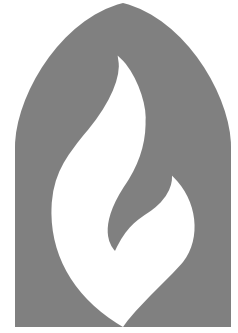
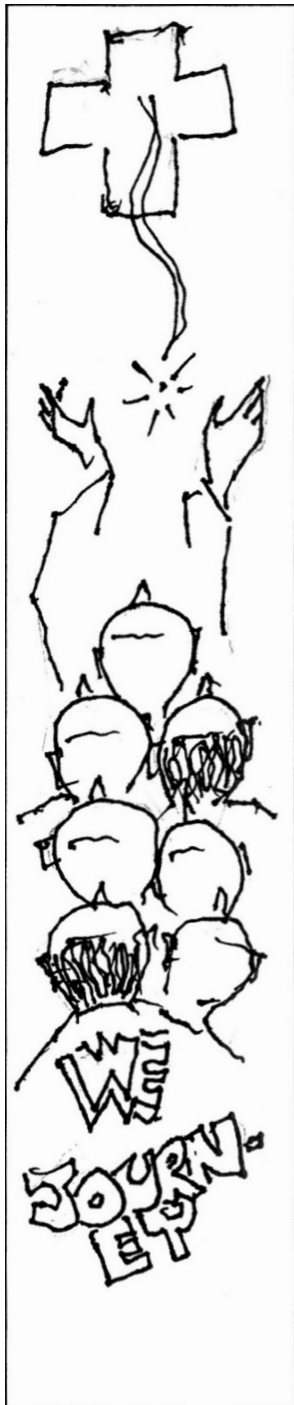


# SPRED



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*“It is a small miracle that each one of us is here in this place on this night. We have come from work, from home, after a hectic day; and now we are together. So, it is a small miracle that Mike, Ernesto, Bridget, Kathy, Victor, Kelly, Meg, Nancy, Linda, Dianna, Diane, Tom, Jen and I are here together. Thank God, for small miracles! We are happy to be together!”*

So begins another SPRED catechesis session in the Silent Circle. Recognizing the gift of “being happy together” is an essential quality of SPRED. Many sessions in SPRED acknowledge that we are happy to be together in God’s love. Sr. Mary Therese Harrington often said, “No one gets to heaven by himself or herself.”

Human beings are social beings. We need each other. Sometimes, we may try to deny that we need each other. We may think that we are self-sufficient. We may think that money, achievement or recognition are the pathway to happiness.

As we age, we recognize human beings can be cruel and inhumane to other human beings. As SPRED catechists and friends, we focus on our collective goodness and on God’s love for each of us. We recognize that we need each other, and we need to be present to each other.

My experience as a leader catechist has convinced me that being happy together in God’s love is no small thing. In my earliest experience, the repeated phrase of “happy to be together” seemed trite and formulaic. As years march by—especially after a global pandemic—I have come to accept that the state of being “happy to be together” is one of the gifts that our friends present to us, as catechists. It is also the marker of a healthy SPRED faith community.

The science of happiness has become a secular topic for reputable journals, college courses, podcasts and TED Talks in recent years. In the TED Talk “The Surprising Science of Happiness,” Harvard professor and author Dan Gilbert said, “We should have preferences that lead us into one future over another. But when those preferences drive us too hard and too fast because we have overrated the difference between these futures, we are at risk.”

“When our ambition is bounded, it leads us to work joyfully. When our ambition is unbounded, it leads us to lie, to cheat, to steal, to hurt others, to sacrifice things of real value. When our fears are bounded, we’re prudent, we’re cautious, we’re thoughtful. When our fears are unbound and overblown, we’re reckless and we’re cowardly.”<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that the daily lives of our friends give us witness to the benefits of this message.

The Grant Study, also known as the Harvard Study of Adult Development, is one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies ever done on human subjects.



Researchers wanted to answer a seemingly simple question: What makes a good life?

1. **Think long-term.** Some individuals started happy and ended lonely and depressed; others reversed that trajectory.
2. **Emotional intelligence is key.** Adaptations are needed to cope with life's setbacks.
3. **Relationships, relationships, relationships.** The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships with other people.<sup>2</sup>

Dare I say that the science is starting to catch up with SPRED? With healthy, small faith communities like SPRED, it is the strong relationships that often surprise newcomers and bond catechists and friends together year after year after year.

I am not saying that our friends (or catechists) always get happiness right. However, persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities often recognize what is truly important and authentic, perhaps because they have been limited and isolated by society and circumstance.

While contemplating the phrase, “happy together in God’s love,” it is important to remember that SPRED is about catechizing our faith. The “Directory for Catechesis” (USCCB. Washington, D.C.: 2020) is a document for catechists, produced by the bishops in continuity with documents extending back to Vatican II and prior. The directory is a resource for catechists of the Catholic faith.

The directory’s statements are worthy of reflection in the context of SPRED. Some of them may surprise the faithful cradle Catholic:

- Faith is certainly a personal act and, nevertheless, it is not an individual and private choice; it has a relational and communal character. (#21)
- In catechesis, our goal is to “put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.” This intimate communion leads us to love all that Jesus loves—the Father, all persons and all of creation—strengthened and made holy by the Spirit. (#75)
- Human experience is integral to catechesis, in its identity and process and also in contents and method, because it is not only the place in which the Word of God is proclaimed but also the space in which God speaks. The experience of individuals or of society as a whole must be approached with an attitude of love, acceptance and respect. God acts in every person’s life and in history and the catechist imitates Jesus in being open to this presence. (#197)
- The Christian community is the primary agent of catechesis. (#218)
- The group is important in personal formation processes... If it is an authentic place for relationships among people, the experience of the group is fertile soil for welcoming and sharing the message of salvation. (#219)
- Constructive interaction among people establishes the group as a place in which exchange and profound communication blossom. When this is intense and effective, the group is at its best in carrying out its function of supporting the growth of its members. (#220)
- The Church’s solicitude for persons with disabilities springs from God’s way of acting. Following the principle of the incarnation of the Son of

God, who makes himself present in every human situation, the Church recognizes in persons with disabilities the call to faith and to a life that is good and full of meaning. (#269)

- Persons with disabilities are a growth opportunity for the ecclesial community, which by their presence is prompted to overcome cultural prejudices. (#270)
- Persons with intellectual disabilities live out their relationship with God in the immediacy of their intuition, and it is necessary and ennobling to accompany them in the life of faith. (#271)
- Persons with disabilities are called to the fullness of sacramental life, even in the presence of severe disorders. (#272)

These statements from the “Directory for Catechesis” connect me with the larger purpose for SPRED, aligned with the life of the Church. We want for our friends a “life that is good and full of meaning” that includes a rich inner life of the Spirit.

Finally, we turn to the Holy Book in the light of the phrase, “happy together in God’s love.” In Scripture, Jesus reminds us that whenever two or more of us are gathered in His name, Jesus is with us. St. Matthew wrote:

“This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them.” (*International Children’s Bible*, Mt 18:20)

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus prays to the Father rejoicing:

“Then the Holy Spirit made Jesus rejoice. He said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you have shown them to those who are like little children. Yes, Father, you did this because this is what you really wanted.’” (Luke 10:21)

St. Paul’s letters were written to exhort entire communities to believe in Jesus Christ and to love one another:

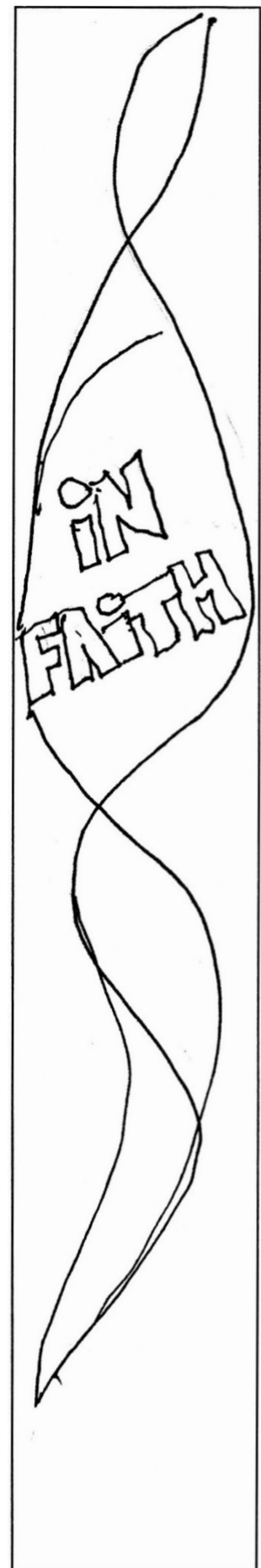
“I want them to be strengthened and joined together with love. I want them to be rich in the strong belief that comes from understanding. I mean I want you to know fully God’s secret truth. That truth is Christ himself. And in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are safely kept.” (Col 2:2-3)

Jesus says to me tonight, “Larry, I give you true happiness together with a loving community of believers. Give thanks to God.” It is easy to take our “happy together in God’s love” reality for granted or to perceive it as a given. We must work at these relationships with presence, prayer and attention.

Larry Adams

Leader Catechist, St. Bede-St. Denis SPRED

1. Gilbert, D. (2013, August). The Surprising Science of Happiness[Video]. TED Conferences. [ted.com/talks/dan\\_gilbert\\_the\\_surprising\\_science\\_of\\_happiness](https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_the_surprising_science_of_happiness)
2. Miller, M. What Makes a Good Life? (2021, April 19) 3 Lessons on Life, Love, and Decision Making from the Harvard Grant Study. Six Seconds. [6seconds.org/2021/04/19/harvard-grant-study/](https://6seconds.org/2021/04/19/harvard-grant-study/)



## CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR 2023 — Spring Planning Meetings

**Vicariate I, ABC:** Monday, May 15 at St. Mary Parish Center, Lake Forest

**Vicariate I DEF:** Thursday, May 18 at Our Lady of the Wayside Parish, Arlington Heights

**Vicariate II AEF:** Monday, May 22 at St. Joseph Parish, Wilmette

**Vicariate II BCD:** Thursday, May 25 at St. Benedict Parish, Chicago

**Vicariate III A & IV AD:** Tuesday, May 30 at SS (Genevieve) Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr Parish, Chicago

**Vicariate III CE:** Tuesday, May 30 at SPRED Center, Chicago

**Vicariate IV BCE:** Thursday, June 1 at St. Pius X and St. Leonard, Stickney

**Vicariate V DE:** Monday, May 22 at St. Alphonsus and St. Patrick Parish Center, Lemont

**Vicariate V ABC:** Wednesday, May 24 at St. Cajetan Parish, Chicago

**Vicariate VI D:** Tuesday, June 7 at St. Donatus Parish, Blue Island

### MAMRE GRAND RAFFLE, 1st Prize: \$1500, 2nd Prize: \$1000, 3rd Prize: \$500

Drawing will take place on June 8, 2023 at 12 p.m. at the SPRED Center. Tickets will be mailed in April or can be purchased through the SPRED Center. Call 312.842.1039 or email [SPRED@archchicago.org](mailto:SPRED@archchicago.org) for more information.

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