



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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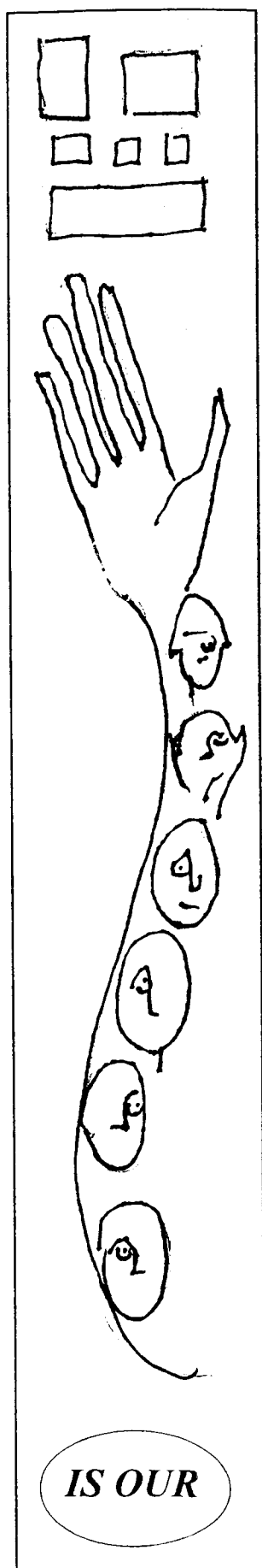
**THE
PARISH
CENTER**

Over the last few decades there has been a great deal of discussion within the Church about the "New Evangelization." Several parishes and dioceses have established offices and commissions focused on the New Evangelization and the New Evangelization has been one of the core components in many of the revitalization efforts taking place in parishes and dioceses around the world. While the term, New Evangelization, has been used extensively in many Church circles and has been a popular topic discussed by theologians and Church leaders, many of us have struggled to fully understand the purpose and goal of the New Evangelization.

A few years ago, I was at lunch with some friends, and one of the topics that came up in our conversation was the New Evangelization. One of my friends mentioned that despite years of reading and attending lectures on the New Evangelization, he was still trying to grasp the full meaning of the New Evangelization. As I sat eating my lunch, I began to ponder why my friend was having such a tough time grasping the meaning of the New Evangelization and I began to wonder about my own understanding. While pondering this conversation, I came to the realization that I never really gave much thought to the New Evangelization. To me, the New Evangelization was an effort to bring the gospel message to those who had fallen away from the church. My understanding seemed to align with Susan Wood, who wrote that "this effort of new evangelization is addressed primarily to lukewarm Christians, former Christians, or secular societies that were once Christian." ¹ "What more is there to possibly grasp" I thought to myself. It is simply an effort to draw those who went astray back to the Church. Later in our conversation my friend made the comment that he felt inspired by **Pope Francis' vision of the New Evangelization which calls us to evangelize those on the margins of society.** It was during this conversation that I realized that Spred is actually on the forefront of the New Evangelization efforts. Spred brings the Gospel message to some of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in our society, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While I had been ministering in Spred for a few years at the time of the conversation, I had yet to associate Spred with the New Evangelization.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis reminds the Church that it is her primary duty to proclaim the Gospel to the poor which includes people with intellectual and developmental disabilities since she has a special bond with the poor. Pope Francis writes that:

"If the whole Church takes up this missionary impulse, she has to go forth to everyone without exception. But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much to our friends and wealthy neighbors, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, "those who cannot repay you" (Lk 14:14). There can



be no room for doubt or for explanation which weakens so clear a message. Today and always “the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel”, and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them.”²

Francis reminds us that the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel and as a Church we must ensure that the poor and vulnerable have the opportunities to hear the Gospel message. Just as Jesus had a special link to the poor, so too must the Church be linked to the poor and vulnerable. If the Church is to remain aligned with the mission of Jesus, it is vital that the Church not forget the material and most importantly spiritual needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through our Spred ministry, we bring the Gospel message to our friends and help to ensure that the Church remains linked to the poor and vulnerable. We also ensure that our friends with disabilities receive the religious and spiritual care they desire.

Pope Francis, however, does not simply instruct the Church to proclaim the Gospel to the poor and marginalized but also instructs the Church to establish and build relationships with them. Pope Francis pleads to the Church to accompany the poor in their journey through life and become close to the poor. Pope Francis writes that “it is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits.”³ Pope Francis wants the Church to build solidarity with the marginalized. He wants the church to understand both the joys and struggles encountered by those who are poor. He desires that the Church become close to the poor. It is one thing for the Church to help the poor, but it is quite another thing for the Church to know the poor, become close to the poor and to build relationships with the poor.

We adhere to this call to build relationships with the poor in Spred. In Spred we build small communities of faith precisely to develop and foster relationships with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In our Spred communities we draw near to our friends and strive to accompany them on their journey through life.

It should be noted that we are not called to proclaim the Gospel to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and develop relationships with them simply because it is the right or the nice thing to do. We proclaim the Gospel to them and develop relationships with them to bring about a spiritual transformation.

Not only are our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities spiritually transformed through the Gospel message that is proclaimed to them, but **we** who proclaim that message and develop those relationships are also spiritually transformed. Through the relationships that we develop with our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities, **we** come to deepen our own relationship with the living God who is in our midst.

Spred does not merely provide a service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, it provides an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal for both the people with disabilities and the catechists. This is precisely the reason Pope Francis insists that the poor, vulnerable and marginalized be put at the **center** of the Church’s mission. If a parish abandons or chooses not to acknowledge those on the margins, including those with disabilities, it abandons any chance of bringing about a real spiritual renewal and transformation.

Pope Francis writes that “The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in the lives of the poor and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”⁴

The primary focus of our new evangelization efforts must be on those living on the margins of society. For Francis the new evangelization is an opportunity for the Church to reevaluate and realign her priorities to ensure that they have not gone astray. It is an opportunity to ensure that the Church’s values are in line with the Gospel values and the mission of the Church.

According to Francis, the new evangelization is an invitation for the church not only to proclaim the Gospel to those on the margins, but also to develop and foster relationships with the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

The new evangelization is a chance for the Church to put the poor, who throughout history have been marginalized and forgotten by both society and the Church, back at the center of the Church’s mission. Just as the poor, marginalized and vulnerable were central to Christ’s mission, the poor, marginalized and vulnerable including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be at the center of the Church’s mission.

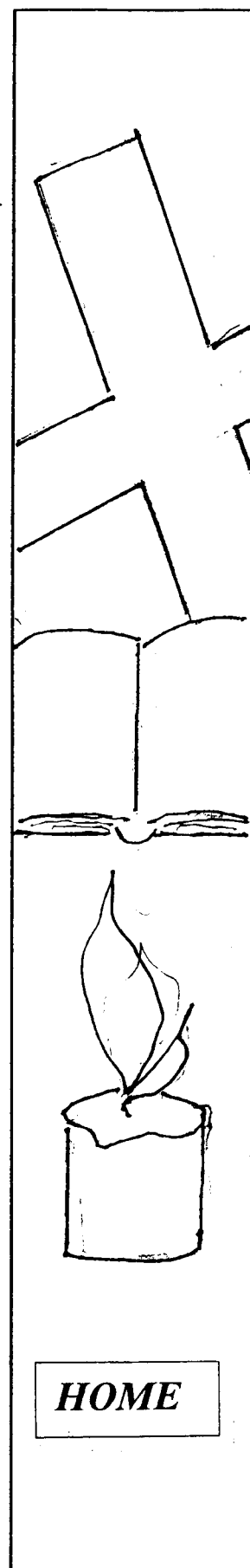
Over the last couple of years, I have assisted with Spred animation efforts at a number of parishes within the Archdiocese of Chicago. One response I frequently hear from pastors, directors of Religious Education, and others in parish leadership when I inquire about establishing a Spred ministry in their parish is that they do not have people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at mass on Sunday. Unfortunately, not only do these parish leaders fail to acknowledge the various physical and attitudinal barriers that keep people and their families from the parish community, they also fail to adhere to what Pope Francis refers to as the “missionary mandate of Christ” which mandates the entire Church to **Go Forth** and proclaim the Gospel to all. Pope Francis contends that “The Word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him **to go forth**. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel.”⁵ It is not enough for a parish community to welcome the poor and marginalized. Parish communities must also be willing to seek out the poor and marginalized and bring the light of the Gospel to them. Parishes cannot simply sit back and wait for them to come to the parish doors, nor can they just turn a blind eye to their spiritual needs. If parishes are serious about becoming truly missionary communities, they must be willing to **Go Forth** and **personally** bring the Gospel message to those on the peripheries which include people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While they may not always be visible to us, we must acknowledge that they do live among us and it is our duty to make sure they are not forgotten and that they receive spiritual care.

Joe Quane
Spred Chicago

1. Susan Wood “The Church: A People Sent in Mission”, in the New Evangelization: Faith, People Context and Practice (London; New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2016) 64.

2. Francis, Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel: Apostolic Exhortation (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013) No. 48.

3. Ibid. No. 210 4. Ibid. No. 198 5. Ibid. no. 20



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Training 2020

Introduction to Spred English and Spanish
February 8, 15, 22, Spred Center 1pm to 6pm
2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago, 312-842-1039

Role Orientation, Parish Chairperson, Leader and
Activity Catechists, March 7, 14, Spred Center

Mamre Dinner Dance Fundraiser
Nov. 16, 2019, Crystal Sky Banquets, McCook Il

Observation

6-10 6:00 p.m. Monday Nov.4,18, Dec, 2
11-16 7:00 p.m. Tuesday Nov.5,19, Dec. 3
22+ 7:00 p.m. Monday Nov.4,18, Dec. 2

Spred Family Liturgies
2956 So. Lowe Ave, Chicago 11:00 312-842-1039
Nov. 3, Dec. 1, Feb. 2, Mar. 1, April 5, May 3

Visit our web site: www.spred-chicago.org

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