

Resurrection Parish Church Dedication  
October 23, 2016  
Bozeman, MT  
Bishop George Leo Thomas

In the autumn of 1962, the newly-ordained Bishop of Helena, Bishop Raymond G. Hunthausen, traveled to Rome to attend the opening session of the Second Vatican Council. At age 41, he was among the youngest bishops in attendance, and frequently mistaken for a driver.

Now, at age 95, Archbishop Hunthausen has the distinction of being the last living American Bishop to have attended all four sessions of the Council, from 1962 until 1965.

Last week, I visited the Archbishop, and listened to him reminisce about those heady days following the close of the Council. In particular, I spoke with him about the faith communities he founded at Montana State University and the University of Montana.

Upon his return to Big Sky Country, the Bishop intentionally and systematically initiated the Council's vision, most especially the spirit of *aggiornamento* – an Italian word used frequently by Pope John XXIII to mean renewal or reform. In visual image, the word symbolized the opening of the Church's windows to let fresh air flow in, and also to allow the light of the Holy Spirit to pour forth from the windows of her heart.

In 1966, Bishop Hunthausen commissioned the leaders of this community to embrace the Council's spirit of *aggiornamento*, and to embody the Council's vision and values. Both the Newman Center at U of M and at MSU became, in a certain sense, laboratories where these values could be cultivated and bear fruit. And like all laboratories, there were fits and starts, successes and setbacks.

Today, as we formally dedicate the new beautiful worship space at Resurrection Parish, I want to take the opportunity to step back, take the long view, and point out some wonderful ways that the Council's vision is thriving in our midst. You can add your own illustrations and examples.

1. In his opening address at the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII asked the leaders of the church to dispense the "medicine of mercy" generously and copiously, and to pay particular attention to those who are weary and wounded in each new age.

Pope Francis has adopted this theme as a major leitmotif of his pontificate, describing the Church as a "field hospital for the physically sick and spiritually wounded." That would be all of us.

Resurrection Parish has helped the gospel value of mercy flourish through its ministry to the hungry through Community Café, its welcome to immigrants seeking safety and solidarity, and its embrace of sinners seeking a second chance.

To paraphrase William Shakespeare, “the quality of mercy falls like gentle rain from heaven. It is twice blessed, blessing the one who gives and the one who receives.” Your parish is living that vision to the fullest measure, under the maternal guidance of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

2. A second theme that emerged from the teachings of the Council is found in the writings of Saint John XXIII. In his personal memoir, he wrote, “There will always be a little lamp shining in my window. All may come in. The arms of a friend are waiting.” A particular quality that has distinguished Resurrection Parish is its capacity for warmth and welcome. Last month, the nationally-recognized Pew Research Center published insightful findings on the qualities of a vibrant parish. The spirit of warmth and welcome, beginning with the attitude of the pastor, and carried out by all the parishioners, is a major predictor of a vibrant parish. When strangers enter through your doors, they are strangers for only a brief moment. In the words of your pastor, “We accept the newly arrived, along with longtime parishioners, to form one faith community.” You offer monthly Mass in Spanish as another way of welcoming the stranger into the heart of the parish. Your deacon Steve Buckner and his wife Ann work assiduously to welcome back parishioners who have returned after short or prolonged absences, always in a spirit of warmth and welcome. For years upon end, dedicated souls like Gina Albini, Martha Hamilton, and so many others have served countless students hungry for a good meal and companionship through your long-standing program humorously called “Chunch.” Hospitality is the second hallmark of this special community.
3. In the years that preceded the Second Vatican Council, the call to holiness was most often identified with clergy and religious, and considered their particular domain. The Council Fathers summarily rejected the “upstairs-downstairs” vision of holiness, underscoring instead the universal call to holiness which flows first and foremost from the Sacrament of Baptism. “All Christians, in any state or walk of life, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity.” This call to holiness is our shared destiny, and our common spiritual DNA. Each and every one of us has been called by name, with a vocation to holiness and an innate dignity that belongs to sons and daughters who are washed in the waters of baptism. That value is symbolized in the Baptismal Font, which greets us as we enter and reminds us that we are beloved children of a good and gracious Father.

4. In the heady days that followed the Second Vatican Council, older Catholics will remember the change that was introduced in the liturgy, as Latin was replaced by the vernacular. But in the realm of liturgical renewal, this was not the most important value introduced by the Council Fathers. Rather it was their insistence that no one is to be present at the liturgy as a stranger or a silent bystander. The Fathers insisted on the "full, active, conscious participation" of everyone in the celebration of the liturgy. Beautifully and thoughtfully prepared liturgy is another hallmark of this parish community. Your liturgical ministers are always well prepared. There are outstanding servers, prayerful reading, and thoughtful homiletic preaching which is rooted in the real life experience of people. The music is prayerful and powerful, due in no small measure to Diane Dwyer, Tom Beausoleil, and many college-age musicians. There are also profound moments of sacred silence. In a word, the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of the life of this community, and all of the parish's activities flow from the Eucharist and then return to the altar in prayers of thanksgiving. This is still another value that flows from the heart of the Council.
5. The fifth quality is related to the fourth. The Council Fathers insisted that we make real-life connections between worship and justice, liturgy and compassion, prayer and service, praise and mercy, contemplation and action, or in the words of Scripture, "love of God and love of neighbor." In a word, the celebration of the sacraments compels us to minister among the least, the last, and the lowliest in the community, always asking the question, "Who is not at the table?" The connection between sacrament and service is so important in the life of the church that Dorothy Day once opined, "God made heaven hinge on the way we act toward Him in His disguise of commonplace, frail, ordinary human beings." I can readily see that Resurrection Parish understands the commission to serve the poor, to be present among God's little ones through a wide array of ministries that have become the hallmarks of this great community.
6. When Bishop Hunthausen returned from Rome, he imported a new vocabulary and a new method for carrying out the mission of the church in the Diocese of Helena. The Council Fathers use words like "cooperation," "collaboration," "consultation," and "collegiality." Bishop Hunthausen captured the concepts in his oft-used phrase "shared responsibility." The Council expected a more expansive role for the laity, and encouraged them to exercise their apostolate both in the church and in the world, in the spiritual and in the temporal order. The creation of this magnificent worship space is a direct result of shared responsibility. Your pastor has surrounded himself with wise and seasoned women and men, key consultants, visionary collaborators who have walked side-by-side with him in creating a vibrant faith community. The Council Fathers insisted that "the wise pastor knows that he was not intended by Christ to shoulder alone the saving work of the Church." This worship space is a living testimony that your pastor

has wisely appropriated this sixth value that comes from the heart of the Council.

7. The Council Fathers prudently admonished us to recall that we are a church that is "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." In a word, each local parish must live in full communion with our Holy Father Pope Francis, with me as the diocesan bishop, with our mission territories, and with the Universal Church. The parish must never become self-enclosed, self-referential, or self-congratulatory. Resurrection Parish demonstrates in particular ways a strong and steady relationship with the wider church. Your youth and young adults are present at CYC and Legendary Lodge. Your parishioners participate vigorously in Chrism Day and diocesan-sponsored events. You have had delegation after delegation traverse to Santo Tomas in Guatemala, as a sign of your communion with the wider church. Your Campus Ministry leaders, today and in yesteryear like Chris Rasmussen, Brian Geer, and Mary Shaun Mize, continually ensure that the students have substantial relationships both to the local and to the wider church.
8. A final marker which comes from the heart of the gospel in the teachings of the Church is the spirit of joy that permeates the heart of this parish and its ministry with and among the staff and students at Montana State University. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, wrote that "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." Conversely, the great saint and mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, said poignantly, "Oh Lord, spare me from sour-faced saints." Our joy comes from knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ, knowing his love for you and me, and sharing His joy with those who do not yet know his name.

This is indeed a day of jubilee and joy, a time to celebrate and give thanks to the Lord Jesus, who is present here, breathing among us, the living stones, who form a loving community of faith.

Keep the eyes of your hearts ever fixed upon Him, for He is the source of our happiness, He is the well spring of our joy! Jesus is the One in whose name we gather, and who is ever in our midst "as one who serves."