



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago



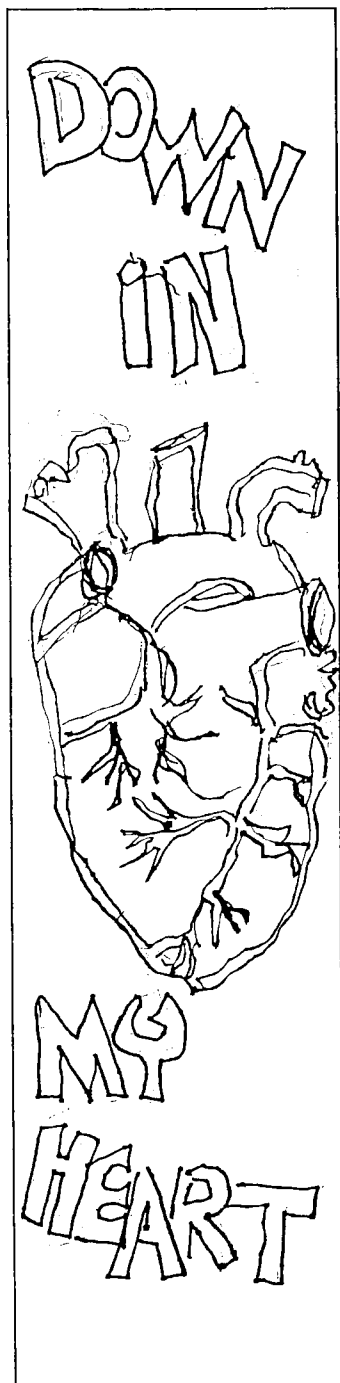
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

312-842-1039 www.spred-chicago.org

January 2018

Volume 94 Number 1



Allow me to introduce my sharing with a rhyme:

Winter nights are dreary.
Winter nights are long.
Cometh March and
the robin breaks the silence with a song.

This is a rhyme which my mother learnt at school and in her old age used to remember and sing when it was the time for it. Another song my mother enjoyed listening to on the CD and sing during our rides together in my car is, **There is a beautiful song:**

There's a beautiful song, beautiful song, in my heart, in my heart. Such a beautiful song, such a beautiful song, a song of praise deep down in my heart.

It sings in praise of a gracious God who's glory fills all the earth, from the highest heavens, to the deepest seas, the glory of our God is known.

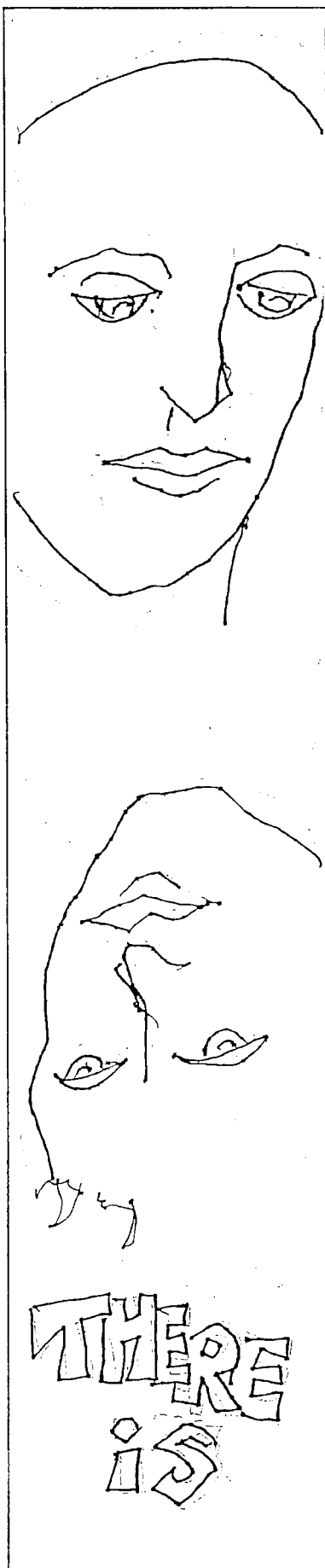
There's a beautiful song...

It sings in praise of a faithful God who's love for us has no end, the God who's face shines on us is the God who's praise we now sing.

A song which was sung both in English and Maltese to welcome her in church for her funeral service.

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know (Blaise Pascal). Meister Eckhart was asked: "Where do we begin?" He replied: "Begin with the heart." And heart speaks to heart.

In SPRED a lot of our communication with our friends is non verbal. We communicate with an open heart. In SPRED we use symbolic awareness and gesture to help us communicate the Word of God with our friends. Through gesture we can only reach others if what we do comes from our hearts and can reach into the hearts of our friends. In SPRED we communicate in different ways: through gathering together in peace, through gathering together around the Book of God's Word, through gathering together around the table sharing contentment, joy, ourselves but always sharing with an open heart.



It is our friends who evermore taught me this means of communication. For this I am really grateful. Through experience we know that at first we approach our friends to be of some help to them.

On the contrary, however, it is I who received help. Accompanying our friends taught me evermore to communicate without words, to speak from the heart to the heart.

Robert, a friend of ours, is always restful on his back with his face almost looking upwards without words but with his face full of expression and showing his teeth with a smile. Looking at him with one's heart and calling him by name I know that I have been able to reach him. I have reached into his heart and he is able to respond in the same way.

It is the same with Renee, more restful on her side. When I call her by name, "Renee, you are going to receive Holy Communion," she with an expression of unity with me, with an expression of great communication with her face and her beautiful eyes wide open, looks at the Host and into my eyes, opens her mouth to receive the Eucharist.

Sitting beside my mother, a very elderly woman, bedbound and restful, she used to call me by name and say, "Hold my hand." I was sure that our hearts were united together.

In our Catechist Preparation Session we, as catechists, are helped to keep our hearts open so that God can enter and be present there at all times and be able to communicate with our heart. This takes place especially, during our reflection time when we are given the opportunity to have some quiet and peaceful time to look into our hearts and then in our sacred space we are able to share without comment or judgement.

One is moved by how effectively heart speaks to heart especially through touch. This takes us more deeply into the mystery of heart speaking to heart at our SPRED sessions. How touched can our friends be with our reaching out to hold their hands. To touch our friends with intellectual disabilities with hands of welcome, of comfort is telling them that they are respected and valued as members of our community of faith. Heart speaks to heart. When we touch the heart of our friends, we find out that our hearts too are transformed. With our friends we know it, we touch it, we feel it.

What a priceless treasure we have received and are trusted with when the door was opened to us and were called and we accepted to be in SPRED: to enter into friendship with persons with intellectual disabilities.

In the Gospel Jesus says that if someone found a treasure in a field, he or she would sell everything in order to buy that field. Our friends seem to have less complicated defense mechanisms than we, the so called intelligent and healthy.

Their inner walls are built more around all the suffering they have lived than around pride and the need for power. Their hearts are simpler, more trusting. They respond to love with love. So it is no wonder that Paul should say in his letter to the Corinthians: "God has chosen the weak and the foolish to confound the strong and the intelligent." (1Cor.1:27,28)

People with intellectual disabilities possess qualities of welcome, wonderment, spontaneity and directness. They are able to touch hearts and to call us to unity through their simplicity and vulnerability. In this way they are a living reminder to the wider world of the essential values of the heart without which knowledge, power and action lose their meaning and purpose. Weakness and vulnerability in a person far from being an obstacle to union with God, can foster it. It is through weakness, recognised and accepted, that the liberating love of God is revealed.

SPRED groups are called to be "banquets of love" (Agapes) prepared especially for those society rejects and considers "useless" or a "problem". For God each person is unique and important whatever his or her gifts, capacities and shortcomings, whatever his or her culture or religion. Each one has a heart made to love and be loved. Our goal is to treat each person with respect and love, as a unique human being, to listen to each one and to help each one become more fully him or herself in an environment of mutual friendship and trust. The heart is the place where heaven and earth meet, where the presence of God is revealed.

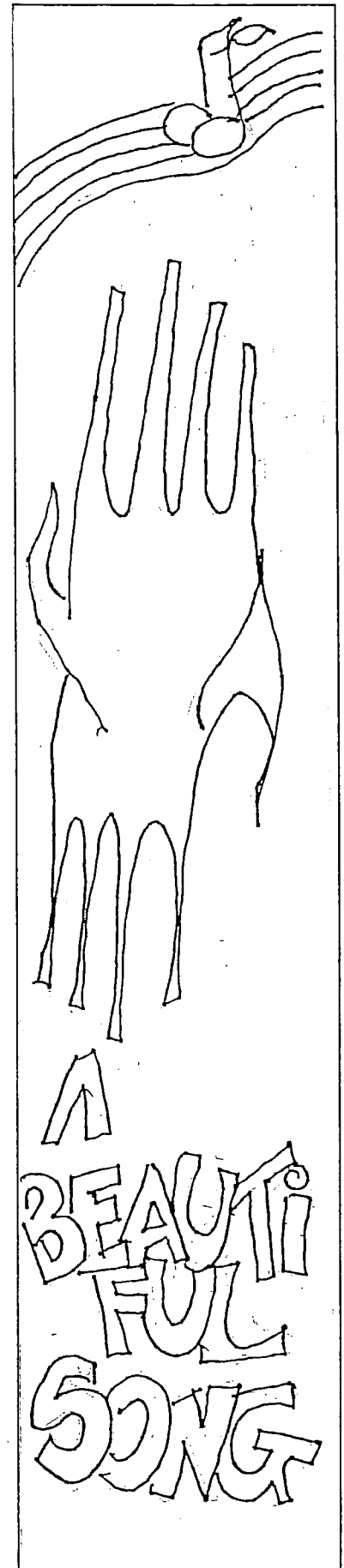
When heart speaks to heart, we become aware that we are called first of all to create communities of love. According to the SPRED Standards, we in SPRED are called, first of all, to welcome persons with intellectual disabilities but also to reveal to society, and thus to our neighbours, that the value of each human being comes from their capacity to love and not from their capacity to do things.

Through our SPRED communities of faith the heart, love, friendship with our friends makes us aware of our call to witness to the importance of those who are weak. We are called to show that it is important to listen with love and respect to each person, especially those who are broken and powerless.

Their lives have meaning; they have a mission as a source of communion of hearts. God is present not only in the beauty and greatness of the universe, but also in weakness and in littleness, in pain and crises which can become moments of growth and also conversion. Sitting beside my bedbound mother silently without words whatsoever I used to look at her lovingly as if looking at Jesus in his littleness in the Eucharist: Heart speaking to heart.

Fr. Trevor Fairclough (with the help of) George Harrington SPRED Malta

This is our first composition of personal sharing originally in Maltese for the Malta SPRED Newsletter. The others up to now were all taken from the Chicago and Glasgow SPRED Newsletters and the SPRED View of Ireland.



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

Helper Catechist training

Feb. 3, 11:00-4:00 Eng. St. Francis de Sales, Lk. Zurich

March 3, English 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

March 24, Spanish 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

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

Core Team Morning of Enrichment

January 27, 9:30 to 12:00 noon Spred Center

Spred Family Liturgies

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

Feb. 4, Mar. 4, April 8, May 6

Visit our website: www.spred-chicago.org

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