

## How has Vatican II touched you?

The Year of Faith celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and invites us to study its wisdom. This short course explores the four main documents that renewed the Church—Constitutions on the Sacred Liturgy, the Church, Divine Revelation, and the Church in the Modern World. The renewal the Council began continues in our parishes and hearts.

**Read the statements below. Check any that express ways the Council touches you. Write your own statement(s).**

★ We live in the inexhaustible and dynamic mystery of God's creative love.

★ Our baptisms call us to holiness, to live Jesus' mission in the world.

★ The baptized form the Church, the people of God, Body of Christ, temple of the Spirit.

★ We practice full, active, conscious participation in liturgy and Church life.

★ We live in solidarity with the afflicted and act and advocate for the common good.

★ Conscience is primary, the ultimate sanctuary where we make decisions.

★ Christian tradition makes progress in our world through our spiritual experience, contemplation, and prayer.

★ We respect and learn from other religious traditions.

★ The Holy Spirit works among us. We listen to signs of the times.



## Session 1

# Cultivating the Wisdom of Vatican II

**H**ow do we cultivate the wisdom of Vatican II today? How can we keep its spirit alive? The 50th anniversary of the council calls us to reclaim the Spirit-filled renewal the Council set in motion and to envision its evolving future in our lives and world.

**Wisely** the Council recognizes that baptism calls every Christian to holiness and to live the mission of Jesus in the world.

**Wisely** the Council empowers full, active, conscious participation in the liturgy.

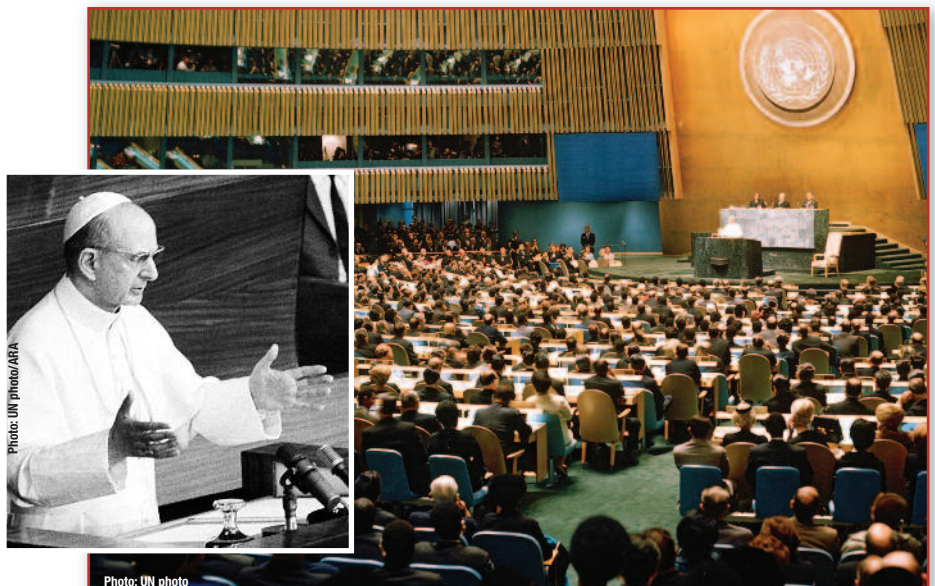
**Wisely** the Council affirms that Christian Tradition makes progress in the world not only through the teaching of the bishops who succeed the apostles but through the prayer and pondering in our hearts of every believer and through our experience of spiritual realities (*Dei Verbum* #8).

**Wisely** the Council insists, "The joys and sorrows, griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially the poor and afflicted, are the joys and sorrow, griefs and anx-



ieties of the followers of Christ" (Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* #1).

**C**hurch officials often label our world today as secular; indeed it is no longer holy and Roman as Europe was in medieval Christendom. Although political leaders ask God to bless America repeatedly in our public discourse, we value separation of Church and state in the United States. In our world 68% of the nations are democracies, while the Church preserves its monarchical structure.



Pope Paul VI at the United Nations, October, 1965



Throughout the 28-year papacy of John Paul II, the Church grew increasingly centralized, curtailing the collegiality among bishops that Vatican II envisioned. National bishops' conferences produced their own pastorals in the 1980s. The U.S. bishops wrote pastorals on economics and on peace; the Latin and Central American bishops meeting at Medellin and Puebla committed to an option for the poor. Today pastorals require members' unanimous approval and Rome's agreement (*1998, Apostolos Suos*). The Vatican today continues John Paul II's practice of appointing like-minded conservatives as bishops in dioceses throughout the world.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, many Catholics feel torn. They live in the tension between leaders reclaiming the Church of the past and laity wanting the renewal of Vatican II to go farther. Because the Church had changed little between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Second Vatican Council

(1962-65), going back to pre-council times returns the Church to the late Middle Ages.

The pray, pay, and obey Catholics of the 1950s have evolved into dream, dare, and do Catholics today. Since the Council ended on December 8, 1965, two generations have learned new science, critical thinking, and Catholic social teaching in our schools and universities. Many bring these skills and insights to serve our parish communities, to live the gospels, and continue Jesus' mission in the world. In the U.S. we work to give all people voice and rights; we elect our leaders; we participate in making policy and governance. As Vatican II taught us, we are the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ in the world. The Holy Spirit lives, breathes, and speaks in us as in our bishops.

## Reflect

- What does the Second Vatican Council stand for in my experience?
- Why am I staying in the Church, or why am I leaving? What tests me?
- When I talk about the Church, who am I talking about? Do I include myself?
- Where do I meet God in my life?
- What are my longings? What stays alive in these longings?
- What do I do for myself to stay awake to God's presence within me, beyond me, among us?