



SPRED

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I am Fr. Jose M. Santiago, O.P., a Dominican priest, and I am honored to serve as the new SPRED Chaplain for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

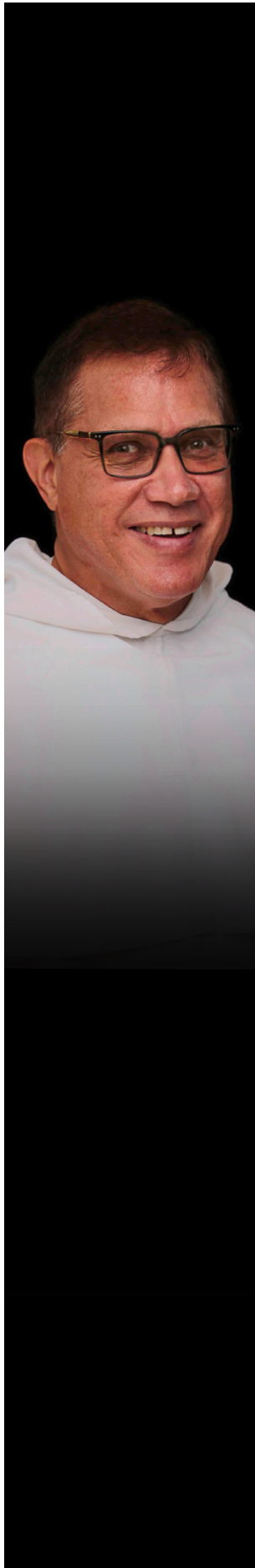
After graduating from Loyola University in 1978, I decided to discern a religious vocation with the Jesuits. During my time with the Jesuits, I volunteered at Fr. Flanagan's Boys Town in Omaha, Nebraska, which was an orphanage for children from age six to eighteen years. After a year of formation, I felt that I was being called to marriage and family life, so I made the decision to leave the Jesuits to explore family life and pursue a career as a layperson.

Upon leaving the Jesuits, I was hired as an Assistant Family Teacher by the couple who ran the home I had volunteered at during the summer at Boys Town. While the experience was very fulfilling, the long hours and low pay led to a quick burnout. I decided to return to Chicago where I had a supportive family and friends.

Soon after arriving in Chicago, I accepted a job at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago in the Personnel Department, but after three years I had the desire to directly assist clients with their needs. I decided to return to social work. I interviewed for a position at a mental health agency, which was seeking to establish a program on the north side of the city of Chicago for persons with chronic mental illness. Our role was to establish a person in a permanent residence in facilities that served people with mental illness on the north side and connect them with various social services. This position made me aware that I needed further education to better serve the people that I was encountering. I finished my Masters in Social Work in 1987, emphasizing group work with youth, organization development, and individual therapy.

During my studies, I began to discern religious life again, exploring common life and prayer with communities that would be inclusive of men, women, laity, religious, single and married. Through my discernment, I discovered the Dominicans, which offered the common life and prayer that I was seeking. Before entering religious life, I traveled around Europe and Israel for three and a half months, fulfilling a dream I had always had. This adventure affirmed and confirmed my commitment to entering the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers.

Eight years after leaving the Jesuits and at the tender age of 31, I entered the Order of Preachers (O.P.). Entering religious life was exciting and fulfilling. During my first summer in religious vows, I was invited to minister with our friars who were ministering in El Salvador during their civil war. The following year, I spent six months in Bolivia where I learned about its beautiful culture and people.



During my formation for ordination, I ministered at a juvenile detention center and at the Hispanic Office of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri. In 1993, I was ordained to the priesthood and my first assignment was to our parish in Denver, Colorado. After three years there, I was appointed pastor. After another four years, I was appointed pastor of our parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota where I served for seven and a half years. While serving as pastor, I began to work on my Doctorate in Hispanic Ministry at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. For my thesis, I did research on domestic violence and immigrant Latino women and the Church's response. This led me to focus on several women's groups in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood.

After completing my Doctorate in Ministry in 2008, I was invited to join the faculty at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri where I had studied during my formation. At Aquinas, I instructed graduate students in pastoral theology and counseling. I eventually helped to coordinate the duo-degree in Pastoral Theology and Masters in Social Work programs. It was an exciting time of learning and sharing the fruits of my contemplation. While teaching, I also assisted in the St. Louis Archdiocese and at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Ferguson, Missouri.

In 2015, I was asked by my provincial to become pastor of St. Pius V parish in Chicago. I was fortunate to lead the parish during a time of transition. During my term as pastor, I renewed the parish's formation process for Confirmation and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. I also oversaw the renovation of the main worship facilities and finances. It was an intense period where a great deal was accomplished.

In 2018, I was asked by my brothers to help the Dominican Order in Puerto Rico with their administration of the University Central de Bayamon. I arrived in Puerto Rico several months after two devastating hurricanes, Irma and Maria, had severely crippled the island financially and physically. The hurricanes severely damaged seven of the ten buildings on the campus of the university, and it took over two and a half years to repair them. I became the Director of the College of Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Education. In addition to my administration duties, I served as professor in pastoral theology. As director, I assisted the University in completing the accreditation process for their Graduate School of Theology through the Association of Theological Schools.

While serving in Puerto Rico, I had been elected as Vicar to the Provincial of Colombia. Two years later, I would continue in a similar role for the Province of St. Albert the Great. This province is headquartered in Chicago and serves the Midwest States of the USA. In 2020, this province also assumed responsibility for Puerto Rico. This meant that I oversaw all the Dominican ministries in Puerto Rico, which included grammar and high schools, parishes, a retreat center, a shrine and the university. In December, 2020 I was elected prior of our convent in Bayamon, Puerto Rico which is the largest house we have in Puerto Rico. I had many responsibilities because we lacked enough healthy friars to assume ministerial responsibilities.

While assisting friars at our parishes in Puerto Rico, I became aware of the increasing number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. After conducting some research about people with special needs in Puerto Rico, I learned that nearly twenty-two percent of the population had some form of disability. I started to inquire with other

non-Dominican priests and parishes and discovered that they also had a large number of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in their parishes. I was also informed that there were no such services on the island. It was then that I remembered the SPRED ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago. We began to explore the possibility of establishing SPRED because of the interest of the parents and volunteers.

I first encountered SPRED (Special Religious Development) as a process when I was invited to the SPRED observation center on Lowe Ave. I was the pastor at St. Pius V Parish, which at that time had four different SPRED groups. I was fascinated to see two children with attention deficit disorder engage with the materials during the preparation period. At the end of the preparation process, I was moved when the friends and catechists were called individually, by name, into an adjoining celebration room.

Before learning of the Method Vivre and the SPRED process of faith formation, I had helped provide faith formation by utilizing a group process as a volunteer with incarcerated youth in St. Louis, with youth catechesis in confirmation programs at our parishes, guiding graduate students in doing theological reflection, and in my domestic violence ministry and research. This process invites participants to share their experiences of a theme presented within the group by a leader, which allows them to begin to process an event or events at whatever level or depth they are able, within the limits of their need and the groups' time.

The Method Vivre, which is the foundation of the SPRED process, is not only a useful method for faith formation of people with development and intellectual disabilities; it is also a great asset for the ongoing formation of the catechist community. The catechist preparation session creates a strong and supportive community which allows us to deepen our relationship with God and helps us to better accompany our friends with disabilities on their faith journey. Some of our friends cannot communicate verbally, nor through sign language, but are able to symbolically enter into the catechists' expression of their understanding and processing within the session. Each one of our friends will perceive and enter at their own developmental stage at their appropriate sensual and cognitive level.

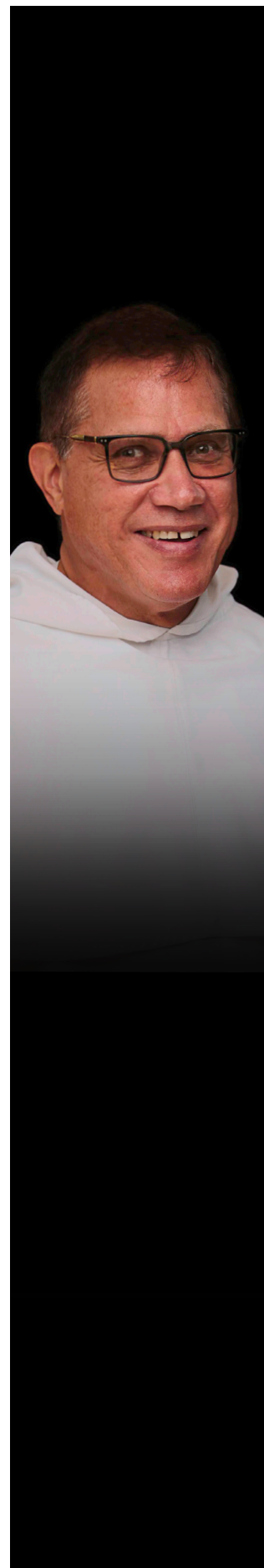
Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel stresses:

“The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. ...Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can in some way be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason.”

In SPRED, we utilize this process to engage each other symbolically and not just cognitively. It is the reason Jesus throughout scriptures proclaimed in parables using symbolically the elements of the environment and the culture of his people and society.

It is wonderful to be able to be part of this ministry of SPRED in the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond. In God's eyes we are special, unique, and blessed in so many ways to journey toward the Reign of God proclaimed by Christ together.

Rev. Jose M. Santiago, O.P.
SPRED Chaplain and Associate Director, Archdiocese of Chicago



CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR**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.

SPRED Family Liturgy, SPRED Center

English: 11 a.m. Nov. 6, Dec. 4

Spanish: 11 a.m. Nov. 20, Dec. 18

Observation, SPRED Center, 312.842.1039

6–10 Group, Nov. 7, 21, Dec. 5 at 6 p.m.

11–16 Group, Nov. 8, 22, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m.

17/21 Group, Nov. 8, 22, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m.

22+ Group, Nov. 7, 21, Dec. 5 at 7 p.m.

Observation, Queen of Angels**4412 North Western Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625**

17–21 Group, Nov. 2, 16, Dec. 7

22+ Group, Nov. 1, 3, 5, 15, 17, 19 and Dec. 6, 8, 10

Reservations: Julia Hess, jchqofa3@gmail.com

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