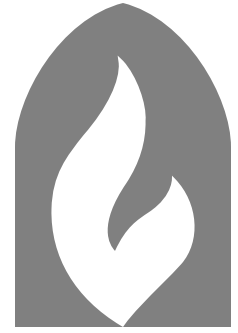


SPRED



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Message from the Interim Editor

Every month, the Pope asks the universal church to pray for a specific intention. For December, he invites the universal church to pray for people with disabilities:

“We pray that people living with disabilities may be at the center of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programs that value their active participation.”

We are grateful for his drawing attention to the needs of people with disabilities. Through this intention, the pope challenges local parishes to address the attitudinal barriers that prevent so

many of our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities from fully participating in the liturgical life of the parish.

He writes, “Creating a completely accessible parish does not only mean eliminating physical barriers. It also assumes that we stop talking about ‘them’ and start talking about ‘us.’”

We can only foster a sense of belonging in our parishes when we embrace people with disabilities as one of ‘us.’

In this month’s newsletter, Fr. Jose Santiago reflects on how we can foster a sense of belonging in our parish communities through SPRED liturgies.



Family members are honored to participate in the procession of the Bread.

Creating a sense of unity

In September, I celebrated my one-year anniversary as the chaplain and associate director of SPRED. It has been a remarkable year, and I am grateful for the opportunities to meet so many of our catechists, friends and families of friends from around the archdiocese. Each of these encounters filled me with joy and hope.

One of the greatest privileges of my role as SPRED chaplain is celebrating SPRED liturgies. During this past year, I not only had the opportunity to celebrate several SPRED liturgies at the archdiocesan SPRED chapel but also participated in SPRED liturgies at various parishes across the archdiocese.

I am always touched and deeply moved by these liturgical celebrations. These liturgies help our friends with disabilities to develop a sense of belonging within the parish. Celebrating a SPRED Mass at a regularly scheduled liturgy can help all parishioners become aware of the presence of

people with disabilities and can help parishioners form relationships with our friends.

Whether a celebrant or participant, I find the SPRED liturgies to be peaceful, prayerful and elegant. We begin each liturgy by welcoming each other and expressing gratitude for those who have gathered. We enter prayer, silence, accompaniment and a mystery that is a Eucharistic engagement.

It is important that the celebrant diligently prepares the Liturgy of the Word when preparing for a SPRED liturgy. Typically, the focus is on the first reading, the psalm and the Gospel.

The use of gestures during the proclamation of the readings assists our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities, especially if they have a hearing impairment or an attention disorder. It is critical that the celebrant work closely with the adult catechists who will be interpreting the readings to ensure that the gestures are sacred and flow with the readings.

During the SPRED liturgy, the celebrant usually does not preach a traditional homily. Rather, the celebrant crafts a short message that can be delivered to the congregation with simple gestures.

The message is usually repeated multiple times to allow the congregation to fully absorb the message. To prepare the message, a celebrant needs to access the golden thread within the readings for the day. For me, this preparation involves partaking in Lectio Divina and listening attentively to what Christ is attempting to communicate to me and his beloved friends.



Parents and son find comfort and belonging at the SPRED Chapel.



Companions bring flowers to dress the altar table.

During a SPRED Mass, we try to understand and become awakened to what Christ is asking us to share with our friends in a brief phrase, no more than one to three sentences. As individuals, we repeat, "Jesus says to you today." Later as a congregation, we close with, "Jesus says to us today."

The phrase is repeated slowly, personally and deliberately. It is a final proclamation of Jesus' intimate statement of love and challenge to our friends, family and the congregation gathered to be nurtured by the Word of God.

We use Lectio Divina, repetitively entering and hearing the Word because Jesus wishes to engage and affect us, too. Jesus wishes to minister to those gathered with his words of refreshment and love because we are created in his image and likeness.

We continue to be loved into existence and the embrace of His love. This statement reminds me that our friends have been loved into existence not only by our wonderful God but by their parents, siblings, family and friends who have sustained them and encouraged them to thrive beyond society's expectations.

For many of our friends, too many words are a distraction; verbal communication can be

a hindrance to the beautiful gestures that accompany the readings — movements and images that make it easier for them to engage, grasp and make the message their own.



Warm greetings by Fr. Jose help all to feel welcome.

As Fr. James H. McCarthy, founder of SPRED (June 2000), intuited, “This set form communicates personally, intimately, relationally. It is not discursive, not topic to topic procedure in any analytical way. Nor is it once removed, a third person insertion which abstracts, objectifies the text. It keeps within the form of ritual, a narrative context, as it were.”

After the prayer of the faithful, we enter a period of silence. In anticipation, we wait for our friends to prepare the environment around the Eucharistic table with flowers, altar cloth and candles.

A friend, accompanied by a catechist, then presents the gifts of bread and wine. Each is brought up slowly and deliberately, signifying the dignity and shared love of our friends and community members.

Of the presentation of the gifts, theologian Karl Rahner wrote, “It is something external that springs from within ... It becomes a visible expression of humans moving through the space of their existence toward the goal.”

One of the most beautiful moments in this prayerful procession occurred last Easter season when some of our friends received the sacraments of confirmation and First Communion.

Anita, a non-verbal friend with Downs Syndrome, was dressed in a beautiful, white lace dress and accompanied by her parents. She gingerly processed to the altar with freshly baked bread from the SPRED kitchen.

As she approached, tears came to my eyes. I knew that the COVID-19 pandemic delayed this moment for almost three years. It was a blessed and graceful moment for all of us.



Fr. Jose Santiago leads the community in a celebration of praise and unity.

Come celebrate with us the many blessings and God's grace of ministering to our friends as they exhibit the joy of God's presence in our midst.

From October through May, Sunday liturgies are held on the first and third Sundays of the month at 11 a.m. at the archdiocesan SPRED chapel. The first Sunday, we celebrate in English; the third Sunday is in Spanish.

Fr. Jose M. Santiago, O.P.
Chaplain and Associate Director

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 (English):

Feb. 3 | 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. | St. Francis de Sales

Observation, SPRED Center (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | Feb 12, 26 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | Feb 13, 27 | 7 p.m.

17-21 Group | Feb 13, 27 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | Feb 12, 26 | 7 p.m.

Observation, Queen of Angels (Make Reservations)

17–21 Group | Feb. 7, 21 | 7 p.m.

22+ Group | Feb. 6, 8, 20, 22 | 7 p.m.

Observation, St. Francis de Sales (Make Reservations)

6–10 Group | Jan 16, 30 | 6 p.m.

11–16 Group | Jan. 17, 31 | 6 p.m.

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

English: Feb. 4, Mar. 3

Spanish: Feb. 18, Mar. 17

Reflection Weekend for SPRED Catechists

Jan. 12-14, 2024 | St. Benedict Abbey Retreat Center

Register at queenofangelsspred.orgInfo: Julia Hess, 773.539.7510 or JHess@archchicago.org

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