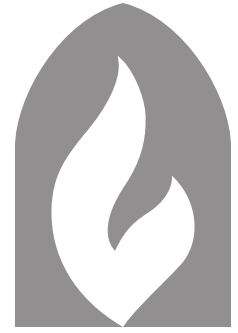


SPRED



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Finding meaning in relationships and shared experiences

My friend is moving to the 17-21 group this fall. I rejoiced when he received the sacrament of confirmation with two other friends. What an uplifting celebration! Forming small communities of faith gives us the opportunity to rediscover the mystery and keep hope alive.

In its orientation course for the volunteers in its catechetical program, SPRED uses an approach which directly reflects the Method Vivre, life as a community.

This method is not only followed by SPRED communities in the Archdiocese of Chicago but in SPRED communities developed in dioceses around the world.

Consistency is important. We as community religious workers want to all be on the same page so that our friends can move freely from one SPRED group to another as they age.



Grace before the agape.

We also need to trust that Method Vivre is reflected in the SPRED ministry of each and every group.

Existentialism and the beauty of being

On the first day of the three-day orientation, we become acquainted with essentialism in contrast to existentialism. In other words, we explore the difference between being and having. Existentialism is a philosophy that places the person at its center. It directs itself away from factors that demean, demoralize and depersonalize a person.

In our age, we tend to identify a person by his or her functions. We sometimes root a person's being in what one has — such as money, position or influence. The emphasis rests on what a person has instead of who a person is. We can easily dispose of things that we have, whether it be property, possessions, people or relationships. Sometimes, we possess friends and use them for our own gains when we should be relishing each other's presence.

Existentialism focuses on a person in his or her historical context, being and uniqueness. Existentialism asks, who am I? How do I recognize and confront my moment of truth? It situates a person as man or woman and supports the individual as opposed to the masses and the object.¹

Existentialism sees the person as its center. For the individual to become a person, one must find the truth for oneself. This truth must become so strong that it becomes a value for which the person would risk one's life. It must be so ingrained in one's life that a person could

claim to “be in” the truth. This truth is an individual kind, one discovered by each person within oneself.

Discovering who we are

To help us discover our subjectivity, we need other people, not in a possessive way but in relationship. We are called to participate in the life of others so that the other sees us as individuals who care. We should ask ourselves: How can we relate to people with our eyes, gestures, attitude, tone of voice and words chosen? How can we express our vulnerability as human beings burdened with cares?

We are made in the image and likeness of God. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel believed that a person needs society and God. He placed this need in the context of community. We affirm this concept and work to form communities composed of individuals. “Having” allows us to dispose of relationships whereas “being” compels us to make ourselves available to others in a personal way.²

Enriching our lives and the life of the Church

Life becomes rich when we are motivated by our love for our fellow men and women and by our love for God. We need to make time for a one-on-one relationship with God to give our lives greater meaning and depth.

Life is a mystery that demands involvement. We need to rediscover the mystery. A community like the Church comes together as people relating interpersonally and, thereby, transcending their situations out of deep respect for the other person.³

The steps to building community

How do we become a small community of faith in SPRED sessions? First, we are present without cell phones and clocks. We need to commit to all sessions in a SPRED year. We need to share our personal lives and answer the question posed at the catechist preparation sessions where the celebration room becomes sacred to us.

We gather in a semicircle around the Holy Book, which is adorned with fresh flowers and a candle. We need to express our love



A warm welcome to a SPRED session.

for God by listening to the shared Scripture, the personal message given to each person, and the gestures and song that conclude the session around the Holy Book.

We are steeped in God's truth and build relationships with people whom we trust on this journey to grow in friendship with one another. In the SPRED session with our friends, the total community session, we need to be present, forgoing any other invitation that night.

We begin with the preparation process in which we choose a work based on art, our senses or everyday life to find that inner peace after a very busy day of doing. After 45 minutes to an hour, we are invited to the silence circle, where we are personally welcomed and wait to hear our name called — an invitation into our celebration area.

There, we share the session with our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities based on an object, picture or sculpture that helps us recall a personal experience. The rest of the session is like the catechist session so we can be witnesses to our friends, witnesses of this loving God who calls us together in this ministry.

Both sessions conclude with the sharing of food and drink around a beautifully set table that everyone creates. We sing a song of thanks to God or say grace. We enjoy each person around our table, especially those nearest to us. We then clear the table and put the dishes into basins. The community gathers for a closing song. Our group sings “Shalom,

Oh My Friends.” Then, we open the door to the waiting families.

Fr. James McCarthy, our founder and former director wrote:

“Our friends – of all ages – in SPRED have humanized me. Method Vivre is a gift. It has given a profound focus to my life. Through the process of evocation, other levels of meaning, a sense of belonging, silence, music, gestures – all have helped me discover beauty all around me.”

“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... 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.

“...we can build bonds even without talking. We can live within these bonds and be happy to be together. We can sense a deep assent internally in our friends. We see change before our eyes. Something is happening.

“We know in a deep way ourselves that an experience is real and that this is a kind of ‘knowing’ that is deeper than the verbal exchanges that lead to essential knowing. Our friends may not be able to recite answers in reply to our questions, but we know that they live a life that is more important. We can reflect back on what has happened; they only experience ‘something’ that leaves them at peace and full of joy.”⁴

The fruits of community

During the summer, I shared a meal with two former SPRED catechists who were part of the SPRED ministry that welcomed people living at



A beautiful agape table.

the Elisabeth Ludeman Developmental Center in Park Forest.

They volunteered back in 1983 and over the years we have kept in touch and share time together. Recently, we spent three hours enjoying memories and naming the friends and fellow catechists in our former SPRED communities. One of the catechists continues to keep in touch with her SPRED friend’s sister and son and brought photos of them. The sister often came with her mom to our annual Christmas party at the home of the catechist.

Relationships that are lived in community are cherished. As a helper catechist at the SPRED Center on Tuesday evenings, I feel these same connections in my present SPRED group. You can observe this community and see for yourself how we enjoy each other’s presence and relish each one’s commitment over the years. If you are new to SPRED, we welcome you. If you are a longtime member, we cherish you.

Elizabeth Sivek SPRED Chicago community religious worker

1. Helmut, Loiskandl, *Man in Society: Facts and Visions*, “Man and Society – the Existentialist View,” Gerald Kreyche, p. 159
2. Marcel, Gabriel, “Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary,” Introduction by James Collins, p. VI.
3. Sivek, Elizabeth, “The Individual Man as opposed to the Institutional Man”, DePaul University, Spring Quarter, 1974, P&R 156 Class – Man in Process.
4. McCarthy, Fr. James H., “Forever In Our Hearts,” found in SPRED Calendar, 2023, between the months of June and July.

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

Core Team Orientation (Eng., Span.): SPRED Center

Intro to SPRED (2-1): Feb. 10, 17, 24 | 1 – 6 p.m.

Role Orientation (3-1): Mar. 9, 16 | 1 – 6 p.m.

Helper Catechist Orientation:

Spanish: Mar. 2 | 1 – 6 p.m. | SPRED Center

English: Mar. 9 | 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. | Queen of Apostles

English: Mar. 23 | 1 – 6 p.m. | SPRED Center

Observation, SPRED Center (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | Feb. 26, Mar. 11 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | Feb. 27, Apr. 9, 23 | 7 p.m.

17–21 Group | Feb. 27, Apr. 10, 24 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | Feb. 26, Apr. 9, 23 | 7 p.m.

Observation, Queen of Angels (Make Reservations)

17–21 Group | Feb. 21 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | Feb. 20, 22 | 7 p.m.

Observation, St. Francis de Sales (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | Feb. 20, Mar. 5, Apr. 9 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | Feb. 21, Mar. 6, Mar. 20 | 6 p.m.

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

English: Mar. 3, Apr. 7, May 5

Spanish: Mar. 17, Apr. 21, May 19

SPRED Spanish Retreat Day for Catechists

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

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