

Fr. Daniel O’Leary who is based in the diocese of Leeds, West Yorkshire in England has written many wonderful books and shared many enlightening insights in his talks and seminars. About once a month Fr. O’Leary publishes an article in The Tablet. Every article of his sparkles with wisdom and wonder.

Recently, I read with great delight one such article by Fr. O’Leary entitled ‘Space for Grace.’ I am always drawn to these articles of his but being a Spred catechist I was (for obvious reasons) very excited about the title of this one and couldn’t wait to read it.

In it, Fr. O’Leary spoke of Thomas More’s (author of Care of the Soul) writing on the concept of **temenos** which he describes as

the holding of a certain area as a special or sacred precinct set aside for the holy. For the Greeks of the past, temenos was sacred space which was not to be filled, used or polluted in any way.

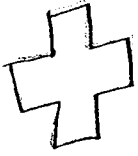
I immediately thought of our unique **temenos**, our Spred environment, which is essential in the catechetical work with our friends with disabilities.

The physical and geographical space of our new Spred Center in Glasgow in Scotland is such a haven of peace that even people who have no knowledge or connection with Spred comment on this when they enter the building. People are touched by the warmth, the fresh, tasteful decor which is so easy on the eye, and the peace exuded here.

For those of us who use this space, the sight of beautifully displayed materials which have the potential to soothe, delight, calm and nurture our spirits, offers a silent, irresistible invitation to our imagination.

Contrasting colours, textures which delight and absorb, compel us to accept this invitation and become creative, peace filled and able to begin afresh at every session to journey into the depths of self.

It is this journey, which leads us into very different space, sacred soul space - space for grace, the real **temenos**. Within this space God speaks.



During my twenty three years as a Spred catechist, there have been many times when I have felt myself 'nudged' into taking risks I would normally never have the courage to take. But the real crunch came in the form of the invitation from the Chicago Spred Staff to locate a place in or around Glasgow for our Peer Support Gathering 2006.



What a challenge! Previously we met in Switzerland which was so beautiful, so breathtakingly beautiful. How could we even begin to maintain such a standard!

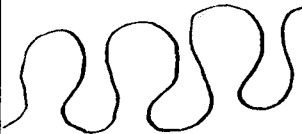
After countless, fruitless attempts to find a suitable venue we were encouraged by a Sister of Notre Dame, a Head Teacher, to try the Beardmore Hotel in Clydebank. The remainder, as they say, is history.

Some would call it gut reaction, I prefer to call it intestinal fortitude, but whatever you call it, we began to *feel* that a profound decision was about to be made as soon as we saw the hotel and its surroundings.



Walking into this space, even on a bleak, dismal January day, it looked beautiful. Clydebank beckoned. Moving from space to space looking for a potential 'chapel' within the Beardmore, intuitively we knew we had at last arrived. This space most definitely held promise and we could begin to relax knowing that it would be a very fitting environment for our Spred people and our needs.

So began all the arrangement, meetings, plans and paper work in preparation for our coming together. It was daunting, it was exciting, it was a bit nerve wracking. Being responsible for so much organizing as opposed to simply following the lead of our very expert and seasoned guides (as we had done in the past) was very different. But the reward was great.



What a joy to welcome so many Spred catechists from so many different countries, backgrounds and cultures. (1) I am still filled with amazement and gratitude as I recall the people who came from far and wide to share in the events, experiences and catechesis which unfolded through our time together.

Each day offered its own blessed surprises as we gathered at table, gathered in small groups, gathered in larger groups. Whenever we met, whoever we met, however formal or informal, a refueling of enthusiasm and joy was always the result.

The Beardmore Hotel was, like Switzerland, a wonderful environment for our gathering, but it was the **people** who gathered together, shared together, prayed and praised God together whose presence graced the space and made it holy ground.

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The spirit of joy, trust, friendship which emanated throughout our space was both enriching and transforming. Through one another's sharing, sacred moments, music, celebration, insights, there was revelation and there was hope.

There was a real dynamism in the laughter, the smiles, the shining eyes, the sacred gesture, and the selfless sharing...all of this goodness highly symbolic of the God in the heart of each one of us.

We shared many experiences and memories of the ordinary, seemingly simple events of life as well as profound ones but all were edifying and effective in joining us to the real essence of life.

Each day as we gathered to celebrate the Eucharist, we formed a colourful, sacred mandala around the Book of God's Word. The diversity of cultures, personalities and language added richness, light and life to our expressions of praise and gratitude.

For many, many years the banks of the River Clyde were a hive of heavy ship-building industry, running the whole length of the river were shipyards where, for generations, some of the world's largest and most legendary ships were built.

The Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Elizabeth II were among the more famous ships built there by the poor Irish immigrants who came and settled in Clydebank during the great famine.

The beautiful vessels, affectionately known as 'graceful ladies' carried many precious cargos of people on their journey to a better and more fulfilling life in the New World. Those who sailed in them to faraway shores were people filled with anticipation and hope.

The banks of the Clyde are silent now, green and spacious, but if they could speak what wonderful stories and pearls of wisdom they would reveal.

Since our Spred International gathering, they hold the wonderful memory of a new generation of **sacred** vessels who have now walked there, **earthen** vessels carrying their own precious cargo of friends on a very different kind of journey - a spiritual journey to a new and more fulfilling life in Christ Jesus.

What a debt of gratitude we owe to the Chicago Spred Team whose life's work, wisdom and selfless generosity have called us to travel with so many delightful people on this journey to the Divine. We too are people filled with anticipation and hope.

Mrs. Jean McConnell
Glasgow, Scotland, Spred

(1) Affiliated with Spred:

1. **Australia** - Perth and Toowoomba,
2. **England** - London and Shrewsbury,
3. **Ireland** - Dublin and Limerick,
4. **Northern Ireland** - Belfast (Down and Connor), Derry, Armagh,
5. **Mexico** - Mexico City and surrounding dioceses,
6. **Malta** - the Island of Malta,
7. **Scotland** - Glasgow, Paisley, Edinburgh, Galloway, Motherwell,
8. **South Africa** - Johannesburg, Cape Town,
- 9 **United States**- Portland ME, Providence RI, Worcester MA, Arlington VA, Charlotte, NC, Scranton, PA, Kansas City-St. Joseph MO, Joliet IL, Milwaukee WI, Saginaw MI, Indianapolis IN, Chicago IL, Oakland CA

