the commissions drew broader and more diverse membership—a move that enlivened proceedings. The bishops rejected most of the Curia's original proposals and directed the commissions to redevelop them. Fifteen minutes into the council the Holy Spirit began encouraging diversity and change.

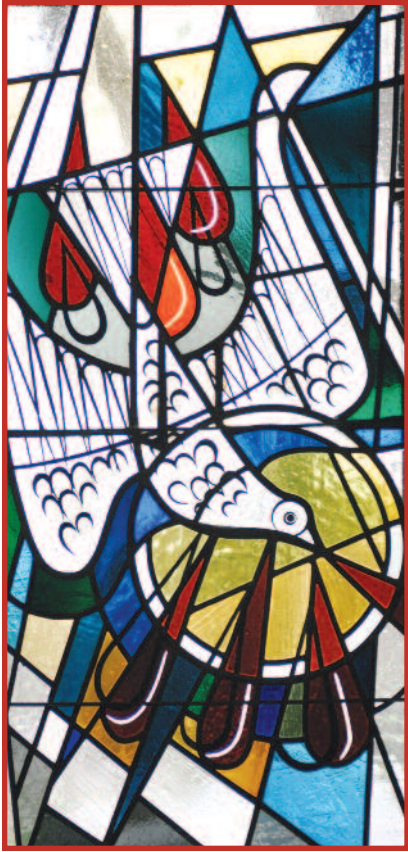
Work on new understandings of scripture and tradition continued throughout the Council. In 1943, Pope Pius XII set off a flurry of scholarship when he approved scientific methods of bible study and recognized three layers of tradition—Jesus' own teaching, then a 40-year period of apostolic preaching and oral tradition, and then the collecting of oral traditions and writing of the gospels.

Not until its final session in 1965 did the Council pass its revised

Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), which tells us that God has entered our history and revealed God's very self. We humans are made for communion with God. God has spoken in creation, in the prophets, and in Jesus Christ, in whom we see God as one of us.

The Council affirms revelation is alive in the Church, making progress in history. The two sources of revelation—scripture and tradition—are really one, for the scriptures arise out of the message of the eyewitness disciples and the life of the early Christian communities. We, the People of God, continue to hand on these traditions today through the prayer, study, and experience of each of us as the document describes:





“The **TRADITION** that comes from the apostles **MAKES PROGRESS** in the Church with the help of the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

There is a **GROWTH IN INSIGHT** into the realities and words that are being passed on.

This comes about in various ways.

It comes **THROUGH THE CONTEMPLATION AND STUDY OF BELIEVERS** who ponder these things in their hearts.

It comes **FROM THE INTIMATE SENSE OF SPIRITUAL REALITIES WHICH THEY EXPERIENCE**.

And it comes **FROM THE PREACHING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED, ALONG WITH THEIR RIGHT OF SUCCESSION IN THE EPISCOPATE, THE SURE CHARISM OF TRUTH**.

Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the **PLENTITUDE** of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her”
(*Dei Verbum* #8).

Reflect

- How do you continue to study and contemplate our Christian tradition?
- How does your study and contemplation animate the way you live and participate in family and civic community?
- To whom have you handed on your study and insight?
- How have you experienced that God lives and the Spirit breathes in you and all of us?

Session 5

Our Mission: Bringing Heaven to Earth

The title of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965) comes from its first words in Latin, *Gaudium et Spes*, in English *Joys and Hopes*. This document transformed the spirituality of Catholics, refocusing us from heaven to earth, from enduring suffering as Jesus did to alleviating it in our world.

“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, too, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (#1).

Gaudium et Spes is the Church’s most authoritative, inclusive source of Catholic social teaching, approved by council and pope together. It calls the People of God to solidarity with the people of our world. It passed on the last day of the Council, 2309 to 75.

This document defines the common good, a concept Catholics have brought into our public, political life as a goal for just legislation:

“The common good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and even those of the human family as a whole” (#26).

Wisely in this document the bishops listen to the signs of our times. They call the People of God to put their faith into action and take responsibility for transforming poverty and suffering. Their words call us to reflect on our own time in history and identify the signs of the times that call us to action.



Reflect on each excerpt from the Church in the Modern World below.
What touches your experience and challenges you to action?

OUR AGE

“In no other age has humankind enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources, and economic wellbeing; and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate. At no time have human beings had such a keen sense of freedom, only to be faced by new forms of slavery in living and thinking. There is on one hand a lively feeling of unity and of compelling solidarity, of mutual dependence, and on the other a lamentable cleavage of bitterly opposing camps (#4).

EQUALITY

“The hungry nations cry out to their affluent neighbors; women claim parity with men in fact as well as of right, where they have not obtained it; laborers and agricultural workers insist not just on the necessities of life but also on the opportunity to develop by their labor their personal talents and to play their due role in organizing economic, social, political, and cultural life (#9).

CONSCIENCE

Deep within our consciences humans discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves but which we must obey. This voice, ever calling us to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells us inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For we humans have in our hearts a law inscribed by God. Our dignity lies in observing this law, and by it we will be judged. Conscience is a human's most sacred core and sanctuary. There we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in love of God and of one's neighbor (#16).

HUMAN RIGHTS

"There must be available to all human persons everything necessary for leading a truly human life, such as food, clothing, shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the up-right norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy, and to rightful freedom in matters religious" (#26).

DUTIES TO OUR NEIGHBORS

"Today there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every individual without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an elderly person abandoned by everyone, a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of being despised, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin of which the child is innocent, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25.40; #27).

NO TO DISCRIMINATION

"With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men" (#29).

WE LIVE IN HISTORY

"The Church, at once a visible organization and a spiritual community, travels the same journey as all of humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and as it were the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (#40).

LAITY

"The council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to evade our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that because of our faith we are all the more bound to fulfill these responsibilities according to each one's vocation.... The laity are called to participate actively in the entire life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity, they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the human community" (#43).

In concluding, *Gaudium et Spes* beautifully summarizes its message: "Hold to the Gospel, join forces with all who love and practice justice" (#92).

Reflect

- With whom do you join forces to love and practice justice?
- Whose joys have you shared in your life? Whose hopes? Whose griefs and anxieties? How have these bonds changed you?

