

*sacrosanctam concilium*

*dei verbum*

*gaudium et spes*

*lumen gentium*

*lumen gentium*

*gaudium et spes*

*dei verbum*

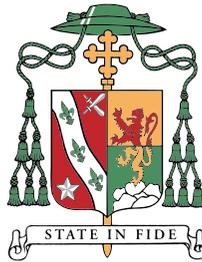
*sacrosanctam concilium*

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*dei verbum*

# The Mystery of Faith

**Pastoral Letter on the Year of Faith**

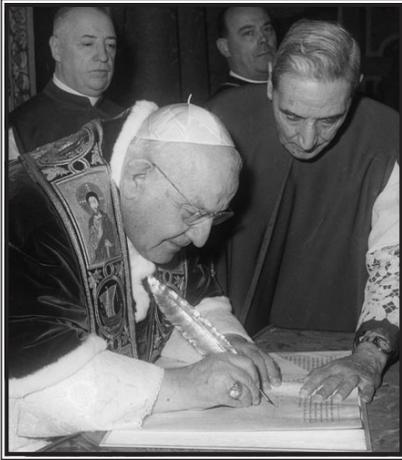


The Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, D.D.  
**Bishop of Dallas**

*gaudium et spes*

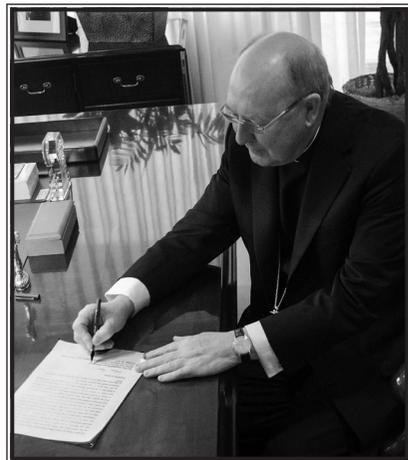
*lumen gentium*





## **The Mystery of Faith**

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Kevin J. Farrell  
on the Occasion of The Year of Faith





For the Christian, all time is sacred and imbued with the presence of God. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has designated the year from October 11, 2012, until November 24, 2013, as a Year of Faith. By giving this year a special focus, the Church helps us to recognize more clearly the abundant blessings God bestows upon us through time. As we celebrate the gift of faith, our Holy Father is calling us to reflect upon one of the most fundamental of our blessings in the midst of an age that tends to be very forgetful or even resistant to this virtue of faith, the very basis of our relationship with God.



## *Pastoral Letter on The Year of Faith*

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*October, 2012*

*Dear fellow Catholics in the Diocese of Dallas,*

**G**reetings and peace to you all as we celebrate this Year of Faith. My purpose in writing to you is to support and encourage all of your present and ongoing efforts to know, teach and live the breadth and depth of our Catholic faith. I also invite you to think about additional ways in which we can collectively and personally revitalize our commitment to understanding and living our faith. For the next year, Pope Benedict XVI has called us to the Year of Faith. In doing so, he recognizes two important anniversaries — fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, and twenty years since the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

### **Anniversaries**

**I**am writing to you on October 11, 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Some of you, like me, can remember those weeks and months from 1962 to 1965 when the Council fathers and other delegates and observers from throughout the world met in Rome to discuss issues facing the Church, as well as the Church's relations with other faiths and, indeed, with the modern world itself. Some of you have come of

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age since those days and have learned of the Council in homilies, lectures, academies, articles and books from a variety of sources, thanks to tireless efforts of so many who were engaged in the educational, catechetical and pastoral ministries in this (and other) dioceses. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to teach the Council documents faithfully and fully.

Twenty years ago the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published as a compendium of the Church's teaching and a sure guide for understanding our faith in terms of what we believe and how we profess our faith in and to the world. Again, I am deeply grateful to all those who are engaged in the ministries of teaching and forming others in the faith and who have used the *Catechism* and other materials wisely and well. From all the studies done since the *Catechism's* inception, it is clear that the *Catechism* has provided an important depth to our faith formation and educational programs.

We mark anniversaries to celebrate people, places and ideas in order to assimilate them anew in the present and to allow them to equip us to face the future with confidence. Church anniversaries provide us with a golden opportunity to reawaken in our Catholic community those features of our faith that we may take for granted and which may need some refurbishing for our communal and individual growth. Anniversaries are not about nostalgia, especially anniversaries as celebrated in the Church. This Year of Faith is important to reawaken and renew us, and shape our collective and individual futures in God. With one another and among our faith communities, we share the task of rekindling the fire of faith that was ignited at baptism. To do this, I continue to rely on the important initiatives which our pastors and

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our pastoral, educational and catechetical leaders are undertaking on the local level to make the Year of Faith a reality. At this local level, the Church “happens,” the faith is made real and the Mystery of Faith is celebrated and renewed day after day.

Allow me to reflect with you on some aspects of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which might resonate in a particular way with us, as the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Dallas, as this special year unfolds.

## **The Second Vatican Council**

**I**n commenting on the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II described it as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century and said that its documents are a sure compass for us to understand and appreciate our faith. In his homily at the Opening Mass for the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us to study the texts of the Council documents themselves. These texts will save us from “anachronistic nostalgia” and “running too far ahead.” He said that these sixteen documents represent both “the letter” and the “authentic spirit” of the Council. In a “blogosphere” culture of instant communications and a media culture of “breaking news,” it is especially important to appreciate that there is a “coherent structure” in terms of the documents and texts. Here is where our belief is codified and enshrined. Leading that coherent structure, there is a hierarchy of documents from an ecumenical Council, such as the Second Vatican Council. Within these documents there is also a hierarchy: first, constitutions,

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then decrees, and finally declarations. Initially we should focus on and study the four *constitutions* from the Council: on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). What I suggest is that these four documents form the pillars upon which we understand our faith, as

- celebrated in the *Liturgy*,
- expressed and lived in and with each other in the *Church*,
- based on *Divine Revelation* itself through the scriptures and tradition, and
- witnessed to and before the *Modern World*.

It seems to me that part of the genius of Catholicism is that these four pillars of faith are always put in dialogue and in relationship — liturgy, church doctrine and life, revelation and witness — and together they solidly comprise the bedrock of who we are and what we believe.

Of second rank, but nevertheless essential and important, are the teachings from the Council called *Decrees*. These important decrees focus on a variety of topics that concern our place in the Church, specifically the decrees on the laity, religious, priests, and bishops. It is important for each of us — and I include myself — to study and reflect on what the Council said about each of our respective vocations in these Decrees. We must do what St. Paul urged Timothy to do, “stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). I urge each of us to reclaim and rekindle

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the joy and enthusiasm for our vocations and our service to each other and the whole Church. In addition, given our multi-ethnic and multi-religious cultures, I also point to the decree on ecumenism as a sure guide now and in the future as we dialogue to find common ground with those of other faiths.

Regarding the third level of documents called *Declarations*, the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* is of particular urgency. Pope John Paul II made dialogue and relations with those of the Jewish faith a hallmark of his papacy. Today, concern for both Jews and Muslims characterizes part of Pope Benedict XVI's agenda when he leaves Rome to visit other countries. He always visits with leaders of other faiths. We need to remind ourselves of what the Council had to say about other faith traditions: we commit to the importance of dialogue with them and our mutual respect for them. Finally, given the urgent and pivotal contemporary debate about this topic in our American culture today, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* is a must-read for all of us.

## **The Catechism of the Catholic Church**

One of the most extraordinary contributions of Popes John Paul II (as Holy Father) and Benedict XVI (as responsible for its formulation) was their contribution to, or encouragement for, the development and promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1969). Its division into four parts is illustrative, again, of the genius of the Catholic faith. Let me take each part in turn.

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### Part One: The Creed

Because we join in professing our faith by reciting the Creed at Mass on Sundays and special feast days, it is especially important for us to review the depth of that faith profession as described in the *Catechism*. I remember the still very valuable book by then-Father Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, which was also based on the structure of the Creed. It seems to me that the inner coherence and interrelationship of what we believe is sometimes lost. The *Catechism* and *Introduction to Christianity* can serve to remind us of the inherent logic as well as the breadth of our faith.

### Part Two: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery

It is often said that we belong to a *sacramental* church. Clearly one of the most demonstrable facets of the Catholic faith is our participation in the Sacred Liturgy and the sacraments. My hope would be that during this Year of Faith that the celebration of the Mystery of Faith would be given special attention and particular care. This section of the *Catechism* can help us all to go more deeply into the meaning of what we do in the liturgy where “the work of our redemption is accomplished” (from the Prayer over the Gifts, *Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper*, as quoted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 2). Liturgy well-prayed shapes the core of our belief and fosters strong faith.

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### **Part Three: Life in Christ**

How we live matters. Christian morality matters. The Catholic teaching on morality matters a great deal. This rich section of the *Catechism* reminds us of what matters in a profound and in-depth way. The way the *Catechism's* fulsome treatment of the Ten Commandments is preceded by a discussion of our vocation to beatitude, the importance of the virtues, life in community, and social justice draws out both old and new from our tradition, and offers the basis for reflecting on and living in accord with God's commandments. This section is a particularly worthy compendium on ways to approach and live the moral life.

### **Part Four: Christian Prayer**

This last section is by no means the least of the *Catechism*. In fact, it is the first in *priority*. Prayer is one of the ways that each of us responds to the "universal call to holiness" to which we are all called, as taught in Vatican II's Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5). It is evident and abundantly clear that there is a variety of forms and expressions of prayer, in this section of the *Catechism*. Particularly in the "connected" world in which we live, I think that first step to prayer is silence. The second step is listening (especially *lectio divina*) and then responding to God in prayer. As I reflect on our diocese, I am truly amazed at the number of communities of religious and lay faithful committed to prayer in a variety of ways, from monastic to mendicant to apostolic. I pray that, during this Year of Faith, each of us takes the time to pray more deeply and fully — for our sake and for our salvation.

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### Communio: Many Facets of Faith and Belief

In 1985, on the twentieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II convoked in Rome the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops. At the Synod's end it was decided that the term *communio* would be the key term which we should use to interpret the Council. This term is as rich in its many facets as a diamond that is seen from a variety of angles with shades of light shining on it: each facet exposing a part of the whole as well as the whole in all its depth and breadth.

For me there are at least two meanings for *communio* which I would like to share with you as I conclude. The first is that the Church is a *communio*, a variety of persons, vocations, cultures and places. I see this day in and day out in my ministry as your bishop in the Diocese of Dallas. Figuratively, the Church is like a mosaic made up of a variety of shapes and sizes of glass and other materials which together comprise a work of art. We all have "gifts that differ" as St. Paul reminds us (Romans 12:6). I ask that, during this Year of Faith, we allow *communio* to be a reminder of who we are, and a challenge to respect each and every other person who belongs to the Body of Christ in the Catholic Church. Our faith is a communal faith. This Year of Faith should be about renewing and possibly reconciling our relationship with each other, as we pray to become more fully "one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

The other meaning of *communio* is the treasure we receive in the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. This is the most precious gift we can receive

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from God. When we receive Holy Communion, we are drawn into the Mystery of our Faith in the most profound way possible. We literally participate in the dying and rising of Christ. We take part in his once-for-all sacrifice for our redemption. But the word "communion" also refers to the action as we receive the Eucharist with each other as the Body of Christ. The *communio* of Church life is based and built upon the *communio* of the Most Holy Eucharist. In our Eucharistic *communio* we are also brought back to the Year of Faith, because when we enter into Communion with Christ we are united in believing all that God has revealed and taught through the Church.

It is my prayer that this Year of Faith might be a tremendous gift to all in terms of beliefs understood more profoundly, belonging to each other more fully in charity in the Church, and as celebrated in the Mystery of Faith that is the Paschal Mystery offered to us in Holy Communion. Let us ask God daily to "strengthen [us] in faith and love [as his] pilgrim church on earth" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

In this way, may this Year of Faith truly become for us a "Year of Grace".

Faithfully In Christ,

*Kevin J. Farrell*

The Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, D.D.  
Bishop of the Diocese of Dallas  
Given on the Solemnity of Our Lord  
Jesus Christ, King of the Universe  
November 25, 2012

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