

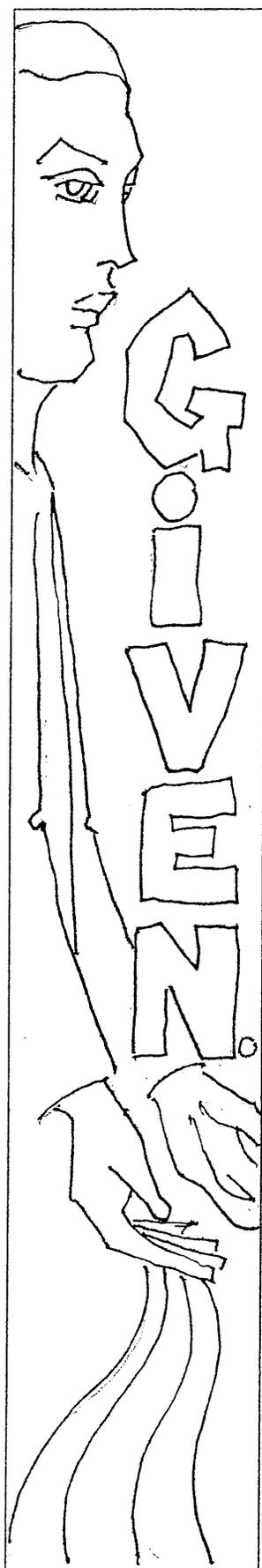
All creatures great and small need support. The little tree needs support from time to time to grow into a large beautiful tree. Certain flowers need support as they grow in the garden so that their heads do not droop. Animals need to be loved and cared for in order to develop into healthy pets. And catechists need to be loved and cared for to keep their mission strong and vibrant. Spred leaders in clusters of parishes and dioceses need a particular support to be able to give coordination and inspiration to parish Spred groups. That is why Spred area leaders from nine countries meet every three years to give mutual support to one another.

All diocesan Spred leaders worry about the quality of life of their friends with intellectual disabilities whether they lived with or apart from their families. They worry about the effects of economic set-backs in their countries and they worry about trends in Church leadership that have an impact on their local parishes and catechists. They soon realize that one way to cope and regain their vitality is to go below the surface agitation to welcome support.

Many years ago, the Chicago Spred leaders welcomed support and found it to be life changing. It all began with membership in the international Medical-Educational and Pscho-Social Commission of the International Catholic Child Bureau. The Spred team worked on issues in LaTurbie France, San Sebastian Spain, Fribourg Switzerland, Rome Italy, Toronto Canada, Vienna Austria, Munich Germany, Montreal Canada, London England, Derry Northern Ireland, Re Italy, Madrid Spain, and Birmingham England. One difficulty however was that the working language was French. Finally the leaders of the commission asked the Spred team, Fr. McCarthy, Sr. Susanne Gallagher, and Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, to begin an English speaking group for study, reflection and planning. Little by little, for various reasons the Commission and the Bureau dissolved or changed focus. So for the past twenty-seven years the English speaking seminar group continued to work under the title of Project Peer Support.

Project Peer Support worked with members from Scotland, England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta, South Africa, Australia, Canada, the United States and then it branched out into Spanish with leaders from Mexico. At first we worked on issues such as Sacramental Inclusion (Fribourg Switzerland, 1994), Catechist Training (Lucerne Switzerland, 1997), Catechesis and Liturgy (Fribourg Switzerland 2000), and Inculturation (Fribourg Switzerland, 2003).

At this point there was a change in orientation. What kept us in a stance of mutual support was not so much our pastoral strategies as the Method Vivre of Fr. Jean Mesny of Lyons France which we treasured. So we began to explore elements of this method.



The Method Vivre is highly symbolic and by exploring its many facets we discovered where our paths converged and where our spirits were enkindled. So we worked on these elements that could become symbolic: the senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling) in Glasgow Scotland in 2006. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2009, we worked on the need to have a clear focus in a symbolic unfolding (the intentionality of a session.) And in Belfast in June 2012 we worked on one element in the Method Vivre called the Liturgical Evocation.

We used the same format from 2006 to 2012. We worked in small groups of six to eight persons with mixed languages and translators. Each person went off alone and wrote a personal session for their own use with an emphasis on the element highlighted by the orientation of the year. Each day the emphasis shifted slightly and members returned to the group to share their sessions and their discoveries. The small group work allowed each person to share comfortably and allowed the group to interact in a supportive way. At the end of each weeks work the topic is chosen for the next three years.

So in 2009 the group chose the topic of the Liturgical Evocation. At first we gulped because there are so many issues around the topic of Liturgy that we were not sure where to start. Each one has issues to sort out; "translation" into a kind of English, music, pace, terms used etc. But then we began to look at some questions. What happens when we get into the flow of a liturgy? What happens when we feel welcomed? When we feel we belong? When we are addressed with respect, care, love? What happens when we seem to matter in the celebration? What happens when the pace takes our breath away? What happens during moments of dense silence?

Elements such as these are part of the liturgical evocation. The leader has to weave a narrative that pulls everyone together at this moment as we are filled with gratitude, praise, love - not as an idea - but as an inner movement. To do this the evocation has to be grounded in a memory that is true. It has been lived so it can be evoked.

As far as our friends with intellectual disabilities are concerned (and us too as catechists) we most often can evoke a liturgical experience if we have in some way been an active participant.

Maybe we brought the flowers to the altar. Maybe we brought the candle forward - carefully and slowly. Maybe we have placed the altar cloth in its place with reverence and care. Maybe we have brought the bread and wine forward. Maybe we sang with everyone. Maybe we loved to sing a particular song. Maybe we remember that song.

Because the narrative that forms the liturgical evocation follows the interiorization moment in which the "we" of the group is established, it cuts the flow of the session if the leader goes back to moments of each individual again. The liturgical evocation continues a "we" narrative. It affirms us as the assembly of God in which the Word of God can be proclaimed. If the little Spred community of faith has developed into an assembly, the proclamation from the Word of God will have an inner resonance - unique to each while received by all.

Because the progression of the Method Vivre is inductive, the leader begins with an element in everyday life and then works with it to discover how we feel about it now in a symbolic moment.

The liturgical evocation forms the bridge from a general symbolic awareness to a deeper sense of the sacred. In this way the path is prepared for the proclamation of the Word in such a way that it may be welcomed.

It would be a totally different method if the leader were to begin with a biblical passage and then go on to explain it so as to apply it to everyday life. This would be a deductive method. To be effective this method requires a developed intellectual capacity. With our friends with intellectual disabilities, we would be talking to ourselves with this kind of deductive progression.

If we proceed with an inductive approach, we discover not only that our friends are awakened spiritually but so are we. Each person may not grasp the totality of the progression but joined to the others in friendship and love, they sense the mystery at work. We are asked, how can we know that. Our only criteria, because many of our friends do not speak verbally, is to observe them. When we see the fruits of the Spirit we sense that the gifts of the Spirit are at work.

At the end of our time together this past June at the lovely retreat house on the Irish Sea, Drumalis, outside Belfast, we asked ourselves what we would like to work on together three years from now.

A question brought us back to the core reality of symbol in our work. The root of symbolic activity can be traced to the ancient categories of water, earth, fire and air. Each of them can give rise to new awareness as well as pairs of them, such as water and earth, or fire and air, or water and fire and earth and air.

These elements are at play in the cosmic events that impact everyone, everyday, including those with most limited intelligence and experience. I think of the new father who frantically searched for a way to connect with his tiny son and came up with holding him close to breathe in unison with the infant. I think of the catechist who became a volunteer when her house burned down. I think of the catechist who became a volunteer inspired by the moment her feet hit the ground after going down flights of stairs on 9/11. I think of the children who find peace and relaxation in water. Each of the elements open doors to our most precious experiences where God discloses presence.

Each of these elements is in tension with its opposite, (light-darkness, etc.) It is this tension, this coming together of opposites that gives power to the symbolic endeavor. With the support of the community of faith, if we can stay with these awarenesses, we become comfortable with the notion that we ourselves are precious and that the presence of God is made known to us.

Our goal is to help to develop communities of faith that are creative and alive. We look for the fruits; peace, patience, kindness, joy, faithfulness, long-suffering, faith, hope and charity, not only as ideas but as lived realities.

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington
Spred Chicago



SPRED CALENDAR

Spred Family Liturgies

Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2, Feb. 3, Mar. 3, April 7, May 5

Spred Training

2-1 Introduction to Spred, English and Spanish

for parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists

Saturdays, Sept. 15, 22, 29, 1:00 to 6:00 pm

Spred Center 2956 So. Lowe, Chicago

Third floor over the church, 312-842-1039

2-1 Introduction to Spred, English

for parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists

Saturdays, Sept. 15, 22, 29, 1:00 to 6:00 pm

St. Francis de Sales Spred Center

33 S. Buesching Rd, lower church

Lake Zurich, IL 60047 -South of Rt. 22

3-1 Role Orientation, English and Spanish

for parish chairpersons, leaders and activity catechists

Saturdays, Oct. 13, 20, 1:00 to 6:00 pm

Spred Center 2956 So. Lowe, Chicago

Third floor over the church, 312-842-1039

Observation

6-10 Mondays 6:00 p.m. Sept. 24, Oct. 8, 22, Nov. 12

11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sept. 25, Oct. 9, 23, Nov. 13

17-21 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sept. 25, Oct. 9, 23, Nov. 13

22+ Mondays 7:00 p.m. Sept. 24, Oct. 8, 22, Nov. 12

Helper Catechist Training

Spred Center, 2956 So. Lowe, English and Spanish

Saturday Nov. 10, 1:00 to 6:00 pm 312-842-1039

Sr. Susanne Gallagher, Mary Claps

Ramiro and Eva Hernandez

Queen of Angels Spred Center, English

4412 North Western Ave. 2nd floor

Saturday Oct. 6, 11:00 to 4:00

Betty Rogus 773-588-0614

St. Francis de Sales Spred Center, English

33 S. Buesching Rd, lower church, Lake Zurich IL

Saturday Feb. 2, 11:00 to 4:00

Kelly Corrigan 847-726-4742

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