

Before cocooning myself in my office, I wandered into the staff dining room to collect some sustenance. I procrastinated for awhile deciding to tidy things up before tangling with the creative endeavor of birthing a newsletter. I brushed leftover crumbs from the tablecloth; pitched half empty containers; washed some dishes and lingered further with the coffee service. Content in my ritual, I mused over the petty outcry regarding whose *responsibility it is to keep the dining room clean*. It is a topic which easily stirs dissent among the ranks in offices, teachers' lounges, homes and even Spred communities.

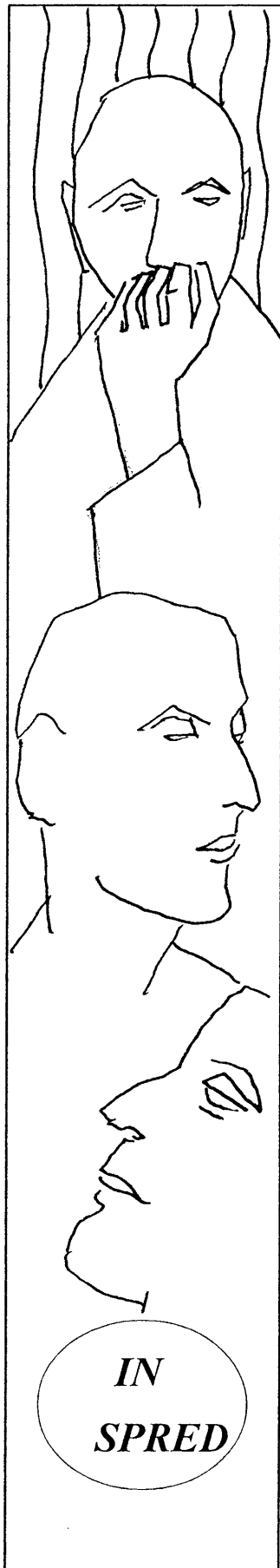
Roles and responsibilities is one of the core topics of Spred training. The presenter attempts to draw fledgling catechists into an appreciation of authentic partnership which is first nurtured in the heart of the communion of catechists. Adult catechists are asked for a commitment of heart to a vision which defines themselves as the media for the faith development of each of the Spred partners. They are called to form an ecclesial household with a regard for humanity in all its variations, vulnerabilities and graces - *a new community*.

In his exploration of the pastoral image of hospitality, Lucien Richard, O.M.I. speaks of a private realm characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and intimacy. "The Christian vision as expressed in the Kingdom of God demands the emergence of a new community, a new place. Membership in the household of God entails an intimate degree of familial relationship. Those who are of *the house of God* are children of God, brothers and sisters of the Lord and in the Lord." 1

The formation of an intimate community of faith is a delicate process. Consequently, there will be challenges and struggles in the intermingling of personalities. Each change in the roster causes a ripple effect which realigns the dynamic of the team. We must accept the reality that we will not always be naturally comfortable with one another. A community of faith calls us to growth and conversion. If we keep our sights set on the essentials of our pastoral vision, we can move beyond the human idiosyncrasies and pitfalls to trust in God's vigilance as we forge our way to create a place of pilgrimage for ourselves and our friends.

When we commit our hearts to the mission of Spred, we accept responsibility for various tasks which are bound to the unique roles of the catechists.

~The parish chairperson agrees to be the source of inspiration; the midwife for the birthing of a new group; the advocate for all parishioners with intellectual and developmental disabilities; the herald of Spred presence in the parish and the liaison to the pastor as well as to the Spred Resource Center; the data keeper and the worrisome parent promoting training and enrichment opportunities.



~The leader catechist is the spiritual director, the one who nurtures and conducts the catechetical process and instills an ambiance of prayer. The leader of catechesis draws the community into a new awareness of the gracious mystery of God's presence and awesome love in life, in the Word and in the celebration of liturgy and sacrament. The catechetical leader holds the group together in solidarity of purpose and prayer.

~The activity catechist guarantees a place of hospitality and empowers the community to enter into a disposition of preparedness for a sacred encounter. She or he attends to the needs of each person in an effort to settle fully into *now time* where peace, harmony and joy can be more fully realized and God's presence becomes tangible. The activity catechist guides the community in care of the environment; satisfaction with the activities; and assures a beautiful meal of fellowship.

~The team of helper catechists forms the infrastructure of the faith community. Each one embraces the call to intimacy and steadfast partnership with a special friend. Their promise includes vigilance, respect, patience, integrity, support, encouragement and faithfulness. They become the bridge of hospitality to the family and caregivers. Each fully commits to an essential and authentic participation in a personal faith journey which is realized through attendance at every catechist preparation session and thus directly influences the catechesis of their friends.

This entire team is encouraged to form a sphere of cohesiveness an *esprit de corps* to create a realm of wholeness and holiness for the uncomfortable, the vulnerable, or the lonely. I imagine two concentric circles to illustrate a Spred ecclesial body. Linked heart and soul, the outer circle of catechists enfolds the inner circle of Spred friends gently escorting them to a deeper awareness of God's gracious love.

Time and again I remark that Spred is counter cultural. We are neither a corporate body nor a pyramidal network. There is no head honcho, no top dog, no CEO.

The Spred contract for the community of catechists calls for a shared and diffused leadership. A Spred community is destined to crumble when the group subscribes to singular leadership positing responsibility on the shoulders of one or two.

Entitled leadership can be initiated by a hunger for power or it can be nurtured by an aversion to responsibility by the flock. Some personalities are drawn toward commandeering while others are content to follow.

The work of the community is to find a sensitive and sensible balance where each person begins to see their own role as an integral part of the whole. They will then be moved to self initiative and personal investment as the entire body moves together in mutuality.

"Power, according to the paschal mystery, is essentially relational and self-sacrificing. It is neither power over, power against, nor power for, but rather power with. The goal of relational power is the creation and development of relationships. It does not intend, either directly or indirectly, to control the 'other'. It intends the enlargement of freedom; it is a

commitment to the relational 'us' - to mutuality. Relational power, the capacity to sustain relationships, is not the business of management, control or domination. ...It is a power of love that challenges, releases and gives life."²

Turf wars can also sabotage the group dynamic and undermine a spirit of respectful fellowship. Either coveting or disclaiming certain tasks can erode trust and rend the fiber of the familial network. The Spread process is contingent on the interdependence and accountability of every catechist. Complacency on the part of any member jeopardizes the outcome of the catechetical intent. As each catechist assents to their personal imprint on the sacred endeavor then there will be no holding back or squandering of gifts. Rather, all will selflessly align themselves as co-leaders sharing enthusiastic dedication.

Fr. Jim McCarthy, Sister Mary Therese Harrington, and Sr. Susanne Gallagher have modeled the essence of shared leadership since they were first inspired to the Spread mission more than 40 years ago. Driven by a commitment of the heart and solidarity of soul, they were bound together in a common vision and a new vocation. Elizabeth Sivek was courted by the same beguiling Spirit and I was soon honored to be a part of this liberating experience as well.

"Listen! I am standing at the door knocking." (Rev. 3:20) Internal passion defines focus, stirs conscience, fuels creativity, stimulates energy and motivates personal action. This spirit of communion has ignited the imagination and passion of a host of catechists world wide. Spread households of hospitality continue to persevere inspired by the Word; nourished by the Eucharist and impassioned by the gracious presence of our friends with disabilities.

Inquiries sometimes come to my office requesting an arbiter to chart crystal clear boundaries in defining roles and responsibilities. Can I sort out the passivity of some and dictatorship of others or the clash of egos? My response - how do you pray together? What happened to the community of faith, the communion of love? What is your passion - your purpose? Does it burn in each person or is it an isolated core?

Communion is not passive. It involves the action of bringing together differences while preserving individuality. It is more than attitudinal. It is behavioral and dynamic. The *new community* is transformative and redemptive.

According to Richard, "It is the house of the Spirit. The Spirit's function is to gather together that which is separated. This gathering is achieved through incorporation into that which is deepest in God. The Spirit, the bond of love between the Godhead and Christ, also binds every relationship between God and humanity. The Spirit is the bond between persons, the source of social as well as divine unity. The Spirit is the source of all *koinonia*, of all communion."³

God calls each Spread catechist to this life. It involves conversion and purification yet promises the joy of new discovery. The work is exacting, but the outcome is new life...life in Jesus.

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1. Lucien Richard, O.M.I., Living the Hospitality of God, Paulist Press N.Y. 2000 2.Ibid 3.Ibid