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Vatican II continues to mark ecclesial life today, archbishop says

by Mary Solberg by Catholic News Service

Erie, Pa. — Archbishop Piero Marini, a Vatican official, recalls watching bishops day after day pour out of the Vatican hall where they gathered 50 years ago to formulate the constitutions, decrees and declarations that brought historic change to the Catholic church.

A young priest at the time, Marini arrived in Rome in September 1965, only a few months before the close of the Second Vatican Council.

Bishops and theologians began gathering in 1962 for the first of four three-month sessions to address more than a dozen aspects of church life, ranging from interfaith relations to greater lay participation in the liturgy, from social communication to relations between the church and the modern world.

"Fifty years later, I feel a great nostalgia and a desire to understand more fully and to experience anew the spirit of the council," said Marini, who is president of the Pontifical Commission for International Eucharistic Congresses.

He addressed the nearly 200 people gathered in Erie for the annual national meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions.

Clergy, religious sisters and laypeople in charge of Catholic worship in dioceses across the United States came together Oct. 7-12 to conduct regular business. But the larger purpose this year was to mark the 50th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, or the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, one of the best known documents of Vatican II.

The weeklong conference allowed participants to explore the theological principles of the document and

its place in the world today. Issued Dec. 4, 1963, the document ordered an extensive revision of worship so that people would have a clearer sense of their own involvement in the Mass and other rites.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Marini told the audience, was really "a matrix for other reforms" and possible changes yet to come. It is not enough, he said, to look at the written document as a manual for reforming the church's rites.

"It was an event that continues even today to mark ecclesial life," the archbishop said. "It has marked our ecclesial life so much that very little of the church today would be as it is had the council not met."

Marini, who was master of liturgical ceremonies under Blessed John Paul II, told the liturgists that Vatican II did not give the world static documents. In an ever-evolving culture, the Catholic liturgy is incomplete unless it renews communities of faith.

"The council is not behind us. It still precedes us," Marini said.

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Two other archbishops attended the national meeting, co-sponsored by the federation and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship. New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, chair of the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship, reviewed the workings of the various committees, and Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver spoke on the sacraments of initiation as a source of life and hope.

Also speaking was author and Scripture scholar Sr. Dianne Bergant, a Sister of St. Agnes, who is a distinguished professor of Old Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

All speakers referred to Vatican II as only the beginning of reforms within Catholic liturgy and the church as a whole. The traditions of the church, Bergant added, are kept alive through contemporary culture.

The best way the church can share Jesus' story, she said, is if it follows the lead of Pope Francis, who has opened his arms to the suffering, the outcast, the poor and the marginalized. For Jesus, there were no "outsiders," she added, saying the church needs to rid itself of the notion that if someone doesn't fit certain standards then they can't be part of the faith community.

"This is not the church of Christ," Bergant said.

Dolores Martinez attended the national meeting with Fr. Heliodoro Lucatero, director of the Office of Worship in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. As a former director of worship, Martinez said the discussions at the national meeting gave her hope.

"The reform (of Vatican II) is not done. It's in front of us," Martinez said. "It's wonderful."

Bernadette McMasters, director of worship for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va., said the messages shared during the week reflect the words and actions of Pope Francis.

"Liturgy has to spread to the people. It has to be relevant to our lives," McMasters said. "How do we make people go out and do the mission of the church? How do we get back to the basics?"

Aquila discussed the need to return to the basics of the church's sacramental life. He is at the forefront of

a national effort to restore the order of the sacraments of initiation -- baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

Even Vatican II called for a revision of the sacramental rites, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law called for confirmation for Latin-rite Catholics to be administered at the age of reason, usually about 7 years old, unless a bishops' conference determines otherwise.

In the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches confirmation is called "chrismation" and is generally received in infancy immediately after baptism.

Baptism should be followed by confirmation, then the Eucharist, Aquila said. He called the holy Eucharist "the crown of the sacraments," and as such, should be placed in its rightful place.

"Baptism and confirmation lead to the Eucharist. This is an attempt to make Eucharist the center of our lives," Aquila said.

[Mary Solberg is editor of *FaithLife*, newspaper of the diocese of Erie, Pa.]

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