“The best preparation for the new millennium ... is a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church.”

Pope John Paul II

Vatican Council II was the twenty-first general, or ecumenical, council of the Church, meeting from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965 in four separate sessions. This council, initially called by Pope John XXIII, is regarded by many as the most significant religious event since the Reformation in the 16th century and certainly the most important in the 20th century. More than 2600 Bishops from all over the world gathered, not to combat a heresy which threatened the unity of the Church, as previous councils traditionally had done, but to rethink how the Catholic Church can best reflect the truth of the Gospel in the 20th century and beyond.

Pope Paul VI, elected following the death of John XXIII, in his opening address to the second session in 1963, listed four aims of the council: the development of a clearer idea of the Church, its renewal, the unity of all Christians, and a dialogue between the Church and the world. In addressing those goals, the council produced 16 documents. Coming to terms with key themes in those documents will be the objective of this class.

Attached to this Preview Sheet are some selections from the documents of Vatican II. Please read through the selections carefully and come prepared to discuss your responses to the questions that follow each topic on the selection sheets.

There are also some notes in the Class Handouts module on Group 16’s special page of our website.

In years past we have always required our candidates to purchase a copy of the Documents of Vatican II. Due to a very unusual set of circumstances involving Hurricane Sandy disabling the New Jersey publishing house, the Documents are out of print at this time. This is hard to believe. The good news is that they are readily available online at the Vatican website. So, to give you a little practice in finding specific passages, please do the following exercise:

1. Go to www.vatican.va
2. Click on Vatican: the Holy See
3. Click on English or whatever language you are most comfortable reading
4. Go to the bottom of the page and click on Resource Library
5. Click on II Vatican Council
6. The documents are all listed by their Latin names

Once you have arrived, navigate the documents to find these answers:
1. How many Constitutions are there? How many Declarations? Decrees?
2. What is the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation called in Latin? What do you think the Latin title means? (Hint: the Latin title is always taken from the first few words of the document)
3. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is called *Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC)*. Article #1 (some prefer to say paragraph instead of article) lists some general goals of the Council. What are they?

4. Go to *Gaudium et Spes (GS)*, which is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. What does the often quoted very first sentence say?

5. Go to GS #4. What must the Church do to be a vibrant force in the modern world?

6. Where can you read about the role of the Laity?

7. What topic is addressed in *Lumen Gentium* (LG) #30-38?

8. What topic is presented at length in LG #52-69?

9. What general topic is *Ad Gentes* about?

10. If you had to make a guess, which of the 16 documents would generally be considered the premier document?

Keep in mind that on October 11, 2012 the Church opened the Year of Faith on the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Council. Pope Benedict XVI, at that time, and joined by Bishop Malloy, ardently encouraged Catholics to study the Documents of Vatican II. And so we are doing just that. As you can see, it’s not easy, but we will make progress and, with prayer and perseverance, come to a deeper appreciation and love for the Catholic Church.

Attached you will find the *Selections* for your preparation. Also attached is a list of the 16 documents with both English and Latin titles.

Please print and bring to class the *notes* for this class in the Year 1 Class Handouts module on the Ministry Formation Classes page.

May God bless your studies.

*John McGrath*
Topic 1  The Nature of Liturgy

SC 6. Just as Christ was sent by the Father, so also He sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. This He did that, by preaching the gospel to every creature, they might proclaim that the Son of God, by His death and resurrection, had freed us from the power of Satan and from death, and brought us into the kingdom of His Father. His purpose also was that they might accomplish the work of salvation which they had proclaimed, by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves. Thus by baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him.

SC 10. Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper.

1. How does baptism “plunge” us into the paschal mystery of Christ?

2. In what way do we celebrate the paschal mystery in the Eucharistic Liturgy?

3. How do/can we reproduce the dying and rising of Christ in our daily living as faithful Catholics?

4. What does it means to say that the Eucharistic liturgy is the source and the summit of Christian life?

Topic 2  Christ Present in the Liturgy

SC 7. To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross", but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

1. What are the various ways in which the faithful can encounter Christ in the liturgy?

2. How do these “presences” help to deepen our experience of and encounter with Christ in the liturgy?

Topic 3  Lay Participation in the Liturgy

SC 14. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation
by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.

SC 26. Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops.

1. How can Catholics achieve full, conscious and active participation in liturgy?

2. What does this document suggest in acknowledging the “priesthood” of all the baptized?

3. This document insists that liturgical celebrations “are not private functions but celebrations of the church” (SC 26). What does this suggest about the communal nature of liturgy?

4. Why does it say that the liturgy is not a “private function”?

Topic 4 Scripture in the Liturgy

SC 24. Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony.

SC 51. The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.

1. How are the Scriptures opened up “more lavishly” in the liturgy today?

2. How can / does the Church promote a “warm and living love for Scripture”?
Topic 1 The Nature of the Church

LG 1. Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.

LG 4. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits... Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse.

LG 5. From this source [the Risen Christ] the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King.

LG 39. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification". However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others.

LG 48. ... for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has
the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God.

1. What does it mean to say that the Church is a sacrament in LG 1?

2. How do you see the light of Christ reflected in the life of the Church? How is the Church an “initial budding forth” of the Kingdom of God (see LG 1)

3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church (see LG 4-5)?

4. What are the hierarchical and charismatic gifts that the Holy Spirit equips and directs in LG 4? What might this suggest about the role and function of the laity in the Church?

5. At the time of the Council, what would be unusual about speaking of “the universal call to holiness” in LG 39?

6. What’s implied in referring to the Church as “the pilgrim Church” in LG 48?

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**Topic 2  The Church and Ecumenism**

**LG 8.** This Church [of Christ] constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.

**UR 1.** The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.

**UR 3.** Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.

The brethren divided from us also use many liturgical actions of the Christian religion. These most certainly can truly engender a life of grace in ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community. These liturgical actions must be regarded as capable of giving access to the community of salvation.
It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.

1. *Is Ecumenism admitting that all Christian religions are basically the same? Does it compromise the distinctive truth of Catholicism?*

2. *What are some ways that this parish contributes to ecumenical unity among Christians?*

**Topic 3 The Church and Non-Christian Religions**

**NA2.** The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

**LG16.** Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

1. *What do these passages have to say about the salvation of non-Christians?*

2. *Should Catholics attempt to evangelize non-Christians?*
The Church in the Modern World

GS 44. Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as an historical reality, and to recognize her good influence, so the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity.

The experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened, these profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too.

GS 90. The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.

GS 80. While extravagant sums are being spent for the furnishing of ever new weapons, an adequate remedy cannot be provided for the multiple miseries afflicting the whole modern world. Disagreements between nations are not really and radically healed; on the contrary, they spread the infection to other parts of the earth. New approaches based on reformed attitudes must be taken to remove this trap and to emancipate the world from its crushing anxiety through the restoration of genuine peace.

Therefore, we say it again: the arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree. It is much to be feared that if this race persists, it will eventually spawn all the lethal ruin whose path it is now making ready.

1. How would you characterize the relationship of the Church to the modern world and American culture?
2. Should the Church be more/less involved in politics?

The Role of the Laity

AA 2. They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, in
accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.

AA 3. The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ’s Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world. The sacraments, however, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.

LG 30-31. But there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission. Due to the special circumstances of our time the foundations of this doctrine must be more thoroughly examined. For their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind... LG31. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

1. Do you think of the laity as participating in the saving mission of the Church?

2. How has lay involvement in the Church changed in the last 50 years since AA was written?

**Topic 3 Religious Freedom**

DH 2. This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

1. For centuries the Church reflected a perspective that if you have the absolute truth then you have a right and duty to impose it on others. Why does this document say otherwise?

2. What does it mean to have freedom of conscience?