

SPRED

  SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

 2956 South Lowe Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60616

 **Special** 312-842-1039 www.spred-chicago.org

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The new Directory for Catechesis presents criteria for catechist formation and training. One of these criteria is especially important for Spred.

 There is to be coherence between the formation of catechists

 and the actual catechesis to be given. (see #135 d) 1

Since the beginning of Spred, this has been a concern. To accompany our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their faith journey, we have to have a clear idea of what we are doing. We have to look at what is essential for our friends and then look at what is essential for the Spred catechist so that there is some coherence between the two.

The first clue comes from Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel.

 Where your **synthesis** is, there lies your heart. (#143)2

Many forms of catechesis and many forms of catechist formation depend on the intellectual functioning that involves **analysis.** Analysis involves taking a thought apart in the hopes of being able to put it back together again successfully. **Synthesis** involves a global intuition. The intellectual functioning of our friends usually involves a global intuition, synthesis. Being able to function with synthesis is fundamental for catechists if they want to get anywhere with our friends. Their faith development depends on a global awareness of the mysteries of revelation. Precise concepts are not much help in their faith journey.3

People with intellectual disabilities do have intellectual functioning.4 Just because they cannot analyze concepts does not mean that they do not know anything. They may have a sensory-motor mode of intellectual functioning. So they may need to move around physically and to move objects around in order to know. Or they may gradually develop to preoperational intellectual forms of knowing. This includes symbolic or intuitive modes of intellectual functioning. In symbolic functioning they enjoy a kind of ego-centric process in which what is known belongs to them. The tree is their very own tree. They assimilate what they know into their own world. Then they may develop a kind of intuitive functioning whereby they identify with the object known. They identify with the tree. They accommodate to what they know. When there is a kind of equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, they may be ready for concrete operational thought.5 What they definitely have a problem with is formal operational thought 6 whereby abstract concepts float out there beyond their capacity. Faith formation unfortunately often takes place through abstractions that require formal operational thought in order to be understood.



Faith formation that involves a symbolic process is open to various forms of intellectual functioning.7 To be at ease with global symbolic awareness rather than precise concepts may be easy for some volunteers and incredibly difficult for others. Often those who are more at ease with symbolic awareness come from the world of the arts; music, dance, theater, stories, and nature. Or their spirituality may involve a kind of global awareness. Other volunteers see catechesis as requiring precise ideas, doctrine, prayers, commandments, sacramental information... and you are either right or wrong. These volunteers are apt to get worn out in Spred. Catechist formation has to take all this into account. Observation of our friends in Spred helps everyone to focus and opens the door to change and development in all volunteers.

In Spred we have four goals for catechesis with our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The goals of Spred are to develop:

 a sense of the sacred

 a sense of the People of God

 a sense of Jesus

 an ability to relate in faith, hope and

 love to God

A sense of the sacred is basic for both the catechist and our friends with intellectual disabilities. A sense of the sacred begins with an appreciation for beauty. Again it is Pope Francis in his text, The Joy of the Gospel, who gives us a push in this direction.

 Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the “way of beauty”

 (via pulchritudinis). Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe

 in and follow him is not only something right and true but also something

 beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy....

 Esteem for beauty is a means of touching the human heart and enabling

 the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it. (#167)8

The Spred catechist is challenged to move beyond a school environment that has desks and black boards to a prepared environment that has an ambiance of beauty. Every parish and every culture has its own criteria of beauty but all of them include an attention to light, color, objects, music, and furniture. All this reflects the care and concern of the catechists for their own faith development and that of their friends.

Through the process of observation, the new catechist watches how a prepared environment can be designed in view of developing a sense of the sacred. When anyone enters this space, it is easy to have a global awareness that this space is different. In this space, I too become different. I become more reverent, silent, open to a spirit of the sacred.

An ambiance of the sacred provides the space Spred needs to develop a meaningful catechesis for everyone. Catechists provide fresh flowers, a lit candle, a beautiful Bible, careful lighting and music. The focal point however is the key to the development of the catechesis and the development of faith. A global awareness is developed by interaction with a concrete object, picture or story. This focal point becomes symbolic when each person present enters into relationship with the object, picture or story in such a way as to assimilate it and make it their own. The skill of the leader catechist supports this process by careful use of speech, silence and movement.

Spred catechists learn to ask questions of one another. Was our conversation helpful in view of our goal? How about our gestures? ...our music? How are the relationships developing in our group? Is everyone comfortable with the process of accompaniment going on? How is the leader assuring the group that everyone feels safe in the sacred environment?

Over time, the goal of Spred to develop a sense of the sacred is obvious as everyone develops a new sense of belonging and reverence at the Eucharistic celebration in the parish.

The second goal of Spred is to develop a sense of the People of God, the church. The little church of the Spred community always opens out to the wider People of God in the parish or in the area community. At first a sense of belonging may be hesitant. The catechists as well as our friends are apt to be shy or just plain terrified. Each person has a variety of competencies and limitations. Only time and kindness will provide the context for a sense of the church. Little by little a sense of belonging develops. It cannot be forced and so the style is always one of invitation as we move into an activity or a relationship. Here grace often becomes visible! We are always surprised.

Our goal to help everyone develop a sense of Jesus requires personal faith in the catechists. The catechist preparation session is a serious process to support growth in personal faith as well as in the community of faith. For every session with our friends, the community of catechists meets to pray and to enter into the mystery that we will be inviting our friends into in the coming session.

Pope Francis reminds us that:

It is impossible to ...persevere unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. ...We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. (# 266)9

I am convinced that our friends drink in the faith of the catechists as the community grows closer together. “When we are happy to be together Jesus is with us.” (Jean Mesny)

We make an effort to learn how to **do** faith, hope and charity, directed to one another and to God. Of course it is easier to talk **about** faith, hope and love than to give witness to it with our friends. We have to face up to the fact that we simply have to give witness to our relationship to God, to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. We want our Spred training teams to know how much everyone appreciates this effort. Our goal is always that there be “coherence between catechist formation and the actual catechesis to be given.”10 Sr. Mary Therese Harrington

 Chicago Spred Team

1. Directory for Catechesis, Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, Vatican City, 2020

2. Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis, Vatican City 2013

3. Models of Revelation, Avery Dulles, S.J. Doubleday & Co, 1983 p. 246

4. Piagetian Theory and Its Implications for the Helping Professions, Emphasis: The Handicapped Child, University of Southern California, 1977 p.19

5.The Impact of Piagetian Theory on Education, Philosophy and Psychology, Frank B. Murray, University Park Press, Baltimore, 1979 p 166

6. Le Diagnosis du Raisonnement Chez les Debile Mentaus, 2nd Ed. B. Inhelder, Delachaux et Niestle, Neufchatal, Paris1963

7. Dulles, Ibid p.257, 8. Pope Francis, Ibid, 9. Pope Francis, Ibid, 10 Directory for Catechesis, Ibid #135

**Tentative Spred Center Calendar 2021**

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| **Spred Center Training: 312-842-1039****Introduction: Oct. 9, 16, 23. 1 - 6 pm.** **2956 South Lowe Ave., Chicago.****Role Orientation: Nov. 13, 20. 1- 6 pm.** **2956 South Lowe Ave., Chicago.** | **Spred Center Observation: 312-842-1039****6-10 Mondays 6:00 pm, Sept. 20, Oct. 4, 18.****11-16 Tuesday 7:00 pm, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, 19.****17-21 Tuesday 7:00 pm, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, 19.****22+ Mondays 7:00 pm, Sept. 20, Oct. 4, 18****Spred Family Liturgy: Oct. 3, Nov. 7, Dec. 5** |