

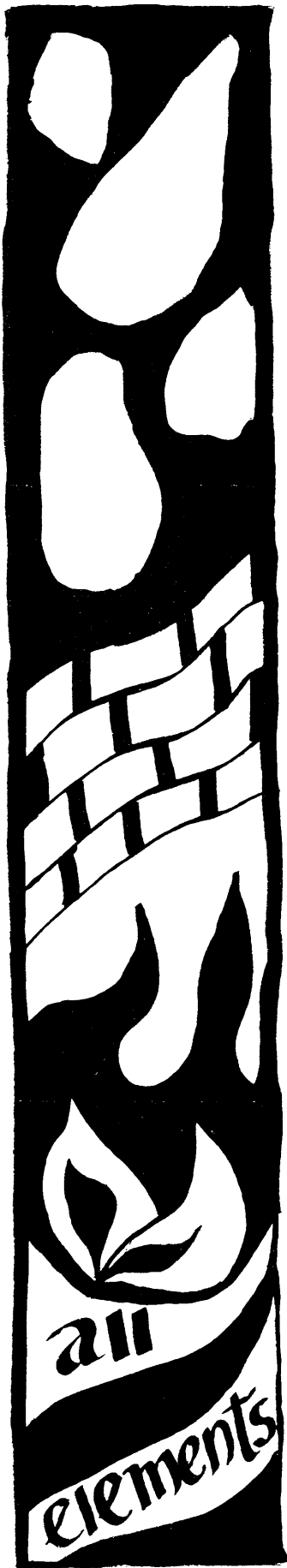
"The whole purpose of assembly, of coming together for public ritual engagements, religious or not, is so that individuals may communicate those experiences that are most incommunicable, in symbolic patterns, so that experiences can be entered into, put on, affirmed and appropriated by the group as a whole". \*

I would like to address some elements involved in symbolic patterns within ritual. I speak as one who has presided for sixteen years at seven Spred family liturgies a year. These have taken place at the regularly scheduled Eucharist at St. John Nepomucene parish on the south side of Chicago. My remarks apply to the input of every participant in the rite, musicians, lectors, choreographers of sacred movement, liturgical thespians, hospitality team and above all, the assembly.

The foundational assumption of every minister in this ritual enterprise is to be inside of and to effect the atmosphere of the Sacred. The 112 Eucharistic rituals were consciously attempted to express the "coming together of opposites", that phenomenon where contraries can exist, where near contradictory forces are juxtaposed and simultaneously a pleasing balance can be discovered to resolve the conflict. Crafting, to the best of one's ability, and discovering balance while allowing the contraries full force, is the Sacred.

#### MOMENTS OF DISCOVERY

I like to sketch. From time to time I use a graphite pencil and start with large sweeping lines. Then I return to where I started and begin either small, rapid circular lines or lively verticle (or horizontal) jabs. I like to vary the value, alternating the light, medium and dark intensities by changing the weight applied to the pencil. It is at this point that I begin to see "something" emerging. My eyes range across the entire form, or perhaps are mesmerized by the texture, or the luminosity that graduates slowly from the dusk-like shadows toward a high intensity. I am hooked. Amidst silent passive pauses I find myself fiddling around the borders, or moving into the seductive weave of crosshatched lines. The intervals grow longer. What started rather insignificantly, almost incoherently, builds until I find myself enveloped in the piece itself. A balance has been achieved,



a moment of contemplation, a zen-like concentration, the sacred. There are two moments in these SPRED family Masses that stand out for me as a measure of the quality of the Sacred present. It is the kind of silence discovered after the liturgy of the Word, and after the assembly has communed with the sacred bread and sacred wine. It is not any one specific element, but rather a confluence of divergent patterns, like the sketch, that suddenly expresses an ensemble, a harmony, a complementarity. And the entire assembly knows it.

#### A CONGENIALITY OF HABIT AND ATTENTION.

Habit is an acquired way of behaving acquired by frequent repetition which becomes nearly or completely involuntary. An asset of habit is that attention need not be strained. Slack and receptive, one can have a form or double attending. The action becomes second nature. It could demand meager attention. The mind can be elsewhere, absorbed and preoccupied. Habit enables a person to be doing one thing with minimal attention and thereby allowing the mind to search elsewhere for deeper significances, for connections to the inner vitality hidden in these apparently mundane acts. This kind of high-wire act can heighten the energy, the drama. A curse of habit is that it can give rise to a deadening formalism.

In Liturgy the danger of habit is that one can perform the ritual act perfunctorily. The mind is inattentive, not present, distant and consequently the action placed can be hollow, unchanged, insignificant. The mind is dulled by fatigue or distracted; it is divided against itself. The same effect can develop if there is too much attention, a mind stressed and nervously taut. It is as though too much is demanded of the action, at least, more than it can provide.

An evening of preparation, and an immediate rehearsal prior to the Mass may be all of three to four hours. It takes all that time in my experience for the different ministries to arrive at that congeniality of habit and attention, knowing what one has to do and yet, free enough to express or place the act with unction.

#### THEN JOINS NOW

I like to think that the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist are in dynamic tension with each other. They are mutually enlightening to each other. They are between the lines, during the silences, beneath the surfaces, of the spoken and unspoken, moving in creative tension. We are always dealing with the seen and the unseen in ritual, and the reciprocal feeding of each upon one another nourishes the assembly. Similarly, catechesis and liturgy are positioned in a taut dialogue, probing the connections between word and life, learning the melodies, the postures, the welcoming attitudes, the gestures, the right expression, to celebrate aptly the

direction and weight of our lives as they unfold, nudging us toward that selfless oblation of the Christ, entering into the holiness of God where nothing can be approached with familiarity, only with awe, and above all with a profound sense of gratitude. He is master of history; He is in control of the journey in time and space, - then, and now.

#### FUSING ORDER AND CHAOS

There is a felt sense of chaos in preparing the rite. People seem to be on edge because of the uncertainty. There is a musical score, there is a scriptural text, a task of hospitality, a gathered assembly. There is an air of incompleteness, dissatisfaction. A step has been taken off the edge of the secure out into the abyss. There are feelings of inadequacy, doubts about ability. Everything appears wooden. Slowly, intermittently, a rhythmic stride manifests itself. Back to the text, the score, the governing elements of the task, a sense of who is really present. Now the ordering principles do not seem so dry and barren. Chaos meets order and tests itself against it. The need for order is conceded at this point. Vladimar Horowitz it is said, played the piano in a way that was like "controlled thunder". Once the order is grasped then a different kind of chaotic force, one of expression, is poured into a systematized funnel and allowed full vent. The combination of chaos and order now radiate in a violent dignity, an organized vehemence, and ritual has become symbolic, vortex-like drawing the community into its dramatic spin.

#### SKILL ABSORBED INTO SIMPLICITY

A Sacred liturgy has two very different processes running counterpoint to one another; the urge toward thoroughness, and unaffected candor. Frequently, after a practice, there is a sense of development, achievement, a growth and grasp of what is to be done, as well as when, where and how by all participants. A realization is experienced, everything is ripe, complete. It can be done. Understanding and execution are in their final stage. Yet, for me, on the day itself, in the presence of our friends and their families, a whole process begins to go in the opposite direction. It is a sense of freedom from sophistication. There is a call to innocence, to be simple, artless, ingenuous. It is a return to unselfconsciousness. One now does what one practised almost in an unaware manner so that it is clearly, purely portrayed. The training and the guilelessness collide into an attractively austere execution which draws us deeper into the mystery of the sacred.

Rev. James H. McCarthy  
SPRED, Director

"The Role of Ritual in Personal Development" by Aidan Kavanagh, in The Roots of Ritual; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, Mi. 1973



1990 SPRED CALENDAR

TRAINING

Training is at St. John Nepomucene Center at 2953 S. Lowe Ave. Exit at 31st from the Dan Ryan, go west to Lowe Ave., north to 30th street.

2-1 Introduction to Special Religious Education  
(for core team: parish chairpersons, leader and activity catechists) 1 to 6 P.M.

3-1 Role Orientation  
(for core team: parish chairpersons, leader and activity catechists) 1 to 6 P.M.

FAMILY MASS: +++

For developmentally disabled persons and their families, hosted by SPRED and the parishioners of St. John Nepomucene 2953 S. Lowe Ave, Chicago Il  
First Sunday of the month at 11 A.M.

OBSERVATION:

Catechetical sessions may be observed through one-way viewing mirrors. Parish chairpersons are invited to host groups of parents. Please call 842-1039.

At ORC - Observation Research Center  
2953 S. Lowe Chgo, Il. 60616

- A 6-10 year olds 10:00 A.M.
- B 11-16 year olds 7:30 P.M.
- C 17-21 year olds 7:30 P.M.
- D 22 + year olds 7:30 P.M.
- E 11-16 year olds 7:00 P.M.

Z: Regional Planning Meetings

MAMRE:\*

Sunday, April 22, 1990 SPRED/MAMRE will hold their dinner dance at the Marnique Restaurant 2500 W. 95th Street Chgo, Il.

*Spred*

SPRED, % 2956 S. Lowe, Chicago, Illinois 60616  
312/842-1039 • Special Religious Education Division, Rev. James H. McCarthy, *director*  
• Newsletter published September through May; subscription \$10.00 per year.

FEBRUARY						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	B D E	C	23	A
24	25	26	27	28	29	21
			B D E			

MARCH						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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18	19	20	21	E	23	A
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APRIL						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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MAY						
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