

**COMMUN  
ION**

I was touched by a statement made at a summer workshop for Spred leader catechists at my parish, St. Rene Goupil. Larry's statement was that "the catechist preparation session was the 'gem' of Spred. He spoke with such conviction that I decided to write about this gem.

The Contract for Adult Communities of Spred Catechists is a booklet distributed during the Introduction to Special Religious Development course for core team members. This is not a legal document but the language expresses how serious the Spred process is. Spred is an unique faith development program for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Its uniqueness goes beyond the sessions with our friends with special needs. Built into the program are the sessions with our fellow catechists which are required.

Why are these sessions for adult catechists so important?

People with developmental delays share the life of the group in varying degrees but the burden of growth in faith falls primarily on the adult community.

For this reason, Spred catechists participate in a preparation session prior to each total community session; that is with our friends with special needs. This shifts the process from a teacher-pupil pattern to growing together as a community of faith. 1

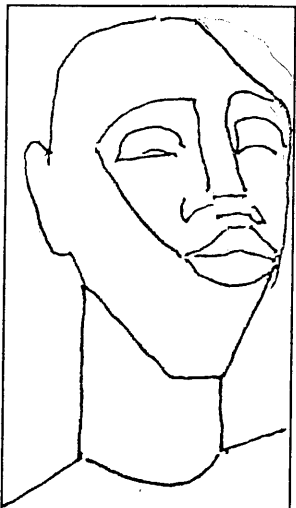
Why is it necessary for the catechist community to gather?

This contract subscribes to a catechesis of adults. All too often due to the pressures of time and due to adults' passion to teach children their religion, the emphasis of adult faith is bypassed. ...Religious education moves forward only when adults grow in faith. The adult community is primary so that others have a Christian community into which they can be welcomed. 2

In a Spred community of faith, about eight catechists come together every other week to experience a process that will help form them into a small community of faith. This is a session that requires the commitment of each catechist. Without this session, the catechists are not prepared as a community to welcome those with special needs on the alternate weeks from September to May.

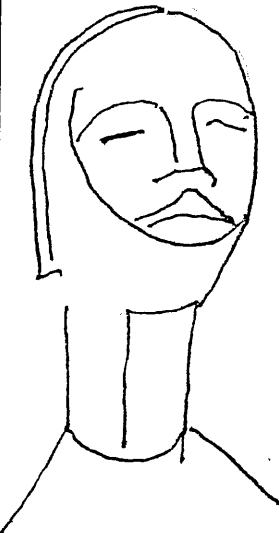
The needs of the Christian today often call for smaller, more vibrant faith groups in a church that knows its catholic and universal nature all too well. 3

A catechist session is to establish a life of communion among ourselves and with God.



Communion is the goal of the adult preparation session. It takes place by advancing into a more and more interpersonal relationship with God, which by its very intimacy, is in some measure mysterious. 4

This session is key for the catechesis that we live with our friends with special needs. It is not to be diminished to a business meeting or just coming together to plan in detail next weeks session with our friends. We know that both of these elements are part of our time together. For example if the group participates in the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll drive, it will be necessary to make plans in order to raise funds for the parish Spred group. However, the heart of this gathering is to enter wholeheartedly into a process we call the method Vivre. That is why training for the core team of catechists involves two chances to explore the process, once during the introductory course and once during the role orientation course. This heightens awareness that the faith life of the catechists is important.



As Spred becomes part of the parish's ministry year after year, does this session maintain the same quality of commitment as when it first began? Is each catechist just as ready to participate in a catechist preparation session now as when each first started? If not, why not, if the goal is communion? It is interesting to me that some priests have discovered this gem in their parish and have chosen to become part of the small community of faith to nourish their own faith life when possible. Sometimes, it is a pastor who realizes that his parish Spred group needs resourcing from the Spred Center so it can become that quality center once again.

In a catechist preparation session, the process used helps us to evoke a story from our own life experiences by first listening to a story from someone else's life experience. This story is read by the leader catechist who has taken time to prepare. It becomes a springboard for remembering one's own story. The story read can take us in a hundred different directions. We need to focus on one. This is why there is a synopsis of the story that reflects the goal of the session. Then a universal statement is read which can include anyone. However, a question for our reflection is read and this time it is our story that is sought. We are given twenty minutes in silence or with quiet music for each one to begin to focus on a life experience. During this time, which can pass quickly, each person sifts through experiences in order to find one that keeps returning so as to re-live it. This re-living of the story brings out feelings in us as we remember using our senses of tasting, touching, seeing, hearing, and smelling. This allows our story to life once again in our memory. This brings us the focus we need so as to share a story of our own life experience with our fellow catechists and grow in a relationship with one another and with God.

**AMONG US  
AND**

For the sharing of our own stories, we move into the celebration area where we gather in a semi-circle around the Book of God's Word. The Holy Book, on a low table, is adorned with fresh flowers beautifully arranged and a lit candle that can be seen by all. When each one shares a personal story, it is held sacred, that is without discussion or questions. The story becomes a gift to build community. Some groups have difficulty with personal sharing and might revert to becoming a sort of book club by choosing to dissect the story read by the leader. But in this sacred space we are called to become known so as to build a welcoming community. Some catechists can be uncomfortable at first. Why? Because we often see our lives as so simple, so ordinary that there is nothing to share. We compare ourselves to the people in the story read and we seem to measure up. We feel that our story is almost embarrassingly simple. But if we share our story

session after session, we can begin to see our life as somehow connected to God's life within us. We are His people and brothers and sisters in Him. Through sharing we build trust and become more and more open and reflective of what we live and how we live. We may even surprise ourselves. This sharing is the beginning of the liturgical evocation.

After the catechists have shared their stories, the leader catechist evokes a story in detail of a particular liturgical experience that the group has had. What is shared could be taken from a Spred family liturgy. How the leader evokes a memory of a liturgical experience needs to resonate with each person.

Our adult preparation sessions every other week draw us ever deeper into our mission which is to welcome people with special needs. As catechists, we are called by God to be a light for our world. We are called to build up the body of Christ where all are welcomed. 5

Our catechist sessions always conclude with an agape. We set a beautiful table with flowers, candles, silverware, glassware, cloth napkins and simple food and drink. This is our social time, our time to laugh and talk about ourselves. It is the third phase of a catechist preparation session and is always included. After a while we all clean up and leave together renewed and refreshed to re-enter life but with the eyes of faith.

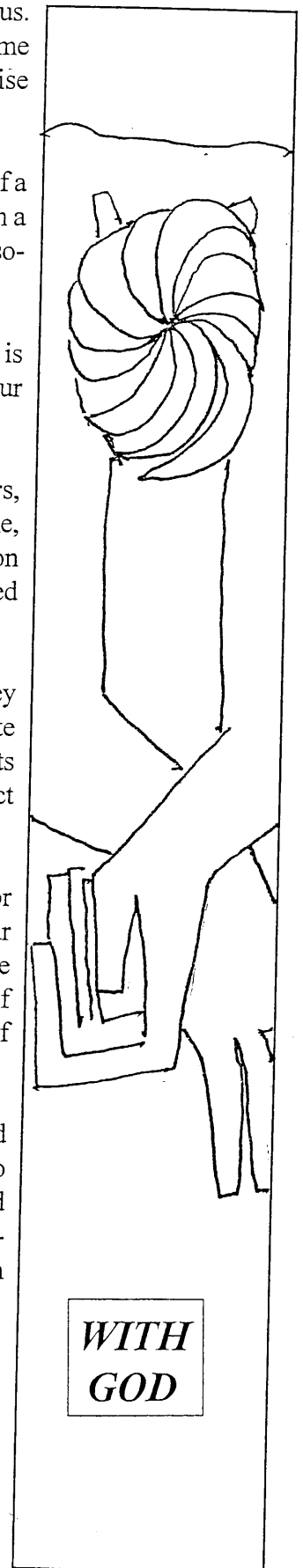
Who are the people who form our small communities of faith in our parishes? How are they invited? How do they become aware of the commitment and the process used? Do we invite them to observe sessions? Do we inform them of the training needed for their role? Catechists are busy people who lead hectic lives. Through Spred each one is called to slow down, to reflect on an aspect of daily life so as to recognize God's presence in the ordinary.

The contract helps Spred communities in their struggle with problems of leadership, process or personal issues. It is better to face the problem than to have catechists upset or confused: Our friends know when people are not happy to be together. They sense negativity and become unsettled. Our focus is to provide for them a community of faith that grows in its awareness of God in their midst. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20)

Sometimes others see Spred groups as made up of volunteers and forget that they are trained catechists who have freely said yes to this ministry of a parish. They are called to be respectful to the process by arriving on time in order to begin on time, respecting those who have hired babysitters or have other plans. If someone is having personal issues speak privately with members of the core team who can offer some hope. Catechists can then see the adult preparation session as this gem to taste adult faith, to embrace personal faith.

Elizab eth Sivek  
Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker

1. Contract for Adult Communities of Spred Catechists, Spred, Special Religious Development Chicago, 1987 pg. 1
2. Ibid. pg. 2, 3, 3. Ibid. pg. 2, 4. Ibid. pg. 3
5. Community and Growth, Jean Vanier, Paulist Press, Revised Edition, 1979



## SPRED CALENDAR

### SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Feb. 5, March 4, April 1, May 6

### SPRED TRAINING

#### Introduction to Spred

for parish chairpersons, leader and activity catechists.

Saturdays Feb. 11, 18, 25, 2012, 1 to 6 p.m.

Spred Center, 2956 So. Lowe, Chicago, 3rd fl.

312-842-1039 English and Spanish

#### Role Orientation (Resource Days)

For parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists in English and Spanish

Spred Center, 2956 So Lowe, Chicago

312-842-1039 Third floor over the church

Saturdays, March 10, 17, 2012 1:00 to 6:00

### MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE

APRIL 22, 2012

DRURY LANE, OAKBROOK

### OBSERVATION

6-10 Mondays 6:00 p.m. Feb. 13, 27, March 12

11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Feb. 14, 28, April 17

17-21 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Feb. 14, 28, April 17

22+ Mondays 7:00 p.m. Feb. 13, 27, April 16

#### Helper Catechist Training

St. Francis de Sales Spred Center

Saturday, Feb. 4, 2012, 11:00 to 4:00

33 S Buesching Rd (lower church) Lake Zurich II

English; Kelly Corrigan, 847-726-4742

St. Mary Spred Center, 97 Herrick Rd. Riverside II

Saturday April 21, 2012, 10:00 to 3:00 RSVP

Eileen Rose, emr366@gmail.com, 708-447-0299

### FUTURE PLANNING

Please let us know if we can be of assistance if you are thinking of including Spred/Mamre in your estate plans. Spred, 312-842-1039

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