



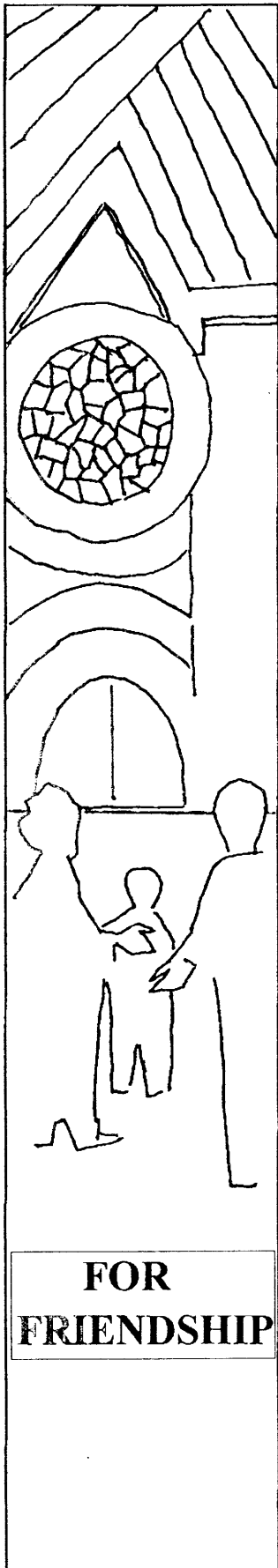
A Spred chairperson is someone who keeps looking for all people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in a parish no matter their age, strengths or weaknesses. I have this role in my parish, St. Rene Goupil. My parish is located on the southwest side of Chicago, in a neighborhood called Clearing, just west of Midway Airport. The parish was founded in 1959. There are about 1,000 families. Even though my parish hosts a Spred community for adults who are 22 years old and older; as the Spred chairperson since 2002, I have discovered twenty two people born between 1944 and 2001 who have developmental or intellectual disabilities. I am collaborating with area Spred chairpersons so that these people can be welcomed into Spred.

As Spred chairperson, I periodically host an information gathering for parents and interested people which I announce through bulletin articles or through a bulletin insert. On one such occasion last fall, I met a couple who are parents of a son who still does not have a clear diagnosis. They like what they heard about Spred and agreed to observe a session at the Archdiocesan Spred Observation and Resource Center. However, they also had another desire beside the faith aspect of their son's life which had an impact on me. This was their desire:

As a mother of a now 6 year old mentally impaired son, it is extremely hard to socialize on a constant basis with friends who have children that are in good health. My friends always listened and offered an open ear as I talked about my son's therapy problems, school issues, etc. but I know it was very hard for them to completely understand what I was going through. My husband and I longed to meet some new friends who were parents or guardians of special needs children or adults. My son's school offered a parent support group but the time which was on Wednesday morning made it impossible for my husband to attend. I searched the web and the phone book for different community organizations, anywhere I could think of, to find a support group that was close by and open to parents such as us that had a son that was undiagnosed. I had always wondered why something was not offered through our local parish.

When my husband and I went to speak with the Spred chairperson about enrolling my son in Spred, I mentioned it to her. She thought it seemed like a really good idea to try and start a parish support group since there were quite a few families like ours within St. Rene. Thus, our support group was started.

We cannot say enough how much we enjoy the meetings and all the new friends we have



met. For once, we do not feel so 'alone' in being the only ones to deal with all the issues in the life of my son. We can talk about school and therapy issues and these friends can actually relate with us; sometimes offering advice or taking ours. We laugh, sometimes we cry. We share valuable information and resources such as respite care, books, IEP advice, magazines, etc.

We had originally planned on meeting every other month. However, everyone agreed that the time seemed to pass so quickly because everyone has so much to talk about that we needed to get together once a month. We are optimistic about our group and hope to open it up to people from our neighboring parishes as well as to bring in a speaker on occasion. We really look forward to our meetings every month and hope our group continues to grow and expand to everyone that needs new friends to lean on.

Julie and Mark Miklos

Remembering Julie and Mark's comments on the night of the Information Gathering, we planned our first get together for February 28 at 7:00 p.m. I invited all the parents and guardians. That first night I set up 8 chairs in the narthex of our church and prepared some refreshments. Then I waited to welcome four families, three of which were parents of children and one was a parent of an adult. We began with prayer. I then invited everyone to introduce themselves in whatever detail they wanted as we shared food and drink. This was a real eye opener as each one expressed their lives as parents; some crying as they spoke about their child and what it was like to meet all the needs. As Spred chairperson, I put together minutes and a roster listing the four families only and sent it to each of them. For the next meeting on April 10th, I again hosted and led an opening prayer, giving them the opportunity to pray for what was in their hearts. I also sent out invitations to other parents and guardians. But this night, the same four families returned. At the next meeting, which was on May 23, eleven parents and guardians participated as I hosted and began with a prayer.

It was at this point that I invited the parents and guardians to consider taking responsibility for future meetings and for the group to be called the St. Rene Goupil Parent/Guardian Support Group. Two of the parents decided to be co-chairpersons to arrange the hosting and calendaring as well as the agenda and send out invitations. Another parent became the secretary. The next meeting on July 24 did not include me. However, I am welcome as a special guest to any of these gatherings. The group decided to meet on the fourth Monday of every month. They also welcomed a new parent, a twelfth person that night.

I recently sent each parent and guardian a short questionnaire asking what the gatherings mean to them. These are their comments:

I have found the St. Rene Parent/Guardian Support group to be a place where parents and caregivers have the opportunity to share their experiences in caring for a loved one with disabilities. I have also made friends as we share our concerns and resources. I always look forward to our meetings.

It is comforting to meet and know other parents who have or are undergoing some of the same difficulties in rearing and educating our special child. More avenues are open for us

to follow. We've always found that as we get to know other special needs children, we begin to understand our own child better. It also follows that other parents may influence our own attitude in parenting. It seems that some new information is given to us at every meeting. We are all planning our children's future in regard to school or living arrangements and information from others is helpful as a resource.

It is good to share with people who really understand what life for us is like. Sharing experiences, successes, disappointments, social time is so important. Meeting new people, planning events, hearing about resources is exciting. It's good to meet people who live near you so it's easier to plan things and see each other at parish events.

I like it very much. There is no support group close to our home. I look forward to going to the gatherings. It is comforting to be with other parents/ guardians who are going through issues, feelings, emotions like us. The gatherings are very informative. We share ideas and inspiration.

Being involved with the Spred program through my brother and this support group has given me more insight into the functioning of these two organizations. How sharing information and ideas with each other is important. I am very pleased to be part of both.

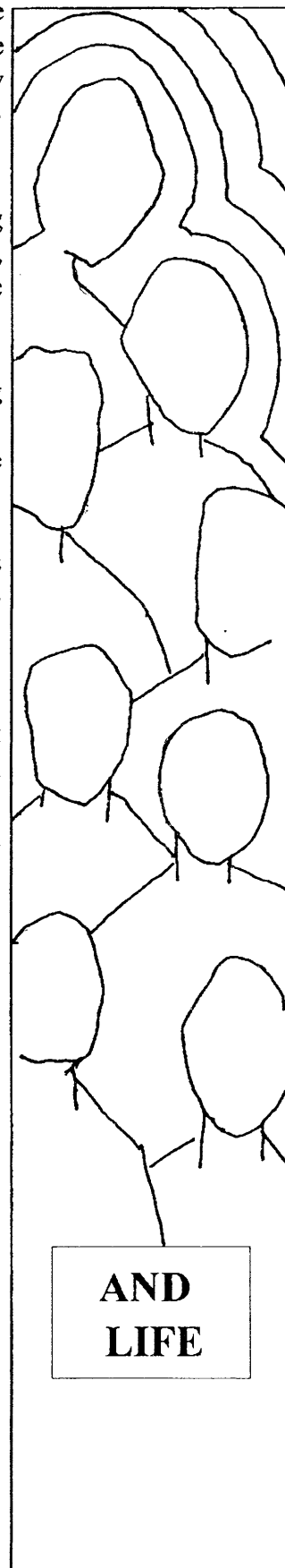
As Spred chairperson, I am aware that through my continuing effort to find people with developmental and intellectual disabilities over the years that this has paved the way for such a support group to exist. I have stopped by their gatherings to listen and to assist where I can. At a recent gathering, the topic of fundraising came up. I told them about the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll drive and they were able to contact the State Council, complete the paper work, and collect on the third weekend of September, Friday and Saturday whereas our Spred group collected on Saturday and Sunday. They wanted funds so that they could invite speakers every now and then, participate in workshops and other meetings that might have a fee and be able to make contributions to groups such as the Autism Society or to the Downs Syndrome group.

At the last meeting, we had a lengthy discussion about the meaning of a support group. My thoughts were that if it is parish based, it should have some spiritual dimension. I also felt that each of those who gather should somehow feel that their own needs are being met because it is parents/guardians who gather. I suggested that they might consider looking over the past month since they met. They could give ten minutes of quiet reflection to this. Then form a circle and each person could share what has been lived. This would bond the group even more and would give them a different meaning to the word, support.

Our parish hosted a Ministries Fair and this group was able to participate since it is a new ministry of St. Rene. Who knows whether a relative or grandparent of a special needs person belonging to our parish would benefit.

It is my hope that other Spred chairpersons could invite parents/guardians to consider developing such a group in their parish whether their person with disabilities is in a Spred group yet or not. Perhaps in this way more people will be identified and linked to other resources.

Elizabeth Sivek, Chicago Spred Community Religious Worker



SPRED CALENDAR

CORE TEAM TRAINING 2007

2-1 Core Team Training in English and Spanish
for chairpersons, leader and activity catechists
Saturdays 1-6 p.m. February 10, 17, 24
Spred Center, 30th and Lowe, Chicago
312-842-1039 3rd floor over church

3-1 Role Orientation in English and Spanish
for chairpersons, leader and activity catechists.
Saturday from 1 to 6 p.m. March 10, 17
Spred Center 2956 So. Lowe, Chicago,
312-842-1039, 3rd floor over church

Send Your Mass Intentions to:

Fr. James H. McCarthy
Spred Center
2956 South Lowe, Chicago, Il. 60616

OBSERVATION 2006

6-10 Monday 6:00 p.m. Nov. 6, 20, Dec. 4
11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Nov. 7, 21, Dec. 5
22+ Monday 7:00 p.m. Nov. 6, 20, Dec. 4

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING

Spred Center, English and Spanish
2956 So Lowe, Chicago, 312-842-1039
Saturday, Nov. 11, 1:00 to 6:00
Jackie Bonds and Ramiro Hernandez

Spred Family Liturgies

Nov. 5, Dec. 3, Feb. 4, Mar. 4, April 1, May 6

Mamre Dinner Dance

April 22, 2007, Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace

Spred

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of Chicago, 2956 S. Lowe, Chicago, IL 60616
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