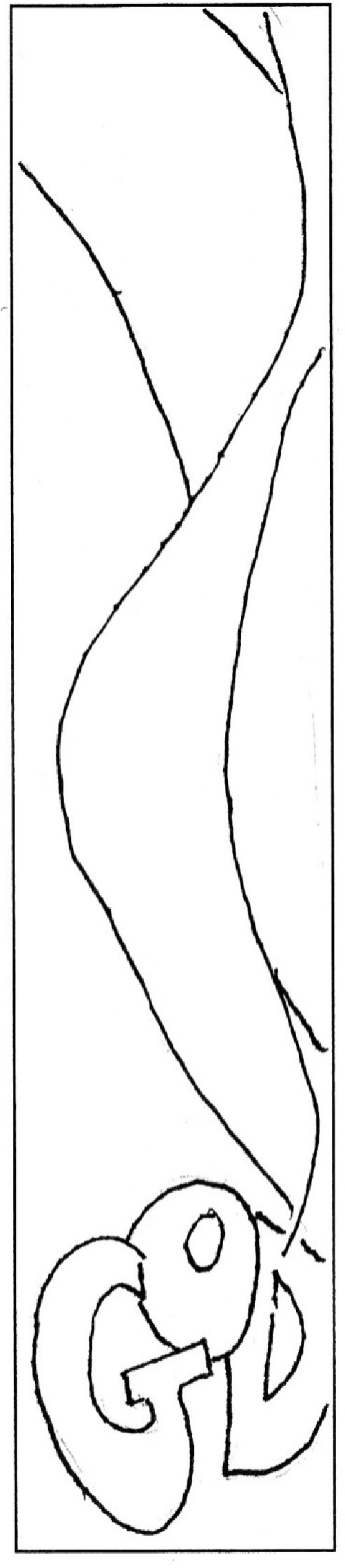
**SPRED**

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There is a business in my neighborhood whose marquee expresses various ways to be **kind**. One expression says, “We wish you **kind** words.” Another says, “We wish you **kind** thoughts.” Another says, “We wish you a **kind** heart.” Then it says, “Be **Kind**.”

The word **kind** has several meanings: of a friendly nature, generous or hospitable, warmhearted, good, agreeable, charitable, helpful, showing sympathy or understanding, considerate, gracious, cordial, pleasant, accommodating, tolerant. (American Heritage Dictionary)

In the Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2, the Greek word for **kind** (chrestos) signifies mild, pleasant, good, honorable.

**Kindness** is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit freely given to us at

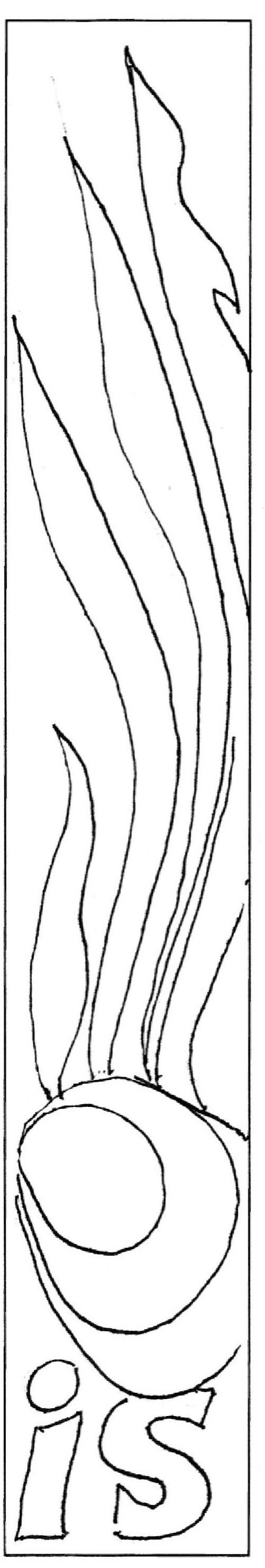
Confirmation. I remember we focused on kindness for one of our SPRED Days of Reflection. As we read through all the background material, we spent the day considering an experience of kindness received from others. At the end of the day, we shared our written session with one another. This really helped us to begin to fathom this fruit of the Holy Spirit.

I recently read an article about Julian of Norwich who lived in the fourteenth century and was a mystic and a spiritual author. She was an English anchoress whose theology was based on the notion of **God’s kindness**. In Middle English, the word **kindness** has a complex set of meanings. In the Middle English, use of the word kindness indicates the benevolence that we mean today when we speak of someone as kind.

It also indicates the nature of a thing, what kind of thing something is, as in humankind. Then somewhere between benevolence and nature, it indicates the relationship between those who share a common nature—thus the words, kin and kindred. Julian’s use of this term encompasses all of these meanings.¹

As kindness is applied to God, it is about the abundance of God’s goodness and God’s covenant faithfulness. We feel the kindness of God, the gracious love of God.

Pope Francis speaks about recovering kindness. He says, “Often nowadays we find neither the time nor the energy to stop and be kind to others, to say ‘excuse me,’ ‘pardon me,’ ‘thank you.’ Yet every now and then, miraculously, a kind person appears and is willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference...once kindness becomes a culture within



society, it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared.”²

I am a helper catechist at the SPRED center where I have been in the same group for several years. I am amazed at how my fellow catechists and I look forward to coming together for our Catechist Preparation Session. Each catechist who arrives is greeted warmly by name. It is a wonderful feeling to be so welcomed by kindness.

When everyone has arrived and has been warmly greeted, we begin our feedback from the last time we were together with our friends with different abilities. Each catechist is given time to share insights from our last time together. Each person’s sharing sparks a conversation. Another catechist might have noticed something pertinent to the conversation. This adds to the richness of our sharing.

In the celebration room, each one in this adult catechist faith community shares a personal story related to the focus of the evening. There is a pause before the next person shares their story. I find the pause helpful so as to enter more deeply into the silence. Then I more easily open myself to listen to another person share and prepare to share my own story.

During the agape, the table fellowship, I often hear “please pass” whatever someone wishes from our beautiful table setting. After it is passed to the person, I hear, “thank you.” In our conversations, we make sure that everyone is included. Often, we learn something new. One particular conversation was about the Bronzeville neighborhood in Chicago that was part of someone’s course work. This sharing gave us many insights into this neighborhood.

At the total session with all the catechists and our friends with different abilities, we carefully greet one another as we did with our fellow catechists in the preparation session. We all love being called by name and being warmly welcomed.

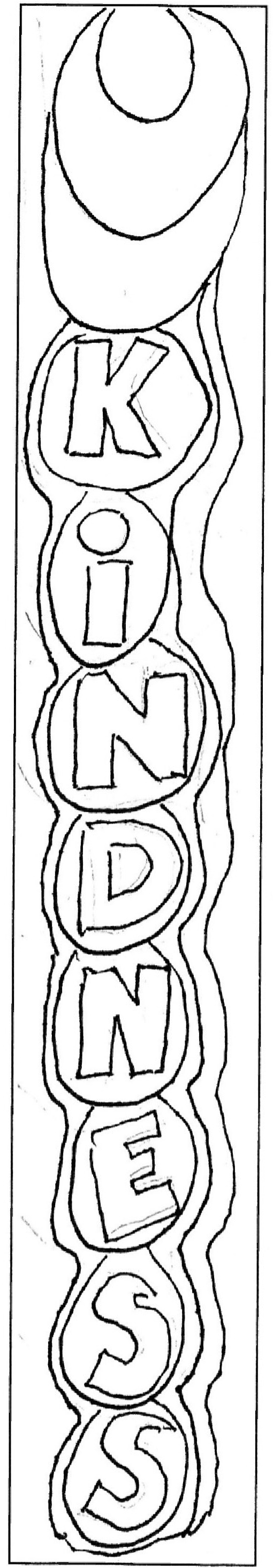
As we prepare for our catechesis, we need support from time to time. We sincerely thank the activity catechist for her assistance. Perhaps another catechist helps us with an activity by bringing another paper to us as we are involved in our painting. Many times, I have experienced the assistance of our activity catechist because she was aware of my need before I asked for help. This makes me so comfortable that I can become more deeply involved in my work.

In the celebration room, I have often needed the support of the activity catechist to help my friend to become more comfortable in the environment. This gave him the support he needed to be with us and experience the Mystery present.

During the agape, our whole community works together to set the table, arrange the chairs, pour drinks into pitchers and bring everything to the tables. We have moved all our tables together so that we can share food together more easily. We become one family sharing food and drink. Our conversation often turns into singing songs that include each one’s name. We often use the words, “please” and “thank you.”

At the close of the evening, we sing our farewell song. We call one another by name as we say good-by until the next time.

Expressing kindness isn’t just when we gather for our SPRED sessions.

Kindness needs to be expressed where we work, where we shop for groceries and where we live. In working at the SPRED office, I am aware that we do not take each other for granted but live out acts of kindness. “Would you kindly help?” and “thank you” is often heard. This lends a pleasant atmosphere to the work environment and helps each of us grow in kindness. This spills over to our home environment as we interact with those we love. There are so many ways to grow in kindness, including charitable giving. Today we are especially aware of many organizations and groups needing funding, such as the Chicago Food Depository, the St. Vincent de Paul Society in our parish or organizations working to obtain clean water in so many places.

In the Book of Proverbs, we are given wisdom regarding kindness:

“The lips of the virtuous man drip with kindness, the mouth of the wicked with deceit.” (10:31)

“Worry makes a man’s heart heavy, a kindly word makes it glad...” (12:25)

“To be a schemer, is this not evil? Lay worthy plans, and kindliness and loyalty await you.” (14:22)

“To oppress the poor is to insult his creator, to be kind to the needy is to honor him.” (14:31)

“The heart of the virtuous contemplates kind action, the mouth of the wicked spews malice.” (15:28)

“A kindly glance gives joy to the heart, good news lends strength to the bones.” (15:30)

“By kindliness... atonement is made for sin; with the fear of Yahweh goes avoidance of evil.” (16:6)

“Kindly words are a honeycomb, sweet to the taste, wholesome to the body.” (16:24)

“One who is kind to the poor lends to Yahweh and will be repaid.” (19:17)

“The one who pursues virtue and kindness shall find life and honor too.” (21:21)

“A blessing awaits the one who is kindly and shares bread with the poor.”

(22:9)

How many times we extend our kindness to our fellow catechists and friends, as well as their families, by being present at a wake or funeral liturgy, by sending birthday, Christmas and Easter cards as well as gifts. During this trying time of coping with the pandemic, we call, send cards or connect on Zoom.

Pope Francis reminds us that we are created in the image and likeness of our God. We need to respect one another and remember that each one of us has different gifts and talents to share.

He reminds us that “a catechist is a Christian who receives a particular calling from God; through this calling is made a participant in Jesus’ mission of introducing disciples into his filial relationship with the Father.”³

We try to imitate God who is kind and merciful.

Elizabeth Sivek

Chicago SPRED Community Religious Worker

1. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Order, Freedom, And Kindness, Julian of Norwich on the Edge of Modernity,” *Theology Today*, April

2003

1. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti, On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, #223, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020
2. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* #112, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2020

# Tentative SPRED Center Calendar 2021

Our plans for observation, training, liturgy and fund-raising are usually in this space, but with the growing uncertainty surrounding the virus, we will communicate later by mail, e-mail, zoom and our publications. Parish Spred groups are making their plans in collaboration with their families and colleagues. In the meantime…

**Keep on the Sunny Side of Life**

There’s a dark and a troubled side of life; There’s a bright and a sunny side, too; Tho’ we meet with the darkness and strife, The sunny side we also may view.

Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side, Keep on the sunny side of life;

It will help us every day; it will brighten all the way, if we keep on the sunny side of life. Let us greet with a song of hope each day, Tho’ the moments be cloudy or fair; Let us trust in our Savior always, who keepeth everyone in His care.

Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side, Keep on the sunny side of life;

Ada Blenkorn, 1899, Becca Anderson, *Prayer for Calm*, Mango Publishing, Florida 2020 pg. 142

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