

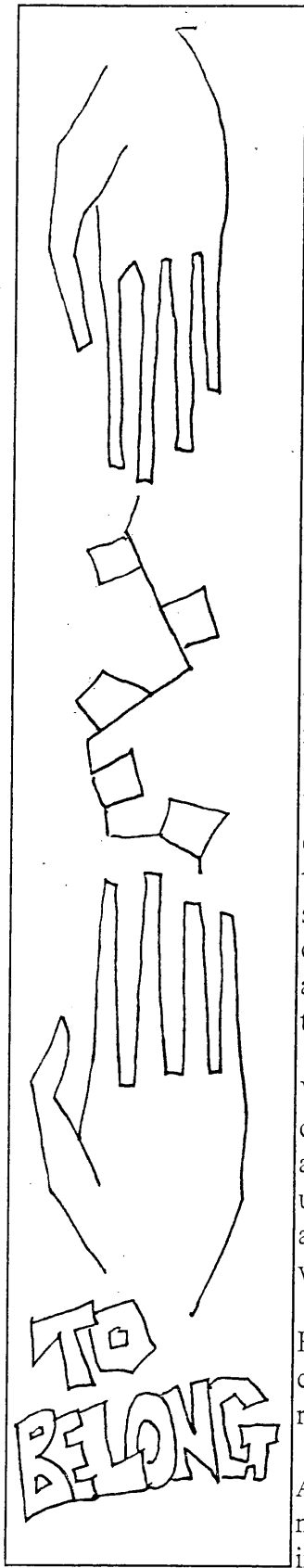
Those familiar with Spred know that a solid adult catechist community is the essential foundation for each parish Spred group. The strength of each catechist community rests in the commitment of each person to be with the group each time it gathers together and to be open to entering into the experience of each session wholeheartedly. The desire to belong, and to recognize the importance of earnest participation is at the core of the community's ability to be a source of nourishment for those friends with disabilities who are welcomed to grow in faith.

Sometimes it takes a good deal of energy to establish a Spred community of faith in a parish. People are busy. Some people don't see themselves as a source of spiritual support for another. Many people have never related to someone who has an intellectual and developmental disability; they don't feel competent. But when the need is announced over and over again, some hear the Spirit within them saying, 'come'.

The experience of observing a Spred community gathered together for catechesis is often the moment when one is encouraged from within to say, 'I want to make this commitment. I see people like myself being a source of support for their friends with special needs. I see the catechists working together sharing the work of responding to the goal of the session so that all may participate as they are able. I need to be a part of a small community of faith. I need the support of others to grow in faith. I want to be a support to others'.

One of our friends was asked about being in Spred. She was asked, "What is Spred?" She responded, "That's when my friends come to be with me." For her Spred is an experience of belonging, of being with those who love her and want to be with her. She never wants to miss the experience of belonging with her friends.

To provide a deep sense of belonging for others is the essential work of the catechist community. This sense of belonging is an ever deepening reality that grows with each experience of the catechist preparation session. Each catechist needs to find a deep sense of belonging among his and her team members so that together they can be that foundation upon which others are able to grow in faith. Yes, each catechist needs to feel that Spred is 'when my friends come to be with me'. We all need to know *through experience*, that we belong together in faith.



I recall a special moment during our last catechist preparation session. We were in the celebration room, gathered around the Book of God's Word at the close of the session. We had each received the message of Jesus, "Jesus says to you tonight, 'I am with you'". We stood in a circle around the Holy Book and sang a prayerful hymn. We sat in silence. No one moved to go back into the meeting room where we would look at the outline to be used for the session with our special friends. No one moved. I didn't want to move. I had such a strong sense of the presence of God in me, in us. The experience of belonging in faith is one to be treasured, to be absorbed as one is able, and one to be shared.

Perhaps we would name the experience in the Spred community, an experience of being re-formed. We engage in personal work. We make an effort to become silent. The work of taking the time to become silent and to focus our attention is often a challenge. We have to agree that it is important to silence the many voices that compete for our attention. Is becoming prepared to welcome the message of Jesus important? What is it that is more important? The task often requires real sacrifice but the journey leads us to a deeper desire to rest in the mystery of God's love.

In the catechist community we agree to enter the process of evocation by accepting the discipline to reflect individually for at least 20 minutes discovering during our reflection, an experience that is in concert with the question posed, a question that is in harmony with and will lead us to experience the goal of the session.

We discover an inner path, through the experience of evocation in which we relive an event and see from within that experience our shared life, our belonging with others in the community, with others in the experience of liturgy, with others in and through scripture, with Jesus who speaks to us and leads us to the Father. We become more conscious of the gift of God's presence in all of life. We realize the need to be patient and to trust in the work of the Spirit guiding us in our effort to be a sign of God's love to those we welcome.

We cannot explain the need to become still to the friends we welcome into our Spred community. We model the essential quality of stillness and contentment that we know and value from our catechist preparation session. We rely on an environment that calls us to engage in activity that supports the journey within. Once the environment is suitably prepared and we, the catechist community within that environment are engaged in work that each has chosen, the moment of welcome is at hand.

Each person needs time and support to say 'yes' to belonging. As with the catechist community, our friends are invited to choose to join in the work of becoming ready to receive the message of Jesus; they choose to belong to the community.

As time passes and we join together week after week and year after year, we become more sensitive to God's work in us. We ask for the wisdom to be the place of belonging in faith for others, a sign of the Church that provides nourishment for all.

The choice to belong is lived in the simplest of ways in the total community when we welcome our friends with special needs. We enter into the work of preparation. We gradually slow the pace of our activity. Our goal is to agree to be together with an emphasis on being rather than producing. In the process of our being together, each engaged in the activity chosen, we sense the harmony among us. We learn together that we are not in competition with one another. We are not being judged by what we do. By participating in the process that prepares us for an experience of the sacred, we are equal members of the community. There are many differences among us but the core reality that we share joins us together as one.

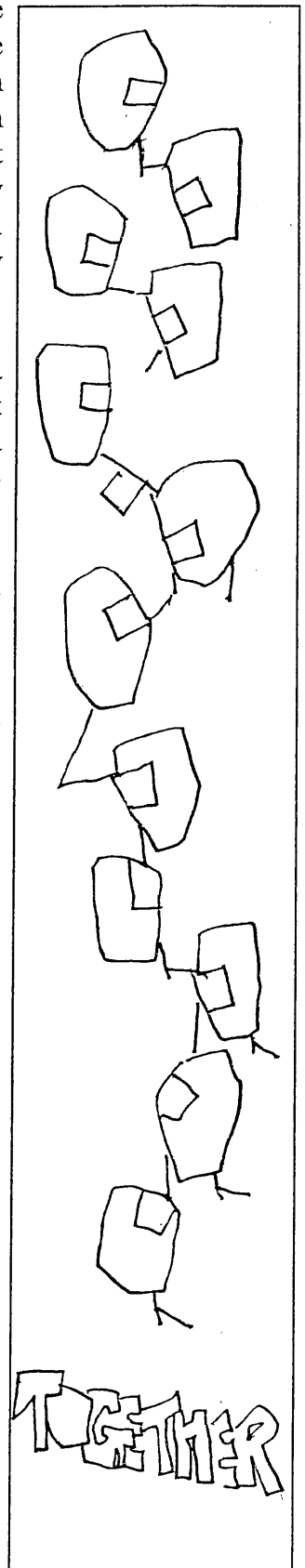
Once we have been together for a few experiences in the celebration room we sense a common spirit growing among us. We discover that we share similar feelings about what we live even though our experiences are quite different. We can say, 'yes' to a common desire for life, for growth, for forgiveness, for peace. We have a *lived experience of belonging together*.

It is at the point of the Liturgical evocation in our experiences together around the Book of God's Word that we become explicitly aware of our identity as children of God. We become aware of our belonging in God's family. We begin to sense the Spirit of Jesus as a never-ceasing presence, calling us to sing praise and to be together in love. We evoke our experiences of being together in Church, gathered by the priest who helps us to know God's call to belong together as one family.

The liturgical evocation flows from the essence of the human experience that we share. Recently we shared the experience of the beauty and glory of the sky that fills us with awe. Through pictures and stories about our experience of the sky, we were alive with the presence of its beauty and glory. We could then evoke coming together around the priest who helps us to praise God, singing, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. As the session progressed we were helped to pray psalm 8 with Jesus; Father...how great you are! The ability of the catechist community to enter into the attitude of praise drew every member into the *experience of belonging together in 'glory'* apart from a clear understanding of the word 'glory'.

The experience of the sacred in a loving community where we experience belonging opens the way for genuine belonging within the larger assembly of worship in the parish. Spred family liturgy is modeled at the Spred Chapel each month and is replicated in parishes throughout the Archdiocese. On these occasions a variety of adaptations are made that make it more possible for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to experience belonging. Most important underlying any attempt to be inclusive is an assembly of believers and celebrant who interact wholeheartedly and treasure belonging as a people. They recognize the *gift of belonging* and welcome all to be with them, singing praise and giving thanks.

Sr. Susanne Gallagher s.p.
Spred Staff



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

SPRED REFLECTION WEEKEND

Jan. 6, 7, 8 2012 St. Benedict Abbey, Benet Lake WI

Contact: Julia Hess, 773-539-3634 All are welcome!

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, emr 366@gmail.com, 708-447-0299

MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE

APRIL 22, 2012

DRURY LANE, OAKBROOK

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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