



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DIVISION

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In Spred we have a treasure which gets very little fanfare and is often put away in a pile of papers to be forgotten. It is a serious response to observed patterns of struggle and growth in Spred Communities of faith since our pioneer days. The Spred Contract for Adult Communities of Spred Catechists was drawn up to facilitate the growth of the adult faith community and anchor them in a shared pastoral vision.

So...Seasoned catechists! Dust off that contract...you know the one you are asked to review each year as you enter into your first session. New catechists! Why not take another look. Pastors, parents and caregivers! Know that it exists. What are its implications on the catechesis that you have chosen for your parishioners, your children or the people in your care?

It seems to me that one might become uneasy when talking about contracts in relation to the life of faith. Is there an implication that if one adheres to the right methodology, everything will work out all right? That's really not the way it works. Programs and methodologies are necessary to define a pastoral plan, but they can be impersonal and theoretical. A plan is objective and effective and may be intellectually or logically sound, but it is not central. In this context, the Spred contract as a written agreement is valuable insofar as it directs the community on the right path. It offers the framework to accomplish an end. But without a commitment of the heart, the group may not hold together.

A vision is born of imagination and insight. It is highly subjective and personal. A vision is affective. It calls for a surrender of the heart. People are at the core of a pastoral vision. Do we believe in them and with them? Do we love them? In this schema, a contract is a pact, or a covenant. It draws together or requires involvement. It needs the assent of two or more people. Without relationship, it is meaningless. The Spred contract embodies this notion.

More than 60 people joined us in Spred Fall training to learn about the pastoral strategy and the methodology designed by Spred to provide appropriate catechesis for children and adults with developmental disabilities. The primary focus is to invite people to embrace a new experience of catechesis. The mentality of Spred is our pastoral vision. Our friends with developmental disabilities are at the center. The underlying belief which becomes the impetus for the formation of a Spred community of faith is that people with various types of developmental disabilities can know God and respond in faith. Adult catechists are asked to open themselves to a vision which challenges their mindset and calls them to begin a new journey of faith in partnership with persons



FOR
COMMUNITIES

with special needs. The faith of the catechists provides the sacred atmosphere for growth in faith for their friends with disabilities. The Spred method is the blueprint which has been drawn from years of sensitive research and lived experience. It is the map which will direct the catechists as they embark on their new course and work toward communion. The Spred Standards are the guideposts to maintain the focus of the core team and their community of catechists.

It is impossible to connect with the pastoral vision of Spred without adhering wholeheartedly to the fifth Spred Standard for Affiliation which names the adult community of believers as the locus for the faith development of their friends with developmental disabilities. Without the catechists' willingness to renew their own appreciation of the mystery of the Kingdom and without their willingness to develop a common bond of faith among themselves, there will be no fertile soil to nourish the seeds of faith which rest in the souls of their friends.

The contract emphasizes the seriousness of this endeavor and recognizes the challenges it presents. In order to insure the healthy growth of the faith community, the initial step will be an intellectual assent to the written contract even in face of some discomfort or misunderstanding. Because the Spred method is so experiential, one often needs to enter into the process before being able to fully embrace it.

The Spred contract asks the community of adults to agree to meet for a faith session which will last about three hours every other week, apart from those sessions that are with our friends with disabilities. Each of the adult preparation sessions opens with a period for feedback. Then the process focuses on the same mystery of faith that will be explored with their friends in the coming week. The progression includes a story; ample time for reflection on a personal life experience; sharing by each member of the community; a liturgical evocation; a biblical evocation; a message; a song and personal expression with a time for quiet meditation. Then the group goes over the coming session with their friends. A ritual sharing of food is essential in cementing the bonds of the community of faith. Elimination of any of these steps will sabotage the method and erect serious roadblocks to the growth of the faith community, the core media for the faith development of their friends.

Faith is found in a community of believers. A look at the early Christian community supports the notion of small groups. Early Christians gathered to remember Jesus, and were experiencing the Lord. They believed that Jesus became the Risen Lord of history, that he was present to them, and that he spoke to them in their lives. Dwelling in them, he could be in communion with them and they with him.

The contract asks the Spred adult community to take the time to get in contact with the Risen Lord dwelling in them. This is a definitive shift from an instructional model of catechesis to an experiential model, inviting the catechist into a more interpersonal relationship with God. Knowledge of God stems from experience. We know through our external senses - sight, smell, touch, sound and taste. We also know through our internal senses - intuition, imagination, and instinct. The Word of God manifests itself in our human experiences. The Word of God is very powerful.

A Spred community of faith moves toward communion with God through a process known as symbolic catechesis or the Method Vivre: to unfold, to interpret life situations...within a group...

through a symbol...in faith...in the light of the Word...moving toward communion and witness. We listen to a story or settle before an object, a piece of life and surrender all our senses to its power. The symbol affectively beckons us personally and collectively toward the depth of our life experiences. Entry into this interior movement brings us into the realm of mystery where the Word of God can resonate. All reality is grounded in the life of the Trinity. Through Jesus, the Word Incarnate all life comes from and returns to the Father.

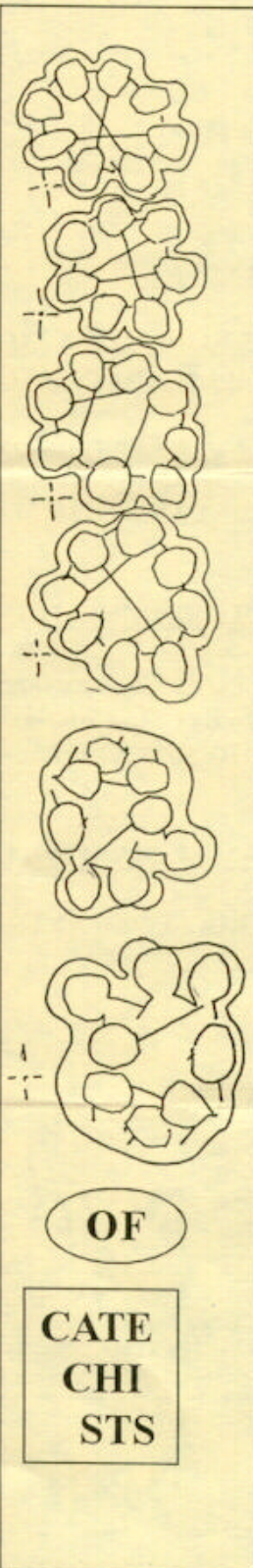
Scripture and tradition are the attempts of our Hebrew ancestors and the early Church to communicate what the Word meant to them. They are the absolutely essential by-products of the Word of God, the two fonts of Divine revelation. We listen to the words of Scripture and we look at our reality, just as the New Testament writers did. Scripture is the story of God's people, their history, their salvation, their liberation, their waking up to God's presence, their trials, their failures and their conversion. We look into their past and we look into our past in order to mount a dream.

The message of Scripture, the message of the Word of God in our lives today is always to "be, to become, to do" never simply to know. We respond in faith, trust and love. In communion with one another we arrive at a new awareness of life. A deep experience of God will bring new insight and provoke a new way of being.

The dynamics of a group, the intermingling of personalities dictates that there will be struggle. There will be challenges with leadership, with individuals and with the process. Leadership in a Spred community of faith is threefold: to welcome the members of the community of faith, to give leadership in the education of the community and to give leadership in celebrations. Leadership involves a sharing of gifts and diffusion of responsibility. The contract cautions against overdependency on a leader or domination by anyone in a leadership position. Every person in a community of faith is valued and their authentic participation is indispensable. Personal problems or limitations can have a serious impact on the bonding within the group. If exchanges are open and honest, the struggle can offer opportunities for personal and communal growth.

The formation of an intimate community of faith is a delicate process. The community will redefine itself with every change of membership and the readiness of each person to surrender to the process. A group that drinks deeply of the experience of the Risen Lord week after week, year after year, will arrive at a new awareness of the pastoral vision of our founders. The contract will progress from its status as a paper document to a living covenant. A contract grounded in intimacy with God and with a community of believers becomes a "want to" not a "must do." The Spred contract becomes an emotional extension of ourselves. We are invited to share the vision of Spred for people with developmental disabilities. We find our purpose and embrace the responsibilities it entails. We are inspired. The process will do this. Our friends with disabilities will also do this. We are a part of something that has already made a profound difference in people's lives. Let your own heart become attached!

Julie Hess
Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker



SPRED CALENDAR

TRAINING

**INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and
Activity Catechists Sat. 1:00 to 6:00
FEBRUARY 19, 26, MARCH 4

ROLE ORIENTATION

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and
Activity Catechists Sat. 1:00 to 6:00
MARCH 18 AND 25

MAMRE DINNER DANCE 2000

APRIL 30, 2000 AT THE MARTINIQUÉ

OBSERVATION

6-10 6:00 p.m. Mon. Feb. 14, 28, Mar. 13, 27
11-16 7:00 p.m. Tues. Feb. 8, 22, Mar. 7, 28
22+ 7:00 p.m. Mon. Feb. 14, 28, Mar. 27

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Dec. 5, Feb. 6, March 5, April 2, May 7

SPRED CENTER

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Directions: Exit 31st Street from Lakeshore Drive or
Dan Ryan, West to Lowe Ave, north to 30th and Lowe.

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