



SPRED

A publication of Special Religious Development

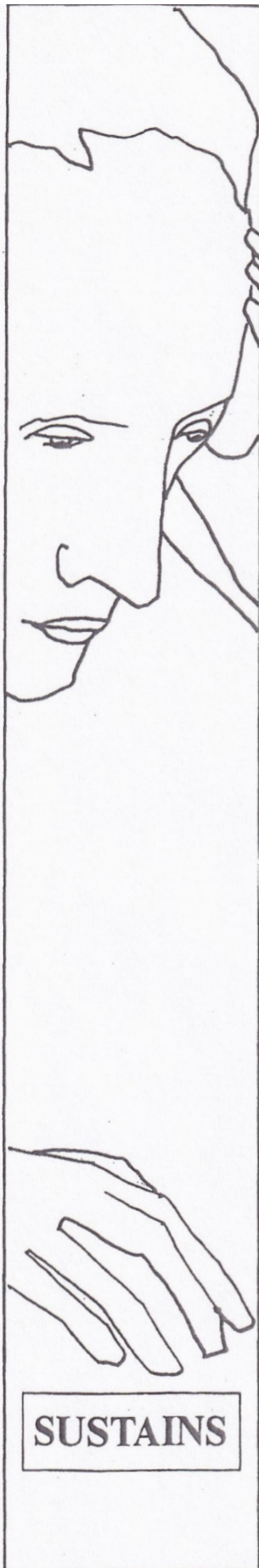
Volume 102 | Number 4 | December 2022



This past September was a rather joyous time for me and everyone involved with SPRED ministry. After nearly a two-and-a-half-year lockdown, we reopened the SPRED center campus and began welcoming our SPRED friends and catechists back to the SPRED chapel and to the SPRED Observation and Training Center. The entire SPRED staff and I were delighted to be able to gather with catechists, SPRED friends and their families from around the Archdiocese to celebrate our SPRED family liturgies once again in our SPRED Chapel. We were happy to welcome new and veteran catechists to our SPRED Center and the satellite locations at Queen of Apostles and St. Francis de Sales. We were grateful to be able to gather once again for a fun filled night of dinner, entertainment and dancing at our Mamre autumn dinner dance. In addition to the excitement we experienced after reopening and resuming all our activities at the central SPRED office and satellite offices, we were ecstatic to learn that most of the SPRED communities in parishes around the Archdiocese of Chicago and the world also reopened their doors to their SPRED catechists and friends. It was a relief to know that almost all our SPRED communities remained together despite all the challenges brought about by the pandemic and the Archdiocesan reorganization, Renew My Church.

While we celebrate the steadfast commitment of our catechists and the reopening of our SPRED centers, we also know that many of our SPRED communities encountered challenges during the pandemic and continue to encounter challenges and setbacks. We know that many SPRED communities are adapting to new realities, including new environments, new parish structures and new parish leadership. Additionally, the pandemic and Renew My Church set back a number of animation efforts in the Archdiocese. This had made the recruitment of new catechists more challenging. Over the last couple of months, several catechists have expressed to me their concern about the future of their SPRED community. They have expressed their ongoing struggles to find new catechists to replace those who have retired from the ministry. Others have mentioned to me that they currently have waiting lists and would like to establish additional SPRED communities, but they simply cannot find enough catechists to meet the needs of their current group. Some catechists have recently informed me that they intend to retire from SPRED in the near future but worry that the group might collapse upon their retirement. While they are actively trying to find someone to replace them in the community, their efforts are not bearing much fruit. Adding to many concerns is the sharp decrease in the number of people attending mass since the pandemic. This has led many to ask me the million-dollar question, "How do we recruit new catechists for our SPRED community in this new reality?"

First and foremost, I like to remind catechists that Christ needs to be at the center of all animation efforts. SPRED is not merely an outreach ministry to



people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, nor is SPRED a simple social gathering for us and for our friends. SPRED is a ministry of encounter. It is not simply an encounter with one another, but it is an encounter with Christ. In SPRED we form small communities of faith where together we encounter Christ and deepen our relationship with Christ as a community. SPRED is an evangelizing and transformative ministry that can bring about spiritual revival and spiritual renewal for both catechists and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If we are to attract more catechists to SPRED, we need to be witnesses to the personal encounter with Christ that we experience in SPRED. We need to know how our small communities of faith have transformed our spiritual lives.

Recently, a catechist mentioned to me that she had invited her nephew, Ernesto, to join SPRED. Her nephew was a cradle Catholic who was struggling with his faith and like many young adults, had stopped practicing his faith on a regular basis. According to his aunt, he never lost his faith in God, but struggled with his relationship with the institutional Church. He struggled to identify with the parish community and struggled to find spiritual nourishment from the liturgy. During a family gathering, Ernesto asked his aunt why she was involved in SPRED and how she was able to deepen her own relationship with God through the SPRED community of faith. After some discernment about his aunt's invitation, Ernesto decided to join a SPRED group and continues with the community to this day. Through his participation in SPRED, Ernesto discovered that being part of a small community of faith was exactly what he needed for his spiritual life. He recently commented to his aunt that he only wished he had discovered SPRED sooner.

If we are to sustain and grow the SPRED ministry, all catechists have to be aware that they have an active role to play in the animation process. We all need to share our stories and experiences and we all need to extend invitations to people who we think may be a good fit for our community. SPRED animation should never be dependent on one person or a small group of people. We are all called to share in the animation process and to build up the SPRED ministry. We are all called to proclaim the transformation that we have experienced through SPRED. In the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, he reminds us of our call to be missionary disciples:

“In virtue of their Baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather we are always “missionary disciples.” (*Joy of the Gospel* #120)

While we may not always want to embrace our baptismal call to be missionary disciples, we are tasked through our baptism to bring the Gospel message to all people, especially those at the margins of society. The call to be missionary disciples can sound daunting to many, but it is a calling that we do not live out alone but rather as a community. As Christians and SPRED

catechists, we know the importance of having a community to assist us and sustain us in our mission.

A popular way to promote SPRED and to recruit catechists is to publish articles in the parish bulletin. While the parish bulletin can be a valuable resource for promoting SPRED, we need to acknowledge that it has its limitations. The parish bulletin tends to have a very limited audience and it is usually read by only a portion of those attending mass on Sunday. The bulletin articles may fail to reach those people like Ernesto who are less engaged in the parish but may be seeking a small community of faith to deepen their relationship with Christ. Parish SPRED communities need to work with their parish evangelization teams to find new and creative ways to connect with those people who may not currently be sitting in the pews. This may involve engaging and networking with local community organizations. Bulletin articles also tend to be a more passive approach to inviting people to SPRED. Sometimes communities tend to publish articles in our local bulletins and then sit back and wait for someone to contact us.

Our call to missionary discipleship requires us to go outside our comfort zones and proclaim how our lives have been transformed by being in SPRED. Over the years, I have learned that personal witness is what tends to attract people to the ministry. We cannot sit back and wait for people to come to us. We must be the ones to take the initiative regardless of how difficult and uncomfortable it may seem.

Lastly, if we want to grow and maintain the SPRED ministry, our communities must be welcoming and must be the source of joy. Pope Francis writes:

“When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic fulfillment. For here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means”.

“Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow...And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ”. (*Joy of the Gospel* #10)

If we are to attract people to SPRED, we have to promote the ministry with authentic passion. People are not going to believe that SPRED is a transformative ministry if we show no passion or excitement about the ministry. If we fail to show any enthusiasm about the ministry, people are going to assume that we are just looking for a body to fill a void. We are not just inviting people to participate in any old program. We are inviting people to transform their lives and the lives of others. We also need to ensure that we are welcoming people into a joyful community. A person is not going to be attracted to a community engulfed in squabbling, infighting or negative vibes. A person is going to find it difficult to experience spiritual renewal within a community entrenched in tension and anguish.

Let us now embrace our role as missionary disciples and offer an invitation to others to be part of a small community of faith that can help them to personally encounter Christ and can transform their spiritual lives.

Joseph Quane
Archdiocese of Chicago SPRED Executive Director



CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR**SPRED Center:** 2956 South Lowe Avenue**Training (Orientations) 2023**

SPRED Center, Contact: 312.842.1039

General Orientation (2-1):

Feb. 11, 18, 25, 1 – 6 p.m.

Role Orientation (3-1):

March 11, 18, 1 – 6 p.m.

English Helper Catechist Orientation:

March 4, 1 – 6 p.m.

Spanish Helper Catechist Orientation:

March 25, 1 – 6 p.m.

SPRED Family Liturgy, SPRED Center

Spanish: 11 a.m. Dec. 18, Jan. 22

English: 11 a.m. Feb. 5

Observation, SPRED Center, 312.842.1039

6–10 Group, Feb. 13, 27, March 13, 27, April 24, May 8

11–16 Group, Feb. 14, 28, March 28, April 25, May 9

17/21 Group, Feb. 14, 28, March 28, April 25, May 9

22+ Group, Feb. 13, 27, March 13, 27, April 24, May 8

Reflection Weekend, January 13, 14, 15, 2023**St. Benedict Abbey Retreat Center**Register at queenofangelsspred.org

For more information, contact Julia Hess at

773-539-7510 or jchqofa3@gmail.com

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