

Pope John XXIII

Pope John XXIII, (1881-1963), was elected on 28 October 1958. Considered a “place-holder” Pope, he served until June 1963 and brought great renewal to the Church.

An era of openness and reform in the Catholic Church

He set out to “bring the Church up to date” through *aggiornamento* (updating). His most famous act was convening the **Second Vatican Council** (1962–1965), which introduced major liturgical, theological, and pastoral reforms, including the use of the vernacular in Mass and a greater emphasis on ecumenism.



Ecumenism and interfaith dialogue

John XXIII actively sought unity with other Christian denominations and recognized the value of dialogue with non-Christian religions. He issued *Nostra aetate* (1965), which rejected anti-Jewish traditions, acknowledged the legitimacy of Judaism and Islam, and condemned antisemitism. He also worked to improve relations with the Eastern Orthodox Church and other Christian bodies.

Expansion of the College of Cardinals

Breaking with the long-standing rule of 70 cardinals, he increased the number to 85 and made history by creating the first cardinals from Africa, Japan, and the Philippines. This reflected his desire for the Church to be more representative of the modern world.

Socially significant encyclicals

His encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963, “Peace on Earth”) addressed nuclear disarmament, human rights, and international peace, aiming to bridge divides between the Soviet Union and the United States. These writings emphasized the Church’s role in promoting justice and peace in a rapidly changing world.

Bridged tradition and modernity

Although he did not live to see the Council’s completion, his leadership marked a turning point in Catholic history. He balanced respect for tradition with a willingness to adapt, leaving a legacy of openness, dialogue, and reform that shaped the Church’s engagement with the 20th-century world.

Reflection Questions (more than yes and no – what can I do with this information)

The Second Vatican Council produced 16 documents to guide the Church, what is your understanding of a few of those documents, beyond how Mass is celebrated?

Pope John stressed the importance of ecumenism. What is your knowledge of different faith traditions throughout the world, and how they worship God in their lives?

Pope John expanded the College of Cardinals to include representation from many nations. What is your understanding of the “universality” of the Church – how it reaches every corner of the globe?