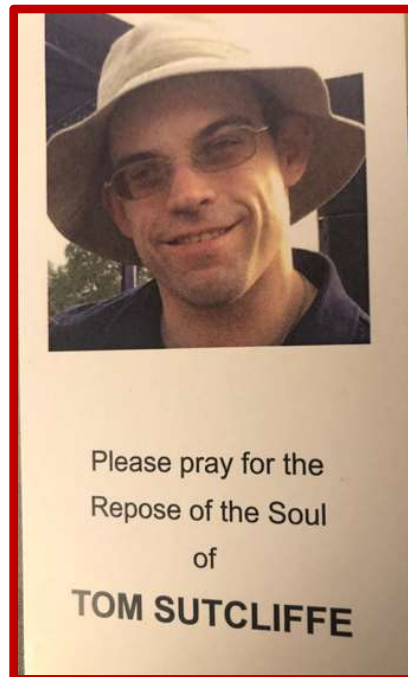




MARCH NEWS

A Memorial Mass for the life of Tom was celebrated on Saturday 15 January at St. Teresa Of Lisieux. It was well attended by family, SPRED Catechists and representatives from the L'Arche community.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.



It is the feast of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary on 19th March.

Psalm 89

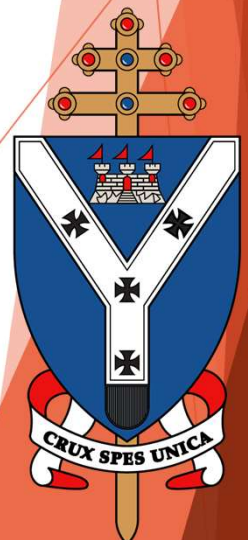
I will sing of thy steadfast love, O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations.

For thy steadfast love was established for ever, thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens. Thou hast said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations.'" [Selah]

He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

Sister Cecilia Dowd together with all Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul renew their vows on 25th March.
It is the feast of the annunciation.

I ask god to give me a grateful heart and help me to always pray as Mary prayed.





News from George Square

Tuesday evening, 8th March saw the return of our SPRED Group's return to George Square after two years. It was a great evening with smiles galore as we greeted one another from a distance, shared Jesus' message and all our news. We were able to sing SHALOM together which was the highlight of the evening. We are back!



The core leaders group held their First face to face meeting since February 2020 in George Square on 19th February. It was wonderful to meet up face to face again!



Pat Edie has just set up a new afternoon group in Rosewell. "Great to meet up today and see so many happy faces."



Here is Katy celebrating her birthday with a chocolate cake.



Dates for your diaries

SATURDAY 18 JUNE 2022

RETREAT day at GILLIS

Exact timings to be confirmed

All are Welcome



TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2022

COMMISSIONING MASS

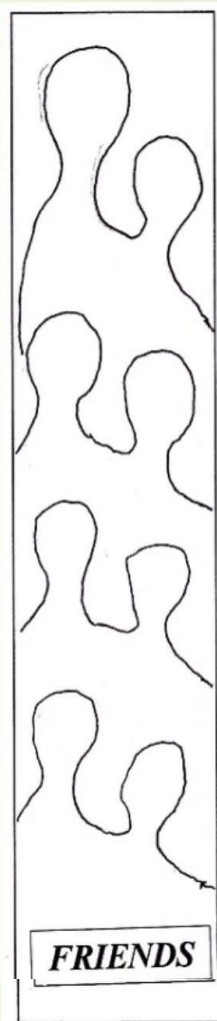
at St Kentigern,

Parkgrove Avenue, Edinburgh

At 7pm

All Welcome





I recently celebrated my second lockdown birthday. Over my birthday weekend, I was happy to receive doorstep and garden visits from friends, together with cards, messages and video calls. I even managed a virtual party on Zoom with friends who have been an important part of my life for over fifty years. There is no question that I would have preferred to celebrate by having people round or by going out to dinner but what counted was being able to spend time with people I am blessed to call friends.

Friendship is a basic human need even if, as the writer C.S. Lewis suggested, it is strictly unnecessary. Friendship, he said, “has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.”¹ You may or may not agree with the first part of Lewis’ statement, but during this past year many of us have realized anew just how valuable our friendships are. Deprived of much of our daily social contact, we have become more aware of our need for those people who care about us and who want to share our joys, sorrows and anxieties and who are interested in the trivial events of our lives. Confined to our own locality and unable to enter other people’s homes, we have had to find ways of keeping these important relationships alive. We have Zoomed, Facetimed, sat in gardens, gone for walks or stood at doors, braving the cold so that we could be with our friends.

So friendship matters. It matters to us in our SPRED groups too. One of the first things we learn in our initial SPRED catechist training is that the term for the people with learning disabilities who come to SPRED is “friend.” Why friend? Well, because as the late Jesuit spiritual guide, Fr. William Barry says, friendship is the best analogy for the relationship God wants with us.² At the Last Supper Jesus said to those gathered with him, “I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends.”³ In those words Jesus is calling humankind back to the relationship that God wanted from the beginning.

In SPRED we are called to respond to God’s offer of friendship and we are called to be friends with one another.

New catechists come to SPRED with a great generosity and willingness to offer friendship to someone who is differently abled but perhaps a little unsure about how to do that. One cause of that hesitancy is that our friendships in SPRED are a bit different from our other friendships. For a start, they involve one person who is legally a child or a vulnerable adult and one who is not. That difference places the SPRED catechist in a position of trust and subjects the relationship to certain rules imposed by the Church and state in order to keep the legally vulnerable person safe.

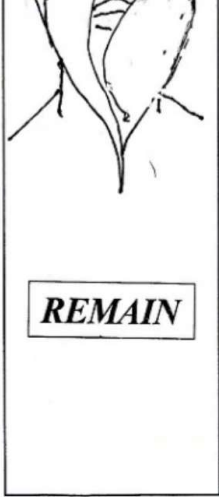
A second difference is that one person in the relationship has a particular role in respect to the other. The catechist’s task is to share faith with their friend. If anything, however, that is an advantage. Their friend also has faith and life experience to share, so there is a place from which to begin the relationship.

Finally, there is the way in which friendships begin. In the world that is more easily open to those of us without disabilities, we make friends at work, through a shared interest or are introduced by someone who knows us both. In SPRED, however, a match is made. Sometimes there is an element of choice as to who is the best match for whom, for example when we start a new group. At other times there is less choice. We have someone in a group who needs a friend and another willing to begin their SPRED journey. While we do not put together two people who are unlikely to get on, often we have to hope that with goodwill on both sides, the relationship will blossom.

We know that those who are differently abled have the same need for friendship as everyone else. We have laws governing physical accessibility to buildings and laws against discrimination. These meet certain needs of our friends, but the human need for friendship cannot be met by legislation. As Jennie Weiss Block wrote almost twenty years ago, “No laws, bishops’ letters, human service paradigms, social programmes or parish accessibility committees will ever truly provide access to people with disabilities. Liberation and real access to the community will only be realized through personal relationships that develop into genuine friendships where shared vulnerability is the rule, not the exception. Accessibility is not the same thing as hospitality.”⁴

A friend is one who is with the other by choice, not through obligation or for financial reward





REMAIN

The only reward friendship seeks is friendship itself. We see how our friends flourish when someone is a friend to them. We know how we flourish when someone is a friend to us. Time and again when catechists speak of their SPRED groups, they speak of the depth of friendships that are formed there. We have proof of the value of friendship every day in our SPRED communities of faith.

So what of the new catechist with the desire to offer friendship but unsure of how it will work? Sometimes a new catechist will look at the depth of friendships between others in the group and wonders how she will ever get there. At this point our new catechist will be wise to remember that all friendships are different and that friendship takes time to develop. Like every friendship, a friendship in SPRED grows out of a mutual attraction. There is something in this person that makes me want to get to know them better and that makes me willing to disclose something of myself in return. In “matched” friendship in SPRED the “something” that draws us to our new friend is the fact that when we stand in their presence, we are in the presence of God who dwells in both of us.

So our new catechist has a desire to offer friendship and that desire seems to be reciprocated. How is that friendship to put down roots and flourish? Since in SPRED our friendships are lived in the context of our faith, the obvious thing to do is to look at some ways in which Jesus models friendship. We look to him to show us what Christian friendship is so that we can do the same.

All good friendship is marked by faithfulness. There are only so many times a friend can let us down before the friendship fades. The model that Jesus shows us is of faithfulness even in the face of terrible betrayal. Peter, the one who said he would never desert Jesus, abandoned and denied him, yet Jesus commissions him to look after his sheep.

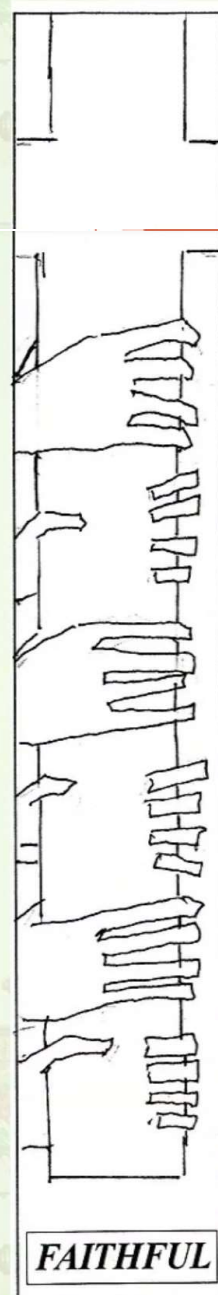
In the parable of the prodigal son Jesus shows us the depth of God's longing for His faithless children. The faithless younger son, who had effectively said he wished his father dead and gone his own way, eventually returns out of desperation. When the father sees his son on the road coming toward him, he goes out to embrace him. He doesn't reproach him for the past nor even mention his less than perfect motives for returning. He simply takes the little his son can offer and welcomes him back. The father has been faithful to the son when the son was not.⁵

The beginning of friendship in SPRED is faithfulness. Even when the catechist is still learning what to do, is still at the very beginning of getting to know his or her friend, and perhaps not even sure if the friend likes them, the very act of getting to the session on time and waiting quietly with an activity for the friend to arrive says, “I am here for you. You can trust me.” Even if the previous session has not gone too well, the faithfulness of the catechist who is there at the next session ready to begin again shows that the friend can trust the catechist to be faithful. The friend learns what faithfulness looks like. The friend can trust God to be a faithful friend.

Friends want the best for each other. God wants the best for each of us. In the prophet Jeremiah we read, “Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”⁶ When we look at Jesus in the Gospels, we see how he wants his friends to be the best they can be. He wants his friends to be happy, to know the true happiness that comes from living in God's love. In SPRED, we also want our friends to be happy, to do well. We accept them exactly as they are, but we also encourage and stretch them. We encourage independence; we encourage sharing with others; we encourage them to contribute their gifts and we rejoice in every bit of growth that we witness. We want our friends to be happy. We rejoice with them in the good things that come their way. We stand up for them. We have their back.

Jesus wants the best for his friends so he wants them to be with him in his Father's house “...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”⁷ SPRED catechists also want their friends to be at home in their Father's house. We want our friends not just to be allowed to participate in their parish communities but we want their contributions to their communities to be sought after, valued and celebrated. Our desire for them is to take their own unique place in the community, a place that is no less important than anyone else's place but a place that only they can fill and a place that will be forever empty if they are not allowed and empowered to fill it. We prepare our friends for this by encouraging them to feel at home in our celebration room around the Holy Book. We show them that this is a place where they belong.

As we get to know our new friend, we learn their likes and dislikes, not by endlessly asking questions but by being observant and allowing our friend to lead us. We make room in our hearts for our friends and when our friendships are visible in our parishes, they have the power to encourage others to build friendships with our friends too.



FAITHFUL

Lisbeth Raeside
Director, SPRED Glasgow, Scotland