

## CELEBRATING VATICAN II

At St. Leo's we are wrapping up a year of celebration of 125 years of ministry in our community. We've remembered the courage of our founders whose deep faith and hard work birthed the parish and began its mission of service to God and the community. We've looked at our ancestors in the faith and the spiritual heritage we received from them. And we've committed ourselves to continue being a Eucharistic community serving and being present in our neighborhoods through living out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

As Catholics, we are also celebrating the 50th anniversary of Vatican II this year, the Council called by Pope John XXIII that was designed, as he put it "to open the windows and let in the fresh air of the Spirit."

He was chosen as a "transitional" pope, one expected not to live very long and certainly not one to shake things up. But the Holy Spirit had a different idea. Pope John XXIII was concerned about how the Church could relate to the modern world, and convened a council, not to defend a matter of doctrine, as previous councils had done, but to explore ways the church could better be involved and minister in the current world. When told it would take several years to prepare for a council, the pope heard none of that and set things in motion to convene the council as quickly as possible. His jovial and effusive spirit, his openness to learn, and his unflinching commitment to doing what he believed the Holy Spirit was prompting resulted in Vatican II which brought bishops and theologians from around the world together to pray and respond to the call of the Church in the Modern World.

These were heady times for the Church. Many called it a season of spring time. For a young journalist just getting started writing for the *Catholic Telegraph* it was a time of wonder and excitement. Aggiornamento, a "bringing up to date" was the spirit of the council and I was privileged to be part of sharing that process. I got to write updates about what was going on at the Council. I got to talk with theologians, "periti" or experts who advised the bishops during the Council. I pored over the documents they wrote, like that on the church in the modern world and I got to see the changes that resulted.

- No longer was Mass in Latin with the priest's back facing the people. It was in English and I could see what was going on. Mass took on a whole new meaning—I was overjoyed.
- Catholics and those of other religions could never enter each other's churches before the Council so you can understand how I felt a sense of awe as I entered a Presbyterian church to speak to a youth group. The ecumenical movement—churches sharing, praying and working together for the common good was begun.
- Lay people were invited to reclaim their involvement in the life of the church.
- Theologians, like Rahner, Danielou, Schillebeckx, and Congar became household names among Catholics.

It was a time of growth and change, and like all change, was sometimes painful and messy. It was a time of moving from a world of black and white in which if you just kept all the rules, you went to heaven; to a more complex world of grey where freedom and openness to the spirit guided decisions. For some, Vatican II upset their black and white thinking. For many others, it was what they had been waiting for. Admittedly some mistakes were made along the way but that is the price of the free will God has given us. The early church was messy too. Just look at Paul's letters to the various faith communities of that time. Yet the Spirit prevailed and the church matured. Fifty years later we are still working to implement the vision of the Council. Let us continue to celebrate the gift of Vatican II to the church and to the world as we strive to be open to the Spirit and the surprising ways it leads us.

-Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate