



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago



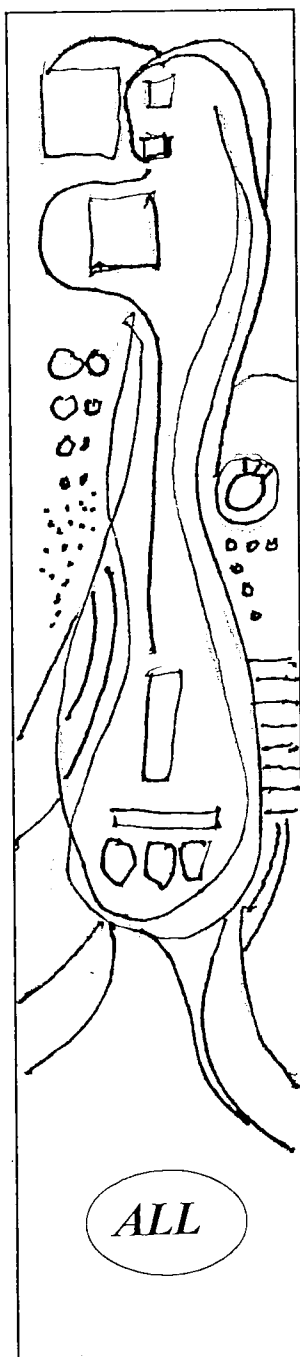
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

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

March 2019

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One of our current Spred songs is 'The earth is full of beauty, the goodness of a loving God.'

We see this so well all around us in nature throughout the seasons of the year.

Last year several Spred sessions encouraged us to reflect on nature: in stories at our catechist preparation sessions and in symbol during our integrated sessions with all the members. One session, using a beautiful large flower, we reflected on reverence for life - life is a gift, life is sacred. Another session led us to feel the beauty of life within us and to praise the Father, source of all life. And in yet another, we reflected on the changing seasons, the encouragement we sometimes need to keep going, which led us to share experiences of caring for one another. Yes, earth, creation in its many forms, are signs of God's care, God's loving. They are all around us, mysterious signs of God's presence!

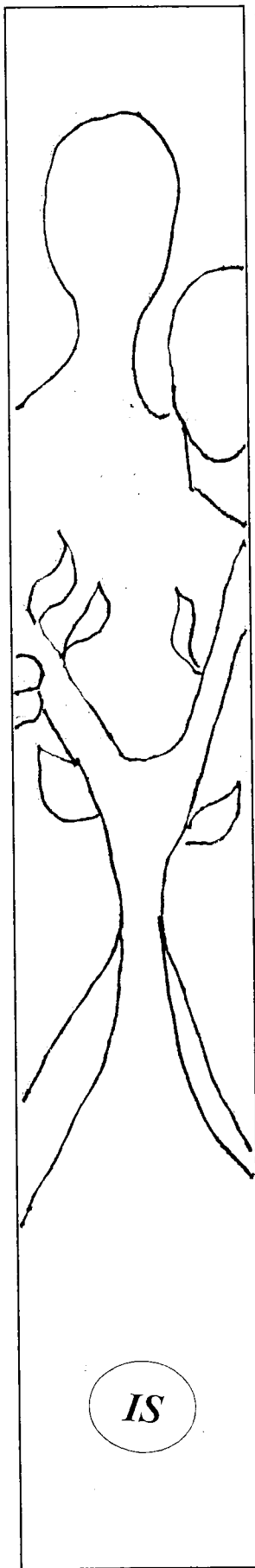
During the summer I saw fields ready for harvest and others having already been ploughed. Open furrows ready to receive new seed. The cycle of life continues, but also dependent on the preparation, on being tilled, nourished, opened up so that transformation from seed to plant could occur. It is indeed a mystery as to how it actually happens!

This mystery is happening in the depth of the earth, and I am led to reflect that the same mystery occurs in the soil of my being. I am called to grow, to develop into the fullness of my personhood, to be the best that I can be, and even develop into the fullness of life in God. Personal transformation, how does it happen? I hope to be open to this change, to be open to transformation.

In something I was reading recently, the words Transformation and Mystery came jumping out at me.

"Transformation...depends on our capacity to be penetrated by the Mystery of Christ. Our being, our substance, must be porous in order for the mystery to enter, to penetrate. It is not enough simply to be immersed in life. We must let ourselves be ploughed so that the furrows of our person become deeper and deeper, so that our earth becomes softer and softer. In the measure that our being becomes porous, open, grace can penetrate us. Depth is possible, transformation is possible. The Mystery can fill us." ¹

I reflected on this in relation to Spred. I recalled how often in Spred we refer to 'the mystery'. In Spred the session progression is beautifully crafted to enable us to be open and receptive. We



use the term 'Initiation into the Sign of the Mystery' as we begin to explore the goal, the theme of each session. Then we see 'Deepening the Sign of the Mystery' as we enter into deeper reflection, enabling us to make connections between our human experiences and God's ever presence with us through the Word and Message.

"Transformation...depends on our capacity to be penetrated by the Mystery of Christ. Our being, our substance, must be porous in order for the mystery to enter, to penetrate."²

How do we open ourselves to receive the Mystery, to be penetrated by the mystery of Christ? In the adult catechist preparation session, the silent reflection after a story is read is key to our receptivity and openness. In the integrated session with our friends, we become prepared as we work on our chosen activities. These preparation periods gently enable us to still the mind and heart and become really present. This is the preparing the ground, enabling the 'Deepening of the Sign of the Mystery' to occur.

At our Catechist Preparation Session, we read a story, a literary piece, to stimulate our reflection. Silently we give time to allow ourselves to become still, open and receptive. At the Integrated Session, we spend time in preparation working with activities which engage the senses, focus the mind, leading us to greater attentiveness. How important the role of the activity catechists at this time as they prepare the environment, the ambience conducive to quiet activity and concentration. Then as the session progresses to the celebration room, the leader catechist presents the object. Engaging with the object, using the senses to look, touch, feel, or smell it, we awaken memories of our life experiences.

'It is not enough to be immersed in life.
We must let ourselves be ploughed
so that the furrows of our person
become deeper and deeper,
so that our earth becomes
softer and softer.'³

During the time given to quiet reflection, preparation, we open our minds and hearts to allow memories and experiences to emerge. We have, so to speak, opened up the ground of our being, the furrows of our person, turned over the soil of our lived experiences. These reflections become focused at the catechist preparation session through a question posed to the group, the 'interiorization'. From this immersion in our lives, we are willing to share something of our individual stories and allow God to speak to these experiences as the session continues. This is the deepening.

For our friends, the engagement with the symbol evokes the human experience. The leader catechist gently encourages us to consider one particular focus (the intentionality). Memories and emotions emerge. As the catechists share from their life experiences, our friends also recall their experiences. This sharing of lived experience does not remain there. 'It is not enough simply to be immersed in life'. We ask 'what is the meaning of this?' In opening ourselves to the light of the mystery being explored, symbolic awareness leads us beyond the concrete reality.

Symbolic awareness enables us to 'deepen the sign of the mystery'. It moves us beyond the

concrete to new awareness. As our life experiences are juxtaposed with the Liturgical and Biblical evocations, we glimpse the God within. Faith is strengthened.

'In the measure that our being becomes porous, open,
Grace can penetrate us,
Depth is possible,
Transformation is possible,
The Mystery can fill us.'⁴

This is akin to what Daniel O'Leary refers to as 'Sacramental Imagination'.⁵ All nature has the capacity to disclose grace and be a vehicle for it. It allows us to understand the 'sacramental nature' of our lives. It is about noticing! How many of our life experiences pass us by without reflection? In Spred, our time together is so important, it provides us this opportunity. In creating the atmosphere whereby we can be truly present to ourselves in the company of faithful friends, we can enter into the deeper realms of our being, and perhaps notice what could have passed us by. Given this opportunity, we can re-read these events and notice God there.

Every human experience presents us with the opportunity to deepen our knowledge and love of God. 'Grace can penetrate us' and transformation is taking place within our hearts.

Experience, we could say, is the ground of our being in which God dwells and also reveals Himself. God's saving action, his unconditional love is active in every moment of my existence. The continually graced character of our lives with all its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows, speaks to us of God. In our day to day human experiences lies the capacity for transcendence, discovering the meaning of life and love. This requires the practice of reflection. We can all tell our life story but it can remain just that, a memory, an event recalled. For us, we are seeking deeper meaning to life, seeing the God of my life, seeking transformation. The Spred method facilitates this 'deepening of the sign of the mystery' the mystery can fill us and thereby transform us.

Our task as catechists is to accompany our friends in this reflective process, thereby deepening our graced experience. Whenever we, as catechists, endeavor to open the mind and heart of our friends to the wonder of themselves and of nature, we are uncovering the holiness of the moment. But first we have to fully engage for ourselves in this belief and process. It is sacred work, a sacred ministry. We try to open to our own self-transformation, and in turn give inspiration and confidence as we share with others.

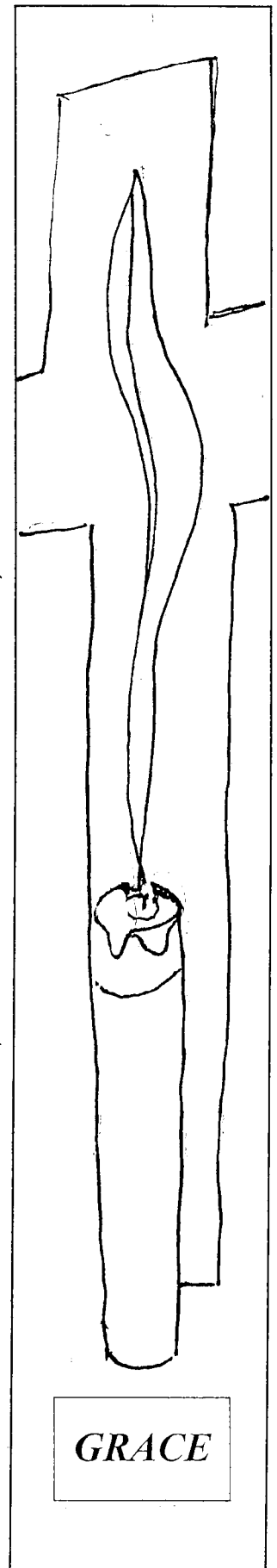
'For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall face to face.
Now I know in part;
then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known.'¹ 1 Cor. 13, 12

In the end 'All is Grace.'

Sr. Kathleen Hogg, DC
Director, Spred Galloway, Scotland

1. Jean-Marie Howe, "Cistercian Monastic Life." Ibid 2, 3, 4.

5. Daniel O'Leary, "Begin with the Heart."



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Training

Role Orientation, March 9, 16, Chicago 1-6pm

Spred Center, 30th and Lowe, 312-842-1039

Helper Catechist Training in Spanish

April 6, 1-6pm Spred Center 30th Lowe, 312-842-1039

Core Team Morning of Enrichment

Changed to March 23, 10:00 am to 12:30 pm Spred

Center 30th & Lowe Enter through parking lot, go to 3rd floor.

Spred Family Liturgies, Chicago 11:00 am

Spred Chapel 30th & Lowe

Mar. 3, April 7, May 5

Observation

6-10, 6:00 pm Monday March 11, April 1, 29, May 13

11-16, 7:00 pm Tuesday March 12, April 30, May 14

17-21, 7:00 pm Tuesday March 12, April 30, May 14

22+, 7:00 pm Monday March 11, April 29, May 13

Helper Catechist Training, English,

Sat. March 2, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center,

30th and Lowe, 312-842-1039

Sat. April 6, 11:00- 4:00 Queen of Angels Spred 2nd fl

4412 N. Western, Register 10:30 Betty Rogus 773-588-0614

or www.queenofangelsspred.org

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APRIL 28, DRURY LANE OAKBROOK