THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AS IT AFFECTS THE PARISH: EVOLUTION AND DIMENSIONS

Cosmas Aluede OJEMEN, JCD

The Ecclesiology of Vatican Council II

The word "ecclesiology" is derived from two Greek words, *ekklesia* (church) and *logia* (study). The combination refers to a branch of theology which is the study of the Church. From the earliest time of its existence, the Church has been the subject of theological reflections by Councils, Popes, other ecclesiastical authorities and theologians. The ecclesiology that emerged from the Council is faithful to the objectives its fundamental objectives in *SacrosanctumConcilium* that include: to bring greater vigour to the Christian life, adaption to the needs of contemporary time, the institutions that are subject to modification, to promote abiding tie of unity among believers, and to strengthen the efforts of evangelization throughout the world. As a transcendent, divine reality that has to do with salvation, the Church is presented as a mystery,[1] an object of faith and not merely in its external manifestation but more importantly in its core composition and transcendence.[2] Thus, it refers to the invisible Trinitarian presence of God in his Church and particularly also through the sacraments, the ministers and in several other ways, which are all aimed at salvation of the human race. Kloppenburg insists on the

point that: "The Church is not the kingdom of God and is not identifiable with the Kingdom of God, but is rather its germ and beginning."[3] Thus, he said the Church "belongs to the time of growth and maturation, and does not possess the glory of fulfilment."[4] It is also the sacrament of salvation through which people would be brought to salvation.[5]

The Church is a visible structure made up of the people, who believe in God and obey his commandments through Christ, by incorporation into the Church through the sacraments of Christian initiation and active participation in her life. They are thus, referred to as the messianic people, sharers in Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal office, endowed with special graces but classified into common and the ministerial priesthoods.[6] The Fathers of the Council while acknowledging that some Christians have attained full membership by virtue of "possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, that by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesial government and communion, are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules through the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops."[7] They also acknowledged other Christian**s**, who although are only now in partial membership, are nonetheless, called to perfect unity with the Church of Christ.[8] There are other people, who are not Christians at all, but share some form of loose ties with her. With all people of the world, the Council calls on Christ's faithful to be engaged in the work of evangelization, by participating in the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church, since each member participate**s** in his or her own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ (c. 204).[9]

The Council emphasized the building up of a bond of unity in the Church at all levels and to give greater opportunities to the lay faithful in the affairs of the Church, by emphasizing their baptismal dignity, obligations and rights (cf. cc. 224-231). The Council downplayed some historical characteristics which were no longer considered relevant to the growth of the contemporary

Church. These include items like tithes, *cathedraticum*, benefices and similar ones. To give the laity more active roles and participation in the Church's mission, greater emphasis was placed in developing the theology of the common priesthood side-by-side with the ministerial priesthood.[10] Deriving from all these is the emphasis placed on principle of communion in the Church: "Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also, as the instrument for the salvation of all."[11] This spirit of communion which is to be promoted in the form of "unity in pluralism," has multiple implications for the Church, including particularly, the promotion of the spirit of collaboration in the mission of the Church. Thus, the Council mentions some instruments of communion, solidarity and collaboration in the Church.[12]These elements are significant in appreciating the present-day dynamism of the Catholic parish.

Evolution of Parochial Ecclesiology since the Council

Since the Second Vatican Council the notion of the parish has changed considerably so that it is no longer looked at from the perspective of being principally a structure, a territory, or a building but rather as "the family of God, a fellowship affair with a unifying spirit," "a familial and welcoming home" and the "community of the faithful" (c. 515, §1).[13] The parish is therefore a "people-centred institution" and not just a mere juridical or physical entity. The aim of this article is to examine some ways by which the parish can become an organic community, where the people of God are formed, organized and assisted to actively perform their duties in the mission of Church in the world. The mission of the Church consists in the exercise of the triplex offices (*munera):* the proclamation of the Word (cc. 747833), the sanctification of the faithful (cc. 8341253) and the governance of the people of God (cc. 330746). The several other canons of the Code of Canon Law are in relation to how these offices are guaranteed and exercised for the good of the generality of the faithful.

Each member of Christ's faithful, is expected to play active role in this mission, according to a person's sacramental capacity to act.

While the clergy principally undertakes the work of governance of the Church, the lay faithful are invited to be involved, by participation, in Church governance by way of collaboration.[14] Both clerics and the laity have the duty to be involved, each in his own way, in the mission of sanctification and evangelization undertaken in multifarious ways. The parish is the place, where the majority of Christ's faithful assembled for prayers, Christian formation and other social and spiritual activities and where the work of sanctification, teaching and governance of the faithful actually take place. It constitutes the "typical and immediate pastoral unity of ecclesiastical organization," where Christ's faithful would usually receive needed information about their Christian life, where the mystery of the church is present and at work and where the Church exists visibly and concretely.[15] Thus, the proper organization of the parish would result in a very effective way for each member playing his or her role in it.

The Parish in the Ecclesiology of Vatican Council II

One place that provides a forum for the implementation of these values that the Council set out to accomplish in its renewal of the Church, is the parish, its constituent members and environment. The Church is both a divine and human institution. It is therefore not surprising that the Church continually adapts to the scientific, sociological and political changes and challenges that human institutions have experienced in the course of history.[16] The Council did not set aside any particular document in presenting her teaching on the parish, but it was expected that the emerging outlook about the Church, would impact significantly on the structure and outlook of the church. Teachings that emanated from the Council that have direct bearing on the life and ministry of the parish would include: the theology of ecclesiastical communion, the renewed understanding about the common and ministerial ways of participating in the priesthood of Christ, the emphasis on the personalistic characteristic of the Church, the greater role acknowledged for the laity in the Church, the revivalist outlook about the Church and the movements that emphasizes the presence of diverse charisms in the Church. All these new insights from the teachings of the

Council greatly reshaped the contemporary canonical understanding of the parish.

The Council's emphasis on the parish has shifted from mere institutional juridical structures to values that emphasize personal qualities, where the members: priests, consecrated persons and laity, can actualize their rights and obligations for the dynamic pastoral and spiritual benefits of members of the community. Thus, the parish provides ample room for the realization of new evolving theological thrusts and models that present the Church as a communion (*koinonia)* and as a family, given the African sociological concept in the context of the parish community.[17] The parish, as a unit of the people of God, can rightly be described as a communion. The Council consequently considered parish in the light of "community" and "family", concepts that would ultimately stimulate the attitude**s** of cooperation, collaborative ministry and the legitimate exercise of one's rights and obligations.[18]

The Council emphasized the presence of Christ and the fullness of the mysteries of the Church, uniquely in the local communities of the Christian faithful. It is inferable that the Church is wholly present in the diocese, in the parish, in the basic Christian communities and in the Christian families, as the domestic sanctuary of the Church. The parish is the place where the church exists in its most obvious social dimensions, where the members of Christ's faithful interact, the mystery of the body and blood of Christ (the Holy Eucharist) is celebrated, missionary and evangelical initiatives are undertaken and human solidarity is very effectively expressed in several ramifications according to the teaching and mind of Christ. The Council emphasized this point clearly in the following passage from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* that:

> This Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New

> Testament. For these are in fact, in their own localities, the new people called by God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as the result of full conviction (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). In them the faithful are gathered together, through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated "so that, by means of the flesh and blood of the Lord, the whole brotherhood of the Body may be welded together." In each (altar) community, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, manifest symbol is to be seen of that charity and "unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation." In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted. For, "the sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive."[19]

The Council Fathers also indicated very clearly that the parish stands out uniquely among local church communities. It has its own pastor, makes present the visible Church and regularly celebrates the Holy Eucharist, so that the depth of the mysteries of the Church is made present in that local community. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* the Council emphasized the importance of the diocesan bishop to establish parishes as groupings of the Christian faithful, appoint pastors over them and ensure liturgical life especially in the celebration of the Sunday Mass.[20] Thus, the Council said that parishes and parochial offices exist for the good of souls,[21] affirming that the concern for the salvation of souls should necessarily motivate the determination and reconsideration of erecting or suppressing parishes or similar changes.[22]Thecommunity dimension of the nature of the parish has become a strong point of emphasis in several post Conciliar teachings and would remain so for sometime in the Church.

Other very significant and related concepts include those of collaborative participation of all the faithful in the mission of Christ in the world, evangelization, sanctification and governance. These are ways of building communion. Thus, the horizontal dimension of the church, finds active participation and effective collaboration. This means that diocesan bishops should be willing to use organs of collaboration in their governance of their dioceses. While there are already established avenues for this collaboration established in the legal framework of the church, pastors could still explore other avenues to further promote dialogue and collaboration. Hence, the Council stipulates that "when occasions arise, let this be done through the organs erected by the Church for this purpose."[23] These organs are several at the universal, diocesan and parochial levels and parish pastors are encouraged to promote collaborative participation among the faithful through the involvement of the faithful in their effective utilization and be disposed to encourage parishioners to participate co-responsibly in the Church's mission. Thus, the provision of Canon law, that Christ's faithful manifest their opinions on matters which concern the good of the Church to their pastors as a matter of right (cf. c. 212) becomes a reality. The Church does not foresee a situation where the whole work in the parish is undertaken by the pastor alone.

A very important element from the Council that brings life and dynamism to the parish is the greater role acknowledged for the laity in the Church and in the world by virtue of their baptismal dignity. This involves their participation in the works of evangelization and sanctification of the people of the world.[24]The members of the laity are therefore called to full and active participation in the life of the Church. This is more resplendent in their active participation in parochial life and ministry. The parochial pastor offers them the unique opportunity to prepare and undertake their apostolates in the parish and in the church as a whole. The parish offers the platform that gathers the faithful into a unity so that all the human cultural diversities are harmonized in the universality of the Church.[25]The Council calls on the laity to develop the habit of working with their priests and

to cooperate in the apostolic and missionary enterprises of their parishes. The laity was particularly encouraged by the Council, to see themselves in their families as the "primary vital cell of society" and the "domestic sanctuary of the Church" and therefore to utilize this bond of mutual affection of its members to build up authentic Christian families where the genuine virtues thrive.[26] Side by side this fact is the duty of the laity to take care of the well-being of their children and young people.[27]

The Parish in the Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law

The 1983 Code, presents the parish as "a certain community of the Christian faithful, stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (c. 515 §1).[28] The parish should be seen as a pastoral organization that is canonically established, structured and guided within the larger community. It is definitively integrated in the communion of the universal and particular Churches, precisely so that the plan for the evangelization and pastoral care of the faithful must be fostered in a very efficient manner through smaller units, as the diocesan bishop would decide on by his prudent judgment. Juan Arrieta noted that the "parish is above all the principal group of the faithful that the bishop must establish in the diocese for the convocation of the faithful around the Eucharist and the development of the liturgical life (SC 42)."[29] Obviously, the parish cannot be separated from the diocese. Indeed, it is a community among the portion of the people of God that is known as the particular Church, of which the bishop is the pastor. This shows also why the governance of the parish is not only guided by the provisions of universal law but also by those of particular laws. The diocesan bishop creates the parish, appoints the proper pastor, provides some particular norms and gives other particular directives to strengthen the pastoral journey of members of Christ's faithful in the parish. Thus, although the priest appointed to head the parish is indeed its proper pastor, he is also the bishop's co-operator in the care of souls in the parish.[30]
The essential elements relevant in this section would include the consideration of the parish as: a) a group of Christ's faithful; b) an

integral part of a particular church (c. 515 §1); c) the appointment of a priest to govern the parish community as the proper leader with ordinary powers (cc. 515 & 519),[31] who exercises his duties under the authority of the diocesan bishop.[32] The parochial pastor represents so many things for the pastoral care of the faithful and is also the instrument that encourages the lay faithful, as individuals and associations, so that the parish "might grow in Church communion and mission."[33]

Canon law prescribes that a parish is to be territorial, embracing all the members of Christ's faithful of a given territory (c 518). The possibility of personal parishes exists in the new parochial ecclesiology, which could be created by reason of the rite, language or nationality of a particular class of the faithful of a certain territory. As a community, all the members of the parish play one role or the other to ensure that the pastoral care of souls is properly carried out, in such a way that the members of the parish community may meaningfully feel the impact of the parish in the actual living realities of their lives. This is where the Church calls on the pastor to understand and discharge his pastoral responsibilities with creative initiatives, commitment and sincerity. Canon law presents a way of operating a parish more flexibly allowing more room for the pastoral initiatives and decisions of the Bishop. It is possible in this dispensation, to entrust a parish to a Religious group (c. 520 §1)[34] or even a team of priests with collective responsibility. This is also known as "team ministry," in which the pastoral care of one or more parishes is entrusted to several priests *in solidum* (cc. 517 §1 and 527 §2).[35]

Another essential element of a parish, considered in the present Code, is the parochial pastor. In the 1983 Code, we find the abolition of non-residential and immovable parochial pastors. Thus, diocesan bishops, are empowered by the Code to enable them create, suppress or alter parishes as they found opportune for the good of souls, after they have heard their presbyteral councils (c. 515 §2). Now, pastors, and in fact, all priests appointed to a pastoral care of souls in the parish are obliged to reside in their parishes (c. 533, §1). They have to be available in

their parishes to render needed services at any time of the day unless, of course, when by special arrangement in the parish among the resident presbyteral colleagues, they are lawfully off duty. The fact is that a parish is only a cell in the particular church, of which the Bishop is the overall pastor. Can. 369 describes a diocese as a portion of the people of God. A parish, instead, is not described as a portion of the people of God but "a community of the faithful." It is only in the diocese that the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly and fully present and operative. The present code equally makes the manner of operating a parish, more flexible, depending on the decision of the Bishop. Thus, it is now possible to have a parish entrusted to a team of priests with collective responsibility, or parish entrusted even to a deacon, etc. It is equally possible to assign an assistant pastor to special responsibilities in a parish even though he is not pastor.

The Parish in the Post-Conciliar *Magisterium* of the Church

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the nature, life and mission of the parish have been expounded and further elucidated very eloquently in the post conciliar documents, issued by several Popes and the dicasteries of the Apostolic See since that time. The documents advanced the Council's teaching about the parish, by applying the renewed ecclesiology of the Church to the life and mission of the parish. These magisterial teachings have, in no small ways, advanced a new and better understanding of the nature and ministry of the parish.

Pope John Paul II pointed out, in *Christifideles Laici,* that the parish is not a structure, a territory, or a building, but a familial and welcoming home or a community of the faithful, a Eucharistic community, a community of faith, an organic community and a community of Christians.[36] He said a parish is the locality, where "the Church finds her most immediate and visible expression" so that it is the place where the Church lives in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters, the family of God, a fellowship affair with a unifying spirit, the family of the faithful. He presents

this idea in the following words: "Such suitableness is rooted in the fact that the parish is a community of faith and an organic community that is constituted by the ordained ministers and other Christians, in which the pastor who represents the diocesan bishop is the hierarchical bond with the entire particular Church."[37]

Thus, he said the parish is the place where the very mystery of the Church is present, celebrated and lived. He said that the parish is not a mere structure or building but a family, a community of faith, a Eucharistic community, an organic community and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with both the rest of the particular and universal Church.[38] The parish is made up of the ordained ministers and the other Christian faithful and he says that the pastor is also the hierarchical bond of the parish with the particular Church. The parish, according to him, offers an outstanding example of the apostolate on the community level, it brings the laity and clerics together in collaborative ministries, as prescribed by Church authorities.[39]

One emphasis in this document is that the parish provides the "neighbourhood" environment, where the faithful encounter the reality of the Church in the mysteries celebrated, in their active participation in the mysteries, in the opportunities created and fostered by the organism of the parish to have encounters with the members of the faithful, as well as in the opportunities created to foster one's rights and obligations individually or in union with others. The document clearly acknowledges the place and role of individual members of the laity in the Church in general and in the parish in particular,[40] or how in union with other members[41] of Christ's faithful, they should promote the growth of the mission of the Church either within or outside the physical structure of the Church. This document also considered how the parochial pastor should exercise pastoral care in contemporary Church in the light of the changing vicissitudes brought about by the Council.[42]

In his apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae,* Pope John Paul II considered the parish under two different headings. He presents it as the "pre-eminent place for catechesis" and as "a fraternal and welcoming family home" inside the quotation below:

> In short, without monopolizing or enforcing uniformity, the parish remains … the pre-eminent place for catechesis. It must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a fraternal and welcoming family home, where those who have been baptized and confirmed, become aware of forming the People of God. In that home, the bread of good doctrine and the Eucharistic Bread are broken for the Pope John Paul II pointed out m in abundance, in the setting of the one act of worship; from that home, they are sent out day by day to their apostolic mission in all the centres of activity of the life of the world.[43]

For him, the parish is the fundamental school where the faithful are given catechetical formation, to enable them become Christians and participate in the life and mission of the Church. While catechism could take place in several other places legitimately, the parish must continue to be seen as the major point of reference for the Christian people, even for the non-practising ones. He, thus, encouraged pastors to ensure that all relevant structures are adequately put in place towards realizing this important goal of the Church. Then all Christians should see the parish as the fraternal and happy family home they should continually return to share the Word of God, to participate in the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread, and to be continually sent out daily to their apostolic mission in the world.[44] Thus, the foundation of the important theme of the Church as a welcoming family home that is equally a school, was already laid, which the special Synod of Bishops, on the church in Africa would explore to a great height.

The Congregation for Bishops further elucidate on the nature of the parish and how the bishop should subdivide the whole

diocese into parishes, which are communities of the faithful. The Congregation emphasized that the diocese should be subdivided into stably constituted parishes, entrusted to priests appointed as their proper pastors. The Congregation indicated the possibility of constituting parishes territorially, on personal basis, constituted on the basis of rite, language, nationality or other considerations, or where there is shortage of priests the establishment of provisional quasi-parishes. The parishes should enable to faithful to be true ecclesial community that can gather for Eucharistic celebrations, receive the Word of God and exercise charity by corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The priests in the parish should join hands in the works of evangelization and celebration of the liturgy, the administration of the sacraments and the active presence of the Church in the lives of the faithful.[45]

In *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II presented the imagery of "family" as appropriate for the description of parish life in the African context as it accentuates the social aspects of "communion" and "collaborative participation." The two concepts emphasize care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, mutual acceptance, dialogue and trust. He said the thrust in the orientation to new evangelisation was aimed at building the Church as "family of God on mission," a Church that would avoid ethnocentrism and excessive particularistic considerations, while encouraging reconciliation and communion between different ethnic groups that favour solidarity and mutual sharing.[46] These are the dynamic social values usually found in several traditional African societies. When the parish is built up this way, the basis of the bond of relationship is that of a common attachment to Christ, from whom all the members draw their new identity, strength, vitality, power and mission. This bond emphasizes the mutual relationship among the members, which is based on love of God and love of neighbour. The pope considered the parish as "the ordinary place where the faithful worship and live their Christian life," the place which manifests the *communion of various groups and movements*, the place that fosters spiritual sustenance and material support for all. He then

encouraged priests and lay people to ensure that parish life expresses the organic social bond of the Church as a family, where the members devote "themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).[47]

When Pope Francis considered "missionary options" capable of engaging the Church in more aggressive and productive evangelization in contemporary world, he presented the parish as a formidable and indispensable institution that still has great potentials. He said the parish possesses great flexibility that "can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community."[48] He particularly attaches the contemporary and ongoing importance of the parish as effective instrument for evangelization, if it "proves to be capable of self-renewal and constant adaptability." Thus, it can continue to play the role of being "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters".[49]This continual relevance of the parish and its efficacy as dynamic tool of evangelization in contemporary times requires that it must be at home wherever it is established. The parish must live with the people it is meant to serve, relate with all the people, the faithful and the community as a whole and prove itself as a veritable and dynamic instrument of life and hope at all time for all the people.

Pope Francis presents the dynamics required of the contemporary parish as follows:

> The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink, in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.[50]

This is a very important contribution to the continual relevance of the parish in evangelization and missionary activities in the contemporary world. It, however, calls for a particular type of parish that is dynamic, readily in contact with the people in their homes and communities by contributing to their lives, by regularly training its members to be evangelizers, by untiringly making itself an effective centre of constant missionary outreach and availability to the yearning needs of people in the differing vicissitudes of life. The Pope teaches that the parish pastor and the community have to demonstrate creativity and dynamism in the structuring and administration of the parish. The ultimate aim is to make the parish to be so proactive that it can respond effectively and spontaneously to promoting the mission of the Church in all its ramifications wherever it is founded. While Pope Francis' postulation is a further development on the contributions of Pope John Paul II in making the parish more relevant contemporary instrument of Christian mission, it is also a good instrument for understanding the parochial responsibilities of the pastor that are highlighted in canons 528 to 530.

These documents point beyond reasonable doubt that the contemporary understanding and structure of the parish must take cognizance of the spiritual and social wellbeing of all the individual persons and groups that constitute it. They are "living" communities where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love. The parish therefore provides ample opportunities for the implementation of the mission of the Church in the world. Every effort should therefore be made to undertake researches that would come up with authentic proposals on how best to make the parish a very dynamic place where the Church can flourish in limps and bounds. This work is a contribution to this endeavour. Most of the parishes this writer has in view in this book are principally to be found in Nigerian and possibly in some African and other developing world countries. The recommendations would definitely find adaptability and relevance in any parish setup anywhere in the world. There are several factors in the Nigerian and African local scenes that make parishes unique. The nature of

the Nigerian and African societies, contributes special characteristics to understanding and crafting of structures and activities of parishes and *quasi-parishes* in these localities. There are characteristics that allow for a thriving church, that enables the Christian faithful to feel a real sense of belonging, but this writer also acknowledges the ancient saying that 'all that glitters is not gold.'

Ignacio Arrieta, in his reflection on the post Vatican Council II documents and the 1983 Code reality of the parish, considered the parish as part of a diocese, a part of the portion of the people of God entrusted to the diocesan bishop, an organizational unit of a greater community that is integral within the communion of Churches, subdivided for reasons of pastoral care into smaller autonomous communities (parishes) and entrusted to a pastor.[51] He said the parish is "the basic ferment" of the public apostolate of the Church, the principal group of the faithful that the bishop must establish in the diocese for the convocation of the faithful around the Eucharist and the development of liturgical life.[52] Relating the parish with the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology of communion, Arrieta considers the parish as an instrument of communion in the particular church, of decongestion of pastoral functions through the diocesan presbytery and "not an autonomous institution, but rather fully integrated within the diocese and dependent upon it."[53]

Structural Implications for Parochial Functionality

Although the concept of parish has been considerably modified by the Council, as well reflected in can. 515, the traditional descriptions of territoriality, pastoral office, stability, and the care of souls are still considered essential characteristics. This is based on the strong reasoning that 'communion in Christ' could not effectively operate in the absence of ecclesial structures. Possibly, for this fact, the new ecclesial concept of the parish community must be realised in the contest of a juridical structure, which is almost externally similar to that of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The dynamic and complete implications of communion in the parish have yet to be fully realised. In most cases, parishes are too

large to provide an effective experience of Christian communion and have been criticised variously for a supermarket approach to the sacraments, depersonalised approach to pastoral ministry or overwhelming burden placed on the clergy. In many of such parishes the gospel has not yet found a proportionate place in the social life of the faithful.

This revolutionary ecclesiological outlook the Council affects parochial structures and Church policies on the operations of parishes. They affect, as well, the way things are done in the parishes and could expectedly affect the mind-set of diocesan bishops, parochial pastors and members of the laity. Theologians and canonists are still reflecting on how best to formulate the vocational identification of parishes as there is greater participation and more effective collaboration between sacred ministers, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful. There are movements and animated activities that sometimes seem to overwhelm what the immediate pastoral structures can accommodate, as envisaged by the Church's *magisterium* and the provisions of the Code of Canon Law. In the midst of the growing transformation in the notion of the parish, there must be a corresponding dynamism of growth with regard to policies and structures that develops from a renewed theological and canonical self-understanding of the Church herself. The Council encourages the lay faithful to join hands in promoting group apostolates in the parishes. It said that such organizations can "afford support to their members, train them for the apostolate, carefully assign and direct their apostolic activities; and as a result, a much richer harvest can be hoped for from them than if each one were to act on his own."[54]

There should be a structural framework of bringing the various new theological understanding of the Church as the people of God in communion together. How does the parish build a communion among the members, so that the spiritual and social ramifications of life are captured and lived together? This nature of communion occupied the mind of Pope Paul VI at the end of the Council. He reflected on the dilemma of making love

dynamic and ever present among the faithful in the parish community. He wanted to bring out the core reason why people are brought together in the parishes. He identified this as love love of God and love of neighbour. He projects that love should be a dynamic feature of the ecclesial communities. People, he said, should see a re-echo in the parishes the words of Jesus: "They will know you are my disciples if you love one another, if there is this warmth of affection and sentiments; if there is this love vibrating (in the parish) … with that greatness of heart and the capacity of generating Christ among us."[55]

Pope Benedict XVI noted that to improve pastoral structures of the parish through involving members of the consecrated life and the lay faithful in the mission of the Church in co-responsible ways. He said that this demands: "a change of mind set, particularly concerning lay people" who must no longer be viewed as 'collaborators' of the clergy but recognized as 'co-responsible' for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity."[56]

These groups are formed for spiritual or apostolic works in the Church. It is evident in the various parishes how these groups are flourishing, and bringing dynamism and vitality to the life of the parishes. They help to explore and recognize the variety of charisms that God offers the faithful to make fruitful contribution to the growth of the Church. Alongside these movements one should also recognize the small Christian communities emerging in different parishes which are evidently offering a sense of belonging to the faithful and generating new ideas for missionary outreach in the parishneighbourhoods.[57] There is need to maintain a balanced relationship between the parishes and the movements to avoid a possible self-perception of being the only valid ecclesial structure for carrying out apostolate work in the Church on the side of the parish, or of the movements, in their desire for simplicity and authentic gospel life, considering themselves the only way of being Church and so detach themselves from valid institutional structures.[58]

Conclusion

The parochial ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council has expounded the notion of the parish arousing new structures, horizons and ways of actualizing the triple mission of the Church. The new ecclesiology has incorporated new elements to make the parish more dynamic and more responsive to contemporary exigencies of the faithful and of the world around them. The parishes of today create greater opportunities for Christ's faithful to actively participate in the life and mission of the Church by virtue of their baptismal dignity that bestows on them commensurate obligations and rights. In the collaborative exercise of their roles in the Church, the parishes have become better organized structurally and the faithful are able to express their charisms in multiple ways. It is important that pastors go outside set structures in pastoral care of parishioners and study the real content of contemporary ecclesiology of the parish. This way they are able to apply the principle of subsidiary to adapt parish structures to respond to the realities of their local environment and communities.

ENDNOTES

1. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 5, 39, 44 & 63; *Optatam Totius,* 9 & 16; *Gaudium et Spes,* 2 & 40; *Ad Gentes Divinitus,* 16
2. Bonaventure Kloppenburg (trans. by1Matthew J. O'Connell), *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 14-15.
3. Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 33; Vat. Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 3 & 16.
4. Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 33
5. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 3-5; *Gaudium et Spes,* 38-40.
6. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 9-13.
7. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 14.
8. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 15.
9. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 9-10.
10. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 10.

11. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 9.
12. Vat Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 8, 9, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32, 36; *Orientalium Ecclesiarium,* 1964, 2; *Gaudium et Spes,* 32; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (trans. By Adrian Walker), *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 75-76 & 142; Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 154-166.
13. Vat. Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 28; John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 26; *Catechesi Tradendae,* 67.
14. Cosmas A. Ojemen, *Canon Law and the Catholic Church in Nigeria: A Reflective Experience* (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Publ. ltd., 2010), 69-110.
15. Sebastian S. Karambai, *Ministers and Ministries in the Local Church: A Comprehensive Guide to Ecclesiastical* Norms (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Paul, 2005), 142.
16. March F. Fischer, "What was Vatican II's Intent Regarding Parish Councils?" in *Studia Canonica*, 33(1999), 5-25. This is also available at http://www.pastoralcouncils.com/A56.htm.
17. Agbonlahon, E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context* (Limuru [Kenya]: 2000), 184p; Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus (*Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2011), 42-46.
18. Brenda Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (New York: New City Press, 2011), 143.
19. Vat. Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 26.
20. Vat. Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 42; Confer the comments of Edward A. Sweeney, *The Obligations and Rights of the Pastor of a Parish: According to The Code of Canon Law* (New York: St. Pauls publ., 2002), 5-6.
21. Vat. Council II, *Christus Dominus,* 31.
22. Vat. Council II, *Christus Dominus,* 32.
23. Vat. Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 37.
24. Vat. Council II, *Lumen Gentium,* 10-11.
25. Vat. Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem,* 10.
26. Vat Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem,* 11.
27. Vat. Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2* &12. The Council states in no. 2: "The laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in

the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God. In the concrete, their Apostolate is exercised, when they work at the evangelization and sanctification of men; it is exercised too, when they endeavour to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about it in a way that bears clear witness of Christ and helps forward the salvation of men. The characteristic of the lay state being a life led in the midst of the world and of secular affairs, lay persons are called by God to make of their apostolate, through the vigour of their Christian spirit, a leaven in the world.

28. Sebastian Karambai, *Ministers and Ministries in the Local Church,* 141-142.
29. Juan Ignacio Arrieta, *Governance Structures within the Catholic Church,* Collection Gratianus Series (Montreal: Wilson &Lafleur Ltee, 2000), 247.
30. Vat. Council II, *Christus Dominus,* 30.
31. Edward Sweeny, *Obligations and Rights of the Pastor of a Parish,* 152-164.
32. John P. Beal, James A. Coriden and Thomas J. Green (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (New York, Paulist press, 2000), 676.
33. John Paul II, *ChristifidelesLaici,* 31.
34. Sebastian Karambai, *Ministers and Ministries in the Local Church,* 158-159.
35. Sebastian Karambai, *Ministers and Ministries in the Local Church,* 160-161. Partly states: "In team ministry, the moderator takes possession of the parish or parishes, directs the joint action of the group and answers for it to the bishop, although all the priests together are responsible for their overall pastoral activity."
36. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 26; Confer also *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67.
37. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 26.
38. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 26.
39. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 27.
40. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 28.
41. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 29-30.

42. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici,* 31.
43. John Paul II, *Catecesi Tradendae*, 67.
44. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae,* 67.
45. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishop, *Apostolorum Successores* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 210.
46. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63, 131-134, 138-139.
47. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 100
48. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013) 28.
49. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 26.
50. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* 28.
51. Juan Ignacio Arrieta, *Governance Structures within the Catholic Church* (Montreal, Canada: Wilson & Lafleur Ltée, 2000, 247; *Christus Dominus,* 10.
52. Vat. Council II, *Sacrosanctum Councilium,* 42.
53. Juan Ignacio Arrieta, *Governance Structures within the Catholic Church*, 247.
54. Vat. Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem,* 18.
55. This is an extract from *Insegnanmenti di Paul VI,* II (Vatican City, 1964), 1072-1073. This is a translation found in Brenda Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities,* 145.
56. Benedict XVI, An Address to the Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme: "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility", May 26, 2009; cited by Brenda Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities,* 144.
57. Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (New York: New City Press, 2011), 146.
58. Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities,* 147.