

Arkansas' bishop participated in all council sessions

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Arkansas' representative at the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Albert L. Fletcher, recognized early on how the diversity of the council attendees could change the Church.

"It was an unusual sight. There must have been a thousand prelates in that one long hall about a block long and 75-feet wide. They were of all colors and races, spoke almost every language under the sun and although they all wore a white mitre and a cape, they were as varied as the rainbow," Bishop Fletcher wrote Nov. 2, 1962 of the council opening.

Bishop Fletcher also recognized the ecumenical importance of the event.

"I think it was a beautiful gesture on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to invite Protestants and other observers. It certainly will make for better understanding between Roman Catholics and Protestants, as well as Eastern Orthodox," the bishop wrote.

Bishop Fletcher made four trips to the Vatican from 1962 to 1965 and wrote weekly letters that were published in *The Guardian* (now called *Arkansas Catholic*) while he was gone. Each session lasted three to four months, taking the bishop out of the state for long periods.

He was joined by his secretary, Msgr. Lawrence Graves, who became an auxiliary bishop for the diocese in 1969. Msgr. Graves was credited with helping the bishop with his Latin and Italian translations.

Bishop Fletcher left Arkansas by train for the opening of the council Oct. 11, 1962, and boarded the S.S. *Constitution* for the voyage to Italy. While at the council, he was named to the "faith and morals panel" by the American bishops.

Bishop Fletcher attempted to speak during the last session in 1965 on marriage, but there was no time. He made 13 interventions during the council and nine were accepted. In 1965 he was given the privilege of celebrating Mass at St. Peter's Basilica on the feast of St. Andrew, Nov. 30.

According to *The Guardian*, the first council-approved change was the use of English during

the sacraments, according to a Sept. 18, 1964, article. A photo in the Oct. 9, 1964, issue, showed a priest facing the congregation for Mass during the Little Rock Diocesan Council of Catholic Women at Holy Redeemer Church in El Dorado.

The Guardian reported in the March 26, 1965, issue that the first concelebrated Mass in Arkansas, outside of ordinations and episcopal celebrations, was held at Subiaco Abbey. "You already know that the council will close Dec. 8, the great feast of the Immaculate Conception," the bishop wrote on Dec. 3, 1965. "It will be a day of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit for guiding the council during these last four years. It is also a day of petition for light and grace and strength to carry out and fulfill the decrees of the council in a spirit of true conformity to the wishes of the Church."

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