

“O God beyond all speech or thought. O God in song half hid, half caught.  
O God for human mind too much. In crib and cross and bread we touch.  
O source and Sabbath of our days. Accept, accept our stammered praise.”<sup>1</sup>

Recently, we sang this hymn at the closing of our Sunday celebration of the liturgy. It beautifully expresses our experience of being enfolded in a sacred experience beyond description which prompts us to sing praise, even if it be a bit stammered.

Our deepest desire as Spred catechists is to help our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience being enfolded in the mystery of God’s love in their Spred community, as preparation for their participation in their parish celebration of the Eucharist where they can enter into the prayer of praise and thanksgiving with others.

Descriptions from catechists of their Spred experience highlight the impact of belonging to a small faith community as the means of becoming prepared to welcome and guide others. The need to grow in faith with others is real for everyone. 2

“Only as the years passed did it become evident to me the impact Spred has had on me, as a catechist and on my faith. A gaping hole in my spirituality has been diminished, filled by living my faith through Spred.”

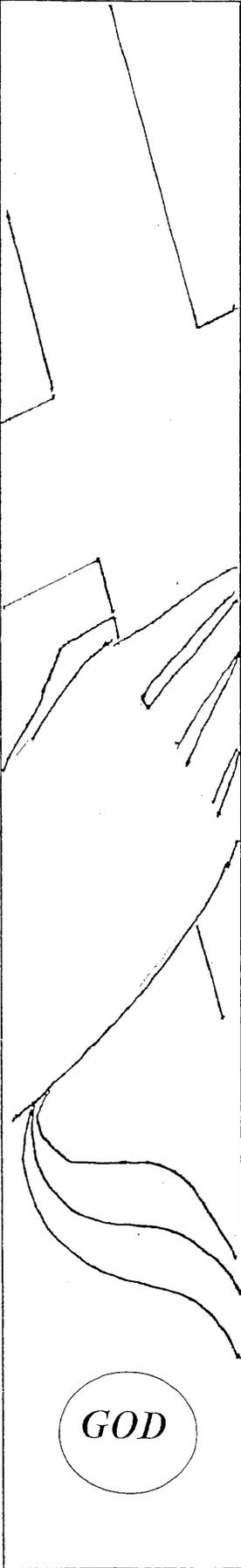
“Spred strengthens my faith in God’s presence.”

“Spred means joy, friendship, love. It has meant walking a different path of faith. Spred has given me the opportunity to know my God at a deeper level, for which I will be forever grateful.”

“Spred is an opportunity for me to quiet my heart and mind and be in the presence of the Lord. Our time together is sacred, loving and powerful.”

“I feel God’s presence in my relationship with others as I never have before.”

“I felt called to participate in Spred communities all these years in order to be part of the welcome of so many baptized children, teens and adults who have largely been marginalized, forgotten, even ignored. More importantly, now I am aware of God’s revelation to each of us, within each of us.”



One is reminded of the request of Christ to his disciples. "Come away with me and rest for awhile... ."3 To rest in the Lord's presence and discover His love, His care, His call to serve is required as the means of nourishing community life and missionary activity.

Many adult believers have become Spred catechists and many more are needed if all are to be served. The Spred catechist experience is thought to be unique compared to other catechetical programs, yet it provides the opportunity for each of us to experience the mystery of God's love as preparation for sharing with those we gather for catechesis.

The gift of the method, shared with us by Frs. Mesny and Paulhus has led us to provide preparation sessions for each catechist community. A brief description follows:

We are helped to evoke a life experience. A literary selection is provided that leads us in a particular direction for our reflection. We dwell in our life experience and share our reflection in the sacred environment gathered around the Book of God's word. Through our sharing the interior spirit of each of us becomes present. We grow together from within.

As the leader catechist evokes a liturgical experience in harmony with our lived experience we experience belonging together as members of God's family.

We become able to let the word penetrate our spirit through a biblical evocation.

We experience the intimacy of receiving the love of God through the message of Jesus. We sing praise together.

We dwell together in the sacred presence of God who commissions us to share the experience of His presence, His love, with others, especially with those whom we welcome for catechesis.

I am reminded that St. Paul prayed for an intimate knowledge of God for his disciples as if it were an indispensable element for the complete development of Christian life. "May he give you the strength for your hidden self to grow strong...that you may be filled with the fullness of God."4. Our catechist preparation experiences lead us to a new awareness of our hidden selves and give us the courage to trust in God's love and abiding presence.

A catechist describes his experience: "For the longest time I thought with all the pressing demands of everyday life, 'who has the time?' But gathering with others in a small Spred community of faith, has made me aware of the reality that it is not in spite of, but because of who we are, that we are called to live the mystery together."

As Spred catechists, we are engaged in the process of knowing through participation. We desire an experiential knowledge of God involving the whole person. We welcome our friends to journey with us. This channel of knowing is accessible to persons with developmental disabilities and is vitally important for all believers. For many of us, our early education in faith focused primarily on objective knowledge. It was the witness of a parent, teacher or priest that was often the source of our experience of the sacred.

A friend once described an experience he had in his youth, of being in church in the early morning with his mother, both of them kneeling. He looked up to see his mother's face. Her eyes were closed. She was totally absorbed. The intensity of her engagement pulled him into the sacredness of the moment. No explanation was needed. He participated in her manner of being and was wrapped in wonder, absorbed in the mystery of faith through her.

Our challenge as those responsible for faith development is to become aware of the elements that support our knowing through participation. There are some essential ways of being that contribute to the stability of the catechist community and assure quality experiences of personal faith for all. Taking time to become uncluttered, to become still, to let our human spirit have space to be, is essential for us. The journey inward helps us to let go of every item that would distract us from our goal. Only those who are open to seeing the value of this seeming lack of activity will be able to help others grow in faith by way of participatory knowledge.

The environment in which we meet has a strong impact on our state of being. We prefer a space that has soft lighting, adequate ventilation and a surrounding free of noise. We prepare the space as a place of beauty, one that speaks of being well cared for. Each of these elements supports the process of becoming aware of the sacred within and among us.

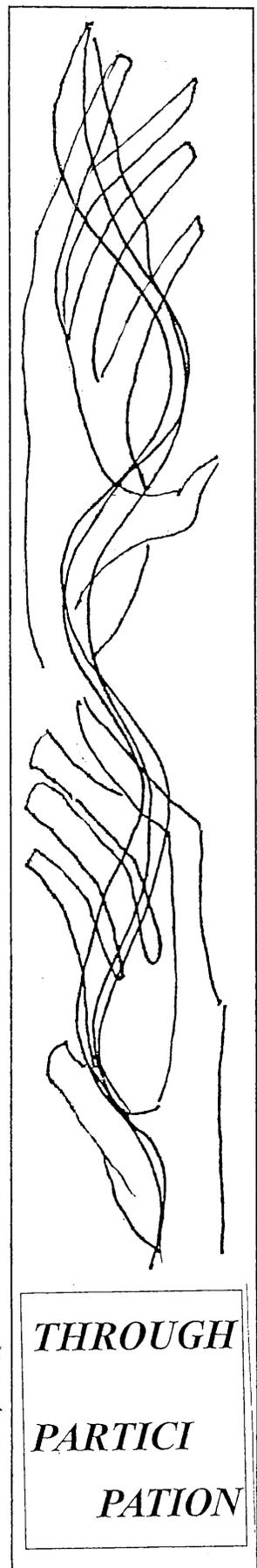
If you were observing the environment of our preparation room before our friends arrive you would see each catechist come into the room, happily greet other catechists and choose an activity in which to focus attention. Each catechist would be seated next to an empty place, saved for his/her friend. Soft music would be heard in the background. You would observe each friend with special needs being welcomed at the door and then helped to go to each person seated at a table for a warm greeting. We are happy to see each person and we encourage each to choose a work that supports peaceful engagement.

Taking time-to-be in this environment makes it possible for our friends to sense their belonging in the community. Each chooses to become part of the work of getting ready to go to the celebration room. The quality of silence during this time of preparation deepens ones awareness of the presence of each person, of belonging together as a community. Our friends are drawn into our state of being as we are drawn into the simplicity of their genuine participation. They sense our joy in being with them. They enjoy having the possibility of meaningful engagement in work that satisfies. They know that we want to be called to go to our celebration room and want them to be with us there. We are alive with the mystery to be celebrated through our experience the previous week. We hope and pray that our friends will sense our trust in God's Love, present in the experiences we share. We make every effort to draw them in to the Love that nourishes us. Their genuine ability to love awakens us to the gift they are. Together we end our sacred experience singing a hymn, knowing that God accepts our stammered praise as members of the worshipping body of the Church. Many of us identify with the catechist who said; "Spred is a part of who I am, who I strive to be and where I feel connected to our friends on a level that cannot be measured in words."

Susanne Gallagher SP  
Chicago Spred Staff

1. John Foley, S.J. God Among Us, OCP Music, 2005

2. Voices, Spred Chicago, May, 2015, 3. Mark 6:31-32, 4. Ephesians 3:14-21



CALENDAR

SPRED TRAINING

+2-1 Introduction to Spred English and Spanish

Spred Center Saturday Feb. 11,18,25, 1:00 to 6:00 pm  
2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago Il 60616, 312-842-1039

+3-1 Role Orientation, English and Spanish

Spred Center Saturday March 11,18,2017 1:00 to 6:00pm  
2956 South Lowe Ave, Chicago Il 60616, 312-842-1039

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES SUNDAYS 11:00 am

Feb. 5, Mar. 5, April 2, May 7

SPRING MAMRE DINNER DANCE FUNDRAISER

Drury Lane, Oakbrook Sunday, April 23, 201

OBSERVATION - Spred Center

6-10 Mon. 6 pm Feb.13, 27, March 13, 27  
11-16 Tues. 7 pm Feb. 14 28, March 28  
22+ Mon. 7pm Feb.13, 27 March 27

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING,  
ENGLISH

Sat. March 4, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center, 2956 So.Lowe  
RSVP 312-842-1039

SPANISH

Sat. March 25, 1:00 to 6:00 Spred Center, 2956 So.Lowe  
312-942-1039

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