

During the Easter season many Spred groups are making pastoral decisions to celebrate the sacraments of initiation with our friends who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. Perhaps some basic insights will give firm footing for those making these decisions.

The fundamental sacrament is the church. This basic reality is important because individual sacraments depend on the church, celebrate the mystery of the church and build up the vigor of the church. The individual sacraments are moments in the life of the church that are occasions for the gracious gift of God, grace, to be active and life-giving. This event may be described in many ways. Here are a few.

The Church in Christ is a sacrament - a sign and instrument- of communion with God and of the unity of the whole human race. 1

The Church is the abiding presence of grace which is Christ in the world. The Church is truly the fundamental sacrament, the well-spring of the sacraments. 2

The Church is the fundamental sacrament because it is totally dependent on the source-sacrament of God, the encounter of humanity with God which is Christ. 3

Every sacrament is first of all a Church event. The Church is the fundamental sacrament of the risen Christ. 4

The Church is the flock of which God foretold that he himself would be the shepherd.5

The Church is the People of God.6

With these thoughts firmly in place, we will be able to avoid seeing the Church as only the dispenser of individual sacraments in a purely extrinsic and superficial manner. The Church is not merely established to meet certain needs. The Church is the perpetual presence of Christ in the work of redemption. 7 So the Spred catechist is right on track who is working to build a community of faith, a little church. This belonging prepares our friends for the assembly of worship and sacramental life. The primary locus of the Church is the celebrating community.8 Sacraments are what we do together as Church. Moreover sacraments belong to the order of doing, they are not ideas. 9 That means that the preparation for sacramental initiation is not made up primarily of truths to be explained but activities to be lived together beginning in the Spred faith community.



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Our friends need the experience of a sacramental event before they can reflect on what it means. “True catechesis takes time but is often most effective **after** a sacramental celebration when even greater meaning is discovered based on common lived experience.”¹⁰ Extraneous things such as artificial time lines (i.e. a 2 year orientation), memory work and prayers beyond the capacity of the person have little to do with a clear focus on the sacramental experience. While a general orientation to the sacraments is required, the true nature of the sacrament needs to be engaged and reflected upon later. This means Spred catechists try to avoid getting muddled with details that are beside the point.

What is the focus for the sacrament of Confirmation? Nearly all those who come to Spred have had Baptism as infants but the sacrament of Confirmation is close to Baptism as originally it was part of the Baptism celebration. Over time it took on a life of its own. However, many pastoral leaders see the wisdom in keeping close to the mentality of Baptism. As the sacrament confirms the person as a member of the assembly of the church. It confers a Church identity. This identity allows us to have a place, our own place, in the assembly.¹¹ We now belong - officially!

Agreeing to belong to the small ecclesial unity, the Spred community of faith, is the preparation for Confirmation. The person is readied to enter the assembly of the faithful with full dignity, to be anointed with the oil of chrism. The celebration takes place at the same liturgy as the person’s first Communion since Confirmation is ordered toward Communion. This is evident on Holy Saturday Night, during the Easter Vigil. Newly Baptised Christians are Confirmed and receive first Communion at the same liturgy. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, it is common practice for the parish priest, in harmony with the Easter Vigil, to confirm our friends before Communion at the same liturgy. The parish leaders or the families may always request that a Bishop preside but the focus of the sacrament is not the celebrant. One is anointed with the holy oil to celebrate belonging to the assembly of believers who are made one with the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to first Communion it is easy to get distracted. Remember, no matter how hard we try we cannot explain everything. We live Communion in our bodies, our own bodies and at the same time in the body of the Church. This works below the level of consciousness on the pre-reflective level of the symbolic and not as an object of discourse (as indispensable as this may be at another time.)¹²

To orient our friends to the celebration, on the day before the event, we bake the bread for the celebration and taste the wine that will be used. The remote preparation has already taken place by helping the person agree to belong to the assembly, by the development of a sense of the sacred during the time of catechesis and by the willingness to share food and drink with others during the agape. Since the sacrament of Communion is what we do, we prepare by what we do. Later we reflect on what we did.

With this clearly in mind, other issues are no longer problems. The most obvious problem in the past was how to deal with the question of the age of reason. Originally called the age of discretion, it meant the ability to tell right from wrong. Over time, this became the age of reason which was artificially attached to the chronological age of seven, and later to the mental age of seven. Then there was the concern that the person could verbally explain the difference between the Eucharistic bread and ordinary bread. Both concerns are beside the point. There needs to be

criteria for sacrament participation that corresponds to experience. Over many years the International Catholic Child Bureau, in liaison with Rome, developed criteria that found its way into the Pastoral Guidelines for Access to the Sacraments of Initiation and Reconciliation for Persons with Developmental Disabilities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, by Cardinal Bernardin. The criteria for admission to Communion involve the person's "desire, relationship with people who share faith and prayer, and a sense of the sacred as manifested in behavior." 13

There are elements that Spred catechists have to put in place as it is clear that the Lord desires to be in communion with us and we desire communion according to our capacities. The capacity of the person with intellectual and developmental disability has to be looked at squarely and realistically. On the most basic level, the person's ability to eat and drink needs to be assessed. If the person has a celiac problem and cannot eat wheat, other approved bread needs to be obtained. 14 If the person has a hard time accepting bread and wine from others, the parents can receive first and then give bread and wine to their children. The person's hesitancy is often put aside by the experience of baking the bread the day before the event. It has become familiar as bread. If the person cannot sustain going before the assembly, the bread and wine can be brought to them. Each of us receives according to our capacity.

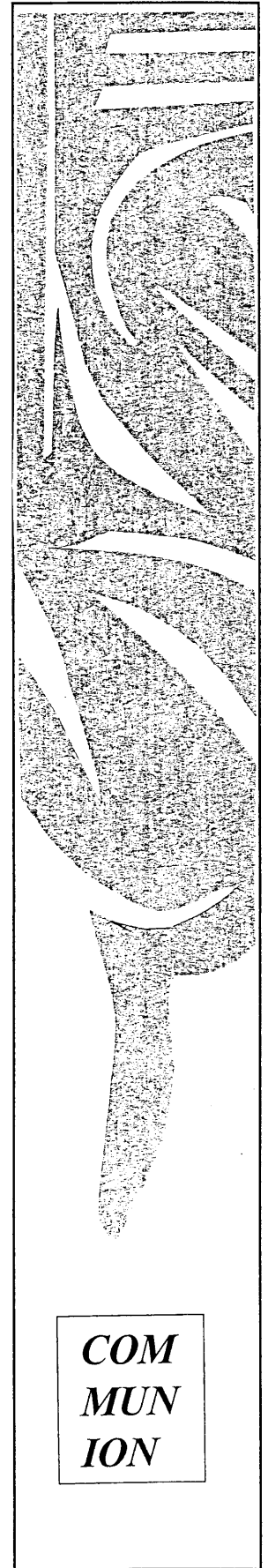
Catechesis and Liturgy go hand in hand. One influences the other over and over. After a sacramental celebration the Spred catechist deepens the person's awareness by calling to mind, remembering, all the elements of the event. This is done during the liturgical evocation of a catechetical session. Obviously there are no specific sessions before the celebration but there are many sessions after the event that draw on the experience.

It is worthwhile to remember that the person's Catholic identity is authenticated by sacramental certificates and notations made in parish records. As persons with intellectual and developmental disability makes their way through life, they are apt to live apart from their families and outlive members of their families. They need these records to have their rights as Catholics respected, the right to belong to a community of faith, the right to participate in Sunday liturgies, and the right to a Christian burial.

Others involved in the lives of our friends are important at the time of celebrations. Families always have hopes and fears. Hope that their loved one will be welcomed and fear of failure. The catechist has to exercise great care in exercising the trust that has been given to them by family members. The same holds true for members of various group homes and living facilities. The celebrant also needs careful consideration. Not every celebrant is immediately at ease with our friends. They need some time with the catechists and friends to be able to work well together during the celebrations. So we see that sacraments are based on every day events such as gathering, sharing a meal, washing, anointing and embracing - all ways in which God's presence is celebrated by the People of God.

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington
Chicago Spred

1. *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican Council 1964 # 1.
2. Karl Rahner, *The Church and Sacraments*, Herder and Herder, 1963, p. 18.
3. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, Liturgical Press, 1997, p. xxi 4. Ibid p. xxiii. 5. *Lumen Gentium* #6.
7. Rahner p. 11, 8. Chauvet p. 30-31. 9. Ibid p. 85. 10. Chicago Guidelines p 5. 11. Chauvet 348.
12. Ibid 341. 13. Chicago Guidelines p. 5. 14. Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde Missouri



SPRED CALENDAR

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

May 1

MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE MAY 15

DRURY LANE, OAKBROOK

OBSERVATION

6-10 Mondays 6:00 p.m. May 9

11-16 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. May 10

17-21 Tuesday 7:00 p.m. May 10

22+ Mondays 7:00 p.m. May 9

SPRING PLANNING MEETINGS

Vicariate I Deanery A,B,C

Wednesday, May 18

St. Francis de Sales/Lake Zurich

Vicariate I Deanery D,E,F

Wednesday, May 25

St. John the Evangelist/Streamwood

Vicariate II Deaneries A,E,F

Tuesday, May 17

St. Nicholas/Evanston

Vicariate II Deaneries B,C,D

Thursday, May 19

Queen of Angels/Chicago

Vicariate III Deanery E (Spanish)

Wednesday, May 25

St. Pius V/Chicago

Vicariate III Deaneries A,B

Vicariate IV Deaneries A,D

Tuesday, May 24

Santa Maria Addolorata/Chicago

Vicariate IV Deaneries B,C,E

Thursday, May 26

St. Louise de Marillac/La Grange Park

Vicariate III Deanery C

Tuesday, May 31

Spred Center/Lowe Ave.

Vicariate V Deanery A,B,C

Tuesday, May 24

Christ the King/Chicago

Vicariate V Deanery D,E

Wednesday, May 25

St. Patricia/Hickory Hills

Vicariate VI Deanery B,C,D

Tuesday, May 17

St. Benedict/Blue Island

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