Workshops on Vatican II
The Story of the Second Vatican Council
VAT401

by Bill Huebsch

General outline
(see below for details and handouts)

General Notes for all the workshops in this series:
- This workshop should fit into about a two hour window of time, depending on the length of the prayer and group discussions.
- For the discussions, you may wish to invite participants to talk first in smaller groups before inviting anyone to comment in the large group. We advise you not to omit the large group conversations as they are a rich experience for all present.
- The room can be set up either with tables around which participants sit, or in theater style. In either case, you do need an LCD projector and laptop to use the PowerPoint.
- The talking points are in the Notes pages of the PowerPoint. To go there, click on view and choose “notes.” You may print in this mode and use the pages as your guide.
- The prayer resource and handout is included in this packet.
- You may wish to read Book One of Vatican II in Plain English before presenting this workshop. Many of the details which will add color and dimension to your presentations will be found there. You can obtain copies at PastoralPlanning.com. Follow the Vatican II links on the home page.

The Story of Vatican II

Open the workshop:
Convene the group, welcoming all warmly. Open with a prayer of your choosing, but we recommend you keep it relatively brief. [Handout included below:] A suggested prayer and faith sharing can be found below. You may reproduce this for use within your group. Don’t be tempted to skip this sharing. Opening our hearts to one another is how we open them to Christ.

The first conversation:
After prayer, lead a large group (or small groups, leading to the large group) conversation on people’s memories of the church on the eve of Vatican II – or for those born after 1960, their recollection of what they’ve been told or learned about the church in that time. Encourage people to share their treasured memories, as well as those
things about which their memory may be less fond. Record a note about each on a flip chart. This helps people listen well to each other.

Let this sharing go on as long as needed. You may wish to simply ask people to complete this sentence: **If it weren’t for Vatican II, I’d…**

**The presentation:**
Using the notes on the PowerPoint presentation and your own knowledge, lead the group through “the story” of the Council. Allow questions as you go, but don’t let them swamp your progress. You may need to take a comfort break part way through.

In preparing for this, don’t hesitate to give our team a call for a little coaching. We’re standing by to assist you. It’s free and there is no limit on time. Call toll free in the US and Canada at 877-944-5844, 8 AM to 5 PM weekdays, excluding holidays.

**Deeper study of Pope John’s opening speech:**
[Handout included below:] Give everyone a copy of the handout giving Pope John’s opening speech. Invite small groups to read it in sections and share with the larger group what they hear and see in this amazing speech. This opened the door to reform and led the way to the modern church. You may also wish to use this as part of your closing prayer for this workshop.

**Method for studying Pope John’s speech:**
Read each stanza faith statements aloud, rotating readers with each stanza. Work in small groups if your numbers are large. Pause where marked for group discussion. The process of reading these together is very important for your group. This movement around your circle begins a process of verbalizing which will help your group delve more deeply into their own hearing and sharing.

**Close the workshop:**
When finished, invite a large (or small) group conversation once again, asking the questions:
- What strikes you most strongly in this story?
- What particular point touched your heart?
- What did you not hear that you thought you would?
End with a simple prayer of thanks, a shared meal, the Liturgy, or a party.
Praying with Blessed John XXIII

Holy Optimism about These Times

by Bill Huebsch

Begin with the Sign of the Cross
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: (Leader alone, in these or similar words :) Friends, we are called to develop an inner sense of optimism about the times in which we live, drawn from our belief that the Holy Spirit speaks in our lives. Let us pray for the grace that God is leading us to what is good.

Prayer:
Oh Divine Source of Wisdom and Insight,
help us to trust in the Spirit who is active in our midst.
Teach us to discern what is of you
so that we might follow it earnestly and trust in it fully. Amen.

The First Reading (Read aloud, or invite a reader to do so.)
On being elected pope, John was very conscious that he had a rare opportunity to assist the peoples of the world to live together in peace and to advance the cause of the gospels. He strongly desired that his pontificate be one known for compassion and the open arms of Christ to the world, on which he meditated daily.

The idea of calling a council, only the twenty-first such gathering in the nearly 2000 year long history of the Christian church, therefore, seemed to him to be that program of work which would meet his desires. But the idea did not arise in him without proper discernment and development. It was not a “private revelation” which came to him.

For many years in Rome, since the beginning of the reign of Pope Pius XII, there had been talk of a council. Early in his own pontificate, Pope John had talked about it with a few close advisors. Some were in favor, others opposed. John kept the idea top secret for several months, speaking only to those who could help him be certain the council was of God, and not an ego trip of his own. He wished to submit to the Lord’s will, and to be of great care in discernment.
He had learned to test ideas that came to him in prayer, but when tested and found to be of God, to trust them and to organize his life around them. He knew self-deception was possible, even for the pope, and was careful not to allow that to interfere. Ideas for him were to be evaluated according to their persistence and the inner sense of rightness and peace they produced. In this way, he was well practiced in the Ignatian School of the Spiritual Exercises.


Faith Sharing: (Here direct the group to share in twos or threes for about 5 minutes.) How does God speak to you in prayer? How do you discern the voice of God in the din of modern “voices”?

The Second Reading, in Pope John’s own words.
(Read aloud, or invite a reader to do so.)
In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, it sometimes happens that we hear certain opinions which disturb us - opinions expressed by people who, though fired with a commendable zeal for religion, are lacking in sufficient prudence and judgment in their evaluation of events. They can see nothing but calamity and disaster in the present state of the world. They say over and over that this modern age of ours, in comparison with past ages, is definitely deteriorating. One would think from their attitude that history, that great teacher of life, had taught them nothing. They seem to imagine that in the days of the earlier councils everything was as it should be so far as doctrine and morality and the Church’s rightful liberty were concerned.

We feel that we must disagree with these prophets of doom, who are always forecasting worse disasters, as though the end of the world were at hand.

Present indications are that the human family is on the threshold of a new era. We must recognize here the hand of God who, as the years roll by, is directing men’s efforts, whether they realize it or not, towards the fulfillment of the inscrutable designs of His providence, wisely arranging everything, even adverse human fortune, for the church’s good.

--This quote taken from the Opening Speech at Vatican II found in The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII, TPS Press, Washington, DC, 1064 pp. 426-427.

Activity Suggestions
(Offer the group suggestions for actions as part of their prayer.)
1. What ideas have you had lately, not major ideas such as calling a council, but ordinary, everyday ideas: to invite someone to your home, to have a talk with your child, to pick up a gift for your spouse, to ask for a new assignment, or to read a certain book? What intuitions have come to you lately?
2. How have you treated these ideas and intuitions? How have you discerned them? What ideas and intuitions have you ignored or been too busy to notice? Which ones have been inaudible because of too much other noise in your life?
3. Pause often throughout your day to listen for ideas and intuitions about your home, school, parish, workplace, or nation and world. What do you hear? How do you discern what you hear to be certain it is of God, not of darkness?

4. Talk with a friend about how you discern God’s voice in your life, about how God speaks to you in prayer.

**Reading from Scripture:** *(Read aloud, or invite a reader to do so.)*

My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.

1 John 4:7-10 –The Message

**Breaking Open the Word**

What words or phrases struck you in this reading?
How do these words touch your life?
What hope do these words bring to you?

**Closing Prayer:** *(Pray aloud together.)*

Of Great Divine Spirit of Truth, you dwell within us at all times guiding us to test the word we hear to clarify your voice.
Guide our ears to hear you more clearly and our eyes to see you.
Guides our hearts to find you in the din of modern life.
Give us the grace to hear your word the wisdom to discern it and the courage to follow it. Amen.
Address of Pope John XIII
at opening of the
Second Vatican Council
October 11, 1962

Paraphrase:
Bill Huebsch
The original full text of this speech is also provided below.

Artwork:
Mark Hakomaki

The entire Church rejoices today because that longed-for moment has finally arrived when, under the watchful eye of the Virgin Mother of God, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is opened, here beside the tomb of St. Peter.

The previous ecumenical councils of the Church, some 20 in number, plus many other regional ones, all prove clearly the vigor of the Catholic Church and are recorded as shining lights in the Church's history.

We take into account the opportunities, as well as errors of our time and we trust that the Church's teachings will be presented exceptionally well to all people.

It is natural for us to look back into our history today and listen again to the voices of Church leadership, both in the East and the West,
where, beginning in the 4th century, 
councils like this have gathered.
But despite the joys of these previous councils, 
there has also been a trail of sorrow and trial, 
just as Simeon foretold to Mary 
that Jesus would be the source 
of both the fall and the rise of many.
What confronts the Church today, 
therefore, is not new: 
those who are in Christ enjoy light, 
goodness, 
order, 
and peace.
Those who oppose Christ sink into confusion, 
bitter human relations, 
and the constant danger of war.

Ecumenical councils like this, 
whenever they gather, 
are an occasion for the celebration once again 
of the unity between Christ 
and the Church.
They lead to a more clear announcement of the truth, 
to guidance for people in everyday life, 
and to the strengthening of spiritual energy 
for goodness’ sake.
We now stand in the wake of 20 centuries 
of such history as we begin.

For the sake of the historical record, 
let me mention the first moment 
when the idea of calling such a council came to me.
I first uttered the words on January 25, 1959, 
on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, 
in the church dedicated to him in Rome.
It was completely unexpected, 
like a flash of heavenly light, 
and it gave rise to three years of tremendous activity 
throughout the world 
in preparation for this day.
These years alone have been an initial gift of grace.
I confidently trust that under the light of this council
the Church will become richer in spiritual matters
and, with this new energy,
will look to the future without fear.
In fact, by bringing itself up-to-date where needed,
the Church will make people,
families,
and whole nations
really turn their minds toward divine things.
And, therefore, we are all very grateful for this moment.

Conversation:
Have you ever had a “flash of heavenly light” about something? What was it? How did you respond to it? Search your own life for this and learn from others who share as well.

Moreover, I also want to mention
before you now my own assessment
of the happy circumstances
under which this council begins its work.
As I go about my daily work as pope,
I sometimes have to listen,
with much regret,
to voices of persons who,
though burning with zeal,
are not endowed with too much
sense of discretion or measure.
These people can see nothing but a decline of truth
and the ruin of the Church
in these modern times.
They say that our era, in comparison with past ones,
is getting worse
and they behave as though they had learned nothing
from history,
which is nonetheless, the teacher of life.
They behave as though at the time of former councils,
everything was a full triumph
for the Christian idea and religious liberty.

I feel I must disagree with these prophets of gloom
who are always forecasting disaster
as though the end of the world was at hand.
In fact, at the present time, 
divine providence is leading us 
to a new order of human relations which, 
by the very effort of the people of this time, 
is directed toward the fulfillment 
of God's great plans for us.

Everything, even human differences, 
leads to a greater good for the Church.

**Conversation:**
Why do you think Pope John was so optimistic about the future of the church? Do you share his optimism today? What gives you hope in the church these days?

It’s easy to see this if you look even casually through history.
Most of the councils called in the past 
were forced to address 
serious challenges to the Church 
brought about by civil authorities, 
even when they thought 
they were helping the Church.
Most of the world today 
does not live under such civil tyranny 
and this is a great thing.
I am saddened, of course, 
by those places where such oppression still exists 
and, indeed, some bishops are noticeable here today 
mainly by their absence 
where they are imprisoned for their faith.
And even though modern life brings with it 
great stress and pressure from economic 
and political sides, 
nonetheless it at least has the advantage 
of having freed the Church 
from obstacles to its freedom 
in most parts of the world.

**The greatest concern of this council is this:**
that the sacred and central truths 
of our Christian faith
should be guarded and taught more effectively.

These central truths embrace the whole human person, composed as we are of body and soul and, since we're pilgrims on earth, they lead us always toward heaven.

This puts into perspective that we are to use earthly things only to attain a divine good.

According to the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus himself called on us to seek first the reign of God, addressing our energy on that.

But Jesus also completed that thought by saying that, if we did seek that first, all worldly things would be given to us as well.

Both sides of this equation are present in the Church today, as they have always been, and we take this into account as we begin.

In this effort, we will not depart from the truth as it is passed on to us by the early Fathers and Mothers of the Church.

But we will also be attentive to these times, to the new conditions and new forms of life present in the modern world which have opened new arenas of work for Catholics.

So, while the Church is mindful of marvelous human progress it is also eager to remind people that God is the true source of wisdom and beauty.

Having said this, it is clear that much is expected of us here regarding the passing on of the doctrines of the Church, as we have done without fail for 20 centuries, despite occasional difficulties in that regard.

The important point of this council is not, therefore,
a discussion of one article or another
of the fundamental teachings of the Church;
a council would not be needed for such work.

**Instead the work of this council**
is to better articulate the doctrine of the Church
for this age.

This doctrine should be studied and expounded
through the methods of research
and literary forms of modern thought.

Here is a key distinction on which our work is based:
The *substance* of our central beliefs is one thing,
and *the way in which it is presented* is another.

It is this latter presentation of the faith
with which we are concerned here
and our approach to this
will be a thoroughly pastoral one.

**Conversation:**
Choose one of the bold statements above (or something else that struck
you) and say in your own words what you think this means for the
Council now beginning.

As we open this council we see, as always,
that the truth of Jesus is permanent.

Often, as one age succeeds another,
the opinions of people follow one another
and exclude each other.

Errors creep in but vanish like fog before the sun.
In the past we have opposed these errors
and often condemned them.

**But today we prefer to make use**
of the medicine of mercy
rather than that of severity.

**We meet the needs of the present day**
by demonstrating the validity of our teachings
rather than by condemning others.

In fact, error today is so obvious when it emerges
that people themselves reject it.

People are evermore convinced of the high dignity
of the human person,
the evil of violence,
and the dead end of arms and political domination.
That being so, the Catholic Church in this council
desires to show herself as the loving mother of all,
    benign,
    patient,
    full of mercy and goodness
    toward all who are separated from her.
The Church does not offer riches that will pass away
to the people of today.
Like Peter when he was asked for alms,
    we say that we have neither silver nor gold
    but that we have a certain power in Jesus Christ
to offer the world:
    a way to walk in truth.
We distribute the goods of divine grace to all
    which raise the children of God
to great dignity.
We open here the fountain of our life-giving doctrines
    which allow all people to understand
their real dignity and purpose.
**Finally, through our members we spread Christian charity,**
**the most powerful tool**
**in eliminating the seeds of discord**
**and in establishing harmony,**
    peace,
    and unity.

**Conversation:**
Choose one of the bold statements above (or something else that struck you) and say in your own words what you think this means for the Council now beginning.

True peace and salvation are associated with having
    a complete grasp of revealed truth.
This truth is passed on
    through the doctrines of the Church
and the Church wishes very much
    to promote and defend this truth
so that everyone can have access to it
    with a unity of understanding.
Unfortunately, the whole Christian family does not have
this unity of mind.
The Catholic Church considers it a duty to work actively
to bring about that unity,
which Jesus himself called for
in his final prayers.
It is a triple sort of unity which we seek.

First, a unity among Catholics themselves
which we want to keep firm and strong.
Second, a unity of prayer and desire
among those other Christians
now separated from Rome.
And third, a unity in esteem and respect
for those who follow non-Christian religions.
It is the clear aim of this council
to bring together the Church’s best energies
and strive to have people welcome more favorably
the good tidings of salvation.
This council will prepare and consolidate the path
toward that unity of humankind
which is required as a necessary foundation
in order that the earthly city
may be brought to resemble the heavenly one
where truth reigns,
charity is the law,
and eternity is the timetable.

Conversation:
What is Pope John asking of the bishops as you read the material below?
What does he expect from them?

If it is available, read article 92 of the Constitution on the Church in the
Modern World, especially the second paragraph. How does it connect
with that we are reading here?

In conclusion, I direct my voice to you,
my venerable fellow bishops of the Church.
We are gathered here today
in this great Vatican basilica
upon which the history of the Church is hinged,
where heaven and earth are closely joined,
near the tomb of Peter
and so many others
who have gone before us in faith.
The council now beginning rises in the Church
like daybreak,
a forerunner of most splendid light.
It is now only dawn.
And already,
at this first announcement of the rising day,
how much sweetness fills our heart!
Everything here breathes sanctity
and arouses great joy.
The Church is now in your hands,
gathered as you are here
from all the continents of the world.
We might say that heaven and earth
are united in the holding of this council,
the saints of heaven to protect us
and the people on earth
looking for inspiration and guidance.
Indeed, our work is expected to correspond
to the modern needs
of the various peoples of the world.
This requires of you serenity of mind,
brotherly concord,
moderation in proposals,
dignity in discussion,
and wisdom of deliberation.
God grant that your labors and work,
toward which the eyes of all people
and desires of the entire world
are turned,
may generously fulfill the hopes of all.

Almighty God!
In you we place all our confidence,
not trusting in our own strength.
Look down kindly on these pastors of your Church.
May the light of your grace help us
in taking decisions
and in making laws.
Graciously hear the prayers which we offer you
with unanimity of faith, voice, and mind.
O Mary, help of Christians
help of bishops,
arrange all things for a happy and helpful outcome.
With your spouse, St. Joseph,
the holy apostles, Peter and Paul,
St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist
intercede to God for us.
Jesus Christ, our loving redeemer,
immortal ruler of people and the ages,
be love,
be power,
and be glory for ever and ever. Amen.