

***Back to the Basics Program***  
***The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)***

I. Key Facts

- A. “Vatican II” was the twenty-first (21<sup>st</sup>) ecumenical council of the Church.
- B. The council was announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959 and formally opened in 1962. Upon Pope John’s death, it was continued by his successor, Pope Paul VI, and formally completed in 1968.
- C. Unlike past councils, Vatican II was not held to combat contemporary heresies or deal with doctrinal questions. It was a *pastoral* council with the goal of how to best convey the truth of Christ to the modern world. The pope desired to “throw open the doors and renew the Church,” using the term *Aggiornamento*, which means “bringing up to date.”
- D. For the first time in history, non-Catholic Christian churches and alliances and Catholic lay organizations were permitted to send observers.
- E. Approximately 2500 bishops participated over the four years that the council was in session. Four future pontiffs took part in the council's sessions:
  - 1. Cardinal Giovanni Montini – Pope Paul VI
  - 2. Bishop Albino Luciani – Pope John Paul I
  - 3. Bishop Karol Wojtyła – Pope John Paul II
  - 4. Monsignor Joseph Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI

II. Council Agenda and Proceedings

- A. Broad spectrum of discussions included:
  - 1. Modern communications media
  - 2. Relations between Christians and Jews
  - 3. Religious freedom
  - 4. Role of laity
  - 5. Liturgical worship
  - 6. Relationships with other Christians and with non-Christians
  - 7. Role and education of priests and bishops
- B. The challenge faced by the council fathers was to reconcile the desires of those who often sought wholesale, sweeping change in every part of the Church with those who desired to retain the ancient customs and traditions of the faith.

C. Vatican II produced a total of sixteen (16) documents approved by the Pope:

1. Four constitutions
2. Three declarations
3. Nine decrees

D. Once voted on, and then approved and promulgated by the pope, such conciliar documents became part of the Magisterium of the Church, requiring loyal submission of the will and the intellect of all faithful Catholics.

### III. Key Changes Wrought by the Council

A. Restoration of the diaconate as a ministry of service to the faithful

B. Expanded use of the laity in liturgical celebrations and parish life

1. Lectors or Commentators
2. Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist
3. Parish councils or advisory boards
4. Religious instruction programs – PSR, RCIA, NFP, etc.
5. Diocesan tribunals

C. Celebration of all of the sacraments in the vernacular language

D. Modification of the Eucharistic fasting period to one hour prior to reception of the sacrament

E. Reinstatement of the catechumenate, which is a multi-stage, formal process (now known as RCIA) for those adults who seek formal instruction in the faith

F. Numerous changes in the celebration of the Mass, including the specific prayers, the structure, and the general flow of the celebration

G. Emphasis on the Eucharistic celebration as a Christian “Passover” meal.

H. Expansion of musical styles and formats beyond the ancient Gregorian Creed and use of the pipe organ

I. Development of a more nuanced understanding of the phrase, “outside the Church there is no salvation...”

J. Greater understanding of the notion of collegiality of the world’s bishops in union with pope

K. Recognition and respect for other Christian groups as members of the Body of Christ, at the same time drawing a distinction between Catholics engaging in ecumenical *activity* versus ecumenical *dialogue*

#### IV. Documents of the Second Vatican Council

- A. *Dei Verbum* - DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION
- B. *Lumen Gentium* - DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH
- C. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* - CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY
- D. *Gaudium Et Spes* - PASTORAL CONSTITUTION: ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD
- E. *Gravissimum Educationis* - DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
- F. *Dignitatis Humanae* - DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
- G. *Nostra Aetate* – DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
- H. *Optatam Totius* - DECREE ON PRIESTLY TRAINING
- I. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* - DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY
- J. *Christus Dominus* - DECREE ON THE PASTORAL OFFICE OF BISHOPS IN THE CHURCH
- K. *Unitatis Redintegratio* - DECREE ON ECUMENISM
- L. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* - DECREE ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF THE EASTERN RITE
- M. *Ad Gentes* - DECREE ON THE MISSION ACTIVITY OF THE CHURCH
- N. *Inter Mirifica* - DECREE ON THE MEDIA OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
- O. *Perfectae Caritatis* – DECREE ON ADAPTATION AND RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE
- P. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* – DECREE ON THE MINISTRY AND LIFE OF PRIESTS