

LUMEN GENTIUM

The Vatican Council II document, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), is one of the first required readings of the Theology of Lay Ministry course as well as for your next course in Ecclesiology. We ask that you get a head start in reading an important resource for the topics you will be studying in this program. As you read please note the following:

- *Lumen Gentium* (LG) has been described as one of the greatest achievements of the Council because it places its central concern on the Church as a whole.
- LG underwent many revisions before the final text was approved, and each revision revealed a deeper development of the Church's self-understanding.
- In the words of Avery Duties, S.J., who was present at the Council, LG sets forth, with conciliar authority "the Church's present understanding of herself."

Of particular importance for the Theology of Lay Ministry course are Chapter I ("The Mystery of the Church"); Chapter II ("The People of God"); and Chapter IV ("The Laity").

- *Lumen Gentium* begins with the Church as mystery (rather than the Church's hierarchical structures and government as did the documents of Vatican Council I) that is, the "paradoxical union of the human and divine."
- The Church exists in the here and now, yet has a goal "beyond history" when God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).
- Beginning the document in this way reflects the more biblical, pastoral, historical, and Christ-centered approach of Vatican II.

Chapters II and IV continue the groundbreaking achievements of the Council.

- In Chapter II, the Church is described as the *entire* people of God, the total faith community of the Church – pastors and other faithful alike. Here again, the Council focuses first on all the Church's members – the "new people of God" – rather than on the hierarchy or ordained members alone.
- Chapter III (which pertains more closely to the Ecclesiology course) takes up the description of the hierarchy of the Church, and the role of the bishop in particular.

Chapter IV on the laity has been described as a "brief but inspiring chapter." Some of the important points of this section include the following:

- The laity is defined in positive terms, that is, in terms of baptism and their active role in the body of Christ (#31).
- Recognition that the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, and, in particular, have their own share in the prophetic, priestly, and royal functions of Christ (#31).
- A mutual relationship of support and dependence exists between clergy and laity (#32).
- Pastors are to recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the layperson and his/her role in the Church (#37).

There is much more to the document, and to draw out its full meaning more than one reading will be necessary. Hopefully, this brief outline will help you on your way. Since *Lumen Gentium* was an important part of "opening the windows of the Church" to the modern world (especially in terms of the laity), we believe you will find the reading worthwhile.