



I press my eye to the beckoning peephole. I squeeze the other tight against any distractions. A luscious pallet of color cascades before me as interlaced patterns play hide and seek to delight me. Each rotation of the kaleidoscope promises a new light show and captures my imagination. I luxuriate in the wonder and unpredictability of every twist of the cylinder.

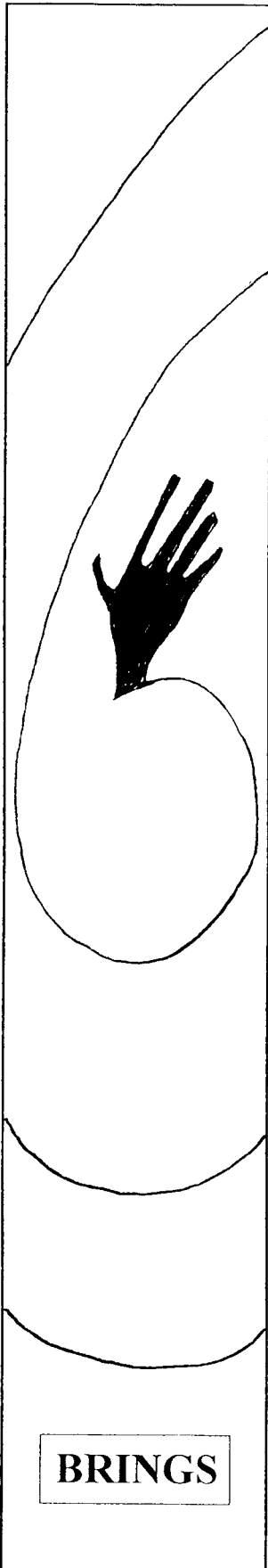
Change is indicative of the unfolding of life. Yet, we are often not so entertained by life's kaleidoscope of transformation. On the contrary, it can be the wellspring of fear and apprehension. We are comfortable with familiarity and treasure it as we would an old pair of shoes that has conformed amiably to the shape of our feet. We hide tenuously in the sanctuary of our comfort zone and yearn to linger unnoticed in the solace therein. Change betrays our vulnerability to the tides of life.

The human condition teems with change and transitions from birth to death. Change demands risk. Letting go relies on faith. Transition requires sensitivity and seeks trust. It is a process of finding balance and discovering personal momentum.

Because Spred communities are grounded in life, they too are marked with inevitable twists and turns: catechists retire; Spred friends grow older and move on to the next age group; families change locations; Spred friends move into state or private residential settings or transfer from one to another. Just when a Spred community burrows into its cozy niche, the tide steals in to rearrange lives. These shifts and passages have an effect on the person with disabilities, the family and the community of catechists. How can one move gracefully through the ebb and flow of change and maintain equilibrium in the pulse of the waves? How can we transform occasions of potential anxiety into junctures of promise and growth?

Many of these changes are inevitable and predictable; some are not. Either way, it is possible to design some common sense guidelines to quell the swell of the sea. The Spred process offers a valid archetype. In the unfolding of the Spred session, there are several transition points which are marked by calming ritual. These shifts involve gentle encouragement, warm invitation and vigilant accompaniment by the helper catechist. The process respects the delicate balance in the coping sensitivities of the person with special needs during change.

Carefully crafted rituals on behalf of the person with developmental and cognitive disabilities are indicative of considerable reflection and deliberation. In recent years, the concern for



respectful and sensitive transitions from one Spred community to another has been drawing attention. There is no place for rigidity, heavy handedness or stifling possessiveness in a method rooted in caring relationships. Thoughtful discussion at area planning meetings and a recent seminar brought people together to explore these issues further. Some valid recommendations have surfaced.

Catechists come and catechists go. This revolving pattern affects all the members of the Spred community. We can ease the moment of departure from a group by marking it as a time of gratitude and celebration. It is helpful for the catechists to take time during their last preparation session together to allow each person to state their intentions for the coming year. This can be done with an attitude of prayer and discernment. Guilt and tension has no place in a community of love. If the team of catechists can get their house in order by April each year, they will then have time for a joyful celebration of closure with their friends during the summer or at the final agape. No catechist should leave a partnership with their friend without a caring home visit and personal closure with their friend and family.

A continuum of movement in Spred acknowledges the natural life cycle of the person with disability. Because the catechetical method is anchored in the life experiences of the people Spred serves, the syllabus is written to address the chronological age of the child ( 6-10), the teenager (11-16), the young adult (17-21) and the adult (22+). Activity catechists are taught to design an environment to respect the age of the persons they serve. There is a clear distinction between a meeting place for children and one prepared for adults. We must highlight transitions as rites of passage that honor each person's growth in age, wisdom and grace.

However, this is not a board game played out by an assembly of clever parish chairpersons. Our friends with disabilities are not inanimate pawns in a venture of strategy and chance. Every transfer is unique and layered with emotion. It involves a rippling that rocks the equilibrium of the person with disabilities and especially those who support them. Orchestration of the move must be grounded in sound judgment, careful consideration and collaboration among all parties.

There must be open and honest communication between the chairperson of the two groups involved. The welcoming group must be able to assure that there is a helper catechist in place for the child or adult. It is advantageous for both chairpersons to team together for a home visit. This approach can settle apprehension and offer a respectful forum for the parents to voice their concerns and make suggestions based on personal wisdom concerning the child's ability to cope with transition. Paperwork can be updated and transportation issues solved.

Parish chairpersons should be responsible for knowing the quality of the Spred communities in their network or deanery. For the sake of the person with disabilities it is important for all Spred communities to adhere to the Spred Standards of Affiliation.

Inconsistency in the method can trigger unwanted behaviors in the person with disabilities and can provoke distrust and disappointment from the family. The parents have a right to observe a group before the transfer is complete. Spred chairpersons have the responsibility to work together to assure a progression of quality and continuity to the families, the caregivers and, most importantly to the person with disability.

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Some situations indicate that discomfort can be eliminated when the former helper catechist accompanies the child or adult to the first session with their new community of friends. This approach has met with success in specialized episodes, but is not supportive in every case. If the helper catechist is riddled with his or her own set of insecurities, their presence can stir fear and negativity in the friend. Each situation stands on its own merit.

Finally parents need to be educated about all the factors that are at play in the transition of their child from one group to another. Bearing this in mind, it is never respectful to wait until the last minute to inform the family of the transfer of their child. It takes time and supportive dialogue to convey the multiple issues involved.

If we neglect to do this, the parent can become defensive and suspicious about the change. It is important that they know all the rationale for transferring their child from one group to another. From the onset of the child's participation in Spred, chairpersons should be open with the family about the checks and balances which affect the journey of their child.

Spred communities are held to small numbers to assure intimacy and provide a comfortable ambiance for the friends we welcome. Consequently, there may be occasions when we are not able to conform to all the hopes and requests of the parents. As friends transfer, it may not always be possible to move each child on with schoolmates or neighbors because of lack of openings in the receiving group. The availability of openings can also affect a timely move to the succeeding group and prevent the need to address the ever present waiting list. It would be a perfect world if the vacancies in Spred communities corresponded faultlessly to all the needs.

In the end, we must all strive to surrender ourselves to the winds of change. We must work together to embrace and love the person with disability through the passage of time. It is essential to set our own egos aside to discover the progression which best serves and honors the relationships at the heart of Spred. We must work to design rituals that celebrate the coming of age of each person we serve. Letting go is at the core of this unfolding. There is no need to cling tightly. To do so would arrest the pattern of each one's growth and stifle freedom. Let us remember that the Spirit is at work to help us poise ourselves perfectly to absorb the mystery of every ripple.

He who bends to himself a joy  
Doth the winged life destroy;  
But he who kisses joy as it flies  
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

(Eternity, William Blake)

Let us attend to our responsibilities and arrest our fears so that we may honor the "winged life" in every person we welcome into Spred and in all who move in the circle of faith and love that enfolds them.

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