

Alive Priests are definitely aware of what it is that gives them life; they want to protect those things for themselves, and they want to pass them on to others.

The many hours of focus group discussion can be boiled down into a dozen basic themes:

1. Risk-taking and Enthusiasm. Alive Priests take risks, thrive on change, and look at life with enthusiasm. The images of jumping off of cliffs, of living on the razor's edge, and of expanding the horizon reflect this very basic aspect of their personalities.

2. Balance. Not everyone who takes risks or thrives on change has a sense of balance, and the combination of risk-taking and balance may be the most unusual aspect of Alive Priests' make-up. They make sure they get time to themselves, that they don't take things too personally, that they maintain a sense of humor, that they remain grounded within themselves. This balance ~~provides~~ ^{prevents} burn-out and bitterness.

3. Authenticity. Alive Priests place a premium on being authentic, on being honest, on not going through the motions. They want to tell it straight to their people, to themselves, and even to their superiors.

4. Multiple Intimacies. Alive Priests don't let celibacy make them lonely. Dr. John Mayer's earlier research, clinical interviews with more than 100 priests, found that the only happy priests were those who had developed intimate relationships, and that clearly is the case with Alive Priests. They form close relationships within their families and build a strong supporting network of all kinds of friends -- men, women, priests, ex-priests, lay people, Catholics, and non-Catholics.

5. The Power of the Gospel and the Power of the Priesthood. The belief that "there is something else going on here besides me" is at the heart of priesthood for Alive Priests. They talk repeatedly of "the power of the gospel" and "the power of the priesthood," about how they have the

Red Bull
Securities
* *

↳ This felt intensely!

best thing in the world to sell. This sense of power of gospel and priesthood is an essential part of their mission; it provides their purpose.

6. God's Love. Alive Priests are sustained by the feeling that God loves them and will take care of them, that "God never sees us as anything but wonderful."

7. Jesus as Model. Alive priests are clear that their role model is not the pope, their bishop, or their seminary rector; their role model is Jesus. "What would Jesus do?" is the question they ask themselves; they look to Jesus for advice like "Go and eat with the people before you teach them."

X¹⁰⁰ Catholic

8. Spiritual Life. Feeling God's love and seeing Jesus as a model are not enough; Alive Priests sustain their core faith with an active spiritual life involving liturgy, prayer, sacraments, scripture, and other spiritual reading. They all use a different mix, but all carve out a part of their lives for spiritual nourishment.

9. Intellectual Curiosity and Creativity. Alive Priests use their heads; they think, analyze, and discuss, and they do so from a solid intellectual base. Their curiosity is on-going and they are creative in approaching problems.

10. Synergy with the People. Alive Priests draw life from the people they serve, and that in turn inspires them to serve those people better, It is a synergistic relationship. Alive Priests draw inspiration from the example that lay people set in their own lives. And Alive Priests are awed by their role in people's lives at the key moments of birth, marriage, death, sickness, and suffering.

11. Listening. "Listen First" is the motto of Alive Priests. In an analysis of recent surveys of representative samplings of priests, Andrew Greeley remarked that their doesn't seem to be much listening going on in the Church. Alive Priests are the exception, and listening gives them life.

12. Sensitivity. Because they draw life from the people and because they have learned to listen to them, Alive Priests are particularly sensitive to people's needs. That sensitivity in turn gives them life; they are motivated by the desire not to be the "unkind priest" who turns someone away from the Church.

When Alive Priests must confront serious issues -- the controversies facing the Catholic Church in the United States, their own role as men in American society, and the state of the next generation of priests -- they draw on those things that give them life. This produces a consistent approach to all challenges.

1. Emphasis on People, not Institutions. Over and over again, when confronted with a choice between hurting people and upholding institutions, they refuse to hurt people. "There's very little worth throwing someone out of the church over, very little," said one priest, "I don't put the Church thing on people," said another.

2. Look for the Silver Lining. To Alive Priests, the glass of life is half full, not half empty. Whatever the challenge, they look for the bright side. They believe that confronting honest differences will make the Church stronger. They believe that the right response to the priest pedophilia scandals will make the Church more honest, less clerical, more responsive to victims. They believe that their role as men in society is to be counter-cultural -- to relate to both men and women, to offer a model of reflection and intimacy that rejects materialism.

3. Being Alive is Teachable. The passion with which Alive Priests voice their criticisms of today's seminarians and newly ordained priests reflects the passion with which they view their priesthood and their belief that what they know is teachable. Some of it involves skills, and some of it involves the lessons that can only come from experience and on-the-job training. Their anger builds a link between priests who have no biological children and any father who has ever been desperate to pass his own knowledge and experience on to his biological children.