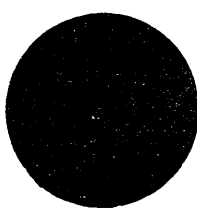





May 1993

Volume 51 Number 5



For twenty-five years, nine times a year, we have been writing this newsletter! The Spred staff and guests have written - in view of their experience - a 1500 word essay once a month. We wanted to take on both this discipline and the expense of this newsletter. Why? First of all, in the process of beginning and developing Spred, most of our sources were in another language and there was little in English to help us or anyone in the field of specialized catechesis. Secondly, we ourselves wanted to work in faith education with persons with developmental disabilities and record our experiences. Finally, if we were really believing in what we were doing, we would be helping to create a new field and it would be important to get the word out!

Recently I compiled an index of the 225 topics touched on in our newsletter. My reaction was - we have grown! The work has become more pastorally substantive. Somehow, we knew this would happen, first crawl, then walk. Here are some reflections on the last twenty-five years of Spred as seen through these newsletters.

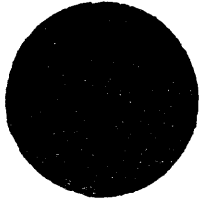


When I began in the catechetical office in 1960, there was a problem. Between 1958 and 1965, many catechists were trained in methods and doctrine courses. But there was such a high turnover in volunteer personnel that it became evident that they felt isolated, unsupported and unsure of themselves. The gifts of Fr. E. Paulhus from Quebec and Fr. J. Mesny from France to Spred were many, but the one that made the deepest impression on me apart from a method to work with people with disabilities, was the absolute need for a core team that would pray together before each experience of catechesis. I had heard about Fr. Henri Bissonnier in Paris, France who prepared passages from scripture to be read and prayed over prior to each catechesis. But the need for a core team to do this together seems to me to have been a wonderful insight. This act of having an adult preparation session, experiencing mystery as adult catechists first, is one of the most important contributions of Spred to pastoral catechesis. As this process of praying together developed, priority has been given to the use of the Method Vivre with adult catechists in small communities of faith as a prayer form.

25  
YEARS

Recently, I spoke to a priest who told me that as a

# OF EXPER IENCE



chaplain he had taken a year off work to get a religious education degree. It was a year of new theology, but he said that he still did not know HOW to do catechesis. His experience hit the nail on the head on why Spred began with a model center and still maintains one twenty-five years later. It is the skill of catechesis, the how of catechesis, the art form that we need help on. The need to watch an artisan at work, that's why we have the one way viewing mirrors, so people can watch not only the development of persons with learning problems but especially the catechist. I have not seen the universal catechism, but my apprehension is that we have more stress on WHAT, and little or nothing on HOW.

International, national and diocesan documentation has been an important part of these newsletters. The documentation is helpful in addressing the needs of persons with developmental disabilities who cope with mental retardation, epilepsy, autism or cerebral palsy. Our friends can be seen to be like the Dakota plains - vast, open, and seemingly empty. Why would people choose to be in touch with such a barren place, let alone love it? But our people are like an icon, there is mystery hidden beyond the surface. How many catechists ultimately say, I came to do for them and I found myself in my undoing. Disarm, befuddle, but change us they will. Their gift is to teach us that it is a gift to be simple. They are a painful reminder of human limits - just as shopping malls, crowded cities and ambitious catechetical goals are attempts to deny limits and the empty spaces that reveal mystery.

We found out how to resource people: write sessions for people we knew in our observation research center - Danny, Johnny, Jimmy, Anne, Eleazar, edit it, throw out some of it, invite others to observe to see if we were on target, record our reflections and come up with an essay for our newsletter. From the accumulation of newsletters, build a training book and boil it all down to a contract for adult communities of catechists, a summary of it all. Our discipline is to be willing to dialogue with people from all kinds of parishes, dioceses and other countries to gain new insights and to refine old insights. Our struggle is to bring new solutions to old problems while being careful not to shortchange our friends with disabilities.

As we worked with the Method Vivre, we knew it must be supported by a well prepared environment. The environment influences our ability to hear the word of God ourselves and to pray, the environment influences our ability to communicate faith, and the environment has a mighty influence on our friends with disabilities in their need for focus and enrichment. The whole community needs a well prepared environment to develop. In the late sixties, a prepared environment and a prepared people as a requirement for catechesis was not addressed in other circles. Today, to develop a prepared people and a prepared place still is a challenge. The search for space in local churches is still difficult but the need to be centered to achieve the goal of faith education is more widely accepted.

In a conversation with two pastors not long ago, one told me that for him "children's liturgies" did not do anything for him, but that there was something about "Spred liturgies". He referred to the music and gestures used. I said that he had to see that the music selected for liturgy was first used in the catechesis along with gestures as part of the Method Vivre. One does not so much teach the music and the gestures as enter into them in an attitude of prayer. Then when these are used in the setting of the Eucharistic liturgy, there is a profound resonance as well as spontaneity. A number of years ago, we began to focus on the experiential connections between catechesis and liturgy. We began to celebrate liturgy with people who were ready because of the catechesis nine or ten times a year at the Archdiocesan resource center. The impact on parishes, parish priests and other parishioners comes from the visitors from those parishes who share in these experiences and bring home insights that help their own Spred communities as they become significant members of their parish assemblies of worship.

In the newsletter of September, 1969, we presented a plan for a new pastoral approach to parishes. We committed ourselves to provide the resources so that each parish could respond to the spiritual needs of its members who had developmental disabilities. As the number of parishes who began base communities according to this Spred model increased, we began to see the need to help these Spred communities relate well with one another in a given area of the Archdiocese. After a two year period of consultation, this led to the 1976 Spred Standards. The Standards, basic and simple as they are, have supported the effort of coordination and collaboration.


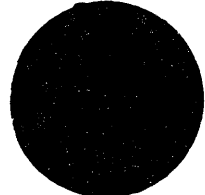
Coordination and collaboration became important as it became clear that Spred would have to take more initiative to reach out to people with developmental disabilities living apart from their families in residences, group homes as well as institutions. The newsletters document the development of community religious workers who connect residents with their local churches, respecting each one's religious identity, while using the Method Vivre in these ecumenical settings.

It is easy to see that our concentration has been on

1. the Method Vivre
2. the Base Community
3. Standards for Coordination and Collaboration
4. Liturgical Coherence
5. Documentation from many sources
6. Pastoral needs of those who live apart from family

It has been our privilege to see our work as a piece of a larger movement. As members of a diocesan core team, we have been together as students, catechists, trainers, and writers. We are grateful to all who have touched our lives.

Fr. James H. McCarthy, Sr. Susanne Gallagher, S.P.  
Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, S.H.



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Distribution of Materials (M)

Training  
Introduction to Special Religious Education

for parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists 1-6 p.m.  
2-1

Role Orientation  
for parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists 1-6 p.m.  
3-1

Location

Spred Center 2956 South Lowe Ave. Exit 31st from Lake Shore Drive or Dan Ryan, west to Lowe, north to 30th. Center at corner over church. (Watch September Newsletter for Lake Co. and south suburbs sites.)

Observation

Saturdays (A) age 6-10, 10:00 a.m.  
Tuesdays (B) age 11-16, 7:00 p.m.  
Wednesdays (D) age 22+ 7:30 p.m.  
Spred Center, Call for reservations  
312/ 842-1039

Spred Family Liturgy

Spred Center Chapel First Sundays  
11:00 a.m. (+) 2956 So.Lowe

1994 FEBRUARY 1994						
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# Spred

SPRED, % 2956 S. Lowe, Chicago, Illinois 60616  
312/842-1039 • Special Religious Education  
Division, Rev. James H. McCarthy, director  
• Newsletter published September through May;  
subscription \$10.00 per year.

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