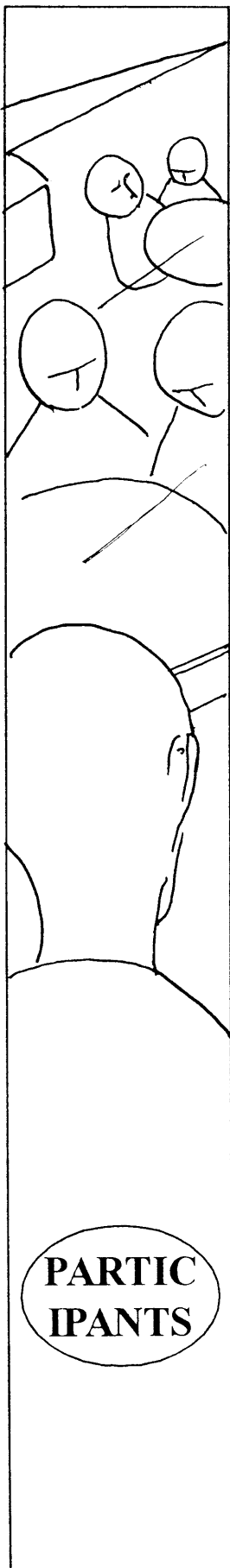


The experience of observation is an essential aspect of the formation of every Spred catechist. Observing a Spred session means taking the time and energy to participate in catechesis by seeing others work together in a community of faith, their ultimate goal being communion with God through the reception of the message of Jesus.

When people come to observe a session, we ask them to acquaint us with their present situation. “Why have you come?”, we ask. “Tell us about your situation.” We want to understand their intentions so that we can collaborate. We then give an orientation to the session they will observe and we give some pertinent information about the group they will be with. Though they will be separated by one-way viewing mirrors, we always hope that each observer will ‘get lost’ in the process they view, and live the session as if they were in the room with the Spred community. Following the session, all the observers meet together with their host to share what they experienced and to reflect on its meaning in view of their present situation. They respond in writing to some questions asked of all who observe. Those who are being observed and those who prepare catechists for Spred centers are helped and encouraged by the insights of observers.

The catechists being observed are volunteers, adult believers, not so different from those who come to observe. They prepare themselves as a community, experiencing a Spred catechist preparation session prior to each session with their special friends. This prayerful preparation helps them to be in harmony in a very personal way with the goal of the session. They too are on the journey of faith, longing to know the Lord’s presence and goodness, to find renewed strength, to sing praise. They do not know how their special friend will experience the session. It is not for them to know. It is for each to be present to his friend, and to witness a hunger to hear the Word, to enter into a process of becoming ready to go to the celebration room, and in that holy space to share life, to receive the message of Jesus and sing praise.

As I study the responses of the marvelous people who have come to the Spred Observation Center in the past three months, I find a tremendous support for the experience of observation. The responses show the many ways that the occasion of observation is drawing the participants into the mystery of faith as it is being lived in the community they are observing. The insights confirm the importance of a lived experience of the different dimensions of faith as an ongoing source of nourishment for a catechist. I present a sampling of insights and comments.



Observers wonder.... can I do Spred ministry in my parish, can I become involved?

"Tonight's observation helped me to realize that we can help the people in our parish who have special needs."

"I found it very beneficial to see what Spred is all about. I never would have realized what actually takes place. I would very much like to be a helper catechist."

"I have attended meetings in which I was given information in general about Spred. I came to observe and determine if I will be suitable for the task. During the observation I saw how everyday experiences put us in contact with the Spirit. I received love and excitement. I saw the Spirit flowing from the kids and the leader and helper catechists. I see myself very compatible with this way of discovery where faith and love grow from relating to each other."

"The observation brought everything together. I've heard explanations of Spred but this experience brought it all to life"

"My experience tonight made me realize that this is something I would really like to be involved in."

"I found the observation to be very moving. I expected the session to be "lesson-oriented" but was amazed at the sense of spirituality and community."

"Tonights experience was a taste of the Eucharistic banquet for me. I will help our parish to establish this program."

Parents wonder.... is Spred a place for my child, for me, to grow in faith:

"I can see that this would really enrich the lives of both the catechists and especially the children. I am really looking forward to having my son participate in this program."

"We are parents of a child with Downs Syndrome and we would like her to learn to pray and make her first holy communion. ...Our daughter will learn in Spred and enjoy it alot."

"Attending an observation gives us a new light and brings greater understanding of the Spred Program and its goals. I encourage all new catechists to attend an observation with me. The smile of understanding after an observation is my fuel to keep all catechists involved in training and observation. I also brought a parent to an observation. He was hesitant about bringing his son to Spred. He not only enrolled his son in our Spred group; he also became a catechist."

"I can see myself involved in Spred because of this observation and I think it will be a deeply spiritual ongoing experience for me."

Catechists wonder... will I be effective...but are drawn to the sacredness of it all:

"I don't think I would be able to understand what Spred is about unless I got to actually see it as I did"

"I gained new confidence tonight in my observation of the leader. I saw how all members of the community were helped to be involved in the session."

"Through observation I gained an insight into patience with the process of evocation. Let each person touch the evocation in his/her own way."

"Tonight's observation convinced me that the sessions work."

"This observation confirmed my commitment. It also put me at ease as I can see that I will be supported by all as I will support all."

"Through observation I feel like I was there. Now I'm more excited to start ."

"This observation really touched me mentally and spiritually. It put a whole new perspective on it."

“During the observation I was able to better identify the process of moving through the session toward the message. It was a “sacred” observation and I treasure the willingness of this community to be observed. The message was ‘trust’, and I feel, though a stranger, a profound level of trust freely given to me as an observer.”

“We are all new to the program. Enthusiasm is high and we are a little anxious. I noticed the calmness and quiet tones of all the catechists. As a leader catechist I hope to bring the Word of the Lord to our friends and to become more spiritually touched myself.”

“The leader catechist was so reverent. The more I see it, the more I love it. I just hope my contribution will be somewhere near what I observed.”

“I just started in Spred last week and have committed myself to the work of this ministry. Each time I attend a session, I find that the experience is a deepening of my faith.”

The experience of observation, although a strong tool for learning skills and understanding a very special pedagogy, is first and foremost an experience of catechesis for all who are present; this includes those who participate as observers. The community being observed becomes the channel for the observer’s experience of communion with the Lord.

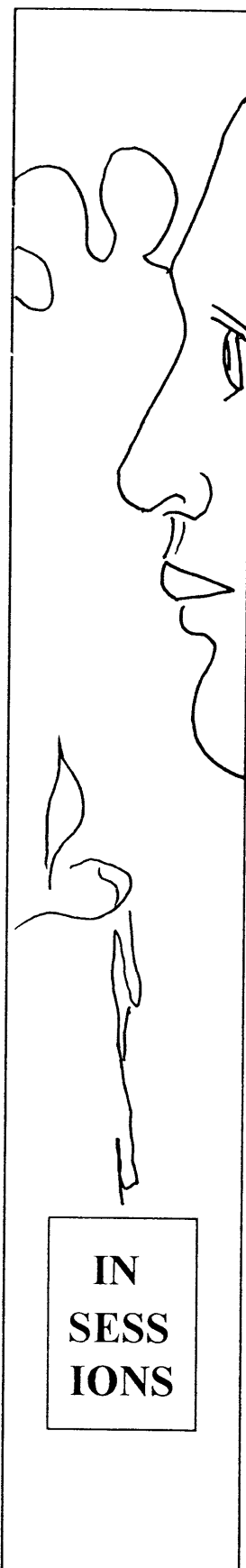
The General Directory for Catechesis reminds us that catechesis is essentially an ecclesial act and that the Church sows faith in the hearts of those to be catechized so as to nourish their profoundest experience of life. What I hear from observers is that the community they have observed has nourished and enlivened their spirit. Most speak of being affected by the faith of those observed, of choosing to belong to a Spred community with hopes of deepening their own faith in the process of being a sign of faith for others. Some speak of wanting this sacred experience for their child, and perhaps sharing in the experience of a faith community together. Those being observed perform one of the fundamental tasks of catechesis, to promote knowledge of the faith. When one encounters Christ one desires to know him, one desires to belong in his family, to learn of the Father’s great love, to grow in a community of faith.

Observers who are preparing to assume a leadership role in their parish Spred group speak of the skills learned through observation. Their role, especially the leadership role is awesome, to proclaim the Word, to give each person the message in the name of Jesus. Yet they draw strength from observing the maturity of the adult catechist community who, like themselves, desire to continue growing in faith. One cannot fail when the Spirit of God is the animator of the community.

It is not unusual for a pastor or other member of a pastoral staff to accompany their catechists for an experience of observation. To observe the climate of the environment needed for an experience of the sacred and the attitudes of the faith community is very helpful. When parish leaders see the faith response of their members to an experience of catechesis they must find consolation in the strength of such witness. They must be gratified by the sense of mission that is so often articulated. “I’m excited to help build a Spred community of faith in my parish.”

Sister Susanne Gallagher, S.P., Spred, Chicago

General Directory for Catechesis , United States Catholic Conference, 3211 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194



SPRED CALENDAR

TRAINING

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and
Activity Catechists Sat. 1:00 to 6:00
FEBRUARY 19, 26, MARCH 4

ROLE ORIENTATION

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and
Activity Catechists Sat. 1:00 to 6:00
MARCH 18 AND 25

MAMRE DINNER DANCE 2000

APRIL 30, 2000 AT THE MARTINIQUE

OBSERVATION

6-10 6:00 p.m. Mon. Feb. 14, 28, Mar. 13, 27
11-16 7:00 p.m. Tues. Feb. 8, 22, Mar. 7, 28
22+ 7:00 p.m. Mon. Feb. 14, 28, Mar. 27

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Feb. 6, March 5, April 2, May 7

SPRED CENTER

2956 So. Lowe Ave, Chicago Il 60616
Tel. 312-842-1039 Fax.312-842-4449

Directions: Exit 31st Street from Lakeshore Drive or
Dan Ryan, West to Lowe Ave, north to 30th and Lowe.

MASS INTENTIONS

Requests and donations can be arranged with
Fr. James H. McCarthy
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Tel. 312-842-1039

Spred

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