



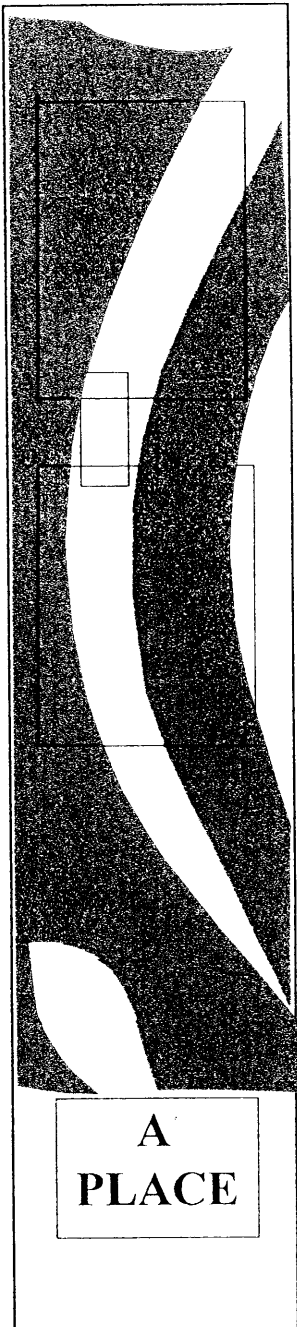
As a Spred catechist I frequently sense the responsibility that is mine to continue to grow in faith within my catechist community. I am fortunate to be with seven other likeminded adult believers who are as intent as I to be effective with six young people of adolescent age who join us for catechesis. Our responsibility is to be a welcoming place for the presence of God.

The catechist preparation session which precedes each experience with our young friends provides a means for us to develop as a community of faith. We participate in a process that calls us to evoke a lived experience. We engage all of our being, body, mind and spirit to become so present to an event, so caught up by it that we live it symbolically. Each persons evocation is unique yet all are linked intrinsically, stemming from the same intentionality. The leader of the catechist community explicitly situates our symbolic experience in the faith of the Church. Our experience is illumined and we become aware of God's presence. As the catechist reads from the book of God's Word we experience being disposed interiorly under the action of the Spirit to receive the message of Jesus. The experience is one of being unified and gathered together in God. It readies us to be an expression of God's love for our young friends and to guide them using the same symbolic method that respects their mode of being-in-the-world.

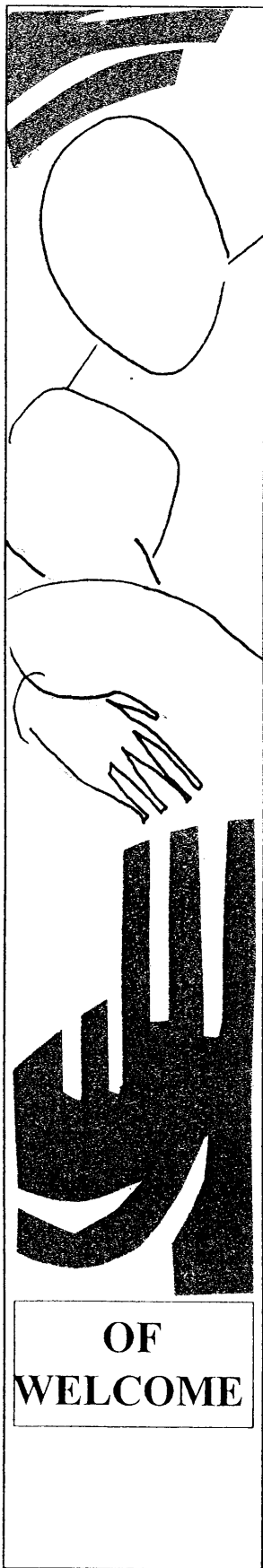
The discovery of God's love in the common events of everyday life helps us to develop a more contemplative attitude regarding our experience. We treasure life as the dwelling place of the sacred. We savor the times we gather to sense the Mystery of life and rest in the Presence of that which defies explanation. We experience our identity as an ecclesial community and grow in our ability to trust the Spirit of God who missions each of us to be Light for others. We discover that symbolic awareness secures us to be a welcoming place for the presence of God.

W. B. Yates describes the powerful attraction of those who possess an interior life.

“We can make our minds so like still water  
that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be  
their own images,  
and so live for a moment  
with a clearer perhaps even with a fiercer life  
because of our quiet.”



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PLACE



Those who gather with us, live in our stillness. We sense that our communion with God through signs and events provides the support they need to live and grow in faith.

The experience of the preparation session energizes us to welcome our friends. We become eager to greet them and share with them. Sometimes we work with those who are challenged by the experience of belonging in a group. When we are secure with one another as a catechist community we are able to sense the particular challenges that our friends endure because of their disability. We can be for them the supportive presence that helps them choose to belong. Our manner of welcome and being together leads them to sense the presence of the sacred among us.

A prepared environment for Spred is close to being on a par with the prepared catechist community. The environment is for us what books and charts are for the teacher of theology. Our request for a place for catechesis and our dedication to the preparation of the environment is not a sign that we are fussy. It is not that we want to claim space to be important. We build a community of faith and receive the message of Jesus in space that speaks the same message as the words we use. Words need to be supported by the experience of the reality of which we speak. Our environment says who we are. It provides the opportunity for each person to discover the call to belong. It calls each to relate and to interact with creation. It urges us to enter symbolic activity that readies us to welcome the Word of God.

If we say that the prepared environment speaks of who we are and what we are about we would include the following in its description.

The space is prepared for the coming together of several people. The tables and chairs are arranged to gather two to four people and are of good quality. The floor is noticeably well cared for. The temperature provides comfort.

Cabinets are arranged surrounding the tables and chairs. The materials on the shelves exhibit a sense of order and are organized with like materials together. All are accessible to those who will live in the environment. The arrangement communicates a sense of care. A disc or tape player is available.

There are various kinds of art materials, sensorial materials and everyday life materials. All are attractive, clean and appropriate to the age of the persons who will be welcomed for catechesis. All materials have the potential to lead one to focus, to become happily engaged, to experience bonding.

The lighting in the space is welcoming and calming, similar to one's light at home or church rather than one's workplace or school lighting.

There is a supply of water for washing hands and cleaning up, for watering plants and preparing fresh flowers for the tables. There need not be running water. The prepared environment does not need to be one that is expensive to create. It implicitly mirrors the faith of the adult catechist community. It manifests care and beauty. It possesses the kind of spirit and substance that is in harmony with the intentionality of

the catechesis. It is always prepared and basically consistent in content. It encourages personal involvement. Every element holds the promise of revealing the sacred. It supports the mission of the catechist community to be a welcoming place for the presence of God.

We look forward to the time of arrival of our young friends. Each catechist tries to be present and engaged with a work that will help them to become focused. Quieting music supports the process of becoming concentrated. Each person arrives at the entrance to the room with an air of excitement. The welcoming ritual is very important. Each person greets every other person, moving around to each of the tables in the environment. There are hand shakes or the bumping of elbows and laughter if hands are busy with clay or charcoal. The activity catechist who guides the preparation process and the leader catechist who is involved in work assist each person in the greeting process. It's a wonderful beginning where spirits connect and share joy in seeing one another. All are happy to be together.

Our friends enter the process of preparation and participate through the spirit and example of the catechist community. Each will enter the process as they are able. Catechists become sensitive to the needs of their friend as relationships grow. What is important is that each person put forth effort to engage in work that is in harmony with the symbolic experience. This includes the ritual of moving from one activity to another as often as is necessary until one is able to settle with something that captures their spirit. The experience of becoming one with our choice of work is symbolic activity that energizes and awakens our interior life.

Sometimes our friends do not find it easy to choose a work nor focus their attention. We know that becoming focused will be an asset for participation in the catechesis. We try to interest them in what they have chosen. If they have spent some time in distracting conversation we call attention to the work of those around them and ask them to speak softly. Gentle suggestions alert them to the concentrated activity of others and often this connects them with the spirit of the group. Catechists will ask, "Are you enjoying your work?" as a way of reconnecting them. Or the activity catechist is sometimes heard to say, "Would you like to change your activity? I have something to show you that I think you would enjoy." Gentle ways of refocusing attention help to redirect behavior and make it possible for the community to sense a common spirit, a sacred quality to the work of preparation and a corporate sense of stillness .

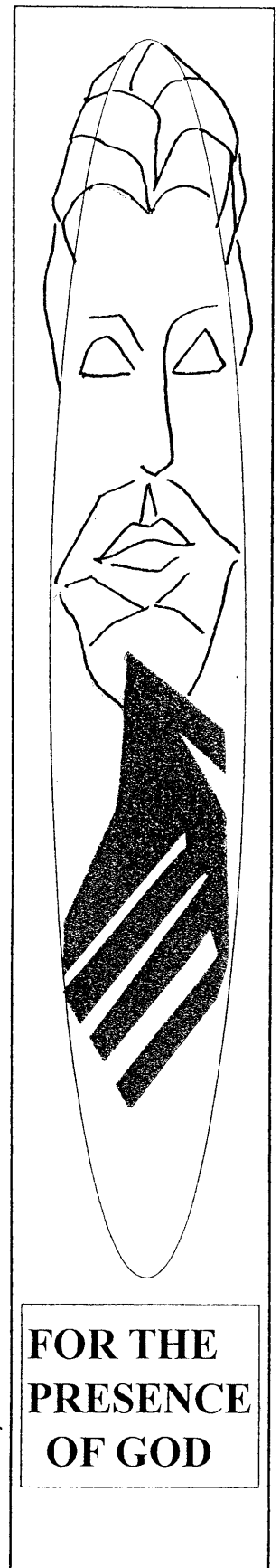
As the time of preparation comes to an end we gather in a circle. With joy we acknowledge each ones presence. The name of each person is quietly called and each responds by moving to the sacred space prepared by the leader catechist. The moment of being together there is filled with anticipation. All are ready. Catechists sit next to their young friend in the circle around the Book of God's Word and provide an echo of support to the leader who begins evoking an event that all have lived. We are a welcoming place for the presence of God.

Sr. Susanne Gallagher  
Spred Staff

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**FOR THE  
PRESENCE  
OF GOD**