“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 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*