



The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) began in October 1962. Over 2500 Bishops and senior church figures from around the world gathered in Rome for four autumn sessions over a four-year period. This council was an **ecumenical** council in that it involved Catholic bishops from around the world as well as a number of observers from other faiths.

Pope John XXIII intended that the Council would “throw open the windows” for a Church that had experienced very little change in over 400 years. Words like *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* were popularised as Pope John initiated both a return to the sources of the Church’s life (*ressourcement*) through the wisdom and writings of the apostles and early Church Fathers, and an updating of practices and procedures within the Church (*aggiornamento*)

Influenced by the lessons of WW2 and in the midst of incredible social, political and technological change, Pope John called for the church to engage with the modern world and to read “the signs of the time”.

After just one session of the Council, Pope John XXIII died. Pope Paul VI was elected as his successor and continued the work of the Council. Despite all the obstacles, Pope Paul VI deftly steered the Second Vatican Council to its conclusion.

In all, the Council was responsible for 16 documents. A number of these documents were **Decrees** (8) and some were **Declarations** (4), but the most significant were four **Constitutions** that would define or restate Church doctrine in a new way. These were:

- The Church: *Lumen Gentium*
- The Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et Spes*
- Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*
- Revelation: *Dei Verbum*

For the average Catholic, the most notable changes coming from Vatican II could be seen in the liturgy. The Mass could be celebrated in the language of the people (vernacular) and the priest would face the people while celebrating Mass, highlighting the communal nature of Eucharist. The rites of the other sacraments were also revised ensuring that they were communal celebrations, included the Word of God, and noting the primacy of the sacrament of Baptism.

More detailed information on the Second Vatican Council can be found at:

- <http://vatican2voice.org/toc.htm>
- <http://www.resourcemelb.catholic.edu.au/object.cfm?o=131&pid=684&showrm=true&uptam=false>