



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago

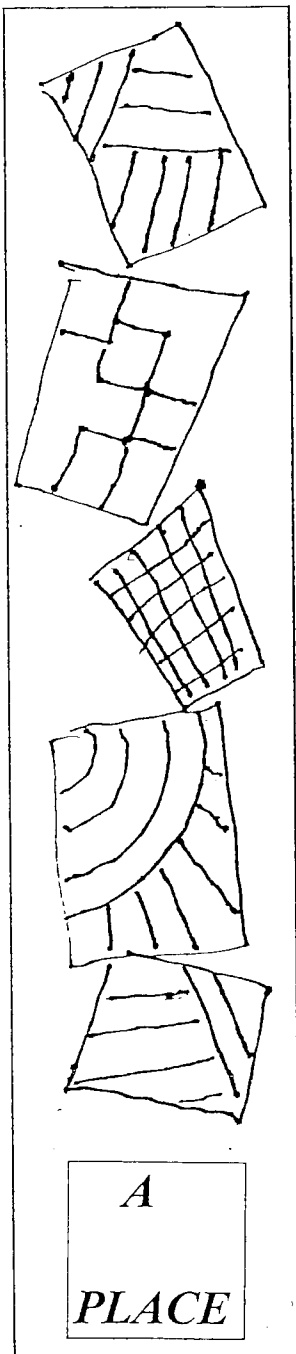


SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616
312-842-1039 www.spred-chicago.org

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The story of Creation is familiar to most people. It invites us to treasure the marvel of life around us. The poetic biblical narrative calls us to be moved by the images of the universe and the enchantment of the precious planet that graces our senses. We have been endowed with a place of endless possibilities and inspiration.

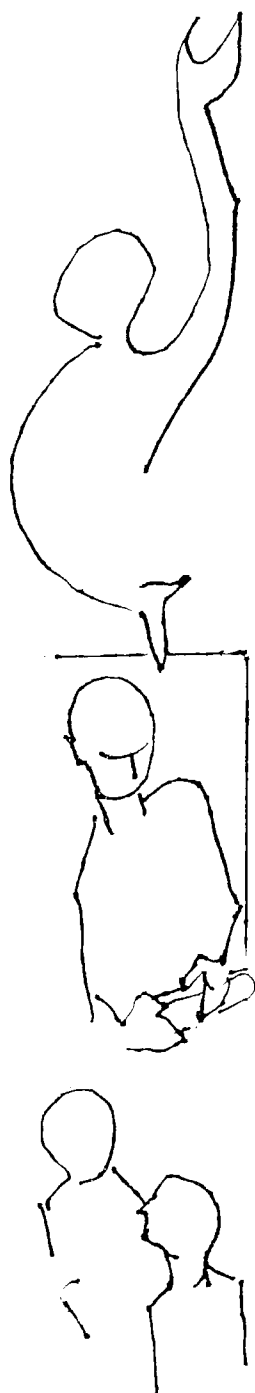
*Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed
And God looked at everything he had made and found it to be very good.
...Then the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and
blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.
Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden and he placed there
the man whom he had formed. ...
The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a suitable partner for him." ... So the Lord God then
built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. 1*

And thus the Lord God graced humanity with a place to excite the senses and awaken the heart and soul of every person throughout the ages to an appreciation of the boundless treasures of our loving creator.

Place then is not a static reality. It enfolds both the life surrounding us as well as the life within us. Place morphs, evolves and surprises us in response to who we are and what we bring to it. There is an exchange in life as we leave little bits of ourselves along the path.

I have a garden. As soon as the earth begins to soften following the winter's assault, I am eager to renew my annual exchange with the tenacious survivors and the timid fledglings crying for help. I survey, I ponder, I imagine. I surmise and rearrange the perennials according to the timing of the sun and the shade. I select the annuals that will best offer a rainbow of color. My heart rejoices with the advent of each new bud, the yawn of a leaf and a pop of color. I bring my care, my energy, and my tenderness to my backyard paradise and it responds in kind. A gracious interplay of co-creation unfolds anew. This is sacred time. This is sacred place.

*For like a grain of fire smouldering in the heart of every living essence
God plants His undivided power, buries His thought too vast for worlds
in seed and root and blade and flower. 2 (Thomas Merton)*



TO

LIVE

My thoughts now drift back to the birthing of our Spred community at Queen of Angels parish. With the blessing of the pastor, our fledgling team of catechists began a renovation project on a quaint little haven we discovered in the rectory basement. Despite its lack of care, it whispered promise. We envisioned a nook of hominess and a certain coziness hidden under its unkempt crust. It teased our creative souls.

And so, our team cleared clutter, dismantled old paneling and removed water-damaged carpeting. We selected paint colors and forged ahead boldly with our interior design. We replaced an old fluorescent light fixture with simple track lighting and warmed the decor with cheerful curtains. We donned old clothes and armed ourselves with paint brushes. We gifted the place with our loving enthusiasm. We blessed it with our hearts. In time the hidden spirit of this precious dwelling drew its life from the people who gathered week after week, year after year. The litany of names, the memories, the bonds of friendship are etched in the walls. Life happened here in a very special way.

Twenty years later our Spred families were invited to a new dwelling place, an accessible space. Again we were privileged in its design. Our personal fingerprint would mark its uniqueness. It would be the hallowed home of our three Spred families with observation windows to welcome new guests. We warmed it with our familiar array of activities, agape settings and the handcrafted wooden table of our celebration circle.

It was a lovely and fresh new place, but in our hearts, we missed our old dwelling. We trusted that time would bring life and spirit and we could continue our sacred journey in love. Indeed our catechists, our friends, our honored exchange gave it the breath of life that we treasure so deeply. What is this phenomenon that we hold so dear? What is happening here?

Place becomes graced through its exchange with the human spirit and the pulse of the people gathered. The Spred program depends heavily on the prepared environment, but without the dedication of the community and the full surrender to the process, the wonder will be lost. Our place is meticulously cared for. Each activity has its place and its purpose. A visit to the space will draw appreciation and evoke the oohs and ahs, but without the community, it is simply a meticulously fussed-over sanctuary. It is a still life.

The members - male and female, young and old, with varying personalities and charms infuse our place with life. The process calls for a full investment of each member in order for the treasure to be unveiled. Our ritual greeting speaks of recognition, welcome and friendship. Partnerships assure accompaniment and security. A waiting seat calls each into fellowship. Attractive materials entice. Choice of work is an honor and a gesture of respect. Soft music soothes the spirit and settles the soul.

This time of preparation asks each to make an effort to enter the dance. The process depends on trust in its intention. It invites an opening of self to inspiration and attention to the moment. It requires full presence to a chosen work. Time is consecrated by mindfulness. It balances solitude with connection and opens the door to sacred time. Our beings are readied for something more.

Drawn together face to face in a circle of communion, each person is recognized and appreciated. A whispered invitation lures us. With hearts full of anticipation we find our place in the hollowed space of our celebration area.

A sense of the sacred envelops us. Our family of faith appreciates and enfolds each member. The leader catechist draws us into a memory of life that unearths a common feeling. Our shared stories become a manifestation of love. This place, this time exonerates the act of gifted exchange and is fundamental to our awareness of God with us. It is a time to listen and to become transparent to one another. Participation is encouraged from all. No one should be left on the fringes. The spirit of our Creator solidifies our bonds and fills us with a new awareness. Renewed in the Spirit in this holy place, we lift our voices in song. We settle in the grace of the moment as the gentle strains of music wash over us and invite us to rest in His presence.

Our simple meal of fellowship is the gift of the community as all share in the setting of the table, presentation of food and prayerful blessing. The evocation is Eucharistic. The deliberate action deepens the intuitive awareness of the sacred meaning of the shared meal and echoes in our being each time we gather for Mass.

Through the catechetical process of Spred we all come to realize the value of our entering into the action of the Mass. The celebration of Eucharist is not for bystanders. Meaning emerges from personal investment. Eucharist is the act of gift exchange. We are called to enter into the dance.

Through training sessions, Spred catechists discover their worthiness to participate in an artful preparation of the Eucharistic Celebration. The proclamation of the Word finds new insight through interpretive movement. Processions are adjusted to the pace of those who may falter. The table is dressed with uncertain hands supported with vigilant tenderness. The gifts are cradled with love and presented with the depth of reverence exemplified in our catechetical holy place.

*We offer you, our Creator, these gifts of bread and wine.
We ask that your Spirit which rests on these gifts,
descend and hover around this community
so that we may learn to be Christ to one another. 3*

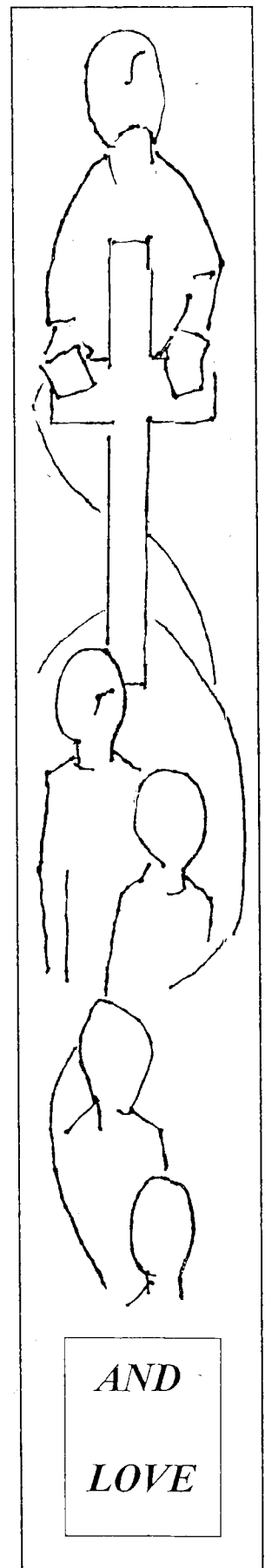
Inspired by the humble posture of our Spred friends, the community is transformed. Our church, our place of worship comes alive with the joy of creation, thrill of participation. The people gathered are touched by a healing wholeness. In our offering the congregation is drawn into the full Eucharistic movement of giving and receiving.

*We come as your people, we come as your own
united with each other, love finds a home. 4*

Julia Hess
Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker

1 Genesis, chapter 2. 2 Poems of Thomas Merton, New Directions Pub. 1948,

3 Ministry & Liturgy Eucharistic Prayer of Inclusion, No. 5 (June-July 2000), 4 David Haas



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Training

Introduction to Spred, English and Spanish

Feb. 10, 17, 24 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center
2956 So. Lowe Ave 312-842-1039

Role Orientation, English and Spanish

March 10, 17, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center
2956 So. Lowe Ave 312-842-1039
Visit our website: www.spred-chicago.org

Observation

6-10 6:00 p.m. Monday Dec. 11, Feb. 12
11-16 7:00 p.m. Tuesday Dec. 12, Feb. 13
22+ 7:00 p.m. Monday Dec. 11, Feb. 12

Spred Family Liturgies

2956 So. Lowe Ave, Chicago 11:00 312-842-1039
Dec. 3, Feb. 4, Mar. 4, April 8, May 6

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