

CATHOLIC MINISTERS FOR CHURCH RENEWAL  
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**Statement  
on the Forthcoming 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Declaration of Vatican II**

November 28, 2009



January 25, 2009 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Blessed Pope John XXIII declaring to a surprised world that he had decided to convene an Ecumenical Council.

His prophetic vision, and what followed, marked the beginning of a reconciliation between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern world. Known for his warmth, humor, and approachability, 'good' Pope John was impatient with empty traditionalism. He wanted the Council to offer the tradition of Catholic teaching to the modern world in a language that would be meaningful and relevant.

He emphatically disagreed with the "prophets of gloom", who distrusted contemporary culture and saw the modern world heading to disaster. For him, the church was not a museum of antiques, but a living sign of Christ in service of the human family.

Bishops who gathered in Rome at the start of the Council said: "...Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ." (*Message to Humanity*)

Sustaining the call to renewal of this prophetic Council serves as a major goal of *Catholic Ministers for Church Renewal*, a group of archdiocesan ministers (lay ecclesial ministers, religious, deacons and priests).

***We thank God for the gift of the Second Vatican Council for our church and our world, and we affirm its call to gospel renewal with gratitude and with hope.***

**Gratitude for Vatican II**

From our perspective as active ministers in our local church, we are grateful for these gifts of the Second Vatican Council:

- An ecclesiology, rooted in the *Constitution on the Church*, expressed in biblical terms as the People of God and the Body of Christ, and also implicit in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. This was a Copernican shift away from the juridical 'perfect society' embodied in the Council of Trent. It ended five hundred years of vertical ecclesiology which shaped every aspect of church life and ministry around clerical and hierarchical preeminence.

- A theological view of revelation as God's self-disclosure initiating a dialogue with us, the testimony of which, when passed on orally, becomes Tradition, and, when recorded in writing, becomes Scripture. Thanks to the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, advances have been made both in scripture research among scholars and in Bible study and reading among priests and people in the pew. Thanks, also, to the Constitution's perspective, revelation's 'incarnational' quality is underscored as taking place in cultural contexts, finding eventual fulfillment in a human life – Jesus Christ.

- Reform of the liturgy that has been actual, if at times slow, yet a reform that has resulted in a genuine initial awakening of the laity to their full baptismal identity and their call to "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy.

- The interpretation, underscored both in the *Constitution on the Church* and in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, emphasizing the call of laity as apostles to transform our world in God's reign of love.

- Development of a theology of lay ecclesial ministry, based in the *Constitution on the Church* and enfolded in our U.S. Bishops' *Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord*.



- Recognition of the role of priests as vital for assuring sacramental celebrations, while, at the same time, having a definitive relational dimension, in building up the unity of the church community in the harmony of diverse vocations and services – acknowledged in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and in John Paul II's *Pastores Do Vobis*.

- Affirmation of the role of bishops, described in the *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church*, in serving as authentic shepherds, in building up the unity of our church, in ministering as successors of the apostles in their own right (not just as legates of the Vatican), and in promoting collegial structures for the life of universal, diocesan, and parish communities.

- Renewal of those serving the church as vowed religious in the charism of their founding leaders so as to promote the *aggiornamento* of the gospel, thanks to the *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*.

- Promotion of vibrant and widespread commitment to peace and justice ministries in Church life (that is, to Catholic social teaching, including respect for the unborn and the dying, respect for immigrants and ethnically diverse groups, responsibility for the poor, and care for the

environment) as a result of the vision of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* and the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*.

- Advances in forthright and amicable ecumenical and interfaith relations – at the international, national, and local levels - with consequent substantive declarations, communications, and collaborative action, thanks to the *Decree on Ecumenism* and the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*.
- Engagement in dialogue with culture and history, as warmly proposed in *Gaudium et Spes*.

### **Hope for the Future**

From our perspective as ministers in our local church, we hold these hopes for the continuation and advance of Vatican II's legacy:



- Continued renewal of the liturgy, so that the priesthood of the faithful is recognized and celebrated as the assembly gathers, in the life of the community, and in the witness of this priestly people. Encouragement of appropriate lay preaching in accord with liturgical norms, archdiocesan policy, and canon law; and support for efforts to restore women's stories to the Lectionary and to the collection of Scripture readings for Sunday Mass.
- Heightened emphasis on the role of sacred scripture in the personal prayer life and public worship of the church, which draws upon scripture's riches for guidance and inspiration and which emphasizes the historical-critical method to grow in understanding and appreciation of God's word.
- Renewed efforts for outreach ministries in our parishes, and for even more earnest advocacy of peace and justice, and the defense of human dignity.
- Sustained acknowledgement, inclusion, and development of ethnic and racial diversity in church life, with a prevailing cultural community's support for people of diverse culture to appreciate differences, resolve conflicts, and build on commonalities in mutual openness to inclusion and welcome.
- Recognition by church leaders and parishioners that everyone is called to ministry through baptism and confirmation.
- Recognition of qualified lay ecclesial ministers through an Archdiocesan designated ritual celebration of commissioning in parishes they serve, at which pastors or pastoral life coordinators preside, to "both instruct the community [on the importance of the minister's role in the life of the community] and spiritually strengthen the lay ecclesial minister." (*Co-Workers in the Vineyard: A*

*Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, p. 59; see also *National Directory for Catechists*, Section 55)

- Openness of our bishops to discussion of the ordination of married men of ‘proven faith’ and to an expanded role for women in our church.
- Development of church structures for holding accountable those bishops who repeatedly reassign predator priests. Creation of structures to deal in a pastorally appropriate way with priests who otherwise seriously abuse their power, and structures that seek justice for all parties involved.
- Honest dialogue about differing models of priestly ministry in our archdiocese, and about effective collaboration between clergy and laity in our local church.
- Openness of bishops to reconsider the discipline of mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests.
- Promoting language in official church statements and in parish preaching and communications that avoids judgment and recognizes the dignity of homosexuals.
- Willingness of church leaders - in due course – to discuss questions of sexual ethics being raised today.
- Deepened expression of ecumenical and interfaith relations at the parish, archdiocesan, and international levels.
- Affirmation of church leaders (ordained and non-ordained) who treat people as thinking adults and who so live the gospel that the very witness of their lives is the ground of their authority, leaders who unfailingly refuse to exercise power as control; and affirmation of lay people who are confident, because of their baptism, to use their gifts responsibly for the vision and future direction of the church, including a role in policy making.

### **Vatican II and Parish Life**

We observe that in our experience, fifty years after the declaration of Vatican Council II, parishioners are generally not aware of the Council or of its implications for church renewal. We note this regarding children, youth, young adults, and adults.



It is our hope, then, that parishes and the archdiocese will use the anniversary of the declaration of the Vatican Council, as well as the anniversary of the Council itself (2012 - 2015) to promote faith formation on the Council and its meaning for our life as God’s People.

Central to this, of course, is familiarity with *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (edited by Austin Flannery, Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975).

Some possible helpful adult, young adult, and senior high faith formation resources are:

A) Huebsch, Bill. *Vatican II in Plain English: The Collection* (Pine City, MN: The Pastoral Planning Team, [PastoralPlanning@aol.com](mailto:PastoralPlanning@aol.com), 612-220-6943)

In three books (separately priced): *The Council* (the church at the eve of the Council); *The Constitutions* (paraphrased texts of the Constitutions on the Liturgy, the Church, Divine Revelation, and the Church in the Modern World); and *Decrees and Declarations* (paraphrased texts for the 9 decrees and 3 declarations). Reads like poetry. A thorough and readable telling of the story of the landmark 1962-1965 Vatican Council, which changed the face of our church dramatically.

B) Madges, William and Michael Daly. *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories* (New London, CT: Twenty Third publications, 2003)

Introduction to Vatican II and why it remains so significant for our lives, by way of men and women who participated in the Council. Insightful introduction to the Council's major themes. Helpful for parish leaders and teams.



C) Paulist Press's eight-book series, entitled "Rediscovering Vatican II", edited by Christopher M. Bellitto.

The series seeks to inform people on the origins and developments of the Council's key documents, how they have been received worldwide since the council's conclusion, and how to take stock of the council's reforms and paradigm shifts. Individual books in the series are:

- *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostrae Aetate* by Cardinal Edward Cassidy
- *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* by Norman Tanner, SJ
- *The Laity and Christian Education: Apostolicam Actuositatem, Gravissimum Educationis* by Delores Leckey
- *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium*, by Rita Ferrone
- *Scripture: Dei Verbum* by Ronald Witherup, SS
- *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* by Richard Gaillardetz
- *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae* by Jeffrey Gross and Stephen Bevans
- *Religious life and Priesthood: Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis* by Maryanne Confoy, RSC

D) Tanner, Norman. *The Councils of the Church: A Short History*. (New York: Crossroad/Herder and Herder, 2001)

E) *The Faithful Revolution*. (RCL Benziger, ISBN:0-88347-900-1, [cservice@rclbenziger.com](mailto:cservice@rclbenziger.com))

A series of five one-hour video tapes with study guides. Examines the dramatic changes initiated by Vatican II and its continuing effects on history and our modern world. Chronicles the men and women, ordained leaders and laity, who "opened the window of renewal and reform" in our church. A must see for parish leadership, adult formation, the catechumenate, and senior high faith formation.

F) Sullivan, Maureen, *101 Questions and Answers on Vatican II*. (New York: Paulist Press, 2002)

Informative and accessible guide to everything you want to know about Vatican II.

This fiftieth anniversary offers an opportunity for preaching about the Council and for teaching: general adult formation forums, possibly utilizing a theologian from Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry; small group discussions, study groups, discussion sessions for youth, young adults, or adults making use of other printed resources or videos/DVDs, It is a very 'teachable moment'.

### **For the Future**



For us *Catholic Ministers for Church Renewal*, the anniversary makes us hopeful that in our local church we might become even more fully a servant church that is humble, one that does not depend on the powers of this world. An inclusive church that gives space to differing perspectives. A church that transmits courage, worth, and welcoming, especially to any who feel marginalized, disrespected, or unheard.

That is our hope for the future, nourished by fifty post-conciliar years.

Like those prophetic twenty five hundred bishops, and the lay men and women auditors, and the observers from the twenty eight Orthodox and Protestant traditions who gathered with them at the outset of the Council, we pray that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we too may renew ourselves as a church so as to be increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ.

"Come Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of your love, and renew the face of the earth."

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