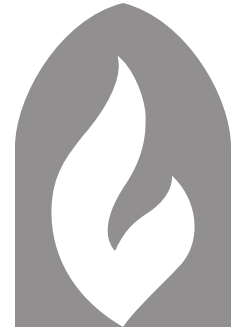


# SPRED



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## **SPRED Staff Update: Sr. Susanne Gallagher SP to retire April 1, 2024 as Associate Director of SPRED**

Sr. Susanne will be retiring from her role as Associate Director of SPRED for the Archdiocese of Chicago after nearly 60 years of service. We are truly grateful for Sr. Susanne and the countless contributions she made to the SPRED ministry and the Archdiocese of Chicago over the past 60 years. The SPRED team plans to honor Sr. Sue at the SPRED family liturgy on April 7 at 11:00 AM at the SPRED Chapel. A reception to celebrate Sr. Susanne's career and upcoming retirement will be held after the liturgy in the SPRED Social Hall. All are welcome to join us and wish Sr. Sue well at the mass and the reception.



## **Embracing Prayer: A SPRED Reflection**

The SPRED group gathers and shares greetings. Some people are upset; some are exhausted; and some are bored. Some seem to light up the room. After a few minutes, each person is busy and focused and quiet — for the most part. Beautiful music plays softly in the background. Some quiet talking happens. Members of the group explore talents and gifts they never knew they had — sketching, painting, working with yarn, ironing cloth napkins. This is prayer.

God is present in each person and in the simple, natural materials with which we work. Our attention and presence, while not explicitly directed toward God, bring a holiness and

the potential for transformation to the entire evening. God as mystery is with us. Our task is to let this transformation happen and gently call individuals back when they stray, usually with a smile and a kind word.

In an experienced SPRED small faith community, the routine is comforting and welcoming. They know that the silent circle, a simple rite of calling, follows. This transition is a gentle and brief show of readiness for the sacred room. We express our joy of being with each other by name. We recall each person missing by name. We become more aware of our physical bodies as we stretch, sit upright and breathe. In turn, each person is called in a whisper to move to the sacred circle.

This is a brief prayer of calling and responding.

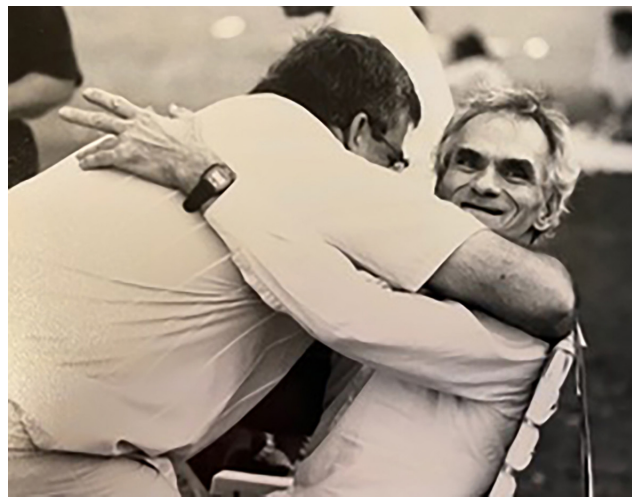
Once in the sacred room, which may be only three or four steps away, each person is comfortably seated in a semi-circle. Before us is the Holy Book on prominent display. Beautiful flowers and a colorful cloth adorn the front of the Bible lying open and facing us. The leader lights the candle signifying that God, an ineffable mystery, is present and we are in a holy place.

Our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities instinctively know there is a difference in this sacred place. They feel safe. They see the adult catechists model the behavior of reverence. The stage is set for prayer.

But now, a twist happens. The leader begins with a tangible human experience — one that each person can somehow grasp. It could be remembering a delicious meal, admiring beauty in nature, being awed by spring growth, feeling the roughness of a piece of tree bark, or relishing the experience of friendship. Senses and memory are stirred through the presentation of objects or photos. Gently, the leader catechist, with an assist from the companions, draws emotion from shared stories.



A gentle hand massage conveys respect.



A warm embrace of welcome.

Now the leader shifts to the greater community of faith. We recall an experience of liturgy, ritual or church tradition. It may be a simple phrase from a prayer or a sacramental experience. The liturgical evocation links to the human experience. No conceptual comparison is made. They are juxtaposed — or placed close together.

It must be a liturgical experience that everyone in the group can understand and relate to. Again, a few moments of silence can deepen the group's sense of sacred memory. This evocation deepens the experience of prayer for the group at this moment. However, it also enhances future prayer, sacramental and liturgical experiences. The SPRED catechetical method has been the deepening of my own prayer life, as well as the catechists who partner with our friends.

Now, the bonded group anticipates the proclamation from the Holy Book. A brief verse or two in simple language supports the goal of the session. Occasionally, a longer narrative or parable is selected. The leader may tell the story as a simple narrative from a longer passage. Repetition or a sung chant enhances the proclamation of God's Word.

Next, the leader gives a message to each person quietly and personally. "Larry, Jesus says to you tonight..." For many catechists and observers, this moment represents the climactic moment of the session. Friends and

catechist anticipate a message delivered with direct and gentle eye contact and a simple holy blessing.



Movement of praise in response to the Word of God.

This simple progression through the evocations of life experiences, liturgical celebrations, proclamation of the Word and a personal message was developed as a catechetical approach for our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I have found this method to be a valuable approach to enhance the prayer life of all.

Our human experience brought into focus side-by-side with Church tradition and Scripture can help us perceive what Jesus says to us — today. And surely, prayer is made up of listening, as well as adoration, petition, intercession and thanksgiving.

The evening closes with a light refreshment or agape. For our friends and catechists, this is an anticipated part of SPRED. We enjoy each other's company and delicious snacks. Laughter and stories flow. This simple sharing is an evocation of Eucharist.

Our friends, their partners and family members often only think of prayer in the traditional formal approach. Or perhaps they know it as petitions or remembrances for those who have died. Occasionally, they express their own needs or the desire for forgiveness through prayer. However, I think of the entire SPRED session, whether with the catechists only in their preparation session or with our friends at the total community session.

My reflections affirm SPRED catechesis as a rich experience of prayer for adult catechists, parents and others who observe our process. However, our friends often surprise us on the cues they receive from their SPRED companions and gradually intuit the gift. A SPRED session is never perfect and rarely happens exactly as we envision. However, if I can think of the entire evening as prayer, the work of the session lasts well beyond a single evening. My relationship with God is furthered, and my image of God is expanded. I know God's work is active in our world.

May your involvement with SPRED lead you to a deeper and more profound life of prayer. May God bless you.



Companions prepare for a prayerful evening.

**Larry Adams is a SPRED leader catechist at St. Bede/St. Denis parish. Larry is also a host for observers and part of the training team at the SPRED Center.**



**CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR****Contact:** 312.842.1039 or SPRED@archchicago.org**SPRED Center:**

2956 South Lowe Avenue, Chicago, IL 60616

**St. Francis de Sales:**

135 South Buesching Road, Lake Zurich, IL 60047

**Queen of Angels:**

4412 North Western Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625

**Observation, SPRED Center** (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | April 8, 22, May 6 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | April 9, 23, May 7 | 7 p.m.

17–21 Group | April 9, 23, May 7 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | April 8, 22, May 6 | 7 p.m.

**Observation, St. Francis de Sales** (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | April 9, 23 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | April 10, 24 | 6 p.m.

**Observation, Queen of Angels** (Make Reservations)

17–21 Group | April 17, May 1 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | April 16, 18, 30, May 2 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | April 20, May 4 | 10 a.m.

**SPRED Family Liturgy, SPRED Center** | 11 a.m.

English: April 7, May 5

Spanish: April 21, May 19

**SPRED Retreat Day for Catechists in Spanish**

Casa Juan Diego at St. Pius V | April 6 | 8:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.

**SPRED Reflection Weekend for Catechists**

St. Benedict Abbey, Antioch, IL | New dates: April 19 – 21

## ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Special Religious Development  
 2956 South Lowe Avenue  
 Chicago, IL 60616  
 312.842.1039  
 spred-chicago.org

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