**Vatican II Study Groups**

Overview

* Originated in fall 2004 when a few parishioners suggested the idea to the parish director of adult faith formation, who consulted with the pastor. They enthusiastically supported the project. Parishioners have had major responsibilities throughout the process.
* Concept: Study groups with continuing members, plus parish-wide symposiums with expert speakers, mostly from local Catholic universities.
* Began in January 2005, with five groups of 8-10 members, plus two Small Church Communities.
* Explicitly open-ended: The 2005 program began with a decision that at the end of the series there would be an evaluation and discernment on how and when to continue; participants to fan out into different directions according to interest and inspiration**.**
* Two **STUDY GROUPS** from that time still continue; new groups are forming now as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and the Year of Faith. More detail below.
* **SYMPOSIUMS** continue and are advertised to surrounding parishes and, to the extent we can, throughout the archdiocese. More detail below.

Study groups

* + **What we have read** and discussed
    - In January-May 2005, study groups focused on one Vatican II Document: *Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. As a Study Guide to the document we used *The Church Emerging from Vatican II* by Dennis Doyle. This book has three chapters addressing each chapter of the document. The two worked extremely well together. The choice of *Lumen Gentium* was brilliant: this is a foundational document on who we are as Church. The Doyle book was very helpful and raised good discussion questions, although groups also asked their own questions.
    - In Sept. 2005-May 2006, groups read parts of a second Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church*, using the second half of the Doyle book.
    - Since then, groups have chosen their own books, within context of the understandings that flowed from these initial documents. A list of **books we have considered or used** is included at the end of this document.
    - Members pay for their own books.
  + **Start-up:** **Advertize** the availability of study groups:
    - letters to religious education parents - while children are at rel ed, parents could have study groups
    - letters to school parents
    - letters to Small Church Communities (SCCs)
    - contact with parish organizations, e.g., the Young Adult program
    - ads in the weekly parish bulletin
    - poster, attended by someone to answer questions, and with a sign-up sheet, at monthly coffees after the Saturday evening and Sunday liturgies
    - THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY: people who want to do it personally invited other people they knew to join in this effort. A personal invitation is powerful.
    - **Advertisements used simple, catchy language,** with less theological and church terminology. Aimed to also appeal to people who don’t have Vatican II on their radar screen.
    - Advertisements said that people could get involved in this on different levels: they can choose to only attend the parish get-togethers or the symposiums to hear from the groups, or they can make commitments to study, etc.
  + **Membership and organization**:
    - An email was sent to all those who originally signed up in 2005. “I am about to form the lists for the different groups, but before doing so I would like to have your input and your preferences. First of all indicate whether you would like to meet on Sundays or on  
      Tuesday nights. In the header of this email message you will see the names of all the people who have signed up. Please indicate whether you have any preferences: whether there are people in the list you would want to be in the same group with. (One group should not have more than 10 people). ”
    - Groups usually have 8-10 members, although some have been smaller.
    - The study groups have never been closed; people could join groups later.
    - New groups are forming now.
  + **Coordinator for each study group:**
  + Keep information flowing
  + Set dates
  + Keep in touch with parish staff for room reservation, notifying membership about changes; include new members, etc.
  + **Study group meeting facilitators:**
  + The role of facilitation can be shared by group members taking turns; group coordinator has to make sure that each meeting has an assigned facilitator.
  + Make sure that the meetings start and end on time;
  + That the discussion stays focused and follows the expressed desire of the members (including coming up with a few questions to start discussion);
  + That everybody has a chance to talk and to share;
  + That no one dominates the discussion;
  + That each meeting is brought to some kind of closure;
  + That there is a follow-up if questions, concerns, or problems may arise.
  + **Study group meeting schedule**:
  + Approximately 2 sessions per month from January through May 2005. Since then, groups have tended to meet monthly.
  + Groups were initially advertized with tentative timeframes before and after popular Sunday liturgies and on several weekdays. Once groups formed, they set their own meeting time. Most meet in parish facilities.
  + **Meeting duration**: 1 hour to 1 1/2 max.
  + **Meeting structure**:
  + Often begins/ends with a short prayer.
  + A volunteer facilitator from the group (often a rotating role) reflects on the reading, comes up with an initial question or two, keeps the group focused during the meeting; helps to reach consensus re the questions the group wants to address; makes sure everybody has a chance to speak and no one dominates the discussion; keeps the time - opening and ending meetings on time, etc.
* **Sharing insights from the groups with the parish as a whole**:
  + Prepare posters, bulletin boards that can be displayed on community Sundays.
  + Write brief reflections for church bulletin; or articles for diocesan newspaper.
  + Informally share personal insights with the members of other ministry or social groups you are involved with.
  + Use a discernment process within each group, and then for all study groups as a whole, and write a report to the pastor and parish council.
  + One group – with participation by members of other groups - initiated a powerful year-long parish-wide process of Healing and Renewal after the pedophilia scandal.

Parish-wide talks and symposiums

* A kick-off talk in January 2005 was open to the entire parish community. That talk – and many more over the following years – was given by an international expert on Vatican II, Fr. Ladislas Orsy, SJ, who happens to live nearby. His depth and breadth of knowledge, and his warm, merry intelligence, add immeasurably to the quality of our experience.
* Throughout 2005, Fr. Orsy came back once or twice in the Spring and once or twice in the Fall. These events were kind of symposiums, when groups brought back (sometimes emailing in advance) their ideas/questions and the speaker gave more input and guidance. These events were advertised and open to the parish at large, and to other parishes as well.
* At some point, a parish Adult Faith Formation committee has assisted the director of adult faith formation in identifying speakers for the annual series. Fr. Orsy has come at least once each year.

Encouragement from parish director of adult faith formation

* **I firmly believe that God's ever new and ever fresh Spirit is at work in God's people and that this project also grew out of the Spirit's urgings.** And with Paul I say "I am confident that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion in Christ Jesus." God bless you all!

Books We Have Used or Considered

**Foundations**

**Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church** - Vatican II

**Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World** – Vatican II

**Companion to the above documents:**

**The Church Emerging from Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism**

By Dennis Doyle

All groups found this book useful as a companion to the Vatican II documents. He gives context and discussion questions that fit *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

**Others we have considered or used, in no particular order**

**The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church**   
by Paul Lakeland

A Fairfield University theologian, Lakeland describes the evolution of the theology of laity leading up to Vatican II and afterwards, and then proposes a detailed vision of a Church in which the laity are fully involved in all major decisions. He organizes the book in two parts: How we got to where we are (the road to Vatican II; the achievement of Yves Congar; collegiality, coresponsibility, and the Council; theology and the laity since Vatican II) and where we go from here (secularity; the liberation of the laity-the liberation of the Church; mission in the [post] modern world; an accountable Church). Published June 2004, 311 pages.

**Faith That Dares to Speak**   
by [Donald Cozzens](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/index=books&field-author-exact=Donald%20Cozzens&rank=-relevance%2C%2Bavailability%2C-daterank/103-4010030-7348643)

A Cleveland priest (former seminary rector and former diocesan vicar for priests and religious), Cozzens underscores the critical need for laity and clergy to speak honestly and courageously to church authorities. He addresses the obstacles to faithful speech as well as the spiritual and moral foundations of mature, adult conversation and commitment. He does not go much into practical or administrative recommendations. He writes about the appropriateness and desirability of the ideas and role lay persons are calling for. “His book will lead me to speak up with more courage than I have shown to date, in hopes that it will lead to a better future for our Church.” Published November 2004, 133 pages.

**Called to Question : A Spiritual Memoir**   
by [Joan D. Chittister](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/index=books&field-author-exact=Joan%20D.%20Chittister&rank=-relevance%2C%2Bavailability%2C-daterank/002-1785332-8491260)

A Benedictine sister and powerful spiritual writer, Chittister shares her reflections on life questions like “what does it mean to live a spiritual life?” and “where do women fit in a male-dominated religion?” She also reflects on religion and spirituality, love and friendship, solitude and contemplation, power and evil, ecology and nature, and ultimately promotes a feminist spirituality to save the world. Published April 2004, 206 pages.

**What Is the Point of Being a Christian?**   
by [Timothy Radcliffe](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/index=books&field-author-exact=Timothy%20Radcliffe&rank=-relevance%2C%2Bavailability%2C-daterank/002-1785332-8491260)

A Dominican priest and Oxford theologian addresses what should mark us as Christians and as a Christian community, both here and now and as part of a cosmic story that extends from the mystery of creation to the mystery of the final Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. He discusses the polarization in today’s Church, which he sees not as liberal – conservative but as “Kingdom Catholics” (engaged with the world) and “Communion Catholics” (engaged with the inner life of the Church). Both groups feel a need to circle the wagons. Against this dichotomy, Radcliffe cites gospel foundations for loving dialogue, not divisiveness. Out of this dynamic tension can come organic growth for the Church. Published January 2006; 224 pages.

**Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian**

by [Charles E. Curran](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/index=books&field-author-exact=Charles%20E.%20Curran&rank=-relevance%2C%2Bavailability%2C-daterank/002-1785332-8491260)

Mostly a personal history by a Catholic priest who is both eminent theologian and leader of loyal dissent over Humanae Vitae in the late 1960s. (He’s also one of only 2 CUA priests who ever joined the women in the kitchen to wash dishes, in my experience). The last four chapters may be more focused on concerns we have shared: 7. Life After Condemnation, 8. My Moral Theology, 9. The Development of Theology in the Past Fifty Years, and 10. My Relationship to the Catholic Church. Published May 2006, 297 pages.

**Best Practices from America’s Best Churches**

By Paul Wilkes and Marty Minchin (editors)

The format is a series of brief (10-15 page) essays written by parish leaders of “best practice” Catholic and Protestant churches that cover a wide variety of ministry topics: evangelizing, preaching, fundraising, etc. Each topic contains two or more essays, usually with a different focus. Published March 2003, 276 pages.

**Just Peacemakers**

By Mary Jegen

Just Peacemakers: Resources for Contributing to the Common Good is an essential guide for those involved or interested in social justice and the Christian call to discipleship. "Our actions do make a difference. Society is not static . . . but at any given moment is a product of the behavior of those who enjoy its benefits, suffer from its inadequacies, and contribute to its flourishing or decline. The question is not whether our actions make a difference, but what kind of actions we should undertake."--Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND This timely and urgent book does more than describe societal problems--it gives concrete methods and means toward resolution. Each chapter is designed for personal study and also for use by groups.

**Swimming in the Sun** by Albert Haase: a commentary on the Lord’s Prayer through the lens of both Francis of Assisi and Thomas Merton (1993, 216 pages)

**Community and Growth** by Jean Vanier: a moving reflection on Christian love, the spiritual journey, and living as a community

**The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality** by Ronald Rolheiser: a phenomenal presentation of the essentials of the spiritual life written in a lucid and evocative manner (1999, 271 pages, $15.61 at Amazon)

**Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of St. Francis in an Age of Anxiety** by Richard Rohr, OFM: He uses clear, down-to-earth language to discuss spirituality. He also comments on church reform and social justice. (2001, 182 pages, $10.16)

**Seeking the Hidden God** by Jane Kopas: explores God as mystery, our images for God, and how both affect the spiritual journey in a central way. (2005, 183 pages, $14.04)

**Reforming the Church Today: Keeping Hope Alive** by Hans Kung: A well written and lucid discussion of reform in the Church with a penetrating vision for remaining hopeful, faith-filled, reform-minded Catholics. (1999, 208 pages, $60 – used copies from $10.45)

**Why Not Be A Mystic?** by Frank X. Tuoti: a clear discussion and description of Christian mysticism with good references to the masters of the Christian mystical tradition and written for a contemporary audience

**Come Down Zacchaeus** by Thomas Green: a lucid discussion of lay spirituality

**The Recovery of Love** by Jeffrey Imbach: a good, easy to follow relation of Christian mystical wisdom to our society’s addictive attitude

**Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom** by Albert Nolan, Dominican from South Africa

**The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium** by Walter Wink

**Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus** by John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts

**Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in Theology of God** by Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ

**Radical Amazement** by Judy Cannato

**Yes We Are! The Living Body of Christ** by Father Jim Hogan

**Credible Signs of Christ Alive: Case Studies from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development** (includes discussion questions for each chapter) by John P. Hogan

**Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality** by Richard Rohr

**A History of God** by Karen Armstrong

**The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day *-*** Robert Ellsberg, editor