

SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago

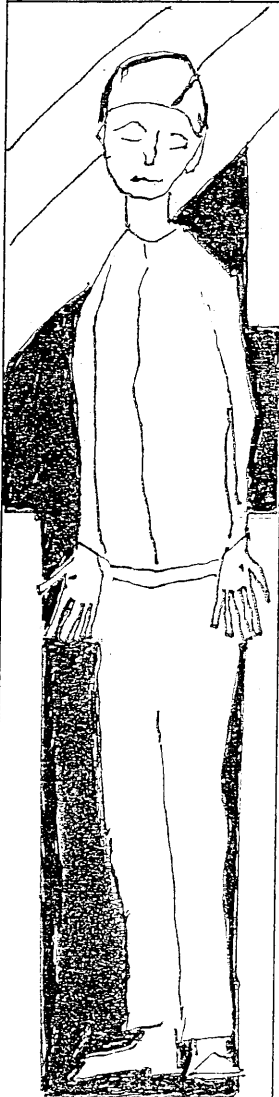
SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago Illinois 60616

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

December 2014

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CALLED

I have now completed my first year within the Spred community, and what a year!

I could share so many wonderful experiences, that I wouldn't know where to begin; and yet at the beginning I believe the words of the popular hymn 'City of God' applied to me, I felt I was sleepwalking through my faith.

Awake from your slumber! Arise from your sleep!
A new day is dawning for all those who weep:
The people in darkness have seen a great light.
The Lord of our longing has conquered the night.

At the time I was a support worker caring for adults with intellectual disabilities. I despaired about the current social climate, monetary budgets are tight, care providers tendering for services compete with each other, lowering staff costs, challenging staff in setting what seems unrealistic goals and in the midst of this are many people with intellectual difficulties whose care packages are being cut. So many changes taking place, so many people affected. During this difficult time I turned to God and prayed asking for guidance.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication,
with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;
and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

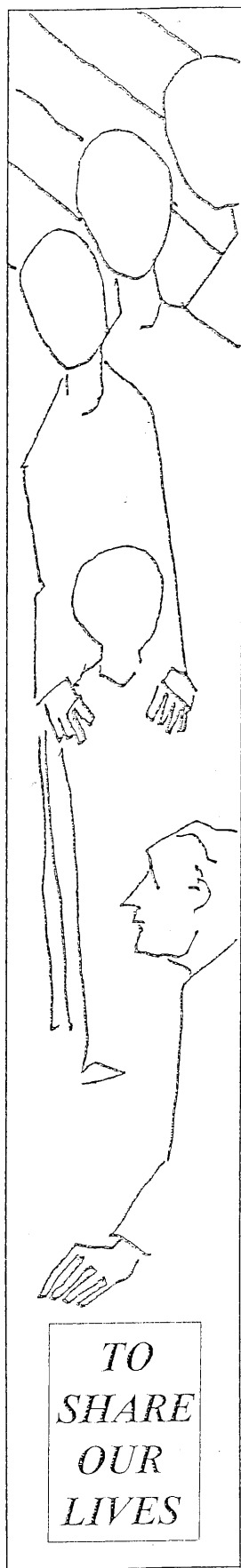
(Philippians 4:6-7)

Even though the national care standards are there to uphold the dignity of people, promote personal growth, respect and support the right of the person to make valued choices including reference to their faith and spirituality, the reality is that care services are overwhelmed. Many are not given that choice and therefore being excluded from the possibility of growing in faith and the love of God.

Meeting the spiritual needs of people with learning difficulties is not
an option, it is a matter of social justice. (J.Swinton)

At Sunday Mass I saw an advert in the Parish Bulletin advertising for an Assistant Member of Spred Galloway, Scotland, Diocesan Team. I wondered, could this be a sign?

I had heard of Spred and knew they worked with people with special needs. During my interview I gave a ten minute presentation to some members of a Spred group, volunteers and friends.



Without knowing anything of Spred methodology and its use of symbol, I chose a short meditation using an orange, which engaged the senses of sight, touch, smell, taste and sound, witnessing the goodness of God. The beauty of the orange as you hold it up to the light and see the colour, moving it to your nose to breathe in the scent of the rind, feeling its perfect roundness as it rolls over your fingertips and notice the dimpled texture. All of your senses are alive as you hear the peel pull away from the skin. A cool spray of juice prickles your skin as the scent of the orange creates an aroma that makes your mouth water. Pull the segments apart and bite into it letting the juice run into your mouth. Savour the sweet liquid as it becomes a part of your awareness. Now give thanks to God for the beauty of nature, for our experiences through our senses, sustaining us with food to eat. I wasn't aware how close to a Spred session I had come. Intuitively I felt that Spred is where I belonged.

Spred is having a tremendous impact on my life, through delving deeper into my own personal journey of faith, and also providing me with an understanding of the spiritual needs of people with learning difficulties. The Spred training programme has given me tools to work toward the Aim of Spred

To provide opportunities for those members of the Church who have intellectual disabilities to be educated in faith and take their rightful place in the local worshipping community.

By observing and being part of two Spred groups in the past year, I have assumed the role of leader catechist in one group and activity catechist in another.

In the Preparation Room I was amazed at first when witnessing friends and catechists sitting together working quietly, caught up in the stillness. I saw a friend choose an activity, a colourful wooden puzzle, moving toward her seat, she placed the puzzle so gently down on the table that it never made a sound. The respect she showed for those around her was so beautiful. I was aware of there being a sense of mutual trust. At times I struggled with the stillness, with trying to empty myself in order to pray; attempting to turn away from distractions and all the things that would pop into my head. I eventually gave up trying and without reason or sense the stillness enveloped me and the silence sought me beyond word or thought.

The Celebration Room filled me with awe. It amazed me how a school classroom could be transformed by soft lighting, curtains, a table draped with a lovely cloth, the Holy Book, a candle and some flowers, into a beautiful sacred space! This transformation of the environment influences our ability to hear the Word of God, influences our ability to communicate and enrich our sharing. During a session, I was struck by the quietness and stillness of all present, and yet a sense of expectation filled the air as the leader catechist revealed the object. It was a large bowl of fresh fruit. The leader catechist drew attention to the fruit and encouraged each person to comment. Christ who is profoundly disabled picked up an orange, his face lighting up like the sun. Examining it closely, Christ indicated he wished to taste the goodness. The leader catechist broke open the orange and shared it around. The awareness of the goodness of our lives was shared by all. I witnessed the beauty of the symbolic process, which called us to an awareness of God through our life experiences.

On reading Pope Francis' Exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" I felt that this could have been

written for me as a support worker, sharing life along side people with special needs. Now I realise how relevant it is for everyone.

If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realise that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image and she or he reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down the walls and our heart is filled with faces and names. (Pg. 130: 274)

Reflecting on this in the light of Spred and Pope Francis' call to a New Evangelisation, each of us has a role to play: leaders, volunteer catechists, drivers, parishioners. *Every person is worthy of our giving.* It is that giving that we all do so generously in Spred, opening our hearts to the various possibilities and ways of communication. Both giving and receiving, recognising that *each person reflects something of God's glory*, we are journeying together spiritually.

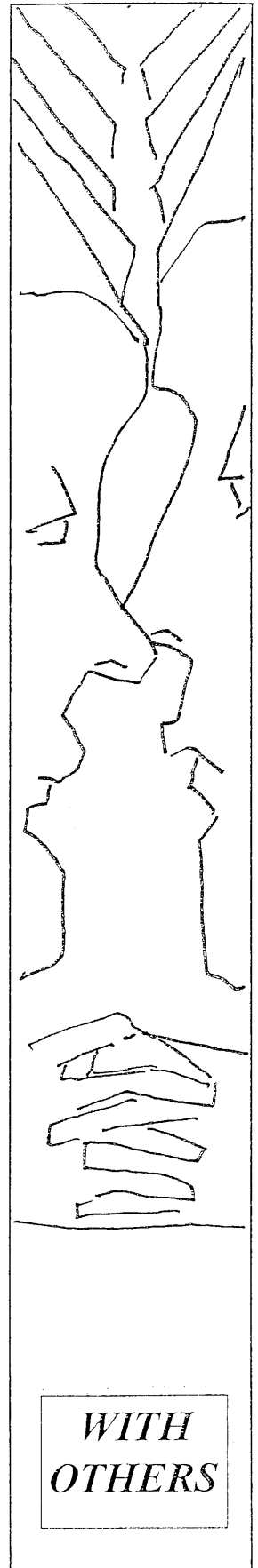
The journey for me this year in Spred has given me a deeper appreciation that the Holy Spirit builds up the church and calls people into her service and sends them the necessary gifts. He leads us ever deeper into communion with God. I see that Spred has answered some of my earlier questions in working with people with special needs. I see that *spiritual needs are real needs*, not only for our members with disabilities but for all who are engaged in Spred. Every Spred session gives us the opportunity to address these needs.

We recognise that God is present in the gathering of the people, and in the Word shared, and in the Bread broken. In our Spred sessions, we recognise that same God as present as we gather and welcome one another, as we work side by side during our preparation time. God is present as we break open our life stories and listen to God's Word. We hear Him speak to us personally in the message and respond in gratitude and praise. When we eat and drink together at our simple Agape we strengthen our bonds of communion and friendship. We are each invited by Spred to commit this time, to come aside and recognise the wonder of our God in all life.

Turn aside for a while from your ordinary employment,
put aside your worldly cares,
let your distractions wait,
free yourself for a while
for God and rest in him.

St Anselm

Theresa McGinley
Galloway Spred Team



SPRED TRAINING

2-1 Introduction to Spred

Saturdays Feb. 7, 14, 21, 1:00 to 6:00

Spred Center 312-842-1039

2956 So Lowe Ave, Chicago, IL 60616

3-1 Role Orientation, English and Spanish

Saturdays March 7, 14 1:00 to 6:00

Spred Center 312-842-1039

2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago IL 60616

Spred Reflection Weekend

Jan. 9, 10m 11, 2015

St. Benedict Abbey, Benet Lake WI

Register on line: www.queenofangelsspred.org

or call Julia Hess: 773-539-3634

Helper Catechist Training

Feb. 28, 2015 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center

30th and Lowe, Chicago, 312-842-1039

OBSERVATION

6-10 Mon. 6 pm Dec. 1

11-16 Tues. 7 pm Dec. 2

17-21 Tues. 7 pm Dec. 2

22+ Mon. 7pm Dec. 1

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Feb. 1, Mar. 1, April 12. May 3

Helper Catechist Training

St. Francis de Sales Parish,

February 28, 2015 11:00 to 4:00

Contact Kelly Corrigan: 847-726-4742

Helper Catechist Training

Queen of Angels Parish

March 21, 2015 11:00 to 4:00

Register on line: www.queenofangelsspred.org

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