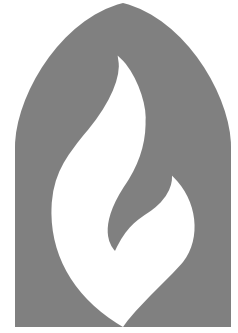
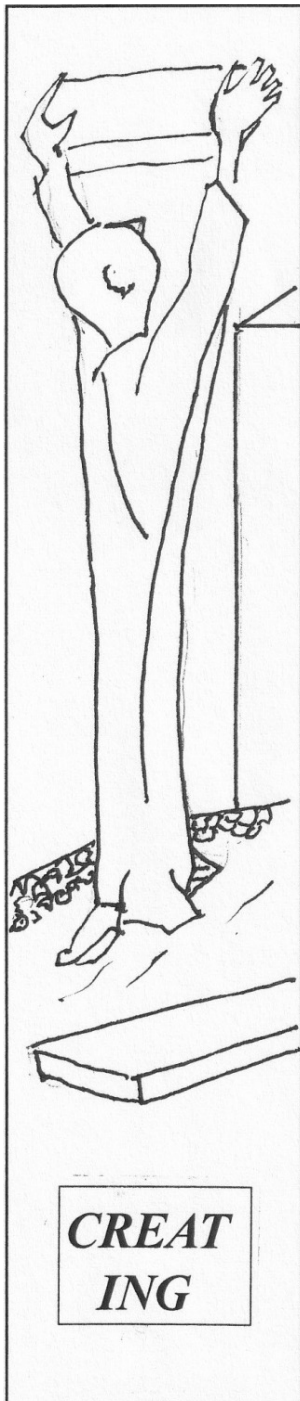


# SPRED



A publication of Special Religious Development

Volume 103 | Number 4 | April 2023



*The Diocese of Ensenada, Mexico opened their first SPRED community this past year. Silvia Carrillo and her team share their story about establishing SPRED in the Diocese.*

When I ask myself how we started this great adventure, memories of how God led us towards this ministry immediately come to mind.

I have been involved with the regular catechetical apostolate in our parish for a long time, and I began to ask myself what we could do to better serve children and young people with different intellectual and developmental disabilities. I knew that some of the children and young adults in the parish had attention-deficit, learning and behavioral difficulties. Others had not been formally diagnosed, but from the descriptions of their parents, it was evident that they had learning challenges and needed special attention.

I decided to speak with Nancy, a fellow catechist and special education teacher about how we might provide faith formation to the children and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our parish. We considered integrating the children and youth with learning or development difficulties into the regular religious education groups but identified several challenges with that approach. While we were not quite sure where the path was going to lead us, we knew God was preparing our hearts for the opportunity to collaborate in something wonderful, something that had not previously been done in our diocese—providing catechesis and faith formation to people with disabilities.

Eager to find a catechism that would help us in our work, I searched my local bookstores but could not find any books or materials specifically for children and youth with special needs. I could not believe that so little attention was given to people with disabilities. Instead of becoming discouraged, an impulse arose within me that gave me the courage to seek the necessary resources to achieve our goal. So many loved ones, relatives and people who could benefit from faith formation ministry for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our parish came to my mind. I began to search the Internet and found that a diocese in the southwest United States had developed a handbook for catechesis with children with disabilities. The handbook described some of the different disabilities and presented some guidelines to consider when providing catechesis to children with disabilities.

My fellow catechists Nancy and Leili, who both have experience in special education, supported me in my endeavor. I presented the material I found online to them, and we began the work of preparing a curriculum for our parish. We informed our fellow catechists that we wanted to implement a new catechetical program and to train ourselves to receive children and youth with disabilities.



We encouraged our fellow catechists to participate in our new catechetical endeavor and encouraged them to take the training we had developed. Seeing how many of our colleagues shared our desire and were aware of the need to provide catechesis for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities was gratifying. At this point, we could visualize what needed to be done and dreamed that our program would expand to serve children, youth and adults with disabilities at the diocesan level.

We had the materials and the drive, but we still did not have a methodology to carry it out. In my restlessness I searched the Internet again. I came across a news article about a group of Chileans who attended training in Chicago, Illinois, to learn a method of catechism for people with disabilities. Emotion overwhelmed me as I became aware of SPRED for the first time. I eagerly emailed and called the SPRED office in Chicago. With great kindness, Graciela helped to answer my many questions. I felt relieved that there was someone in the SPRED office who spoke Spanish, which made it easier for me to ask my questions and obtain all the information I was seeking. As I learned more about SPRED, joy filled my heart, and I knew that this was what I needed. After obtaining the necessary information, I shared it with my colleagues. SPRED's 60 years of providing catechesis and faith formation to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities convinced us that SPRED was the ideal ministry for our endeavor. We felt that SPRED was the ministry we needed to establish in our parish.

With the support of our parish priest, we worked with the Chicago team to organize face-to-face training in Chicago. We all agreed that we needed to bring this ministry to Ensenada. Our brothers and sisters with disabilities must have a place in our parishes; without them, the Church is incomplete. They must feel welcomed in the parish community. With faith in God's plan, we planned our trip to Chicago.

My colleagues Sofía, Elga and Margarita, who have served in the regular catechesis program for years, agreed to travel to Chicago for the training. Their stay in Chicago was a fraternal meeting. They felt warmly received by the SPRED staff in Chicago. They wanted to make the most of the opportunity to obtain vast knowledge about the SPRED method; intense work characterized the days. During their stay, they had the opportunity to visit several SPRED centers at different parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago. The team was impressed with the different SPRED environments and was grateful for the opportunity to meet with several SPRED Catechists and hear about their roles and experiences with SPRED.

During the training, the team received extensive insight into the different elements of a SPRED session: the preparation process, the catechesis in the sacred room and the agape. They distilled each part of the process and learned how each part is essential in the experience of each session. The extensive training in Chicago gave the team a clearer understanding of the Method Vivre and how it can benefit both people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the adult catechists.

Upon returning to Mexico, Elga, Margarita and Sophie organized and scheduled a training session for all the people of Ensenada who might be interested in participating in SPRED. During the training, they shared with us everything they learned in Chicago. Shortly after the meeting, the first small adult community of faith was formed, and we began gathering all the necessary materials and searching for a suitable environment. Through the goodness of God, we managed to gather all the necessary equipment and materials needed for our environment.

In consultation with the leaders of the parish, we located a room in the parish that could serve as our permanent SPRED environment. The newly formed SPRED community and a few helpers from the parish then began rehabbing the room and preparing the environment.

While we were rehabbing the space, we held several informative meetings for the parents from the parish. They were beautiful meetings, full of enthusiasm. We were thrilled when 20 people joined our first meeting. We also sent a notice to the entire community to welcome all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to join our parish community and to join our SPRED community. The response from the community was very favorable, and they began to call us to request information. It brought us joy to know that there were people who wanted to belong to our SPRED community and our parish. Many people expressed that they have been waiting for a ministry like SPRED for a long time.

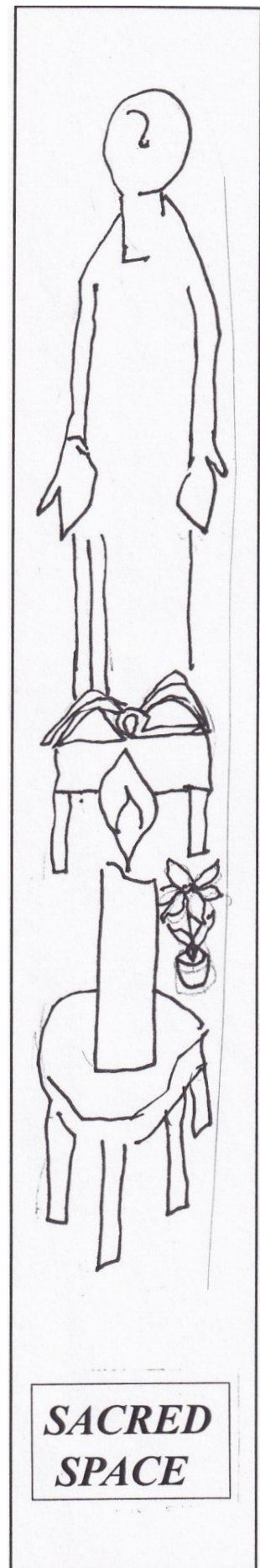
We soon recognized that God was working within us, helping us in our endeavor to provide faith formation to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We prepare ourselves in prayer and disconnect from our worries. As we prepare ourselves to be catechists for those with disabilities, we discover God's purpose for our lives—to finally have this beautiful moment of coexistence with our brothers and sisters in Christ. God has given us the gift of sharing this great mission, and we have formed beautiful bonds of friendship, not only among the catechist team but also with our friends. It has been a process of getting to know each other, of trusting each other. We have received great joy through this ministry. Every day that we gather is a celebration, a fraternal meeting where we share our lives as the family in Christ. We have received much more than we could have imagined.

Last October we were able to welcome our first 6 adult friends with disabilities into our small community of faith. We are grateful to have the opportunity to welcome them into the group and we know from the joy that they express at our sessions that they are grateful to belong to our SPRED community. While there is much to celebrate with the opening of our first SPRED community, we know that there is still much work to do, which we are willing to do with the grace of God. Our next goal is to form another small community of faith that can welcome people with IDD from another age group. Little by little we are working toward establishing SPRED communities for all 4 age groups and we hope to continue to reach more friends who expect our service, generosity and time. With God's help, we are confident that He will guide us as we continue advancing our mission.

I would like to thank each of my colleagues who are a part of this team and who have been called by God to this very special mission. Thank you for your generosity and dedication. Everything we have achieved to date has been the result of your work and dedication. I pray that we can faithfully reflect the love of God for our brothers and sisters with intellectual and developmental disabilities and that in each meeting with our friends, we grow in faith, hope and charity. I hope that all parishes and faith communities will be motivated to implement a SPRED ministry so that we can form the people of God into a single flock with the same shepherd.

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Peace and blessings,  
The SPRED team  
Ensenada, Mexico



## 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 C, E:** Tuesday, May 30 at SPRED Center, Chicago

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

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

**Vicariate V A,B,C:** 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.

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Special Religious Development  
2956 South Lowe Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60616  
312.842.1039  
[spred-chicago.org](http://spred-chicago.org)

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
CHICAGO, IL  
PERMIT NO. 2769

**SPRED** 