



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago



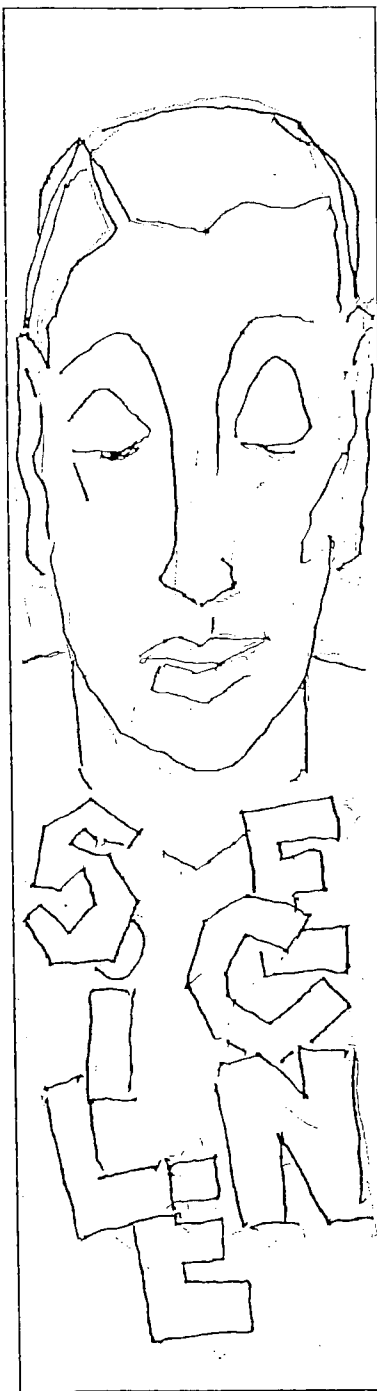
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

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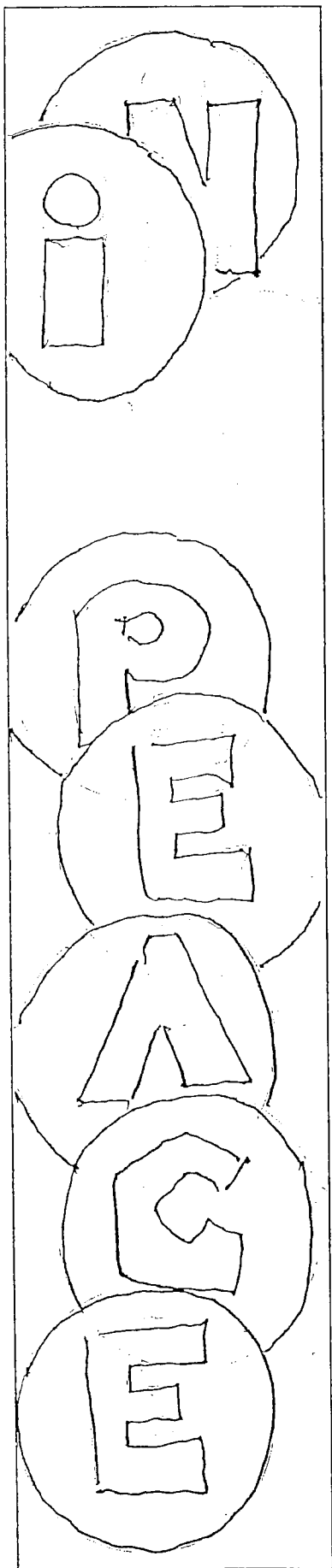
We were blest to discover the catechetical work of Fathers Mesny and Paulhus from Quebec, Canada and Lyon, France. They introduced us to a method of catechesis that is permeated with life and personal relationships. Work with the method helped us to realize that when daily life situations are drawn into a faith atmosphere we are enabled to discover the presence of God through the action of the Spirit. We contemplate the Mystery together and deepen our awareness of belonging in the body of Christ.

Such a method is open to all. Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are able to relate and catechetics is all about a personal friendship with God. I remember especially being told that if we want others to know God not just in a scientific way, but in a personal way, with their whole being, then we must testify by putting our own personal relationship with God out where everyone can see. As catechists we witness the faith in us by our very way of being.

We were trusted by our mentors, after several seminars over a period of time, to live the method with others. We began to write sessions with a view to forming small faith communities of catechists who would receive help similar to what we had received so that they could welcome persons with special needs who need a method that calls for an environment of friendship that focuses on discovering God's love present in life experiences common to all in the faith group. We formed a small group so that others could observe us and replicate a Spred faith group in their parish.

Reflecting on the history of our experience over the years I am aware of essential elements incorporate in each Spred session that make it possible for us to reach our goal, to know God's loving presence abiding within us, among us and in all of creation.

As we embark on this way of knowing through the catechist preparation session, we begin to experience a personal transformation which enables us to be a source of spiritual light for those we welcome. Such an experience allows the Spirit of Jesus to speak through our spirit, our way of being. It is the shared effort of each catechist community to know God through personal communion, that unites us and makes it possible for our friends with special needs to find a spiritual home, an experience of Church, with us in any Spred center.



Becoming spiritually prepared to welcome our Spred friends means that:

- + *A spirit of trust* develops among us. We relate personally and become grateful to share faith together.
- + We become committed to our mission and make every effort to be present and participate wholeheartedly. *A spirit of joy* develops among us as we treasure our belonging in the group.
- + We appreciate the need for shared leadership and become able to support the effort of each person to enter into the experience of the sacred. *A spirit of generosity* grows among us.
- + We welcome a contemplative spirit, recognizing and treasuring the value of **silence**. Becoming still and free of distraction allows us to discover our own spirit and prepares us for communion with *the indwelling Spirit of God*.

A contemplative spirit cannot develop without an environment that supports each person's need to become still, to live in the present, to welcome **silence** in an atmosphere of friendship.

Looking into the room where Spred friends are welcomed one would observe:

- + soft lighting that comforts and supports stillness, **silence**
- + soft music that supports harmony, **silence**, peace, security
- + activities prepared for the entire community that invite concentration leading to personal **silence**
- + each catechist engaged in an activity, personally chosen, as a means of becoming concentrated, content, peaceful, **silent** and ready to welcome their friend with special needs
- + each friend being welcomed into the environment that supports friendship and invites participation in an activity that leads to their experience of stillness, **silence**, sitting next to their catechist, happy to belong, anticipating the joy of being together in the celebration room around the book of God's word.

Such is the ideal toward which each catechist community strives. Each tries to develop a schedule that allows time for the essential elements, that support the goal of the session, to be in place. When this model of being joined together in friendship and in stillness is cultivated by the catechist community, our friends accept the invitation. They gradually experience **silence** through the dynamic relationship that develops between them and their catechist. They absorb the spirit of the catechist community and choose to participate, to belong.

As the experience of becoming prepared for the heart of the catechesis with our friends ends, we all are different than we were at the time of our arrival. Being silent for a period of time we have lived the experience of belonging together. We sense a common spirit. In **silence** we form a circle and the leader catechist helps each person to acknowledge being happy to be present and ready to be called to our sacred space. All in the circle await to hear their name called. Each responds to the call to go to the sacred space and is guided to a place around the Book of God's word by the Leader catechist.

We anticipate with joy being able to support the process of guiding our friends toward their experience of the Mystery, in which we are enveloped through our experience of the catechist preparation session. We share a desire to pray together. Prayer for us is experiencing the life of the Spirit of Jesus in what we live.

Because we have made an effort to rid ourselves of distractions and agreed to enter the work of becoming **silent** we are able to enter the process of evocation. The method is a continuous evocation. We become engaged through the leader catechist with a life experience that we know our friends have experienced. Evocation calls us not to just remember what we have lived but to become united with the essential core of the event. Our whole being is engaged. Our mentors expressed evocation as "ones total presence or communion with the fundamental life dynamic of the human experience".¹

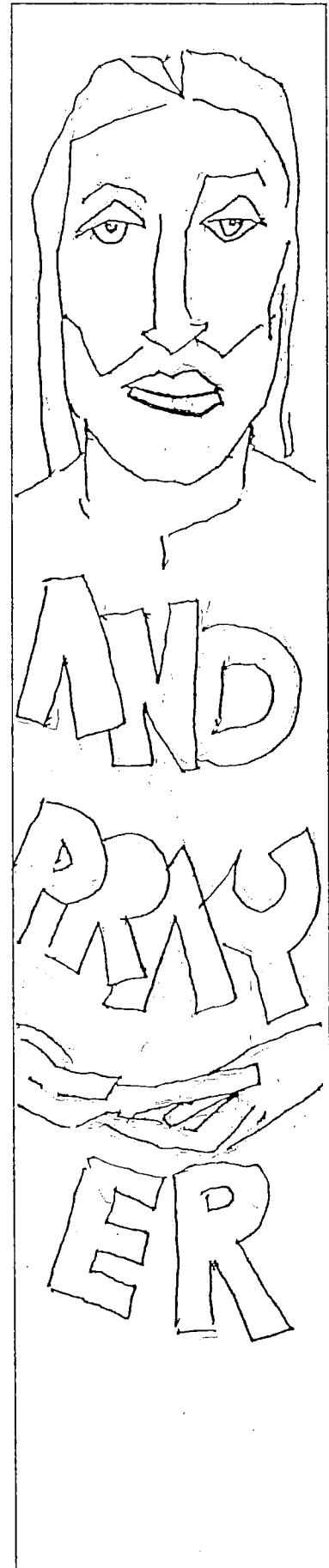
Our personal sharing of our life experience draws our friends into their experience. When all are engaged the leader names the quality of our experiences that is universally true. We experience being one. In the intensity of our being unified we gain an implicit awareness of the divine presence. This allows the evocation of a life experience to become explicitly sacramental, situating it in the faith of the Church. The leader then identifies a liturgical evocation where we meet Christ through the priest who gathers us. Finally through the biblical evocation when the leader reads from the bible we sense our relationship with the Father through Christ. It is then that a special unification takes place and each of us becomes disposed to receive the message of Jesus.

Our human spirit is our life line to the Spirit of God. The experience of **silence** that deepens within us allows us to sense our spirit and readys us to welcome the message of Jesus. Catechist preparation is essential if we are to be a light for others who hunger as we do to experience the Spirit of Jesus flooding our hearts with God's love.

Sr. Susanne Gallagher SP
Spred catechist & staff member

1. Study Week, 1967 Mentality, Method, Program by Fr. Euchariste Paulhus

2. Word into Silence, Dom John Main O.S.B., 1998, The Continuum Publishing Co. New York.



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Training

Spred Center, 2956 So Lowe, Chicago 312-842-1039

Introduction to Spred, English and Spanish

Feb. 17, 24 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

Role Orientation, English and Spanish

March 10, 17, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

Helper Catechist Training

March 3, 1-6 pm Spred Center, English

March 24, 1-6pm Spred Center, Spanish

Observation

6-10 6:00 p.m. Monday Feb. 12, Feb. 26

11-16 7:00 p.m. Tuesday Feb. 13

22+ 7:00 p.m. Monday Feb. 12

Spred Family Liturgies

2956 So. Lowe Ave, Chicago 11:00 312-842-1039

Mar. 4, April 8, May 6

Visit Our Website: www.spred-chicago.org

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