

A Reflection on the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*
from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

We at the Second Vatican Council
make an earnest appeal
to all the laypeople of the Church.

We ask that you make a willing, noble,
and enthusiastic response to God's call.
Christ is calling you indeed!
The Spirit is urging you.

You who are in the younger generation:
you, too, are being called!
Welcome this call with an eager heart
and a generous spirit.

It is the Lord, through this council,
who is once more inviting all Christians
of every level of the Church
to work diligently in the harvest.

Join yourselves to the mission of Christ
in the world,
knowing that in the Lord,
your labors will not be lost.

(Article 33)

DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II (1962-1965)

Council documents are written first in Latin and so have an “official” Latin title (taken from the first words of the document). What has become the English translation of the documents’ titles follows in parenthesis.

CONSTITUTIONS

Constitutions are the most solemn and formal type of document issued by an ecumenical council. They treat substantive doctrinal issues that pertain to the “very nature of the church.”

Sacrosanctum concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church In the Modern World)

DECREES

Draw on the doctrinal principles focused on in the Constitutions and applies them to specific issues or groups in the Church.

Christus Dominus (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church)

Presbyterorum Ordinis (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests)

Optatam Totius (Decree on the Training of Priests)

Perfectae Caritatis (Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life)

Apostolicam Actuositatem (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People)

Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism)

Orientalium Ecclesiarum (Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches)

Inter Mirifica (Decree on the Mass Media)

Ad Gentes (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity)

DECLARATIONS

Focus on particular issues of contemporary interest of pastoral concern.

Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education)

Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Liberty)

Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)

n.b. all council documents can be downloaded from the Vatican's official website (www.vatican.va). Follow the "Resource Library" link.

Adapted from Edward P. Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*. Cincinnati, OH, St. Anthony Messenger Press: 2007.

VATICAN II: CHURCH HISTORY IN THE MAKING 1962-1965

What is Vatican II?

It's been said that when asked, students answered in unexpected ways: "Isn't that the Pope's summer residence?" and, "That's the name of the Pope's airplane!" We can smile at this, but we wonder. What do our parishioners, especially younger ones, think about Vatican II? It has been 50 years since the Council, and much has happened since then. Anniversaries are always special. And for this very special anniversary, the Church as a whole, and Pope Benedict XVI in particular, want us to both remember the Council and celebrate its legacy. Hopefully, this brief essay, first in a series, will be useful in helping Vatican Council II come alive for Catholics today.

Let's begin by framing some basic questions: Who called the Council and why? Where was it held? Who attended? What did the Council do?

Let's Have A Council!

Pope John XXIII announced his decision to call a Council on January 25, 1959. It was a surprise to everyone, including it seems, to the Pope himself. He had been Pope for less than one hundred days and there was no crisis or heresy (in church history the usual reasons for calling a Council) that seemed to need the attention of a Council. In fact, Pope John would later say that the idea of a Council came to him "like a flash of heavenly light."

Trembling a little with emotion but at the same time humbly resolute, I announce to you a double celebration which I propose to undertake: a diocesan synod for the City [of Rome] and a general Council for the universal Church.

That "general Council for the universal Church" is what we know as Vatican Council II.

Before the Council Opens

Preparation for the Council was lengthy and much was done including writing the drafts of what would eventually become the official sixteen documents of the Council. Also, Pope John used this time to explain his hopes for what the Council would mean to the life of the Church.

Hopes and Goals of the Council

One goal was that the Council be a "new Pentecost"; that the power of the Holy Spirit as reflected in that "flash of heavenly light" would guide the Council and bring forth good fruit. The Council was meant, as well, to be a means of inner renewal – both for individuals and for the Church as a whole. It was to be a Council **for** the Church as well as a Council **about** the Church. The Council was to "read the signs of the times" and respond to them. That is, the Council was to engage the modern world in a positive way.

Also important was Pope John's strong commitment to ecumenism; that is, the restoration of unity of all Christians. This commitment to unity was uppermost as he announced his desire for a Council that would reach out to "the faithful of the separated Churches."

The Council Opens; Who Attends

The Council's first session opened on October 11, 1962 when 2500 persons gathered in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Attending were bishops from around the world, superiors of religious orders, and theologians who worked alongside the bishops. During the Council, members of Protestant and Orthodox eastern Churches were invited as Observers, and, as Auditors, 80 Catholic laypersons.

The Torch Is Passed

Pope John XXIII saw the first session of the Council he envisioned, but after his death in 1963, Pope Paul VI saw it through to its concluding session in December 1965.

A Word on What They Did

The task of the assembled bishops was to draft, debate, revise, and approve the sixteen documents that we have today. All of the documents were overwhelmingly approved by the bishops, with final approval of Pope Paul VI, and then officially promulgated.

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Additional Information on Documents of Vatican II:
<http://www.vatican.va/>;

View *Vatican II: Inside the Council* Episode One: History of Vatican II and Its Genesis

Time Warner Channel 97 ♦ Cablevision Channel 30 ♦ Verizon Fios On Demand (no cost)

When	What
Jan. 1959	John XXIII : wants a council
July 1959	Decision to call council Vatican II
June 1961	Central Prep. Commissions-work begins
Oct. 1962	Opening of Council in St. Peter's Basilica
Dec. 1962	Last session of first period
1962/63	Preparation for second session
June 1963	John XIII dies; Pope Paul VI elected
Sept. 1963	Opening of second session
Dec. 1963	2 nd session ends;
	Sacrosanctum Concilium approved

When	What
1964	Opening of 3 rd period of the council
Nov 14-21	“Black Week”
Nov. 21	3 rd session ends; LG, UR, OE approved
Sept. 1965	4 th session of council opens
Oct. 1965	CD; PC, OT, NA approved
Nov. 1965	DV; and AA approved
Dec. 1965	Concluding session.
	G et S, AG, PO, DH approved.
Dec. 8	Final celebration; message to humanity read