



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago



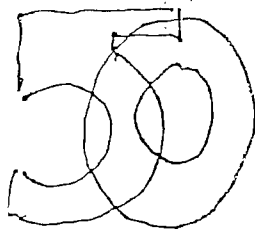
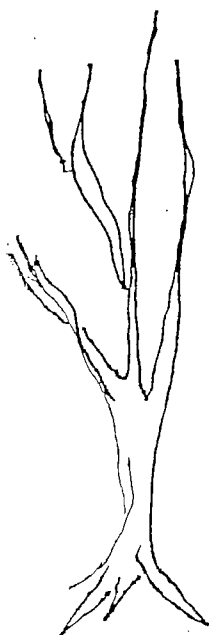
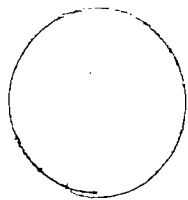
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

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

October 2017

Volume 93 Number 2



YEARS

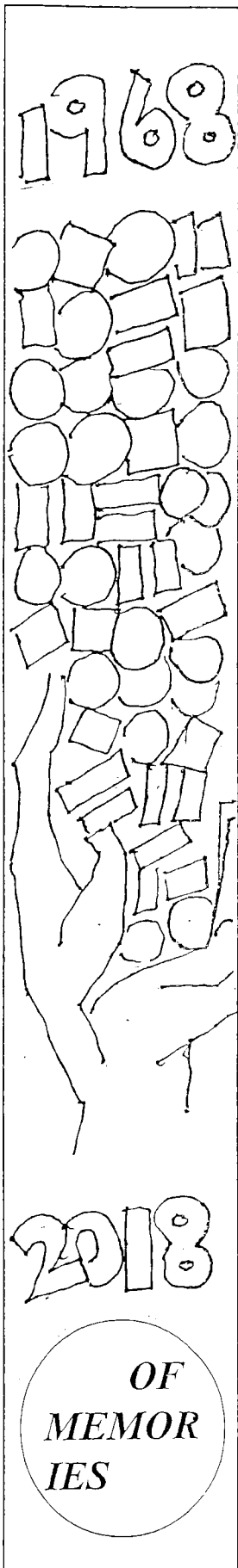
"We all have known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community."* The task of Spred has been to reduce loneliness for our friends with disabilities in every parish. We do this by gathering in small groups. Activities and incidents of everyday life are examined. We can find these usual realities to be in fact unusual. The unusual can also be discovered in liturgy and in scripture and turned into an awareness of Divine Providence within us. That is the Method Vivre at its best. We do not offer physical activities like parks do. We do not provide residential care. Our focus is pastoral catechesis and liturgy in the parish.

In this our 50th year of Spred Newsletters, I remember:

There are several children, teenagers, and adult friends who come to the liturgy at which I preside. There are twin brothers who have just made their first communion. One brother swings freely into the assembly calling out to me "Hi God" or later "Bye, God." That is heady stuff! Of course, he loves the kiss of peace as he "high fives" everyone. He is at home; he knows he can be himself and swing from branch to branch as it were. He is a natural born community maker; a form of glue in the assembly. Yet there is a sense of quietness in the assembly that calmly stills him and puts him in awe. Does he understand the proclamation of the Word? I doubt it. Yet is the larger vibes he picks up from watching other people that pulls him down into the pool of the sacred. There is so much to say about the influence of environment of people and place. There is a power too of silence in the community of catechesis or of liturgy. It has mystery in it. It works its wonder on us. It pulls us into a mysterious atmosphere of presence in ourselves.

I remember a young man who was asked during the liturgy to bring up the bread during the presentation of the gifts. An adult catechist gives him the bread, indicated that he was to bring the bread forward but neglected to tell him to turn around to go forward. He very solemnly walked backwards all the way up the aisle before handing me the plate. Respectfully we did not howl.

In the adult group (22+) men and women are wonderfully respectful to each other and yet can laugh at each other. One man has a vision problem and yet moves around and teases the others. He sees and experiences something deeper, friendship. Several of the men who started out in our 6-10 group are now adults. Close to 8 of our friends in the adult group over the years have died. I attended a funeral of one of our friends in his own parish. When it was time for the responsorial hymn, the friends and catechists who were



in the assembly stood up spontaneously, gathered around the casket in the center aisle and made gestures to the words and melody of the hymn. It was very moving.

Recently an adult friend came to the door while I was eating lunch. He was excited. His words were coming fast. The various sketches of his account were in segments and needed to be sewn together to get the whole picture. He lived in a three floor boarding house. His space was on the third floor; his room had space for a bed and a chair. The washroom was at the end of a long hallway. His sister wanted him to live with her but that would take him out of the neighborhood with which he was familiar. His building was going to be torn down and he was going to have to move. His workshop had found a place for him but he would be living further away. He was afraid he would not be able to be in his 22+ group. This group was made up of his friends. He didn't want to be without them. He had to be reassured that he would still belong and we would work out a solution. He was proud to say that he still has his first communion picture in Spred some 40 years ago.

Over the years we have had two sets of three adults from different families in our Spred center at St. John Nepomucene (now closed). It is hard to convey their disarming presence. All of them were different individuals with their own qualities. They were kindly toward one another and toward others. One group stopped because their guardian thought they had had enough "school." The other group moved and are on a waiting list for a Spred group in another parish.

Some parents too see Spred like a school. People "graduate" as it were after receiving the sacraments of initiation. They miss the point. When they have passed through the sacraments of initiation they are now members of the church, a church in mission to serve others and in Spred, frequently this service is just to be. Our friends give a remarkable service. Their service is friendship.

It is difficult to see that questions about mental state are not cut-and-dried about someone's potential to live. When tests measure brain function, they do not give a solid indication of future quality of life...Christians have resources to think differently about disability. We are asked to live lives of solidarity with all, including those who are disabled. Friendship is the primary marker of human life.**

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2208)

A Spred group in a parish liturgy can change the perspective of every one present. Last year there were 43 Spred family Masses in parishes. This phenomenon is due to the guidance and training of our Community Religious Workers, Elizabeth Sivek and Julia Hess.

In another parish in the neighborhood one of our friends was an usher in church. It developed that when the Lincoln institution in southern Illinois closed he came to live with his mother. She happened to be blind. Leaders in the parish sent him to Spred to prepare him for first communion, but we discovered he had never been baptized! He became a valued member in his Spred group with us. He and his mother have both died.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops called together a large assembly over the 4th of July weekend to reflect on the vision of the Joy of the Gospel, by Pope Francis.

In this apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis states the need for the church “to care for the vulnerable, which includes the poor, the disabled, the aged and unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us, whose defense is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right.” (America, July 24, 2017)

Early in my venture into catechesis for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, I was the helper catechist in an 11-16 group for a young man who had severe disabilities. He also was quite large. His mother and father were immigrants from Germany and they spoke of wanting to begin a new life in this country. They spoke with resignation of this their child. Though limited, I found him to be charming in his own way. At time he would gingerly grab the hair of the person nearest him. Frequently, I had to say, “Johnny likes you.” With a groan, other friends were not so sure. What captured his fancy was the group itself. I felt this was his catechesis. He was welcomed, even if everyone was wary of his reach. In a conversation with another priest who observed this session, he asked disparagingly “Is this what you want to do with your life?” This remark reminded me of a superior who said, “Don’t stay with that too long, it will effect your career.” I do not think less of these priests. Still today, I read the gospels and the outreach of Jesus to those on the edge and I have a hard time putting it all together.

There is a sentence which Daniel Berrigan, S.J. used which I have recited to myself many times: “Hope is reductionary. Despair is inflationary.” So as a staff we have placed one parish brick at a time to build Spred as a viable resource in 150 parishes. These small communities of faith consist of 6 friends and 6 adult godparents and 2 leaders. “We are asked to live lives of solidarity with all, including those who are disabled.” Yet we are confronted with the “persistent bias against disability.”**

When it comes to people on the autism spectrum, much discernment is needed. We have people who have been in Spred who are now in college and we have others who need care to be able to speak. The range of disability is challenging. It does not take too much to try to look at reality through their eyes. There is an underlying kindness. Intuitively they sense whether we are open and welcoming. “I could never do that” I have heard many times as I invite others to be catechists. The trouble is “our society had replaced the value of presence with function.”*** Just to be present to another - not fawning, not putting on a false self - just being there at hand. The deepest presence is ultimate silence.

When we are not in a Spred session, life is not all wine and roses. I remember when an adult friend with a disability, in a fit of temper, out of nowhere, since he did not talk much, said, “How long is this going to go on?” It’s the long loneliness. A community of respectful relationships in a parish is one antidote.

“This is why I want a church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us...in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way.”****

Rev. James H. McCarthy, Director Spred Chicago

*Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness

**“The Charlie Gard case reveals a persistent bias against disability,” J.Bennett, America 8/7/17

***John Main, Silence and Stillness in Every Season, Continuum NY 1997

****The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, #198, USCCB 2013



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Training

Role Orientation, English and Spanish

Oct. 14, 21, 1:00 to 6:00 pm

Spred Center 30th and Lowe 312-842-1039

Mamre Autumn Dinner Dance Fundraiser

At Crystal Sky Banquets, McCook, IL, Saturday

Nov. 11, 2017

Spred Family Liturgies

2956 So Lowe Chicago 11:00 am 312-842-1039

Oct. 1, Nov. 5, Dec. 3, Feb. 4, Mar. 4, April 8, May 6

Observation

6-10 6:00 p.m. Monday Oct. 2, 16, Nov. 13

11-16 7:00 p.m. Tuesday Oct. 3, 17, Nov. 14

17-21 7:00 p.m. Tuesday Oct. 3, 17, Nov. 14

22+ 7:00 p.m. Monday Oct. 2, 16, Nov. 13

Helper Catechist Training

English, Oct. 7, 11:00 to 4:00 Queen of Angels Spred Center, 4412 Western Ave. Julia Hess, 773-539-3634

English, Oct. 28, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center, Lowe Ave

Spanish, Nov. 4, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center, Lowe Ave

Visit our website: www.spred-chicago.org

SPRED

Special Religious Development, Archdiocese
of Chicago, 2956 S. Lowe Avenue, Chicago, IL
60616, September-May Subscription \$20.00
Editor Sr. Mary Therese Harrington S.H.

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CHICAGO, IL
PERMIT NO. 2769