



COME

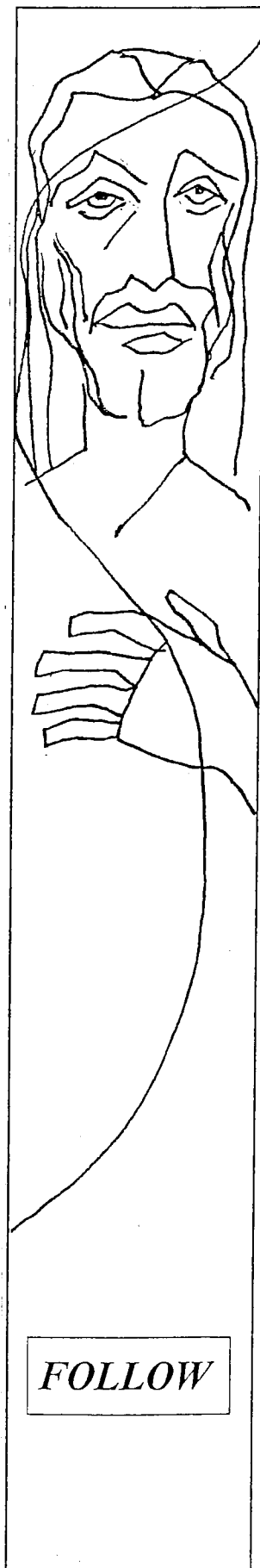
I was twenty one years old, a working woman, who had Saturday mornings free, when one day I was invited by Fr. McCarthy to become the leader catechist for six to ten year old children at St. Cletus. I said yes. It was a life changing response! In thinking back on that experience, it reminded me of the call of Jesus to the apostles, "Come, follow me," and they did. They didn't even think of their business or families but followed. It was their life changing response! My journey began by taking two Spred training courses at the Office of Religious Education on Fry Street since Spred at that time was a division of this agency. Observation was available in mobile units in the garden next door.

Does anyone think they are worthy to be a catechist? I find that it is a role that one grows into despite feelings of unworthiness. At Informational Gatherings for the formation of a Spred community in a parish, some people say that they would like to begin as a helper catechist and then perhaps take on a leadership role in a year or two. Why? They are afraid. However, if one sees this as a call from God and not of one's own choosing, one would realize that God will guide the person just as He did His apostles. I remind a group that three of the eight people need to take on leadership roles and step up to the plate so their Spred community won't be delayed in starting. Sometimes, in a discernment process, others see your strengths and invite you to accept a role you would rather not take on.

At a Spred Evening of Enrichment, one of the mentoring opportunities for core team members, a leader catechist wrote: "My embracement of the role of leader catechist has been a reluctant one...but it has grown into a wonderful experience." In the work of formation, I simply remind people that in Spred everyone is a catechist: leader, activity, or helper. One of the helpers is a chairperson, a pastor's liaison to the parish.

Another catechist wrote: "I remember our first session, it was a cold January Thursday evening. I was nervous so I took a half day off work and arrived at our Spred center 1 1/2 hours before anyone else. Walking up and down the room, moving items around, hoping everything I purchased would keep everyone calm in order to prepare for our celebration room... I told myself it is okay to be afraid... Now I love my role as activity catechist.

A new leader catechist visited her friends in their homes to welcome them to Spred. She writes: "It happened to be on Sept. 11, 2001, the day of one of our country's saddest moments. I think because of the day's horrific event, a special bond was formed that nobody in our group could ever forget. Friendships were quickly made that day and forged for life. Even though we had



to see our original five friends move on to the next group, we did not say good-bye. We invite them back for parish Masses with adaptations accustomed to Spred communities.”

A Spred chairperson writes: “ Sometimes, I am distracted by other issues in my life, but then I am reminded of what is really important. When one of our friends shares an event or feeling in a way that lets us know that we have connected, I think the feeling of ‘oneness’ envelopes us all.” She continues: “I have embraced my role as chairperson by helping to organize events and fundraisers, and acting as the liaison to the parish. I feel a sense of belonging and that I am, hopefully, making a small difference in the lives of our friends and our parish.”

Jean Vanier, in his book, Befriending the Stranger, speaks about these things. “God calls forth men and women in every age...and in our own time too. We should not think that we are too insignificant, too unimportant or unworthy to be called by God. God does not choose the strong, the most influential and the most learned, but rather the weak, the humble, the most needy.”¹ We need to hear that gentle, inner voice of God who tells us: “You do not need to pretend. You do not need to hide your weakness. You can be yourself. I didn’t call you to help others or to prove that you were generous or efficient. I called you because you are poor just like the ones you came to serve, and because the Kingdom of God is promised to the poor.”²

“God calls each one of us. There are many reasons why we go to a church or a group but we only remain committed if we realize that we are there because God has called us. Our belonging to a community, a group, our commitment, is a response to a call from God.”³

When we discover and welcome God’s call, something beautiful happens in us. We experience the love of God for us and a whole new world opens up inside us. We also realize that it is a very demanding call. We are invited to leave our former, familiar world, and let go of what we used to know and hold on to.”⁴

Does this sound familiar? The ministry of Spred changes us and opens us to embrace the unfamiliar, the unknown. We trust in God who brought us to this point in our lives so we can be in communion with Him which is the goal of catechesis.

Before I became involved in Spred, my experience was teaching CCD classes in my parish. I knew nothing about building a community of faith or growing in a relationship with the Lord by becoming more aware of Him in my ordinary life experiences. I chose to allow the process of evocation to slowly influence my way of being. I was faithful to the progression in a catechist session and faithful to the progression in a total community session. This has helped me become a person of gratitude and thanks, compassion and care, of praise and wonder.

After five years as leader catechist at St. Cletus, I was invited to become an employee of Spred. My role was as a resource person in forming communities of faith who welcome our friends with disabilities in a particular age group. My affirmation meant a commitment to be educated. I pursued a college degree in religious studies and a masters degree in religious education with an emphasis in Spred. I was apprehensive. Could I do this?

When I first started my work for Spred, I was part of a team with Dick Austin and Josephine Kinney. I traveled with them to various parishes all over the Archdiocese. Jo, who was the age

of my father, became my mentor. I remember the times we would travel to a parish interested in starting a Spred group to meet with the interested people and parents or speak to the pastor or his staff. I watched how she handled different situations and addressed questions. Then on our journey home, we would stop for ice cream and talk about the experience. Jo was the kind of mentor who was always available to listen even if you called her late at night. For many years we were the first co-trainers for Spred chairpersons based on the standards. Our friendship grew as we worked together. Jo died on February 20, 1992. I try to continue her legacy.

In Vanier's book, he reminds us of the Letter of James (2: 4-9) which was written shortly after the death of Jesus. This letter reveals how quickly the community had changed: people were paying more attention to those dressed in fine clothes while keeping those more shabbily dressed at the back of the assembly. James was hurt and angry. Hadn't Jesus died because he had put the poor and the weak at the heart of the community? And now this same community was gradually excluding them!

"With each new era, each new situation of poverty and oppression, God calls people forth in a new way. God's call is ever new and yet the same."⁵ How do we hand on this precious gift of unity and community - a spirit of real hospitality to our friends in our own parishes?

In Spred, a community's sense of unity deepens in their faithfulness to the Spred method and standards. They give witness when hosting a liturgy with adaptations drawn from our catechesis in their regular Sunday Masses. The witness of our friends and their families and catechists and their families touch those who are present. They work to give everyone an opportunity for full and active participation in that liturgy. The congregation becomes less fearful of being with people who have disabilities. Are catechists apprehensive? Of course, but there is an opportunity in the form of a liturgy workshop for them. At these workshops we work to unravel the steps so that they understand the why of these adaptations.

The Spred ministry blossoms when it is connected to the larger parish. Spred needs a meaningful place alongside other ministries in the parish. Does your parish have a parish council? Are the commissions active? Which commission best reflects Spred? In my parish of St. Rene Goupil, Spred fits into the Spiritual Life commission along with the RCIA, Scripture Study, Liturgy Committee, and Ministers of Care, to name a few. We have much in common with these ministries and feel comfortable being with them.

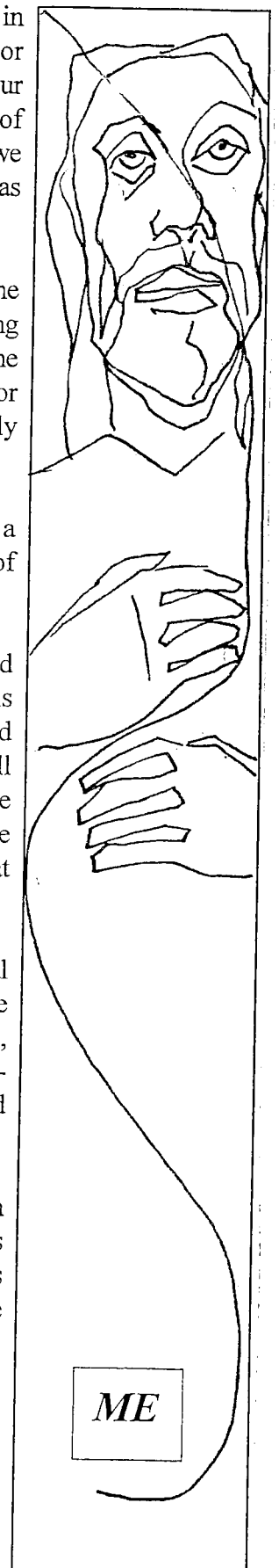
"We have a mandate from Christ: to proclaim his Gospel and bring people into communion with God. Jesus Christ is the energizing center of evangelization and the heart of catechesis. Jesus Christ is at once the message, the messenger, the purpose of the message. Only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Holy Spirit and invite us to share the life of the Holy Trinity."⁶ He is with us to remind us not to be afraid.

Elizabeth Sivek
Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker

1. Jean Vanier, Befriending the Stranger, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2010, pg. 14

2. Ibid. pg. 17 3. Ibid. pg. 17 4. Ibid. pg. 19 5. Ibid. 13

6. National Directory for Catechesis, "Introduction" pg.4, U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops



SPRED CALENDAR

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

March 6, April 3, May 1

SPRED SPRING TRAINING, 2011

3-1 ROLE ORIENTATION MAR. 12, 19

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING

April 16, Saturday, 11:00 to 4:00
St. Mary, 126 Herrick Rd Riverside II
RSVP Eileen Rose 708-447-0299
emr366@gmail.com

March 5, Saturday, 11:00 to 4:00
Queen of Angels Spred Center
4412 N. Western Ave, 2nd fl. Chicago
Julia Hess, 773-539-3634

MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE
DRURY LANE, OAKBROOK, SUN.MAY15

OBSERVATION

6-10 Mondays 6:00 p.m. March 7, 21, April 4
11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. March 22, April 5
17-21 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. March 22, April 5
22+ Mondays 7:00 p.m. March 21, April 4

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF SPRED/CADIAM IN MEXICO CITY

**March 13, Mass and Pastoral Letter
Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera
Cathedral of Mexico**

**May 15 Celebration
with All our Friends**

**Congratulations can be sent to
Rev. Eduardo Mercado Guzman
Director de la Comission de Catequesis
Durango 90, 10 Piso, Col. Roma
Delegacion Cuauhtemoc CP 06700
Mexico City, Mexico**

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