



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago

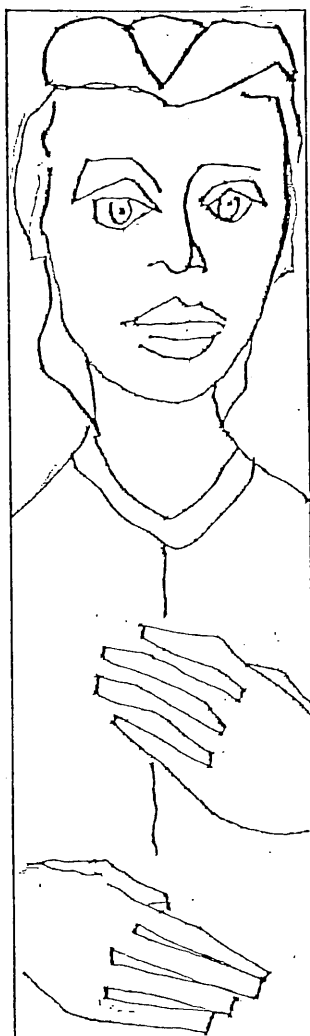
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

312-842-1039 [www.spred.org](http://www.spred.org)

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Volume 90 Number 3



*THE*

*LEADER*

Recently we received a request to reflect, and to share our reflections on the mission of the leader catechist in a Spred community of faith.

The leader catechist is a believing adult who has set out on a path to lead the Spred group in the development of faith. The leader is somewhat at ease with the path chosen and has the confidence to move forward. Not everything is in place at once. Along the path there are new insights, new friendships, as well as moments of pain, uncertainty and confusion. However, the leader pilgrim has to keep going. But going toward what, toward whom?

The leader is not alone. There are other adult catechists following the same path of discovery and growth. When the whole group is together, the adult catechists and their friends with intellectual disabilities, there is an air of enthusiasm.

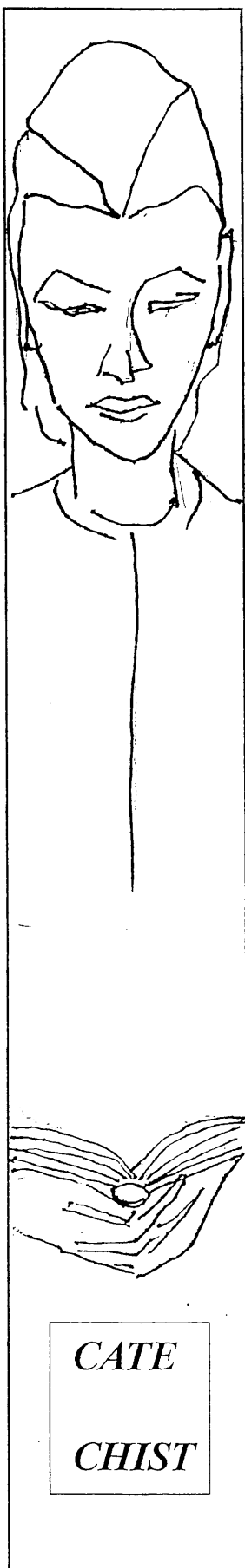
However, while trying to give direction to the group, the leader has to first cope with the self. Of course we are God's handiwork and our first task is to let God get to work. In the words of St. Irenaeus:

"You who are the handiwork of God, await the artist's touch. God will work everything in the best possible way. Offer God a heart that is supple and docile. Maintain the imprint that the artist has given you. Do not lose your plasticity, lest you forfeit by hardening the marks left by his fingers. If you keep the relief, you will rise to perfection, for God's will will adorn what is clay. His hands have fashioned your substance. He now comes to clothe you with pure gold and silver within, while without you will be so splendidly embellished that the king will himself desire your beauty...If only you give him what is your own - that is, your trust and your obedience - his art will fashion you and you will be God's work." <sup>1</sup>

While God is doing his work in us, we too have some work to do. We need to understand what this work is. We need to be at ease with the task and above all with the mentality that gives meaning to these tasks.

#### Environment

The leader along with the parish chairperson needs to have an appropriate space for the catechesis. The first step in the method used will be to develop a sense of the sacred. So there has to be at least a hint of the sacred in the space to be used for Spred. Sometimes this is a big job and the leader has to keep on working until the space is conducive to silence and beauty.



"Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the 'way of beauty' (via pulchritudinis). Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus." 2

### Our Friends

The environment is for our friends who may have various sensory issues that have to be taken into account. So it may be wise to limit the amount of sensory stimulation in the room. To get an idea of what is needed, the leader visits the family or the group home to pick up clues and warning signals. While approaching our friends with respect and acknowledging their dignity, it is important to get an idea of their needs.

Our friends are persons who have likes and dislikes, desires and fears, gifts and limitations. No matter what, the leader catechist is there to grow in acceptance and love. As our friends experience being loved, they will love. The basis of catechesis is the relationship of love.

### Objects

Each session with the total community requires objects that can become symbolic as the evocation process develops during the session. The object (flowers, paintings, water, oil, etc.) has to be clearly visible and able to be touched by each and every one. Time has to be given so that each element has a chance to become symbolic.

### Time and Pace

Time, pace and an atmosphere of peace is necessary for the symbol to unfold. Catechesis "is not the same as a set of tasks dutifully carried out despite one's own inclinations and wishes. ...Evangelization is full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction." 3

This attitude is "picked up" by observing other good leader catechists. This attitude is caught rather than taught. One can learn the bits and pieces of the tasks but the tasks only make sense within this mentality of love, patience, kindness and joy. These require time and a slow pace to come to the surface.

The goal of the path we are struggling along is to be in communion with God. God is beyond being an idea. God is a presence and the leader is first of all a witness to this presence. There are an infinite number of ways to grow in awareness of the presence of God. We get a clue from all the elements that are involved in developing a sense of the sacred. We seldom hit our nose directly on the sacred. Rather the sacred is usually something we catch out of the corner of our eye.

I find one way to develop a sense of the sacred is through music. "Music is the homeland of mystery: it has the echo of an unknown world beyond clear ideas and defined feelings." 4 I mean great music that does more than assault the nerves and crush the heart. This form of "music" is an end in itself. But we think of great music as that which opens the heart. "Music is...at certain moments the force that shatters the vault within which we suffocate." 5 When our hearts are open it is much easier to be a leader catechist. If our hearts have been touched by mystery, it is easier to lead others along the path that has a symbolic quality and is open to mystery. If we are to lead the group into communion with God, we go as far as we can and then God does the rest.

## Method

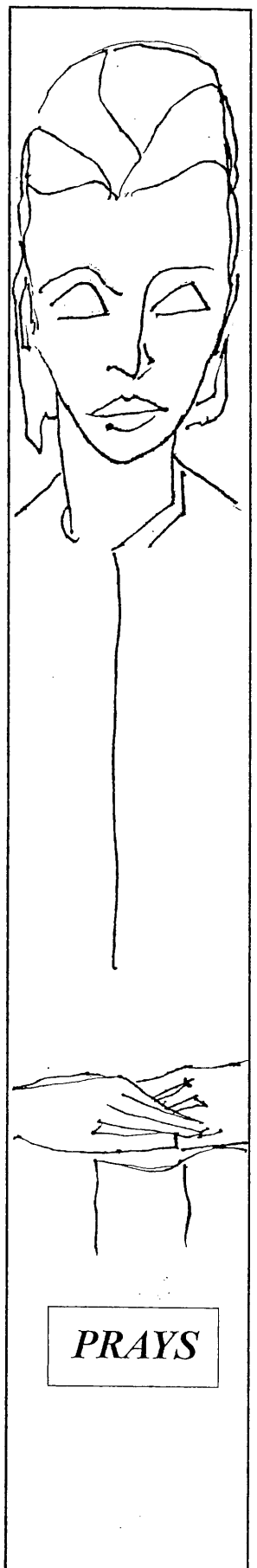
The method used in Spread catechesis is the Method Vivre. This method begins with what we live everyday. Then we take a particular piece of it, move it around in the light to get a better fix on it. When it offers a glimmer of light that speaks of the sacred, the beyond, we can move along with the rest of the session. It is not a question of giving a typical sermon. It is not explaining something or declaiming something or articulating a moral to be lived. Actually few words are used if it is true to the experience and the group's awareness. When the group gets a focus on the object that is becoming symbolic, then feelings are explored and we are able to go from individual insights to a group insight and can use the word "WE". At this point we are able to place this group awareness in the light of liturgy and then in the light of the word. The leader can then say to each one, "Jesus says to you today...". This all flows easily when the leader catechist is at home in the world of beauty, music, and communion with God. This process of unfolding the method begins in the community of adult catechists. It moves to the mystery that will also come into play in the session with our friends the following week. With the adult catechists, the leader really has to assume leadership. This often involves working through sticky issues so that all can grow in faith through symbolic awareness.

The next challenge is to incorporate those with disabilities into the group. The symbolic process is a gift and a grace because some of our most limited friends quickly pick up in an intuitive way what is happening. My greatest joy as a leader catechist is to see one of my friends soak up the sacred like a sponge. This goes beyond ideas and feelings. It shows itself in a kind of resonance. When this grace appears only silence is appropriate. In this silence "we are in a mysterious sanctuary where we are inseparably joined to God." 6

After the leader leads the group in personal expression through music and gestures and enjoys table fellowship, then the doubts are apt to set in. After all, chances are that the leader was educated in faith by being instructed in the truths of the faith. This means primarily ideas. But we are working with people with intellectual disabilities so we have to live in the world that is theirs and it certainly is not the world of ideas. Like any person living in another culture for the first time, it seems to be an odd world. In our former world, you either knew something or you did not. The catechist could give grades and have a pretty good idea how well the instruction went. So the leader using a symbolic progression worries "did the group get it?" "What am I going to do with..? Did I slip off the path and teach rather than evoke? All we know is that we have planted seeds and who knows what will develop.

"Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor.4:7) This certainty is often called 'a sense of mystery.' It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit. This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable (cf. Jn 15:5). We can know that lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted." 7

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, SH, Chicago Spread



1. Labat, Elizabeth-Paule, *The Song That I Am, On the Mystery of Music*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minnesota, USA 2014 pg.78. 4. Ibid pg. 1, 5. Ibid pg. 42, 6. Ibid pg. 32

2. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*, US Conference of Bishops, 2013, No. 167 3. Ibid No. 261 7. Ibid No. 279

## CALENDAR

### SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Mar.6, April 3, May1

### MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE

Drury Lane Oakbrook, April 24, 2016

### CORE TEAM TRAINING

Role Orientation (3-1) March 12, 19, 1:00-6:00pm

English and Spanish at Spred Center, 30th and Lowe  
parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists  
Enter through parking lot, go through garden door.

To register call Spred office, 312-842-1039 ext.11.

Leader Catechist Workshop Sat. April 16, 9:30 to  
noon, Spred Center, 30th and Lowe, Donation \$3:00

### OBSERVATION

6-10 Group Mon. Mar. 7, 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 19 7:00 pm

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

### HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING

Sat. March 5, 1-6pm Spred Center, English

Sat. April 9, 1-6 Spred Center Spanish

312-842-1039, 30th and Lowe, parking lot entrance

Sat. April 9, 11 am to 4:00 pm Queen of Angels English

4412 N. Western, 2nd fl. To register call Betty Rogus

773-588-0614 or [www/queenofangelsspred.org](http://www/queenofangelsspred.org)

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