

**In the Heartland  
With Bishop Pates**

**Being Church**

**Summit on Church Administration**

December 8 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican Council II. At the time, I was a first year seminary theologian residing at the North American College and studying at the Gregorian University in Rome.

The council's closing ceremony ended one of the singular events in the 21 centuries of the Church's history. Temporary seats had been constructed on a rise in front of Bernini's Columns in St. Peter's Square. I was privileged to be seated there and was able to look down on Pope Paul VI and the altar which centered the festive occasion. Little did I realize that Vatican II would play such a preeminent role in my priestly ministry.

The organization of the Church for me and my contemporaries growing up was hierarchical in nature. In my parish, this meant that the pastor and associate pastor(s) and a lone secretary were responsible for the administration of the parish. Similarly, the school was blessed with a few lay teachers but the rest were dedicated and effective religious women.

The same held true for the operation of the Archdiocese of St. Paul. The Archbishop was fully in charge and the diocesan offices were held by priests, sisters or brothers. The Archbishop had the last word. I remember Archbishop William O. Brady unequivocally proclaiming to us minor seminarians: "The Church's liturgy will be forever in Latin. It will never change." But change it did.

As the documents of Vatican II began to filter through for diocesan and parish consumption, changes began to occur. Concepts such as the Church being the “Perfect Society” faded and images such as “The People of God,” and the “Body of Christ,” began to gain traction as we pictured the “community of believers.”

Early on in this transition, the role of the laity took on more prominence which meant greater involvement in the life of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* (“Light of Nations”) asserted: “The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.”

Very quickly, the phenomenon of professional lay ministry emerged. Today, we are blessed with significant numbers whom we title “Staff.” These are directors of faith formation, liturgy, administration, youth ministry, social justice, volunteer ministries, development – the list goes on.

On the non-professional side, parishioners assumed roles of leadership. The eventual make-up of parishes consisted of councils that contributed greatly to the fabric of the parish community. Again, Vatican II in its Decree on the Laity encouraged this development on the local level:

“Sharing in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity within the church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect.” (AA, 10)

Three councils emerged in most parishes: pastoral, financial and educational. The two parish trustees also took on a more prominent role as corporate representatives in both the civil and ecclesial formats of Church governance.

The Pastoral Council: This group is organized essentially to develop the ongoing vision for the parish community. It formulates a mission statement that guides the mission and ministry of the community always in tune with Catholic identity.

The Finance Council: This representative group is responsible for the material functioning of the parish. The necessary funds to fulfill the parish mission, the physical plant and legal requirements come within its purview.

The Educational Council/Board of Education: Central to the life of each Church community are the tasks of Evangelization and Catechesis. This council helps to develop and sustain the lifelong formation and learning objectives.

Two Trustees: Each parish has two individuals from the community who are appointed by the pastor to a corporate board of five members. It is their responsibility to advise the pastor on overall parish administration. On the ecclesial level, they are to assist the pastor in guiding the parish in its diocesan and universal relationships giving credence to its Catholic identity.

All of these organizations work on a collaborative level with the pastor whom they advise. Their members are intended to be at the heart of the formulation of their mission and the parish community's ongoing relationship to the diocesan Church.

Leadership exercised in the parish has differences from that exercised in secular contexts. It is presumed those engaged are very conscious of their faith journey and are seeking to establish the kingdom of God in their local setting. In this particular way, they are exercising their baptismal and confirmation identity.

As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vatican II looms on the near horizon, it is timely to gather to renew lay participation in this dimension of Church life. The purpose is to once again solidify our relationships as diocesan and parish communities and to foster best practices to enhance effectiveness.

We will be having two meetings and I am asking representatives from every parish engaged on a council to attend one. They will be held as follows:

**Saturday, Oct. 31**

**8:30 to 11:30 a.m.**

**Queen of Apostles Parish Hall, Council Bluffs**

**Saturday, Nov. 7**

**8:30 to 11:30 a.m.**

**St. Pius X Parish Hall, Urbandale**

It is our goal to refresh these instruments of **being Church** and to move forward with renewed energy with our principal life of growing in Word and Sacrament and taking on the challenge of Pope Francis to be **Missionary Disciples**: “To make Jesus Christ known and loved in our time by choosing to live out the Gospel at every moment.”

I look forward to seeing many of you at one of these Saturday morning gatherings.