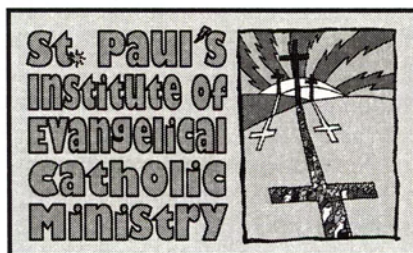


Evangelical Catholic Life: An Introductory Study
Facilitator Guide
3rd Edition

by
Tim Kruse ©2003

With contributors Sandra Kruse and Brad Klingele



The St. Paul's Institute of Evangelical Catholic Ministry
723 State Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53703
608-258-3140 www.evangelicalcatholic.org ecm@evangelicalcatholic.org

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Introduction

Pope John XXIII summoned the Second Vatican Council with the intention of turning Catholicism into a vibrant evangelical movement.... George Weigel, official biographer of John Paul II

Vibrant evangelical movements, such as the Franciscans or Jesuits, are simply movements begun and filled with individuals on fire with the *evangel*, or gospel, of Christ. The Franciscans, for example, would have never renewed the Catholic Church of the high-middle ages, had St. Francis not first experienced a fresh conversion, a turning around of his life, in response to Christ's call to repentance and faith in the gospel. Once St. Francis experienced the joy of conversion and growing in Christ, it took little time for him to begin setting others on fire with a similar love for the gospel. So it has been—and will always be—that the Church is only as vibrant and evangelical as its individual members.

But what does it mean to be a *vibrant, evangelical Catholic*? Let us look at each of these words, beginning with the noun, *Catholic*, and concluding with the two adjectives—*vibrant* and *evangelical*. *Catholic*, meaning “whole” or “universal,” was early in Christian history meant to distinguish the Church universal, or spread throughout the world, from local churches in a given city.

Gradually, however, the term “catholic” took on a more polemical significance used often to distinguish those belonging to the true (i.e. catholic, or universal) Church from those belonging to schismatic (meaning “separated from the whole”) movements. Today, and in this series, we use the term more broadly and less polemically to describe those Christians who, belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, emphasize certain aspects of the Christian tradition, such as liturgical or ritual worship, a sacramental life rich in sign and symbol, the centrality of the Eucharist, the communion of saints, the distinctive role of the priest, and in general, a greater continuity with Jewish forms of worship than some Christian churches and ecclesial communities have seen as desirable.

Vibrant, meaning “pulsating with life,” is what every Christian church and life is meant to be. To quote Jesus: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). To keep our Church and personal life vibrantly Christian is indeed challenging for all of us, but frequently a special effort or intention is required of those of us coming from more liturgical or ritualistic church backgrounds. Pope John Paul II has frequently cautioned Catholics to avoid what he calls “hollow ritualism”—a mere “going through the motions” of Christian worship and living, in contrast to a vibrant engagement with one's faith.

Evangelical, meaning “living the gospel,” is again what every Christian church and life is meant to be. To quote John the Baptist, we are to “repent, and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15.)” Conforming our lives, as Catholic Christians, to the gospel is just what this series, *Evangelical Catholic Life*, is all about. These reflections have been written in order to help individuals and communities discover how to live more evangelically. To this end, over the course of these fourteen reflections, we will look at perennial wellsprings of grace and spiritual renewal, such as personal conversion, private prayer, devotional Scripture reading, and a rich sacramental and liturgical life. Our prayer is that you too will discover just how abundant a truly evangelical Catholic life can be!

These reflections are designed for personal or group use. If you are doing them in a group, we recommend that you read together the Small Group Discussion Guidelines on Page 4 at the beginning of your initial meeting. We also recommend reading the Bible Primer in Appendix A whether you are using the reflections on your own or in a group.