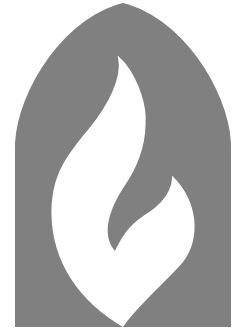




SPRED



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You are invited to an Open House at SPRED! Welcome to SPRED!

What a treasure God has entrusted us with in calling us to be part of the SPRED family and how blessed are we who have accepted his call. In the Gospel, Jesus says that if one finds a treasure in a field, one sells all one has to buy that field. This is what we in SPRED always try to do; to be open; to have open hearts; to be open doors of SPRED. Our desire is to be poorer, that is, to lose the extra baggage, all that hinders us, so that Jesus and others may have more places to open more doors of SPRED.

SPRED groups are called to be “festive meals,” prepared especially for those society leaves aside and puts on its margins and considers as “useless” or a “problem.” For God, every person is unique and important, no matter the person’s qualities, skills and inabilities, no matter her or his culture or religion. Every person has a heart that wants to love and be loved. If we are to be open doors of SPRED, our aim is to treat each person with respect and love, as a unique human being. Our goal is to listen to each person and help each one to be ever more herself or himself in a friendly and trusting environment.

“Out of the ordinary comes love big enough to build a house that’s open to those who yearn that God might enter in.” ‘How well these words describe our SPRED catechists. Ordinary people whose love is big enough to build a house for our friends. Giving thanks for ordinary people filled with God’s love.’ (Kenneth Steven, Out of the Ordinary, SPRED Glasgow post in Facebook 12 October, 2022)

Very often our world chooses to strengthen those who are strong. God wants a society where those who are weak and without strength have a place. Those in SPRED are like the servants in the parable who invite persons with intellectual disabilities to the “meal of love” and bring them to it. Once we are there, we are all called to celebrate together.

We all know that the “festive meal” in the gospel is the Eucharistic meal in which Jesus gives Himself as nourishment; it is a spiritual event. It is also the place where we open our hearts for each other. We live it out in our daily lives together. We prepare for all this during our agape. The “festive meal” is truly both human and divine. The heart is the place where heaven and earth meet, where the presence of God is revealed. As St. John the Evangelist says in his first letter: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (1John 4:7)

In order to be Open Doors of SPRED, the heart of each is called to grow, to ever deepen and be open for others.



We are called to drink from the Source of Love that is God, so that we become a source of love for others. Our friends with intellectual disabilities are chosen by God who is love because they thirst for love and friendship. SPRED with open doors means to welcome “strangers,” those who are “different,” and to enter into friendship with them.

SPRED with its open doors is a special place where we learn how to love, and this calls for a loving encounter with God who is love. SPRED with its open doors are communities of faith and celebration, “festive meals” where we learn to rejoice and be grateful to God for the presence of each person. As members of SPRED with its open doors, we are called to be witnesses to those around us in our daily lives that the value of each person comes from her or his ability to love and not from the ability to do things. We are called to witness to the importance of those who are weak.

Their lives have meaning and call us to communion of hearts. God is not only present in the beauty and greatness of the universe but also in weakness and littleness. In fact, that is how He chose to come to us: as a child in a manger. And all beauty points to the Source of beauty.

SPRED with its open doors gives witness to the importance of listening with love and respect to each person, especially those weak and without power. SPRED with its open doors is built on the pain of persons; persons who do not find many to welcome them in our churches and parishes. So SPRED humbly opens its doors to alleviate the pain of lack of inclusion in the life of our parishes.

SPRED welcomes persons with intellectual disabilities to support the parish in the journey of faith with our friends, together with other parishioners. In doing so, it also supports their families. In having its doors open, SPRED gives witness that our friends with intellectual disabilities have gifts they would like to share with others. Otherwise, these gifts will remain hidden, and the parish would be incomplete without them.

However, SPRED with its open doors does not pretend to support everybody and alleviate the suffering and pain of all. In our SPRED communities, our friends may begin to accept themselves, have friends, be accompanied in their lives of faith, and find meaning to their lives and even a certain joy of living.

SPRED with its open doors believes that an important part of relief from pain is presence; somebody who reveals to the person that he or she is not bad or all alone. They have a friend who is happy to be there only for them. In fact, the foundation of SPRED is friendship, the best witness of God’s love and presence to every person. Friendship gives life to others and a new desire to live. However, this takes time. To build a relationship of trust and to enable someone to believe in the fidelity of a friendship takes time.

For SPRED to keep open doors, its members are called and expected to have initial and continuous training. But above all, they need help and strength that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Fr. James McCarthy, the founding Director of SPRED in Chicago and to whom all the SPRED family around the world owe a great deal, has recently passed away. In an interview he gave for the SPRED Newsletter three years ago and reprinted in September 2022, he sums up the meaning of open doors of SPRED:

“They (our friends) live in shadows. I want my life to bring joy to them and to their families and friends. They need joy to live. They need light-hearted moments in communities. When they are together with those who love them, you can see the sun rising. I want anything that can bring light and lessen their burdens. A parent recently told me that the one time she is sure to see her daughter happy is in her SPRED group. This meant so much to me.”

Fr. McCarthy goes on to say,

“Last night we had a gathering of SPRED catechists to prepare for this Sunday SPRED Family Liturgy. I am the happiest about these family gatherings within the parish community liturgies. Our SPRED chapel provides a setting to work out what could be helpful during these liturgies. We needed to be some kind of model. Now there are SPRED Family Liturgies all over the Archdiocese of Chicago and in other dioceses that use the SPRED model of catechesis. When those with disabilities have been in SPRED communities of faith for catechesis, they bring a distinct quality to liturgy. They may have short attention spans, but in the moments that they are present, they are all there. They have developed the capacity to focus. They are curious. They really want to be in friendship with everyone. In the Eucharistic prayer, we ask that we may all be gathered into one, and we experience being gathered into one.”

“My deepest joy has been to have a catechesis that brings life and to have that life celebrated in liturgy. This catechesis and liturgy are devoid of judging one another, of being negative toward one another. It is rooted in respect, care and love.”

“I suspect this is also why people, catechists and friends stay in SPRED. They linger after gatherings. They linger in their memories also. Remembering is a call for presence. So often, long after someone has had to leave a SPRED group, we hear from them about how much it meant to them to have been in SPRED.”

“I am always in awe at the quality of presence in both catechesis and liturgy. Presence changes everything.”...

“On the surface there are many wounded people in SPRED. The cross is more than apparent. But the wounded people can become people who are cherished. Then the cross has become a tree of life. The thirst for love is slated in these relationships. There is joy and moments of peace. Our friends want to come to this space, so do catechists, so do families. What is it? It is grace in action. This taste of the beyond is at work in our Eucharistic liturgies. It is inexpressible. An ignored person can become someone. This experience of ministry makes me very happy. This is my work and my life. This is my meaning. I cherish it.”

May it mean so much to us all and may Fr. James pray that we continue to keep the open doors of SPRED wide open.

Fr. Trevor Fairclough and George Harrington
SPRED, the Island of Malta



CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR 2023**SPRED Center:** 2956 South Lowe Avenue**Training (Orientations) 2023**

SPRED Center, Contact: 312.842.1039

General Orientation (2-1):

Feb. 11, 18, 25, 1 – 6 p.m.

Role Orientation (3-1):

March 11, 18, 1 – 6 p.m.

English Helper Catechist Orientation:

March 4, 1 – 6 p.m.

Spanish Helper Catechist Orientation:

March 25, 1 – 6 p.m.

Observation, SPRED Center, 312.842.1039

6–10 Group, Feb. 13, 27, March 13, 27, April 24, May 8

11–16 Group, Feb. 14, 28, March 28, April 25, May 9

17/21 Group, Feb. 14, 28, March 28, April 25, May 9

22+ Group, Feb. 13, 27, March 13, 27, April 24, May 8

SPRED Family Liturgy, SPRED Center

Spanish: 11 a.m. Feb. 19 and March 19

English: 11 a.m. Feb. 5 and March 5

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