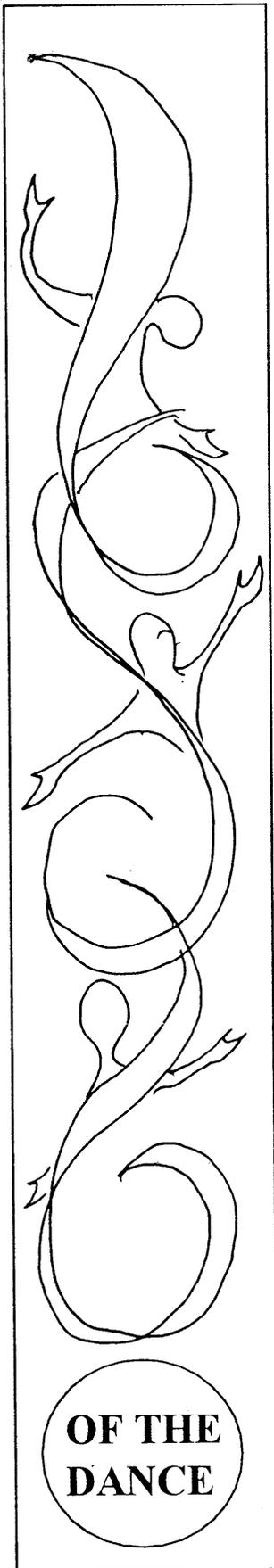


Circles suggest motion. Motion implies life. A circle is formed by one continuous line having neither a beginning nor an end. A circle has no rough edges or sharp corners. Its movement is fluid. Energy flows both clockwise and counterclockwise. The mandala is the universal symbol of integration, harmony, and transformation reflecting one's search for the center, for God. Our solar system is a network of globes spinning in circular orbits around the sun. A simple wedding ring speaks of a profound spiritual union of love. The rings of the Olympic games proclaim a spirit of solidarity.

Father Albert Holtz, author of *A Saint on Every Corner*, concludes his sabbatical year of travel in a small town in southern France. He describes the *Sardana*, a traditional folk dance of Catalonia. By chance he finds himself at the edge of the cobblestone plaza offering an evening demonstration of this spirited dance. Ten couples begin slowly with hands clasped moving their feet in intricate patterns. In a collaborative effort, the dancers increase their speed as the tempo of the music reaches a crescendo. Father Albert confides his wonder as circles multiply and gradually link to make one large circle. He revels in the beautiful unity of the *Sardana* circle. He can envisage a glorious blend of old and young, children from Iraq holding hands with others from Israel. The circle stretches to include Eskimos, Australian aborigines, Bosnians, Serbs and Croats, Protestants from Belfast clasping hands with their Catholic neighbors. Tears welling in his eyes as an inner voice proclaims, "Yes, this is the way it could be, the way it would be if we were to let the Lord lead the dance." (1)

About ten years ago, I was introduced to another circle when I attended a course at the Pastoral Institute of Loyola University. Using a text by Peter Schineller (2), we were introduced to a method of inculturation called the *hermeneutical or pastoral circle*. The pastoral circle delineates a method for all Christian ministry involving the principles and attitudes of inculturation. The circle presents three poles. The first, consists of persons in a particular situation such as a third world country, an exclusive culture or a diverse urban setting. It can represent a subculture such as persons with developmental disabilities. The second pole represents the message - insight from scripture or tradition and Christian life which serves to illuminate the present situation. The third pole identifies the pastoral agent who attempts to mediate God's word to a particular situation. The pastoral agent varies from missionary to a pastor, a lay minister or a catechist. The method works best within the framework of a small Christian community that is searching for the meaning of God's revelation in the midst of life's struggles and joys. As we applied the pastoral method to our personal ministries, I found that its inductive approach



permeates all aspects of the Spred ministry - animation, training, catechesis and liturgy. The mission of Spred is to form small communities of faith in parishes to welcome children and adults with developmental disabilities, to provide an appropriate method of catechesis, and to foster full inclusion in assemblies of worship. The reality is that these friends of ours are living in every parish. The goal is to welcome all.

Animation is the operative word in Spred for stirring a consciousness of the situation of people with special needs within a parish. The work of animation is accomplished through the leadership of a Spred community religious worker. Dialogue usually begins with a parent of a child with a disability, a caregiver, or a member of the parish staff. A meeting is set up between the pastor and the religious worker to address the pastoral need. The Spred agent articulates the situation with conviction. The Spred method of symbolic catechesis is the cornerstone of the call to action. This is the message. It is important to listen attentively to the concerns voiced by the pastor, drawing out objections and respectfully diffusing any obstacles with sensitivity and tact. Inculturation does not destroy or criticize, but builds on values already present. It is invitational.

Once the Spred agent has obtained the blessing of the pastor, a strategy is mutually defined to surface volunteers and accompany them in the formation of a small community of faith. The search for catechists can be a slow and arduous process which may involve challenging mindsets and changing attitudes. Inculturation is a hunt for a treasure already present. The digging is the work of the parishioners themselves. The community religious worker returns to the parish time and again to invite, to inform, to encourage, to wait, and to listen. As a catechist in a Spred community, the animator is called to share what one lives, to map out with humility where one has already traveled. The formation of a community of faith cannot be imposed or hurried. With the gospel imperative to embrace all people as its leaven, the group gently rises to its fullness.

The attitude of the community religious worker is not to be that of a conquistador, but rather that of a facilitator offering accompaniment on the pilgrimage to discover who are called, to identify leadership, meet with friends with disabilities, seek out and design a meeting place in response to the commission of the pastor. Every journey is new and each community is unique. A prayerful and respectful animation approach will unearth creativity and secure solid relationships. Observation and training will foster confidence and independence. The essence of the work of animation is *to be present, to beget and to be gone*. Yet, as a faithful mentor, the community religious worker remains ever present to the Spred community through enrichment seminars, workshops, reflection weekends, area planning meetings as well as an openness to share sessions and liturgy.

The pastoral circle initiates a spirit of mission activity as the newly begotten Spred community immerses itself in the Spred method of catechesis. The communion of catechists become the pastoral agent. The situation continues to be the church's obligation to respond to the catechetical needs of our friends. The community gathers in service of persons with developmental disabilities to become aware of God's presence and saving action in the midst of their lives, both particular and communal.

In the spirit of inculturation, the Spred method reflects the pastoral circle. It demands the risk of expression of personal experiences while listening respectfully to the stories of others. The leader catechist becomes the catalyst leading but not dominating, accompanying the group in the

process of new awareness. In Spred we encourage relationships grounded in mutuality and respect. We recognize the buried treasure of our friends with disabilities. We cultivate an atmosphere of graced interaction. As catechists, we do not come with all the answers to be imposed on our friends. We listen, we accept, we embrace the gift of one another. As pilgrim people we journey side by side.

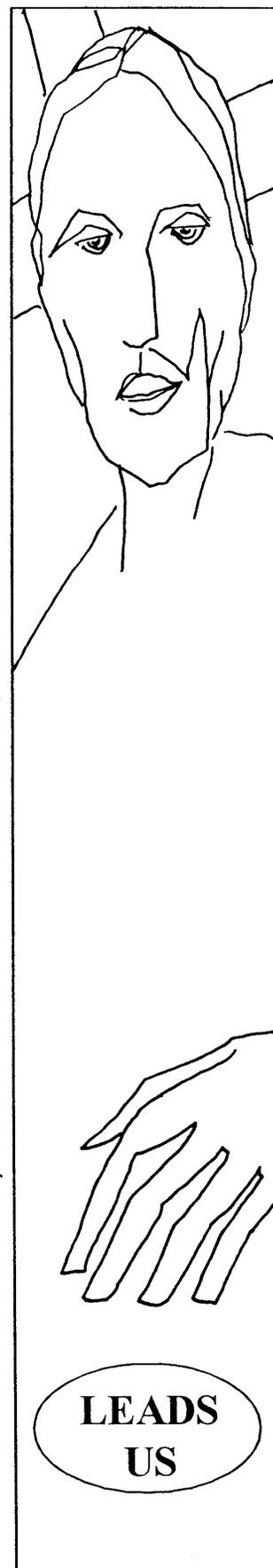
The situation of each person is not seen in isolation, but in continuity with God's word. Our Christian heritage acts as a resource for the present. The ritual action of the sacraments as well as the word of God in scripture - the life, the words, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ inform the present life of the community. As a servant of the faith community, the leader catechist bears a listening and humble heart. Resonance best describes the moment of truth as catechists, friends and the message are mutually illuminated by the presence of God. The results of the symbolic method are not clear and measurable. Like inculturation, the method calls for faith in the God already at work in the heart of the community. Hope for new life is inseparable from true inculturation.

The pastoral spiral continues to spin as the Spred community becomes the next agent of inculturation. The sacramental life of the parish presents the new situation. The message is the gospel call to welcome the stranger to the banquet of the Lord. Spred communities are bringing edification to the larger church through their particular ways of living and sharing the Gospel. These basic communities are making their contribution to the sacramental and worshipping life of their own parishes through their vitality and creativity. In a spirit of mutuality, the Spred catechist introduces the pastor and his staff to adaptations which bring more meaning to Eucharistic celebrations for our friends with developmental disabilities. As a pastoral agent, the catechist works with the priest, at his pace in tune with his readiness to embrace suggestions. Force feeding causes indignation and resentment. Relationships cannot be cemented in antagonistic dialogue. The catechist considers and values the suggestions of the priest. The spirit of the pastoral circle demands complementarity. Catechists and priests learn to move in step with one another. The priest becomes open to the needs of our friends. The catechists sensitize themselves to the concerns of the priest, allowing time for change.

Spred is an act of faith carried out by small faith communities in diverse settings throughout the world. The world has a long way to go before we are mysteriously united. Each new parish which forms a Spred community of faith, every Spred community that joins in solidarity around the Spred method, every parish which provides creative liturgical events to honor the needs of our friends and grace them with dignity - these small circles preview the final Dance. "On that day the Lord of the Dance will stand up and invite all the peoples of the world to join hands as brothers and sisters in a final Sardana. One great circle of dancers will embrace the whole earth and reach upward into the clouds of heaven" (3) Our friends with disabilities will set the pace.

Julie Hess  
Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker

- (1) Albert Holtz, O.S.B., A Saint on Every Corner. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN 1998
- (2) Peter Schineller, S.J., A Handbook on Inculturation. Paulist Press, New York, 1990
- (3) Albert Holtz, O.S.B., A Saint on Every Corner. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN 1998



**SPRED CALENDAR**

**TRAINING 2003**

**INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (English and Spanish)**

for parish chairpersons, leaders and  
activity catechists, Saturdays from 1 to 6 p.m  
March 1, 8, 15.

**ROLE ORIENTATION( English and Spanish)**

for parish chairpersons, leaders and  
activity catechists, Saturdays 1 to 6pm  
March 29, April 5.

**Location:** Spred Center, 2956 So Lowe, Chicago  
over the Church, 312-842-1039

**OBSERVATION 2002-2003**

6-10 6:00p.m. Mon. Dec. 2, Feb. 10, 24

11-16 7:00p.m. Tues. Dec. 3, Feb. 11, 25

22+ 7:00p.m. Mon. Dec. 2, Feb. 10, 24

**SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES**

Dec. 1, Feb. 2, Mar. 2, April 6, May 4

**MAMRE-SPRED DINNER DANCE**

**SUNDAY APRIL 27, 2003 AT THE MARTINIQUE**

*Spred*

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