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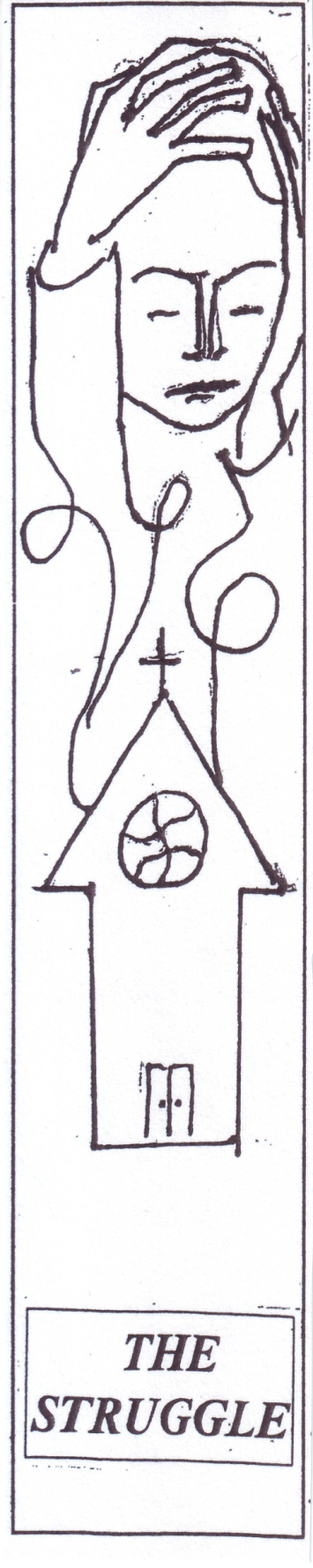
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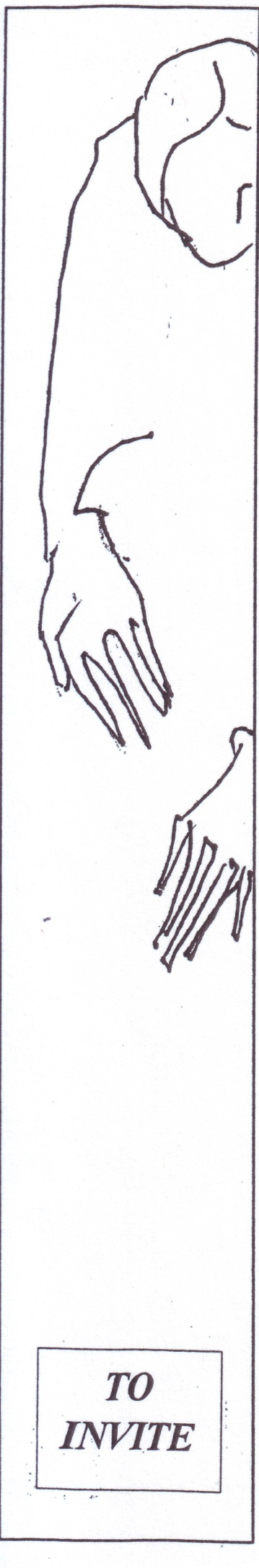
Our days are filled with busyness. We hold on to our cell phones. We text and talk. It is difficult to get anyone’s personal attention, especially to talk about a ministry being offered in their parish. We may read a bulletin article or listen to someone speak at Mass. Someone else may have the interest and the time to respond. Others may hear but walk away. Response is slow.

Yet the need for Spred in parishes is great. People with disabilities are living in parish neighborhoods. Some may live in community integrated living arrangements (CILA homes) with four to six others. On the outside their houses look just like any others in the neighborhood. But there are standards in place before they can move in. Others live in various apartments or live in all the apartments of a given complex. They are waiting to be invited to belong to what is going on in the area. We can invite them to belong to Spred. We can invite them to belong to our parish.

A Spred parish chairperson can discover these homes and be introduced to the manager. With the help of the manager we can find out who in the home is of the Catholic faith or who may like to be. A letter can be sent to the parent or legal guardian for consent for them to belong with us. There are already many parishes who welcome people from these homes. Some parishes have many homes and others have few. But our parishes need to know where they are and who lives there. CILA homes are created by various agencies who reach out to our friends such as; Blue Cap in Blue Island, LARC in Lansing; Park Lawn in the south suburbs, Seguin in the western and southern suburbs, Envision in the city, etc.

Pope Francis is an extraordinary champion of those who are poor and vulnerable. He often contrasts what he calls a **culture of indifference** and a **culture of encounter**. He says. “We are accustomed to a culture of indifference and we must strive and ask for the grace to create a culture of encounter, of a fruitful encounter, of an encounter that restores to each person his or her own dignity as a child of God.”1

Pope Francis reminds us that we are accustomed to this indifference when we see the disasters of this world and realize that others are suffering, but then we carry on with our busy lives. He says that for many of us, it is not a matter of being cold hearted or inhumane but over time we become absorbed in our own concerns and become indifferent. He points out that a kind of indifference can even seep into our family relationships. “In our families, at the dinner table, how many times while eating, do people watch the TV or write messages on their cell phones. Each one is indifferent to that encounter. We must choose to listen and not just hear. We must choose to stop and not just meet and pass by. We must become involved and encounter people with the language of the heart.”2 He quotes St. Therese of Lisieux’s ‘little way of love.’ A kind word, a small or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship can contribute to building a ‘civilization of love.’3



We are called by our Baptism to spread the message of Jesus who invites us to go into the world to make disciples of all people. It is not an easy mission. People are busy and believe they don’t have time. But I believe that if God is calling someone to encounter our friends with special needs, we must go and trust his call.

I have read Pope Francis’ book, **The Joy of the Gospel**, and have often quoted different paragraphs through the years. Recently I came upon paragraph 279 and was struck with what I read.

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 life will bear good fruit (Jn.15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our 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 acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction, or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward, let us give Him everything, allowing Him to make our efforts bear fruit in His good time.”4

This is the struggle of Spred parish chairpersons who invite parishioners to consider becoming involved in the Spred ministry in the parish. This is the struggle of Spred community religious workers who are invited by the pastor to help launch the Spred ministry in the parish.

As someone who yearns for the Spred ministry to begin in a parish, I am often faced with parents who live with people with developmental and intellectual challenges who see no one present at gatherings but themselves. Where is the welcoming community for their child?

We are called by our Baptism to go into the world to make disciples of all people. Why are we so afraid to encounter our friends with special needs? People usually explain that they have never been around anyone with this challenge. They are not sure how to respond. They do not feel qualified. However, Spred is a ministry that helps one to see that our Baptism and the Holy Spirit will help us to witness to the message of Jesus in a way that involves being with others more than doing for others. We are asked to become friends. Spred’s main work is to develop loving relationships with others. This is the door to being in a loving relationship with God who is always in a loving relationship with us.

In the Fall we had Sunday Readings that really touched my heart. In the First Reading on the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Prophet Amos spoke about people who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land; who buy the lowly for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals. Amos is often referred to as the ‘prophet of justice.’ He was a prophet for only one year around 760 B.C. And in that year he witnessed the harsh treatment of the poor while the wealthy appeared complacent. 5 On the next Sunday we heard the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was complacent and indifferent. In his indifference he could not encounter the person in front of him.

I have a friend whose daughter lives in a nearby residential facility. Each Sunday, she and her husband accompany their daughter to Mass at their parish by using a PACE bus. After Mass they bring Communion to three other Catholic residents. When I visit with this family at the residential facility, I am amazed how they help other families to know about Spred so that guardians can choose Spred for their child. One of these families has given consent for their child to go to Spred since there was an opening in the group with my friends’ daughter.

It is my hope that pastors and associate pastors will invite parishioners to Spred Information Gatherings. By extending personal invitations to men and women of the parish, these parishioners may respond to the need when they catch a glimpse of Spred. They may even become the catalyst for a Spred group to be formed in their parish. It is a risk that I hope they will consider. It is a way to get more people involved in ministry in their parish. It is a way to support those families whose child will benefit and feel a sense of belonging.

We as the people of God are called to grow in a culture of encounter. We need to hear these families’ desire for faith development for their child no matter their age or level of abilities. We need to listen to their stories of living with a person with special needs. The support of a Spred community of catechists and other families can give them what they need to care for their loved one. In Pope Francis’ own words: “I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith.6

Elizabeth Sivek,

Spred Chicago, Community Religious Worker

1. “Indifference or Encounter” by Fr. Donald Senior, C.P. Mass for September 29, 2019 The Chicago Catholic, Sept. 22, 2019, Issue 18, pg. 18

2. Ibid. pg. 18, 3. Ibid. page 18

4. The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation, by Pope Francis, USCCB, 2013, #279

5. Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers and Proclaimers of the Word, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Liturgy Training Publications, 2019, pg. 254

6. The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation, by Pope Francis, USCCB, 2013, #200

**Our dear friend and mentor, Msgr. Euchariste Paulhus died on June 15, 2019. He was a Sherbrook diocesan priest and worked at the University of Sherbrook in Quebec. From 1965 until the 1990s he helped us to develop Spred Chicago. He worked closely with Fr. Mesny to develop the Method Vivre which we use. He was a studious and gentleman. May he rest in peace with the Savior he served so well.**