



A newspaper opinion piece by Lawrence Downes* about persons with developmental disabilities and the Special Olympics is full of refreshing candor; wrapped in disappointment and determination. Slightly edited it reads:

“We hail the good will, the medals and smiles in the 50 year battle for inclusion and acceptance for people with intellectual disabilities. The glow has to last because the athletes will need it when they get home and become invisible again.

The Special Olympics chairman, Timothy Shriver, convened world and corporate leaders to help them to commit to greater support in terms of global development programs and priorities. They are not on the world’s agenda, however much he tries.

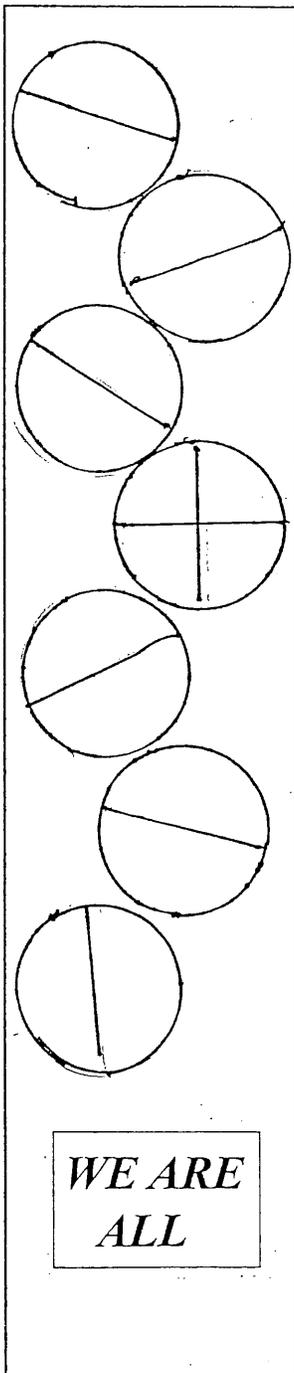
Money for schools and health education never reaches people with intellectual disabilities, an estimated 3% of the population. They are hidden. The injustices they suffer go unanswered.”

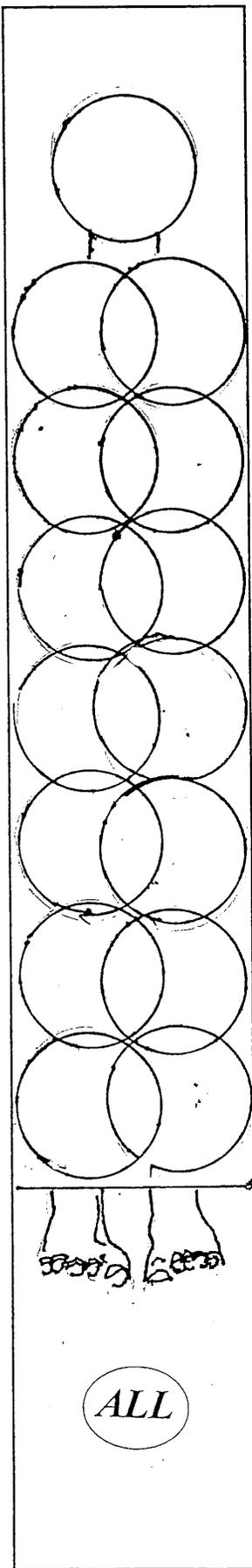
Mr. Shriver has a theory.

“When members of a minority make progress, he said, it is because ‘deep down’ most people know they are the same as us, as me, whoever the dominant majority is. ‘But our group it’s like ‘no, no, no they are not like us. They are not going to medical school if we give them a scholarship. They are not going to become engineers,’ he said. ‘We labor under the barrier, the attitudinal barrier, that this population is too different to matter.’

Given this barrier, Special Olympics is sticking with gentle persuasion and the attitude-changing power of sports. It is all carrot, no stick. Special Olympics is a utopian organization, and to encounter it is to enter a well-constructed bubble of acceptance and equality. But outside the bubble, the battle of hearts and minds and for rights and laws is not going away.”

What can an evangelizing Church do?





The Archdiocese of Chicago Spred has a strategy. It uses the principles of hospitality, subsidiarity and reproducibility focused entirely on a PARISH. Key to this effort within the believing community is to understand that catechesis and liturgy are simply two different sides of the same coin.

Community Religious Workers (CRWs) are emissaries of the main staff. When invited by a parent, or pastor, they will come to a parish, solicit assistance from mission-oriented parishioners through announcements, on-site meetings, e-mails, home visits to families or even speak from the pulpit. We seek to form a cadre of adult catechists while simultaneously pursuing persons with developmental disabilities of whatever age. Invariable they will invite parents and volunteers to "come and see," i.e. visit the Archdiocesan Center in Vicariate III and view actual sessions from observation booths. The same resource is available at the Regional Centers - in Vicariate I at St. Francis de Sales in Lake Zurich or in Vicariate II at Queen of Angels in Chicago. Observations can allay the apprehensions of parents or prospective volunteers. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, there are six vicariates consisting of about 60 parishes each.

The Archdiocesan Spred Office in Vicariate III offers resources for catechesis and liturgy. It is a servant to parishes to help them discover the 'invisibles' and to own them. It supplies materials, 7 standards, a guide for adult catechesis sessions, folders for each of the 4 roles in a parish community of Spred catechesis. This observation resource center offers four different environments for the four chronological age groups. Two 30 hour training courses are offered, one set in the Fall and another in the Spring.

Fr. Jean Mesny, a priest of the diocese of Lyons in France and his friend, Fr. Euchariste Paulhus, an educational psychologist in Sherbrooke, Quebec developed a mentality and a method of catechesis suitable for persons with developmental disabilities. It focuses on creation, community and Word. Through the process of evocation, creation and everyday events, especially elements of Liturgy, are scrubbed and become transparent to the presence of Christ. We are all in a state of conversion, so Chicago added a similar prior session for adult catechists. Faith is dynamic, it is either growing or receding for all of us. An adult personal faith of the catechist is key.

The strategic effort of Spred has been to make the "invisible" visible by forming small communities of faith in each of the 350 parishes of the Archdiocese. It is an invitational approach. We try to have others see the possibilities. Parents and Siblings are quick to see the possibilities - yet sometimes are hesitant: "You don't know my son, or daughter, brother or sister." Again, our response is 'Come and See' by observing a small community of faith working with a small child, a teen, a young adult or an adult at Archdiocesan or Regional Centers. It is an easy way to put people at ease. The goal is to form quasi-permanent catechumenates within the parish for those with developmental disabilities. People do not graduate. The sacrament of the Church remains. What they will see, they will recognize as possible to replicate in their own parish. Community Religious Workers will sometimes work for years to establish a particular parish Spred center.

Chicago Spred is aware of 1,192 care providers in Cook and Lake counties for persons who live apart from their families. They are in homes, such as Community Independent living arrangements which may house anywhere from 1 to 15 persons. A recent study established that developmental disabilities include about 1.6% of the population. Developmental disabilities include persons with intellectual delays, those on the autism spectrum, those with cerebral palsy, severe epilepsy and other disabling impairments. In Chicago alone there are at least 52,000 people

ages 15 - 64 with developmental disabilities - this does not include children younger than 15. In the state of Illinois there are more than 184, 688 persons with developmental disabilities. Spred is only scratching the surface. Yet, as Karl Rahner writes, the tyranny of numbers can oppress. Evangelization cannot be overwhelmed by statistics.

Pope Francis writes to this issue:

“Since this exhortation is addressed to members of the Catholic Church, I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”**

Beginning with Josephine Kinney in the 1960s, along with Elizabeth Sivek (1972) and Julia Hess (1987) the Community Religious Workers are true apostles. Ramiro and Eva Hernandez, Armando Cuaya and Rocio Lopez have reached out to those who speak Spanish. And now goals are being set for ministry with those who speak Polish.

All these workers are to be commended for their dedication and work; at times it reflects the disappointment and determination of Mr. Timothy Shriver or the myth of Sisyphus. In this myth, Sisyphus, the king of Corinth, is condemned to rolling a stone up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again just as it nears the top. Deaths, aging, residential transfers of friends and catechists contribute to the Community Religious Workers constant “backing and filling.” Spred may not be on the parish agenda for years. Yet with 140 parish Spred centers and with 15 new ones preparing to open, the effort is not utopian.

The culmination of the whole endeavor is when one participates in a Spred Family Liturgy. This celebration is held seven times a year on the first Sunday of the month in the Spred Chapel at the Archdiocesan center. Spred Family Liturgies have been held in 43 parishes this last year. At these liturgies, nice things happen - in W.B. Yeats’s phrase, there is a “terrible beauty.”

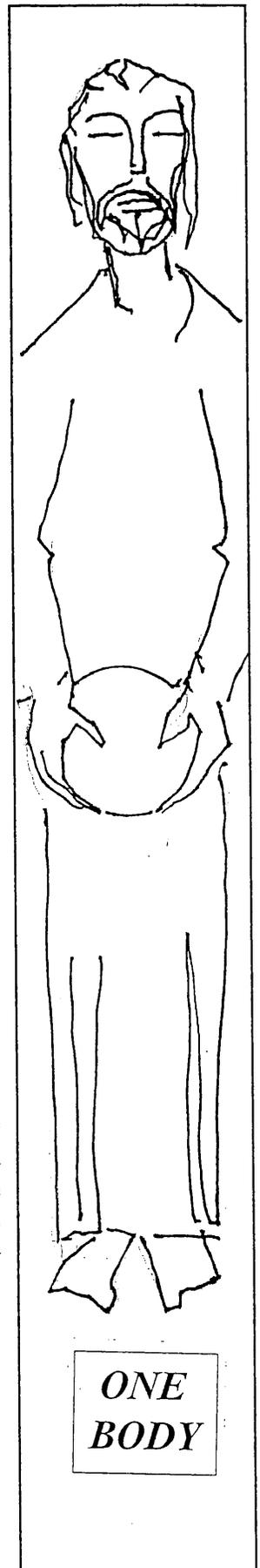
The catechesis in Spred is biblical-liturgical and thus prepares everyone for the Eucharist; the use of gestures, slow processions involving all in preparing the altar, in presenting the gifts, silence, a simple “message” by the priest. When ordinary Mass attendees experience our friends in the context of the Liturgy you can almost hear the bubble burst and disappear. Now we know who they are. They are like us, ordinary people, with anxieties that we have, and yet struggle on. They have burdens we do not have and yet are uncomplaining and open to reality.

Faith and worship can make us all one Body, fed and nourished at the same table.

Rev. James H. McCarthy
Director, Spred Chicago

*New York Times, August 1, 2015

** Evangelii Gaudium, the Joy of the Gospel by Pope Francis, # 200



Planning Meetings

Vicariate I Deanery A, B, C

St. Paul the Apostle, Gurnee Tuesday May 17

Vicariate I Deanery D, E, F

St. Alphonsus Lgouri, Prospect Hts Wednesday May 18

Vicariate II Deanery A, E, F

St. Catherine LaBoure, Glenview Wednesday May 25

Vicariate II Deanery B, C, D

St. Teresa of Avila, Chicago Monday May 23

Vicariate III Deanery A, B

Vicariate IV Deanery A

St. Viator, Chicago Thursday, May 26

Vicariate III Deanery C, E

Spred Center, Lowe Ave Tuesday May 31

Vicariate IV Deanery B, C, E

St. Odilo, Berwyn Wednesday May 25

Vicariate V Deanery A, B, C

Our Lady of the Snows, Chicago Thursday May 26

Vicariate V Deanery D, E

St. Alexander, Palos Hts. Thursday May 19

Vicariate VI Deanery A, B, D

St. Benedict, Blue Island Thursday June 2

SPRED

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CALENDAR

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES 11:00 AM April 3, May 1

MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE APRIL 24, 2016

Drury Lane Oakbrook

LEADER CATECHIST WORKSHOP April 16, 9:30 to 12:00

Spred Center, 30th and Lowe, Donation \$3:00

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING April 9, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

SPANISH SPEAKING. 30th and Lowe, parking lot entrance.

OBSERVATION

6-10 Group Mon. April 11, 25 May 9 6:00 pm

11-16 Group Tues. April 12, 26, May 10 7:00 pm

17-21 Group Tues. April 12, 26 May 10 7:00 pm

22+ Group Mon. April 11, 25, May 9 7:00 pm

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING Sat. April 9, 11 am to 4:00 pm

Queen of Angels 4412 N. Western, 2nd fl. To register call

Betty Rogus 773-588-0614 or www.queenofangelspread.org ENGLISH