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**MULTIMODAL INQUIRY OF SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT
(SPRED) PROGRAM: TOWARDS A FRIENDSHIP MODEL OF
INCLUSIVE CATECHETICAL COMMUNICATION**

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9 August 2024

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Acceptance Page:

This paper prepared by **MARLON BOBIER VARGAS** with the title: **MULTIMODAL INQUIRY OF SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT (SPRED) PROGRAM: TOWARDS A FRIENDSHIP MODEL OF INCLUSIVE CATECHETICAL COMMUNICATION”** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Course.

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Biographical Sketch

Marlon Bobier Vargas, SVD is a Catholic religious-missionary priest with the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). He began his journey with the SVD Chicago Province in the US, and professed his evangelical vows as a religious-missionary on August 8, 2015. He was ordained a priest on August 15, 2020. He serves as a mission secretary and vocation director in the Spain Province.

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He completed a Master in Divinity (Theological Studies) from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, USA, in 2020. His studies focused on World Mission and Liturgical Studies.

Father Vargas' work focuses on his faith, education, and the mission of the Society of the Divine Word. His efforts in religious education and service to individuals with special needs highlight his commitment to fostering an inclusive and spiritually enriched community.

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Dedication

For my dearest

SPRED faith community, catechists, parents, friends,

and most especially to Fr. James McCarthy+

For my family,

especially to my dearest mother

Maria Justita Bobier Tinguha

For my religious missionary congregation,

Society of the Divine Word

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
University Permission Page	ii
Acceptance Page	iii
Biographical Sketch	iv
Acknowledgment	v
Dedication	viii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
ABSTRACT	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Objectives of the Study	12
Significance of the Study	14
Scope and limitation of the Study	16
Definition of terminologies	21
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	24
The Evolving Nature of Catechetical Praxis	25
Understanding and Supporting Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities	36
Identity, Role, and Challenges of Catechists in Contemporary Catechesis	39
Navigating Communication Barriers in Inclusion Efforts	52
Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Inclusivity	57
Current Trends and Challenges in Communication for Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities	61
The Future of Communication for Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities	64

CHAPTER III: FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY	66
CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY	77
Research Design	79
Data Collection Procedures	80
Data Recording Procedures	86
Data Analysis Procedures	91
Interpretation	95
Trustworthiness of the Findings	97
CHAPTER V: BRIDGING WORLDS: THE TECHNOLOGICAL REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY	99
CHAPTER VI: BUILDING CONNECTIONS: THE SOCIAL REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY	150
CHAPTER VII: NARRATING FAITH: THE DISCURSIVE REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY	184
CHAPTER VIII: SENSEMAKING AND THEORIZING OF SPRED'S COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES	234
CHAPTER IX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION CONCLUSION	324
REFERENCES	342
APPENDICES	365

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Communicative Ecology Model as Analytical Framework	68
Table 2 Key Steps in Theoretical Analysis	83
Table 3 Procedures in Socio-Spatial Analysis	86
Table 4 Friendship Framework and Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication Model	310
Table 5 Friendship Framework and Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication	330
Table 6 Sample SPRED Newsletters Content Analysis	365

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Layout	118
Figure 2 Symbolic elements	119
Figure 3 Altar	120
Figure 4 Candle	121
Figure 5 Bible	122
Figure 6 Flowers	123
Figure 7 Lighting, ambience, visual accessibility	124
Figure 8 Spatial arrangement	126
Figure 9 Indoor plants of the SPRED catechetical environment	128
Figure 10 Closer look at the catechetical celebration environment	129
Figure 11 Facilitating SPRED session in the environmental setting	133

Abstract

This multimodal inquiry investigates inclusive catechetical communication within the Special Religious Development (SPRED) program in the Archdiocese of Chicago, focusing on persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). The central research question examines how catechists implement and refine inclusive catechetical communication to engage and support PDID effectively. Existing research highlights significant gaps in catechetical programs tailored for PDID, often due to the limitations of traditional methods and materials.

This research addresses these gaps by employing a triangulation approach, integrating content analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis. The study utilized SPRED newsletters, educational materials, religious artifacts, and observations of the catechetical environment to gather comprehensive insights. This multifaceted methodology ensures a robust understanding of the dynamics involved in inclusive catechetical praxis.

Findings reveal the critical importance of adapted communication methods, accessible educational materials, and supportive physical environments. Key themes include the necessity for continuous adaptation of materials to meet PDID needs, the positive impact of sensory-friendly features, and the role of community support in fostering inclusivity. The socio-spatial analysis highlights the importance of well-organized, accessible environments that enhance engagement and interaction.

This research highlights the significant benefits of inclusive catechetical communication, such as enhanced spiritual and personal growth, deeper emotional connections, and a profound sense of belonging for PDID. The study underscores the necessity of strategies like non-verbal communication, emotional support, sensory-

friendly materials, and community integration. Catechists' reflections and artifact analyses reveal that inclusive practices foster mutual enrichment, reduce social exclusion, and celebrate unique contributions, thereby promoting a more inclusive and supportive faith community.

Central to this study is the Friendship Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication, which encompasses three key dimensions: intimacy, inter-animating collaboration, and interculturality.

Intimacy involves creating supportive relationships through personal engagement and emotional support. Catechists use gestures, facial expressions, and symbols to communicate effectively with individuals who may have difficulty with verbal communication. This dimension fosters trust and meaningful engagement, ensuring participants feel valued and supported.

Inter-animating transformation focuses on mutual growth and learning through reflective practice and empowerment. Catechists and participants engage in activities that promote mutual learning and spiritual connections. This collaborative environment allows both catechists and participants to gain insights from each other, leading to deeper spiritual enrichment.

Interculturality ensures that catechetical practices respect and incorporate diverse cultural backgrounds. Catechists demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adapt practices to be culturally appropriate, creating a welcoming environment for all participants. This dimension promotes social inclusion and mutual respect, enhancing the quality of friendships and community bonds.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the field of religious education by providing practical recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in catechetical communication. It advocates for the adoption of adaptive communication methods,

continuous refinement of educational materials, and strategic modifications to the physical environment. These findings offer valuable insights for improving catechetical practices and fostering a more inclusive community within SPRED and similar settings.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the heart of Chicago, a transformative experience within the Special Religious Development (SPRED) ministry vividly illustrates the profound impact of *inclusive faith formation*. SPRED, which stands for Special Religious Developmental Program, is a pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago in the United States dedicated to persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This program is specifically tailored to meet their spiritual needs and fully integrate them into the life of the church.

One autumn afternoon, shortly before the commencement of our annual SPRED session, I received a call that would mark the beginning of an enlightening journey. Our lead catechist introduced me to Marie, a new member of our group, and assigned me the role of her helper catechist—a first for me in such a capacity. Meeting Marie, a non-verbal young girl on the autism spectrum, I initially felt a mix of excitement and apprehension. These emotions quickly subsided as I joined her at a table where she was intently engaged with sand and seashells, her focus and calmness drawing me into a state of ease.

Marie's method of interacting with her surroundings and with me, though non-verbal, was profoundly *communicative*. Her ability to engage and connect without words underscored the essence of our faith as *relational* and *transcendental*, not merely cognitive and conceptual. This experience underscored the significant challenges many faces within the faith community—challenges of inclusion, understanding, and acceptance.

SPRED's mission extends beyond catechetical instruction; it is also about advocating for the rights and welfare of individuals with disabilities to participate fully in liturgical life by providing inclusive catechetical communication. Despite existing church teachings that affirm their place within the family of God, many such individuals face isolation and marginalization. In some distressing and disappointing instances, families have been discouraged or even asked to leave church premises and services, a stark contradiction to the inclusivity taught by the faith. Our engagement at SPRED, supported by our shared experiences and the bonds formed therein, serves as a testament to the potential for spiritual, psychological, and emotional growth that inclusive catechetical communication practices can foster and strengthen. Since its beginning, SPRED strives to be a beacon of hope and a model for how faith communities can more effectively embrace all members, regardless of their cognitive capacities and communicative abilities.

Marie's involvement in our liturgies, supported by her family, powerfully demonstrates the importance of recognizing and integrating individuals with diverse communication styles as vital members of our faith community. Her story not only informs the basis of my proposed research into inclusive catechetical communication but also highlights the transformative power of embracing and cultivating the spiritual lives of all individuals, especially those who are often sidelined. Recognizing a person like Marie, who communicates non-verbally, as a *full* participant means not only welcoming and accepting her but also actively developing an environment that enhances her communication and social skills. Such a supportive social environment is crucial for deepening her faith experience and ensuring she is fully included in all aspects of faith formation. This proactive approach to nurturing her communicative

abilities is essential for her holistic integration into the community and for enriching the spiritual lives of everyone involved.

In SPRED, the persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities are referred to as "*friends*." This terminology is derived from the Bible passage John 15:15, where Jesus said, "I have called you friends" to refer to his disciples. Disciples are considered learners of faith, and similarly, friends in SPRED are learners who are growing in their faith with the community. SPRED catechists use the term "*friends*" to foster a more inclusive and respectful environment. This approach not only avoids the potential stigma associated with clinical labels and jargons but also emphasizes the relational aspect of the ministry, highlighting the importance of personal connections and mutual respect within the faith community. The passage serves as a primary foundation for catechesis in SPRED. The passage serves as a primary foundation for catechesis in SPRED. As such, this is one of the reasons why I, as an engaged researcher, wanted to explore the SPRED model in inclusive catechetical communication.

Therefore, recognizing the often overlooked and subdued voices of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) is crucial when advocating *spirituality for all*. Although the literature acknowledges the gap in catechetical programs tailored for friends, there remains a notable deficiency in effective and inclusive strategies, approaches, and materials. This shortfall primarily stems from catechists' limited understanding of inclusive communication methods, which hinders the development of truly inclusive catechetical practices.

There is a significant lack of research including the voices and vantage points of catechists advocating for PDID. This gap has been highlighted in various studies and reviews, which often focus on broader stakeholder engagement—such as

individuals with disabilities, their families, and healthcare professionals—rather than on catechists specifically (Bendixen et al., 2022). Moreover, research on inclusive practices tends to concentrate on social work and broader community inclusion, frequently neglecting the unique contributions and perspectives of religious educators like catechists. Catechists are crucial communicators of religious education and faith formation for PDID, yet their experiences and challenges in this context are underexplored.

Catechists serve as vital links between the Church's teachings and the experiences of the faithful, effectively transmitting faith and guiding personal spiritual journeys. They function similarly to street-level bureaucrats in public administration, directly interacting with the community to adapt teachings to local needs and diverse circumstances (Lipsky, 1980; Brodtkin, 2012). This direct engagement positions catechists uniquely to foster inclusive catechetical communication, especially important for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (IDD). Their ability to tailor approaches ensures that all participants, particularly those with IDD, are fully included in religious education.

Research highlights the need to focus on catechists' insights and experiences to understand and enhance inclusivity in religious settings (Bendixen et al., 2022; O'Brien et al., 2022). Studies have traditionally concentrated on broader community inclusion, often overlooking the unique contributions of catechists. Yet, their frontline role is critical in translating and contextualizing Church teachings to fit local cultures as seen in historical and contemporary contexts, such as early missionary work in Ghana and the role of indigenous Jesuit missionaries (Tengan, 2018; Jesuit Missionaries, 2015). Understanding catechists' perspectives is crucial to identifying the barriers and facilitators of effective inclusive communication and could lead to

better-designed catechetical programs that address community needs more comprehensively.

There is a significant gap in research involving catechists' insights on advocating for PDID, with existing studies failing to adequately capture their insights on navigating the challenges and deploying effective strategies for inclusive communication (Kallon, 2022). The study proposed here aims to define 'inclusive catechetical communication' based on catechists' reflections on their personal experiences, enhancing our understanding of practical, empathetic catechetical methods that incorporate diverse sensory and cognitive approaches. This research is expected to contribute significantly to creating more inclusive religious environments, ensuring that all community members, regardless of their abilities, can participate fully in their faith, aligning with the Church's inclusive mandate (Pope Francis, 2022; Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020).

By focusing on catechists' insights and reflections, this study seeks to close the gap in understanding and implementing inclusive practices within catechetical settings, ensuring that the educational methods are not only theoretically sound but also practically effective in fostering a welcoming and spiritually enriching environment for all members of the faith community.

Statement of the Problem

This qualitative study is designed to explore the social practices of SPRED catechists as they employ inclusive communication strategies within faith formation for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). The research question is: How do catechists reproduce and implement inclusive

catechetical communication to effectively engage and support individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities?

The central objective is to identify the communication-related enabling conditions (i.e., supportive elements) as well as the disabling conditions (i.e., subtle challenges) that exist within religious education settings which influence the spiritual development of PDID. By examining the perspectives and reflections of catechists on social practices, this social investigation seeks to deepen our understanding of the issues at play and offer practical guidance for improving catechetical methods. This, in turn, is intended to ensure that these methods meet the theological imperatives of inclusivity and universal love, ultimately fostering a more encouraging and supportive spiritual environment for everyone involved.

The sub-questions of the study include:

- What are the practices involved in the multimodal strategies currently used in inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and how do these practices establish the social order of ICC with PIDD?
- In what ways catechists adapt and refine their communicative practices to better address the diverse needs of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities?
- What are the perceived benefits of inclusive catechetical communication on PDID, according to catechists based on their reflection pieces, employment of artifacts, and use of spaces?

Over the past six decades, SPRED catechists advocate for a shift from traditional religious education to faith formation approach, integrating a robust

communicative dimension in providing catechesis to *friends*. They have recognized that traditional catechetical methods and materials often fall short in addressing the communicative, cognitive, and perceptual needs of PDID.

The parish catechists in religious education settings apply traditional catechetical methods and materials that focus more on intellectual understanding, studying sacred texts, doctrines, ethics, and history to impart formal knowledge of a religion (Harahap et al., 2023).

Several journal articles provide support for the claim that traditional catechetical methods, which often rely on verbal instruction and abstract concepts (e.g. Holy Trinity, Salvation and Grace), may not adequately meet the communicative, cognitive, and perceptual needs of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), limiting their full participation in parish life and risking spiritual neglect.

For example, the analysis of traditional pedagogical initiatives and interventions in educational settings indicates that traditional methods fail to promote adequate communicative competence necessary for full engagement and understanding, which is crucial in catechetical contexts as well (Yede, 2020). Communicative competence refers to the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various contexts, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills. This suggests a need for more interactive and inclusive teaching styles to enhance participation and understanding, especially for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

Furthermore, discussions around the histories and methodologies of catechesis highlight how the approach has evolved and continues to require adaptation to better address the needs of contemporary learners, including those with disabilities. This

includes a reevaluation of the efficacy and responsiveness of traditional methods in facilitating meaningful religious experiences and ensuring that PDID can fully participate in their faith communities.

The research on different models and methods for confirmation catechesis also underscores the need for revising youth catechesis to be more engaging and responsive to the needs of younger audiences, potentially including those with developmental disabilities (Canales, 2020). Confirmation Catechesis, which involves a period of religious instruction and spiritual preparation for individuals, typically adolescents, before they receive the sacrament of Confirmation in the Catholic Church, requires effective communication to ensure that candidates fully grasp the significance of the sacrament and its impact on their faith journey.

Conversely, faith formation is holistic, fostering personal spiritual growth and a deeper divine connection. It is experiential and transformational, nurturing spiritual life through practices such as prayer, worship, and other religious activities, helping individuals live out their faith daily (Reilly & Lappin, 2020).

Religious education primarily focuses on imparting doctrinal knowledge, while faith formation delves into personal and communal spiritual enrichment, emphasizing the deeper aspects of faith within both the individual and community levels. Each serves distinct educational and spiritual needs essential for socio-spiritual development. Faith formation, however, adopts a holistic approach that is particularly significant in inclusive catechesis. This approach encompasses exploring diverse communication dimensions of PDID, ensuring that catechesis is accessible and meaningful for all members of the community.

Healey (2006) argues for the integration of individuals with developmental disabilities into all aspects of parish life. Her work provides practical insights into inclusive practices within liturgical settings, faith formation, and community participation. Healey's recommendations focus on ensuring that religious education and other church activities are accessible and meaningful, promoting a comprehensive approach that supports full inclusion and active participation of people with developmental disabilities in the faith community. This approach underlines the importance of making adjustments and accommodations within church settings to foster an environment where everyone, regardless of ability, is valued and can contribute to the spiritual and communal life.

The diverse communication dimensions of PDID in the context of faith formation involve tailoring educational and communicative approaches to better meet the unique needs of these vulnerable individuals. This encompasses various modalities and strategies to enhance accessibility and engagement. Firstly, multiple modes of communication are utilized, including verbal, non-verbal, visual, and written forms, each selected based on the individual's specific capabilities and preferences. For example, some may benefit from the use of symbols or pictures, while others might find straightforward verbal instructions more comprehensible.

Additionally, consideration is given to sensory inputs which play a critical role in how individuals with PDID process information. Adjustments might include the integration of tactile learning tools or the careful modulation of auditory and visual stimuli to avoid sensory overload. The complexity of language is another crucial aspect, with simplifications or modifications made to ensure that teachings are conveyed in an understandable and relatable manner.

Interactive techniques such as role-playing or hands-on activities are also emphasized to keep individuals engaged and to provide real-world context to abstract concepts. Furthermore, assistive technologies such as communication boards or specialized software can be vital in facilitating more effective communication and learning.

By incorporating these diverse dimensions and multiple interventions into catechetical practices, faith formation programs aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where individuals with PDID can actively participate and experience personal and spiritual growth within their faith communities. This holistic approach not only respects but *celebrates* the varied ways individuals engage with and comprehend the world, ensuring that each person has the opportunity to explore and express their spirituality in ways that are meaningful to them.

This gap underscores the need for methods and materials that incorporate inclusive catechetical communication, addressing both educational and ethical concerns. Significant progress is needed in developing and applying catechetical methods that are conceptually and methodologically innovative, specifically tailored to the attributes of PDID. Current programs frequently overlook their specific learning needs, leading to their exclusion from life-affirming parish participation. An integrated communicative dimension within faith formation is crucial to ensure that these individuals are welcomed, accepted, and provided an environment that enhances their communication skills, thereby enabling them to deepen their faith life and facilitating their full inclusion in the faith community. This approach coherently aligns with the church's theological and moral imperatives of inclusivity and universal love, promoting a more inclusive and supportive spiritual environment for all.

Based on the foregoing, several inter-animating critical issues have been identified that contribute to the problem in question:

Integration challenges: Catechists often struggle with integrating PDID into traditional settings alongside other children, leading to isolation and neglect. PDID possesses unique learning abilities that are not well-served by conventional catechetical approaches.

Resource limitations: There is a lack of catechetical training and resources specifically designed to cater to the needs of PDID. Catechists face instructional challenges with using traditional resources such as books and manuals that require significant intellectual engagement, which are not accessible for PDID.

Inadequate learning environments: The typical classroom setting does not facilitate an engaging, multisensory learning experience that can fully evoke religious experiences for PDID. Catechists find it difficult to create a learning environment that is conducive to the spiritual and educational needs of these vulnerable individuals.

Lack of effective strategies: There is a profound need for the development and application of more appropriate strategies in catechesis for PDID. Catechists often lack the necessary tools and methods to effectively teach and engage PDID within the existing catechetical framework and practice.

Through a comprehensive examination of the communication-related challenges faced by catechists and the insights gained from their experiences, this study aims to bridge these systemic gaps by addressing the lack of research on inclusive catechetical communication that is adaptive, practical, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of PDID. Consequently, this research seeks to advocate

for and facilitate a shift towards more inclusive and effective catechetical communication practices that affirm the dignity of every individual and their rightful place within the spiritual life of the church.

Objectives of the Study

The Special Religious Development (SPRED) ministry, founded by Fr. James McCarthy in 1960 in Chicago, represents a transformative approach to religious education tailored to individuals with developmental disabilities. SPRED differs significantly from traditional models by fostering an inclusive environment where participants, referred to appropriately as “friends”, engage in spiritual growth within small, intimate groups. This setting promotes a shared experience model called "Method Vivre," which emphasizes everyday interactions and universal emotions like love, concern, and trust, thus enhancing the participants' sense of belonging within the faith community.

SPRED’s model transcends the typical educational dynamics, focusing instead on deep relational ties and a personalized approach to spiritual guidance. Catechists, who typically commit to a minimum of two years, often remain longer due to the profound connections they develop with participants and co-learners. The inclusive nature of SPRED not only benefits the individuals and their families but also has a broader impact on the parish community, embodying Pope Francis’s vision of a church where everyone feels a genuine sense of belonging.

More particularly, this communication inquiry aims to delve into the catechists' experiences within this unique ministry, exploring how they implement the program and perceive the effectiveness of inclusive catechetical communication with persons

with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The study is structured around the following set of objectives:

The objectives outlined focus on enhancing inclusive catechetical communication within the SPRED program and the broader church community, particularly for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

Objective 1: To critically assess the multimodal strategies currently employed in inclusive catechetical communication with PDID and how these strategies help establish a structured social order within this communication framework. By analyzing these practices, the church can better understand the effectiveness of different communication methods and how they support social integration and engagement among PDID.

Objective 2: To explore how the SPRED program's communicative practices foster collaborative dialogue and mutual learning. These practices are designed to enhance spiritual growth and connection between catechists and PDID, ensuring that the spiritual needs of all participants are met and that their contributions are valued in a shared learning environment.

Objective 3: To investigate the SPRED program's efforts to adapt its communication methods to be culturally inclusive, respecting and integrating diverse cultural backgrounds into catechetical communication. This approach ensures that inclusivity is deeply rooted in the everyday operations and interactions within the church, creating an environment where all members, including those with disabilities, are valued and supported.

By focusing on these objectives, the church can translate inclusivity from a theoretical concept into practical reality, impacting daily life and participation within the community. This involves making tangible changes—such as reconfiguring spaces, adjusting communication and teaching methods, and cultivating a supportive atmosphere—demonstrating a true commitment to inclusivity and fostering a more connected and engaged faith community. Ultimately, these objectives aim to develop a comprehensive approach to inclusive catechetical communication that enhances religious education, pastoral communication, and the social involvement of PDID in the Christian faith community.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the communication dimension of catechetical work for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). By delving into the specific communicative strategies employed by catechists in engaging PDID, the research aims to uncover how adaptive communication enhances faith formation and fosters a more inclusive faith community.

One of the primary significance of this study is its potential to enhance understanding and interaction between catechists and PDID. Traditional catechetical methods often rely heavily on verbal and abstract teaching, which may not be effective for all learners, particularly those with communicative and cognitive differences. This study also aims to reveal how multi-sensory communication methods—incorporating visual aids, auditory components, tactile elements, and interactive activities—make religious concepts more accessible and meaningful to PDID. By highlighting the

effectiveness of these adaptive strategies, the research advocates for their broader and sustained adoption in religious education settings.

The study also seeks to identify and bridge the wide gap in the communicative practices of traditional catechesis. Insights into how catechists modify their communication approaches to meet the diverse needs of PDID could guide the development of new catechetical curricula and training programs. These programs would aim to equip religious educators with the set of knowledge and skills necessary to effectively engage all learners, ensuring that educational content and format is not only accessible but also engaging for individuals with various disabilities.

By focusing on communication, the study underscores the role of effective interaction in fostering inclusivity within the church community. Enhanced communicative practices are expected to promote a deeper sense of belonging and participation among PDID, making them feel valued and supported within their *spiritual homes*. This inclusivity not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also enriches the *communal life of the congregation*, highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence of all members.

Correspondingly, the research could also have significant implications for the empowerment of both catechists and PDID. For catechists, gaining expertise in inclusive communication strategies can increase their confidence and effectiveness in their roles, enhancing their ability to make a positive impact on their students' spiritual lives. For PDID, being engaged in communication that respects and adapts to their needs can increase their agency, autonomy, and self-expression within religious settings, contributing to their overall spiritual growth and social well-being.

Finally, the study could set a significant precedent for future research in the fields of religious education and disability studies. By systematically documenting and examining the communicative dimensions of inclusive catechetical work, the research could provide a foundational framework that influences future catechetical practices and policies. It could also encourage parish faith community and religious institutions to prioritize inclusive communication, leading to more comprehensive approaches to spiritual education that respect and celebrate diversity within faith communities.

The significance of studying the communication dimension in catechesis for PDID lies in its potential to transform faith formation practices by emphasizing adaptive, inclusive, and engaging communication paradigms, practices, and policies.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This multimodal inquiry of the catechetical praxis is centered on understanding the reflections, insights and experiences of catechists involved in inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) within the SPRED center of the Archdiocese of Chicago. While the gap in catechetical programs suited to PDID is recognized in literature, effective strategies, approaches, and materials remain insufficient, largely due to catechists' lack of profound understanding regarding inclusive communication methods. Drawing on the insights of SPRED catechists as a knowledge base not only correspondingly and indirectly amplifies the voice of PDID but also enriches our approach to inclusive catechetical communication. The insights from these catechists, deeply involved with PDID, can

significantly contribute to bridging this gap in perspective and analysis. The design of the research framework takes into account its potential strengths and inherent limitations. This design is intended to effectively identify and reflect on the unique abilities and particular challenges that are often encountered by individuals with PDID, shaping both the approach and the outcomes of the study.

The research rigorously examined faith formation practices, with a specific focus on the experiences of catechists rather than those of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This study did not delve into religious education in a general sense but instead concentrated on the practical and communicative aspects of catechists' work. The methodology involved three primary components: (1) thematic analysis of SPRED newsletters to understand the communicative and discursive practices of catechists, (2) artifact analysis to examine the materials and resources used in catechetical instruction, and (3) evaluation of the catechetical spatial environment within the SPRED center to assess how well it supported and potentially limited faith formation efforts. This multi-modal approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in catechetical communication.

However, the study faced certain limitations. It was geographically limited to Chicago's SPRED center, potentially restricting the broader applicability of its findings. The selection of participants through purposive sampling could have introduced contextual biases and might not have represented the diversity of catechists in similar settings, not to mention the possibility of social desirability bias. Its inherently subjective nature might have affected the analysis and interpretation of data. The analysis of newsletters was confined to the past five years, possibly excluding

pertinent historical data. Additionally, the socio-spatial analysis might have missed nuanced elements of space utilization that were not immediately apparent.

To address these limitations, the study employed data triangulation to corroborate findings across different sources, member checking to ensure interpretations accurately reflected participant experiences, reflexivity to acknowledge and minimize researcher biases, and an external audit to validate the research process and outcomes.

By having an unbiased external party scrutinize the coding, thematizing, and categorizing, any potential biases or methodological flaws were identified and addressed. Literature supported the use of coding validation as a means to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of data interpretation (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The independent reviewer's feedback provided an additional layer of verification, ensuring that the findings were well-supported by the data and that the research adhered to rigorous academic standards.

To address and mitigate the inherent limitations of the study, the research design incorporated several robust methodologies to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation was employed as a critical strategy, utilizing multiple data collection methods to corroborate findings across diverse sources. This approach was supported by the literature, which suggested that triangulation could significantly increase the depth and trustworthiness of research findings (Smith, 2018). Member checking was another essential method used, where preliminary findings were presented back to participants for validation. This technique helped ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences and was often recommended in qualitative research to enhance the credibility of the data (Jones, 2017).

As a researcher, I applied the concept of reflexivity to ensure the integrity and objectivity of my study. Reflexivity involved a conscious and deliberate consideration of my own biases and their influence on the research process. This was achieved by maintaining a reflective journal to document my thoughts and potential biases throughout the study and by engaging in discussions with peers who were not involved in the research to gain unbiased perspectives. Reflexivity's structured and deliberate nature allowed for a more focused and practical assessment of biases without becoming overly self-centered, ensuring that the research remained grounded in its theoretical and practical objectives. This approach helped maintain the rigor and reliability of my findings, making it the best fit for my study's needs.

The literature underscored the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, highlighting its role in clarifying and enhancing the researcher's self-awareness and objectivity throughout the study process (Taylor & Khan, 2019). By integrating these strategies, the study aimed to uphold the integrity of its findings and contribute meaningful insights into the field of inclusive catechetical communication.

This multimodal inquiry, while focused and in-depth, acknowledged its limitations in scope and methodology. By transparently addressing these limitations and employing rigorous methods to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings, the study aimed to contribute valuable insights into inclusive catechetical communication. These insights not only enhanced academic understanding but also provided practical guidance for improving catechetical practices in similar settings.

Through these measures, the study acknowledged its limitations and strived to provide valuable insights into inclusive catechetical communication, enhancing both academic knowledge and practical applications for improving catechetical practices within similar contexts.

Definition of Terms

For the proposed study on Inclusive Catechetical Communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), a contextual definition of key terminologies is crucial. Below are some possible keywords along with brief contextual definitions to ensure social situatedness and coherence throughout the research:

Inclusive Catechetical Communication (ICC): A coherent set of teaching practices and strategies designed to make faith formation accessible and meaningful for all students, particularly those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This includes adaptations and interventions in communication teaching methods, materials, and the learning environment to accommodate diverse learning needs and contexts.

Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (PDID): Individuals diagnosed with significant impairments in cognitive and adaptive functioning that present before adulthood, affecting their learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and social skills.

Faith formation: It refers to a more holistic approach in communicating faith that not only encompasses learning about one's religion but also involves personal spiritual growth and the development of a deeper relationship with the divine. Faith formation is experiential, transformational and communicational, focusing on nurturing the spiritual life of individuals through practices like prayer, worship, and other religious activities. It is designed to help individuals internalize their faith and live out their religious convictions in daily life.

Catechesis: It is a dynamic relational and inclusive process of faith formation that actively engages all members of the community, regardless of their communicative, cognitive, and perceptual abilities. This approach emphasizes

adaptability and interaction, utilizing various communication methods tailored to individual needs to ensure full participation. It involves not just the transmission of religious knowledge but also the fostering of personal and communal spiritual growth through interactive, experiential, and transformational activities. These activities may include the use of visual aids, tactile elements, sign language, digital tools, and physical spaces, as well as the integration of symbols and rituals that resonate with diverse learners. This form of catechesis aims to nurture a deep, personal connection with the divine and encourage the internalization of faith in daily life, thus supporting the holistic development of each participant's spiritual and communicative competencies within the faith community.

Catechist: Catechist is a faith communicator who guides and accompanies people with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), teaching and facilitating their understanding and deepening of faith. The role involves active engagement with the community's spiritual life, helping PDID learn and experience faith through practical involvement in traditions, liturgy, and community activities. By fostering such interactions, the catechist ensures that faith is a dynamic and shared journey, accessible, meaningful, and life-affirming to everyone within the faith community.

Adaptability: The capability of catechetical message, methods and materials to be modified according to the specific needs of learners, particularly those with disabilities, ensuring that all students can engage with and understand the religious content being taught.

Accessibility: The extent to which catechetical instruction is available to all PDID, including the provision of physical, sensory, and cognitive aids that assist PDID in accessing religious education. **Engagement:** Active involvement of PDID in

catechetical activities that promotes their participation in discussions, practices, and community life, facilitated through interactive and participatory teaching methods.

Empathy and understanding: Qualities exhibited by catechists that reflect a deep comprehension of and sensitivity to the experiences and challenges faced by PDID, fostering a supportive and inclusive educational atmosphere.

Community and belonging: The sense of inclusion and acceptance that PDID experience within the faith community, characterized by mutual respect, recognition, and the valuation of contributions from all members, regardless of their abilities.

Holistic approach: A comprehensive method in catechesis that considers the interanimating spiritual, emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of learning, addressing the overall development and well-being of PDID.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, the review of related literature explores the multifaceted dimensions of catechesis, particularly in the context of inclusivity for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Beginning with an examination of the evolving nature and practices of catechesis, this chapter delves into the historical and contemporary shifts that shape how religious education is imparted. Following this, the discussion turns to the specific needs and supports required by individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, emphasizing a holistic understanding. The role and identity of catechists, along with the unique challenges they face in modern catechetical settings, are scrutinized to highlight the subjectivities and complexities of their vocation. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the crucial issue of communication barriers, assessing the strategies and tackling difficulties in fostering inclusive environments. Underpinning these discussions, the philosophical and theological foundations of inclusivity are analyzed to provide a robust framework for understanding these efforts. Finally, current trends and challenges in communication for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities are reviewed, offering insights into the latest developments and ongoing obstacles in this evolving field and social practice.

The Evolving Nature of Catechetical Praxis

Catechesis within the Catholic Church has evolved significantly, responding to the cultural, communicational, and technological changes across the world. This

section explores the contemporary nature, objectives, and practices of catechesis by critically analyzing selected key documents, including recent discourses and messages from Pope Francis and other papal documents and directives from the Church, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the current trends and their theological underpinnings.

Nature of Catechesis

The fundamental nature of catechesis is to make every person's faith become living, conscious, and active through the light of instruction (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997). Over time, the Church has reinforced that catechesis is *not* merely a pedagogical and didactic practice but a profound invitation to grow and participate in a faith journey that is transformative and engaging. Based on the "Participant Manual: Directory for Catechesis," catechesis in the Catholic Church is characterized as a dynamic and complex reality devoted to the service of the Word of God. It transcends traditional pedagogical and didactic approaches, aiming to make the proclamation of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continually resound and endure in the hearts of individuals, thus transforming lives (Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021). This transformation is seen as both an educational and formational process, facilitating an introduction to the celebration of the mystery, and offering illumination in making sense of human life and history.

By integrating various aspects of faith—accompanied by education and formation—catechesis reflects the richness of its essence. It contributes specifically to the pastoral mission of the Church, emphasizing catechesis as more than the mere transmission of factual religious knowledge. Instead, it invites and engages

participants into a deep, personal encounter with faith, shaping their entire existence and fostering a lifelong relationship with God (Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021).

This holistic approach underscores the transformative potential of catechesis, where learning is not confined to cognitive understanding but extends to spiritual and existential engagement, fostering a mature faith that is both *informed* and *lived*.

Theological Underpinnings of Catechesis

Catechesis is premised on the belief that every individual is created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*), which imbues each person with inherent dignity and worth. This fundamental principle is echoed throughout Church teachings and is central to the Church's mission of evangelization and catechesis. The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) reiterates that the aim of catechesis is not merely to teach doctrine but to facilitate a meeting with Christ, which is transformative and respectful of the individual's dignity (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997). The theological underpinnings of catechesis are deeply rooted in the Church's understanding of human dignity and the revelatory nature of God's communication with humanity. This understanding drives the Church's approach to catechesis, ensuring that it not only imparts knowledge but also respects and enhances the inherent dignity of every *catechumen*, including those with disabilities. A *catechumen* refers to an individual who is being educated and formed in the Christian faith through a multifaceted process that involves clear instruction, interactive dialogue, adaptive methods, empathetic pastoral care, and meaningful rituals. This comprehensive approach ensures that *catechumens* are not only educated in the faith but also feel valued and supported as they prepare for full initiation into the Christian community.

The recognition of inherent dignity influences the Church's approach to inclusive catechesis. It demands that catechetical efforts be adaptable to meet the diverse needs of all *catechumens*, especially those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This approach is about acknowledging each person's capacity to encounter God and participate fully in the communal life of the Church, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

Catechesis is also deeply connected to the Church's mission of evangelization, which is itself rooted in the concept of revelation. As God reveals Himself through Scripture and tradition, the Church is called to communicate this revelation in a manner that is accessible and meaningful to all. The General Directory of Catechesis highlights that catechesis should serve as an echo of what is celebrated in the liturgy, professed in the creed, lived in observance of the commandments, and prayed in the Lord's Prayer (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997).

Practical Realization of Theological Concepts

Practically, this theological vision translates into a catechetical practice that emphasizes both personalized and community-based approaches. It advocates for methods and materials that are accessible to people with disabilities, promoting their active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. The use of appropriate language, symbols, and actions that resonate with the experiences and capacities of all *catechumens* is encouraged to ensure that catechesis is truly an experience of *receiving* and *responding* to God's Word.

In essence, the theological underpinnings of catechesis highlight a dual focus on the dignity of the human person and the revelatory action of God. These underpinnings compel a catechetical approach that is inclusive, person-centered, and

deeply evangelical, aimed at fostering a transformative encounter with Christ that respects and uplifts the dignity of every individual, especially the downtrodden and those with disabilities. This approach not only educates but also sanctifies and empowers all members of the Church community, reflecting the universal call to holiness articulated in the Church's magisterial teachings.

Core Objectives of Catechesis

The primary objective of catechesis is to foster a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and encourage an authentic Christian lifestyle, which encompasses thorough sacramental preparation, deepened knowledge of the scriptures, and active participation in Church life. This mission reflects the directive from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and is underpinned by the principles laid out in foundational Church documents such as the General Directory for Catechesis.

Sacramental preparation: Sacramental catechesis is fundamental, ensuring that the faithful are well-prepared for the sacraments. This preparation is not merely a doctrinal instruction but a journey into the living tradition of the Church, aimed at a transformative participation in the sacraments.

Scriptural knowledge: A profound engagement with the scriptures is vital for a mature Christian life. Catechesis encourages a *dialogical encounter* with the Word of God, enabling believers to apply its truths to their lives, thereby fostering spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of their faith.

Active participation in church life: The ultimate aim of catechesis is to prepare the faithful to actively participate in the life of the Church. This includes not only liturgical participation but also engagement in the mission of the Church, through

various forms of service and community life, which reflects a mature Christian witness in the world.

These components of catechesis highlight its comprehensive and transformative nature, aimed at fostering not just a theoretical knowledge of faith but an active, living experience of Christian discipleship. The evolving nature of catechetical practice is reflected in the emphasis on adapting catechetical methods to meet the diverse needs of the modern faithful, including the use of digital technologies to enhance accessibility, engagement, and collaboration.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

Throughout the decades, many prominent communicators of the Catholic Church have significantly inspired SPRED in promoting and upholding the dignity and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), with his initiation of the Second Vatican Council, emphasized inclusivity and the intrinsic dignity of every individual, setting a precedent for advocacy within the Church. Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) reinforced this commitment to social justice and the marginalized through his encyclicals and speeches, underscoring the Church’s duty to *serve all*, especially the disenfranchised and those with disabilities. Although his papacy was brief, Pope John Paul I (1978) highlighted the importance of humility and pastoral care, reinforcing the Church’s inclusive message. Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) was particularly influential, known as a vigorous advocate for the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. His powerful encyclicals and public addresses frequently emphasized their inherent worth and the necessity for their full participation in all aspects of life, including religious life. Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013) continued this legacy, advocating for a

deeper understanding and acceptance within the Church, reinforcing the spiritual and human dignity of every person.

Pope Francis (2013–present) has further advanced this mission with a strong focus on mercy, compassion, and the need for a supportive community that includes everyone, particularly the vulnerable and the subaltern. His teachings and actions continue to inspire SPRED’s mission, fostering an environment where individuals with disabilities are not only included but are integral members of the faith community. Together, these great communicators have profoundly shaped the Church’s approach to inclusivity, providing a robust framework for SPRED to promote and uphold the dignity of persons with disabilities.

Recent directives emphasize making catechesis accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. The Church advocates for adaptations in catechetical delivery to ensure that everyone, regardless of physical or cognitive abilities, can participate fully in the faith (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin & Lipiec, 2020). This includes the use of appropriate communication elements such as languages, signs, symbols, and spaces and the incorporation of technology to aid understanding and engagement.

Interrogating Subalternity in the Socio-Religious Context

Making sense of the concept of subalternity in the socio-religious context offers a critical lens to both affirm and critique existing policies and programs. The Church’s historical commitment, as outlined in the text, to the dignity and inclusion of persons with disabilities aligns with the goals of social justice by raising visibility and voice for marginalized groups. The acknowledgment by various Popes and the Church’s adaptive approaches in catechesis resonate with the aim of eliminating societal and

communicative barriers (Lipiec, 2020; Pope Francis, 2021). However, subalternity, as conceptualized by scholars such as Spivak (1988), challenges the depth of these inclusivity efforts. It questions whether the Church's actions fundamentally transform power dynamics or if they merely adjust superficial aspects of participation. Are persons with disabilities actively involved in shaping the frameworks they participate in, or are they just included within pre-existing structures? This perspective urges a critical evaluation of whether the Church is addressing the root causes of marginalization and ensuring that inclusivity results in substantive empowerment. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the actual agency persons with disabilities hold within the Church, pushing for a scenario where these individuals not only have a seat at the table but also a voice in the discourse, potentially redefining their roles and influence within the faith community. Through a subaltern lens, the Church's commendable steps toward inclusion are seen as part of an ongoing process that requires continuous critical reflection and action to ensure true transformation and empowerment for all its members (Spivak, 1988).

Current Practices in Catechesis

The adoption of digital tools has become a significant trend in modern catechetical practices. Online platforms, virtual reality, and interactive applications are being utilized to reach a broader audience and to cater to the young digital natives (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to Mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 2020). This shift not only follows technological trends but also aligns with the moral objective of making catechesis more engaging and accessible.

As contemporary catechetical practices evolve, the integration of digital tools has become increasingly prominent, addressing the multifaceted challenges of social

communication and enhancing engagement in religious education. Researchers emphasize the necessity of incorporating multimedia elements such as presentations, videos, and interactive content to effectively communicate religious teachings. This approach not only modernizes catechesis but also makes it more appealing and accessible, particularly to younger demographics (Kopiczko, 2023). The transition from traditional face-to-face communication to digital interactions requires catechists to adapt their methodologies, ensuring that the Gospel message remains pertinent and engaging in today's digital context. The literature highlights the importance of disseminating positive and hopeful messages through digital platforms, which can inspire and attract the faithful. Visual communication plays a crucial role in this strategy, using images, infographics, and videos to simplify and clarify complex religious concepts and precepts such as the *Holy Trinity*, *transubstantiation*, *salvation*, and *grace*. Despite the benefits, researchers caution against the superficial relationships that digital communication can foster, advocating for the use of digital tools to complement rather than replace personal interactions.

Despite the numerous advantages offered by digital communication in catechetical settings, researchers have highlighted significant concerns about the potential for these interactions to become superficial. Digital communication can facilitate quick and easy exchanges of catechetical content, but it often lacks the depth and emotional richness of in-person interactions. This limitation can lead to weaker interpersonal bonds and a diminished sense of genuine connection within the faith community. Therefore, experts recommend using digital tools to complement, rather than replace, personal interactions in catechesis. This approach ensures that the benefits of digital communication are leveraged without compromising the quality of human connections in religious education (Mihailidis, 2019).

Mihailidis (2019) explores this issue extensively in *Civic Media Literacies: Re-Imagining Human Connection in an Age of Digital Abundance*. He emphasizes that while digital tools have transformed how we communicate, there is an inherent risk of these tools fostering relationships that lack depth. Mihailidis argues that meaningful communication, especially in the context of catechesis, requires more than just the exchange of information; it involves empathy, understanding, and a shared sense of presence—elements that are often diminished in digital interactions. He advocates for a balanced approach where digital communication enhances but does not replace personal, face-to-face engagements. This perspective underscores the importance of maintaining a human touch in our increasingly digital world to ensure that catechetical relationships remain robust and meaningful.

Additionally, social media is recognized for its potential to facilitate evangelization and community building, provided it is used thoughtfully to mitigate risks such as misinformation and the focus on decadence over substantive content. The adoption of digital tools is thus essential in making catechesis more effective, inclusive, and engaging, reflecting a well-rounded response to the challenges posed by contemporary social communication (Kopiczko, 2023).

Key elements of effective inclusive catechesis include the adaptation of teaching methods and materials to meet diverse needs. This involves using simplified language, visual aids, and interactive digital tools that cater to different learning styles and preferences (Baric, 2023). The use of visual and artistic expressions plays a significant role in making catechesis more relatable and understandable. For example, images and artworks can convey complex theological concepts in a more accessible manner, thereby enhancing comprehension, retention, and application (Baric, 2023).

Moreover, inclusive catechesis emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and empathetic environment where every participant feels valued and included. This involves training catechists to be sensitive to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities and to employ various communication methods that ensure everyone can participate fully in the catechetical process (Halbach, 2020).

Digital tools have become an integral part of modern catechetical practices, offering new ways to engage learners and make catechesis more inclusive. Online platforms, virtual reality, and interactive applications provide customizable learning experiences that are particularly beneficial for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (Kopiczko, 2023).

The synodal process initiated by Pope Francis highlights the importance of listening and journeying together, reflecting a community-based approach in catechesis. This approach fosters a culture of encounter, deliberation and dialogue, which is crucial in a diverse and globalized Church (Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Third International Congress of Catechists, 2022).

Emphasizing catechesis as a form of pastoral care, recent teachings advocate for a *personalized approach* that considers the unique circumstances and needs of each individual, especially those facing physical and intellectual challenges. The Church's pastoral responses are crafted to not only educate but also to care, comfort, and empower (2021 Message of Pope Francis for International Day of Persons with Disabilities).

In the contemporary practice of pastoral ministry, especially in relation to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, the core of effective communication lies in fostering an inclusive and empathetic environment. As delineated by Zsupan-Jerome (2023) in *The Handbook on Religion and*

Communication, pastoral communication is not simply about disseminating information but about creating meaningful interactions that nurture spiritual and social well-being tailored to individual needs.

The theology underpinning pastoral communication emphasizes that divine revelation is accessible to all, affirming that every individual, regardless of ability, is made in the image of God and deserves to participate fully in the life of the Church. This theological stance advocates for a ministry that adapts to and respects the unique ways individuals perceive and interact with the Word (i.e., text) and the social world (i.e., social context), particularly those with disabilities and similarly disadvantaged situations.

Practically, this means that *pastoral caregivers* must employ a variety of communication methods. These include the use of simplified language, visual aids, and instructional technologies that facilitate understanding, introspection and engagement. Such adaptations ensure that communication is not a barrier to experiencing the love and community of the Church but rather a bridge that connects all members more deeply.

Moreover, pastoral ministry calls for a keen awareness of non-verbal communication and the emotional and spiritual nuances of interactions. This sensitivity enriches the ministry's encounters and supports a holistic approach that considers the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of individuals with disabilities.

Ultimately, the practice of inclusive pastoral communication enhances the experiences of the entire faith community. It fosters a culture of acceptance and understanding that not only supports the spiritual growth of individuals with disabilities but also educates and enriches the wider community, embodying the Christian directive to love and serve one another inclusively and wholeheartedly. The current

practices of catechesis within the Catholic Church demonstrate a dynamic and responsive adaptation to the modern world's complexities and challenges. By embracing digital advancements and fostering an inclusive, community-oriented approach, the Church ensures that catechesis remains a vital and effective ministry in the evangelization mission. Each practice is deeply rooted in the Church's commitment to uphold the dignity of every person, facilitating not just a learning experience but a profound communicative act of faith and journey of conversion.

Understanding and Supporting Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

Persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities encounter diverse challenges that affect their cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and communicative functions. Enhancing their quality of life requires a deep understanding of these personal and social circumstances and a commitment to fostering an inclusive and development-oriented society. This chapter explores the essential aspects of disability such as conceptual definitions, diagnostic criteria, systematic classifications, and effective interventions that are essential for supporting these vulnerable individuals and groups.

Defining Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

Developmental disabilities are chronic conditions that manifest during the developmental stages of an individual and generally persist throughout their lifetime. These conditions cover a broad spectrum, including intellectual disabilities, brain injuries, autism spectrum disorders, and various learning dysfunctions. As defined in the "Handbook of Developmental Disabilities," these disabilities significantly impair

physical, learning, language, or behavioral capabilities, reflecting the complexity and diversity within this group (Odom et al., 2007).

Intellectual disabilities specifically involve pronounced limitations in intellectual functions and adaptive behavior, impacting social interactions and practical skills. The consensus document, "Defining, Diagnosing, Classifying, and Planning Supports for People with Intellectual Disability," emphasizes that these limitations originate during the developmental period, outlining the lifelong challenges these individuals face (Schalock et al., 2021).

Diagnostic Criteria and Systems of Classification

The accurate diagnosis and classification of developmental disorders are crucial and are guided by established criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). These criteria ensure that diagnoses are precise, facilitating appropriate interventions and support systems (i.e., both pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic dimensions). Classification not only aids in understanding the specific needs of persons with developmental disabilities but also helps in developing tailored interventions that respond to the severity and particular characteristics of the disability (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

For example, the DSM-5 categorizes intellectual disabilities into levels based on severity, which guides the development of individualized support plans that address specific needs and capabilities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Planning Support and Interventions

Effective planning and implementation of support systems are pivotal in improving the lives of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The

"International Handbook of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities" discusses various evidence-based interventions that promote cognitive, social, and vocational skills (Emerson et al., 2004). These interventions are designed to be adaptive and responsive, meeting the unique needs of each individual.

A person-centered approach to support planning is advocated, which aligns with the individual's specific needs and personal goals. This approach not only supports individuals but also empowers them, promoting greater autonomy and integration into society (Schalock et al., 2021).

Social Contexts and Policy Frameworks

The social contexts and policy frameworks surrounding developmental and intellectual disabilities significantly influence the support systems and opportunities available to these individuals. Effective policies must recognize the diverse abilities and potential of these individuals, ensuring robust support systems that promote their inclusion and active participation in society.

Future policy directions should emphasize inclusivity, accessibility, and empowerment, ensuring that all individuals receive the support necessary to lead fulfilling lives. This requires ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, healthcare providers, and families to refine and enhance support structures continually (Schalock et al., 2021).

This comprehensive review of the issues surrounding persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding and the need for adaptive policies that respond to their evolving needs. As our understanding deepens, social development frameworks must adapt to better support and include every community member.

Identity, Role, and Challenges of Catechists in Contemporary Catechesis

Catechists occupy a pivotal role in the spiritual education within the Catholic Church. Their responsibilities extend from imparting church doctrines to embodying the faith in a manner that is both inspiring and accessible to all learners. This chapter integrates key insights from foundational texts including the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the General Directory for Catechesis, the International Congress of Catechists, and the Participant Manual on the Directory for Catechesis.

Identity and Role of Catechists

Catechists are regarded as spiritual educators tasked with the effective transmission of the faith, serving not only as instructors of doctrine but also as facilitators of personal faith journeys. Pope Francis emphasizes the role of catechists as primary agents in the evangelization process, responsible for instigating personal encounters with Christ that are transformative (International Congress of Catechists, 2022; Participant Manual on the Directory for Catechesis, 2020). This role can be compared to that of street-level bureaucrats in public administration, such as teachers, police officers, and social workers, who implement government policies and interact directly with citizens.

Both catechists and street-level bureaucrats act as implementers of policy. Catechists convey the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church, interpreting and applying them to various contexts and communities. Similarly, street-level bureaucrats apply government rules and regulations to specific cases, often using their discretion to address individual needs (Lipsky, 1980).

Interaction with individuals is a crucial aspect of both roles. Catechists engage directly with individuals, guiding them through their spiritual development, addressing their questions, and providing tailored support. In the same vein, street-level bureaucrats interact with citizens to address their concerns, requiring them to exercise judgment and discretion in providing services (Brodkin, 2012).

The *necessity for discretion and adaptation* is another commonality. Catechists must be flexible in their teaching methods, making Church doctrines relevant and understandable across diverse cultural and generational contexts. Street-level bureaucrats also exercise discretion, interpreting policies in ways that make sense in specific situations and adapting their actions to meet the unique needs of individuals and communities (Lipsky, 1980).

Both roles face significant challenges and constraints. Catechists deal with issues like cultural relevance, technological integration, and complex theological questions, balancing adherence to doctrine with the need for accessibility and engagement. Street-level bureaucrats navigate constraints such as limited resources, bureaucratic rules, and high workloads, striving to deliver effective public services despite these challenges (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

By understanding the key role of catechists through the lens of street-level bureaucrats, one can appreciate the balance they must strike between adhering to Church teachings and providing personalized support and guidance. Flexibility, empathy, and understanding are crucial in roles that directly impact the lives and well-being of the people they serve.

Challenges Facing Catechists

Catechists play a crucial role in the spiritual education and formation within the Catholic Church. However, their ministry is fraught with numerous challenges that

require a multifaceted approach to address effectively. This section will delve into the key challenges facing catechists, including issues and concerns pertaining to cultural and generational relevance, integration of technology, theological and doctrinal depth, pastoral care and sensitivity, and hidden victimization within catechetical ministry. Drawing from the literature, each challenge will be explored with specific strategies and examples to illustrate how catechists can navigate these complexities and enhance their effectiveness in fostering faith, compassion, and solidarity.

Cultural and Generational Relevance

Adapting the timeless truths of the gospel to the diverse and ever-changing cultural landscapes poses a significant challenge. Catechists must strive to make teachings relevant to various audiences, which requires a deep understanding of cultural nuances and generational differences (Participant Manual on the Directory for Catechesis, 2020). For instance, in a multicultural urban parish, the catechist faces a diverse group of participants, including children from immigrant families, teenagers immersed in digital culture, and elderly parishioners with traditional backgrounds. For instance, when teaching about the significance of the Eucharist, the catechist uses different approaches to resonate with each subgroup. For the children of immigrant families, the catechist draws parallels between the Eucharist and cultural practices of communal meals from their countries of origin, thus making the teaching relatable to their experiences. For the tech-savvy teenagers, the catechist incorporates multimedia presentations and interactive discussions on social media to capture their attention and connect the ancient tradition with their digital reality. For the elderly parishioners, the catechist references traditional prayers and hymns, evoking a sense of nostalgia and continuity with their lifelong faith practices. This tailored approach ensures that

each group feels included and imparts the lessons in a manner that resonates with their unique cultural and generational contexts, thereby effectively bridging the gap between the timeless truths of the gospel and the contemporary cultural landscape.

Integration of Technology

The rise of digital media offers new avenues for catechesis, yet it also presents challenges in maintaining the depth and personal touch that traditional catechesis provides. Catechists are tasked with harnessing technology without compromising the personal engagement that is central to effective faith formation (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997).

Digital catechism represents a contemporary approach to religious education that leverages digital tools and platforms to disseminate the teachings of the Catholic faith. By utilizing online resources, social media, mobile applications, and interactive websites, digital catechism makes faith formation more accessible and engaging, especially to younger generations who are digital natives. This approach allows catechists to reach a broader audience, including those who may not regularly attend traditional church settings. Through virtual classrooms, video tutorials, and interactive discussions, digital catechism can provide personalized and flexible learning experiences that cater to individual needs and schedules. Additionally, digital platforms enable the incorporation of multimedia elements such as videos, animations, and interactive quizzes, which can enhance understanding and retention of religious teachings. By embracing digital catechism, the Church can effectively communicate the timeless truths of the gospel in a manner that resonates with the modern, tech-savvy world, fostering a deeper and more dynamic engagement with the faith. While digital catechism offers numerous benefits, it also has potential downsides. One

significant drawback is the risk of reduced personal interaction, which is crucial for building strong, supportive faith communities. The reliance on digital platforms can lead to a sense of isolation among participants, as they may miss out on the communal and relational aspects of traditional catechesis. Additionally, there is the challenge of digital accessibility; not all individuals have equal access to technology or possess the digital literacy required to engage fully with online catechetical content. This *digital divide* can exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder the inclusivity that catechism aims to promote.

Theological and Doctrinal Depth

In a world where secularism is on the rise, catechists face the challenge of addressing complex theological questions and deepening their own understanding of faith to effectively engage with both the faithful and skeptics alike. This necessitates a robust foundation in theological and doctrinal knowledge, enabling catechists to articulate the intricacies of Catholic teachings with clarity and confidence. By immersing themselves in advanced theological studies and continuing faith formation, catechists can provide answers to challenging questions, fostering a more profound appreciation and adherence to the faith. This depth of understanding not only equips catechists to counter secular arguments but also enriches their own spiritual journey, ensuring they can inspire and guide others with authenticity and conviction. As noted by Lianto et al. (2023), theological education helps bridge the gap between faith and contemporary cultural practices, reinforcing the relevance, rootedness and applicability of doctrinal teachings in diverse contexts.

Pastoral Care and Sensitivity

Catechists often encounter participants from varied backgrounds and with different personal struggles. Providing pastoral care that is empathetic and sensitive to individual circumstances is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive community. This involves recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals, whether they are dealing with personal crises, family issues, or mental health concerns. Catechists must be equipped with the skills to listen actively and compassionately, offering support and guidance without judgment. This pastoral sensitivity extends to understanding socio-cultural and socio-economic differences, ensuring that catechesis is accessible and relevant to all. It also includes creating a safe and welcoming environment where participants feel valued and understood, which is essential for their spiritual growth and social development. By situating their approach to meet the specific needs of each person, catechists can help individuals feel connected to the faith community and empowered in their personal faith journeys. This comprehensive and empathetic pastoral care is fundamental to the mission of catechesis, as it embodies the love and compassion of Christ, fostering a genuine sense of belonging and support within the Church. As noted by Barić (2023), effective catechesis involves diverse methods and a deep understanding of cultural contexts to facilitate growth in faith and education, highlighting the importance of reflectivity and sensitivity in pastoral care.

Hidden Victimization in Catechetical Ministry

Catechists often face the challenge of hidden victimization within their ministry, which can take various forms and significantly impact their effectiveness and well-being. This hidden victimization can include subtle forms of discrimination, emotional

stress, and the burden of dealing with complex pastoral issues without adequate support. Catechists might encounter participants who have experienced severe trauma, such as forced marriages, domestic violence, or other forms of coercion, which are not immediately visible but require sensitive and informed pastoral care. These situations demand a high level of empathy, contextual understanding, and specialized knowledge to be addressed responsively and responsibly.

For example, in dealing with victims of forced marriages, catechists must navigate the delicate balance of providing support and guidance while respecting cultural and familial contexts. The hidden nature of such victimization often means that catechists must be vigilant and perceptive, recognizing signs of distress that may not be openly discussed. This requires ongoing training and support for catechists to equip them with the necessary skills to identify and respond to these hidden challenges effectively (Reva, 2021).

Addressing hidden victimization involves creating a safe and welcoming environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Catechists must foster an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality, ensuring that fellow catechists feel valued and supported. Additionally, it is essential for catechists to collaborate with other professionals, such as counselors and social workers, to provide comprehensive care and support to those affected by hidden victimization. This holistic approach helps to mitigate the adverse effects of hidden victimization, promoting healing and resilience within the faith community.

By understanding and addressing the complexities of hidden victimization, catechists can better serve their communities, ensuring that all individuals receive the pastoral care and support they need. This aspect of catechetical ministry underscores the importance of ongoing faith formation and pastoral sensitivity, enabling catechists

to respond with compassion and effectiveness to the diverse and often hidden needs of all stakeholders.

Strategies for Effective Catechesis

Catechists face the intricate task of navigating a complex landscape that demands social adaptability, continuing education, and innovative approaches to teaching. Effective catechesis involves a blend of lifelong theological education, the strategic use of digital platforms, community building, and the customization of teaching methods to suit diverse audiences and settings. Each of these strategies is vital for enhancing the catechetical process and ensuring that the teachings of the Catholic faith remain relevant and impactful in today's contemporary world.

Pursuing lifelong learning and spiritual formation equips catechists with the necessary theological foundation and personal spiritual growth to inspire and guide others effectively. Leveraging digital platforms allows catechists to reach a broader audience and create engaging, interactive sessions that resonate with younger generations. Building strong community connections fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among *catechumens*, which is essential for sustaining their faith journeys. Adapting flexibility and customization in teaching methods ensures that catechetical content and format are accessible and relevant to participants from varied personal, cultural, educational, and personal backgrounds. By implementing these strategies, catechists can address the complex challenges of their ministry and contribute meaningfully to the spiritual development of their communities.

Pursuing Continued Religious Education and Spiritual Formation

To address the multifaceted challenges faced by catechists, ongoing theological education and spiritual formation are indispensable. This continuous learning process enables catechists to deepen their understanding of the faith, refine their pedagogical skills, and stay abreast of contemporary issues that impact their ministry. Theological education provides catechists with a solid foundation in Church teachings, allowing them to convey complex doctrinal concepts with clarity and confidence. This educational pursuit is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about fostering a personal spiritual growth that enhances their ability to inspire and guide others.

Spiritual formation, on the other hand, nurtures the catechist's own faith journey, ensuring that they are spiritually equipped and empowered to lead by example. It involves regular participation in spiritual retreats, engaging in personal prayer and reflection, and seeking mentorship from experienced spiritual leaders. This holistic approach to formation helps catechists to embody the virtues they teach, making their witness of faith more authentic, impactful, and lifegiving.

As highlighted by Mashabela and Madise (2023), theological education is crucial for preparing catechists to address societal and contextual issues effectively. Their study emphasizes the need for a sustainable and contextually relevant theological education that not only imparts knowledge but also prepares catechists to engage with the real-world challenges faced by their communities. By investing in continuous education and spiritual formation, catechists can remain dynamic and responsive leaders and faith communicators within the Church, capable of nurturing faith in diverse and often challenging and disruptive environments.

Leveraging Digital Platforms

Incorporating digital tools and platforms can help create interactive and engaging catechetical sessions, especially appealing to younger demographics and extending the reach of catechetical teaching. Digital platforms offer a multitude of resources such as multimedia presentations, interactive quizzes, and online discussion forums, which can enhance the learning experience and make complex theological concepts more intelligible. For instance, using video content to explain biblical stories can captivate the attention of younger audiences, making the lessons more relatable and memorable.

Moreover, digital catechesis allows for greater flexibility, enabling catechists to reach participants who may not be able to attend in-person sessions due to geographical or scheduling constraints. This adaptability ensures that the teachings of the Church are available and accessible to a broader audience, promoting inclusivity and continuous engagement with the faith. The integration of online tools also facilitates continuous learning, where participants can revisit materials and engage with supplementary resources at their own pace.

The practice of using digital tools and platforms to create and share narratives, such as digital storytelling, is often incorporating multimedia elements such as images, audio, and video to enhance the storytelling experience. This approach has significant relevance to catechism, as it offers an innovative way to convey religious teachings and faith stories in a manner that resonates with contemporary audiences.

By utilizing digital storytelling, catechists can make biblical stories and Church teachings more engaging and relatable, especially for younger generations who are accustomed to digital media. The visual and auditory elements of digital storytelling can help to capture attention and facilitate a deeper understanding of complex

theological concepts. Additionally, digital storytelling allows for interactive and participatory experiences, where learners can create and share their own faith stories, fostering a sense of community and personal connection to the teachings. As noted by Bin You (2023), transforming traditional catechetical content into digital formats can bridge the gap between ancient teachings and modern cultural contexts, making religious education more accessible and impactful. Furthermore, research by Halperin et al. (2023) suggests that digital storytelling can expand documentation methods with multimedia support, offering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to sharing and preserving personal and communal narratives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools in education, highlighting their potential to transform traditional teaching methods. As noted by Danca et al. (2023), the pandemic necessitated the rapid development and implementation of digital tools in education, which now play a crucial role in developing competences for both students and educators. Relatedly, this shift underscores the importance of digital literacy for catechists, who must be proficient in using these tools to effectively impart religious teachings and engage with their audience.

By leveraging digital platforms, catechists can create a dynamic and interactive catechetical environment that meets the needs of modern learners. This approach not only enhances the learning experience but also ensures that the teachings of the Church remain relevant and accessible in the digital age.

Building Strong Community Connections

Building a strong community among catechumens can foster a sense of belonging and mutual support, which is essential for sustaining faith journeys. Creating an environment where individuals feel connected and supported helps to nurture their

spiritual growth and maintain their commitment to the faith. This community-centric approach encourages catechumens to share their experiences, challenges, and insights and apprehensions, thereby enriching the collective learning process.

For instance, regular group discussions and community activities provide opportunities for catechumens to interact and form meaningful relationships. These interactions can lead to a deeper understanding of the faith as individuals learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. Moreover, a strong community can provide a support system for individuals facing personal or spiritual challenges, offering them the encouragement and assistance they need to persevere in their faith journey.

The importance of community in catechesis is echoed in the practices of early Christianity, where the communal aspect of faith was pivotal. St. Augustine's sermons to catechumens often emphasized the communal nature of learning and living the faith, highlighting the significance of mutual support and collective growth (St. Augustine, 2023). By fostering a strong sense of community, catechists can create an inclusive and supportive environment that enhances the spiritual development of all participants.

Engaging with the broader parish community through joint events, service projects, and communal worship further strengthens these bonds. Such activities not only deepen the participants' connection to the faith community but also reinforce the practical application of their beliefs in everyday life. This comprehensive approach ensures that catechumens are not journeying in isolation but are part of a vibrant and supportive faith community, which is crucial for sustaining their spiritual growth and commitment.

Adapting Flexibility and Customization

Catechists must develop the ability to adapt the content and delivery of catechetical teachings to meet the needs of their diverse audiences effectively. This flexibility is crucial in addressing the varied personal, cultural, educational, and personal backgrounds of participants, ensuring that the teachings are both accessible and relevant. For example, visual aids and interactive activities can be particularly effective for younger audiences or individuals with developmental disabilities, making abstract theological concepts more concrete and understandable.

Customization of catechetical content also involves contextualizing lessons to resonate with the participants' experiences. This might include integrating contemporary issues and providing examples that are familiar to the audience, thereby bridging the gap between ancient teachings and modern life. The use of contextualized storytelling, real-life scenarios, and culturally relevant analogies can make the material more engaging and relatable, fostering a deeper connection to the faith.

Furthermore, flexibility in teaching methods allows catechists to respond to the dynamic nature of their groups. This adaptability ensures that catechetical sessions remain vibrant and responsive to the needs of the participants. For instance, digital tools and online platforms can be leveraged to create a blended learning environment that combines traditional in-person sessions with digital resources, catering to different learning styles and preferences.

The importance of adaptability and customization in catechesis is highlighted by Barić (2023), who emphasizes the role of visual and artistic expressions in making catechetical education more effective. By incorporating diverse methods and media, catechists can enhance understanding and engagement, thereby fostering a more inclusive and enriching educational experience. Through ongoing reflection and

willingness to innovate, catechists can ensure that their teachings remain relevant and impactful, meeting the spiritual needs of their communities in meaningful ways.

Strengthening Communication Competence

The role of the catechist is dynamically evolving, shaped by both historical precedents and contemporary challenges. By understanding their identity as both educators and witnesses to faith, catechists can fulfill their crucial role in the Church's mission of evangelization, adapting to socio-cultural shifts and socio-technological advancements while maintaining the essence of catechetical ministry. Communication competence, defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately engage in communication, is integral to the role of catechists. It involves knowledge of cultural and generational differences, skills in using technology and engaging multimedia, motivation to maintain theological and doctrinal depth, and the adaptability to customize teaching methods. Catechists must demonstrate contextual awareness and flexibility to make the timeless truths of the gospel accessible and relevant to diverse audiences (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011; Rubin & Martin, 1994). By embodying these aspects of communication competence, catechists can navigate the complexities of contemporary catechesis, ensuring that their teachings are impactful and resonate with all learners.

Navigating Communication Barriers in Inclusion Efforts

Navigating communication barriers is a critical aspect of promoting inclusion within catechetical settings. Effective communication is essential for ensuring that all participants, regardless of their background or abilities, can fully engage with and benefit from catechetical teachings. Communication barriers can arise from various

sources, including language differences, cognitive disabilities, and cultural misunderstandings. To address these challenges, catechists must employ a range of strategies designed to enhance clarity and understanding. These strategies might include the use of visual aids, simplified language, and technology-assisted communication tools, among others. Additionally, fostering an environment of patience and openness encourages participants to express their needs and seek clarification without hesitation.

In this section, I will present basic key points from my review of literature on overcoming communication barriers in inclusive catechesis. These points will be examined and integrated into the findings of my study to understand their effectiveness and applicability in real-world contexts. By identifying and implementing effective communication strategies, catechists can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that respects and accommodates the diverse needs of all faith participants.

Comprehension Challenges

Individuals with PIDD often struggle with the complexity of language, which can impede their understanding of conversations or directives. Simplistic, closed-ended questions that require a yes or no answer can be deceptive as responses might merely echo the question's format or be influenced by non-verbal indicators such as tone or facial expressions (Clare & Elliott, 2001).

Expressive Difficulties

Many PIDD find expressive communication challenging. They may use alternative means like sign languages or pictorial systems to convey their thoughts.

While these methods are effective, they necessitate specific training for both the speaker and the listener to be fully effective (Tuffrey-Wijne, 2012).

Acquiescence

A common issue among those with PDID is their tendency to agree with statements or questions, irrespective of their actual opinions or understanding. This acquiescence aims to please the communicator but can result in significant miscommunications about their real needs and desires (Clare & Elliott, 2001). This behavior is closely related to the concept of *social desirability bias*, where individuals respond in a manner they believe will be viewed favorably by others, rather than reflecting their true feelings or thoughts.

In the context of IDD, this bias is particularly pronounced because individuals may seek approval from those they perceive as more powerful or authoritative. This dynamic can be understood through the lens of *symbolic capital*, which refers to the power and prestige that certain individuals or groups hold. When interacting with those who possess symbolic capital, individuals with IDD may experience *symbolic violence*, a term coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Symbolic violence occurs when the dominant group's norms and expectations are imposed on the subaltern, leading to internalized feelings of inferiority and compliance. This interplay of social desirability bias and symbolic capital highlights the power imbalances that can perpetuate misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the needs and desires of individuals with IDD. It underscores the importance of creating communication environments that minimize these biases and empower individuals with IDD to express their true selves, free from the pressure to conform to the expectations of those in positions of power.

Sensory Impairments

Many individuals with PIDD also contend with sensory disabilities, such as auditory or visual impairments, further complicating their communication challenges. These impairments can drastically affect their ability to receive and interpret information accurately (Emerson & Bernal, 2001).

Need for Simplified and Structured Communication

Adopting simplified and structured communication techniques can significantly enhance comprehension. This method involves breaking information into smaller segments and ensuring understanding before moving forward. It is recommended that caregivers and educators employ concise, straightforward language and avoid technical jargon to boost the efficacy of their communication (Tuffrey-Wijne, 2012).

Strategies for Overcoming Communication Barriers

To improve the inclusion of PDID, implementing the following strategies can significantly enhance communication and engagement:

Training in Alternative Communication Methods

Educating caregivers, teachers, and healthcare providers in alternative communication methods such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA) is crucial. PECS is a form of augmentative and alternative communication that uses pictures to help individuals with limited verbal abilities express their needs and desires. This method encourages communication initiation by allowing users to exchange pictures for items or activities they want. VOCA, on the other hand, includes devices that produce speech when a user selects symbols or pictures, thus facilitating verbal communication for those who

cannot speak. Both methods have been shown to improve communication skills and social interactions for individuals with IDD (Carruthers, Astin, & Munro, 2017).

Regular Sensory Assessments

Early identification and intervention for sensory impairments through regular assessments can reduce their negative impact on communication. Sensory impairments, such as hearing or vision loss, can significantly hinder communication. Regular sensory assessments allow for the early detection of these impairments, enabling timely interventions such as the provision of hearing aids, glasses, or other supportive devices. Addressing sensory issues early can enhance the individual's ability to engage and communicate effectively within catechetical settings.

Enhanced Communication Training

Offering specialized training to all involved parties, including catechists, parents, and peers, can refine their communication techniques with individuals with IDD. This training should emphasize the importance of verifying comprehension and respecting different communication styles. Techniques might include using clear, simple language, repeating or rephrasing information, and using visual aids to support verbal communication. Enhanced communication training helps create an inclusive environment where all participants feel understood and valued.

Use of Technology

Employing technology to aid communication for those with IDD can significantly enhance their ability to interact and express themselves. Various applications and devices are designed to simplify speech or augment auditory and visual inputs, making

communication more accessible. For example, apps that convert text to speech like Proloquo2Go or those that use visual symbols like TouchChat HD can bridge the gap for individuals who struggle with traditional forms of communication. The integration of these technologies into catechetical sessions can provide continuous support and foster greater independence among participants with IDD.

By implementing these strategies, catechists can overcome communication barriers and promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for all participants. These approaches are supported by research and have proven effective in enhancing communication and engagement for individuals with IDD (Carruthers, Astin, & Munro, 2017).

Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Inclusivity

The dialogue surrounding inclusivity within the context of Christian religious education is multifaceted, incorporating theological, philosophical, and social justice perspectives. This chapter delves deeper into these perspectives, emphasizing the ethical imperative for inclusivity as grounded in Christian doctrine and broader educational philosophies.

Theological Imperatives for Inclusivity

Theologically, the Christian faith emphasizes principles of love, acceptance, and community, which serve as foundational imperatives for inclusivity in religious education. McNair and Carter (2010) argue that inclusivity within Christian education not only reflects these core values but also acts as a practical application of Jesus' teachings regarding the treatment of the marginalized and oppressed. This

perspective is supported by the holistic view that every individual, regardless of ability or background, is valued equally in the eyes of God, a principle that should inherently extend to educational practices within Christian contexts (McNair & Carter, 2010).

Philosophical Underpinnings of Inclusive Education

From a philosophical standpoint, inclusivity in education aligns with theories of justice and equality. Noddings (2005) discusses the ethic of care as a crucial philosophical approach that emphasizes understanding and empathizing with others' conditions, which is especially relevant in educational settings. Applying this to religious education, an ethic of care encourages an environment where all students feel understood and valued, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance that transcends doctrinal differences (Noddings, 2005).

Social Justice and Educational Praxis

Linking inclusivity to social justice, Hannam and May (2022) propose that religious education should transcend traditional boundaries of doctrinal teaching to embrace a role that fosters social justice. This involves educating students not only about religious beliefs but also about their role in a just society. This approach mandates an educational framework that is responsive to the diverse backgrounds and needs of students, facilitating an inclusive environment that respects and celebrates diversity (Hannam & May, 2022).

Non-Confessional Faith-Based Education

Expanding on the model of non-confessional faith-based education, Hand (2021) argues for a distinction between imparting religious faith and fostering an

educational environment influenced by religious values. This model supports inclusivity by allowing students from diverse religious backgrounds to engage with the ethical and moral teachings of Christianity without the pressure of doctrinal conformity. Such an approach not only respects individual beliefs but also enriches the educational experience by introducing a variety of perspectives and fostering a dialogue centered around mutual respect and understanding (Hand, 2021).

Inclusivity in Curriculum Design

Further exploring the implications of inclusivity in curriculum design, the works of Freire (2000) highlight the importance of developing a pedagogy that empowers students by valuing their voices and experiences within the educational process. Applying Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed to religious education suggests that curricula should be designed to enable students to critically engage with content and reflect on their own beliefs and values in light of theological teachings, promoting a more inclusive and empowering educational environment (Freire, 2000).

Integrating the concept of an embodied curriculum into the discussion of inclusivity further enriches the approach to religious education. An embodied curriculum emphasizes the importance of experiential learning and the physical, emotional, and spiritual engagement of students in the educational process. This approach aligns with the inclusive educational practices that prioritize the experiences of students.

An embodied curriculum requires educators to create learning experiences that are deeply connected to the students' own lives and contexts. For instance, Hannam and May (2022) illustrate how the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education: Living Difference IV incorporates students' personal experiences as a starting point for

learning. This method encourages students to draw connections between their experiences and the religious concepts being taught, fostering a more profound and personal understanding of the material.

The embodied curriculum also involves practices that engage students physically and emotionally. Activities such as role-playing, storytelling, and community service projects allow students to internalize religious teachings through direct experience. This approach not only enhances cognitive understanding but also nurtures empathy and moral development, essential components of an inclusive educational environment.

This extended discussion integrates various scholarly perspectives to build a comprehensive understanding of the foundational roles that theology, philosophy, and social justice principles play in fostering inclusivity within Christian religious education.

Communication Foundation of Inclusivity

The foundation of inclusive communication is built on the principles of accessibility, respect, and adaptability, ensuring that individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities can fully participate in social, educational, and professional environments. Inclusive communication requires the adoption of various strategies and tools that cater to the unique needs of these individuals. This includes the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, which provide non-verbal or minimally verbal individuals with means to express themselves effectively (Maenner et al., 2020). Educational institutions play a critical role by implementing personalized learning plans and incorporating communication-focused technologies to support students with disabilities, promoting their engagement and interaction within mainstream settings (Christensen et al., 2018). Furthermore, societal attitudes must

evolve to recognize and value the contributions of individuals with disabilities, fostering an environment of respect and understanding. Efforts to educate the public and reduce stigma are essential in creating inclusive communities where everyone has the opportunity to communicate and be heard (Olusanya et al., 2023). Overall, the communication foundation of inclusivity is about breaking down barriers and enabling meaningful participation for all.

Current Trends and Challenges in Communication for Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

Communication strategies for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities have evolved significantly, integrating advanced technologies and tailored educational approaches to enhance inclusivity and accessibility. However, several enduring challenges impede the full realization of these advancements.

Technological Innovations in Communication

The advent of technology has introduced revolutionary tools such as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, specialized software, and various digital platforms, facilitating better communication for those with intellectual disabilities. These technologies allow non-verbal individuals or those with limited speech to express their needs and thoughts more effectively, fostering greater independence and interaction with their communities (Maenner et al., 2020). Despite these advancements, disparities in access to these technologies persist, driven by factors like socio-economic limitations, lack of appropriate training for both users and caregivers, and the digital divide that affects rural and underserved areas (Zablotsky et al., 2019).

The accessibility features of apps and programs are fundamental in promoting inclusivity, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Modern advancements in smartphone technology have significantly enhanced accessibility, enabling individuals with visual, auditory, and cognitive impairments to engage more fully in daily activities. Key features include built-in screen readers like TalkBack for Android and VoiceOver for iOS, which provide voice feedback and allow users to navigate their devices without visual input (Senjam et al., 2021).

These accessibility features extend to various third-party applications designed to assist individuals with disabilities. For example, apps like Be My Eyes connect visually impaired users with sighted volunteers for assistance with daily tasks, while apps like Supersense use artificial intelligence to help users read text, identify objects, and navigate their surroundings (Apostolidou & Fokaidis, 2023). These tools not only enhance independence but also improve the quality of life for users by providing solutions tailored to their specific needs.

Moreover, the integration of tactile feedback, gesture controls, and voice commands in smartphones has facilitated a more intuitive and accessible user experience. Features like magnification, color inversion, and customizable text sizes further ensure that individuals with low vision can use their devices effectively (Khasawneh, 2023). Such innovations highlight the importance of inclusive design in technology, emphasizing the need for continuous improvement and user-centered development to address the evolving needs of people with disabilities.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring widespread awareness and usage of these features. Studies indicate that many individuals, especially in low- and middle-income countries, are unaware of the accessibility functionalities available on their devices (Christy & Pillai, 2021).

Therefore, ongoing education and training for both users and caregivers are essential to maximize the benefits of these technologies.

The accessibility features of apps and programs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between technology and inclusivity. By leveraging advancements in human-computer interaction and prioritizing user-centered design, developers can create more accessible and empowering tools for individuals with disabilities.

Educational Strategies and Inclusion

Education systems are increasingly adopting inclusive curricula that accommodate the diverse needs of students with intellectual disabilities. This shift not only aims to integrate these students into mainstream classrooms but also to provide specialized support to enhance their communication skills. Personalized education plans and the use of communication-focused technologies within the classroom are becoming more prevalent, helping to bridge the gap between students with and without disabilities. However, the implementation varies significantly across different regions and institutions, often limited by inadequate funding, insufficient training of educational staff, and lack of consistent policy enforcement (Christensen et al., 2018).

Social Challenges and Public Perception

Stigma and social isolation remain significant barriers. Misconceptions and lack of awareness about intellectual disabilities can lead to exclusion and discrimination, inhibiting the social and communicative development of affected individuals. Efforts to promote awareness and acceptance within communities are crucial to changing public perceptions and encouraging a more inclusive society. Programs aimed at educating

the public and fostering direct interactions with individuals with intellectual disabilities can alleviate stigma and foster a more supportive community environment (Olusanya et al., 2023).

Impact of Global Health Emergencies

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of individuals with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the realms of health and communication. Lockdown measures and the abrupt shift to online platforms have disrupted traditional education and therapy services, posing significant challenges for those who rely heavily on face-to-face interactions and specialized support. The rapid adoption of telehealth and online learning resources, while beneficial, has not universally met the needs of this demographic, highlighting the need for more robust, accessible, and adaptable communication solutions during crises (Rogers et al., 2021).

The Future of Communication for Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

Looking ahead, the future of communication for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities is poised to be shaped by continued technological innovation, more inclusive educational practices, and a broader societal commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. Emerging technologies such as advanced augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, artificial intelligence (AI) applications, and personalized learning platforms are expected to play pivotal roles in enhancing communication capabilities (Senjam et al., 2021; Apostolidou & Fokaides, 2023).

The integration of AI and machine learning into communication tools holds promise for creating more adaptive and intuitive systems that can better meet the unique needs of each user. For instance, AI-powered apps can learn from user interactions to provide more accurate and contextually relevant suggestions, thereby improving the user experience and effectiveness of communication aids (Christy & Pillai, 2021).

Educational institutions are likely to adopt more comprehensive and inclusive approaches, utilizing technology to support personalized learning experiences and foster an environment where students with disabilities can thrive. Training programs for educators and caregivers will become increasingly important, ensuring they are equipped to utilize these advanced tools effectively (Khasawneh, 2023).

Moreover, societal attitudes towards disabilities are expected to continue evolving, with a greater emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility. This cultural shift, coupled with technological advancements, will contribute to breaking down barriers and enabling individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities to communicate more freely and participate fully in all aspects of life (Olusanya et al., 2023).

Chapter III

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Qualitative Paradigm

The qualitative research paradigm serves as the primary analytical framework for exploring inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) in SPRED ministry. This approach emphasizes an in-depth examination of the experiences, perceptions, and interactions of individuals within faith formation and religious education settings. It values the subjective experiences of individuals (catechists), allowing the researcher to capture the nuanced and context-specific aspects of inclusive communication practices. Methods such as content analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis provide rich, detailed insights into the communicative dynamics at play.

By focusing on the written narratives of catechists about their social practices of ICC, qualitative research uncovers the specific strategies that foster inclusivity, the challenges encountered, and the impact of these practices on the spiritual development of individuals with disabilities. This paradigm is particularly suited to capturing the complex interplay of social, cultural, and communicative factors that shape the effectiveness of inclusive catechetical communication, offering valuable insights that can inform best practices and policy development in faith-based educational settings.

Socio-cultural Tradition

The socio-cultural tradition, as articulated by Robert T. Craig, provides a framework for understanding how communication practices are deeply embedded in and influenced by the cultural and social contexts in which they occur. This tradition emphasizes that communication is not just a transmission of information but a process of creating and negotiating meaning within specific social and cultural settings (Craig, 1999). In the context of inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), the socio-cultural tradition highlights the importance of considering the cultural norms, social practices, and power dynamics that shape how religious education is conveyed and received. For instance, catechists must be aware of the cultural backgrounds and social experiences of PDID to create an inclusive environment that respects and values their unique perspectives and needs. This involves adapting communication methods to be more inclusive, such as using simplified language, visual aids, and interactive activities that resonate with the participants' experiences.

Moreover, the socio-cultural tradition underscores the role of community in shaping communication practices, suggesting that a supportive and inclusive community can significantly enhance the effectiveness of catechetical communication. By fostering an environment that encourages mutual respect, understanding, and active participation, catechists can help PDID to fully engage with and contribute to their faith community. Thus, the socio-cultural tradition offers valuable insights into how inclusive catechetical practices can be developed and implemented to better serve PDID, promoting a more equitable and empathetic approach to religious education (Craig, 1999).

Communicative Ecology

To effectively explore the social practices of catechists of inclusive catechetical communication with individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), it is crucial to establish a robust analytical framework. As part of the theoretical triangulation of this study, the analytical framework will integrate various theoretical perspectives to offer a comprehensive view for interpreting and understanding the data. In line with the *communicative ecology model*, this inquiry will consist of three interconnected dimensions—*technological*, *social*, and *discursive*—each providing unique insights into the nature, structure, and dynamics of inclusive catechesis. By examining these dimensions (or layers) and their interactions, the study aims to uncover the complex nature of catechetical communication and identify conditions that enhance or hinder its effectiveness in fostering inclusivity within faith formation and religious education contexts.

Table 1

Communicative ecology model as analytical framework

Communicative Ecology of Inclusive Catechetical Communication		
<i>Technological layer</i>	<i>Discursive layer</i>	<i>Social Layer</i>
Qualitative Methodological Approaches in Multimodal Inquiry		
content analysis	content analysis	content analysis
artifact analysis	artifact analysis	artifact analysis
socio-spatial analysis	socio-spatial analysis	socio-spatial analysis

Primarily, communicative ecology will be adopted as the overarching framework to deepen our understanding and improve the effectiveness of the various dimensions (i.e., technological, social, and discursive) of catechetical communication specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities. Communicative ecology, as a

framework, encompasses multiple layers of communication—each contributing uniquely to the complex formation experience. Understanding the three interanimating layers is pivotal in crafting formative environments that are both inclusive and engaging.

Technological Layer

The technological layer in communicative ecology encompasses the various tools, platforms, and infrastructures that facilitate communication and information exchange. This layer includes traditional media such as books, television, and radio, as well as digital technologies like computers, smartphones, and the internet. It also covers assistive technologies designed to aid individuals with disabilities, such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, and customized educational apps. The technological layer is integral to creating accessible and inclusive communication environments, as it provides the means through which messages are delivered and received. In the context of catechetical communication for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, the technological layer can be leveraged to develop interactive and multimedia-rich content that enhances understanding and engagement. For example, digital platforms can offer adaptive learning modules that adjust to the user's pace and comprehension level, while virtual reality tools can create immersive experiences that make abstract religious concepts more tangible. By effectively utilizing the technological layer, catechists can ensure that their teachings are accessible to all learners, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment (Parrish, 2020; Reed & Black, 2018).

Social Layer

The social layer in communicative ecology encompasses the interpersonal relationships, community dynamics, and social structures that influence communication processes. This layer includes the interactions between individuals, groups, and institutions, highlighting the roles that social networks and community ties play in shaping communication practices. In the context of catechetical communication, the social layer is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities can actively participate. This involves creating and maintaining a network of relationships that encourage mutual support, understanding, and collaboration. Catechists, religious educators, and community members must work together to develop inclusive practices that accommodate diverse needs, such as peer support systems, inclusive group activities, and personalized mentoring. By focusing on the social layer, catechists can create a sense of belonging and community for all participants, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included in the educational process. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of catechetical communication but also strengthens the overall cohesion and unity of the faith community (Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Williams, 2019).

Discursive Layer

The discursive layer in communicative ecology involves the content, symbols, language, and narratives used in communication. This layer is crucial for shaping how messages are constructed, interpreted, and understood within a given context. In catechetical communication, the discursive layer encompasses the theological concepts, religious teachings, and moral stories conveyed through various forms of

media and interaction. For individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, it is essential to adapt these discourses to be more accessible and comprehensible. This can involve simplifying complex theological language, using concrete and relatable examples, incorporating visual aids, and employing multimodal storytelling techniques. Additionally, the discursive layer includes the cultural and contextual nuances that influence how religious messages are perceived and internalized. By carefully considering and tailoring the discursive elements, catechists can make religious education more engaging and meaningful for all learners, fostering deeper understanding and connection to the faith (Smith & Clark, 2018; Brown, 2021).

Communicative ecology is a multifaceted framework that examines the complex and dynamic interactions within communication environments, offering a holistic perspective that integrates various elements to provide a thorough understanding of communication processes. Its general attributes include a layered structure, adaptability, contextual sensitivity, and an emphasis on interactivity and relationships. The layered structure, typically divided into technological, social, and discursive layers, allows for a detailed analysis of how different aspects of communication interact. The technological layer includes traditional and digital media as well as assistive technologies that enhance accessibility and inclusivity (Parrish, 2020; Reed & Black, 2018). The social layer focuses on interpersonal relationships, social networks, and community dynamics, highlighting the importance of creating supportive and inclusive environments (Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Williams, 2019). The discursive layer involves the content, language, symbols, and narratives used in communication, ensuring that messages are accessible and meaningful (Smith & Clark, 2018; Brown, 2021). Communicative ecology's adaptability allows it to be applied across various contexts, from small community groups to large media

environments, tailoring strategies to specific needs. Its contextual sensitivity ensures that communication practices are relevant and effective, considering cultural and environmental factors. The emphasis on interactivity and relationships underscores the importance of active participation and mutual understanding in communication processes. Overall, communicative ecology provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and enhancing communication, making it a valuable tool for various fields, including education, community engagement, and media analysis.

Integrating these dimensions within the communicative ecology framework not only makes catechetical ministry more effective for individuals with disabilities but also enriches the broader faith community. By promoting inclusivity and understanding, this approach helps build a more cohesive community spirit, fostering an environment where all members feel valued and empowered to contribute. Thus, this strategy supports not just the spiritual development of those with disabilities but also the spiritual vitality and unity of the entire community. This holistic approach ensures that everyone, regardless of ability, can participate fully in the spiritual life of their community.

Conceptual Framework

Communicative ecology is a comprehensive framework that examines the interplay between different communication components within a given environment. This approach recognizes that effective communication is not merely about the transmission of messages but also about understanding the complex interactions between various elements such as technology, social networks, and discursive practices. By exploring how these elements interact, communicative ecology provides a holistic view of communication processes, making it particularly useful for addressing

the needs of diverse audiences. This framework can be applied to various fields, including education, media studies, and community engagement, to develop strategies that are both effective and inclusive. The integration of the technological, social, and discursive realms within the communicative ecology framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding inclusive catechetical communication. By examining the interactions between these realms, the study will offer insights into how catechists can create more inclusive and supportive environments for PDID, ultimately enhancing their participation and spiritual growth within the church community.

Technological Realm

The technological realm in communicative ecology focuses on the devices and connecting media that enable communication and interaction. In the context of inclusive catechetical communication, this realm is crucial for understanding how technological tools facilitate or hinder the engagement of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) in religious education.

The researcher will identify and examine the various technologies that SPRED has integrated into its operations to enhance virtual meetings and online gatherings, online training and development, digital communication and coordination, observation centers with audio-visual technology, digital tools and resources, and creative initiatives for community engagement. This comprehensive analysis will explore the specific platforms and tools utilized to support these activities. Additionally, we will delve into the use of observation centers equipped with advanced audio-visual technology, digital resources designed for accessibility, and innovative community engagement strategies. By understanding these technological interventions, we aim to provide a detailed overview of how SPRED leverages digital tools to support its

mission and foster an inclusive environment for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Social Realm

The social realm consists of people and the social structures that organize them, ranging from informal friendship groups to formal community organizations. This realm is pivotal for exploring how social interactions and relationships impact inclusive catechetical communication.

Moving forward, the research will analyze social engagement and communication patterns among catechists and PDID in various settings, such as group discussions and social events. This analysis aims to examine how social norms and practices influence inclusive communication, particularly looking at how catechists either facilitate or impede the participation of PDID. In addition, the study will evaluate social artifacts like community newsletters, event programs, and meeting minutes. This evaluation will focus on how these artifacts reflect and promote inclusivity within catechetical practices, for example, by assessing the representation of PDID in community events. Lastly, the research will investigate the physical and social environments of catechetical settings, concentrating on aspects like seating arrangements and accessibility features. The objective here is to analyze how these environments support social inclusion and interaction among participants, such as the presence of ramps, signage, and overall accessibility of the spaces.

Discursive Realm

The discursive realm involves the content of communication—the ideas, themes, and narratives that constitute the social universe within which the communicative ecology operates.

Transitioning to the analysis of written and spoken discourse, this research will examine catechetical texts, sermons, and conversations. The goal is to identify themes and strategies in inclusive communication and to understand how language is used to include or exclude persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). For instance, the study will look at the specific terminologies used to address or describe PDID in catechetical instruction. Next, the study will shift to examining physical artifacts such as catechetical books, pamphlets, and visual aids. This analysis will focus on evaluating the content and design of these materials for inclusivity and accessibility, assessing aspects like text readability and the use of inclusive language and imagery. Finally, the research will investigate the layout and organization of physical spaces used for catechetical instruction, such as classrooms and prayer rooms. The analysis will concentrate on how these spaces are designed to support or hinder inclusive communication, with a particular focus on seating arrangements and accessibility features.

Examining communicative ecology through the lenses of content analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive catechetical communication can be optimized for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). Content analysis reveals the underlying themes and language strategies used in written and spoken discourse, highlighting the ways in which inclusivity is fostered or hindered through verbal communication. Artifact analysis offers insights into the design and functionality of educational materials, ensuring that catechetical resources are accessible and

engaging for all learners. Finally, socio-spatial analysis examines the physical and virtual environments where catechetical activities occur, assessing how these spaces can be structured to promote interaction and inclusivity. Together, these analytical approaches provide a holistic view of the communicative practices within the SPRED program, enabling the development of more effective and empathetic strategies that honor the diverse needs of all participants. By integrating these findings, the study aims to enhance the overall catechetical experience, fostering a more inclusive and supportive faith community.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The qualitative research design was applied through the lens of communicative ecological analysis to investigate inclusive catechetical communication within the SPRED environment. By employing this framework, the study systematically explored how various communicative modes—such as linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial—worked together in the social practice of catechetical ministry to facilitate engagement and support for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). The research involved a combination of content analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis to comprehensively understand the communicative practices of catechists. Content analysis examined written texts to uncover the themes and strategies used in inclusive communication. Artifact analysis assessed the materials used in catechetical instruction, evaluating their design and functionality for inclusivity. Socio-spatial analysis investigated both virtual and physical spaces to understand how these environments supported or hindered inclusive interactions. This multimodal approach provided a holistic understanding of the catechetical praxis, emphasizing the interplay between different modes of communication and the broader social and cultural context in which they operated.

Multimodal discourse analysis

Complementarily, this research study employed a multimodal discourse analysis to understand the complex and integrated ways in which catechists used

various modes of communication to engage and support persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) within the SPRED environment. This analytical framework explored how different communicative practices combined to create inclusive catechetical communication. Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is an analytical approach that examined how various modes of communication, such as linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial elements, interacted to create meaning in different contexts. In the context of inclusive catechetical communication, MDA provided a robust framework for understanding how catechists could effectively engage and support persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This approach acknowledged that communication was not limited to spoken or written language alone but encompassed a range of semiotic resources that could enhance understanding and participation. For example, visual aids, such as images and symbols, could simplify complex theological concepts, while auditory elements like music could create a more engaging and accessible catechetical environment (Jewitt, 2009). Additionally, gestures and spatial arrangements could facilitate better interaction and inclusion during catechetical sessions. By analyzing these multimodal elements, researchers identified best practices and strategies that fostered a more inclusive and participatory catechetical experience for PDID. Ultimately, MDA helped in creating a more empathetic and effective communicative practice that respected and accommodated the diverse needs of all participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The study examined how catechists utilized multiple modes of communication, such as linguistic (written words), visual (images, symbols), auditory (music, sounds), gestural (body language, facial expressions), and spatial (use of physical space and objects). This approach acknowledged that meaning was constructed not through a

single mode but through the interplay of various semiotic resources. Moreover, the analysis explored the interrelationships between different modes of communication within the catechetical practice. Understanding how visual aids complemented verbal instructions or how spatial arrangements enhanced tactile learning experiences was key to understanding the effectiveness of inclusive catechetical communication. This framework considered the specific affordances of each mode in conveying religious and spiritual concepts. For example, visual symbols could help simplify complex theological ideas, while tactile materials could enhance engagement for individuals with certain sensory preferences. Consequently, the study situated the catechetical practices within the broader social and cultural context of the SPRED community. This included considering how societal attitudes towards disabilities influenced communicative practices and how the community's cultural norms shaped the interpretation and reception of different modes.

Catechists were encouraged to engage in reflective practice, critically examining their use of multimodal communication and its impact on PDID. This reflective process helped uncover tacit knowledge and unarticulated nuances that shaped their interactions and pedagogical strategies. The study employed a combination of qualitative methods to gather data and conduct a thorough analysis of multimodal communication practices. Thematic analysis was used to analyze SPRED newsletters, which documented the communicative and discursive practices of catechists. This helped identify common themes and strategies used in multimodal catechetical communication. Artifact analysis involved examining the materials and resources used in catechetical instruction, such as visual aids, tactile objects, and digital tools. This analysis provided insights into how these artifacts facilitated inclusive communication. The study assessed the catechetical socio-spatial environment within

the SPRED center to understand how the physical setup supported or limited faith formation. This included analyzing how spaces were organized to accommodate diverse communicative needs and preferences.

By applying the principles of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this research aimed to deepen the understanding of how inclusive catechetical communication was practiced and perceived within the SPRED environment. This approach fostered a more empathetic and tailored catechetical practice that honored the unique experiences and expressions of faith by all participants, promoting a more inclusive and participatory community of faithful that genuinely accommodated the diversity of its members.

Data Collection Procedures

The methodology for this research study aimed to explore how catechists at the Special Religious Development (SPRED) center in the Archdiocese of Chicago implemented inclusive catechetical communication with individuals who had developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

SPRED as an agency

The choice of SPRED center is pivotal as it embodies an agency deeply committed to fostering inclusive communication within its educational and communal practices.

Apart from my prior involvement in the Archdiocese of Chicago's SPRED program, I decided to conduct my research about SPRED because of its nature as an agency that supports and encourages inclusive communication through the following means:

Ensures accessibility - It establishes social and physical environments that are accommodating to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This includes places where people can fully and easily engage in liturgical, educational, and communal contexts.

Promotes inclusion - It strives to make sure that individuals with disabilities are actively included in all facets of church life, not just as beneficiaries of pastoral care but also as active participants in the social and spiritual life of the community. This may entail modifying community events, liturgical duties, and religious education curricula so that everyone can participate fully and express their opinion. For instance, in catechetical settings, adaptations might include the use of assistive technologies or simplified instructional materials tailored to the learning needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This approach is supported by research that emphasizes the importance of creating accessible and inclusive environments for all participants. According to Terrón-Pérez et al. (2021), the physical environment significantly influences engagement and participation, highlighting the need for adaptations in catechetical settings to promote inclusivity. Moreover, the roles of catechists and other liturgical leaders have historically evolved to include broader participation. As noted by Caron (2023), these roles have been adapted over time to meet the changing needs of congregations, including those with disabilities, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and compassionate accommodation.

Acknowledges and fosters gifts - It recognizes and fosters the practical and spiritual gifts that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities possess. This can entail giving them venues to impart their knowledge, skills, and insights in ways that uplift the Church and validate their worth as members of Christ's Body.

Educates the community - It raises awareness within the larger Church community of the value of inclusivity and the ways in which it benefits the Church as a whole. This entails dispelling myths and biases about individuals with disabilities and promoting an environment of love and respect for one another.

Support families - It provides support to the families of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, recognizing that they are an integral part of the Church community and that their well-being is essential to the full participation of their family members.

The data collection procedure comprised three critical steps designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of inclusivity in catechetical communication: content analysis of SPRED newsletters, artifact analysis of catechetical objects, and socio-spatial analysis of the catechetical environment.

Thematic Analysis

The first method focused on the SPRED center's monthly newsletters. Thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative research method, was particularly suitable for investigating the rich content of the SPRED center's newsletters. These newsletters provided firsthand reflections from catechists on their experiences, thereby revealing the underlying patterns of catechetical practices and inclusivity. As described by Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis offered a flexible yet systematic approach to analyzing textual data, emphasizing the need for a rigorous method to ensure trustworthiness and in-depth exploration.

In the context of SPRED's newsletters, thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify and report recurring themes related to catechetical activities and inclusivity practices, which were crucial for understanding the nuanced and situated

perspectives of the catechists. This was aligned with the views of Braun and Clarke (2019), who highlighted the method's ability to reflectively adapt to different datasets, enabling researchers to delve into complex narratives like those found in SPRED newsletters.

The procedure for conducting thematic analysis on these newsletters involved several key steps:

Table 2

Key steps in thematic analysis

1. Familiarization	Reading through the newsletters extensively to gain a deep understanding of the content
2. Coding	Generating initial codes from the data which capture key thoughts and concepts related to the catechists' experiences
3. Developing themes	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each prospective theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset, ensuring they form a coherent pattern.
5. Defining and naming themes	Refining each theme and generating appropriate phrasing for each.
6. Writing up	Relaying the analysis in an insightful, coherent narrative form, incorporating vivid examples from the dataset.

Practical Implications of Using Newsletters for Thematic Analysis

Using newsletters as the primary source for thematic analysis in this context was particularly beneficial for the following reasons:

Shed light on ongoing conversations: Newsletters often contained regular columns or sections that addressed ongoing developments in catechetical methods, offering a longitudinal perspective of how strategies evolved over time.

Highlighted community feedback: They included feedback from the catechetical community, giving voice to the experiences of those directly involved, including catechists, participants, and families.

Served as educational resources: Newsletters also served as a platform for disseminating best practices and tips for inclusive communication, which were analyzed to understand what was considered an exemplary set of practices within the community.

Applying thematic analysis to SPRED's newsletters not only uncovered the embedded narratives within but also enhanced the understanding of the catechetical approach to inclusivity. It offered a structured yet flexible method for SPRED to systematically review and enhance their communicative practices and discursive strategies, ensuring that the core values of inclusivity and community support were effectively transmitted and practiced.

Artifact Analysis

The second method used was artifact analysis. It involved a detailed examination of the various materials and resources used in catechetical instruction to assess their inclusivity and effectiveness in supporting persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This analysis included catechetical books, pamphlets, visual aids, tactile objects, and digital tools. The goal was to evaluate how these artifacts facilitated engagement and comprehension for PDID by considering their design, accessibility features, and the extent to which they incorporated multimodal elements (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For instance, visual aids were analyzed for their clarity and relevance to the theological concepts being taught, while

tactile materials were assessed for their ability to provide sensory stimulation that aided learning.

The study assessed common artifacts used in SPRED sessions, including flowers, the Bible, the cross, candles, and the altar, for their accessibility and effectiveness in meeting diverse needs. By examining these items, the study aimed to identify best practices and areas for improvement in creating inclusive catechetical resources that enhanced the faith formation experience for all participants (Jewitt, 2009).

Socio-spatial Analysis

The third method used was socio-spatial analysis, which involved an assessment of how physical environments influenced interactions and behaviors, especially within settings like SPRED where inclusive catechesis was practiced. In particular, the method involved evaluating the arrangement of spaces, accessibility of materials, and overall setup to determine their impact on the engagement of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

The rationale for employing socio-spatial analysis in this context was well-supported by literature that examined how physical spaces affect individuals with disabilities. According to Terrón-Pérez et al. (2021), the physical environment significantly influenced activity levels and engagement in preschool children, suggesting that similar dynamics could affect PDID in catechetical settings. Moore and Sugiyama (2023) also emphasized the importance of physical environment quality in early childhood educational facilities, further underscoring the relevance of such an analysis for SPRED.

In practical and procedural terms, conducting socio-spatial analysis within SPRED involved:

Table 3

Procedures in socio-spatial analysis

<i>Observation and documentation</i>	Systematically recording the physical setup and accessibility features of the SPRED center.
<i>Analysis of space layout</i>	Critically assessing how the spatial arrangement supports or hinders inclusive communication and engagement.
<i>Impact assessment</i>	Perceptively evaluating how these physical factors contribute to or detract from the effectiveness of catechetical communication.

By applying socio-spatial analysis, I was able to provide empirical evidence on which aspects of the physical environment needed adjustment to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in catechesis. This method not only aligned with the principles of inclusive education but also provided a structured and systematic approach to making informed improvements in environments designed for PDID.

By integrating these three methodological approaches, the research aimed to provide a holistic understanding of how catechetical communication was conducted in an inclusive manner at the SPRED center. The findings from this study were expected to offer valuable insights into improving practices and enhancing the educational and communal experiences for all members of the SPRED community.

Data Recording Procedures

In my research on the social practices of catechists in inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities, meticulous data recording procedures were implemented across all methods of data collection to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Thematic Analysis

I employed thematic analysis to investigate the SPRED newsletter, focusing on how it showcased and promoted communication strategies and educational techniques for inclusive catechetical teaching. The newsletters served as a primary source, offering valuable insights into the ongoing development, successes, challenges, and triumphs associated with teaching catechism inclusively to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Detailed Steps for Utilizing Newsletters in Thematic Analysis

1. *Digitization and organization of newsletters*: If the SPRED newsletters were not in electronic format yet, they were digitized to facilitate easier retrieval, access, and analysis. This step ensured that all newsletter content was available for systematic examination, including articles, catechist testimonials, and feedback from participants or families.
2. *Systematic coding of newsletter content*: Each newsletter was carefully coded. The coding involved inductively and iteratively identifying and tagging text segments that related directly to inclusive communication strategies, descriptions of catechetical sessions, and feedback or stories from catechists

about their experiences. Codes might have included tags like "visual aids used," "participant engagement," or "strategies for inclusivity."

3. *Identification and analysis of themes:* From the coded data, major themes were extracted. These themes might have involved specific educational tools highlighted within the newsletters, common challenges faced by catechists in implementing inclusive practices, or success stories that showcased effective communication methods. The themes reflected both the content of the newsletters and the broader goals of the catechetical program.
4. *Refinement and definition of themes:* The emerging themes were refined to ensure they precisely encapsulated the insights gathered from the newsletters. This involved iteratively revisiting the coded segments to verify that the themes accurately represented the intended message and were comprehensive in their scope, covering aspects like adaptations for various disabilities, catechist training programs, and community responses.
5. *Reporting and discussion:* The findings from the thematic analysis were compiled into a detailed report. This report not only discussed each theme but also linked the findings back to the theoretical frameworks and existing literature on inclusive education. Examples from the newsletters were used to illustrate how the themes manifested in real-world catechetical settings, providing practical insights into the effectiveness of different communication and pedagogical strategies.

By focusing on newsletters, the thematic analysis tapped into a rich vein of documented experiences and reflections that were directly relevant to the practice of inclusive catechetical communication. This approach not only enriched the

understanding of how catechesis was conducted for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities but also enhanced the practical knowledge base from which catechists could draw in their ongoing educational ministry.

Socio-spatial Analysis

In the context of understanding inclusive catechetical communication, socio-spatial analysis offered a unique and invaluable perspective. This method involved the meticulous collection and analysis of visual data from the physical environments where catechetical sessions occurred, enhancing our understanding of how space influenced teaching efficacy, reflective learning, and participant engagement.

Collection of visual data: Photographs of the catechetical settings were systematically collected to document the physical-structural arrangements and patterns. This set of visual information captured everything from seating arrangements and accessibility features to the overall layout that accommodated or hindered inclusivity.

Annotation of visuals: Each image was carefully annotated to emphasize features critical to the focus of the study, such as elements that facilitated or obstructed effective communication and participant interaction. Annotations included notes on the placement of assistive technology, the use of visual aids, and the physical barriers that might have affected participants with physical disabilities.

Comprehensive field notes: Detailed field notes were compiled, synthesizing the annotated visual data and recorded observations. These notes provided a contextual basis of how spatial arrangements impacted the learning and communicative processes within catechetical sessions.

Socio-spatial analysis provided a profound lens through which to view and improve the physical environments of catechetical education, particularly for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. By examining and annotating visual data, such as photographs and sketches, and meticulously noting the interactions within these spaces, this method offered critical insights into how physical settings could either facilitate or hinder inclusive communication and learning. The findings from such analysis were vital for crafting more accessible and engaging catechetical environments that supported the needs of all participants, ensuring that educational practices were as inclusive, responsive, and effective as possible. This approach not only enhanced our understanding of spatial dynamics but also guided practical improvements in educational settings, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of inclusive education.

The data recording procedures involving thematic analysis of newsletters, artifact analysis, and spatial analysis of the catechetical environment collectively provided a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to understanding inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Thematic analysis of newsletters helped identify and document recurring themes and applications that reflected the evolving dynamics of catechetical communication. Artifact analysis in inclusive catechetical communication involved evaluating the design and accessibility of educational materials to ensure they effectively supported and engaged persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Finally, socio-spatial analysis illuminated how physical environments influenced teaching and learning processes, highlighting ways in which space could be optimized to support inclusivity and engender social justice. In synergy, these methods not only enriched our understanding of effective catechetical practices but

also guided improvements that could make religious education more accessible and meaningful for all participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collection procedures for the study on inclusive catechetical communication within the SPRED program employed a triangulation approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach encompassed three distinct but complementary methods:

Thematic Analysis

In this research study, thematic analysis utilized the SPRED newsletters as a crucial source of qualitative data. These newsletters, produced monthly from September to May each year, were penned by the catechists themselves and disseminated among the SPRED community, including other catechists, parents, and persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This rich repository of narratives provided reflections on personal experiences, detailed accounts of interactions during catechetical sessions, and observations on the use of materials and methods that fostered inclusive catechetical communication.

The process involved a systematic examination of newsletters published over the last five years, amounting to at least 45 issues. I methodically coded the content of these documents, focusing on descriptions of catechetical activities, instances of inclusivity practices, and reflections on both successes and challenges encountered by the catechists. This analysis aimed to identify recurring themes and patterns that emerged within these written reflections, providing profound insights into how

catechists perceived and navigated their roles within the inclusive educational framework.

By analyzing these newsletters, the study gained access to the catechists' firsthand perspectives and experiences, articulated in their own words. This approach not only enhanced the authenticity of the data but also enriched the understanding of the lived realities and operational dynamics at the SPRED center. The document analysis served as a foundational component of the research, complementing the in-depth interviews and socio-spatial analysis to construct a comprehensive picture of the catechetical practices and the environment fostering inclusivity at SPRED.

Artifact Analysis

The second data collection procedure for this study involved a detailed and methodical examination of various educational materials and resources. This process was designed to assess their design, accessibility, and effectiveness in supporting the engagement and learning of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

The first step in artifact analysis involved gathering physical artifacts used in SPRED catechetical sessions. This included catechetical books, pamphlets, visual aids, and tactile objects. These materials were sourced from multiple SPRED sessions to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Each artifact was cataloged with detailed descriptions, including the type of material, its purpose, and how it was used in catechetical instruction. Special attention was given to modifications and adaptations made to these materials to cater to the needs of PDID, such as the use of simplified language, large print, braille, or sensory-friendly features.

To provide context for the artifacts, detailed notes were taken on their usage within the SPRED sessions. This involved direct observations of catechetical sessions where these materials were employed. Field notes captured how catechists utilized these artifacts, the reactions and interactions of PDID with the materials, and any challenges or successes observed in their application. This contextual information was crucial for understanding the practical implications and effectiveness of the artifacts in real-world settings.

The collected data were organized and documented systematically. Each artifact was accompanied by descriptive data, including the context of its use and any observed modifications. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common patterns and themes in the data, focusing on aspects such as inclusivity, accessibility, and the overall impact on catechetical communication. This comprehensive documentation and analysis provided a holistic understanding of how educational materials supported inclusive catechetical practices within the SPRED program.

By following these detailed data collection procedures, the study aimed to provide a thorough evaluation of the artifacts used in SPRED catechetical instruction. The insights gained helped identify best practices and areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to more effective and inclusive catechetical communication strategies for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Socio-spatial Analysis

Socio-spatial analysis was utilized to examine the physical environment of the Special Religious Development (SPRED) center to understand how space influenced and facilitated inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental

and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This methodological approach involved a detailed assessment of the layout and arrangement of the catechetical settings within the center. I documented and analyzed how the physical configuration of these spaces—such as the placement of furniture, the accessibility of entryways and materials, and the overall spatial organization—affected the engagement and interaction between catechists and PDID.

The socio-spatial analysis included observations of how spaces were used during catechetical sessions, noting any modifications or setups that promoted inclusivity. For instance, I looked at whether spaces allowed for wheelchair access, how materials were displayed for those with sensory impairments, and how the arrangement of seating affected communication dynamics. Photographs and sketches were used to capture the spatial layouts, providing visual data that supported the analysis and interpretation. This spatial data helped identify potential physical barriers that could hinder inclusive practices and suggested improvements to enhance the physical environment for more effective catechetical communication. By integrating these spatial insights with data from interviews and document analyses, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of how space played a critical role in supporting or impeding inclusive education within the SPRED center.

The data analysis procedures for this research study integrated findings from thematic analysis of SPRED newsletters, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis to construct a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of inclusive catechetical communication practices. Each method provided a unique lens through which to examine the complexities and subjectivities of the insights of catechist interlocutors working with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Through a meticulous process of coding, thematic analysis, and cross-validation, this study

identified overarching themes and subthemes across diverse data sources, ensuring a robust and holistic analysis. The convergence of data from various collection methods enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a deep, multi-faceted view of the catechetical environment. This integrated approach not only helped to uncover the essence of inclusive communication within catechesis but also informed future strategies and interventions aimed at improving educational practices and fostering a more inclusive community within the SPRED program.

Interpretation

In this research on inclusive catechetical communication at the SPRED center in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the integration and interpretation of data were guided by a methodical approach to ensure a robust and insightful analysis. The study meticulously examined how catechists engaged in inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

Data Integration Approach

The research employed triangulation to cross-validate the findings from diverse data sources. This included thematic analysis of SPRED newsletters, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis of the catechetical environment. By comparing and contrasting insights from these varied sources, the study aimed to construct a comprehensive understanding of catechetical practices and experiences. This triangulation not only enhanced the reliability and depth of the findings but also provided a more nuanced view of the complexities involved in practicing inclusive catechetical communication.

Participant Engagement and Validation

To ensure the validity and resonance of the findings with participants' experiences, the process of member checking was integral. Preliminary results of the analysis were shared with catechists to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations. This step was crucial as it allowed catechists to reflect on the findings and offer corrections or additional insights, thereby enriching the data interpretation and reinforcing the study's credibility.

Comprehensive Reporting

The final stage of the research involved synthesizing all data into a coherent narrative. This narrative detailed the intricacies and subtleties of how inclusive catechetical communication was implemented by catechists at the SPRED center. The report aimed to provide actionable insights and deepen the understanding of effective practices that could potentially inform policy development and enhance educational strategies within the SPRED program and similarly situated settings.

Future Directions

This methodical approach to data integration and interpretation ensured that the research captured a holistic view of the catechetical environment. It offered meaningful contributions to the field of religious education and community integration by elucidating the effective and empathetic communication strategies used by catechists. Furthermore, by laying out the complexities of inclusive practices, the study paved the way for future research and development in catechetical education, promoting empirically grounded policy changes and educational improvements across various religious and educational contexts. This comprehensive analysis not only

contributed to academic knowledge but also provided practical value to the communities involved, enhancing the communal life of faith and inclusion within the church.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

In my qualitative research focused on inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID), I ensured the trustworthiness of my findings through a series of deliberate strategies to enhance credibility, trustworthiness, and applicability.

To bolster trustworthiness, I utilized triangulation by incorporating multiple data collection methods—document analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis. This approach allowed me to cross-verify data collected through these diverse sources, enriching the data and confirming consistency across different modes of data collection.

I conducted member checking to guarantee the accuracy of the research findings. By presenting preliminary analysis to participants and inviting their feedback, I refined the data interpretation to ensure it accurately reflected their perspectives and experiences.

Reflectivity was a critical component of my approach. Throughout the study, I maintained a critical awareness of how my biases and background might influence the research process. By keeping a reflective journal and engaging in discussions with unbiased peers, I worked to minimize these influences and authenticate data interpretation.

Furthermore, I maintained detailed documentation of every step of the research process, including data collection procedures, coding decisions, and any changes made during the study. This meticulous documentation allowed the research to be reproducible and the findings verifiable.

A systematic approach to coding was employed, using predefined codes based on the research questions (deductive approach) and themes that emerged from the data (inductive approach). I utilized qualitative data analysis software, and regular reviews of the coding scheme ensured consistency throughout the data analysis phase.

Peer debriefing was used to enhance reliability. By discussing the findings and the process with peers not involved in the research, I provided an external check that helped to enhance the study's reliability.

To enhance trustworthiness, I provided rich, thick descriptions that offered detailed insights into the contexts and interactions of the catechetical sessions. Such depth ensured the findings were deeply rooted in comprehensive data.

I clarified and tackled any form of researcher bias at the outset and maintained an external audit trail. An intercoder validation process was employed, where multiple coders independently analyzed the data and compared their results to ensure consistency and accuracy in coding. These rigorous methods and procedures were designed to provide valid, reliable, and trustworthy insights that could influence future educational strategies and policies in faith formation.

Chapter V

BRIDGING WORLDS: THE TECHNOLOGICAL REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY

“As I step into the holy room, the soft, calming music surrounds us, creating a sense of unity and tranquility. It's in these moments that I realize the profound impact of technology on our SPRED community. Beyond the holy room, technology serves as a bridge, connecting us to SPRED groups across the globe. Through online training and virtual support sessions, we strengthen our bonds and share knowledge, ensuring we are well-prepared to support individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This digital realm not only enhances our training but also fosters a global community, united in our mission” (Lopez, 2024).

This SPRED catechist's testimony captures the *dual function* of technology in their communication ecology. It highlights how technology enhances both the spiritual ambiance within the holy room and the practical aspects of training and global connectivity. In the following discussion, we will delve deeper into the technological realm of SPRED's communicative ecology, exploring how digital tools and platforms have been integrated to promote inclusivity, maintain connections, and support the SPRED mission.

Content Analysis of SPRED Newsletters

The analysis of the SPRED newsletters was undertaken through a deliberate, meticulous, and systematic process. Each newsletter, spanning from September 2019 to May 2024, was carefully examined to identify recurring themes and significant insights related to the technological realm within the communicative ecology of

SPRED. The thematic analysis involved an in-depth review of the content, categorizing and comparing the various technological tools and communication methods employed as described by the catechists. By systematically extracting and synthesizing these insights, the analysis revealed how technology has been integrated into SPRED's activities, enhancing communication, training, and community engagement. This methodical approach not only highlighted the benefits and challenges faced by the SPRED community but also provided a comprehensive understanding of the transformative impact of technology on inclusive catechetical communication.

Pre-Pandemic Technology Integration

Prior to the pandemic, SPRED had been relatively inactive in integrating technology into its catechetical practices. This was largely due to a perceived lack of necessity for its use and a prevailing mindset that technology could act as a barrier rather than a bridge in engaging with individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This perception led to a more traditional approach to catechesis, emphasizing in-person interactions and hands-on activities that were believed to be more effective in fostering personal connections and spiritual growth. However, the pandemic created opportunities for SPRED to explore and utilize technology in new ways.

Post-Pandemic Technological Integration

In examining the newsletters from SPRED, it becomes evident that technology now plays a pivotal role in the organization's communicative ecology. This analysis highlights how SPRED has effectively integrated digital tools to foster inclusivity, maintain connections, and support its mission. The newsletters provide a

comprehensive overview of how technology has been utilized to continue catechetical sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitate training and development, enhance communication and coordination, and expand fundraising and outreach efforts. Additionally, the commitment to adapting technology for accessibility ensures that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can fully participate in the community's activities. This discussion underscores the transformative impact of technology on SPRED's operations and its broader implications for communicative ecology.

Socio-Cultural Context of Communication

Transitioning from the individual practices examined through multimodal inquiry it is crucial to consider the broader cultural and social frameworks that influence these interactions. The socio-cultural tradition in communication examines how cultural norms, social practices, and power dynamics shape communication processes. This perspective is essential for understanding how SPRED navigates inclusivity and engagement with PDID. The newsletters reveal how SPRED's communication practices are influenced by cultural values of inclusivity and support. For example, the shift to digital platforms for training and development during the pandemic was not only a technological adaptation but also a reflection of SPRED's commitment to maintaining an inclusive environment for all catechists, regardless of their physical location (Sivek, 2022). This approach underscores the importance of understanding the broader cultural and social context in which SPRED operates, ensuring that communication practices are aligned with the community's values and needs.

Integration of Technology for Inclusivity and Connection

Technology plays a crucial role in promoting inclusivity and sustaining connections within the SPRED community. According to the newsletters, digital platforms have been indispensable for continuing catechetical sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. By utilizing online gatherings and virtual meetings, SPRED has managed to keep its community engaged despite social distancing requirements. Adams (2021) highlights this by stating, "The use of online gatherings and virtual meetings allowed the SPRED community to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Online training and development: The shift to online platforms for training and development has been another essential aspect of SPRED's technological integration. Virtual training sessions and orientations provide catechists with the support and preparation they need, regardless of their location. This digital transition has been vital in maintaining the quality and consistency of SPRED's ministry. Sivek (2022) notes, "Virtual training sessions and orientations have ensured that catechists remain well-prepared and supported, regardless of physical location."

Digital communication and coordination: Effective communication and coordination through digital channels are critical to SPRED's operations. The newsletters frequently discuss the use of emails, virtual meetings, and other digital tools to keep the community informed and engaged. This strong digital infrastructure supports the seamless execution of SPRED's activities. Harrington (2023) emphasizes, "Efficient communication and coordination through digital means, such as emails and virtual meetings, are vital components of SPRED's operations."

Virtual fundraising and outreach: Digital platforms have also transformed SPRED's fundraising and outreach efforts. Virtual events and online campaigns have enabled SPRED communities to raise funds and reach a wider audience. This shift not only aids in resource mobilization but also extends SPRED's impact globally. Quane (2022) points out, "SPRED communities have leveraged virtual events and online campaigns for fundraising and outreach, expanding their reach and impact globally." By embracing online fundraising, SPRED has not only raised essential funds but also increased awareness about their work with individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. These efforts have strengthened their community and enabled them to continue their mission during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when traditional in-person events were not possible. This innovative approach to fundraising reflects SPRED's adaptability and commitment to inclusivity and support.

Technological adaptation for accessibility: Adapting technology to meet the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is a recurrent theme in SPRED. The development and use of accessible digital tools and resources ensure that all members can fully participate in community activities. This dedication to inclusivity through technology reflects a broader trend in communicative ecology. Hess (2023) asserts, "Adapting technology to meet the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities ensures full participation in SPRED's activities."

Analysis and Interpretation

The SPRED community has leveraged the technological realm of communicative ecology to enhance its mission of inclusive catechetical

communication. By integrating digital tools and communication platforms, SPRED has not only maintained but also enriched its training, engagement, and support systems, especially during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the use of online gatherings and virtual meetings allowed the SPRED community to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic (Adams, 2021).

Ensuring Accessibility and Engagement through *Diverse Formats*

The use of online training sessions, webinars, and digital resources ensures that information is accessible in various formats, catering to different learning styles and preferences (Hess, 2020; Gallagher, 2022). These formats include visual learning through videos and presentations, auditory learning through webinars and audio resources, and kinesthetic learning through interactive online activities. By employing virtual platforms that allow for text, video, and audio interactions, SPRED accommodates diverse ways of participation and expression. For instance, the use of video conferencing tools enables visual learners to see and interact with their catechists and peers, while audio recordings and live webinars cater to those who prefer listening. Text-based resources, such as downloadable guides and handouts, support learners who benefit from reading and writing.

Furthermore, activities such as virtual liturgies and creative initiatives like car parades offer alternative engagement methods, ensuring that all members, including those with disabilities, can participate meaningfully (SPRED 2020). The car parade event, for example, was a creative response to the social distancing measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This event allowed SPRED members to see each other and celebrate together while remaining in the safety of their cars. The parade was decorated with colorful signs and decorations, and participants honked

their horns and waved, creating a festive and inclusive atmosphere. This initiative not only provided a sense of community and celebration but also ensured that even those unable to join virtual meetings could still engage with the SPRED community in a meaningful way.

Facilitating Inclusive Community Engagement through *Digital Tools*

The integration of digital tools into SPRED's community-based activities reflects the broader system of social and religious engagement (Harrington, 2021). Digital tools like Zoom and online forums serve as mediating tools that facilitate communication and interaction within the community. The collaborative nature of SPRED's activities, involving catechists, community members, and families, highlights the importance of defined roles and supportive relationships in fostering inclusivity and solidarity (Quane, 2021). The newsletters also demonstrate SPRED's commitment to evolving and improving practices over time, adapting to new technologies to better serve the community's needs (Sivek & McCarthy, 2020).

Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Environment through *Digital Engagement*

Using digital tools to ensure inclusivity, SPRED exemplifies pastoral communication principles by creating an environment where all members, including those with developmental and intellectual disabilities, feel supported and engaged (Adams, 2024). Clear and consistent messaging through emails, newsletters, and virtual sessions ensures effective communication and understanding (Vargas, 2020).

Observation Centers with Audio-Visual Technology

The use of observation centers equipped with audio-visual technology is a significant aspect of SPRED's approach. These centers allow catechists and

volunteers to observe sessions discreetly, using one-way mirrors and microphones to monitor interactions without disrupting the participants. This setup provides a valuable opportunity for real-time feedback and training, helping catechists improve their techniques and better support the individuals in their care. Ethical considerations are paramount in the operation of these observation centers. Privacy and dignity of the participants are strictly maintained. Observers are trained to focus on learning and development rather than critique, ensuring that the feedback process is constructive and respectful. Informed consent is obtained from all participants and their guardians, ensuring transparency and trust within the SPRED community. By maintaining high ethical standards, these observation centers contribute to continuous improvement while upholding the values of respect and compassion (Adams, 2020).

Maintaining Community and Belonging

By fostering strong relationships through interactive virtual platforms and community activities, SPRED maintains a sense of community and belonging, reinforcing the pastoral mission of inclusivity and support. Virtual sessions, such as online gatherings and training workshops, enable ongoing engagement and connection among members. Additionally, creative initiatives like virtual liturgies and car parades offer diverse ways for members to interact and celebrate together, despite physical distances. These efforts ensure that every member feels valued and included, reinforcing SPRED's commitment to an inclusive and supportive community (Quane, 2021).

Areas Needing Further Consideration and Exploration

While the integration of technology in SPRED has shown significant benefits, there are key areas that require further exploration and consideration.

1. *Resistance to technology*: There may be resistance or reluctance among some catechists or participants to fully embrace technological tools. Understanding the root causes of this resistance and finding ways to address them is crucial for ensuring inclusive participation (Adams, 2021; Quane, 2022).
2. *Digital divide*: The accessibility of digital tools and resources can vary widely. It is important to explore how socio-economic factors influence access to technology and address any disparities to ensure all members can fully participate (Sivek, 2020; Harrington, 2021).
3. *User-friendliness*: While many digital tools are employed, their user-friendliness and adaptability to diverse learning needs must be continuously assessed. Ensuring that these tools are intuitive and accessible for all, including those with varying levels of digital literacy, is essential (Hess, 2023; Gallagher, 2022).
4. *Impact on engagement*: Further research is needed to explore how the shift to digital platforms impacts the depth and quality of engagement among participants. Understanding the long-term effects of virtual interactions compared to in-person engagement is vital (Adams, 2020; Vargas, 2020).
5. *Ethical considerations in observation centers*: While observation centers provide valuable training opportunities, ongoing attention to ethical considerations, such as privacy and informed consent, is necessary to maintain trust and respect within the community (Adams, 2020; Quane, 2021).

By addressing these areas, SPRED can continue to refine its use of technology and ensure that its catechetical practices remain inclusive, effective, and supportive for all members (Harrington, 2023; Raeside, 2023).

Pitfalls of Technological Fix and Technological Determinism

In relation to the study, it is important to be cautious of the pitfalls of technological fix and technological determinism. The concept of a technological fix implies that technology alone can solve complex social issues, which may overlook the underlying cultural, social, and ethical dimensions. Similarly, technological determinism suggests that technology dictates societal changes, potentially ignoring the role of human agency and cultural contexts. These perspectives can lead to an over-reliance on technology without addressing the holistic needs of the SPRED community.

Understanding SPRED as a socio-technological system involves recognizing the interplay between social practices, cultural norms, and technological tools. This approach considers how technology is integrated within the social fabric of the SPRED community, shaping and being shaped by social interactions and cultural values. It emphasizes the co-evolution of technology and society, ensuring that technological integration aligns with the inclusive and supportive ethos of SPRED. This perspective helps in creating a balanced approach that values both technological advancements and the human elements of catechetical practices.

Sacred Symbols in the Digital Age: Analyzing Artifacts in the Technological Communicative Ecology of SPRED

In the realm of SPRED (Special Religious Development), artifacts hold immense significance in crafting a spiritually enriched and communicative environment. The SPRED newsletters highlight several key artifacts, including flowers, the Bible, the cross, candles, plants, and the altar. Each of these artifacts uniquely enhances the sensory and symbolic dimensions of SPRED gatherings, contributing to the overall communicative ecology.

Flowers

Flowers are a constant presence in SPRED environments, used to decorate the altar and gathering spaces. They symbolize beauty and the transience of life, bringing a touch of nature into the space. This natural element has a calming effect and enhances the aesthetic appeal of the environment, making it more inviting and conducive to reflection and worship. The inclusion of flowers reflects the participants' efforts to create a welcoming and sacred space, reinforcing the communal and celebratory aspects of their sessions.

For example, Larry Adams (2021) mentions, "Spring flowers grace our meeting space, lifting spirits and reflecting the new life that Easter brings". This illustrates how flowers are used not just for decoration but also to symbolize renewal and hope.

Bible

The Bible is a central artifact in SPRED sessions, serving as the cornerstone of spiritual guidance and teachings. It provides the foundation for discussions and

reflections, highlighting its importance in the communicative and religious practices of SPRED. The Bible is often adorned with flowers and placed prominently on the altar, underscoring its sacredness and the reverence with which it is treated.

Quane's statement, "The scripture readings from the Bible are central to our meetings, providing a foundation for discussion and reflection" (2020), emphasizes the pivotal role of the Bible in shaping the spiritual discourse within SPRED sessions.

Cross

The cross is a potent symbol within SPRED gatherings, representing Jesus' sacrifice and the transformative power of faith. Its presence at the center of the altar or meeting space serves as a constant reminder of the core tenets of Christianity. The cross's symbolic significance fosters a sense of connection to the broader Christian community and history, anchoring the participants' faith and practices.

On a symbolic level, the cross can be dissected into its vertical and horizontal dimensions, each representing a fundamental aspect of Christian faith and practice. The vertical dimension of the cross signifies our relationship with God. It symbolizes the direct, upward connection between humanity and the divine, reflecting the importance of worship, prayer, and personal spiritual growth. This vertical line reminds believers of the divine love and grace bestowed upon them and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong and personal relationship with God.

Conversely, the horizontal dimension of the cross represents our relationship with each other. This horizontal line highlights the necessity of community, compassion, and fellowship among believers. It serves as a reminder of the call to love and serve one another, reflecting the teachings of Jesus about kindness, support, and unity within the community. Together, these two dimensions form a complete symbol of Christian faith, encapsulating the dual commitment to God and to each other

that defines a holistic spiritual life. In the context of SPRED, these dual aspects of the cross enhance its role as a central artifact. By representing both vertical and horizontal relationships, the cross encapsulates the core mission of SPRED—to foster both personal spiritual development and communal bonds among participants. This dual symbolism of the cross helps anchor SPRED gatherings in a profound spiritual tradition, encouraging participants to deepen their faith and their connections with one another. Julia Hess (2020) notes, "The cross stands at the center of our altar, a powerful reminder of Jesus' sacrifice and love", highlighting the cross's role in maintaining a spiritual focus during SPRED sessions.

Candles

Candles are used to create a serene and spiritual atmosphere during SPRED sessions. The act of lighting a candle signifies the presence of God and symbolizes the light of Christ. This practice enhances the visual ambiance and introduces a ritualistic element that helps participants transition into a reflective and prayerful state. Quane (2020) describes, "Lighting the candle is a cherished tradition, marking the presence of the Holy Spirit among us", indicating how candles are integral to establishing a sacred and contemplative environment.

Plants

Plants, alongside flowers, bring elements of nature into the SPRED environment. They symbolize growth, life, and the care of God's creation, reinforcing themes of stewardship and interconnectedness with nature. Their presence helps create a tranquil and inviting atmosphere conducive to contemplation and worship.

Vargas (2020) states, "Green plants add a touch of nature to our space, reminding us of God's creation and our duty to care for it," showcasing the role of

plants in enhancing the spiritual ambiance and fostering a sense of responsibility towards nature. This statement underscores the concept of *stewardship* and aligns with the *theological doctrine of the scale of nature*.

Stewardship is a fundamental concept in many religious traditions, particularly within Christianity. It involves the responsible management and care of the resources and environment that God has entrusted to humanity. In the context of SPRED, the use of green plants not only enhances the spiritual ambiance but also serves as a tangible reminder of this duty. The presence of plants in the gathering space symbolizes life, growth, and the beauty of God's creation, prompting participants to reflect on their role as caretakers of the Earth.

Stewardship calls for an ethical and moral approach to managing the environment, emphasizing sustainability and respect for all forms of life. It encourages individuals to act as guardians of the natural world, preserving it for future generations and ensuring that their actions contribute positively to the health and vitality of the planet. This concept is deeply rooted in the belief that humans are partners with God in the ongoing creation and maintenance of the world, highlighting a sacred responsibility to nurture and protect the environment.

The theological doctrine of the scale of nature, also known as the *Great Chain of Being*, is an ancient concept that describes a hierarchical structure of all matter and life. This doctrine posits that everything in the universe has its place in a divinely ordered continuum, from inanimate objects to plants, animals, humans, angels, and ultimately God. Each element of this scale has intrinsic value and purpose, contributing to the harmony and balance of creation.

In this framework, plants hold an essential position as part of the natural world. They are seen as a vital link in the chain of being, providing sustenance and life to

other creatures, including humans. By incorporating plants into the SPRED environment, participants are reminded of the *interconnectedness of all life forms* and the importance of each element in the broader context of creation.

This hierarchical view encourages a holistic perspective on nature, where caring for plants and the environment is seen as part of honoring the divine order established by God. It reinforces the idea that humans have a duty to maintain the balance and integrity of this scale, acting with respect and reverence towards all forms of life.

In SPRED gatherings, the integration of plants serves as a practical embodiment of both *stewardship* and the *scale of nature*. By enhancing the spiritual ambiance, plants create a serene and reflective environment that encourages participants to contemplate their place within the natural world and their responsibilities towards it. The presence of plants aligns with the theological principles of stewardship, reminding participants of their duty to care for God's creation.

Moreover, recognizing the scale of nature within the SPRED context highlights the interconnectedness of all creation. It communicates the message of awareness of the intricate relationships that sustain life and encourages a sense of humility and gratitude for the natural world. This awareness supports the spiritual growth of participants, nurturing a deeper connection to both the divine and the environment.

The incorporation of green plants in SPRED gatherings, as highlighted by Vargas (2020), serves as a powerful reminder of the concepts of stewardship and the scale of nature. By enhancing the spiritual ambiance and fostering a sense of responsibility towards nature, plants help participants reflect on their role as caretakers of the Earth and their place within the broader continuum of creation. This integration

enriches the spiritual experience, promoting a holistic understanding of faith that includes a deep respect and care for the natural world.

Altar

The altar is a focal point in SPRED sessions, where various artifacts like the Bible, flowers, candles, and other symbols are placed. The preparation and decoration of the altar are meaningful acts that involve the participants, highlighting their active role in the liturgical process. The altar serves as a sacred space for reflection and prayer, centralizing the spiritual focus of the gatherings. Vargas (2021) describes, "Our altar, where we place the Bible and light the candle, is a sacred space for reflection and prayer", underscoring the importance of the altar in the spiritual life of SPRED participants.

Analysis and Interpretation

In the communicative ecology of SPRED, these artifacts function within a technologically mediated framework to enhance spiritual communication and connection among participants. The use of artifacts in SPRED is not just about their physical presence but also about the meanings and interactions they facilitate. Below are the ways how these artifacts contribute to the technological realm of communicative ecology:

Enhancing sensory experience

Artifacts like flowers, candles, and plants appeal to the senses, creating an environment that is visually and olfactorily pleasing. This sensory enrichment helps

participants feel more present and engaged during the sessions. The vibrant colors and natural scents of flowers and plants, combined with the soft glow of candles, create a calming and inviting atmosphere that fosters reflection and spiritual connection.

Facilitating rites and rituals

The Bible, cross, and candles are central to the rituals and symbols of the faith practiced within SPRED. These artifacts help in structuring the sessions and providing a familiar and comforting framework for participants. These artifacts are imbued with deep symbolic meanings that resonate with the participants' beliefs and values, reinforcing the spiritual messages and teachings of the sessions.

Creating a sacred space

The careful arrangement of artifacts transforms ordinary spaces into sacred ones, fostering a sense of reverence and communal worship. The altar, adorned with the Bible, cross, flowers, and candles, becomes the central focus of the gatherings, anchoring the spiritual activities. This transformation is crucial for creating an environment conducive to reflection, prayer, and spiritual connection. By entering this sacred space, participants are able to leave behind the distractions of daily life and focus on their faith and community.

Promoting participation and inclusion

Involving participants in the setup and decoration of the altar, or in lighting candles, promotes a sense of inclusion and active participation. This participatory approach is vital for building a strong community bond. By engaging in these rituals,

participants feel more connected to the spiritual activities and to each other, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Symbolic Communication and Technological Mediation

Each artifact in SPRED carries deep symbolic meanings that communicate essential aspects of the Christian faith. The Bible, as the word of God, represents divine guidance and wisdom. The cross symbolizes sacrifice, redemption, and the transformative power of faith. Candles signify the light of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Flowers and plants symbolize the beauty and transience of life, as well as the participants' stewardship of God's creation. By interacting with these artifacts, participants engage in a form of symbolic communication that reinforces their spiritual beliefs and values. This communication is both personal and communal, helping to build a strong sense of identity and purpose within the SPRED community.

While the artifacts themselves are traditional, their role within SPRED is enhanced by modern communication technologies. Newsletters and digital communication help in sharing the significance and usage of these artifacts, extending their impact beyond the physical gatherings. Through these digital platforms, participants can stay connected and engaged with SPRED activities even when they are not physically present. For example, digital newsletters can include images and descriptions of the artifacts used in recent gatherings, along with reflections and prayers that incorporate these symbols. Online platforms can host discussions and virtual sessions where participants can share their experiences and insights related to the artifacts.

Artifacts in SPRED play a multifaceted role in enhancing the communicative ecology by enriching the sensory experience, facilitating rituals, creating sacred spaces, promoting participation, and conveying symbolic meanings. Through the

integration of these artifacts, SPRED effectively fosters a spiritually and communally enriching environment that supports the faith and well-being of its participants. The technological mediation through newsletters and digital platforms further amplifies their significance, ensuring that the values and practices of SPRED are communicated and celebrated within and beyond the immediate community. This blend of traditional artifacts with modern technology creates a dynamic and inclusive spiritual experience that resonates deeply with participants, enhancing their spiritual growth and communal bonds.

Socio-Spatial Analysis on the SPRED Catechetical Environment

The socio-spatial analysis of the SPRED (Special Religious Development) catechetical environment highlights how its design enhances spiritual and communicative engagement for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. By examining various photographs of the catechetical space, this analysis reveals how the environment's physical layout, use of symbolic elements, and overall design support inclusive, meaningful interactions and learning experiences. Each element of the space is purposefully crafted and positioned to (1) enhance accessibility, (2) foster communal participation, and (3) facilitate a rich, inclusive dialogue about faith and spirituality.

The provided photos show various views of a catechetical environment designed to enhance *spiritual* and *communicative engagement* for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Below is a detailed socio-spatial analysis of each photo based on inclusive catechetical communication principles.

Figure 1

Layout



- *Layout:* This photograph depicts a serene and open space, with chairs arranged in a *semi-circle* facing a central table adorned with a *candle* and *religious texts*. This layout promotes a non-hierarchical and inclusive communication setting where PDID can engage directly with each other and the leader catechist. In religious settings, circle and semi-circle arrangements are used to create an inclusive and participatory worship experience. These layouts help in establishing a sense of community and belonging, which is central to many religious practices. The circle is often used in religious gatherings to symbolize *unity* and *equality*. It visually represents the concept of all persons being equal parts of the whole, reinforcing the communal and inclusive nature of the gathering (AmpliVox, 2023). In small group settings, such as prayer groups or discussion circles, this arrangement allows for more intimate and engaging interactions. It ensures that each participant can see and *hear* everyone else, fostering a more personal and connected experience (Teach for America,

2023). Semi-circle seating is beneficial for larger congregations where the focus is on a central altar or speaker. It allows everyone to have a clear view of the focal point, enhancing the collective worship experience and ensuring that all participants feel included (Strobel Education, 2023). Similar to educational settings, semi-circle arrangements in religious contexts promote participation and interaction. They create a welcoming environment where individuals feel more comfortable sharing and participating in communal activities (Teach for America, 2023).

- *Accessibility:* The ample space between chairs and the absence of physical barriers ensures easy accessibility for PDID with mobility aids, such as wheelchairs or walkers, supporting the principle of physical accessibility in inclusive design.

Figure 2

Symbolic elements



- *Symbolic elements:* The central table with a candle and religious items serves as a focal point for gatherings, helping to anchor discussions and focus attention during sessions, which is beneficial for PDID who may need clear, concrete symbols to aid their understanding and participation. In a SPRED setting, four fundamental religious symbols commonly present are the altar, candle, flowers, and the Bible.

Figure 3

Altar



- *Altar:* The altar represents a sacred area that embodies the *presence of the divine*. It acts as the main focal point for worship, receiving the highest levels of

reverence and respect. This sense of sanctity helps participants, including those with PDID, to focus their attention and engage in spiritual reflection and worship (Gibson, 2005; Martinez, 2007). During SPRED sessions, the altar serves as the central point for liturgical activities, including scripture readings, prayers, and sacramental celebrations. These rituals performed at the altar underscore the spiritual importance of the events, enabling participants to connect more deeply with their faith (Clark, 2018; Harris, 2010). The altar is often adorned with candles, flowers, and religious symbols, creating an aesthetically pleasing and sensory-rich environment. This decoration helps foster a calm and inviting atmosphere, conducive to meditation and spiritual contemplation (Jones, 2013; Brown, 2016).

Figure 4

Candle



- *Candle*: The presence of a candle signifies light and illumination. Candles are often used to symbolize spiritual enlightenment, representing the *divine light*. Lighting a candle in many religious traditions signifies the presence of a higher power, bringing clarity and dispelling darkness (Gibson, 2005). Candles also represent hope and guidance, serving as a beacon to help believers navigate spiritual and emotional challenges (Jones, 2013). During SPRED sessions, a candle is lit at the beginning to signal the start and draw the attention of participants, including those with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) and catechists, indicating the commencement of the session. Extinguishing the candle at the end of the session marks its conclusion.

Figure 5

Bible



- *Bible*: The Bible serves as an essential engagement tool. It is used to actively involve participants, particularly those with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). By reading and discussing biblical stories, PDID and catechists can connect with the religious narratives and understand the moral lessons, fostering a sense of participation and belonging within the faith community (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015). Additionally, the Bible acts as a central element in catechetical rituals within SPRED. Its presence during sessions signifies the sanctity of the occasion and is treated with deep reverence and respect. This ritualistic use of the Bible helps create a sacred atmosphere that is conducive to worship and reflection (Martinez, 2007; Clark, 2018).

Figure 6

Flowers



- *Flowers*: The flowers are often viewed as symbols of the beauty and diversity of God's creation. Their presence in sessions serves to remind participants of the natural world's wonder and magnificence, fostering a sense of appreciation and reverence for life (Miller, 2008; Thompson, 2017). This connection to nature helps individuals feel closer to the divine and more attuned to their spirituality. Additionally, flowers can symbolize community cohesion. In SPRED, arranging, presenting or offering flowers can be a communal activity that encourages cooperation, shared purpose, and unity among participants (Lee, 2015; Martinez, 2007).

Figure 7

Lighting, ambience, and visual accessibility



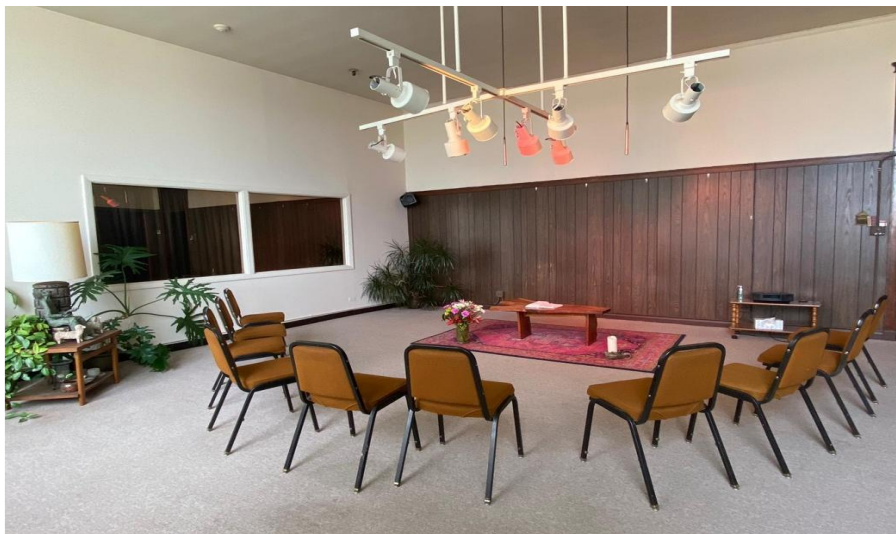
- *Lighting and ambience*: The natural light from the windows coupled with the soft interior lighting creates a calming atmosphere conducive to reflection and engagement. Such an environment can be particularly comforting for participants who are sensitive to overstimulation. Overstimulation occurs when individuals are exposed to excessive sensory input, leading to cognitive overload, emotional stress, and physical fatigue (Sweller, 1988; Lupien et al., 2009; Schmiedek, Lovden, & Lindenberger, 2014). This state can impair cognitive functions such as memory and attention, trigger anxiety and irritability, and disrupt sleep patterns, ultimately affecting overall health and well-being (Mayer & Moreno, 2003; McEwen, 2012; Czeisler, 2013). In children and adults, overstimulation can hinder learning, productivity, and social behavior, emphasizing the need for balanced sensory environments (Christakis, 2009; Seddigh et al., 2015; Dunckley, 2015).
- *Visual accessibility*: The large windows provide natural lighting, which is crucial for individuals with visual impairments, enhancing their ability to participate in activities and interact with their surroundings effectively. In the SPRED program, natural lighting plays a crucial role in creating a conducive environment for catechists, particularly those with PDID. Research has shown that natural lighting can significantly improve mood and cognitive function by reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, which are often prevalent among individuals with visual impairments due to the challenges they face (Beauchemin & Hays, 1996). In the context of SPRED, enhancing mood and cognitive function through natural light enables participants to engage more fully in catechetical activities. This improved mood and cognitive function foster greater participation in *social* and *recreational* activities, which is integral to the

holistic approach of SPRED in enhancing the quality of life and spiritual development of its participants (Aarts, van Bronkhorst, & de Kort, 2015).

Moreover, natural lighting has also been linked to better attention and learning outcomes, which are critical in educational and therapeutic settings like SPRED (Heschong Mahone Group, 1999). For participants with visual impairments, natural light can make a substantial difference by enhancing their ability to focus and process information during catechetical sessions. This enhancement is particularly beneficial in SPRED's structured environment, where sustained attention and cognitive processing are essential for understanding religious teachings and participating in activities. By leveraging natural light, SPRED can create an optimal learning environment that supports the cognitive and educational needs of its participants, thereby facilitating more effective engagement and spiritual growth.

Figure 8

Spatial arrangement, décor and aesthetic considerations



- *Spatial arrangement:* Similar to the first photograph, this setup shows a semi-circle of chairs focused towards a central area, ideal for group discussions and activities. This arrangement fosters a sense of community and equality among participants, encouraging open communication and interaction.
- *Decor and aesthetic considerations:* The presence of plants and minimalistic decor not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the space but also contributes to a sensory-friendly environment that can help reduce anxiety and promote relaxation among participants. The use of plants and minimalistic decor in SPRED settings not only enhances the aesthetic appeal but also contributes to a sensory-friendly environment that helps reduce anxiety and promote relaxation among participants.
- Creating sensory-friendly environments is crucial for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). Research indicates that minimalistic decor, characterized by simplicity and lack of clutter, can significantly reduce sensory overload and its associated stress (Kumar, 2005; Augustin & Fell, 2015). Minimalistic spaces tend to be calming, helping individuals focus better and feel more at ease.

Figure 9

Indoor plants at the SPRED catechetical environment

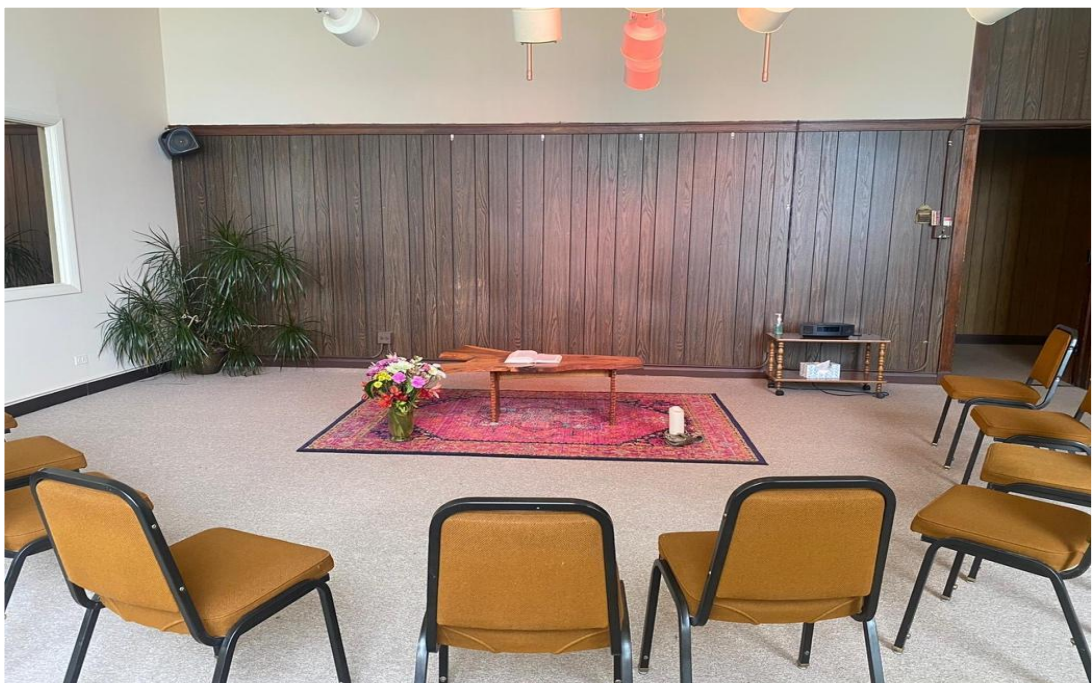


- The presence of plants in indoor spaces has been shown to have profound psychological benefits. Studies have demonstrated that indoor plants can reduce stress and anxiety levels, improve mood, and promote overall mental well-being (Bringslimark, Hartig, & Patil, 2009; Dijkstra, Pieterse, & Pruyn, 2008). These benefits are particularly relevant in SPRED settings, where the goal is to create a supportive and calming environment for catechetical activities.
- Indoor plants contribute to better air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Some plants also remove toxins from the air, leading to a healthier indoor environment (Wolverton, 1996). Improved air quality can enhance cognitive function and physical health, benefiting all participants in the SPRED program.

- Exposure to greenery has been linked to enhanced cognitive performance and emotional well-being. Studies have found that interacting with plants can improve concentration, memory, and productivity (Raanaas, Patil, & Hartig, 2011). In SPRED settings, these cognitive benefits can facilitate better engagement and learning during catechetical sessions.
- The aesthetic appeal of plants can create a more inviting and pleasant environment. Their presence is associated with therapeutic benefits, such as reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, making them a valuable addition to spaces intended for spiritual and emotional growth (Kaplan, 1995).

Figure 10

Closer look at the catechetical celebration environment



- *Closer look at the celebration environment:* This photograph provides a closer look at the interaction space, highlighting the use of a vibrant rug and a wooden table which adds *warmth* and a *tactile* element to the environment. Such textures and colors are beneficial in creating a welcoming and engaging space for participants. In SPRED catechesis, the engagement area is thoughtfully designed to include tactile elements such as vibrant rugs and wooden tables, which significantly enhance the sensory experience for participants, particularly those PDID. The tactile dimension is crucial as it promotes sensory engagement and stimulation, helping PDID process information more effectively and form meaningful connections with their environment (Ayres, 2005; Dunn, 2001). The warm textures of natural materials like wood provide emotional comfort and a calming influence, reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of security (Kumar, 2005; Heller, 2017). Additionally, tactile elements encourage active participation and hands-on involvement, which are vital for maintaining attention and motivation in activities, thereby enhancing cognitive and emotional development (Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). These elements also offer therapeutic benefits, such as improving fine motor skills and sensory integration, which are critical for daily functioning (Case-Smith & Clifford O'Brien, 2010). Overall, the inclusion of these tactile elements in SPRED settings underscores a commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive environment that caters to the diverse sensory needs of all participants, aligning with the program's *holistic* and *inclusive ethos* (Guralnick, 2017).
- *Focus on materiality:* The natural materials used in the furnishings (wood, fabric) are essential for creating a homely and less institutional feel, which can be particularly reassuring and stimulating for individuals with intellectual

disabilities. In the context of inclusive catechetical communication within SPRED programs, the use of natural materials like wood in interior design plays a significant role in creating a supportive and engaging environment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The integration of wood and other natural materials is crucial for several reasons.

Wooden furnishings and décor contribute significantly to psychological well-being. Research indicates that environments incorporating natural materials like wood can reduce stress and enhance overall well-being due to their *biophilic properties* (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015). These environments are particularly beneficial for individuals with intellectual disabilities, who may experience heightened anxiety. The warm and calming effect of wood helps mitigate anxiety and fosters a sense of security, which is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive atmosphere in SPRED settings (Rice et al., 2006).

The tactile and visual qualities of wood provide cognitive and sensory stimulation. Engaging multiple senses through natural materials helps individuals with intellectual disabilities process information more effectively and enhances their emotional engagement (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). This stimulation is crucial for cognitive development and learning, which are core objectives of SPRED catechetical activities (Evans, 2003).

Using wood in interior design helps create a *homely, non-institutional feel*, which is important for fostering a sense of belonging and comfort. The natural aesthetic of wood, with its warm tones and organic textures, contributes to a welcoming and familiar environment. This homely atmosphere is vital in making participants feel at ease, thereby enhancing their ability to engage fully

in catechetical and therapeutic activities (Augustin & Fell, 2015; Taylor & Francis, 2009).

Wooden environments are associated with better indoor air quality due to their ability to regulate humidity and reduce harmful volatile organic compounds (VOC) emissions that cause indoor pollution (Nyrud & Bringslimark, 2010). Maintaining a healthy indoor environment is crucial for individuals with intellectual disabilities, who may be more susceptible to respiratory issues and other health problems (Satish et al., 2012).

The natural appeal and sensory benefits of wood can enhance focus, reduce disruptive behavior, and increase participation in activities. These benefits are particularly valuable in SPRED settings, where the goal is to create an engaging and supportive environment for catechetical instruction and spiritual development (Jahncke et al., 2011).

Incorporating wood in the interior design of SPRED settings offers multiple benefits, including psychological well-being, cognitive and emotional stimulation, and a homely, non-institutional atmosphere. These merits make wood an ideal material for creating environments that are welcoming and supportive for individuals with intellectual disabilities, enhancing their overall engagement and participation in various catechetical and therapeutic activities. By leveraging the natural properties of wood, SPRED programs can create a more inclusive and effective setting for spiritual development and community building.

Figure 11

Facilitating SPRED Session in the Environmental Setting



- *Preparation and initial setup:* Before the session begins, the SPRED catechist prepares the room to ensure that the environment is conducive to inclusive catechetical communication. This preparation includes arranging the chairs in a semi-circle to foster a sense of community and equality among participants. The semi-circle arrangement ensures that everyone can see each other, which is crucial for engagement and interaction, particularly for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) (Guralnick, 2017). The vibrant rug and wooden table in the center serve as focal points, grounding the session in a warm and inviting atmosphere.
- *Symbolic focus and opening ritual:* At the start of the session, the catechist lights a candle placed on the wooden table, symbolizing the presence of the divine and creating a sacred space for the activities to follow. The open Bible

on the table serves as a tangible reference point, helping participants to focus their attention on the teachings and discussions. The flowers add a touch of *natural beauty*, enhancing the sensory experience and providing a calming effect, which can be particularly beneficial for individuals who may experience anxiety or sensory overload (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015).

- *Interactive and inclusive activities*: Throughout the session, the catechist uses a variety of interactive methods to engage participants. These activities might include reading and discussing passages from the Bible, using the open book as a central reference. The catechist encourages participants to share their thoughts and reflections, fostering a sense of participation and belonging. The semi-circle seating arrangement ensures that everyone feels included and can contribute to the discussion.
- *Sensory engagement and relaxation*: The catechist incorporates sensory elements to maintain engagement and promote relaxation. The natural light streaming through the large windows, combined with the tactile feel of the wooden table and the visual appeal of the flowers, creates a soothing environment. These elements help to reduce stress and enhance focus, making it easier for participants to engage with the material and with each other (Augustin & Fell, 2015).
- *Structured environment and accessibility*: The spacious and open design of the room, as seen in the photograph, is key for physical accessibility. The uniform arrangement of chairs provides a clear and structured environment, helping participants with cognitive challenges to navigate the space easily. The catechist ensures that pathways are clear and that the room layout remains

consistent from session to session, which aids in reducing confusion and promoting a sense of security (Dunn, 2001).

- *Closing ritual and reflection:* At the end of the session, the catechist leads a closing ritual, which may involve extinguishing the candle and offering a final prayer or reflection. This ritual signals the end of the session and helps participants *transition out* of the catechetical space. The structured closing, combined with the consistent use of symbolic elements, reinforces the session's teachings and provides a sense of closure and completeness (Clark, 2018).

In facilitating SPRED (Special Religious Development) sessions, the catechist effectively uses the environment to create an inclusive, engaging, and calming space. Through meticulous preparation, the strategic use of symbolic elements, and interactive activities, the catechist ensures that all participants, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, can engage meaningfully in the catechetical experience. Each aspect of the environment, as depicted in the photo, reflects a thoughtful approach to designing a catechetical space that supports the needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This approach adheres to the principles of inclusive catechetical communication by enhancing physical, sensory, and communicative accessibility.

Symbolic Integration: Enhancing Inclusion in the Technological Realm of SPRED Communicative Ecology through Socio-spatial Analysis

Analyzing the SPRED catechetical environment photos through the technological realm of communicative ecology provides a comprehensive perspective on how these spaces are designed to improve learning and communication. Each framework enhances our understanding of how technology—broadly defined to encompass all tools and mediated communication methods—supports inclusive educational practices. This perspective emphasizes how various devices and media facilitate interactions within SPRED settings.

Tools such as candle, bible, and potentially audio systems (if present) are employed to create a conducive learning environment. Although these tools are technologically simple, they effectively focus attention and establish a contemplative mood, which is essential for the reflective communication that SPRED sessions aim to foster.

Design choices, including the arrangement of chairs and the use of natural lighting, are socio-technological decisions that significantly affect how individuals interact within the space. These decisions enhance accessibility and ease of communication, which are crucial for participants with disabilities.

In human geography, "space" and "place" are distinct yet interconnected concepts. *Space* refers to a physical location that is abstract and often quantifiable. It is a more general concept that encompasses the physical dimensions within which human activities occur. Space is characterized by dimensions, distances, and the relationship between different locations (Massey, 2005). *Place*, on the other hand, is imbued with meaning and experience. It is a space that has been given context,

history, and significance by human actions and interactions. Place is relational and subjective, often associated with emotional and cultural connections that people develop with specific locations (Cresswell, 2014).

In the context of SPRED (Special Religious Development) catechetical sessions, the concepts of space and place can be applied to understand how environmental adaptations impact participants. The physical dimensions of the SPRED room, including the arrangement of chairs in a semi-circle, the presence of large windows, and the open layout, define the space. These elements are carefully chosen to create a spacious and accessible environment. The semi-circle arrangement ensures that all participants, including those with mobility issues, can move freely and see each other, facilitating interaction and communication (Dunn, 2001). The space of the SPRED room becomes a meaningful place through its use and the experiences of the participants. The symbolic elements, such as the Bible, candle, and flowers, add layers of meaning to the space, transforming it into a sacred and welcoming place. These elements help to ground discussions and provide tangible points of reference, making the environment more engaging and comforting for participants with intellectual disabilities (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015).

The socio-technological decisions, such as the use of natural lighting and the thoughtful arrangement of furniture, further enhance this *transformation*. Natural lighting improves mood and cognitive function, creating a calming atmosphere that reduces anxiety and supports engagement (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015). The consistent layout of the room, with clear pathways and familiar objects, helps participants navigate the space easily and feel secure, turning the physical space into a supportive place for catechetical activities (Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). By distinguishing between space and place, catechist can better understand how environmental

adaptations in SPRED catechetical settings contribute to creating an inclusive and meaningful environment. These adaptations not only facilitate physical accessibility but also enrich the participants' experience, transforming the space into a place of learning, engagement, and spiritual growth.

Enhancing Accessibility and Engagement in SPRED Environment

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework designed to enhance teaching and learning for all individuals, rooted in scientific understanding of how people learn. Rather than offering a single, uniform solution, UDL provides a *flexible blueprint* for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments tailored to diverse needs. It emphasizes three key principles: (1) *multiple means of representation*, which involves presenting information in various formats such as visual, auditory, and tactile to ensure comprehension; (2) *multiple means of engagement*, which includes employing different strategies like interactive activities and personal relevance to engage learners; and (3) *multiple means of action and expression*, allowing learners to demonstrate their understanding through various forms like writing, speaking, drawing, or using technology (CAST, 2018).

In the context of SPRED catechetical communication, the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are essential for fostering an inclusive environment that accommodates the varied needs of participants, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. UDL's multiple means of representation involve using visual aids, tactile materials, and auditory components to convey religious teachings, such as placing an open Bible on a wooden table and incorporating flowers and other symbolic elements (see photo 2) to present content in diverse forms, enhancing accessibility and internalization (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015).

Engagement is heightened through interactive activities (see photo 5) like group discussions, role-playing, and hands-on projects, with the semi-circle chair arrangement (see photo 1) promoting a sense of community and encouraging participation (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Additionally, participants can express their understanding through various means, including verbal and non-verbal responses, gestures, body movements, or artistic expressions, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their communication abilities, can effectively demonstrate their learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

The analysis of the photograph shows a well-designed catechetical environment that aligns with UDL principles. The spacious and open design, the semi-circle arrangement of chairs, and the use of natural lighting and tactile elements (e.g., wooden table and flowers) create a physically and sensorially accessible space. These design choices are socio-technological decisions that impact how individuals interact within the space, facilitating *accessibility* and *ease of communication*, which are crucial for participants with disabilities.

The careful preparation and thoughtful arrangement of symbolic elements provide multiple means of representation, helping participants focus their attention and engage with the content. The inclusive layout supports diverse forms of engagement and expression, allowing all participants to actively participate and demonstrate their understanding in ways that suit their abilities.

The integration of UDL principles in SPRED catechetical communication ensures that the learning environment is inclusive and supportive for all participants. By providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and action and expression, catechists can create a more effective and meaningful catechetical experience. The observations from the photograph analysis highlight how thoughtful

environmental design can facilitate these principles, making the catechetical space welcoming and accessible for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Fostering Spiritual Connection and Sacred Space in SPRED Settings

Pastoral communication is an approach within religious settings that emphasizes the creation of supportive, engaging, and spiritually enriching environments. It involves using various communication strategies to foster a sense of community, spiritual connection, and sacredness among participants. In the context of SPRED, settings, pastoral communication is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD).

Spatial layout and community engagement: The semi-circle arrangement of chairs in SPRED settings promotes a non-hierarchical and inclusive communication environment. This layout is conducive to fostering a sense of community and equality among participants, encouraging open communication and interaction. By arranging chairs in a semi-circle, everyone can see and hear each other, which is essential for creating an engaging and participatory worship experience (Teach for America, 2023; Strobel Education, 2023). This spatial design supports the principles of pastoral communication by ensuring that all participants feel included and valued, reinforcing their spiritual connection and sense of belonging.

Symbolic elements and sacred space: The use of symbolic elements such as an open Bible, a candle, and flowers on a central table helps create a sacred space within the SPRED environment. These elements serve as focal points that ground discussions and rituals, making the spiritual experience more tangible and meaningful for participants (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015). The presence of these symbols fosters a

sense of reverence and sacredness, which is central to pastoral communication. By integrating these elements, SPRED catechists can help participants with ID/DD connect more deeply with their faith and spiritual practices.

Natural lighting and ambience: Natural light from large windows, complemented by soft interior lighting, creates a calming and inviting atmosphere in SPRED settings. This type of environment is particularly beneficial for individuals who are sensitive to overstimulation, as it helps reduce anxiety and promotes relaxation (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015; Dijkstra, Pieterse, & Pruyn, 2008). The calming ambience supports the goals of pastoral communication by providing a space where participants can reflect, engage, and connect spiritually in a stress-free setting.

Sensory engagement and tactile elements: Incorporating tactile elements such as a wooden table and a vibrant rug enhances the sensory experience for participants. These elements provide sensory engagement and stimulation, which are crucial for individuals with ID/DD to process information effectively and form meaningful connections with their environment (Ayres, 2005; Dunn, 2001). The tactile and visual qualities of natural materials like wood contribute to creating a homely and less institutional feel, fostering emotional comfort and a sense of security (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015). This approach aligns with pastoral communication principles by making the space more welcoming and supportive, enhancing participants' spiritual engagement.

Structured environment and accessibility: The spacious and open design of SPRED settings, with clear pathways and consistent layout, ensures physical accessibility and ease of navigation for participants with mobility aids. This structured environment helps reduce confusion and promotes a sense of security, which is essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive atmosphere (Dunn, 2001). By

creating a physically accessible space, SPRED catechists can ensure that all participants can fully engage in catechetical activities, reinforcing their spiritual connection and sense of belonging.

Pastoral communication in SPRED settings is integral to fostering spiritual connection and creating a sacred space for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The spatial layout, use of symbolic elements, natural lighting, sensory engagement, and structured environment all contribute to a supportive and engaging atmosphere that aligns with the principles of pastoral communication. By incorporating these elements, SPRED catechists can enhance the spiritual experience and sense of community among participants, ensuring that everyone feels included, valued, and connected in their faith journey.

Mediating Learning through Cultural Artifacts in SPRED Programs

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is a framework that examines human actions within the context of their cultural and historical environments. It emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural contexts, considering how tools, symbols, and community practices influence learning and development (Engeström, 2001). CHAT is relevant in educational settings, including SPRED (Special Religious Development) catechesis, where it can help understand how spatial arrangements and symbolic elements support inclusive and meaningful religious education.

The application of CHAT in SPRED catechesis offers valuable insights into how the interplay between social interactions, cultural tools, and community practices enhances the educational experience for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Mediating artifacts and tools: CHAT posits that learning and development are mediated by artifacts and tools. In SPRED catechesis, symbolic elements such as the Bible, candles, and flowers act as mediating tools that facilitate religious learning and spiritual engagement. For example, photograph 2 depicts a central table with a candle and religious items, serving as focal points that ground discussions and focus attention during sessions. These elements help participants, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD), connect with the material in a tangible and meaningful way (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015).

Community and social interaction: A core principle of CHAT is the importance of community and social interaction in learning. The semi-circle arrangement of chairs shown in photographs 1 and 4 fosters a sense of community and equality among participants, encouraging open communication and interaction. This layout ensures that all participants can see and hear each other, promoting an inclusive and participatory catechetical environment (Strobel Education, 2023). By facilitating social interaction, this arrangement helps participants build relationships and learn from each other, reinforcing the communal aspect of SPRED sessions.

Social roles and division of labor: CHAT also examines how different social roles and the division of labor within an activity system contribute to learning. In SPRED catechesis, catechists and participants have distinct roles that support the learning process. For instance, the catechist prepares the room, leads activities, and facilitates discussions, while participants engage with the material and each other. Photograph 6 illustrates how the catechist sets up the room to ensure that the environment is conducive to inclusive catechetical communication, demonstrating the division of labor and the collaborative nature of the learning process (Guralnick, 2017).

Cultural and Historical Context: CHAT emphasizes the importance of understanding activities within their cultural and historical contexts. SPRED catechesis is rooted in the Catholic tradition, with specific symbols, rituals, and practices that reflect its cultural and historical background. The spatial arrangement and use of religious symbols in SPRED settings help convey this cultural heritage, making the catechetical experience more meaningful for participants. For example, the use of a central table with a candle and Bible (photograph 2) reflects traditional Catholic practices, connecting participants to a broader socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts (Gibson, 2005; Martinez, 2007).

Socio-technology: Integrating Simple Tools for Inclusive Learning

Socio-technology explores the interplay between social systems and technology, emphasizing that technology does not exist in a vacuum but is deeply embedded in societal contexts. In the SPRED catechetical environment, the use of simple tools like candles and Bibles within the space underscores how technology, even in its simplest forms, is tailored to meet specific social and cultural needs to facilitate inclusive learning. This tailored use of technology within SPRED illustrates how technological choices are influenced by the cultural and social values of inclusivity and communal participation, creating an environment conducive to reflective communication and learning for individuals with developmental disabilities. For instance, the central table adorned with a candle and religious texts in the semi-circle arrangement promotes a non-hierarchical and inclusive communication setting, fostering a sense of community and belonging among participants (Latour, 1992).

Social Shaping of Technology: Reflecting Community Values in Design

The social shaping of technology posits that technological development is influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors, contrasting with technological determinism, which argues that technology evolves independently and shapes society unidirectionally. In the context of SPRED, the arrangement of chairs and use of natural lighting are *socio-technological decisions* reflecting and communicating the community's values and needs, rather than technology dictating these choices. This approach ensures that the environment is accessible and supportive for all participants, aligning technological design with the inclusive ethos of SPRED. For example, the ample space between chairs and the absence of physical barriers ensure easy accessibility for participants with mobility aids, supporting the principle of physical accessibility in inclusive design (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1985).

Co-evolution of Social Arrangements and Cultural Practices with Technology

The co-evolution of social arrangements and cultural practices with technology suggests that as technology evolves, so do societal structures and cultural norms, creating a dynamic interplay. For instance, SPRED's inclusive design practices evolve with advances in understanding disability and inclusivity. As architectural and design technologies advance, they foster new social practices and arrangements within SPRED, such as more adaptive seating configurations and better lighting systems, which enhance the learning and engagement of participants with developmental disabilities. The thoughtful use of natural lighting and minimalistic decor, for example, contributes to creating a sensory-friendly environment that helps reduce anxiety and promote relaxation among participants (Bijker & Law, 1992).

Technological Artifacts as *Actants*: Shaping Interactions in SPRED

Technological artifacts as actants refers to the idea that objects can influence social dynamics and interactions. In Actor-Network Theory (ANT), artifacts are seen as active participants in networks, playing crucial roles alongside human actors (Latour, 2005). This perspective emphasizes that objects are not passive but actively shape and are shaped by social interactions.

In SPRED (Special Religious Development) settings, artifacts such as the Bible or candle serve as focal points around which social interactions and learning are structured. These artifacts provide tangible references that facilitate discussion, reflection, and a sense of community among participants. For instance, the Bible in a SPRED setting acts as a central object that grounds theological discussions, offering a shared text for exploration and interpretation. Similarly, the presence of a candle signifies light and illumination, creating a sacred atmosphere conducive to spiritual reflection and engagement. The candle not only symbolizes divine presence but also helps to focus attention and set a contemplative mood, essential for the type of reflective communication desired in SPRED sessions (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992).

By serving these functions, artifacts like the Bible and candle help shape the catechetical environment, enabling participants to connect more deeply with the material and with each other. This interaction between human and non-human actors fosters a more inclusive and engaging space, where participants with developmental and intellectual disabilities can actively partake in and contribute to the learning process. This approach aligns with the principles of inclusive design, ensuring that all participants can benefit from and engage in the catechetical activities (Callon, 1986; Law, 1992).

Social Construction of Technology: Facilitating Spiritual and Educational Development

The social construction of technology posits that technology is shaped by human actions, choices, and social contexts. It highlights the interpretive flexibility of technological artifacts, meaning that different groups may ascribe different meanings and uses to the same technology. In SPRED, the use of everyday objects like candles and bibles is *socially constructed* to facilitate spiritual and educational development for participants with developmental disabilities. These objects are not merely decorative but serve as crucial components of the learning process, aiding in the construction of shared meanings and experiences. For instance, the Bible acts as a central element in catechetical rituals within SPRED, signifying the sanctity of the occasion and creating a sacred atmosphere conducive to worship and reflection (Pinch & Bijker, 1984).

Technological Mediation: Enhancing Engagement through Design Choices

Technological mediation examines how technology mediates human experiences, perceptions, and actions. This concept suggests that technology influences not only what we do but also how we perceive and engage with the world. In SPRED environments, design choices such as lighting and seating arrangements mediate participants' experiences by creating a supportive atmosphere conducive to engagement and learning. These technological mediations help reduce anxiety, improve mood, and enhance cognitive function, thereby supporting the participants' overall engagement and learning experience. For example, natural light from large windows, coupled with soft interior lighting, creates a calming atmosphere conducive to reflection and engagement (Verbeek, 2005).

Technological Diffusion: Spreading Inclusive Design Principles

Technological diffusion refers to the process by which innovations spread within and across societies. This can be seen in how inclusive design principles are adopted and implemented in various educational and catechetical settings. As SPRED *adopts* and *adapts* these principles, they influence other similar environments, promoting wider acceptance and implementation of inclusive design. This diffusion process helps spread best practices in creating accessible and supportive learning environments for individuals with disabilities. For instance, the integration of tactile elements such as vibrant rugs and wooden tables enhances the sensory experience for participants, promoting sensory engagement and stimulation (Rogers, 2003).

Technological Transition: Embracing Inclusivity in Educational Design

Technological transition involves significant changes in the way societal functions are fulfilled through technological advancements. This includes shifts from one technological system to another, often accompanied by social and institutional changes. SPRED's transition to more inclusive and accessible designs represents a broader movement within educational settings to adopt technologies that better serve individuals with disabilities. This transition reflects a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and the recognition of the importance of adaptive learning environments.

Technological Convergence: Integrating Traditional and Modern Tools

Technological convergence refers to the merging of distinct technologies into a unified whole, creating new forms of media and communication. In SPRED settings, this could involve integrating various technologies, such as audio-visual aids with traditional tools like candles and bibles, to create a richer, more engaging learning

environment. This convergence enhances the educational experience by combining different modes of communication and interaction, ensuring that all participants can engage fully and meaningfully with the catechetical content. The use of natural materials like wood in furnishings also contributes to creating a homely and less institutional feel, promoting a sense of security and emotional comfort among participants (Jenkins, 2006).

Chapter VI

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: THE SOCIAL REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY

“As a catechist with SPRED, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of trust and encouragement. These elements form the bedrock of our interactions, ensuring that every participant feels safe, welcomed, and valued. Establishing this foundation is especially crucial when working with friends who face developmental challenges. The journey can be complex and requires patience, but the rewards are immeasurable. One of the most profound insights I have gained is the importance of sharing our lives, time, and food. These simple acts of hospitality open the door to deeper connections and foster a genuine desire among our friends to be part of something greater. Our shared faith is the glue that binds us together, creating a robust sense of belonging that is felt equally by catechists and participants alike. Sometimes, just being present is enough. This presence, imbued with empathy and understanding, lays the groundwork for meaningful relationships. Beyond our SPRED sessions, we extend our bonds through social activities like bowling or going out for ice cream. These outings allow us to experience life on an equal level, fostering real friendships that transcend the structured environment of our sessions (Lopez, 2024)”

This testimony from a catechist illustrates the essence of SPRED’s social realm of communicative ecology. It highlights the critical role of trust, presence, and shared experiences in building a cohesive and supportive community. Within this context, we see how these interactions facilitate the construction of knowledge and understanding. The social model of disability is evident in SPRED's commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that every member feels valued and included.

To delve into the discussion on the social realm of communicative ecology in SPRED, it is essential to recognize these foundational elements. They not only define

our approach but also illuminate the path to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and spiritually enriching environment for all members.

The SPRED newsletters from September 2019 to May 2024 consistently demonstrate a commitment to fostering a community centered on faith, inclusivity, spiritual growth, and resilience. These overarching themes within the social realm of communicative ecology emphasize SPRED's dedication to inclusivity, community engagement, and continuous development through both digital and traditional methods. This dedication highlights SPRED's mission and adaptive strategies in response to various challenges, showcasing a holistic approach to supporting its members.

Connections and Fostering a Sense of Community

SPRED places significant emphasis on the importance of maintaining strong connections and fostering a sense of community among its members. This theme is consistently highlighted in the newsletters spanning from 2019 to 2024, demonstrating SPRED's commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment. For instance, Adams (2020) highlighted how observation sessions allow adults, particularly new catechists, volunteers, and parents, to learn about the SPRED method and witness community interactions firsthand. This practice not only educates but also integrates new members into the community, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of SPRED's welcoming environments and reflective practices. These sessions help build a cohesive community by encouraging active participation and engagement from all members.

The September 2019 newsletter discusses the importance of relational communication and the creation of an inclusive environment. It highlights that

relationships are at the heart of the SPRED method and emphasizes the power of community support in promoting inclusivity (Vargas, 2019). Similarly, the October 2019 newsletter stresses the need for active outreach to marginalized groups, advocating for the development of strong, supportive relationships within small communities of faith (Reaside, 2019).

In the February 2020 newsletter, SPRED focuses on the universal need for support and the importance of creating a structured environment for new members. The newsletter emphasizes that trust is fundamental to building a strong community, which is essential for fostering inclusive communication (Reaside, 2020). The March 2020 newsletter further highlights the significance of communal support during significant life events, reinforcing the importance of shared experiences in building a cohesive community (Sivek, McCarthy, 2020).

The newsletters from 2021 continue to emphasize inclusivity and the importance of active participation. The February 2021 newsletter, for example, highlights the community's adaptability in maintaining connections through virtual meetings during the pandemic, ensuring that all members feel heard and valued (Junkes, 2021). The March 2021 newsletter discusses the principles of inclusivity and mutual respect, positioning these values as fundamental aspects of SPRED's mission (Harrington, 2021).

SPRED's newsletters consistently highlight the importance of connection and community, showcasing a commitment to inclusivity and support for all members.

Observation and Participation in SPRED's Community Building Approach

Observation and participation play a crucial role in SPRED's approach to building a connected and supportive community. Observation sessions are specifically designed to allow adults to immerse themselves in the SPRED method and witness firsthand the community interactions that are integral to its success. By observing these interactions, new catechists and volunteers can see how SPRED's inclusive and respectful approach is implemented in real-time, gaining insights into the subtle ways that SPRED creates a supportive atmosphere where all members feel valued and accepted. This firsthand experience is invaluable as it helps new members internalize the practices and principles they will be expected to uphold and promote within the community. Furthermore, parents who participate in observation sessions benefit greatly as they can see how their children are engaged in a nurturing environment that prioritizes dignity and personal growth. This visibility reassures parents about the positive impact of SPRED's programs on their children's spiritual and social development, allowing them to better understand and support their children's experiences and progress within the community.

In the May 2020 newsletter, it is highlighted that observation serves as a powerful tool for helping parents and others appreciate the inclusive practices of SPRED (Adams, 2020). This practice allows individuals to see the real-time benefits and effectiveness of the community's efforts to foster an inclusive environment. The emphasis on relational communication and the significance of witnessing firsthand the community interactions further underscores the importance of these observation sessions in building a cohesive and supportive community.

Moreover, the newsletters consistently emphasize the need for creating a welcoming and supportive environment through structured support and active participation. For instance, the March 2020 newsletter discusses how communal activities and shared experiences, such as participating in agape gatherings, help in building strong community bonds and promoting inclusivity (Sivek, McCarthy, 2020). These activities are designed to engage all members, regardless of their individual needs, ensuring that everyone feels included and valued within the SPRED community.

Concrete examples from the newsletters illustrate how SPRED's observation sessions are structured to maximize inclusivity and support. The May 2020 newsletter describes the use of microphones to enhance communication, ensuring that everyone can hear and be heard, thereby minimizing communication barriers (Adams, 2020). It also highlights the individualized attention given to participants, with a focus on meeting specific needs and promoting active participation.

In the February 2021 newsletter, SPRED's adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic is showcased, with virtual observation sessions allowing the community to remain connected and inclusive despite physical distancing measures (Junkes, 2021). This adaptability not only maintained the community's cohesion but also demonstrated the commitment to ensuring that all members, including new catechists and parents, could continue to observe and participate in the SPRED method.

SPRED's observation sessions are a critical component of its community-building efforts, providing valuable insights and experiences that reinforce the principles of inclusivity and support.

Creative Adaptation in SPRED Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of maintaining connections became even more pronounced. SPRED communities demonstrated remarkable resilience and ingenuity in maintaining connections despite the challenges posed by social distancing. Sivek (2020) described how SPRED communities adapted to these challenges by organizing virtual ice cream socials, car parades, and mailing cards to friends in residential facilities. These innovative methods ensured that community bonds remained strong despite the physical separation, showcasing SPRED's resilience and creativity in maintaining a sense of togetherness.

One notable initiative was the organization of virtual ice cream socials, where participants could join from the comfort of their homes via video conferencing platforms. Each member enjoyed their favorite ice cream while engaging in conversations and activities designed to promote a sense of community and fun, despite physical separation. These virtual gatherings provided a much-needed opportunity for social interaction and connection, helping to uplift spirits and maintain a sense of normalcy.

Another creative adaptation was the car parades, where SPRED members decorated their cars with signs, balloons, and streamers, and drove by the homes of other members. Participants waved, honked horns, and displayed signs with messages of support and encouragement, allowing members to see each other in person while maintaining social distancing protocols. This initiative not only kept the community connected but also brought joy and excitement to participants, demonstrating the power of simple, yet thoughtful, gestures in maintaining community bonds.

Additionally, SPRED organized card mailing initiatives to maintain personal connections. Members sent handwritten notes and cards to each other, filled with messages of hope, encouragement, and reminders of their shared community, helping to bridge the gap created by physical distancing. The act of receiving a personalized message provided emotional support and reinforced the sense of belonging and connection within the community.

These examples from the newsletters illustrate SPRED's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, even in the face of unprecedented challenges. By creatively adapting their methods of communication and interaction, SPRED ensured that all members continued to feel valued and connected, highlighting the organization's resilience and dedication to its community.

Consistent Engagement in SPRED's Community

In recent years, Raeside (2023) emphasized the role of personal engagement by leader catechists who deliver messages from Jesus to each group member. This direct and personal form of communication fosters spiritual connections and reinforces the sense of community among participants. By continually engaging with each other in meaningful ways, SPRED members build a supportive network that nurtures their spiritual and communal growth. The personal engagement described in these newsletters involves leader catechists taking an active role in reaching out to each member of the SPRED community through various methods, including personal visits, handwritten letters, phone calls, video chats, and digital messages. These personalized efforts help maintain a sense of community and spiritual growth, reinforcing SPRED's core values of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.

One notable example from the September 2023 newsletter illustrates the importance of personal engagement. It describes how leader catechists personally visit each member to deliver messages from Jesus, ensuring that every interaction is meaningful and tailored to the individual's needs. This practice not only strengthens spiritual bonds but also highlights the respect and care given to each participant. Furthermore, the October 2022 newsletter emphasizes that these personal engagements are not hurried or superficial but are delivered with genuine care and attention, reflecting Jesus's love and respect for each individual (Sivek, 2022).

The May 2020 newsletter provides another concrete example of consistent engagement through personal visits and communications (Adams, 2020). It details how catechists adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by maintaining regular contact with members through phone calls and video chats. This ensured that the sense of community remained strong even during times of physical isolation. Additionally, the newsletters highlight the role of handwritten letters and digital messages in maintaining personal connections. These methods allow catechists to reach out to members who may not have access to digital platforms, ensuring inclusivity and continuous engagement.

In essence, consistent engagement through personalized communication methods fosters a strong sense of community within SPRED. By actively reaching out and maintaining meaningful connections, SPRED catechists embody the values of inclusivity, support, and spiritual growth, reinforcing the organization's commitment to creating a nurturing and connected community.

Inclusivity and Belonging in SPRED's Mission

Inclusivity is central to SPRED's mission, ensuring that all members feel accepted and valued. SPRED's efforts to involve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in religious activities highlight its commitment to inclusivity. Creating welcoming environments that cater to the unique needs of participants is a recurring theme, ensuring everyone feels included and valued. The Renew My Church process, initiated by the Archdiocese of Chicago, aims to revitalize parish communities to ensure they remain vibrant and sustainable. SPRED's involvement in this process highlights its dedication to inclusivity, ensuring that individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) are fully integrated and supported within parish life. Through these efforts, SPRED fosters deeper community engagement, encouraging parishes to collaborate with local organizations and undertake outreach initiatives that promote social justice and inclusion. This comprehensive approach contributes to the sustainable growth of parishes, ensuring they remain vibrant, resilient, and capable of meeting the needs of all their members both now and in the future (Quane, 2021).

The September 2020 newsletter emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive communication environments. It discusses how SPRED uses tools like microphones to ensure everyone can be heard, fostering an atmosphere where communication barriers are minimized (Vargas, 2020). The newsletter highlights that individualized attention to participants' needs is crucial for inclusivity, ensuring everyone receives the support necessary to participate fully.

In the February 2023 newsletter, SPRED's commitment to integrating individuals with disabilities into the parish community is showcased (Fairclough and Harrington, 2023). The newsletter details how SPRED sessions are designed to be

inclusive, recognizing and celebrating the unique gifts of each person. It emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued, and highlights the role of mutual support and understanding among participants.

The March 2023 newsletter further underscores the importance of inclusivity by describing SPRED's efforts to provide sacraments to individuals with disabilities within their community (Harrington, 2023). It highlights how the sacrament of Confirmation for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities has been a significant part of SPRED's mission, ensuring they receive this sacrament within their supportive community. The Sacrament of Confirmation within the SPRED community is thoughtfully adapted to meet the unique needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). Preparation is personalized using simplified explanations, visual aids, and interactive activities to ensure participants understand the sacrament's significance. The ceremony itself is inclusive, held in accessible venues with supportive environments and customized rituals. Community involvement is crucial, with family and parish members supporting the participants throughout the process. Celebrating each individual's achievements boosts confidence and affirms their commitment to their faith, ensuring a meaningful and inclusive experience for all.

Additionally, the November 2022 newsletter discusses SPRED's initiatives to assess and address the needs of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities inclusively (Santiago, 2022). It highlights the establishment of SPRED to meet the interests and needs of the community, promoting inclusivity and community building. The newsletter emphasizes the use of symbolic engagement and inclusive

methods for faith formation, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can participate fully in the spiritual life of the parish.

Through these detailed examples, it is evident that SPRED's efforts to foster inclusivity and belonging are multifaceted and deeply rooted in its mission to create a supportive, welcoming environment for all members.

Spiritual Growth and Reflection in SPRED's Community

The spiritual dimension of SPRED's work is highlighted through various reflective practices. Raeside (2020) emphasizes the concept of "Everyday God," which integrates faith into daily activities, such as routine chores, personal interactions, and simple daily rituals. This approach fosters a deeper connection with God and the community by recognizing the divine presence in all aspects of everyday life. Adams (2020) highlights that feedback from observation sessions contributes to continuous improvement and spiritual growth, encouraging catechists to engage in reflective practices that assess and refine their approaches continuously. These reflective practices not only enhance personal and communal spiritual growth but also foster a culture of continuous improvement within the SPRED community. Vargas (2020) details how shared moments of stillness, breathing, and prayer within SPRED sessions foster deep spiritual connections and communal harmony. These practices promote mindfulness and spiritual engagement among participants, reinforcing the idea that every moment of life is an opportunity to encounter and reflect God's love.

The September 2020 newsletter emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive communication environments that enhance spiritual growth (Vargas, 2020). It discusses how SPRED uses tools like microphones to ensure everyone can be

heard, fostering an atmosphere where communication barriers are minimized. The newsletter highlights that individualized attention to participants' needs is crucial for inclusivity, ensuring everyone receives the support necessary to participate fully.

In the March 2020 newsletter, SPRED's commitment to integrating spiritual practices into daily life is showcased. The newsletter details how sessions are designed to be inclusive, recognizing and celebrating the unique gifts of each person. It emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued, highlighting the role of mutual support and understanding among participants.

Through these detailed examples, it is evident that SPRED's efforts to foster spiritual growth and reflection are multifaceted and deeply rooted in its mission to create a supportive, welcoming environment for all members.

Resilience and Adaptation in SPRED Communities

The resilience and adaptability of SPRED communities are evident in their response to challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hess (2020) describes how SPRED communities adapted their activities to maintain connections and support their members, demonstrating resilience and flexibility. Quane (2022) highlights the creation and maintenance of beautiful, welcoming, and safe environments, even during challenging times, reflecting SPRED's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging and reassurance.

The September 2020 newsletter illustrates the creative approaches SPRED communities took to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic (Vargas, 2020).

For instance, the newsletters highlight how SPRED communities organized virtual ice cream socials, car parades, and card mailing initiatives to maintain connections and support members. These activities ensured that community bonds remained strong despite the physical separation, showcasing SPRED's resilience and creativity in maintaining a sense of togetherness.

In the May 2020 newsletter, SPRED's commitment to maintaining a welcoming and safe environment is evident (Adams, 2020). The newsletter details how the community used various tools to enhance communication and ensure everyone felt included and supported. This included the use of microphones to facilitate better communication and the organization of communal activities that accommodated all participants, regardless of their needs or restrictions.

Additionally, the October 2022 newsletter emphasizes the importance of community resilience and continuity, particularly in overcoming the challenges of the pandemic (Sivek, 2020). It highlights how SPRED's focus on developing relationships and building a supportive environment helped the community navigate the difficulties of the pandemic while maintaining its core values of inclusivity and support.

The December 2022 newsletter discusses the importance of creating an environment that fosters resilience and a sense of belonging (Quane, 2022). It underscores the collective efforts of the community to support each other and maintain a positive outlook, despite the uncertainties and challenges faced during the pandemic. This commitment to mutual support and community building is a testament to SPRED's resilience and adaptability.

SPRED's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain strong community bonds during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights its resilience and dedication to creating a supportive, inclusive environment for all its members.

Creative Engagement in SPRED's Community

SPRED's approach to creative engagement involves various innovative and interactive activities designed to maintain interest and promote spiritual growth among its members. Raeside (2020) and Gallagher (2022) describe how creative activities, such as arts and crafts, storytelling, role-playing, and music and movement, are used to sustain engagement and foster spiritual growth. These activities not only enrich the spiritual lives of SPRED members but also strengthen the sense of community and belonging. Innovative methods, such as online gatherings and gift baskets, further illustrate SPRED's commitment to maintaining community engagement during periods of physical distancing. The use of art materials, sensorial materials, and everyday life materials in SPRED sessions supports spiritual growth and community involvement by engaging participants in multi-sensory experiences that make spirituality more accessible and relatable.

The November 2022 newsletter highlights the use of storytelling and role-playing as key components of SPRED's creative engagement strategy (Quane, 2022). These activities allow members to express their thoughts and emotions in a supportive environment, fostering a deeper connection with their faith and with each other. The newsletter details how role-playing helps individuals with developmental disabilities to better understand and relate to spiritual concepts by acting out biblical stories and moral lessons, making the teachings more tangible and meaningful.

In the May 2020 newsletter, the use of arts and crafts is emphasized as a tool for spiritual expression and engagement (Adams, 2020). Participants create artwork that reflects their personal faith journeys and experiences, which are then shared with the community during SPRED sessions. This not only encourages personal reflection and creativity but also promotes a sense of pride and accomplishment among members.

Music and movement are also integral to SPRED's creative engagement approach. The September 2021 newsletter describes how music sessions are used to enhance spiritual connection and community bonding (Harrington, 2021). Members participate in singing, playing instruments, and engaging in movement activities that align with the themes of their sessions. These activities help to break down barriers, allowing individuals to connect on a deeper emotional and spiritual level.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SPRED communities adapted their methods to continue fostering engagement despite physical distancing. The May 2020 newsletter recounts how virtual gatherings, such as online ice cream socials and digital storytelling sessions, were organized to keep members connected (Adams, 2020). Gift baskets filled with art supplies and spiritual materials were also delivered to members' homes, enabling them to continue participating in creative activities remotely.

Building a Vibrant and Inclusive SPRED Community

Through these creative and adaptive methods, SPRED has successfully maintained a vibrant and inclusive community, ensuring that all members can engage in meaningful spiritual practices regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

A dedication to building a community focused on faith, inclusivity, spiritual development, and resilience is continuously evident in the SPRED newsletters from September 2019 to May 2024. These overarching themes and subthemes within the social realm of communicative ecology emphasize SPRED's dedication to inclusivity, community engagement, and continuous development through both digital and traditional methods. This dedication highlights SPRED's mission and adaptive strategies in response to various challenges, showcasing a holistic approach to supporting its members.

SPRED integrates faith into daily activities, promoting a deeper connection with God and the community. Concepts such as "Everyday God" encourage members to see the divine in everyday life. Reflective practices like shared moments of stillness, prayer, and observation sessions contribute to continuous spiritual growth and improvement.

Inclusivity is a central theme in SPRED's mission. The newsletters emphasize the importance of creating welcoming environments that cater to the unique needs of all participants, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Initiatives like the Renew My Church process by the Archdiocese of Chicago highlight SPRED's efforts to ensure full integration and support for all members within parish life.

SPRED's resilience and adaptability are evident in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Creative approaches, such as virtual ice cream socials, car parades, and card mailing initiatives, helped maintain connections and support members despite physical separation. These strategies reflect SPRED's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging and reassurance, even during challenging times.

SPRED uses a variety of innovative and interactive activities to maintain interest and promote spiritual growth. Arts and crafts, storytelling, role-playing, and music and movement activities enrich the spiritual lives of members and strengthen the sense of community. During the pandemic, virtual gatherings and gift baskets further illustrated SPRED's commitment to maintaining engagement through creative means.

A thorough and cogent strategy for creating a robust, welcoming, and spiritually enriching community is presented in the SPRED newsletters for the months of September 2019 through May 2024. Through adaptive strategies and inclusive practices, SPRED creates a nurturing and supportive environment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, emphasizing the importance of connection, spiritual growth, resilience, and creative engagement in its mission.

Enhancing Spiritual and Communal Experience: An Analysis of Artifacts in the Communicative Ecology of SPRED

This section elaborates on the various artifacts utilized within the SPRED (Special Religious Development) community, stressing their essential role in creating a sacred and inviting environment. These artifacts significantly contribute to SPRED's communicative ecology, enhancing both spiritual and communal experiences for participants. Each artifact is meticulously discussed, underscoring its relevance in the social context of SPRED's communicative ecology.

Blossoming Faith: The Significance of Flowers in SPRED Sessions

Flowers in SPRED sessions hold both *functional* and *symbolic significance*, playing a vital role in enhancing the sacred ambiance and fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment. Fresh flowers are meticulously arranged to decorate the space, creating a sensory-rich atmosphere that engages participants and underscores the beauty and life inherent in spiritual gatherings. They symbolize beauty, life, and the transient nature of existence, enhancing the spiritual environment as discussed by Raeside (2020). Sivek (2020) emphasizes their *aesthetic* and *symbolic value*, while Adams (2021) notes that spring flowers uplift spirits and reflect the new life brought by Easter. Testimonials from participants highlight the *personal* and *communal value* of flowers, with individuals often bringing flowers to place on the table as a gesture of love and devotion to the community and to Jesus. Culturally and spiritually, flowers act as a universal symbol of beauty, promoting sensory engagement and reinforcing the inclusive nature of SPRED activities. This thoughtful inclusion of flowers contributes to a peaceful and inviting setting, making participants feel valued and included, and exemplifying care and thoughtfulness within the community. Flowers contribute to a welcoming and comforting atmosphere, symbolizing renewal and the natural beauty of God's creation, reinforcing themes of life and rebirth central to Christian teachings.

The Bible: A Cornerstone of SPRED Sessions

The Bible serves as a cornerstone in SPRED sessions, emphasizing the importance of scripture in guiding spiritual reflection and discussion. Sivek and McCarthy (2020) underscore the Bible's role in providing spiritual guidance, while Sivek (2020) describes how it is read during sessions, bringing and communicating spiritual wisdom to participants. Adams (2023) highlights its use in reading passages

during services. The inclusion of the Bible ensures that teachings and reflections are grounded in scripture, fostering a deeper connection to the faith and serving as a source of divine wisdom and spiritual growth.

In SPRED sessions, the Bible functions as a *central spiritual text*, integral to the catechetical process. It is often described as a beautiful and essential element, placed prominently to draw participants' attention and underscore the importance of scripture in their spiritual education. This placement signifies the centrality of the Bible in guiding the sessions and focusing the participants on the teachings of Christianity. The practice of inclusive participation is also emphasized, with each participant taking turns to read passages from the Bible in their *own voice*. This approach not only highlights the inclusive nature of SPRED but also allows for the sharing of diverse perspectives, fostering a strong sense of community. By enabling everyone to engage with and reflect on the sacred text, SPRED ensures that the Bible is not just a static object, but a dynamic tool for spiritual growth and communal bonding. The Bible's presence in SPRED sessions thus reinforces its role as a source of divine wisdom, providing a foundation for spiritual reflection and fostering a deeper connection to the Christian faith.

The Cross: A Symbol of Sacrifice and Love in SPRED Sessions

The cross is a powerful symbol of Jesus' sacrifice and love, central to the Christian faith. Raeside (2020) discusses its significance in SPRED meetings, Harrington (2021) highlights its presence as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice, and Adams (2021) mentions a handcrafted wooden cross serving as a poignant centerpiece. The cross acts as a *visual reminder* of core Christian beliefs, encouraging participants to

reflect on themes of redemption, sacrifice, and love, thereby communicating and reinforcing the spiritual and communal bond among participants.

In SPRED sessions, the cross serves both functional and symbolic purposes, playing a significant role in the spiritual and communal life of the participants. Its presence is a visual and spiritual reminder of Jesus' sacrifice and love, anchoring the sessions in the core tenets of the Christian faith. Functionally, the cross provides a focal point for reflection and prayer, aiding participants in deepening their connection to their faith and the teachings of the church. Culturally and spiritually, the cross embodies the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, symbolizing hope, redemption, and love. These themes are integral to SPRED's catechetical approach, fostering an environment of inclusivity and support. By prominently featuring the cross, SPRED reinforces the sacredness of their gatherings and underscores the shared faith and spiritual journey of all participants. This enhances the communal and reflective nature of their sessions, making the cross a central and unifying element in their spiritual practice.

The Significance of Candles in SPRED Sessions

Candles are extensively used in SPRED sessions to create a serene and spiritual atmosphere. Hess (2019) describes their calming influence, Sivek (2020) notes that lighting a candle represents the light of Christ in participants' lives, and Brian (2021) explains the candle as a symbol of hope and faith. Candles signify God's presence and the light of Christ, enhancing the ritualistic and contemplative aspects of gatherings, helping to create a peaceful environment conducive to prayer and reflection.

In SPRED sessions, candles serve a vital function and carry deep symbolic meaning. They are frequently mentioned as part of the sensory elements used to create a sacred and inclusive environment. Lit candles are integral to the ambiance, helping to focus attention and signify the presence of the sacred, thereby enhancing the spiritual atmosphere of the sessions. Culturally and spiritually, candles symbolize light and hope, which are key themes in the SPRED catechetical approach. They represent the light of Christ, guiding and illuminating the spiritual journey of the participants. The act of lighting candles can also signify prayers being offered and the presence of the Holy Spirit, fostering a sense of peace and reverence among the community members. The use of candles helps to engage multiple senses, making the environment more welcoming and spiritually uplifting for all participants, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. By incorporating candles into their sessions, SPRED not only enhances the sacredness of the space but also promotes inclusivity, ensuring that all participants feel valued and connected to the broader spiritual community.

The Role of Plants in SPRED Sessions

Plants, along with flowers, add a touch of nature to the SPRED environment, symbolizing God's creation and the duty to care for it. Vargas (2020) highlights the use of green plants to bring a sense of nature into the space, emphasizing a sense of peace and natural beauty. The inclusion of plants fosters a connection to the natural world, highlighting themes of stewardship and the beauty of God's creation.

In SPRED sessions, plants, although mentioned less frequently than flowers, play a crucial role in enhancing the environment. As natural elements, they contribute to creating a welcoming and peaceful setting that significantly enhances the sensory

experience for participants. The presence of plants fosters a sense of tranquility and connection to nature, which is both aesthetically pleasing and spiritually uplifting. This cultivation of an inclusive atmosphere values and respects the natural world. Culturally and spiritually, plants symbolize growth and life, mirroring the themes of spiritual development and community support that are central to SPRED's mission. By integrating plants into the environment, SPRED reinforces the importance of nurturing both spiritual and communal growth, making the setting more conducive to reflection, inclusion, and support.

The Significance of the Altar in SPRED Sessions

The altar serves as a focal point in SPRED sessions, central to liturgical and spiritual activities. Adams (2020) details its setup and significance, Harrington (2021) describes the altar adorned with meaningful symbols, and Santiago (2023) discusses the deliberate and meaningful preparation of the altar. The preparation and decoration of the altar involve participants, emphasizing their active role in the faith community. It serves as a sacred space where key elements like the Bible, candles, and flowers are placed, reinforcing the communal and sacred nature of gatherings.

In SPRED sessions, the altar holds both functional and symbolic significance. It transforms a small space into a sacred environment, welcoming everyone and highlighting the communal and inclusive nature of the gatherings. The altar is not just a physical structure but a symbol of the sacredness of the space, where all participants, regardless of their abilities, can come together in worship. *Friends* with disabilities are actively invited to prepare the altar and present the gifts, promoting their active participation and empowering them within the religious ceremonies. This practice underscores the importance of inclusivity and ensures that everyone has a

meaningful role to play. Culturally and spiritually, the altar acts as a focal point in catechesis, guiding the faith development of the community and maintaining a central focus for spiritual activities. It embodies the principles of empowerment and inclusivity, fostering a sense of belonging and contribution among all members. Through this active engagement, the altar helps reinforce the spiritual and communal bonds that are central to SPRED's mission.

In the social realm of SPRED's communicative ecology, these artifacts play crucial roles. They enhance sensory experiences through visual and olfactory engagement, carry deep symbolic meaning that reinforces Christian teachings and values, foster community and participation by involving members in their preparation and use, and create sacred spaces that transform ordinary settings into places of reverence and contemplation. These artifacts are integral to SPRED sessions, enriching the spiritual and communal experience, embodying key religious symbols, and fostering a sense of sacredness and participation, thereby supporting the spiritual development and mutual support central to SPRED's mission (Raeside, 2020; Sivek, 2020; Adams, 2021; Sivek & McCarthy, 2020; Sivek, 2020; Adams, 2023; Raeside, 2020; Harrington, 2021; Adams, 2021; Hess, 2019; Sivek, 2020; Brian, 2021; Vargas, 2020; Ensenada Team, 2021; Adams, 2020; Harrington, 2021; Santiago, 2023).

Creating Connections: Unveiling the Social Realm in SPRED's Communicative Ecology" through Socio-Spatial Analysis

Analyzing photographs of the SPRED catechetical environment through the lens of the socio-cultural tradition of communication within communicative ecology offers a comprehensive framework to understand how the social order are shaped,

structured, and facilitated. This approach provides deep insights into how these environments enhance communication and learning for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The analysis focuses on how physical layouts and relational dynamics structure social interactions. For example, inclusive seating arrangements, such as circular configurations shown in the photographs, encourage face-to-face interactions, promoting a sense of equality and community among participants. This setup facilitates both verbal and non-verbal communication, which are critical in fostering a supportive group interaction. Additionally, the design of the space emphasizes communal participation, ensuring that everyone can see and interact with each other easily. This configuration supports the social goal of inclusivity, allowing all participants, regardless of disability, to be actively involved in the communal experience.

Building Knowledge through Interactive Learning in SPRED Setting

Spatial factors play a crucial role in learning by determining how social interactions and engagements unfold within an environment. Effective learning is greatly enhanced in collaborative and interactive settings, as these environments support the construction of knowledge through social interactions and shared experiences. In SPRED catechesis, these ideas are evident in the purposeful design and organization of the space, which promotes communication and communal participation for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (ID/DD).

Spatial patterns in the SPRED environment are designed to enhance interaction and engagement. The semi-circle arrangement of chairs fosters a sense of community and equality, promoting face-to-face interactions and supporting collaborative learning. This layout encourages clustering of participants around a

central focal point, facilitating meaningful social interactions and creating a more engaging and interactive environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

The spatial arrangement in SPRED settings, such as the circular seating configuration, supports collaborative knowledge construction. This layout encourages face-to-face interactions, promoting equality and a sense of community among participants. Research indicates that such environments enhance learning by facilitating dialogue, peer teaching, and collective problem-solving (Vygotsky, 1978). The central table with symbolic religious items serves as a focal point around which discussions and communal learning activities are centered, embodying the principle that learners construct knowledge collaboratively through participation.

Place attachment in the SPRED environment is fostered through the use of symbolic elements and thoughtful design choices that create a welcoming and engaging space. Participants develop emotional and cultural connections to the space, which is transformed into a meaningful place through its use and the experiences of the participants. This sense of attachment enhances the overall experience and promotes a deeper connection to the catechetical environment (Cresswell, 2014).

According to Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, an activity system refers to a network of relationships among the elements involved in a collective activity. These elements include tools, community, rules, division of labor, and the object of the activity. Norms and conventions within this system guide behavior and interactions, providing a framework for the participants. In SPRED settings, symbolic elements and structured rituals, such as lighting a candle at the beginning of the session and extinguishing it at the end, exemplify these norms and conventions. These rituals create a sense of order and predictability, helping participants understand the flow of activities and feel more secure (Clark, 2018). This structured approach supports the

development of a shared understanding and collective engagement in the catechetical process, reinforcing the activity system's coherence and purpose.

The visibility of symbolic elements like the open Bible, candle, and flowers not only anchors discussions but also serves as tangible references that participants can relate to. These elements create a visually and emotionally engaging environment that supports sustained attention and active participation. Studies have shown that environments rich in stimuli and organized around meaningful artifacts can significantly enhance cognitive engagement and learning outcomes (Piaget, 1969; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Items such as candles, books, and other religious symbols in SPRED settings are more than just decorations. They function as shared cultural artifacts that aid in collective understanding and meaning-making. These artifacts are essential for mediating social interactions and cognitive processes (Wertsch, 1991), acting as common reference points that assist participants in constructing and reconstructing knowledge through group interactions.

A valuable framework helps understand how spatial arrangements and symbolic elements in SPRED catechesis support inclusive and meaningful religious education. By examining the mediating role of artifacts, the importance of community and social interaction, the division of labor, norms and conventions, and the cultural and historical context, this framework illuminates how SPRED catechists create an environment that fosters spiritual connection and engagement for participants with ID/DD. The spatial analysis of the photographs demonstrates how these principles are applied in practice, enhancing the overall catechetical experience.

Through the use of these shared cultural artifacts, participants engage in discussions that allow them to explore and reconstruct meanings collectively. This

process is fundamental to learning in SPRED settings, as it helps participants connect religious teachings with their personal experiences and social contexts. The communal use of these artifacts fosters a shared cultural experience that is essential for deep learning and spiritual growth (Rogoff, 1990; Wenger, 1998).

Spatial arrangement plays a critical role in learning environments. Studies have found that the physical layout of a classroom can significantly affect student engagement, behavior, and learning outcomes (Gump, 1987; Weinstein, 1979). Circular and semi-circular seating arrangements, in particular, have been shown to promote more equitable participation and better communication among students, supporting a more interactive and inclusive learning environment (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008).

Environmental stimuli, such as lighting, color, and the presence of meaningful artifacts, can enhance cognitive and emotional engagement. Natural light and aesthetically pleasing decor have been linked to improved mood, reduced stress, and better cognitive performance (Ulrich, 1984; Tanner, 2000). In SPRED settings, the use of natural light and symbolic religious items contributes to creating a supportive and engaging environment that facilitates learning and spiritual connection.

Shared cultural artifacts, such as religious symbols and texts, play a vital role in mediating learning and social interactions. These artifacts provide common reference points that help individuals construct shared understandings and meanings. Research has shown that the use of such artifacts in educational settings can enhance collaborative learning and foster a deeper sense of community (Säljö, 1991; Cole, 1996).

The spatial factors in SPRED catechetical settings significantly enhance learning and communication for individuals with ID/DD. By creating an interactive

learning environment and using shared cultural artifacts, SPRED catechists can foster a supportive and engaging space that promotes collaborative knowledge construction, community participation, and spiritual growth.

Creating Accessible and Empowering Environments in SPRED Programs

Disability, according to the social model of disability, arises from the way society is organized rather than from an individual's impairment or difference. This model emphasizes the need to remove societal and environmental barriers to enable individuals with disabilities to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life (Oliver, 1990). In the context of SPRED (Special Religious Development) programs, this approach is crucial for creating inclusive and empowering environments that support the spiritual and social development of participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD).

Accessibility in the social realm of the SPRED environment is achieved by creating spaces that allow all participants, regardless of disability, to engage fully in the communal experience. Inclusive seating arrangements, such as circular configurations, promote face-to-face interactions, fostering a sense of equality and community among participants. This setup ensures that individuals with mobility issues can move freely and see each other, facilitating interaction and communication (Dunn, 2001).

The spacious layout and lack of physical barriers in SPRED settings, as shown in the photographs, demonstrate a commitment to an inclusive design approach. This setup ensures that the environment is tailored to accommodate the needs of all users, rather than requiring users to adjust to the environment. Such a barrier-free design

promotes greater autonomy, participation, and well-being for individuals with disabilities (Imrie, 2004).

Universal design principles are evident in the social arrangements of the SPRED environment. The layout supports collaborative knowledge construction by promoting face-to-face interactions and a sense of community among participants. This design ensures that all individuals, including those with mobility aids, can engage fully in the sessions. For instance, the semi-circle arrangement of chairs promotes a non-hierarchical and inclusive communication setting, encouraging active participation and engagement (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

Inclusive design in the social realm involves creating environments that cater to diverse needs. The spacious layout and lack of physical barriers in SPRED settings ensure that the environment is tailored to accommodate the needs of all users, promoting greater autonomy and participation. This approach ensures that the space is accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, enhancing their ability to participate fully in the catechetical activities (Imrie, 2004).

For instance, the semi-circle arrangement of chairs promotes easy movement and interaction, ensuring that all participants, including those with mobility aids, can engage fully in the sessions without physical constraints. By removing barriers and creating an environment that is physically and socially accessible, SPRED settings empower individuals with disabilities to participate fully and equally. This empowerment challenges societal norms that often marginalize people with disabilities. An inclusive environment where participants can engage without hindrance promotes a sense of dignity and self-worth, essential for personal and spiritual growth (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). The use of natural lighting, minimalistic decor, and sensory-friendly elements like plants and tactile materials further enhance

this empowerment by creating a calming and supportive atmosphere conducive to learning and interaction (Augustin & Fell, 2015; Kaplan, 1995).

Inclusive planning in SPRED settings involves designing environments that support the full participation and well-being of individuals with ID/DD. This planning combines physical accessibility with inclusive social practices, ensuring that all participants can engage fully in the spiritual and communal aspects of the program. By removing societal and environmental barriers, SPRED promotes equality and full participation for all individuals (Heylighen & Nijs, 2014).

Barrier-free environments significantly enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities by promoting independence and social inclusion. Research shows that environments designed with accessibility in mind enable people with disabilities to participate more actively in social, educational, and recreational activities (Preiser & Ostroff, 2001). In educational settings, such as SPRED programs, barrier-free design is critical for enabling full participation and engagement in catechetical activities.

Spatial justice is reflected in the inclusive design of SPRED environments, which cater to diverse needs and promote well-being. Spatial Justice refers to the equitable distribution of space and the fair allocation of resources and opportunities within a physical environment. It emphasizes the importance of designing and organizing spaces in a way that promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and well-being for all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, physical abilities, or other factors. Spatial justice aims to create environments where everyone has equal access to the benefits and opportunities that space can provide, thereby fostering social equity and inclusion. The thoughtful integration of natural elements, appropriate lighting, and sensory-friendly materials creates a supportive environment that enhances cognitive and emotional engagement. This approach ensures that the physical space supports

the psychological and emotional needs of participants, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment (Evans, 2003; Ulrich, 1984).

Accessible design not only removes physical barriers but also fosters an inclusive social environment. Studies have demonstrated that accessible environments contribute to the empowerment of individuals with disabilities by providing opportunities for meaningful participation and reducing the stigma associated with disability (Heylighen & Nijs, 2014). In SPRED settings, the combination of physical accessibility and inclusive social practices ensures that all participants can engage fully in the spiritual and communal aspects of the program.

The building design of SPRED environments emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity. Features such as large windows for natural lighting, minimalistic decor, and the use of natural materials like wood contribute to creating a calming and supportive atmosphere conducive to learning and interaction. These design choices help create an environment that is both physically accessible and emotionally supportive, enhancing the overall experience for participants (Burnard & Kutnar, 2015).

Inclusive design principles, which focus on creating environments that cater to diverse needs, play a significant role in promoting the well-being of individuals with disabilities. Research indicates that well-designed, inclusive environments can reduce anxiety, enhance mood, and improve cognitive function (Evans, 2003; Ulrich, 1984). In SPRED programs, the thoughtful integration of natural elements, appropriate lighting, and sensory-friendly materials helps create a supportive environment that enhances the overall well-being of participants.

Participatory mapping in SPRED settings involves engaging participants in the design and organization of the space. This approach ensures that the needs and preferences of all users are considered, putting into practice the social model of

disability. By involving participants in the planning process, SPRED ensures that the environment is tailored to their needs, promoting full participation and equality (Oliver, 1990).

SPRED catechesis emphasizes the importance of creating accessible and empowering environments. By removing barriers and fostering inclusive practices, SPRED settings support the full participation and well-being of individuals with ID/DD. The spatial analysis of the photographs demonstrates how barrier-free design and empowering environments can enhance social interactions, learning, and spiritual growth.

The SPRED environment upholds *disability rights* by ensuring that the space is designed to be accessible and inclusive for all participants. This commitment to accessibility aligns with the broader goals of disability rights advocacy, promoting greater autonomy and participation for individuals with disabilities. By creating an environment that is accessible to everyone, SPRED supports the rights and dignity of all participants (Heylighen & Nijs, 2014).

Enhancing Mindful Engagement and Experience in Catechetical Spaces

A multimodal inquiry examines the everyday methods people use to make sense of their world and organize their activities. This perspective is particularly relevant in SPRED (Special Religious Development) catechesis, where the aim is to create a meaningful and engaging environment for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (ID/DD). By analyzing the SPRED environment through this approach, we can gain insights into how the design and setup of the space affect participants' experiences and interactions.

Sense of Place refers to the emotional and psychological attachment people develop towards a specific location due to its distinctive characteristics and the meanings they associate with it. This concept encompasses the feelings of belonging, identity, and connection that individuals experience in a particular environment. It is shaped by the physical attributes of the space, the social interactions that occur within it, and the cultural and symbolic meanings attached to it. In a SPRED (Special Religious Development) environment, the sense of place is cultivated through thoughtful design and the integration of symbolic elements that resonate with participants on a personal and collective level.

The *sense of place* in the SPRED environment is created through the integration of symbolic elements, such as the Bible, candles, and flowers, which add layers of meaning to the space. These elements help ground discussions and provide tangible points of reference, making the environment more engaging and comforting for participants with intellectual disabilities. By creating a space that is both physically accessible and emotionally meaningful, SPRED enhances the spiritual and social engagement of all participants (Gibson, 2005; Lee, 2015).

The SPRED environment is meticulously crafted to enhance the sensory and emotional experiences of participants. This is evident in the use of soft lighting and comfortable seating arrangements, as seen in the photographs. Soft lighting creates a calming and inviting atmosphere, which is crucial for individuals who may be sensitive to overstimulation. Comfortable seating ensures that participants can relax and engage more fully in the activities. These elements contribute to a setting that participants can experience positively and comfortably, fostering a sense of well-being and security (van Manen, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

The setup of the SPRED environment encourages a mindful presence and engagement among participants. The arrangement of chairs in a semi-circle promotes face-to-face interactions, enabling participants to be fully present and engaged in the catechetical activities. This intentional design facilitates deeper personal connections and shared experiences within the group. By being fully present, participants can immerse themselves in the here-and-now of the activities, enhancing their spiritual and emotional engagement (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 2014).

Communicative ecology theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the SPRED catechetical environment. This approach highlights the significance of designing spaces that are physically accessible as well as emotionally and spiritually enriching. By examining the everyday methods and communication patterns of participants, SPRED catechists can create an inclusive and empowering environment that enhances social interactions, learning, and spiritual growth.

Chapter VII

NARRATING FAITH: THE DISCURSIVE REALM OF SPRED COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY

"I make sure each person is called by name as often as possible. As catechists, we prepare beforehand, learning the capability of each of our friends, what are their triggers, likes, and dislikes. By continually speaking to their families, we are able to choose the right objects for the sessions and know the best possible form of expressions that would reach each friend. No matter what their level of intellect is, we become very familiar with each other that sometimes words are not needed. Just by having the right object which will become symbolic as we guide each individual towards remembering their life experiences, heading towards one objective, the goal of the session, recognizing that Jesus is with us. " (Lopez, 2024)

This heartfelt testimony from a SPRED catechist beautifully encapsulates the essence of discourse in the realm of communicative ecology. It highlights how communication goes beyond mere words, incorporating names, symbols, and personalized interactions to convey deep meanings and foster spiritual connections. This personal approach exemplifies how discourse, in its various forms, can create an inclusive and nurturing environment for all participants.

Understanding Discourse

Discourse generally refers to written or spoken communication. It encompasses the ways in which language is used to convey meaning, construct reality, and express social relationships. This broad concept can be understood through various specific definitions. From a *linguistic perspective*, discourse is viewed as a sequence of sentences or utterances that go beyond the level of the individual sentence to form coherent and meaningful communication. It involves the study of how these

sequences create meaning in different contexts (Gee, 2014). In the context of social theory, discourse is seen as a *social practice* that reflects and constructs social identities, relationships, and institutions. It is not just a means of communication but a way of structuring knowledge and power relations in society (Foucault, 1972). Moving to critical discourse analysis, this perspective views discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes social structures and power dynamics. It involves analyzing how language is used to construct social reality and influence social change (Fairclough, 1992). Lastly, within cultural studies, discourse is understood as a *system of representation* that includes not only language but also visual images and cultural practices. It shapes how people understand and engage with the world around them (Hall, 1997).

Exploring Discursive Practice

Just as discourse can be understood through various perspectives, discursive practice also encompasses multiple dimensions, reflecting the ways in which language is produced, circulated, and consumed within specific contexts. From a *linguistic practice perspective*, discursive practice involves the patterns and conventions of language use in different social contexts. This includes the ways in which language is structured and the strategies used to produce coherent and meaningful communication (van Dijk, 2008). In terms of *social practice*, discursive practice refers to the ways in which language is used to enact and reproduce social structures and power relations. It involves the processes through which discourse shapes and is shaped by social identities, relationships, and institutions (Foucault, 1972). Through the lens of *critical discourse analysis*, discursive practice involves the ways in which discourse is used to produce, maintain, and challenge social inequalities and power

dynamics. It includes the analysis of how language is used to influence social change (Fairclough, 1992). Lastly, considering *cultural practices*, discursive practice includes the ways in which cultural meanings and values are produced and negotiated through language and other forms of representation. It involves the study of how discourse shapes cultural identities and social norms (Hall, 1997).

The Discursive Realm of Communicative Ecology in SPRED

The discursive realm of communicative ecology can be seen as a dynamic interplay of ideas and narratives that shape and are shaped by the socio-cultural environment in which spiritual education occurs. Niitamo (2024) highlights the importance of examining the socio-cultural environment, recognizing that communication does not happen in isolation but within a network of interconnected individuals, media, and technologies. In the context of inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities, this framework is essential for understanding how catechetical processes are influenced by various internal and external factors. Addressing themes such as inclusivity, power dynamics, and the role of technology in communication, the discursive realm reveals the complexities of creating effective catechetical processes. This approach emphasizes the necessity of continuous critical analysis to ensure that spiritual education is genuinely inclusive, considering the diverse needs and voices of all participants, including those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. In practice, this means creating a catechetical environment where every participant, regardless of their abilities, feels valued and included. It involves using adaptive communication methods, such as visual aids, simplified language, and multisensory

activities, to ensure that all participants can engage meaningfully with the spiritual content. By fostering an inclusive and supportive atmosphere, catechists can help participants with developmental and intellectual disabilities to connect with their faith and the community in a profound and personal way.

Understanding Social Semiotics: The Interplay of Signs, Meaning, and Society

Social semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that studies how people use signs and symbols to create and communicate meaning in social contexts. It extends traditional semiotics by emphasizing the role of social and cultural factors in shaping how signs are produced, interpreted, and understood. This approach focuses on the dynamic and interactive nature of meaning-making, considering the ways in which power, ideology, and social structures influence communication processes.

At its core, social semiotics investigates the various modes of communication, including language, images, gestures, sounds, and spatial arrangements, and how these modes are used within specific social contexts to convey meaning. It examines not just the signs themselves, but also the practices and processes by which these signs are employed and interpreted. This involves looking at the broader social and cultural environment in which communication takes place and how different groups and individuals use signs to negotiate and construct their identities, relationships, and realities.

One of the key concepts in social semiotics is the idea of multimodality, which refers to the use of multiple modes or channels of communication simultaneously. For example, in a classroom setting, a teacher might use spoken language, written text, images, and body language together to convey a lesson. Social semiotics analyzes how these different modes work together to create a cohesive and effective message.

Social semiotics also pays close attention to the concept of discourse, which encompasses the ways in which language and other signs are used to construct and maintain social realities. Discourses are seen as powerful tools that can shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. By analyzing discourses, social semioticians can reveal underlying ideologies and power structures that influence communication and social interaction.

The field draws on theories and methods from linguistics, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and media studies, among others. Key figures in the development of social semiotics include Michael Halliday, who introduced the idea of systemic functional linguistics, and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, who have extensively explored the role of visual communication in social semiotics.

Social semiotics provides a framework for understanding how signs and symbols function within social contexts to create meaning, emphasizing the interplay between communication, culture, and power. It offers valuable insights into the ways in which people use various modes of communication to interact, represent their experiences, and influence one another within specific social environments.

The qualitative content analysis shows how the Special Religious Development (SPRED) program is dedicated to the faith formation of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, creating a unique communicative ecology that fosters spiritual growth and community inclusion. This analysis highlights how SPRED's discursive practices—emphasizing a well-conceived environment, strong community relationships, socially adaptable catechetical program, and the centrality of prayer and liturgy—integrate to support a holistic and inclusive spiritual journey for all participants.

Creating Inclusive Environments

Creating spaces that are physically welcoming and conducive to spiritual engagement is crucial. This involves arranging furniture and sensory elements to foster peace and allow participants to connect deeply with their faith (Adams, 2020; Vargas, 2020; Gallagher, 2022; Sivek, 2022; Sivek, 2024). Within this context, understanding the concepts of *positive peace* and *negative peace* can further illuminate the effectiveness of inclusive catechetical communication in SPRED. *Negative peace* in SPRED can be seen as the initial effort to create a safe and non-threatening environment where individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can participate without fear of exclusion or discomfort. This is achieved by implementing sensory-friendly environments and using clear, straightforward communication to prevent immediate barriers to participation (Sivek, 2022). These measures address overt obstacles, similar to how preventing direct violence creates a superficial peace in conflict scenarios.

In contrast, *positive peace* in SPRED represents a deeper, transformative approach that goes beyond just creating a safe space. It focuses on fostering a genuine sense of belonging and community, addressing the underlying causes of exclusion, and promoting true inclusion and equality. Positive peace involves providing individualized support and designing flexible, adaptable activities to ensure all participants can engage meaningfully and feel valued (Hess, 2020). It also emphasizes building a community characterized by empathy, compassion, and mutual support, helping participants form strong, supportive relationships that extend beyond mere coexistence (Harrington, 2021).

While negative peace in SPRED ensures an accessible and non-threatening environment, positive peace aims to transform the community and enhance the

experiences of its members. Sensory-friendly settings and simple communication tools (Raeside, 2020) address immediate needs, creating a foundation for participation. However, achieving positive peace involves deeper engagement, such as fostering authentic relationships and recognizing and celebrating each participant's unique spiritual contributions (Adams, 2024).

Both positive and negative peace are essential in creating an inclusive catechetical communication environment in SPRED. Negative peace removes immediate barriers and prevents exclusion, while positive peace works towards a sustainable form of inclusion that nurtures the spiritual and emotional well-being of all participants. By striving for positive peace, SPRED not only prevents immediate exclusion but also builds a truly inclusive and supportive community that aligns with its mission of fostering spiritual growth and community bonding among individuals with IDD.

Forming supportive networks among catechists and participants nurtures relationships through shared experiences and mutual support, deepening connections with each other and with God. SPRED sessions are inclusive, ensuring everyone feels valued and part of the community (Raeside, 2020; Sivek, 2020; Harrington, 2021; Santiago, 2022; Adams, 2024).

In SPRED sessions, participants may engage in group activities such as collaborative art projects, shared storytelling, or communal prayers. These activities create a sense of belonging and foster deeper relationships as participants support each other and share their personal journeys, enhancing both their spiritual and communal bonds.

Collaborative Activities in SPRED

In SPRED sessions, participants engage in various group activities that foster a sense of belonging and enhance their spiritual and communal bonds. These activities include collaborative art projects, shared storytelling, and communal prayers, each playing a significant role in creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Collaborative art projects in SPRED sessions involve participants working together to create artwork that reflects their faith and experiences. These projects may include painting, drawing, or crafting, allowing individuals to express their spirituality through visual means. The process of creating art together fosters cooperation and mutual support, as participants share ideas, encourage each other, and celebrate their collective achievements. This collaborative effort helps build a sense of community and belonging, as everyone's contribution is valued and integrated into the final piece.

Shared storytelling is another key activity in SPRED sessions. Participants take turns sharing personal stories, reflections, or experiences related to their faith journey. This activity not only allows individuals to express themselves and be heard but also creates opportunities for empathy and understanding within the group. By listening to each other's stories, participants can find common ground and build deeper connections. Shared storytelling helps to reinforce the themes of inclusion and mutual support, as everyone's voice is given importance and respect.

Communal prayers are integral to SPRED sessions, providing a shared spiritual experience that strengthens communal bonds. These prayers may be recited collectively, with participants joining together in reciting familiar prayers or responding to prayer prompts. The act of praying together fosters a sense of unity and collective spirituality, as participants support each other in their faith practices. Communal

prayers also create a space for individuals to express their needs, gratitude, and hopes, reinforcing the supportive nature of the SPRED community.

The discursive elements in SPRED's collaborative activities are crucial for understanding its approach to inclusive catechetical communication. Collaborative art projects and shared storytelling provide platforms for expression, where participants can communicate their thoughts and feelings in ways that suit their abilities. These activities ensure that everyone's contributions are valued, reinforcing the inclusive nature of SPRED sessions (Sivek, 2022). Through shared storytelling and communal prayers, SPRED fosters empathy and mutual support among participants. Listening to each other's stories and praying together helps to build a supportive community where individuals feel understood and valued (Hess, 2020). The collaborative nature of these activities enhances the sense of community and belonging within SPRED. By working together on art projects, sharing personal stories, and praying as a group, participants strengthen their communal bonds and develop a collective identity (Harrington, 2021). The flexibility of these activities allows SPRED to cater to the diverse needs of participants. Art projects can be adapted to different skill levels, storytelling can be facilitated through various communication aids, and prayers can be simplified to ensure accessibility for all (Raeside, 2020).

The collaborative activities in SPRED sessions, such as art projects, shared storytelling, and communal prayers, are fundamental in creating an inclusive and supportive environment. These activities embody the discursive elements of expression, empathy, community, and adaptability, which are central to SPRED's approach to inclusive catechetical communication. By integrating these elements, SPRED ensures that all participants can engage meaningfully and feel valued within the faith community.

Meaningful social and cultural activities help participants engage with the spiritual content in a way that is *accessible* and *resonant*. These actions facilitate the internalization of faith and allow participants to express their spirituality meaningfully, irrespective of their abilities (Raeside, 2020; Hess, 2020; Gallagher, 2022; Harrington, 2023; Sivek, 2024).

Symbolic Actions and Gestures in SPRED Liturgies

Catechists describe in the newsletters how symbolic gestures like lighting candles, making the sign of the cross, or using hand movements during prayers create a tangible connection to the spiritual content. Activities like creating religious artwork, participating in processions, or handling religious artifacts (e.g., rosaries, crosses) allow participants to experience their faith in a physical and engaging manner. These symbolic actions can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of all participants, ensuring everyone can partake in and resonate with the spiritual practices being taught. This inclusive approach allows participants to internalize their faith deeply and express their spirituality in ways that are personally meaningful and enriching.

SPRED adapts to meet the diverse needs of its participants, ensuring that individuals with various intellectual and developmental disabilities can fully participate in the spiritual life of the community. This adaptability addresses a wide range of needs such as sensory sensitivities, communication challenges, cognitive processing differences, and physical accessibility requirements.

Some participants may be sensitive to lights, sounds, or touch. SPRED accommodates these needs by creating *calm* and *predictable environments*, using soft lighting, minimizing background noise, and ensuring that tactile activities are gentle and non-intrusive. For individuals with verbal communication difficulties,

SPRED employs alternative communication methods such as visual aids, sign language, or picture exchange systems, ensuring all participants can understand and express themselves during sessions. Participants with varying cognitive abilities might require simplified instructions, repeated explanations, or additional time to process information. SPRED adapts activities to be straightforward and allows flexible pacing to ensure comprehension and engagement. Ensuring physical accessibility is essential for participants with mobility issues.

Individualized Support and Flexible Activities

SPRED's flexibility is evident in its diverse methods and practices that are adjusted to suit different contexts and needs. One key approach is individualized instruction, where teaching methods are tailored to each participant's learning style and ability level. This personalization ensures that spiritual content is accessible to everyone, allowing participants to engage with the material in ways that best suit their unique needs (Sivek & McCarthy, 2020).

Additionally, SPRED employs small group activities, which provide a more personalized and supportive environment. Conducting sessions in small groups allows for individualized attention and creates a setting where participants can engage at their own pace, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Harrington, 2021).

The program also incorporates multi-sensory learning techniques, utilizing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic aids. This approach ensures that participants can interact with the material in ways that match their sensory preferences and capabilities, enhancing their learning experience and engagement with the content (Sivek, 2022).

Simplified and Inclusive Prayers

Moreover, SPRED adapts traditional religious practices to be more inclusive. This includes using simpler language in prayers and providing tangible symbols of faith, which help all participants feel included and engaged. These adaptive practices ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can participate fully in the spiritual life of the community (Sivek, 2024).

For example, the traditional "Our Father" is simplified to "Our Father in heaven, *holy is your name*. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." Similarly, the "Hail Mary" is adapted to "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is your child, Jesus." These simplified versions make the prayers more accessible, allowing participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities to understand and participate meaningfully in the spiritual practices (Sivek, 2024).

By employing these adaptable and inclusive strategies, SPRED ensures that every individual, regardless of their abilities, can participate meaningfully in the community's spiritual life (Sivek & McCarthy, 2020; Sivek, 2020; Sivek, 2021; Santiago, 2022; Sivek, 2024).

The Centrality of Prayer and Liturgy

The centrality of prayer and liturgy in SPRED sessions underscores the spiritual framework of the community. Prayerful activities and the celebration of liturgies create a sacred space for participants, fostering personal growth and strengthening communal bonds (Adams, 2020; Sivek, 2024; Gallagher, 2022; Harrington, 2023; Sivek, 2024). Evidence of this centrality is found in the simplified and inclusive prayers used during sessions, which help all participants engage meaningfully with their faith.

Simplified Prayers for Inclusivity

As briefly mentioned above, the adaptation of the "Our Father" prayer to simpler language allows participants to understand and connect with the prayer more deeply. The traditional version, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is simplified to "Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." This makes the prayer more accessible to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, facilitating their participation in communal worship (Sivek, 2024).

Similarly, the "Hail Mary" is adapted from "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus," to "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is your child, Jesus." This simplification helps participants grasp the essence of the prayer, making it easier for them to join in and feel included in the spiritual life of the community (Adams, 2020).

Inclusive Adaptation of Traditional Prayers

The "Glory Be" prayer is another example, simplified from "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen," to "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen." This adaptation helps participants focus on the core message of the prayer without being overwhelmed by complex language (Gallagher, 2022).

Additionally, the "Act of Contrition" is simplified to ensure it is understandable and meaningful. The traditional version, "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having

offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen," is adapted to "My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Amen." This ensures that participants can fully participate in the sacrament of reconciliation (Harrington, 2023).

The Role of Liturgy in Faith Formation

By simplifying these prayers, SPRED makes the spiritual practices more accessible and inclusive, allowing participants to engage more fully and meaningfully in the communal worship and liturgies. These adaptations highlight the program's commitment to fostering a sacred space that supports personal spiritual growth and strengthens the bonds within the community (Sivek, 2024).

Liturgy refers to the customary public worship performed by a religious group, particularly in the Christian tradition. It involves a set sequence of prayers, readings, hymns, and rituals during communal worship services. Liturgy is crucial to faith formation as it provides a structured approach to worship, allowing individuals to connect with their faith on a deeper level through repetitive and meaningful practices. This structure helps inculcate spiritual values, fosters a sense of community, and provides a shared language and experience of faith.

Inclusion and Belonging in Liturgies

In SPRED sessions, liturgies are designed to be inclusive and resonate with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). These liturgies commonly emphasize several key themes. *Inclusion* and *belonging* are central, reinforcing that every individual is a valued member of the community regardless of ability, which supports the belief that everyone has a place in the spiritual life of the community (Hess, 2020).

One of the evident ways SPRED ensures inclusion is through the use of simplified language in prayers. This adaptation allows individuals with IDD to understand and participate fully in the liturgical practices. As explained above, the traditional "Our Father" is simplified to "Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven," making it more accessible to all participants (Sivek, 2024). Such adaptations ensure that language is not a barrier to participation, fostering a sense of belonging.

Collaborative Activities and Individualized Support

SPRED sessions often include collaborative activities such as art projects, shared storytelling, and communal prayers. These activities are designed to create a sense of belonging by encouraging participants to work together and support each other. For example, in collaborative art projects, participants contribute to a collective piece of art, which helps them feel that their input is valued and significant (Adams, 2020).

Providing individualized support to participants is another crucial aspect that reinforces inclusion and belonging. SPRED sessions are tailored to meet the unique needs of each participant, ensuring that everyone can engage meaningfully with the spiritual content. Personalized support helps participants navigate the material and

feel valued within the community, as evidenced by the personalized attention given during sessions (Hess, 2020).

Personalized support in SPRED sessions is multifaceted, involving one-on-one assistance, customized learning materials, adaptive activities, behavioral and emotional support, and individualized instruction. These tailored approaches ensure that all participants feel included, valued, and able to engage meaningfully with the spiritual content.

Themes of God's Love and Community Support

Liturgies in SPRED sessions frequently include themes of God's love and compassion, which help participants understand that they are loved and accepted by God. This affirmation of individual worth is vital for fostering a sense of belonging. Participants are reminded through these liturgies that they are integral parts of the community, deserving of respect and love (Raeside, 2020).

Shared storytelling and communal prayers are designed to promote empathy and mutual support among participants. By listening to each other's stories and praying together, participants build strong, supportive relationships. This mutual support reinforces the theme of belonging, as each person's experiences and feelings are acknowledged and respected (Harrington, 2021).

Promoting Trust and Gratitude in Liturgies

The themes of God's love and compassion, as well as the importance of community and mutual support, are prominently highlighted. These themes are crucial for fostering participants' spiritual and emotional well-being, ensuring that they feel loved, accepted, and supported within the faith community. SPRED liturgies emphasize God's unconditional love and acceptance of all individuals, helping

participants to understand that they are cherished by God regardless of their abilities. This message is vital for their spiritual and emotional well-being. For example, during sessions, simplified prayers often highlight this theme: "My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things." This prayer emphasizes God's love and forgiveness, reinforcing the idea that participants are loved and accepted despite their shortcomings (Harrington, 2023).

Liturgies also include narratives and teachings that affirm God's love for all participants. These affirmations help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) feel valued and accepted in the spiritual community: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is your child, Jesus." This prayer reinforces the concept of divine grace and presence, highlighting that God is always with them and loves them unconditionally (Adams, 2020).

SPRED sessions stress the importance of community and mutual support, reminding participants that they are not alone in their spiritual journey. The community's presence and support strengthen communal bonds and foster a sense of belonging: "Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." This collective prayer underscores the shared faith journey of the community, reinforcing the idea that participants are united in their spiritual pursuits (Sivek, 2024).

By engaging in activities like shared storytelling and communal prayers, participants develop empathy and mutual support for one another. These practices are designed to build strong, supportive relationships within the community: "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who

trespass against us." This prayer fosters a sense of shared experience and mutual forgiveness, highlighting the importance of supporting each other through life's challenges (Sivek, 2024).

The emphasis on community and mutual support in SPRED sessions helps participants feel integrated and valued within the group. This integration is essential for their emotional and spiritual development: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." This invocation encourages participants to pray for and support each other, reinforcing the sense of a caring and united community (Adams, 2020).

SPRED liturgies highlight themes of God's love and compassion and the importance of community and mutual support through simplified prayers and shared spiritual practices. These themes are substantiated by quoted passages from the prayers used in SPRED sessions, which emphasize God's unconditional love and the supportive nature of the community. These elements collectively foster a nurturing and inclusive environment, ensuring that all participants feel loved, accepted, and supported on their spiritual journey (Raeside, 2020; Adams, 2024).

Emphasizing Trust in God's Plan

Liturgies in SPRED sessions often emphasize the importance of trusting in God's plan, especially during difficult times. This theme teaches participants to rely on their faith, fostering resilience and spiritual growth: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." This passage from Psalm 23 is frequently used in SPRED liturgies to encourage participants to trust in God's guidance and care, even when facing challenges (Quane, 2019).

Fostering Gratitude and Celebrating Blessings

Liturgies incorporate elements of gratitude and celebration, helping participants appreciate the positive aspects of their lives and develop a thankful heart: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." This verse from Psalm 136 is used in SPRED sessions to encourage participants to express gratitude for God's enduring love and the blessings in their lives (Raeside, 2019). Participants are often invited to share what they are grateful for, fostering a sense of thankfulness and positivity: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This passage from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 is used to remind participants to maintain a thankful attitude, regardless of their circumstances (Sivek & McCarthy, 2020). Promoting understanding and respect is central to SPRED's mission, teaching participants to value and support one another, thus fostering a harmonious community: "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." This verse from Romans 12:10 is used to encourage participants to treat each other with respect and kindness, reinforcing the values of empathy and mutual respect within the community (Vargas, 2019).

Promoting Understanding and Respect

Liturgies often include discussions and reflections on the importance of understanding and respecting others, extending these values beyond the liturgical setting: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." This passage from Ephesians 4:32 is used in SPRED sessions to emphasize the importance of kindness, forgiveness, and respect, helping to build a supportive and respectful community (Gallagher, 2022).

By focusing on these themes, SPRED liturgies help participants with IDD connect with their faith in an accessible, meaningful, and supportive way, ensuring the spiritual needs of all community members are met.

The SPRED program offers a rich array of discursive practices that foster a nurturing and inclusive environment for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. These practices highlight how SPRED creates a supportive community and promotes spiritual growth among its participants.

Disability theology emphasizes the inherent dignity and value of individuals with disabilities, viewing them as integral members of the faith community. SPRED embodies this perspective by creating an environment that acknowledges and celebrates the unique spiritual contributions of its participants. The newsletters frequently highlight how SPRED sessions are designed and organized to foster a sense of belonging and community among individuals with disabilities. For example, the emphasis on a prepared and well-conceptualized environment that caters to the sensory and cognitive needs of participants underscores the theological commitment to inclusivity and accessibility (Adams, 2020). This approach aligns with the principles of disability theology, advocating for the full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of religious life.

As articulated in the newsletters, PIDDs bring unique spiritual contributions to the faith community. Their presence and participation often inspire others by showcasing authentic and unfiltered expressions of faith, as well as embodying core tenets of spirituality.

PIDDs often express their faith in ways that are deeply genuine and authentic, which can inspire others to engage with their own spirituality more sincerely. Their

straightforward approach to faith can cut through complexities and remind others of the simplicity and purity of spiritual truths. According to Harrington (2021):

In SPRED sessions, participants with IDD often lead by example in expressing their faith with an authenticity that is both inspiring and humbling. Their genuine prayers and heartfelt participation serve as a powerful reminder of what it means to connect deeply with one's faith.

The spiritual perspectives of PIDDs, characterized by simplicity and purity of heart, remind the broader community of essential faith principles such as love, trust, and humility. Their approach to spirituality often highlights these core values in a manner that is both profound and accessible. Hess (2020) stated:

The presence of participants with intellectual disabilities in our faith community continually brings us back to the basics of our faith—love, trust, and humility. Their simple yet profound way of living out these values is a powerful testament to the beauty of a pure heart.

By living out their faith with simplicity and purity, PIDDs help the broader community reconnect with fundamental spiritual values. Their straightforward and humble approach often serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of these values in everyday life. Hess (2020) noted:

Participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities often display an unwavering trust in God's plan and a humility that is deeply moving. Their interactions and expressions of faith remind us all of the essential qualities of love, trust, and humility that are at the heart of our spiritual journey.

The unique spiritual contributions of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PIDDs) to the faith community are substantial and profound. Their authentic and unfiltered expressions of faith, along with their embodiment of core spiritual values like love, trust, and humility, inspire others to engage more deeply and sincerely with their own spirituality. These contributions highlight the importance of inclusivity in spiritual communities, as the presence and participation of PIDDs enrich the spiritual life of the entire community (Harrington, 2021; Hess, 2020).

Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PIDDs) significantly enrich the faith community through their unique contributions. Their presence brings joy and enthusiasm to worship and community activities, showcases resilience, fosters empathy and compassion, and offers fresh perspectives on religious teachings and practices.

PIDDs) often bring an infectious joy and enthusiasm to worship and community activities. Their lively spirit and genuine excitement contribute to a more uplifting atmosphere, positively affecting those around them. This energy not only elevates the mood of the community but also makes the environment more vibrant and dynamic. By participating with such enthusiasm, PIDDs inspire others to engage more fully and joyfully in communal activities, fostering a sense of unity and shared happiness. Raeside (2020) wrote:

In our worship sessions, the joy and enthusiasm displayed by participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities are truly infectious. Their lively participation often lifts the spirits of everyone present, creating a more engaging and dynamic atmosphere for all.

The resilience of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PIDDs) in overcoming daily challenges serves as a powerful testament to their strength of faith and the indomitable human spirit. Their ability to navigate and surmount obstacles with grace and determination is truly inspiring. This perseverance not only highlights their inner strength but also sets a remarkable example for others, encouraging them to remain steadfast and committed in their own spiritual journeys. By witnessing the fortitude of PIDDs, community members are often moved to deepen their faith and persist through their own struggles, finding strength and motivation in the resilience displayed by these individuals. Sivek (2022) explained:

Watching our participants with disabilities navigate and overcome daily challenges is profoundly inspiring. Their resilience and steadfast faith remind us all of the enduring strength of the human spirit and the power of unwavering faith.

PIDD often exhibit high levels of empathy and compassion, creating a nurturing and supportive environment within the community. Their natural inclination to understand and share the feelings of others fosters a culture of mutual care and consideration. This heightened sense of empathy helps to strengthen the bonds between community members, ensuring that everyone feels valued and supported. As a result, the overall sense of unity and mutual support within the community is significantly enhanced, promoting a harmonious and inclusive atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to look out for and uplift one another. Santiago (2022) stated:

The empathy and compassion demonstrated by participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities create a nurturing and

supportive community environment. Their ability to understand and share in the feelings of others strengthens our bonds and fosters a deep sense of unity.

The unique perspectives of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PIDDs) bring fresh and invaluable insights into religious teachings and practices. Their distinct viewpoints and experiences often challenge conventional interpretations and encourage deeper reflection among community members. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, the community can develop a richer, more nuanced, and inclusive understanding of faith. This inclusive approach not only benefits PIDDs by validating their spiritual experiences but also enriches the spiritual life of the entire community, fostering an environment where all voices are heard and respected. Ultimately, the insights offered by PIDDs help create a more vibrant, dynamic, and holistic faith community that embraces and learns from the diversity of its members. Sivek (2024) noted:

Participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities offer unique and valuable perspectives on our faith practices. Their fresh insights often lead to a deeper and more inclusive understanding of our religious teachings, enriching the faith experience for everyone.

PIDDs contribute significantly to the faith community by bringing joy and enthusiasm to activities, demonstrating resilience and inspiring others, fostering empathy and compassion, and providing new perspectives on religious teachings. These contributions help create a more vibrant, supportive, and inclusive community that benefits all members (Raeside, 2020; Sivek, 2022; Santiago, 2022; Sivek, 2024).

SPRED sessions are meticulously designed to accommodate the sensory and cognitive needs of participants, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

Accommodations and interventions employed include:

1. SPRED sessions are designed with a commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that all participants, regardless of their cognitive abilities, can fully engage in the spiritual content and activities. This is achieved through clear and simple communication, flexible and adaptable activities, and personalized support.
2. SPRED employs straightforward language, visual aids, and other communication tools to make spiritual content accessible to everyone. This approach ensures that participants with varying cognitive abilities can understand and engage with the material. *Quane (2019) explained:*

In our sessions, we use clear and simple language to explain prayers and religious teachings. Visual aids, such as picture cards and illustrated books, are also utilized to help participants grasp complex concepts. This method has proven effective in making spiritual content more accessible and meaningful.

3. SPRED designs social activities that can be easily adapted to meet the varying abilities and needs of participants. This flexibility ensures that everyone can participate meaningfully and enjoy the activities. For instance, during a group art project, participants might be given tasks that suit their individual skill levels, such as simple coloring for some or more intricate painting for others. Similarly, in interactive storytelling sessions, participants can engage by using visual aids, acting out parts of the story, or contributing ideas at their own comfort level. This adaptive approach allows each individual to feel included and valued,

promoting a sense of accomplishment and belonging within the group. By providing various ways to engage, SPRED ensures that every participant can experience the joy and benefits of the activities, regardless of their specific abilities. Hess (2020) explained:

During our sessions, we conduct activities such as group art projects and interactive storytelling. These activities are designed to be flexible, allowing us to modify them according to each participant's abilities. For instance, art projects can range from simple coloring tasks to more complex creations, ensuring that everyone can contribute and feel included.

4. SPRED provides individualized support and attention to help each participant navigate the spiritual material and feel valued within the community. This personalized approach ensures that participants receive the assistance they need to fully engage in the sessions. For example, catechists might work one-on-one with participants, offering tailored explanations and guiding them through prayers and activities at a pace that suits their individual needs. Personalized support can also include using specialized tools or resources, such as simplified texts, visual aids, or tactile materials, to make spiritual concepts more accessible. Additionally, catechists might provide emotional and behavioral support, helping participants manage any anxieties or challenges that arise during the sessions. By addressing the unique needs of each participant, SPRED ensures that everyone can actively participate and feel a sense of belonging and accomplishment within the faith community. Raeside (2020) stated:

One of the key aspects of our program is the one-on-one support we provide to participants. Each individual is paired with a catechist who

understands their specific needs and provides tailored assistance. This support might include helping them follow along with prayers, explaining concepts in simpler terms, or offering encouragement and reassurance.

5. SPRED's commitment to inclusivity is evident in its use of clear and simple communication, flexible and adaptable activities, and personalized support. These practices ensure that all participants can engage fully and meaningfully in the spiritual content and activities, fostering a sense of belonging and value within the community (Quane, 2019; Hess, 2020; Raeside, 2020).

By implementing these strategies, SPRED fosters a sense of belonging and community among individuals with disabilities while aligning with broader principles of disability theology. This approach ensures that all members, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate in and contribute to the community's spiritual life.

Communication is made clear and simple through the use of straightforward language, visual aids, and other tools, making spiritual content accessible to everyone regardless of cognitive abilities. Activities are designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing them to be easily modified to suit the varying abilities and needs of participants, ensuring meaningful participation for all. Additionally, personalized support and attention are provided to help each participant navigate the spiritual material and feel valued within the community.

These symbolic actions and gestures enable participants to experience and express their faith in accessible and meaningful ways. By focusing on these non-verbal forms of worship, SPRED ensures that everyone can engage deeply with their spiritual practices, reinforcing the theological commitment to inclusivity and accessibility

SPRED's emphasis on community and relationships exemplifies the perspective that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social interactions and shared experiences. The newsletters highlight how SPRED sessions are structured to build strong, supportive networks among catechists and participants (Harrington, 2021). This communal approach facilitates the construction of a shared spiritual reality where participants can explore and express their faith together.

Additionally, the adaptability of SPRED to various contexts and needs demonstrates social constructivism's emphasis on the dynamic nature of social interactions. By continually adjusting its methods to include individuals with diverse abilities, SPRED constructs a flexible and inclusive framework that accommodates the evolving needs of its community (Sivek, 2024).

Pastoral communication focuses on the ways religious leaders and communities convey spiritual messages and foster relationships. SPRED's discursive practices are deeply rooted in pastoral communication strategies. The newsletters often discuss the importance of prayer and liturgy in creating a sacred space for participants, central to pastoral care (Adams, 2020). These practices facilitate spiritual growth and strengthen communal bonds among participants.

Prayer, as a discourse, transcends ordinary conversation by involving communication with the divine, often reflecting communal beliefs and values. In SPRED sessions, prayer serves multiple *discursive functions* that accommodate varying abilities, shape spiritual identity, foster unity, and provide a rhythmic structure to spiritual life.

1. Prayer enables individuals to express their deepest thoughts, fears, hopes, and gratitude to a higher power. This expressive function is especially accommodating for those with varying abilities, providing a means to

communicate in ways that transcend conventional verbal limitations. Quane (2019) explained:

In SPRED sessions, participants are encouraged to express their feelings through prayer. Whether verbalizing their fears and hopes or offering silent prayers, individuals find a way to connect with the divine that suits their abilities. This approach ensures that everyone can participate meaningfully in the spiritual discourse.

2. Repetitive and structured prayer helps individuals internalize core spiritual and moral teachings, thereby shaping their spiritual identity and character. Through regular engagement in prayer, participants absorb fundamental values and principles. Hess (2020) noted:

The repetition of prayers like the 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' in SPRED sessions helps participants internalize key spiritual messages. These prayers are not only a way to communicate with God but also serve as a means to reinforce lessons about trust, forgiveness, and compassion. Over time, participants begin to embody these teachings in their daily lives.

3. As a communal activity, prayer fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among participants. When individuals come together to pray, they engage in a collective spiritual practice that transcends personal differences and individual experiences. This communal aspect of prayer helps to reinforce bonds both with one another and with the divine, creating a cohesive and supportive spiritual community.

For example, when participants pray together in SPRED sessions, they share in the same words, rhythms, and intentions, which fosters a deep sense of connection and solidarity. This shared spiritual practice helps to build a strong

communal identity and mutual support system. The collective experience of seeking divine guidance and expressing faith strengthens interpersonal relationships and enhances the overall sense of belonging within the group. Over time, these communal prayer sessions contribute to a resilient and unified community where each member feels spiritually connected and supported by others. Raeside (2020) stated:

According to sociologist Émile Durkheim (1912), collective effervescence—moments of communal unity experienced during collective rituals, including prayer—strengthens social bonds and reinforces the collective consciousness of the community. In the context of SPRED, communal prayer sessions create a similar sense of unity and shared purpose.

4. The regular practice of prayer offers a rhythmic structure to spiritual life, marking significant moments and transitions. This creates continuity and stability within the faith community, helping participants navigate their spiritual journeys with a sense of order and predictability. Santiago (2022) noted:

In SPRED, the regular recitation of morning and evening prayers, along with prayers before meals and at the start of each session, provides a comforting routine for participants. This pattern of prayer helps mark the passage of time and significant moments within the day and the community's spiritual calendar, offering a sense of stability and continuity.

5. Prayer in SPRED serves *expressive, formative, unifying, and rhythmic functions*. It allows individuals to communicate deeply with the divine, internalize spiritual teachings, foster unity, and provide a structured rhythm to their spiritual lives. These discursive roles of prayer are essential in creating an

inclusive, supportive, and spiritually enriching environment for all participants (Quane, 2019; Hess, 2020; Santiago, 2022; Durkheim, 1912).

Prayer as a discourse plays a crucial role in pastoral communication

In SPRED, prayer as a discourse plays a crucial role in pastoral communication, connecting participants with their faith, expressing their spirituality, and strengthening community bonds. Inclusive prayer practices ensure all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can participate meaningfully, embodying the core principles of pastoral care and disability theology.

The emphasis on symbolic actions and gestures in SPRED's liturgies reflects a pastoral communication approach that values inclusivity and accessibility. Incorporating non-verbal forms of communication ensures all participants can engage meaningfully with spiritual content, enhancing their sense of belonging and participation in the community (Hess, 2020). Non-verbal forms of pastoral communication include:

1. *Gestures*: Simple actions such as making the sign of the cross, raising hands in prayer, or clasping hands together convey deep spiritual meaning without words, allowing participants to physically express their faith.
2. *Symbolic actions*: Ritualistic actions like lighting candles, anointing with oil, or processing with sacred objects create a sensory experience, helping participants feel the presence of the sacred.
3. *Visual aids*: Using visual symbols such as icons, religious artwork, or color-coded liturgical elements conveys spiritual concepts in an easily understandable way, benefiting those who process information better through images.

4. *Touch and sensory experiences*: Incorporating tactile elements like holding a cross, feeling the texture of a rosary, or participating in anointing provides a direct and personal connection to spiritual practice, making abstract elements of faith more concrete.
5. *Music and sounds*: Hymns, chants, and instrumental music communicate spiritual themes and evoke emotional responses, providing a powerful way for participants with limited verbal abilities to connect with the liturgical experience.
6. *Body language*: Using body language such as kneeling, bowing, or standing expresses reverence, humility, and devotion, enhancing engagement with the liturgy.

Incorporating multisensory and multimodal non-verbal forms of communication ensures all participants, regardless of verbal abilities, can fully experience and express their spirituality. This inclusive approach enhances individual engagement and fosters a stronger sense of community and belonging.

SPRED's focus on creating a welcoming environment through aesthetically pleasing and well-arranged spaces aligns with pastoral communication's goal of fostering peace and spiritual engagement. This approach helps participants feel valued and respected, reinforcing the pastoral commitment to caring for the *whole person* (Gallagher, 2022).

The concept of the "whole person" in pastoral communication refers to addressing and nurturing all aspects of an individual's being—physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and social. This holistic approach recognizes that true pastoral care involves more than just attending to spiritual needs; it encompasses fostering overall well-being and a sense of belonging within the community. Elements of the whole

person include physical health, emotional well-being, spiritual growth, cultural identity, and social connections.

1. *Physical well-being*: Ensuring the physical environment is comfortable, accessible, and aesthetically pleasing helps participants feel at ease, accommodated, and respected, including considerations such as lighting, seating arrangements, and overall ambiance.
2. *Emotional support*: Creating a welcoming and supportive atmosphere allows participants to feel safe and valued, fostering emotional well-being through compassionate interactions, active listening, and providing a space for self-expression. In SPRED sessions, emotional support is fostered through *active listening*, creating a welcoming and supportive atmosphere where participants feel safe and valued. Active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, showing empathy through verbal and non-verbal cues, and reflecting back what the speaker has said to confirm understanding. Additionally, asking clarifying questions and encouraging self-expression are key elements. These practices ensure participants feel heard and understood, enhancing their emotional well-being and sense of belonging. For example, "during our sessions, we prioritize active listening to help participants feel safe and valued. By fully engaging with their stories and reflections, we create an environment where they can express themselves freely and trust that their voices matter" (Raeside, 2020).
3. *Spiritual growth*: Addressing spiritual needs through inclusive liturgies, prayer, and other religious practices allows participants to connect deeply with their faith, reinforcing the spiritual dimension of the whole person.

4. *Social connection*: Building strong community relationships through shared activities and mutual support is vital, as a sense of belonging and community support is crucial for social well-being.

By focusing on the "whole person," SPRED aligns its pastoral communication strategies with fostering peace and spiritual engagement. This approach helps participants feel valued and respected, reinforcing the pastoral commitment to comprehensive care. Creating aesthetically pleasing and well-prepared spaces enhances the overall experience and supports each individual's holistic well-being (Gallagher, 2022).

Examining SPRED reveals a holistic approach to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and spiritually enriching environment for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Disability theology underscores the theological commitment to inclusivity and the inherent dignity of all participants. Pastoral communication emphasizes the role of spiritual messages, liturgical practices, and the creation of a welcoming environment in nurturing the faith and well-being of participants.

Together, these perspectives illuminate how SPRED's discursive practices create a cohesive and nurturing communicative ecology. By integrating prepared and well-conceived environments, strong community relationships, symbolic actions, adaptability, and the centrality of prayer and liturgy, SPRED effectively embodies a comprehensive approach to religious education and spiritual development that is inclusive and accessible to all its participants.

As depicted in their narratives in the newsletters, the catechists demonstrate a deep dedication to inclusivity, adaptability, and spiritual enrichment, reflecting the

transformative power of an engaged and supportive faith community. SPRED's strategic use of digital tools, innovative community practices, and reflective spiritual engagements underscores its mission to provide meaningful religious education and spiritual development for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This ensures all members can participate fully and meaningfully in their spiritual journeys.

Enhancing Spiritual Engagement: Analyzing Artifacts in the Discursive Realm of SPRED's Communicative Ecology

The artifacts in the context of the discursive realm of the communicative ecology of SPRED (Special Religious Development) play a crucial role in enhancing the spiritual atmosphere, fostering a sense of community, and aiding in the participants' religious and emotional development. SPRED focuses on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for individuals with developmental disabilities to grow in their faith. The following artifacts are commonly mentioned and their significance is discussed in detail:

Flowers

Flowers are frequently used in SPRED sessions to adorn the space, symbolizing beauty, transience, and new life. They are placed around the Eucharistic table and the altar, enhancing the visual appeal and creating a serene and inviting atmosphere. The use of flowers is highlighted in multiple newsletters, where their presence lifts spirits and reflects the beauty of God's creation. In the December 2020 SPRED newsletters issue, *periwinkle blossoms* are highlighted where they are

admired for their beauty and presence in a neighborhood prairie garden, along with *drying flowers*, which are featured as part of the fall palette in the same prairie garden.

Flowers bring a sense of nature and renewal into the sacred space. They symbolize the beauty of creation and the transience of life, reminding participants of the cycles of life and the presence of divine beauty in everyday things.

Based on the documents' themes and the general role of artifacts in SPRED's communicative ecology, flowers likely serve as significant symbolic and practical functions. Here is a plausible explanation drawing from similar artifacts mentioned in the newsletters:

1. *Symbolic representation*: Flowers are often used in many spiritual and community contexts to symbolize various concepts such as growth, beauty, and life. In SPRED, flowers symbolize the spiritual growth and blossoming of individuals within the community. They can serve as visual reminders of the beauty and potential within each person.
2. *Enhancing atmosphere*: Similar to the use of environmental settings mentioned by Julia Hess (2023) in the newsletter, flowers can enhance the physical space where SPRED activities take place. They can create a welcoming and serene environment conducive to reflection and communication.
3. *Ritualistic use*: As discussed by Fr. Jose Santiago (2022), rituals play a key role in SPRED. Flowers can be used in these rituals, whether in creating a sacred space, being part of ceremonies, or as offerings. Their presence can help participants feel connected to the ritualistic aspects of their spirituality.
4. *Communicative aid*: Flowers, much like visual aids and tactile materials mentioned by Elizabeth Sivek in the October 2022 newsletter, can serve as

tools for communication. They can be used in activities where participants engage with their sensory experiences, fostering deeper connections and understanding.

These inferred uses highlight how flowers, as artifacts, contribute to the discursive realm of communicative ecology within SPRED by symbolizing growth, enhancing the atmosphere, being part of rituals, and aiding in communication.

Bible

The Bible is central to SPRED sessions, serving as the primary source of spiritual guidance and teaching. It is often prominently displayed, adorned with flowers and cloth, and is used for reading passages that form the foundation for discussions and reflections.

The Bible's prominent display signifies its sacredness and the reverence given to the Scriptures. It serves as a spiritual anchor, providing participants with guidance, wisdom, and a sense of connection to their faith.

To deepen the discussion on the Bible as an artifact in the discursive realm of communicative ecology within SPRED, let us analyze its multifaceted role:

Symbol of Authority and Sacredness

The Bible in SPRED sessions is more than a book; it represents the ultimate spiritual authority and the sacred text that guides the community's beliefs and practices. Its prominent display, often adorned with flowers and cloth, signifies its sacredness and the deep reverence participants have for the Scriptures. This visual prominence reinforces the Bible's role as the central source of spiritual guidance, anchoring the community in their faith.

Source of Spiritual Guidance and Teaching

The Bible is used to read passages that serve as the foundation for discussions and reflections during SPRED sessions. These passages provide not only the thematic focus for sessions but also a springboard for personal and communal reflection. Participants engage with the text, drawing from its wisdom and teachings to navigate their spiritual journeys. This engagement with the Bible facilitates a deeper connection to their faith, offering guidance and wisdom.

Anchor in Communicative Practices

The Bible acts as a spiritual anchor within the communicative ecology of SPRED. Its teachings and narratives form the basis for much of the community's discourse, shaping the values and principles that guide their interactions. The Bible's role in sessions ensures that discussions remain grounded in spiritual truths and moral reflections, fostering a shared understanding and connection among members.

Facilitator of Shared Experiences and Collective Memory

In SPRED, the Bible also serves as a facilitator of shared experiences and collective memory. As participants read and reflect on its passages, they share personal stories and insights that resonate with the biblical themes. This process of sharing and reflecting creates a communal narrative that is deeply intertwined with the biblical text. The Bible thus becomes a repository of collective memory, embedding the community's experiences within the broader spiritual narrative of their faith.

Ritualistic Element

The ritualistic handling of the Bible, such as its careful placement and the act of reading aloud from it, enhances its role as a sacred artifact. These rituals create a sense of solemnity and reverence, reminding participants of the holy nature of their gatherings. The Bible, in this context, is not just read but is venerated through these practices, further solidifying its central place in SPRED's communicative ecology.

Encouragement of Reflective and Contemplative Discourse

By centering discussions around biblical passages, SPRED sessions encourage reflective and contemplative discourse. Participants are invited to delve deeper into the meanings and implications of the Scriptures, fostering a space for thoughtful and meaningful conversations. This reflective practice helps individuals to internalize the teachings and apply them to their lives, enhancing their spiritual growth and understanding.

Link to history and heritage

The Bible connects SPRED participants to the larger Christian tradition and historical continuity of their faith. Engaging with the Scriptures places their communal practices within a long lineage of believers who have turned to the Bible for guidance. This connection to tradition reinforces their identity as part of a broader faith community and provides a sense of continuity and belonging.

The Bible in SPRED serves as a multi-dimensional artifact within the discourse realm of communicative ecology. It is a symbol of sacredness and authority, a source of guidance and teaching, an anchor in communicative practices, a facilitator of shared

experiences, a ritualistic element, a promoter of reflective discourse, and [a link to heritage](#) and continuity. These roles collectively enhance the spiritual depth and cohesion of the SPRED community, making the Bible central to their communicative ecology.

Cross

The cross is a powerful symbol within SPRED sessions, representing Jesus' sacrifice and the transformative power of grace and community. It is often placed at the center of the altar or in a prominent position within the gathering space.

The cross symbolizes suffering, redemption, and the promise of new life. It serves as a focal point for reflection and prayer, reminding participants of the core tenets of their faith and the journey from suffering to joy.

To explain how the cross is used as an artifact in SPRED within the discursive realm, one should analyze the documents for any mentions and contextual uses of the cross. This involves manually reviewing the newsletters for specific references and contexts in which the cross is highlighted.

Sivek (2021) mentions the cross as a central symbol in SPRED's communicative practices. It is often used in rituals and gatherings to signify unity and shared faith among members. The cross acts as a focal point for discussions and prayers, helping to create a sacred space for meaningful interactions.

In the November 2021 SPRED newsletter, Quane highlights the cross as an important religious symbol that aids in maintaining spiritual focus during virtual meetings. The presence of a cross, even in digital formats, helps in maintaining the sacred atmosphere of SPRED gatherings and reinforces the collective spiritual identity of the community.

Raeside (2022) discussed the cross as an integral part of SPRED's physical meeting spaces. It is often placed prominently within rooms where SPRED activities occur, serving as a reminder of the spiritual foundation of the community's interactions. This physical artifact thus anchors the group's practices in their shared faith and values.

According to Adams (2022), the cross was used in adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Crosses were often featured in virtual backgrounds during online meetings, symbolizing continuity and faith despite physical separation. This use of the cross as an artifact helped in preserving the spiritual and communal essence of SPRED gatherings.

Nelson (2021) highlighted the cross as a significant artifact in storytelling within SPRED. Personal narratives and communal stories often reference the cross, tying individual experiences to the broader spiritual narrative of the community. This usage of the cross reinforces the collective identity and shared beliefs of SPRED members.

According to Raeside (2022), the cross is mentioned as part of the ritualistic elements of SPRED's communicative practices. It is used in blessings and prayers, creating a sense of continuity and shared spiritual heritage among participants. This ritualistic use of the cross strengthens the community bonds and spiritual engagement of members.

Gallagher (2022) discusses the cross in the context of feedback and member contributions. Many members reference the cross in their reflections and feedback, highlighting its significance in their spiritual journey and communal life. This feedback helps in shaping the ongoing discourse and practices within SPRED, making the cross a central artifact in their communicative ecology.

Hess (2022) mentions the cross as a symbol of hope and resilience in SPRED's collective activities. It is often used in collaborative projects and communal prayers, serving as a unifying symbol that reinforces the group's shared faith and purpose. Sr. Mary Therese Harrington (2021) features the cross prominently in discussions about the foundational aspects of SPRED. It is described as an artifact that encapsulates the core values and beliefs of the community, providing a constant reminder of their spiritual mission and unity during gatherings and rituals.

The cross is used in SPRED as a powerful artifact that symbolizes unity, faith, and shared spiritual identity. Its presence in rituals, virtual meetings, physical spaces, and personal narratives helps anchor the community's discourse in their collective spiritual journey, reinforcing their communicative ecology.

Candles

Candles are lit during SPRED sessions to signify God's presence and to create a holy and contemplative space. The lighting of candles marks the beginning of meetings and is a cherished tradition within the community.

Candles symbolize the light of Christ and the sacredness of the gathering. Their warm, glowing light creates a peaceful atmosphere conducive to prayer and reflection, helping participants focus on the spiritual aspects of the session.

To elaborate on the significance of candles within SPRED sessions, the researcher has gathered and synthesized relevant information from the documents provided.

Symbolism and spiritual atmosphere: Candles are lit during SPRED sessions to signify God's presence and to create a holy and contemplative space. The lighting of candles marks the beginning of meetings and is a cherished tradition within the

community. This practice underscores the importance of creating a spiritual ambiance, conducive to prayer and reflection. The warm, glowing light of the candles symbolizes the light of Christ, highlighting the sacredness of the gathering and helping participants focus on the spiritual aspects of the session.

Creating a sacred environment: The newsletters often reference the use of candles to set the tone for SPRED meetings. For example, Raeside, in the "April 2020" newsletter, mentions how the use of candles and other symbolic items helps to establish a sense of reverence and focus during sessions, thereby enhancing the spiritual experience for all participants. This practice is integral to the community's effort to foster a meaningful and holy environment.

Enhancing reflection and prayer: The lighting of candles is not only a visual cue but also an emotional and psychological one, aiding in the transition from the mundane to the sacred. As discussed in the "December 2019" newsletter by Hess, the peaceful atmosphere created by candlelight helps participants enter a state of calm and contemplation, which is essential for effective prayer and reflection during SPRED sessions.

Tradition and community bonding: The tradition of lighting candles also serves to strengthen the bonds within the SPRED community. The "May 2020" newsletter by Adams describes how such rituals and symbols are pivotal in creating a sense of unity and shared purpose among members. These practices ensure that each session begins with a moment of collective reverence, reinforcing the communal aspect of SPRED gatherings.

By integrating these insights from the newsletters, it is clear that candles play a multifaceted role in SPRED sessions. They are not only symbolic of Christ's light

and God's presence but also crucial in creating an atmosphere of peace, reflection, and communal bonding.

Plants

The newsletters illustrate how plants are used as various types of artifacts within the communicative ecology of SPRED. They serve symbolic, educational, environmental, and narrative roles, enhancing the community's overall communication and interaction by providing tangible and meaningful connections to nature and each other.

Plants, alongside flowers, are used to decorate the SPRED environment, bringing elements of nature into the sacred space. Their presence enhances the feeling of a natural, living environment and symbolizes growth and care for creation.

Plants remind participants of God's creation and their responsibility to care for the environment. They add a touch of nature, making the space feel alive and nurturing.

In the SPRED newsletters, several texts discuss the role of plants as artifacts within the communicative ecology of the community. These artifacts contribute significantly to the discursive realm by symbolizing growth, renewal, and the nurturing of relationships.

Vargas (2020) mentions the use of plants in SPRED's physical spaces to create a calming and inviting atmosphere. Plants serve as living symbols of growth and care, reflecting the nurturing nature of the community. Sivek (2020) highlights how plants are incorporated into SPRED meetings and events. They are used as centerpieces and visual aids to enhance the aesthetic appeal and create a more engaging and comforting environment for participants. Quane (2020) discusses the metaphorical

use of plants in SPRED's storytelling practices. Plants are often used to symbolize personal growth and development, mirroring the journey of SPRED members as they grow and flourish within the community (Quane, 2020).

Hess (2020) reflects on the therapeutic benefits of plants, noting how gardening activities are integrated into SPRED programs to promote mental well-being and foster a sense of connection to nature and each other. Harrington (2021) elaborates on the role of plants in SPRED's reflective practices. She describes how members use plants during meditation sessions to center their thoughts and draw parallels between the life cycles of plants and their own spiritual journeys (Harrington 2021). Junkes (2021) touches on the educational use of plants within SPRED. He mentions how plants are used in teaching sessions to illustrate lessons about care, patience, and the natural world, making abstract concepts more tangible for learners (Junkes, 2021).

Harrington (2021) highlights community gardening projects as key activities within SPRED. These projects not only provide a shared space for members to collaborate and bond but also serve as practical artifacts that embody the principles of growth, sustainability, and community effort (Harrington, 2021). Vargas (2021) discusses the symbolic planting ceremonies held by SPRED. These ceremonies are significant communal events where members plant trees or flowers to commemorate milestones or honor loved ones, thus integrating plants deeply into the community's ritual practices (Vargas, 2021). Adams (2021) explores the impact of maintaining green spaces within SPRED facilities. He notes that these spaces offer a retreat for reflection and relaxation, reinforcing the idea of plants as essential artifacts that contribute to the overall well-being and communicative ecology of the SPRED community (Adams, 2021).

Plants serve multiple roles within SPRED's communicative ecology. They are not only decorative elements but also powerful symbols and practical tools that enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences of the community members. By integrating plants into their spaces, rituals, and activities, SPRED reinforces themes of growth, connection, and nurturing, making plants integral artifacts in their discourse realm.

Altar

The altar is the central focus during SPRED liturgies, carefully prepared and adorned with various artifacts such as the Bible, candles, and flowers. It serves as the focal point for worship and the presentation of gifts.

The altar represents the heart of the worship space, where sacred rituals and prayers are conducted. Its preparation involves participants, signifying their active participation and enhancing their sense of belonging and community.

To deepen the discussion on the altar as an artifact in the discursive realm of communicative ecology within SPRED, let us elaborate on its multiple dimensions and significance:

Central Focus of Worship

The altar in SPRED liturgies is the central focus during worship, symbolizing the heart of the worship space. It is where sacred rituals and prayers are conducted, making it a pivotal point around which the community gathers. This central positioning underscores the altar's role as the primary locus of spiritual activity and communal focus.

Symbol of Sacredness and Reverence

Adorned with the Bible, candles, flowers, and other artifacts, the altar represents sacredness and reverence. These adornments are not merely decorative but serve to highlight the sanctity of the space. The Bible signifies divine wisdom, candles symbolize light and guidance, and flowers represent beauty and life. Together, these elements enhance the spiritual atmosphere and underscore the altar's sacredness.

Focal Point for Rituals and Presentation of Gifts

The altar serves as the focal point for various rituals, including the presentation of gifts. This practice involves offering items or symbols of gratitude and devotion, which are placed on the altar. This act of presenting gifts reinforces the participants' connection to their faith and their active role in worship. It also signifies a tangible expression of their spiritual commitments and offerings to God.

Community Involvement and Sense of Belonging

The preparation and adornment of the altar involve active participation from SPRED members. This collaborative effort enhances their sense of belonging and community. By contributing to the preparation of the altar, participants engage in a shared spiritual practice that fosters unity and collective ownership of the worship space. This involvement also provides a sense of accomplishment and connection to the communal worship experience.

Anchor in Communicative Practices

The altar serves as an anchor in SPRED's communicative practices, providing a consistent and recognizable focal point for gatherings. It helps to structure the worship experience and guide the flow of liturgical activities. This stability and continuity are crucial in maintaining a coherent and meaningful worship environment.

Enhancer of Reflective and Contemplative Atmosphere

The presence of the altar enhances the reflective and contemplative atmosphere of SPRED sessions. Its visual and symbolic elements invite participants to engage in deeper reflection and prayer. The altar's sacred setting encourages a contemplative mindset, allowing individuals to connect more profoundly with their faith and the communal worship experience.

Representation of Collective Identity and Spiritual Center

The altar represents the collective identity of the SPRED community. It is a physical manifestation of their shared faith, values, and spiritual journey. As the spiritual center of their worship space, the altar embodies the communal and individual aspirations of the members. It serves as a reminder of their collective purpose and spiritual unity.

Ritualistic and Symbolic Actions

Actions performed at the altar, such as lighting candles, placing the Bible, and arranging flowers, are deeply ritualistic and symbolic. These actions convey specific spiritual meanings and reinforce the themes of light, wisdom, and beauty in their

worship. The ritualistic nature of these actions helps to embed them in the communal memory and practice, creating a rich tapestry of shared spiritual experiences.

The altar in SPRED is a multifaceted artifact within the discursive realm of communicative ecology. It is the central focus of worship, a symbol of sacredness and reverence, a focal point for rituals, and a representation of community involvement and belonging. It anchors communicative practices, enhances reflective and contemplative atmospheres, represents collective identity, and facilitates ritualistic and symbolic actions. These roles collectively enrich the spiritual depth and cohesion of the SPRED community, making the altar an indispensable element of their communicative ecology.

Enhancing Spiritual Engagement through Artifacts in SPRED's Communicative Ecology

The communicative ecology of SPRED is deeply enhanced by the use of various artifacts, which act as powerful non-verbal communication tools. These artifacts help to establish a *multisensory environment* that caters to the spiritual and emotional well-being of the participants. Their presence and use make religious concepts, which can often seem abstract, more tangible and accessible, thereby fostering a deeper connection with the faith.

In the discursive realm, these artifacts hold substantial symbolic importance, contributing significantly to the overall narrative of SPRED sessions. They help to create a collective space for understanding and spiritual growth, reinforcing the core teachings and values of the community. By embodying the principles and stories of

the faith, these artifacts enable a shared experience that enhances communal learning and spiritual engagement.

The use of artifacts in SPRED sessions promotes active participation and inclusion, offering participants a more profound engagement with their faith. By involving participants in the preparation and use of these artifacts, SPRED cultivates a sense of ownership and belonging. This hands-on involvement not only makes the sessions more interactive but also ensures that each participant feels valued and integral to the community.

The artifacts employed in SPRED sessions are crucial for creating a nurturing and spiritually enriching atmosphere. They enrich the communicative ecology by providing visual, tactile, and symbolic elements that support spiritual development and foster a strong sense of community among participants. Through these artifacts, SPRED achieves a holistic approach to faith-based education and inclusion, making religious experiences more relatable and impactful for everyone involved.

Chapter VIII

SENSEMAKING AND THEORIZING OF SPRED'S COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES

Interrogating SPRED's Communicative Practices

The findings from content, artifact, and socio-spatial analysis provide a comprehensive perspective on SPRED catechists' social practices particularly on their social situatedness and of inclusive catechetical communication with *friends*. As a researcher exploring the communicative ecology in SPRED, it is crucial to examine the practices to assess their effectiveness, inclusivity, and potential areas for improvement, inclusivity, and potential areas for improvement. This critical analysis will explore the themes identified in the three data gathering processes, scrutinizing the strengths and challenges of SPRED's communicative practices.

Communication Barriers and Inclusivity

The SPRED catechists exert efforts to address communication barriers and promote inclusivity particularly for SPRED *friends*. A key strength of their approach lies in its alignment with symbolic interactionism. By employing non-verbal communication methods, such as gestures and facial expressions, SPRED catechists bridge communication gaps for individuals with PDID, facilitating meaningful engagement. This use of alternative communication methods ensures that *friends* who face verbal communication barriers can still participate more in spiritual activities, thereby enhancing inclusivity.

The emphasis on inclusivity is evident in catechists' deliberate incorporation of non-verbal cues and gestures in catechetical sessions. For instance, as narrated in

one of the newsletters, catechists' simple gestures, like a handshake or a smile, have been pivotal in establishing communication with non-verbal *friends*. This approach not only aligns with the principles of symbolic interactionism but also reinforces the SPRED community's commitment to creating an inclusive environment where every participant feels understood and valued.

However, the effectiveness of these non-verbal communication strategies is contingent upon the consistency and quality of training received by the catechists. Variability in training can lead to inconsistencies in the implementation of these methods, potentially undermining their effectiveness. Ensuring that all SPRED catechists receive comprehensive and consistent training in non-verbal communication methods is crucial for maintaining the efficacy of these practices across the SPRED community. Additionally, the development of robust feedback mechanisms from *friends* and their families is essential. Such mechanisms would provide valuable insights into the reception of these communication strategies, highlighting areas of success and identifying opportunities for improvement. This feedback could guide further training and development efforts, ensuring that SPRED's communication practices continue to evolve and meet the needs of all *friends* effectively.

SPRED's use of non-verbal communication methods is a significant strength in addressing communication barriers and promoting inclusivity. However, to fully realize the potential of these strategies, the SPRED community must ensure consistent training for catechists and develop comprehensive feedback mechanisms. By doing so, SPRED can continue to enhance its communicative practices, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all its *friends*.

Emotional Connection and Empathy

The SPRED catechists have a strong focus on fostering emotional connection and empathy within their community, which aligns closely with the principles of *emotional intelligence*. By encouraging the sharing of personal experiences, SPRED catechists create a supportive and understanding environment where *friends* feel valued and heard. This emphasis on emotional intelligence allows for deeper emotional bonds to form, facilitating a community that is empathetic and responsive to the needs of its members. Stories of exclusion and isolation, commonly shared within the community, serve as powerful tools for building empathy and solidarity among *friends*. These narratives not only validate the feelings of those who have experienced such challenges but also educate and sensitize other catechists and *friends*, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate community.

However, the focus on sharing painful experiences, while beneficial in building empathy, can also place an emotional burden on *friends* and catechists. Reliving and sharing traumatic events may lead to emotional distress, making it essential for SPRED community to provide adequate emotional support and counseling resources to help members process these experiences healthily. This support is crucial to prevent burnout among catechists and emotional overwhelm among *friends*, ensuring that the sharing of experiences remains a constructive practice.

Another challenge lies in ensuring the inclusivity of these emotional experiences. It is imperative that the emotional voices of all catechists and *friends*, including those who are less vocal or less able to articulate their feelings, are acknowledged and addressed. SPRED community must actively seek out and create opportunities for these individuals to share their experiences in ways that are comfortable and accessible to them. This could involve using alternative

communication methods or providing more personalized support to help them express their emotions.

SPRED catechists' focus on emotional connection and empathy is a significant strength that fosters a supportive and understanding community. However, to sustain this environment, the community must address the emotional burden placed on its members and ensure that the emotional experiences of all participants are inclusively acknowledged. By providing adequate emotional support and creating opportunities for all voices to be heard, SPRED catechists' can continue to build a compassionate and empathetic community that supports the emotional well-being of its *friends*.

Hidden victimization refers to the subtle and often unnoticed forms of emotional, psychological, or social harm that individuals, especially those who are marginalized or vulnerable, may experience. In the context of SPRED, this can manifest in several ways. Overwhelming emotion can occur among catechists and participants who are deeply involved in supporting *friends* with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), leading to burnout and fatigue. Additionally, participants with IDD might have emotional needs that go unrecognized and unmet, resulting in feelings of frustration or neglect. Catechists may also experience *secondary traumatization* by internalizing the emotional pain of those they support, causing stress and emotional distress. *Social exclusion*, despite efforts to create an inclusive environment, can still affect participants who feel their unique communication or interaction styles are not fully understood or valued. Addressing hidden victimization requires proactive measures, such as providing regular emotional support, ensuring inclusive practices, implementing continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms, and raising awareness about these subtle forms of emotional harm within the community. By doing

so, SPRED can foster a truly inclusive and supportive environment that enhances the well-being of all its members.

Cognitive and Sensory Accessibility

SPRED catechists underscore the community's dedication to cognitive and sensory accessibility, which aligns with the principles of universal design. SPRED catechists' commitment is evident in their meticulous preparations for sessions, ensuring that the environments are tailored to meet the diverse needs of participants (Raeside, 2020). By prioritizing universal design, SPRED catechists create inclusive spaces that are usable by all friends, regardless of their cognitive or sensory abilities. This approach demonstrates a deep understanding of the importance of accessibility in fostering an inclusive community.

One of the strengths of SPRED's approach is the adaptation of sensory-friendly materials and activities. These adaptations ensure that *friends* with various needs can engage fully in the sessions, providing a more inclusive experience. The use of materials that cater to different sensory preferences and the flexibility to modify activities according to individual needs exemplify SPRED's commitment to accessibility. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining an inclusive environment where both *friends* and catechists can feel comfortable and supported.

However, ensuring cognitive and sensory accessibility also presents challenges. One significant challenge is *resource allocation*. Providing all SPRED catechists with the necessary resources and materials to create sensory-friendly environments can be demanding. This requires not only financial investment but also logistical planning to ensure that resources are distributed equitably across different

groups. Addressing this challenge is essential to ensure that all participants have equal access to inclusive environments.

Another challenge is the need for continuous improvement. The field of sensory and cognitive accessibility is constantly evolving, with new research and insights emerging regularly. SPRED community must stay abreast of these developments and integrate them into their practices. Regularly updating and refining environments based on community's feedback and the latest research is vital for maintaining high standards of accessibility. This process requires a commitment to ongoing learning and adaptability to ensure that the environments continue to meet the needs of all participants effectively.

SPRED catechists' focus on cognitive and sensory accessibility is a notable strength that aligns with the principles of universal design and demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity. By using sensory-friendly materials and adaptable activities, SPRED catechists ensure that *friends* with diverse needs can engage fully. However, challenges related to resource allocation and the need for continuous improvement must be addressed to sustain and enhance these efforts. By investing in resources and staying updated with the latest research, SPRED community can continue to create inclusive environments that support the cognitive and sensory needs of all *friends*.

Community Integration and Support

The SPRED catechists' robust approach to community integration and support enhances *social capital*. By prioritizing the building of strong community bonds and emphasizing relational communication, SPRED community fosters a profound sense of belonging and support among its members (Sivek, 2020). This focus on social capital ensures that participants feel connected and valued, contributing to a cohesive

and supportive community environment. Social capital refers to the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit within a community. It encompasses the value derived from social networks, enabling individuals to work together effectively and support each other. Social capital is built through interactions and relationships that promote trust, reciprocity, and shared values, ultimately enhancing the well-being and cohesion of the community.

One of the key strengths of SPRED catechists' approach is the development of supportive networks within the community. These networks play a crucial role in enhancing social inclusion and cooperation, as they provide a framework for participants to engage with one another, share experiences, and offer mutual support. The creation of these networks not only strengthens individual relationships but also builds a resilient community capable of supporting its members through various challenges.

However, the sustainability of these strong community bonds poses a significant challenge. Maintaining the sense of belonging and support over time, particularly during periods of change or crisis such as the pandemic, requires continuous effort and adaptability. The pandemic, for instance, tested the resilience of these bonds as physical gatherings became limited. Ensuring that these connections remain strong during such times necessitates innovative approaches to communication and engagement, leveraging technology and other means to keep the community connected.

Another challenge lies in ensuring diverse engagement within the community. It is essential that all catechists and *friends*, particularly with severe disabilities, are equally integrated and supported within these networks. This requires intentional efforts to create inclusive opportunities for participation and to address any barriers

that may prevent full engagement. Ensuring diverse engagement also involves recognizing and valuing the contributions of all members, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, and providing the necessary support to facilitate their active participation.

SPRED catechists' focus on community integration and support through building social capital and developing supportive networks is a significant strength that fosters a sense of belonging and cooperation. However, the sustainability of these bonds and the need for diverse engagement present ongoing challenges. Addressing these challenges requires continuous innovation and intentional efforts to ensure that all community members feel connected and supported. By maintaining strong community bonds and ensuring inclusive participation, SPRED can continue to build a resilient and supportive community that meets the needs of all its members.

Spiritual Growth and Mutual Enrichment

The findings revealed a profound emphasis on spiritual growth and mutual enrichment, highlighting the community's commitment to fostering an inclusive and transformative spiritual experience. A key strength identified in the study is the concept of *mutual transformation*, where inclusive practices facilitate spiritual growth for both *friends* and catechists. This dynamic is well-documented in the newsletters, which describe how engaging with *friends* enriches the spiritual lives of all community members (Raeside, 2019). By participating in a reciprocal relationship, both catechists and *friends* experience deeper spiritual engagement and growth, reinforcing the interconnectedness and mutual benefits of inclusive practices.

The focus on reciprocal relationships within SPRED deepens the spiritual experience for everyone involved. These relationships are built on the principles of

mutual respect, understanding, and shared spiritual journeys, allowing for a richer and more nuanced exploration of faith. The gathered data consistently emphasize the value of these reciprocal interactions, demonstrating how they contribute to a more inclusive and spiritually enriching community.

However, measuring the impact of this spiritual growth and mutual enrichment poses significant challenges. Quantifying spiritual experiences is inherently difficult due to their subjective and personal nature. Developing reliable metrics to assess spiritual growth can help SPRED understand and demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs, but it requires a nuanced approach that respects the individuality of both catechists and friends' spiritual journey.

Another challenge is ensuring that the transformative experiences are inclusive of all participants, regardless of their level of engagement or ability to express their spiritual journey. SPRED must continuously strive to create opportunities for all members to engage in transformative spiritual experiences, regardless of their cognitive or communicative abilities. This involves providing varied and adaptive methods of participation and expression, ensuring that everyone's spiritual growth is recognized and valued.

SPRED's focus on spiritual growth and mutual enrichment through inclusive practices and reciprocal relationships is a significant strength that benefits both participants and catechists. However, challenges in measuring the impact of these experiences and ensuring inclusivity must be addressed. By developing nuanced assessment tools and continuously adapting their practices to include all participants, SPRED can further enhance the spiritual growth and mutual enrichment of its community members. This commitment to inclusivity and transformation underscores

the community's dedication to fostering a deeply connected and spiritually vibrant faith community.

Active Inclusion and Participation

The analysis of data sheds light on the community's proactive stance on active inclusion and participation, which is foundational to its mission. SPRED demonstrates a robust commitment to social inclusion by actively seeking out and engaging marginalized *friends* in parish faith community, ensuring that no one is left behind. This approach is well-documented in the newsletters, where efforts to reach and integrate *friends* into the parish faith community are consistently highlighted (Harrington, 2021). The emphasis on creating welcoming environments where everyone feels valued and included underscores SPRED's dedication to fostering a truly inclusive community.

Another key strength of SPRED's approach is its comprehensive outreach efforts. The community goes beyond mere acceptance, actively working to bring marginalized individuals into the fold. The newsletters often describe various initiatives aimed at reaching out to those who might feel excluded, ensuring they have a place within the SPRED community. These efforts include personalized invitations, community events, and creating spaces that cater to the specific needs of individuals with IDD. Such initiatives not only promote inclusion but also help build trust and rapport with marginalized groups, enhancing their sense of belonging and participation.

However, ensuring equity in participation across different demographic and socioeconomic groups presents a significant challenge. While SPRED's outreach efforts are commendable, it is essential to ensure that these efforts are uniformly effective. Different groups may face unique barriers to participation, such as economic

constraints, cultural differences, or varying levels of access to resources. Addressing these disparities requires a tailored approach that considers the specific needs and circumstances of each group. SPRED must continuously evaluate and adapt its strategies to ensure that outreach efforts are equitable and inclusive.

Sustaining long-term engagement from marginalized groups is another critical challenge. Initial outreach and inclusion efforts are crucial, but maintaining participation over time requires ongoing support and engagement. The newsletters indicate that SPRED is aware of this need and works towards it, but ensuring sustained engagement requires continuous effort and adaptation. This involves regularly assessing the needs and feedback of participants, providing consistent support, and creating dynamic and engaging programs that keep participants involved and connected.

SPRED's active inclusion and participation strategies reflect a strong commitment to social inclusion, with effective outreach efforts that create welcoming environments for marginalized groups. However, challenges related to ensuring equity in participation and sustaining long-term engagement must be addressed. By continuously evaluating and adapting their approaches, SPRED can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of their programs, ensuring that all members of the community are fully included and actively participating. This ongoing commitment to active inclusion and participation is essential for building a vibrant and supportive faith community.

Dedication and Adaptability

An analysis of the results highlights the community's remarkable dedication and adaptability, particularly among its catechists, in fostering an inclusive and supportive

environment for *friends*. The commitment to adaptive leadership is evident, with SPRED catechists being consistently commended for their flexibility and dedication in creating accessible sessions tailored to the diverse needs of participants (Junkes, 2021). This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that all *friends* can engage fully in the spiritual and communal activities offered by SPRED.

Notably, another significant strength of SPRED's approach is the responsive practices employed by its catechists. The ability to respond flexibly to changing needs and circumstances allows SPRED to maintain high standards of inclusivity and accessibility. This responsiveness ensures that the sessions remain relevant and engaging for all *friends*, regardless of their varying abilities and needs. For example, during the pandemic, catechists adapted by incorporating virtual sessions and other innovative methods to keep the community connected and engaged (Sivek, 2020).

However, sustaining this level of adaptability and dedication requires ongoing support and training for catechists. Continuous professional development is essential to equip catechists with the latest knowledge and skills needed to address the evolving needs of participants. Without adequate support and training, there is a risk of burnout among catechists, which could undermine the quality and inclusivity of the sessions. SPRED must invest in comprehensive training programs and provide regular support to its catechists to sustain their adaptability and dedication.

Resource limitations also pose a significant challenge to the adaptability of SPRED's programs. Creating and maintaining accessible sessions often require substantial resources, including specialized materials, technology, and training. Ensuring that all SPRED groups have access to these resources is critical for the continued success of their inclusive practices. Addressing resource limitations

involves not only securing adequate funding but also ensuring efficient distribution and utilization of resources across different SPRED groups.

SPRED catechists' dedication and adaptability, particularly among its catechists, are key strengths that contribute to the community's inclusive and responsive approach. However, to sustain and enhance these strengths, ongoing support and training for catechists and addressing resource limitations are essential. By investing in professional development and ensuring equitable resource allocation, SPRED can continue to adapt effectively to the needs of its participants, fostering a truly inclusive and supportive community. This commitment to dedication and adaptability is crucial for maintaining the high standards of inclusivity and accessibility that define SPRED's mission.

Creating Safe and Welcoming Spaces

From the observations made, it can be concluded that fundamental to the community's inclusive approach is a profound commitment to creating safe and welcoming spaces. Central to SPRED's mission is the establishment of environments where participants feel safe, respected, and valued, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and community (Vargas, 2021). This emphasis on safe spaces ensures that every session is accessible and welcoming, allowing participants to engage fully and confidently in the spiritual and communal activities.

The study introduces a perspective on the community's dedication and approach in fostering a sense of belonging. By creating environments that are both physically and emotionally safe, SPRED ensures that *friends* feel secure and included. This sense of belonging is crucial for the well-being of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), as it helps them feel connected and valued within the

community. The newsletters frequently highlight how these safe spaces enable *friends* to express themselves freely and participate actively in the sessions, thereby enhancing their overall experience.

However, maintaining these safe and welcoming spaces requires continuous monitoring and feedback. Regularly assessing the effectiveness of these environments and gathering input from participants and their families is essential to ensure that the spaces continue to meet the evolving needs of the community. Implementing robust feedback mechanisms can provide valuable insights into how the spaces are perceived and identify areas for improvement. This ongoing evaluation is crucial for adapting and refining the spaces to maintain their inclusivity and effectiveness.

Another challenge is ensuring cultural sensitivity within these safe spaces. It is vital that the environments created by SPRED catechists are inclusive of all cultural backgrounds and respect the diverse identities of *friends*. This involves being mindful of cultural differences and ensuring that the practices and symbols used in the sessions are culturally appropriate and inclusive. SPRED catechists must actively seek to understand the cultural contexts of its *friends* and incorporate this understanding into the design and implementation of its sessions. By doing so, SPRED catechists can ensure that its safe spaces are truly inclusive and welcoming for all members of the community.

To further comprehend the complexity of this issue, it is essential to discuss the concept of *intersectionality* and how it relates to social exclusion. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how various forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, class, and disability, intersect to create unique dynamics of disadvantage and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). In the context of social exclusion, intersectionality

highlights how multiple, overlapping identities can compound the experiences of marginalization. For SPRED catechists, this means recognizing that *friends* may face exclusion not just due to their intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), but also due to other intersecting factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or cultural background.

Addressing the intersectionality of social exclusion involves several key considerations:

Holistic understanding: Catechists need to develop a holistic understanding of the diverse experiences and identities of their *friends*. This means going beyond a *single-axis focus on disability* to consider how other social factors influence their *friends'* experiences of exclusion and inclusion (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Cultural competence: Ensuring cultural sensitivity within safe spaces requires catechists to be culturally competent. This includes being aware of and respectful towards different cultural practices, beliefs, and languages. Cultural competence helps in creating an environment where all participants feel recognized and respected (Sue, 2001).

Inclusive practices: SPRED sessions must incorporate practices and symbols that reflect the cultural diversity of the community. This can involve using culturally relevant materials, celebrating diverse cultural traditions, and ensuring that religious practices are inclusive of different cultural expressions (Banks, 2015).

Empowerment through representation: It is important for *friends* from diverse backgrounds to see themselves represented in the community leadership and decision-making processes. This empowerment can help in breaking down barriers of social exclusion and fostering a sense of belonging (Crenshaw, 1991).

Active engagement and dialogue: Catechists should engage in ongoing dialogue with friends and their families to understand their unique needs and experiences. This active engagement can provide valuable insights into how to make sessions more inclusive and culturally sensitive (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

By incorporating these intersectional considerations into their approach, SPRED catechists can better address the complex and multiple layers of social exclusion. This will help in creating truly inclusive and supportive environments where all *friends*, regardless of their multiple and intersecting identities, can feel valued and included. This commitment to intersectionality is crucial for fostering a community that not only acknowledges but also celebrates diversity in all its forms.

The SPRED catechists' commitment to creating safe and welcoming spaces is a significant strength that fosters a sense of belonging and community among its participants. However, to sustain and enhance these environments, regular monitoring and feedback, as well as cultural sensitivity, are essential. By continuously evaluating the effectiveness of these spaces and ensuring they are culturally inclusive, SPRED can maintain high standards of safety and respect, thereby supporting the well-being and active participation of all its members. This ongoing commitment to creating safe and welcoming spaces is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive community.

In addition to traditional feedback mechanisms, incorporating *feedforward* is crucial for continuous improvement and the proactive enhancement of these environments. Feedforward focuses on providing suggestions for future improvements rather than merely evaluating past performance (Goldsmith, 2002). This approach is *forward-looking* and *constructive*, aiming to identify potential areas of enhancement before issues arise.

Proactive improvement: Feedforward allows SPRED catechists to anticipate and address potential challenges before they become problems. By soliciting suggestions and ideas for future sessions, catechists can implement proactive changes that enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of their practices.

Empowerment and engagement: Engaging participants and their families in feedforward processes empowers them to contribute to the development of the community. This *sense of ownership* and *involvement* can deepen their commitment to the community and ensure that their needs and preferences are considered in future planning.

Continuous learning: Feedforward promotes a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By focusing on future possibilities rather than past shortcomings, catechists and participants can collaboratively explore innovative ways to enhance the SPRED environment. This iterative process of learning and improvement aligns with the principles of *adaptive leadership*, which emphasize flexibility and responsiveness (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Cultural sensitivity and inclusion: Incorporating feedforward helps in understanding and integrating the diverse cultural backgrounds of participants. By actively seeking suggestions on how to make sessions more culturally relevant and inclusive, SPRED catechists can ensure that all cultural contexts are respected and represented. This approach not only respects diversity but also enriches the community by incorporating a wide range of cultural perspectives.

Enhanced communication: Feedforward facilitates open and constructive communication between catechists and participants. By focusing on future improvements, it fosters a positive dialogue that can strengthen relationships and build

trust within the community. This enhanced communication is essential for maintaining a supportive and collaborative environment.

Celebrating Diversity and Unique Contributions

Interestingly, the results demonstrate the community's commitment to celebrating diversity and recognizing the unique contributions of each community member. This approach aligns with the principles of *appreciative inquiry*, which focuses on recognizing and valuing the strengths and positive attributes of *friends*. SPRED's emphasis on appreciating diversity fosters an environment of inclusivity and mutual respect, where all *friends* feel valued and their contributions are acknowledged (Junkes, 2021).

One of the significant strengths of SPRED's approach is its focus on the recognition of *gifts*. The newsletters consistently emphasize the importance of identifying and celebrating the distinct talents and contributions of each community member. This recognition not only boosts the self-esteem and confidence of individuals but also enriches the community by showcasing a wide array of abilities and perspectives. For instance, highlighting the artistic talents, musical abilities, or interpersonal skills of participants underscores the value of each individual's unique gifts and promotes a culture of appreciation and respect.

However, ensuring that the recognition of contributions is truly inclusive poses a challenge. It is crucial to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of those who may have more subtle or less visible gifts. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may express their strengths in ways that are not immediately obvious, such as through quiet resilience, emotional sensitivity, or small

acts of kindness. SPRED catechists must strive to recognize and honor these less visible contributions, ensuring that every individual feels valued and appreciated.

Another challenge is balancing the celebration of diversity with the need for a cohesive community identity. While it is essential to acknowledge and respect individual differences, it is equally important to foster a sense of unity and shared purpose within the community. SPRED must navigate this balance by promoting inclusivity and diversity while also building a collective identity that binds the community together. This can be achieved through shared values, common goals, and collective activities that reinforce a sense of belonging and togetherness.

SPRED catechists' commitment to celebrating diversity and recognizing unique contributions is a significant strength that fosters an environment of appreciation and inclusivity. However, to fully realize the benefits of this approach, it is essential to ensure that the recognition of contributions is inclusive of all individuals, including those with more subtle or less visible gifts. Additionally, balancing the celebration of diversity with the need for a cohesive community identity is crucial for maintaining unity and a shared sense of purpose. By addressing these challenges, SPRED can continue to build a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive community that values and celebrates the unique contributions of all its members.

Use of Technology and Innovation

Supporting our initial assumptions, the findings demonstrate the community's use of technology and innovative practices to maintain community connections, especially during challenging times like the pandemic. SPRED catechists' adaptability in leveraging technology to foster inclusivity and engagement is a significant strength, as illustrated by their use of virtual sessions and creative solutions like virtual ice cream

socials and car parades (Sivek, 2020). These innovations have allowed SPRED to continue its mission of providing spiritual support and community engagement despite physical distancing constraints.

The strength of SPRED's technological adaptation lies in its ability to keep the community connected through virtual platforms. This approach not only facilitated ongoing participation in spiritual and social activities but also provided a sense of continuity and normalcy during uncertain times. The newsletters describe various creative solutions, such as hosting virtual social events and organizing car parades, which have been instrumental in maintaining a sense of community and belonging. These initiatives demonstrate SPRED's commitment to using technology creatively to support its members.

However, the effective use of technology also presents challenges, notably the digital divide. Ensuring that all participants have access to the necessary technology and the skills to use it is crucial for maintaining inclusivity. The digital divide can exclude those without reliable internet access or the means to acquire and use digital devices, potentially marginalizing vulnerable community members. SPRED catechists must address this issue by providing technological support and resources to those in need, ensuring equitable access to virtual activities.

Mong Palatino's (2019) concept of "The Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed" addresses the digital divide and the inequalities that technology can exacerbate. Palatino (2019) argues that digital oppression occurs when individuals lack access to technology, excluding them from essential educational, social, and economic opportunities. This is particularly relevant to SPRED's mission of inclusivity and support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Palatino emphasizes ensuring equitable access to technology for all. For SPRED, this means

providing necessary devices, internet access, and technical support to participants. SPRED catechists can help bridge the digital divide by distributing devices, offering internet subsidies, or setting up community access points.

Beyond physical access, Palatino (2018) highlights the importance of digital literacy—skills needed to use technology effectively. SPRED catechists can offer training to help participants and their families use digital tools, covering basics like navigating online platforms, using communication tools, and understanding online safety. Palatino's pedagogy also advocates using technology as a tool for empowerment, aligning with SPRED's goals. By equipping participants with digital skills and access, SPRED can enhance their engagement in virtual activities, learning experiences, and community connections. Additionally, Palatino (2019) stresses fostering critical awareness about the power dynamics and biases in digital technologies. SPRED catechists can educate participants on these issues, promoting critical thinking about online information and technology's impact on their lives, helping them advocate for their digital rights.

Addressing digital oppression requires collective action and community involvement. SPRED can engage with local organizations, schools, and government agencies to create broader initiatives aimed at reducing the digital divide. By collaborating with these entities, SPRED can leverage additional resources and support to ensure all participants have equitable access to technology.

Addressing the digital divide within SPRED is essential for ensuring inclusivity and supporting the full participation of all community members. By integrating the principles of Mong Palatino's "The Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed," SPRED catechists can create a more equitable and empowering digital environment. This approach not only provides necessary technological access and skills but also fosters

critical awareness and community engagement, aligning with SPRED's mission of inclusivity and support for individuals with IDD.

Another challenge is sustaining innovation over time. The initial burst of creativity in response to the pandemic must be followed by ongoing efforts to keep the community engaged and connected. Continuously finding new and innovative ways to use technology requires not only creativity but also resources and a commitment to ongoing learning and adaptation. SPRED must remain proactive in seeking out new technologies and methods to enhance its programs, ensuring that the community remains vibrant and engaged.

The SPRED catechists' use of technology and innovation during challenging times showcases the organization's adaptability and commitment to maintaining community connections. The creative use of virtual events and activities has been effective in keeping members engaged and supported. However, addressing the digital divide and sustaining innovation are critical challenges that must be addressed to ensure that all participants can benefit from these technological advancements. By providing technological support and continuously exploring new innovative solutions, SPRED can enhance its ability to connect and support its community in meaningful ways.

The triangulation analysis reveals a robust and dynamic approach to inclusive catechetical communication. By interrogating these practices through various theoretical lenses, we can appreciate the depth of SPRED catechists' commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive environment. However, addressing the identified challenges is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of these practices. Continuous improvement, feedback mechanisms, and resource allocation will be key to sustaining

and advancing SPRED's mission of providing meaningful religious education and spiritual development for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Theorizing and Sensemaking of SPRED's Communicative Ecology

The consolidated findings from the thematic analysis of SPRED content, artifact, and socio-spatial analysis reveal a rich and comprehensive approach to inclusive catechetical communication. By examining these themes critically, we can theorize the findings and understand SPRED's communicative ecology within the framework of inclusive community building.

Communication Barriers to Inclusivity

The consolidated analysis of findings suggests the importance of recognizing and addressing communication barriers for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PDID). SPRED's use of non-verbal cues, gestures, and alternative communication methods helps bridge communication gaps, ensuring inclusivity and responsiveness. For example, the use of simple gestures like a handshake or lighting candles during sessions allows participants to engage meaningfully despite verbal communication challenges (Vargas, 2019). This recognition of communication barriers is crucial, as noted in the testimonial, "Our friend did not speak and that she is on the autism spectrum. The communication barrier was one of my main concerns about working with my new friend" (Vargas, 2019). Moreover, understanding non-verbal cues is emphasized, with another catechist noting that "she looked at me for a second and then offered her right hand to shake my hand" (Vargas, 2019).

SPRED catechists' testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence supporting the importance of addressing communication barriers. For instance, one catechist shared, "SPRED is integral to our parish community. I have grown spiritually through preparation sessions and group sessions, especially enjoying participating in the Eucharistic celebration with our friends" (Raeside, 2019). This highlights how alternative communication methods foster deeper connections and understanding. Another catechist noted, "Our friends' simple, non-judgmental approach has shown me the beauty of everyday life and strengthened my faith" (Raeside, 2019). These testimonials illustrate how SPRED's inclusive environment and adaptive communication strategies contribute to significant milestones in participants' spiritual journeys.

Moreover, the importance of non-verbal communication is evident in another testimonial: "SPRED helps me slow down, meditate, and connect with my faith, bringing comfort and confidence to face daily stressors" (Raeside, 2020). This demonstrates how the intentional use of symbols and gestures in SPRED sessions can lead to profound personal and spiritual growth. These non-verbal communication methods are integral to the meditation and faith connection described by the catechist. In SPRED sessions, symbols and gestures such as lighting candles, sharing handshakes, or using specific postures can help create a meditative atmosphere and facilitate spiritual reflection. These practices allow participants to engage with their faith on a deeper level, providing comfort and confidence in their daily lives. The catechist's experience of *slowing down* and meditating is likely supported by these non-verbal cues, which help frame the spiritual and reflective nature of the sessions, fostering a calm and introspective environment conducive to personal growth.

These insights align with symbolic interactionism, where symbols and social interactions play critical roles in constructing meaning and fostering inclusivity. By recognizing and adapting to communication barriers, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one parent expressed, "Enrolling our daughter/granddaughter in SPRED was one of the best things we ever did for her. She loves the sessions and the catechists who help her. She made friends, joined the Children's Choir, and made her First Holy Communion". This emphasizes the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED's approach to overcoming communication barriers through symbolic interaction and alternative communication methods is essential for fostering inclusivity and meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD. These methods bridge communication gaps, create supportive environments, and enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Emotional Connection and Empathy

The findings highlight that emotional connection and empathy are critical components of SPRED's inclusive communication approach, aligning with emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others. It encompasses skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness (Goleman, 1995). The newsletters frequently share stories of personal experiences and emotional support, fostering an environment of empathy and understanding. Significant efforts have been made to ensure that every member feels valued and heard, as inclusivity in SPRED involves recognizing and celebrating the unique contributions of each

individual (Harrington, 2021). Catechists make sure that every voice is acknowledged and respected during their sessions, and they foster strong, supportive relationships through shared activities and discussions (Vargas, 2021). For instance, one catechist mentioned, "In our SPRED community, many parents have shared stories about their sad and painful experiences of rejection and isolation because of their child's condition" (Raeside, 2019). Another noted, "My anxiousness and worries started to subside gradually while I was with her. I believe her calming presence helped me get over my anxieties" (Raeside, 2019).

Transitioning from the emotional and empathetic bonds formed within the SPRED community, it is crucial to delve deeper into the underlying social dimensions that contribute to these experiences. Understanding the concept of social suffering can provide further insights into the collective nature of the challenges faced by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families.

Social suffering theory examines how social forces, such as economic, political, and cultural factors, contribute to the experience of pain and distress among individuals and communities. It goes beyond individual pathology to explore how suffering is produced and exacerbated by social structures and relationships. Social suffering highlights the interconnectedness of personal experiences with broader societal issues, emphasizing that suffering is not only a personal affliction but also a collective and socially mediated phenomenon.

The social suffering theory, developed by scholars such as Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, provides a lens to understand how social factors influence the experience of suffering. This theory posits that suffering is not only a result of direct physical or psychological harm but also arises from social injustices, inequalities, and the failure of social institutions to provide support and care. It

emphasizes that suffering is embedded in social contexts and relationships, and thus, addressing it requires a comprehensive understanding of these contexts.

The concept of social suffering is particularly relevant in the context of SPRED, where many participants and their families experience rejection and isolation due to their disabilities. The sharing of these experiences within the SPRED community highlights the collective nature of their suffering. By acknowledging and addressing these shared experiences, SPRED fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual support among its members.

The emotional bonds formed through sharing stories of exclusion and isolation align with the principles of social suffering theory. When catechists and participants share their experiences, they create a *communal space* where individual suffering is recognized and validated. This process not only builds empathy but also strengthens the emotional connections within the community, as illustrated by the testimonials shared (Raeside, 2019).

Social suffering theory also calls attention to the structural barriers that contribute to the suffering of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). By creating an inclusive environment and addressing communication barriers, SPRED actively works to dismantle some of these structural impediments. This effort is crucial for reducing the social suffering experienced by its members and promoting a more equitable and supportive community.

The transformative potential of addressing social suffering is evident in the impact of SPRED's inclusive practices. By providing a platform for shared experiences and fostering a supportive community, SPRED not only alleviates individual suffering but also transforms the social dynamics that contribute to it. This transformative effect

is seen in the enhanced spiritual and emotional well-being of participants, as they find comfort and confidence through their involvement in SPRED.

By fostering empathy and emotional connections and by addressing structural barriers, SPRED creates a supportive environment that enhances the well-being of its members. This comprehensive approach underscores the transformative power of community and inclusivity in mitigating social suffering and promoting spiritual and emotional growth.

SPRED testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence that supports these findings. For instance, one catechist shared, "SPRED has profoundly touched my life, teaching me to listen, slow down, and appreciate simple joys". This highlights how emotional connections foster deeper understanding and empathy.

Appreciating Simple Joys

In today's fast-paced world, the importance of slowing down cannot be overstated. The pressures of modern life often lead to a constant rush, where moments for reflection, deep connections, and appreciation of simple pleasures are overlooked. Slowing down, as exemplified in the SPRED catechist's testimonial, offers several profound benefits that enhance both personal well-being and community relationships.

Slowing down allows individuals to be more present and attentive in their interactions. This presence is crucial for fostering genuine emotional connections and empathy. In SPRED sessions, taking time to listen and engage with friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) allows for deeper understanding and mutual respect, reinforcing the inclusive and supportive nature of the community.

Slowing down encourages *mindfulness*, the practice of being fully engaged and aware of the present moment. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce stress, improve mental clarity, and enhance emotional regulation. For SPRED catechists and participants, practicing mindfulness can create a more peaceful and focused environment, conducive to spiritual and personal growth.

In a fast-paced world, simple joys are often overshadowed by the pursuit of larger goals and constant busyness. Slowing down helps individuals appreciate the small, everyday moments that bring happiness and fulfillment. As the catechist mentioned, learning to appreciate simple joys can lead to a more enriched and satisfying life.

The concept of slowing down is central to the *Slow City movement* (Cittaslow), which advocates for a more balanced and sustainable approach to urban living. Founded in Italy in 1999, the Slow City movement encourages cities to prioritize quality of life, environmental sustainability, and community well-being over rapid development and industrial growth. The Slow City movement emphasizes the importance of living well and enjoying life's pleasures at a comfortable pace. This principle aligns with the practices in SPRED, where slowing down enhances the quality of interactions and the overall experience of participants.

Promoting Sustainability and Social Cohesion

Environmental and social sustainability are core tenets of the Slow City movement. In SPRED, sustainability can be seen in the long-term commitment to building inclusive communities that support the holistic development of individuals with IDD. This approach ensures that the benefits of the program are enduring and far-reaching.

Slow Cities focus on fostering strong community bonds and encouraging social interactions. SPRED's emphasis on emotional connections and empathy mirrors this principle, as it creates a supportive network where participants and catechists can thrive.

The Slow City movement advocates for mindful living, where individuals are encouraged to be conscious of their actions and their impact on the community and environment. SPRED's practice of slowing down and appreciating simple joys resonates with this concept, promoting a more *mindful* and *intentional way of life*.

Integrating the principles of the Slow City movement into SPRED's practices can further enhance the program's effectiveness. SPRED can continue to create spaces where slowing down is encouraged, allowing participants to fully engage with the sessions and each other. This can involve activities that promote mindfulness, such as meditation, reflective discussions, and sensory experiences. By focusing on the quality of interactions rather than the quantity, SPRED catechists can ensure that each participant feels valued and heard. This approach can deepen emotional connections and foster a sense of belonging. Implementing sustainable practices within SPRED sessions, such as using eco-friendly materials and promoting activities that connect participants with nature, can align the program with the broader goals of the Slow City movement.

Slowing down in a fast-paced world offers numerous benefits that align with SPRED's mission of fostering inclusivity and support for individuals with IDD. Drawing insights from the Slow City movement, SPRED can further enhance its practices by promoting mindfulness, quality interactions, and sustainable living, thereby enriching the lives of its participants and the broader community.

Another testimonial from a parent noted, "SPRED allows my daughter to participate in her faith meaningfully, bringing peace and support to our family" (Raeside, 2019) This illustrates how SPRED's inclusive environment and emotional support contribute to significant milestones in participants' spiritual journeys.

Building Empathy through Emotional Intelligence

Moreover, the importance of empathy is evident in another testimonial: "SPRED has taught me acceptance and care, reflecting on how accepting I am of other people" (Raeside, 2019). This demonstrates how emotional intelligence within the SPRED community enhances the overall experience for both participants and catechists.

These insights align with the principles of emotional intelligence, where recognizing and managing emotions play critical roles in fostering empathy and inclusivity. By recognizing and adapting to emotional needs, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED offers a peaceful, loving, and supportive environment for spiritual growth and community connection" (Raeside, 2019), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices. SPRED catechists' approach to fostering emotional connections and empathy through the principles of emotional intelligence is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive environment. These methods build emotional bonds, enhance empathy, and create a supportive environment that enhances the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Cognitive and Sensory Accessibility

Universal design is an architectural and design philosophy that aims to create environments accessible to all people, regardless of their age, disability, or other factors (Mace, 1985). It promotes designing products and spaces that can be used by everyone without the need for adaptation. SPRED's focus on creating cognitively and sensory-accessible environments can be analyzed through universal design principles. The findings emphasize adapting activities and spaces to meet diverse cognitive and sensory needs, ensuring everyone can participate fully. This approach is evident in the careful preparation of spaces and the use of sensory-friendly materials to create a welcoming environment (Raeside, 2020). Additionally, recognizing the diverse cognitive capacities of participants, it was noted, "Our friends with disabilities may not have the same cognitive capacity as we have to understand prayers, hymns, gestures, and sacraments" (Raeside, 2020).

SPRED catechists' testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence supporting the importance of creating accessible environments. For example, one catechist shared, "SPRED allows my daughter to participate in her faith in a way she understands, bringing peace to her and our family," illustrating how sensory-friendly and cognitively accessible environments support meaningful participation (Raeside, 2020).

The significance of these accessible environments is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "SPRED helps me slow down, meditate, and connect with my faith, bringing comfort and confidence to face daily stressors" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that a well-designed environment not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also enhances the overall spiritual experience for all participants.

These insights align with universal design principles, emphasizing that creating environments accessible to everyone enhances participation and inclusivity. By recognizing and adapting to the diverse cognitive and sensory needs of participants, SPRED not only ensures meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also fosters a supportive and inclusive community. As one testimonial expressed, "SPRED offers me the chance to deepen my spiritual connections in a loving, supportive environment" (Raeside, 2020), underscoring the holistic benefits of accessible design.

SPRED catechists' approach to creating cognitively and sensory-accessible environments through universal design principles is essential for fostering inclusivity and meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD. These methods ensure that everyone can participate fully, create supportive environments, and enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

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Community Integration and Support

SPRED catechists' focus on building strong community bonds and emphasizing relational communication underscores the importance of social capital in promoting social inclusion. Social capital, a concept extensively discussed by Robert Putnam, refers to the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit within a community (Putnam, 2000). This concept is crucial in understanding how SPRED's efforts create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Putnam's idea of social capital highlights the value of connections among individuals and the trust and reciprocity that arise from these connections. SPRED catechists, by fostering loving relationships and community bonds, are effectively building social capital. This is evident in how they ensure meaningful engagement for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), enhancing both personal and communal spiritual experiences.

Other scholars have also contributed to the understanding of social capital. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, defined social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). SPRED catechists' work in developing these networks among community members and individuals with IDD exemplifies Bourdieu's notion of leveraging relationships for mutual benefit.

James Coleman viewed social capital as a set of resources inherent in family relations and in community social organization, useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person (Coleman, 1988). This perspective aligns with SPRED's focus on holistic development—emotional, spiritual, and relational—by

building strong, supportive networks that enhance the well-being of all participants, particularly those with IDD.

Nan Lin's concept of social capital emphasizes the importance of resources embedded in social networks, which individuals can access and use to gain returns in instrumental actions (Lin, 2001). SPRED's catechetical ministry, by creating inclusive and empowering environments, enables individuals with IDD to access these social networks and resources, thereby fostering their spiritual and personal growth.

The work of SPRED catechists in building strong community bonds and emphasizing relational communication is a practical application of social capital theory. By fostering networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity, SPRED promotes social inclusion and enriches the spiritual experience of the entire community. This approach not only supports individuals with IDD but also strengthens the community as a whole, reflecting the interconnected nature of social capital as discussed by scholars like Putnam (2000), Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001).

The role of community support in fostering inclusivity aligns with social capital. The newsletters frequently discuss the power of being part of a community and the supportive networks within SPRED. Statements like "We cannot underestimate the power of being part of a community" (Raeside, 2020) and "Relationships are at the heart of the SPRED method" (Raeside, 2020) emphasize this aspect.

SPRED testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence supporting the importance of community integration and support. For instance, one catechist shared, "SPRED means a slower, more accepting life with gratitude for blessings. It has deepened my faith and relationships" (Raeside, 2020). This highlights how building strong community bonds within SPRED fosters meaningful relationships and enhances social capital. Another testimonial noted, "SPRED has made me a better

father and husband, connecting me with fantastic people and deepening my faith" (Raeside, 2020), illustrating the profound impact of community support on personal and familial growth.

The significance of community integration is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "SPRED is a communal and personal religious experience where my family and I experience God's love uniquely" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that strong community networks not only benefit individuals with disabilities but also foster a sense of belonging and mutual support among all participants. The concepts of social connectedness and social cohesion are crucial here; social connectedness refers to the relationships people have with others, and social cohesion is about the strength of these relationships and the sense of solidarity within the community.

These insights align with the principles of social capital, where strong social networks and community connections play critical roles in fostering inclusivity and cooperation. By recognizing and nurturing these community bonds, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED Masses are well-received by the parish community, touching parishioners deeply and reducing fear of the unknown" (Raeside, 2020), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED catechists' approach to fostering community integration and support through the principles of social capital is essential for promoting social inclusion and mutual benefit within the community. These methods strengthen social networks, build trust, and create supportive environments that enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

It emphasizes the value of social networks and the connections within a community that enable individuals to work together effectively. The role of community support in fostering inclusivity aligns with social capital. The newsletters frequently discuss the power of being part of a community and the supportive networks within SPRED. Statements like "We cannot underestimate the power of being part of a community" (Raeside, 2020) and "Relationships are at the heart of the SPRED method" (Raeside, 2020) emphasize this aspect.

SPRED testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence supporting the importance of community integration and support. For instance, one catechist shared, "Spred does not merely provide a service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities it provides an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal for both the people with disabilities and the catechists" (Quane, 2019). This highlights how building strong community bonds within SPRED fosters meaningful relationships and enhances social capital. Another testimonial noted, "SPRED has made me a better father and husband, connecting me with fantastic people and deepening my faith" (Raeside, 2020), illustrating the profound impact of community support on personal and familial growth.

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The concepts of social connectedness and social cohesion are critical in understanding the impact of SPRED's community integration efforts. Social connectedness refers to the relationships individuals have with others, which create a

sense of belonging and support. It is the degree to which people feel connected to their community and the quality of their relationships within it. Social cohesion, on the other hand, refers to the strength of these relationships and the sense of solidarity and trust among community members. It involves the extent to which members of a community support each other and work together towards common goals.

In the context of SPRED, social connectedness is evident in the strong bonds and meaningful relationships formed between participants, catechists, and the broader community. The supportive networks within SPRED enhance individuals' sense of belonging and emotional well-being. As one catechist shared, the slower, more accepting life promoted by SPRED fosters gratitude and deepens relationships, thereby enhancing social connectedness.

Social cohesion is reflected in the collective experiences and shared religious practices within SPRED. The communal religious experiences, where families and individuals feel God's love uniquely, underscore the solidarity and mutual support within the community. This cohesion is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where everyone, including individuals with disabilities, can thrive.

These insights align with the principles of social capital, where strong social networks and community connections play critical roles in fostering inclusivity and cooperation. By recognizing and nurturing these community bonds, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED Masses are well-received by the parish community, touching parishioners deeply and reducing fear of the unknown" (Raeside, 2020), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

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SPRED catechists' approach to fostering community integration and support through the principles of social capital is essential for promoting social inclusion and mutual benefit within the community. These methods strengthen social networks, build trust, and create supportive environments that enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Spiritual Growth and Mutual Enrichment

SPRED's approach to spiritual growth and mutual enrichment aligns with the concept of mutual transformation. This theory suggests that interactions between individuals can lead to reciprocal growth and change, benefiting both parties involved. It emphasizes the bidirectional nature of learning and transformation within relationships, especially in supportive and inclusive environments (Freire, 1970). The newsletters illustrate how engaging with marginalized individuals enriches the spiritual

lives of all community members, showcasing the transformative power of inclusive practices (Raeside, 2020).

For instance, the relationships developed with friends who have intellectual and developmental disabilities help deepen participants' own relationship with God, highlighting the profound impact of these interactions. Additionally, SPRED offers an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal, not just for the individuals with disabilities but also for the catechists. This dual enrichment underscores the holistic benefits of SPRED's inclusive approach, where both participants and catechists experience significant personal and spiritual growth.

Rich, qualitative evidence demonstrating the importance of mutual transformation can be found in the testimonies of SPRED catechists. For instance, one catechist shared, " Mutual Transformation: "Spred does not merely provide a service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities it provides an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal for both the people with disabilities and the catechists" (Raeside, 2019). This highlights how interactions within SPRED lead to profound changes in understanding and relationships. Another testimonial noted, " "Transformation happens when we recognize that our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities have so much to offer us and not just what we can do for them" (Junkes, 2021), illustrating the reciprocal enrichment experienced by participants.

Moreover, the importance of mutual transformation is evident in another catechist's reflection: "SPRED helps me slow down, meditate, and connect with my faith, bringing comfort and confidence to face daily stressors" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that engaging with individuals with disabilities not only supports their spiritual growth but also significantly enhances the spiritual life of the catechists.

These insights align with *mutual transformation*, where reciprocal interactions lead to mutual growth and enrichment. By fostering these interactions, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED has been part of my family and parish life for over 15 years. It has helped define who I am and provided a loving catechesis to our friends" (Raeside, 2020), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED's approach to fostering spiritual growth and mutual enrichment through mutual transformation is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive environment. These methods not only bridge communication gaps and build emotional bonds but also create a supportive environment that enhances the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

SPRED's proactive approach to active inclusion and participation reflects the principles of social inclusion. Social inclusion emphasizes ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life, including social, economic, and political activities (Silver, 1994). It involves removing barriers and providing support to ensure equitable participation for marginalized groups. SPRED's efforts to seek out and engage marginalized groups demonstrate a commitment to social inclusion (Raeside, 2020). This approach ensures that everyone feels valued and included, as illustrated by the statement, "It is not enough for a parish community to welcome the poor and marginalized. Parish communities must also be willing to seek out the poor and marginalized and bring the light of the Gospel to them" (Raeside, 2020).

The testimonials from catechists offer valuable qualitative evidence highlighting the significance of active inclusion and participation. For instance, one catechist

shared, "SPRED has profoundly touched my life, teaching me to listen, slow down, and appreciate simple joys" (Raeside, 2020). This highlights how inclusive practices within SPRED foster meaningful relationships and enhance social inclusion. Another testimonial noted, "SPRED has been a blessing for our family, bringing my son closer to God and connecting us with the parish community" (Raeside, 2020), illustrating the profound impact of community support on personal and familial growth.

The significance of social inclusion is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "SPRED offers a peaceful, loving, and supportive environment for spiritual growth and community connection" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that actively seeking out and including marginalized groups not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among all participants.

These insights align with social inclusion principles, where removing barriers and providing support ensure equitable participation and enhance community cohesion. By recognizing and nurturing these community bonds, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "Being part of this welcoming and joyful small community of faith renewed my spiritual life and led to my own spiritual transformation" (Quane, 2020), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED's approach to fostering active inclusion and participation through social inclusion principles is essential for promoting equitable participation and mutual benefit within the community. These methods strengthen social networks, build trust, and create supportive environments that enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Dedication and Adaptability

The dedication and adaptability of SPRED catechists can be theorized using the concept of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership focuses on the ability to respond flexibly and creatively to changing circumstances, particularly in complex and challenging environments (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). It involves mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive in changing conditions. The newsletters commend catechists for their efforts to adapt methods and create accessible sessions, reflecting adaptive leadership in action (Raeside, 2020). This adaptability is crucial for maintaining an inclusive environment and addressing the diverse needs of participants, as noted in, " Together we continue to explore ways to bring our friends nearer to a welcoming and loving community to make sacred places where they can experience not just participation but communion" (Vargas, 2021) and "We have adapted our methods to be more inclusive, ensuring that no one is left out" (Raeside, 2020).

The testimonials from SPRED catechists present robust qualitative evidence underscoring the critical roles of dedication and adaptability. For instance, one catechist shared, "SPRED has profoundly touched my life, teaching me to listen, slow down, and appreciate simple joys" (Raeside, 2020). This highlights the importance of adapting to the needs of participants to foster meaningful relationships and enhance inclusion. Another testimonial noted, "SPRED helps me slow down, meditate, and connect with my faith, bringing comfort and confidence to face daily stressors" (Raeside, 2020), illustrating the adaptability of SPRED's methods to support spiritual growth.

The significance of adaptability is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "SPRED offers a peaceful, loving, and supportive environment for spiritual growth and community connection" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that the flexibility in SPRED's approach not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among all participants.

These insights align with adaptive leadership principles, where responding creatively to challenges and changing circumstances enhances participation and inclusivity. Adaptive leadership involves mobilizing individuals to tackle tough challenges and adapt to change effectively (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This approach is critical in creating an environment where diverse needs are met, fostering meaningful engagement and inclusion.

In addition to adaptive leadership, the concept of transformative leadership is also relevant. Transformative leadership goes beyond mere adaptation; it seeks to create significant change in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and the structure of organizations. It is characterized by leaders who inspire and motivate others to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity (Burns, 1978). Transformative leaders focus on the broader goal of achieving equity and inclusivity by transforming systems and structures that perpetuate inequality.

By recognizing and adapting to the diverse needs of participants, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED's main work is to develop loving relationships with others. This is the door to being in a loving relationship with God who is always in a loving relationship with us," emphasizing the holistic benefits of

inclusive practices. This sentiment underscores a core principle of transformative leadership: fostering inclusive, meaningful relationships that benefit both individuals and the broader community.

Transformative leadership is deeply interwoven with SPRED catechetical ministry, as both aim to foster inclusive, nurturing, and empowering environments. SPRED, which stands for Special Religious Development, focuses on adapting religious education to meet the diverse needs of individuals with IDD. This approach embodies several key principles of transformative leadership. For instance, transformative leaders are attentive to the unique needs of their followers. SPRED's ministry recognizes the specific requirements of individuals with IDD and adapts its methods to ensure meaningful participation. This reflects a fundamental aspect of transformative leadership, which seeks to empower and uplift all community members by acknowledging and addressing their unique circumstances.

Furthermore, transformative leadership involves creating spaces where everyone can engage meaningfully. SPRED ensures that individuals with IDD are not only included but also actively involved in the community's spiritual life. This engagement is beneficial for the individuals and enriches the entire community's spiritual experience, demonstrating the positive ripple effect of inclusive leadership practices. Transitioning from this, transformative leaders focus on the overall well-being of their followers, nurturing emotional, spiritual, and relational aspects. SPRED's emphasis on developing loving relationships aligns with this holistic approach. By fostering these relationships, SPRED helps individuals connect more deeply with their faith and community, enhancing their spiritual and emotional growth.

The catechist's statement that SPRED's main work is to develop loving relationships highlights a crucial element of transformative leadership—building

strong, supportive, and compassionate connections. These relationships are foundational to achieving broader goals, such as spiritual growth and communal harmony. Transformative leaders prioritize relationship-building as a means to foster a cohesive and supportive community. Moving forward, transformative leadership is about driving change through inclusivity and equity. SPRED's inclusive practices ensure that all members, regardless of their abilities, are valued and can contribute to the community. This approach transforms the spiritual experience of the entire community, aligning perfectly with the essence of transformative leadership.

SPRED catechetical ministry exemplifies transformative leadership by recognizing and adapting to diverse needs, fostering meaningful engagement, emphasizing holistic development, building strong relationships, and promoting inclusivity and equity. These principles not only enrich the lives of individuals with IDD but also enhance the collective spiritual experience of the entire community.

SPRED's approach to fostering dedication and adaptability through adaptive leadership principles is essential for promoting inclusivity and mutual benefit within the community. These methods strengthen social networks, build trust, and create supportive environments that enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Creating Safe and Welcoming Spaces

SPRED's focus on creating a sense of belonging and making each session accessible and welcoming highlights the critical role of safe spaces in fostering inclusive communication (Raeside, 2020). According to Hunter (2008), the concept of safe spaces involves environments where individuals feel secure to express themselves without fear of judgment, harm, or discrimination. Such spaces enhance

feelings of safety, acceptance, and support, enabling full and authentic participation. This approach is exemplified in SPRED's efforts, as noted in the newsletter: "We have developed a supportive environment where all members feel safe and valued" (Raeside, 2020).

SPRED testimonials offer substantial qualitative evidence emphasizing the importance of establishing safe and welcoming environments. For example, one catechist remarked, "SPRED provides a peaceful, loving, and supportive setting for spiritual development and community bonding," underscoring the role of a secure environment in nurturing meaningful relationships and promoting inclusion (Raeside, 2020). Another testimonial stated, "SPRED enables my daughter to engage with her faith in an understandable way, bringing peace to her and our family," demonstrating the significant impact of creating welcoming spaces on individual and familial growth (Raeside, 2020).

The significance of safe spaces is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "SPRED helps me slow down, meditate, and connect with my faith, bringing comfort and confidence to face daily stressors" (Raeside, 2020). This indicates that creating a safe and welcoming environment not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among all participants.

These insights align with the principles of safe spaces, where providing a secure and supportive environment enhances participation and inclusivity. By recognizing and nurturing these safe environments, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "SPRED offers me the

chance to deepen my spiritual connections in a loving, supportive environment" (Raeside, 2020), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

In the context of SPRED catechesis, a safe space is an environment where individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can express themselves without fear of judgment, harm, or discrimination. According to Hunter (2008), safe spaces are designed to enhance feelings of safety, acceptance, and support, enabling full and authentic participation. These spaces are vital for fostering a sense of belonging, promoting mental well-being, and encouraging open communication among SPRED participants.

In SPRED, creating safe spaces is particularly crucial for individuals with IDD, who may face various forms of exclusion or discrimination in broader society. By providing a supportive atmosphere, SPRED allows participants to explore their faith, emotions, and identities in a nurturing environment. This inclusive approach ensures that all individuals, regardless of their background, feel welcomed and valued.

SPRED's approach to fostering safe and welcoming spaces through the principles of safe spaces is essential for promoting inclusivity and mutual benefit within the community. These methods strengthen social networks, build trust, and create supportive environments that enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Diversity and Unique Contributions

The celebration of diversity and unique contributions within SPRED can be analyzed through appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths and positive attributes of individuals and organizations (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). It involves asking questions that help discover what

works well and building on those strengths to create a more effective and inclusive environment. By celebrating the distinct gifts of each community member, SPRED fosters an environment of appreciation and inclusivity. As one catechist shared, "The use of gestures during the proclamation of the readings assists our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities" (Raeside, 2023).. This approach aligns with appreciative inquiry's emphasis on building on positive attributes to create a more inclusive and supportive community.

SPRED testimonials provide rich, qualitative evidence supporting the significance of celebrating diversity and unique contributions. For instance, one catechist shared, "I look forward to the proclamation from the Holy Book and waited expectantly for Jesus's personal message to me" (McLean, 2023). This highlights how recognizing and celebrating individual strengths fosters a supportive and inclusive environment. Another testimonial noted, "My relationship with God is furthered, and my image of God is expanded. I know God's work is active in our world" (Adams, 2024), illustrating how appreciating unique contributions can enhance spiritual practices.

The significance of celebrating diversity is further underscored by a catechist's reflection: "We are especially blessed to be in the company of such good people whose kindness, character, and stamina have shown me what so many in our Church have forgotten or ignored" (Bennett, 2024). This indicates that recognizing and valuing the unique contributions of each member not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among all participants.

These insights align with appreciative inquiry principles, where building on positive attributes and strengths enhances participation and inclusivity. By recognizing

and celebrating the diverse gifts of participants, SPRED not only facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience. As one catechist expressed, "The evening offered a delightful way to include our families" (McLean, 2023), emphasizing the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED's approach to celebrating diversity and unique contributions through appreciative inquiry principles is essential for promoting inclusivity and mutual benefit within the community. These methods build on positive attributes, create supportive environments, and enhance the spiritual and personal growth of all participants.

Use of Technology and Innovation

SPRED's use of technology and innovative methods to maintain connections during challenging times reflects technological adaptation principles. Technological adaptation refers to the ability to leverage technology to enhance communication, support, and engagement, especially in response to changing circumstances (Rogers, 2003). It emphasizes the importance of adopting and integrating new technologies to meet the needs of a community effectively. The September 2020 SPRED newsletters highlights the creative approaches taken to maintain connections and support while ensuring safety and health guidelines are followed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes using technology for virtual sessions and other inclusive practices (Vargas, 2020). This use of technology demonstrates SPRED's commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, ensuring all members can participate and stay connected.

SPRED's use of technology and innovative methods to maintain connections during challenging times exemplifies the principles of technological adaptation. This concept involves leveraging technology to enhance communication, support, and

engagement, especially when circumstances change (Rogers, 2003). It underscores the necessity of adopting and integrating new technologies to effectively meet the needs of a community. The newsletters highlight various creative approaches, such as virtual ice cream socials and car parades, to keep the community connected. These initiatives reflect SPRED's commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, ensuring all members can participate and remain engaged. For example, Vargas (2020), in the September newsletter, describes how a SPRED community hosted an ice cream social via Zoom, while Adams (2020) recounts how catechists organized a car parade to visit friends within their community. These activities demonstrate SPRED's dedication to using technology to foster a sense of community and support among its members (Vargas, 2020; Adams, 2020).

The insights gathered from the SPRED newsletters align with the principles of technological adaptation, emphasizing the enhancement of participation and inclusivity through the adoption and integration of new technologies. By recognizing and leveraging the potential of technology, SPRED facilitates meaningful engagement for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), enriching the entire community's spiritual experience. This approach not only ensures that all members can participate fully but also creates a more connected and supportive environment. The use of virtual gatherings, online training sessions, and digital communication tools exemplifies how SPRED has successfully adapted to changing circumstances, fostering an inclusive and engaging community. As noted in the newsletters, these technological advancements have played a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening the bonds within the SPRED community, demonstrating the holistic benefits of inclusive practices.

SPRED's approach to using technology and innovation through the principles of technological adaptation is essential for promoting inclusivity and mutual benefit within the community.

The detailed analysis of SPRED's communicative ecology reveals a robust and dynamic approach to inclusive catechetical communication. By integrating concepts and constructs such as emotional intelligence, universal design, social capital, mutual transformation, social inclusion, adaptive leadership, safe spaces, appreciative inquiry, and technological adaptation, we can understand the depth and breadth of SPRED's commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive environment. SPRED's practices not only promote accessibility and participation but also enhance the spiritual and emotional growth of all community members, reflecting the transformative power of an engaged and inclusive faith community.

(Re)producing the Social Order in/through the Task-Oriented Communicative Practices

Building on the analysis of SPRED's communicative ecology, which highlights the community's dynamic and inclusive approach to catechetical communication, the focus now shifts to exploring how these practices contribute to (re)producing the social order within the community. Through task-oriented communicative practices, SPRED not only fosters accessibility and participation but also actively shapes the social fabric of the community. These practices, deeply embedded in the principles of emotional intelligence, universal design, and adaptive leadership, play a crucial role in creating a cohesive and supportive environment. In the following section, we will delve into the specific ways in which SPRED's task-oriented communicative practices reinforce

social norms, values, and relationships, thereby sustaining and enhancing the inclusive nature of the faith community.

The SPRED Center employs a range of social and communicative practices and methods to ensure inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). These practices are designed to create an environment that values each individual's unique presence, fosters a sense of belonging, and promotes active participation.

In exploring social order, it is crucial to comprehend how the SPRED Center's practices contribute to fostering and sustaining an inclusive and respectful environment for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). This approach involves studying the methods and practices that individuals employ to understand and navigate their social world. I have examined the methods and practices identified by (1) analyzing the content of newsletters, (2) evaluating the artifacts used in catechesis, and (3) conducting socio-spatial analysis of the catechetical environment. Additionally, social and communicative practices were investigated through the analysis of the *communicative ecology* of SPRED by examining the technological realm, social realm, and discursive realm within the Center. From this study, the following communicative practices have been identified:

1. Welcoming PDID warmly upon arrival

Welcoming individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) warmly upon their arrival is a fundamental practice that sets the tone for an inclusive and respectful environment. This approach emphasizes the importance of a friendly and inviting atmosphere where every person feels valued and accepted from the

moment they step into the space. By greeting each individual with genuine warmth and enthusiasm, catechists can create a sense of belonging and ease, which is crucial for fostering positive interactions and engagement. This practice not only helps in making the individuals feel comfortable but also establishes a foundation of trust and openness, essential for effective catechesis.

2. Acknowledging each *friend* personally by name

Acknowledging each friend personally by name is a powerful practice that reinforces the individual dignity and uniqueness of each PDID. This personalized recognition highlights the importance of every individual and respects their identity, making them feel seen and appreciated. Calling someone by their name is a simple yet profound way to affirm their presence and worth, which can significantly enhance their self-esteem and willingness to participate. This practice also helps in building strong, personal connections between catechists and participants, fostering a more inclusive and supportive community.

3. Using inclusive language

Using inclusive language particularly that respects the backgrounds and abilities of friends is essential in creating an environment of equality and respect. Inclusive language involves carefully choosing words that affirm the dignity and capabilities of all participants, avoiding any terms that could be perceived as demeaning or exclusionary. This practice involves being mindful of the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities of each individual, and ensuring that communication is accessible and respectful to all. By using language that is inclusive

and empowering, catechists can promote a sense of belonging and respect, encouraging active participation and engagement from all friends.

The SPRED community believes inclusive language to be a fundamental component of their catechetical communication methodology. Individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities are affectionately addressed as "friends," fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect. Additionally, every person within the SPRED community is recognized as "members," emphasizing their valued role within the group. SPRED consistently observes the *Person-First Language* approach, which highlights the individuality of the person before their disability. For example, rather than using the term "a disabled person," SPRED refers to individuals as "a person with a disability." This practice places the focus on the person rather than their disability, promoting a more inclusive and positive perspective, and ensuring that each individual's dignity and worth are acknowledged and respected.

4. Inviting friends to make a choice

Inviting friends to make a choice and experience decision-making is a critical practice in promoting autonomy and personal growth among individuals with PDID. This practice involves providing opportunities for participants to make decisions about their activities, roles, or contributions within the catechetical setting.

For instance, catechists might offer choices such as selecting a song to sing, deciding on a group activity, or choosing a role in a storytelling session. By encouraging and supporting friends in making choices, catechists help to build their confidence and independence, fostering a sense of control and ownership over their participation. This practice also demonstrates respect for their autonomy and

capabilities, reinforcing the belief that every individual has valuable contributions to make. Moreover, catechists in SPRED do not give orders or oblige the PDID during sessions. Instead, they invite and encourage participation by using gentle and inclusive language. For example, instead of instructing, a catechist might say, "I would like to invite you to proceed to our celebration room" or "Would you like to hear the word of God?". This approach ensures that PDID are asked to participate in every activity by first inviting them, which respects their autonomy and supports their right to make personal choices. This method not only fosters a sense of respect and dignity but also promotes active engagement and a deeper sense of belonging within the SPRED community.

By encouraging and supporting friends in making choices, catechists help to build their *confidence* and *independence*, fostering a sense of control and ownership over their participation. This practice also demonstrates respect for their autonomy and capabilities, reinforcing the belief that every individual has valuable contributions to make.

5. Engaging in one-on-one interaction

Active listening in the context of SPRED's communicative practices begins with engaging in *one-on-one interactions*. This approach focuses on understanding the unique perspectives of friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities. By fostering personal connections, catechists can tailor their communication strategies to meet individual needs. For instance, a catechist accompanies one PDID from the beginning until the end of the session. This consistent companionship allows the catechist to become a constant companion every session, fostering a deep bond of friendship between them. A catechist attentively and consciously listens to both the

verbal and non-verbal communication of the PDID, tailoring their communication strategies to meet individual needs. This personal engagement not only validates the experiences of *friends* but also encourages a more meaningful exchange of ideas and feelings. By doing so, SPRED ensures that each person's voice is heard and valued within the inclusive catechetical community. This method promotes a deeper understanding and respect for the unique contributions of every individual, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and participation in the community.

This personal engagement not only validates the experiences of friends but also encourages a more meaningful exchange of ideas and feelings, ensuring that each person's voice is heard and valued within the inclusive catechetical community.

6. Observing non-verbal cues and body language

Another crucial aspect of active listening involves keen observation of non-verbal cues and body language. Friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities often communicate their feelings and thoughts through gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal signals.

Observing non-verbal cues and body language is paramount to gaining a deeper understanding of participants' emotional states and needs. Catechists are trained to pay close attention to these cues to create a supportive and inclusive environment. For instance, the use of gestures during SPRED liturgies and sessions is crucial. As Fr. Jose M. Santiago (2022) explains, “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”. This method is beneficial because many participants may find verbal communication

challenging or distracting. Additionally, non-verbal communication helps participants connect with the material on a deeper level. Larry Adams (2024) notes, “Simple gestures of praise to accompany the Psalms; setting of the altar table; and presentation of the gifts” are ways that catechists use non-verbal cues to foster engagement. This approach enables participants to express and share their emotions and thoughts more freely, creating a sense of belonging and comfort essential for their spiritual and emotional growth.

The SPRED method encourages catechists to be mindful of non-verbal signals from their friends. As written in the newsletter, “Catechists and friends from far and near made the pilgrimage to the SPRED Chapel... to indulge in the gift of an enhanced experience of the Sacred Liturgy” where non-verbal cues played a significant role in engagement (Hess, 2024). This awareness allows catechists to respond appropriately, offering support and guidance as needed, thus ensuring a more personalized and meaningful catechetical experience. By focusing on non-verbal communication, SPRED catechists can address the individual needs of their friends more effectively, creating an environment where everyone feels included and understood. This practice not only enhances the overall catechetical experience but also deepens the spiritual connection between the catechists and their *friends*, fostering a more profound sense of community and belonging within the SPRED program.

Catechists who pay close attention to these cues can gain a deeper understanding of their friends' emotional states and needs. This practice enhances the communicative process by recognizing and responding to the subtle, yet significant, ways *friends* express themselves beyond words.

7. Conversing with warm tone of voice and supportive gestures

A key aspect of active listening is expressing empathy and understanding through both verbal and non-verbal communication. This involves recognizing *friends'* emotions and experiences, providing comfort, and displaying genuine care. Catechists can convey empathy by using a warm tone of voice, making supportive gestures, and listening attentively. These actions help to build a compassionate and inclusive atmosphere where friends feel acknowledged and valued, promoting a sense of belonging and emotional security within the catechetical community.

8. Encouraging catechists and *friends* to share personal experiences to build a trusting community

Encouraging catechists and friends to share personal experiences is vital for building a trusting community based on dignity and respect. By creating opportunities for individuals to open up about their lives, catechists help to establish a culture of mutual respect and understanding. This practice not only enhances personal relationships but also reinforces the communal bond. When friends feel safe to share their stories, they contribute to a collective narrative that values every individual's dignity and fosters an inclusive, supportive catechetical environment.

9. Preparing and sequencing the catechetical session activities

In the context of SPRED's communicative practices, collaborative experience begins with conceptualizing, preparing, and sequencing catechetical sessions that have clear and appropriate goals or objectives. This *task-oriented practice* ensures

that each session is tailored to the specific needs and abilities of friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities. For instance, in May 2023 SPRED newsletter, Adam describes the sequencing of activities in SPRED that follows a structured, yet flexible framework designed to maintain a balance between routine and variety. This balance is essential for keeping participants engaged while providing a predictable structure that fosters a sense of security.

The session typically begins with an initial gathering, where participants come together and acknowledge each other's presence. This could involve a simple round of introductions or a shared prayer. The text emphasizes the importance of being happy together, highlighting that "we are happy to be together in God's love" (Adam, 2023). This communal acknowledgment reinforces the sense of belonging and prepares participants for the activities ahead.

Following the initial gathering, the session progresses to interactive activities that engage participants in various sensory and cognitive experiences. These activities might include singing, storytelling, or group discussions. The approach of inviting participants to make choices is integrated here, allowing them to decide which activities they want to engage in, thus promoting autonomy and personal growth.

A core component of the session is the catechetical instruction, where religious teachings are presented in an accessible and engaging manner. This might involve reading passages from the Bible, discussing their meanings, or participating in related activities. Catechists use inclusive language and person-first approaches, ensuring that each participant feels respected and valued.

After the instructional segment, there is a period of reflection and sharing. Participants are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings about what they have learned. This practice of engaging in one-on-one interaction and active listening

is crucial here, as catechists attentively listen to both verbal and non-verbal communications, fostering a meaningful exchange of ideas.

The session concludes with a closing ritual, which might involve a prayer, a song, or a moment of silence. This closing activity helps to bring the session to a peaceful end, leaving participants with a sense of fulfillment and connection. The repeated emphasis on "happy together in God's love" underscores the spiritual and communal bonds that have been strengthened during the session.

By setting achievable and meaningful objectives, catechists can create a structured yet flexible framework that guides the session, promoting a sense of purpose and direction. This preparation also helps to focus the collaborative efforts of both catechists and friends, fostering an environment where everyone works towards a common aim.

10. Sharing of one's life story

A crucial aspect of collaborative experience involves the sharing of one's life story. This practice encourages catechists and *friends* to open up about their personal experiences, creating a space for *mutual understanding* and *connection*. By sharing their stories, individuals build relationships based on trust and empathy, which are essential for inclusive catechetical communication. This exchange not only enriches the communal experience but also empowers friends by validating their experiences and providing them with the opportunity to be heard and respected within the catechetical community.

11. Collecting feedback

Collecting feedback is an essential component of collaborative experience that aims to continually improve future catechetical sessions. This practice involves

actively seeking input from friends and catechists regarding their experiences and suggestions for enhancement. By valuing and incorporating this feedback, catechists can adapt their methods and strategies to better meet the needs of their friends. This iterative process of reflection and adjustment helps to create more effective and engaging sessions, ensuring that the catechetical practice remains responsive and inclusive.

Sivek (2020) emphasizes the importance of feedback during the initial gathering and reflection sessions. During the initial gathering, participants share their thoughts and feelings, allowing catechists to gauge the mood and readiness of the participants. This informal feedback helps in setting a positive tone for the session and ensuring that each participant feels acknowledged and valued. Similarly, during reflection sessions, participants are encouraged to express their thoughts on what they have learned, providing direct insights into their experiences and understanding. This feedback allows catechists to refine their teaching methods and address any challenges participants might face.

In addition, Raeside (2020) discusses the practice of gathering feedback through interactive activities and the reflection period. She underscores the role of active listening and personal engagement in collecting meaningful feedback from participants. Throughout the interactive activities, catechists observe participants' engagement and responses. This observational feedback helps catechists to understand what activities resonate well with the participants and which ones may need adjustment. By engaging in active listening, catechists can tailor their communication and activities to better meet the needs of each participant, ensuring that everyone is fully included and engaged in the session.

Sivek and McCarthy (2020) elaborate on the feedback mechanisms used during closing rituals. It illustrates how participants' feedback helps in assessing the session's effectiveness and informs future planning. During the closing rituals, participants might share what they enjoyed or found challenging, allowing catechists to gather valuable insights into the session's impact. This feedback is crucial for continuous improvement, as it helps catechists to understand the overall effectiveness of the session and make necessary adjustments for future sessions.

Through the use of these feedback mechanisms, SPRED guarantees that its catechetical sessions continue to be adaptive and customized to meet the requirements of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This method not only increases the program's efficacy but also strengthens the participants' sense of value and belonging in the SPRED community. Every participant feels heard and valued in a dynamic and inclusive environment that is fostered by the ongoing gathering and incorporation of feedback.

12. Choosing symbolic objects within the environment

Selecting symbolic objects within the *friend's* environment is another key practice in collaborative experience. This involves identifying and incorporating objects that hold personal significance for friends into the catechetical sessions. These symbolic objects serve as tangible connections to the *friends'* everyday lives and experiences, making the sessions more relatable and meaningful. By integrating familiar items, catechists can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that acknowledges and respects the unique backgrounds and preferences of each friend, thereby enhancing their engagement and participation in the catechetical process.

13. Arranging the chairs in circle formation

Empowerment within SPRED's communicative practices begins with arranging the chairs in a circle formation. This setup promotes equality, allowing everyone to maintain eye contact and engage openly with one another. It symbolizes the creation of a space where each person is given dignity, respect, and acceptance as an individual. By fostering an environment where everyone can share equally, the circle formation lays the foundation for meaningful relationships. Friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities feel accepted and valued, reinforcing their sense of belonging within the catechetical community.

14. Enthroning the Holy Book

Enthroning the Holy Book during catechetical sessions represents the words of Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of God, and serves as a powerful symbol of empowerment. This practice emphasizes the sacredness of the teachings being shared and reinforces the spiritual foundation of the catechetical experience. By placing the Holy Book in a prominent position, catechists highlight the importance of divine guidance and the presence of God in their communal journey. This act of reverence fosters a deeper connection to faith and empowers friends to engage more fully in the spiritual aspects of the session.

15. Decorating with flowers and candles

Decorating the catechetical space with flowers and candles is another vital aspect of empowerment. Flowers symbolize creation and remind friends of God the Creator, while the flame of a candle represents the Holy Spirit. These elements bring a sense of beauty and sacredness to the environment, enhancing the spiritual

atmosphere. The visual and symbolic presence of these decorations helps *friends* connect with the divine and feel more empowered in their faith journey. It reinforces the idea that they are part of a larger, divinely inspired creation, contributing to their sense of purpose and inclusion.

16. Arranging the room with plants and appropriate lighting

Creating a comfortable and inclusive environment is essential for empowerment. By arranging the room with plants and appropriate lighting, catechists ensure that the space is inviting and accessible to all friends. Plants add a natural element that can have a calming and grounding effect, while well-thought-out lighting enhances visibility and comfort. This attention to detail in the physical setup of the room shows respect for the needs and preferences of each individual, making them feel valued and empowered to participate fully in the catechetical sessions. This thoughtful arrangement underscores the commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive atmosphere where everyone can thrive.

17. Welcoming and accepting friends from diverse groups

Cultural awareness within SPRED's communicative practices begins with welcoming and accepting *friends* from diverse groups. This practice emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive environment where individuals from various cultural backgrounds feel respected and valued. In several SPRED groups, there were catechists and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) from Poland, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the USA. By actively embracing diversity, catechists promote a sense of belonging and unity among friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This approach ensures that every individual, regardless of their

cultural background, is given the dignity and respect they deserve, fostering a more cohesive and supportive catechetical community.

18. Providing catechetical materials and resources in multiple languages

To further support cultural awareness, SPRED provides catechetical materials and resources in multiple languages, such as *Spanish, English, and Polish*. This practice ensures that participants can engage with the content in their preferred language, making the sessions more accessible and meaningful. By offering resources in various languages, catechists acknowledge and respect the linguistic diversity of their friends, enhancing their ability to understand and participate in the catechetical activities. This multilingual approach empowers friends to connect more deeply with the teachings and feel included in the spiritual journey.

19. Sharing of personal stories and experiences reflecting diverse cultural backgrounds

Sharing personal stories and experiences that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of *friends* is another essential component of cultural awareness. This practice allows individuals to express their unique cultural identities and histories, enriching the communal experience. By listening to and valuing these stories, catechists and *friends* can build stronger connections and a deeper understanding of each other's cultural perspectives. This exchange fosters mutual respect and appreciation, contributing to a more inclusive and empathetic catechetical environment.

20. Integrating liturgical elements from different cultures

Integrating liturgical elements from different cultures into catechetical sessions is a powerful way to enhance cultural awareness. This can include using music, prayers, and readings from various cultural traditions to enrich the spiritual experience. By incorporating these diverse elements, catechists create a more vibrant and inclusive liturgical environment that reflects the richness of the friends' cultural heritage. This practice not only celebrates cultural diversity but also fosters a sense of inclusion and unity, allowing friends to experience their faith in ways that resonate with their cultural backgrounds and enhance their spiritual growth.

21. Using a variety of expressions of greetings

Interculturality within SPRED's communicative practices begins with using a variety of forms of greetings. This practice acknowledges and respects the diverse cultural backgrounds of friends with developmental and intellectual disabilities. By incorporating different greeting styles, catechists can make each individual feel recognized and valued in a manner that resonates with their cultural identity. In the SPRED community, greetings reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of its members, yet all share a common warmth and joy. In Poland, members offer a courteous handshake with direct eye contact and a smile. In Mexico, casual nods can evolve into warm embraces and a kiss on the cheek as familiarity grows. In Puerto Rico, a handshake with direct eye contact and a welcoming smile is standard, accompanied by greetings like "buenos días" or "buenas noches". While in the USA, greetings can range from a simple "hello" or handshake to more casual and friendly forms like a hug or wave. Regardless of cultural differences, SPRED greetings are always warm and joyous, accompanied by a personal handshake. This approach helps to create an

inclusive atmosphere right from the start of each session, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect among all participants.

22. Performing rituals

Performing rituals that hold particular cultural significance is another key aspect of intercultural engagement. This practice involves teaching and incorporating culturally meaningful actions into catechetical sessions, allowing friends to connect with their heritage and feel respected. The SPRED community embraces cultural diversity by incorporating various liturgical rituals from around the world into catechetical sessions. For example, in Poland, the Easter blessing of food baskets and Corpus Christi processions are significant rituals. In Mexico, Día de los Muertos altars and Semana Santa processions are culturally important practices. Puerto Rico celebrates with Three Kings Day parades and the tradition of Santos de Palo. In the USA, Christmas and Easter services, along with diverse interfaith ceremonies, play a crucial role. These rituals are discussed during catechetical sessions, where personal stories and experiences are shared to enhance cultural understanding and spiritual growth. By understanding and performing these rituals, catechists can bridge cultural gaps and create a more inclusive and relatable environment. This not only enhances the spiritual experience but also promotes a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation within the catechetical community.

23. Celebrating cultural festivals and significant religious events

Celebrating cultural festivals and significant religious events from various traditions is a vital part of fostering interculturality. This practice involves recognizing and honoring the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of *friends* by incorporating

their festivals and events into the catechetical calendar. Some of these important festivals are discussed during catechetical sessions where personal stories and experiences are shared. In Poland, Easter, the most significant Christian festival, is marked by Holy Week rituals, the blessing of food baskets, and the "Śmigus-Dyngus" tradition. In Mexico, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is celebrated on November 1st and 2nd to honor deceased loved ones with altars (*ofrendas*), marigolds, and food offerings. In Puerto Rico, Three Kings Day (Día de los Reyes) is celebrated on January 6th with parades, gift-giving, and reenactments of the visit of the Magi. In the USA, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November with communal meals and expressions of gratitude, reflecting thanksgiving prayers. By doing so, catechists create opportunities for *friends* to share and celebrate their traditions with the community. This practice enriches the communal experience, promotes cultural awareness, and strengthens the bonds among participants, making everyone feel included and respected.

24. Ensuring a culturally inclusive catechetical environment

Ensuring the physical environment is inviting and culturally inclusive is crucial for effective intercultural engagement. This involves displaying culturally significant symbols and decorations from various traditions, creating a space that reflects the diversity of the catechetical community. Cultural backgrounds are thoughtfully considered when telling stories and using symbolic objects such as the cross, flowers, holy books, and images. This careful consideration ensures that the stories and symbols resonate deeply with the participants' heritage and traditions, fostering a more inclusive and relatable catechetical experience. Additionally, the environment should be accessible and comfortable for all participants, accommodating their physical

needs and cultural preferences. By thoughtfully arranging the space, catechists can make friends feel welcome and respected, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing their overall catechetical experience.

The SPRED Center's inclusive catechetical communication practices for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID) encompass a *holistic approach* that integrates personal engagement, active listening, collaborative learning, empowerment and agency, cultural awareness, and engaging practices in interculturality. By implementing these diverse methods, the SPRED Center ensures a social order that each individual is valued, respected, and included in the catechetical community. These practices not only foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect but also empower participants to engage fully in their spiritual journey. Through these conscious and coordinated efforts, the SPRED Center exemplifies a compassionate and inclusive model of catechesis, where every voice is heard, and every person is recognized for their unique contributions.

Inclusive Catechetical Communication for Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities Framework and Model: Key Principles and Strategies

Friendship is a vital aspect of human relationships and social interaction, deeply embedded in cultural, emotional, and psychological frameworks. The study of friendship spans various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and education. The following sections explore the discourses surrounding friendship, its significance in different contexts, and various models that have been developed through various

researches, with a specific focus on inclusive catechetical communication for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Friendship Discourse

The discourse on friendship highlights its multifaceted nature and its role in personal and social development. Friendship is often viewed as a voluntary relationship characterized by mutual affection, support, and understanding. In early childhood education, the concept of friendship is crucial for social competency. Inclusive settings, where children with and without disabilities play together, emphasize the mantra "we are all friends," promoting social integration and development (Watson, 2018).

Furthermore, the impact of literary works on friendship cannot be underestimated. Books and stories about friendship can significantly influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors regarding their own friendships. A study on the impact of a book about friendship demonstrated how such narratives could shape social interactions and emotional connections among readers, highlighting the profound social impact literature can have (SAGE, 2022).

One of the prominent models in friendship studies is the Structurally Induced Homophily model. This model suggests that the formation of friendships is heavily influenced by social structures and contexts. As individuals progress through different life stages, the primary sources of friendships shift from educational settings in youth to workplaces in midlife. This transition underscores the role of structural environments in shaping friendship networks and the potential for diverse friendships (Thomas, 2019).

Friendship models also vary across cultures, reflecting different societal norms and values. Research on cross-cultural differences in friendship has highlighted the need to move beyond Western-centric perspectives.

In psychology, friendship is often examined through the lens of well-being and personal development. Friendships are considered crucial for emotional support, mental health, and overall happiness. Psychological studies have linked high-quality friendships to both hedonic (pleasure-based) and eudaimonic (meaning-based) well-being. Anderson and Fowers (2019) conducted an exploratory study that highlighted how friendships characterized by pleasure, utility, and virtue contribute to life satisfaction and positive affect. This aligns with Aristotle's view of friendship, emphasizing the importance of mutual benefit and shared values.

Sociology offers a broader perspective on friendship, focusing on its role within social structures and cultural contexts. Friendships are seen as both products and constructors of social norms and values. In the realm of spirituality, friendship is viewed as a pathway to deeper understanding and fulfillment. Spiritual friendships often emphasize moral and ethical development, encouraging individuals to seek meaning and purpose in their relationships. Shushok (2011) highlighted how campuses can foster spiritual and moral friendships, which contribute significantly to students' inner lives and values. These friendships provide a foundation for exploring profound questions about existence and personal growth.

Christian religious education also underscores the importance of friendship as a context for spiritual development. Shields (2014) discussed how Christian education integrates the concept of friendship to promote moral and spiritual growth, creating a supportive environment for exploring faith and ethics.

Educational settings are critical for the development of friendships, particularly during early and middle childhood. Friendships formed in schools contribute to social competence, emotional well-being, and academic success. A study on friendship quality among children in different educational settings in Israel found that high-quality friendships positively impact children's social-emotional development and academic performance (Heiman, 2014). Moreover, the role of friendship in educational contexts extends to conflict resolution and emotional literacy. Initiatives like the "Happy Children" project in Malta have utilized friendship cards as educational tools to develop these skills, demonstrating the importance of friendship in fostering a positive learning environment (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2020).

Friendship among Persons with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities

In SPRED, the term "friend" is used to refer to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This terminology reflects the organization's emphasis on creating an inclusive and respectful environment where every participant is valued and seen as a beloved member of the community. By using the term "friend," SPRED underscores the importance of friendship, mutual support, and the dignity of each person, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among all participants. Friendship is a fundamental aspect of human life, offering emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging. For individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, friendships can be particularly significant, providing not only social interaction but also enhancing their quality of life and well-being. This discourse explores the nature of friendships among persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities, examining the barriers they face and the supports that can foster meaningful relationships.

Individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities often encounter various barriers that hinder the formation and maintenance of friendships. These barriers can be both internal, such as communication difficulties, and external, such as societal attitudes and structural limitations.

Communication difficulties are a major barrier to friendship for individuals with disabilities. For instance, those who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) often find it challenging to initiate and sustain conversations, which can lead to fewer friendships and less depth in existing relationships (Therrien, 2019). The limited ability to express themselves can make it hard for individuals with disabilities to connect with others on a deeper level, impacting the quality of their social interactions. Societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities can also pose significant barriers. There is often a lack of understanding and acceptance, which can lead to social isolation. Young people with intellectual disabilities have reported feeling excluded from social activities and experiencing difficulties in making friends due to prejudices and misconceptions held by their peers (Diaz Garolera et al., 2020). This exclusion is compounded by the limited opportunities for inclusive interactions in many social settings.

Despite these barriers, there are several supports that can enhance the ability of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities to form and maintain friendships. These supports include inclusive education, social skills training, and the use of technology.

Inclusive education settings play a crucial role in fostering friendships among children with and without disabilities. Research has shown that inclusive classrooms, where students with and without disabilities learn together, can promote social integration and help build reciprocal friendships (Schwab, 2018). In such

environments, students with disabilities are provided with opportunities to interact with their peers, participate in group activities, and develop social skills.

Social skills training programs can significantly enhance the ability of individuals with disabilities to engage in meaningful social interactions. These programs focus on teaching essential communication and socialization skills, such as initiating conversations, understanding social cues, and resolving conflicts. For example, the "Happy Children" project in Malta demonstrated how educational tools aimed at developing emotional literacy and conflict resolution skills could improve the social competence of children with developmental disabilities (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2020).

Technology, particularly AAC, can be a powerful tool in facilitating communication and friendship for individuals with disabilities. AAC devices and applications enable users to express themselves more effectively, bridging the communication gap and fostering better social interactions. Research has highlighted the positive impact of AAC on the social lives of individuals with disabilities, noting that these tools can help build robust social networks and enhance the quality of friendships (Dada et al., 2020).

Perspectives on Friendship

Understanding the perspectives of individuals with disabilities on friendship is essential for creating supportive environments that foster these relationships. Studies have shown that individuals with intellectual disabilities value friendships for the companionship, support, and enjoyment they provide. They often define friendship in terms of trust, mutual respect, and shared activities, similar to their peers without disabilities (Høybråten & Sigstad, 2016).

The quality of friendships among individuals with disabilities is influenced by several factors, including the level of support they receive and the opportunities for social interaction. High-quality friendships are characterized by emotional closeness, mutual support, and positive interactions. A study on friendship quality among children in different educational settings found that inclusive environments that promote social engagement and provide appropriate support can significantly enhance the quality of friendships for children with developmental disabilities (Heiman, 2014).

Adults with disabilities who use AAC have reported both challenges and successes in forming and maintaining friendships. They emphasize the importance of having supportive environments and understanding peers who are willing to engage with them despite communication barriers. Positive experiences with friends can lead to robust social networks and enhanced well-being (Therrien, 2019).

Friendship remains a cornerstone of social life, influencing personal development, emotional well-being, and social cohesion. The discourse and models of friendship provide valuable insights into how friendships form, evolve, and are maintained across different contexts and cultures. As research continues to evolve, it will further unravel the complexities of friendships and their significance in our lives. Inclusive environments, social skills training, and the use of technology are crucial supports for fostering meaningful friendships among individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Understanding the perspectives and experiences of these individuals is essential for creating environments that promote high-quality relationships. As society becomes more inclusive and supportive, individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities will have greater opportunities to form and maintain the friendships that are so essential to their well-being and quality of life.

Friendship through the Lens of Inclusive Catechetical Communication

The framework of Inclusive Catechetical Communication encapsulates a holistic approach to fostering a spiritually nurturing and culturally rich faith community. This approach is built upon three fundamental pillars: (1) *intimacy*, (2) *inter-animating transformation*, and (3) *interculturality*. Each pillar integrates key practices and principles to ensure comprehensive engagement and support for all members.

Table 4

Friendship Framework of Inclusive Catechetical Communication

Friendship Framework of Inclusive Catechetical Communication					
Intimacy		Inter-animating transformation		Interculturality	
Personal Engagement	Active listening	Collaborative Learning	Empowerment and Agency	Cultural Awareness	Engaging Practices
Emotional Support		Reflective practice		Dialogue and Exchange	

Under the pillar of *intimacy*, (a) personal engagement, (b) active listening, and (c) emotional support are emphasized to build deep, meaningful connections within the community. *Inter-animating transformation* focuses on (a) collaborative learning, (b) empowerment and agency, and (c) reflective practice to foster mutual growth and transformation. Lastly, *interculturality* highlights the importance of (a) cultural awareness, (b) engaging practices, and (c) dialogue and exchange, ensuring that diverse cultural perspectives are respected and integrated into the faith experience. This inclusive framework aims to create an environment where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, can actively participate and thrive in their

spiritual journey. By implementing these principles, catechetical communication not only supports personal and communal growth but also enriches the entire community's spiritual experience.

Creating and Sustaining *Intimacy* through Effective Communication

Effective communication is the cornerstone of creating and sustaining intimacy, particularly for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. These individuals often require adapted communication methods to ensure they can share emotions, care for others, and connect deeply. Utilizing visual aids, simplified language, and sensory activities can significantly aid in their ability to understand and express their feelings. Knapp and Vangelisti (2014) emphasize that effective communication fosters emotional sharing and mutual support, which is essential for building intimate relationships. This is especially relevant for individuals with disabilities, who may need tailored communication strategies to express themselves and understand others. In a spiritual context, Johnson (2011) notes the importance of sharing the message of God's love and Christ's sacrifice. By employing inclusive communication techniques, individuals with disabilities can also experience spiritual intimacy and feel a sense of belonging within their faith community.

Moving beyond mere proclamation, true intimacy in relationships, including those involving individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, is built through meaningful interactions that foster trust and understanding (Duck, 2007). Effective catechetical communication should incorporate interactive and engaging methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, and hands-on activities, to nurture and build relationships (Anderson, 2006). This approach ensures that individuals with disabilities can fully participate and connect, leading to stronger, more resilient

relationships within the community. Transitioning from this, the focus on communication and community becomes paramount.

Effective communication is essential for creating and maintaining a sense of community among individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Habermas (1984) posits that communicative action is crucial for social integration, implying that communication methods must be accessible and inclusive for those with disabilities. Healy (2010) emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support among community members. This can be achieved by using adaptive communication tools, such as sign language, picture exchange communication systems (PECS), and assistive technology, to ensure everyone can participate in communal activities and dialogues. Building on this foundation, communication also helps create a shared identity and collective purpose, which are vital for the cohesion and sustainability of any community, including those with individuals with disabilities.

Ensuring that communication is inclusive and accessible within catechetical programs helps individuals with disabilities feel valued and included, reinforcing their sense of belonging and contributing to the overall health of the community. This transition leads to an exploration of the symbolic nature of communication.

Communication, inherently rooted in symbolization, is fundamental for connecting individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities to God and defining their humanity. Cassirer (1944) argues that symbolic thought and behavior are defining features of human life. For individuals with disabilities, symbols and visual aids can be particularly effective in conveying complex spiritual concepts. Langer (1957) notes that symbolization enables us to make sense of the world and our place in it. Using symbols in catechetical instruction, such as pictorial representations of biblical stories or tactile

religious objects, can help individuals with disabilities understand and relate to spiritual teachings. Additionally, symbols and rituals play a crucial role in shaping human culture and religious practices, providing a means for individuals with disabilities to express and experience their spirituality.

Burke (1966) emphasizes that humans are "symbol-using animals," and Geertz (1973) highlights the importance of symbols in cultural and religious expression. In religious practices, rituals such as prayer, worship, and sacraments are essential for communicating with the divine (Eliade, 1959). For individuals with disabilities, these rituals can be adapted to be more accessible, incorporating sensory elements in sacraments or simplified prayer formats, to ensure they can participate fully and meaningfully.

Incorporating these principles within task-oriented communicative practices further enhances the social order within catechetical settings. Key practices include:

1. *Welcoming individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities warmly upon their arrival:* This sets the tone for an inclusive and respectful environment.
2. *Acknowledging each friend personally by name:* This reinforces the individual dignity and uniqueness of each person.
3. *Using inclusive language that respects the backgrounds and abilities of friends:* This is essential in creating an environment of equality and respect.
4. *Inviting friends to make choices and experience decision-making:* This promotes autonomy and personal growth among individuals with disabilities.
5. *Engaging in one-on-one interactions:* This helps in understanding personal needs and building trust.

6. *Observing non-verbal cues and body language*: This ensures that the unspoken needs and emotions of individuals are understood and addressed.
7. *Conversing with a warm tone of voice and supportive gestures*: This creates a comforting and encouraging atmosphere.
8. *Encouraging catechists and friends to share personal experiences*: This builds a trusting community where everyone feels valued and heard.

By contextualizing these key points within the framework of inclusive catechetical communication, it becomes evident that adapting communication methods to meet the needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities is essential. This ensures that they can fully engage in and benefit from the intimate, communal, and symbolic aspects of their faith, fostering a deeper connection with God and their community.

Creating and Sustaining *Interanimating Transformation* through Effective Communication

Interanimating transformation, a concept rooted in the dynamic and reciprocal nature of human interactions, refers to the ongoing process of mutual influence and change that occurs through effective communication. This transformation is particularly significant in inclusive settings in SPRED (Special Religious Education), where communication practices not only support persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PIDD) but also enrich the entire community. The key elements of this transformation—*collaborative learning, empowerment, and agency*—

are deeply interwoven into the fabric of SPRED's communicative ecology, fostering an environment of growth, inclusion, and mutual enrichment.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning in SPRED is founded on the principles of shared knowledge, mutual support, and collective engagement. This approach to learning emphasizes the importance of relational communication and community bonds, aligning with social capital theory as discussed by scholars like Putnam (2000), Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001). Social capital theory highlights the value of networks, trust, and reciprocity in fostering community cohesion and inclusion. SPRED catechists exemplify this by creating environments where every participant's voice is heard, respected, and valued.

SPRED's focus on collaborative learning is evident in their use of non-verbal cues, alternative communication methods, and universal design principles to accommodate diverse cognitive and sensory needs. This inclusive approach ensures that all participants can engage meaningfully, regardless of their abilities. The use of gestures, visual aids, and sensory-friendly materials helps bridge communication gaps and facilitates deeper connections.

The collaborative nature of SPRED's learning environment fosters a sense of belonging and mutual respect. Testimonials from catechists highlight how these practices have deepened their faith and relationships, underscoring the transformative power of shared experiences. This reflects the holistic benefits of an inclusive, collaborative learning environment that nurtures both spiritual and personal growth.

Empowerment and Agency

Empowerment and agency are central to the transformative potential of SPRED's communicative practices. Empowerment in this context refers to enabling individuals with IDD to express themselves, make choices, and participate fully in their community. Agency involves the capacity to act independently and make decisions, which is fostered through supportive and inclusive communication strategies.

SPRED's emphasis on creating cognitively and sensory-accessible environments through universal design principles is crucial for fostering empowerment and agency. By recognizing and adapting to the diverse needs of participants, SPRED ensures that everyone can participate fully. Empowerment in SPRED is about giving individuals with IDD a voice and recognizing their unique contributions. This is achieved through inclusive practices that value each participant's abilities and perspectives. The use of non-verbal cues, gestures, and sensory-friendly materials ensures that everyone can engage meaningfully in SPRED activities.

A powerful testament to this approach is found in the experiences of catechists who observe and support the development of participants. For instance, one catechist reflects on how SPRED's prepared environments and symbolic catechesis methods facilitate personal transformation and community growth. They note, "When a SPRED community gathers in friendship in the prepared meeting space and each person becomes focused through concentration, a sense of harmony develops" (Gallagher, 2024). This prepared environment fosters a sense of peace and readiness to engage in sacred experiences, thereby empowering participants to connect deeply with their faith and community.

Moreover, the emphasis on relational communication within SPRED aligns with the principles of social capital theory. By fostering networks of trust and reciprocity,

SPRED helps build a supportive community that values the contributions of all its members. This is evident in the testimonial of a catechist who highlights the joy and dignity experienced during SPRED Masses. They state, "Sharing meaningful liturgical experiences with our special friends connects us to our SPRED catechesis and the whole worshipping community grows together in faith and love" (Kasier, 2023). Such experiences underscore the interconnected nature of social capital and its role in promoting inclusivity and empowerment.

The concept of social suffering theory, developed by scholars like Kleinman, Das, and Lock, provides further insight into the collective nature of the challenges faced by individuals with IDD and their families. Social suffering theory examines how social forces contribute to pain and distress, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of these contexts to address them effectively. By fostering an inclusive environment and addressing structural barriers, SPRED actively works to dismantle these impediments, promoting a more equitable and supportive community.

SPRED's inclusive practices not only alleviate individual suffering but also transform the social dynamics that contribute to it. This transformative effect is seen in the enhanced spiritual and emotional well-being of participants, as they find comfort and confidence through their involvement in SPRED. Testimonials highlight this impact, with one parent noting, "SPRED allows my daughter to participate in her faith meaningfully, bringing peace and support to our family" (Harrington, 2021). This underscores the profound benefits of creating spaces where individuals feel empowered and capable of expressing their agency.

The sustainability of interanimating transformation in SPRED is rooted in the continuous and adaptive nature of its communicative practices. Effective

communication in SPRED involves recognizing and adapting to the evolving needs of participants, fostering emotional connections, and building strong community bonds. This adaptive leadership, as described by Heifetz and Linsky (2002), is essential for responding to the diverse and changing circumstances of participants with IDD. SPRED's commitment to creating safe and welcoming spaces, as discussed by Hunter (2008), ensures that participants feel secure and valued, which is fundamental for sustaining engagement and transformation. The practice of slowing down and appreciating simple joys, inspired by the Slow City movement (Cittaslow), further enhances the quality of interactions and fosters a mindful, intentional approach to community life.

Incorporating principles of appreciative inquiry, SPRED celebrates the unique contributions of each community member, fostering an environment of appreciation and inclusivity. This strengths-based approach recognizes and builds on the positive attributes of individuals, creating a supportive environment that enhances spiritual and personal growth. By leveraging technology and innovative methods, SPRED maintains connections and supports inclusivity, ensuring that all members can participate fully, even during challenging times.

To further understand how SPRED implements these principles in practice, it is essential to explore the specific task-oriented communicative practices that reproduce and reinforce the social order within the community. These practices are designed to create a structured, inclusive, and engaging environment for all participants:

1. *Preparing and sequencing the catechetical session activities*: Ensures a structured and coherent flow that accommodates the needs of all participants.
2. *Sharing of one's life story*: Builds trust and fosters personal connections within the community.

3. *Collecting feedback*: Encourages continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of participants.
4. *Choosing symbolic objects within the environment*: Enhances the sensory and spiritual experience.
5. *Arranging the chairs in a circle formation*: Promotes equality and openness in interactions.
6. *Enthroning the Holy Book*: Symbolizes the centrality of faith in the community.
7. *Decorating with flowers and candles*: Creates a welcoming and peaceful atmosphere.
8. *Arranging the room with plants and appropriate lighting*: Ensures a calming and inclusive environment.

By integrating these practices, SPRED creates a supportive and engaged faith community where every member feels valued and included.

Creating and sustaining interanimating transformation through effective communication in SPRED involves a multifaceted approach that integrates collaborative learning, empowerment, and agency. By fostering inclusive environments, building strong community bonds, and adapting to the diverse needs of participants, SPRED not only supports individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community. This comprehensive approach underscores the transformative power of community and inclusivity in promoting spiritual and emotional growth, highlighting the vital role of effective communication in creating a supportive and engaged faith community.

Creating and Sustaining *Interculturality* through Effective Communication

Creating and sustaining interculturality in SPRED (Special Religious Education) involves fostering an environment where cultural diversity is recognized, valued, and actively engaged. This process requires a comprehensive approach to communication that emphasizes cultural awareness and inclusive engagement practices. SPRED's communicative ecology provides a model for how effective communication can bridge cultural divides and promote a cohesive, inclusive community.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness within SPRED involves understanding and appreciating the diverse cultural backgrounds of its participants. This awareness is fundamental for creating an inclusive environment where all members feel respected and valued. Cultural awareness goes beyond mere acknowledgment of differences; it involves a deep understanding of the cultural contexts and experiences that shape individuals' identities.

In SPRED, cultural awareness is demonstrated through practices that honor the unique cultural expressions of participants. For instance, the newsletters highlight the celebration of SPRED liturgies in multiple languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the community. One such example is the celebration of Mass in both English and Spanish, ensuring that participants can engage in their preferred language (SPRED Newsletter, December 2023). This practice not only accommodates linguistic preferences but also acknowledges the cultural significance of language in religious worship.

Additionally, SPRED's emphasis on non-verbal communication methods, such as gestures and symbols, is another way cultural awareness is integrated into their practices. These methods transcend language barriers and allow participants from different cultural backgrounds to connect and engage meaningfully. As noted in the newsletters, the use of gestures during the proclamation of readings assists friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities, making the liturgy more accessible and inclusive (SPRED Newsletter, January 2024).

Engaging Practices

Engagement practices within SPRED are designed to foster active participation and inclusion of all community members, regardless of their cultural background. These practices are rooted in the principles of relational communication and social capital, which emphasize building strong networks, trust, and reciprocity.

One of the key engagement practices in SPRED is the inclusion of cultural rituals and traditions in their liturgical celebrations. By incorporating elements that are culturally significant to participants, SPRED creates a sense of belonging and respect for cultural diversity.

Another important aspect of engagement is the creation of safe and welcoming spaces where cultural expressions are encouraged and valued. SPRED's prepared meeting spaces are designed to be sensory-friendly and cognitively accessible, which helps create an environment where participants feel comfortable expressing their cultural identities. This approach ensures that participants can engage fully in their faith and community life, regardless of their cultural background.

Furthermore, SPRED's use of adaptive leadership and inclusive communication strategies plays a crucial role in sustaining interculturality. Adaptive leadership

involves being responsive to the diverse needs of participants and creating opportunities for everyone to contribute meaningfully. This is evident in SPRED's commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation of their practices to better serve the community. For instance, the newsletters highlight the ongoing efforts to enhance the inclusivity of SPRED liturgies by incorporating feedback from participants and catechists (SPRED Newsletter, May 2024).

Sustaining Interculturality

Sustaining interculturality within SPRED requires ongoing efforts to maintain and deepen cultural awareness and engagement practices. This involves regular training and reflection for catechists and leaders to ensure they are equipped to support a diverse community.

Additionally, fostering interculturality involves creating opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and learning. SPRED organizes events and activities that bring together participants from different cultural backgrounds, facilitating intercultural dialogue and understanding. These interactions help break down cultural barriers and build a cohesive, inclusive community.

By leveraging technology and innovative methods, SPRED also ensures that cultural engagement is not limited by physical barriers. Virtual gatherings and online resources provide platforms for cultural exchange and learning, enabling participants to connect and share their cultural experiences even when they cannot meet in person.

To further understand how SPRED implements these principles in practice, it is essential to explore the specific task-oriented communicative practices that reproduce and reinforce the social order within the community. These practices are designed to create a structured, inclusive, and engaging environment for all participants:

1. *Welcoming and accepting friends from diverse groups:* Fosters an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels valued.
2. *Providing catechetical materials and resources in multiple languages:* Ensures accessibility and respect for linguistic diversity.
3. *Integrating liturgical elements from different cultures:* Enriches the spiritual experience and reflects cultural diversity.
4. *Sharing of personal stories and experiences reflecting diverse cultural backgrounds:* Fosters empathy and connection by highlighting unique perspectives, allowing individuals to learn from and appreciate each other's journeys.
5. *Using a variety of expressions of greetings:* Promotes cultural awareness and respect.
6. *Performing rituals:* Reinforces cultural traditions and spiritual practices.
7. *Celebrating cultural festivals and significant religious events:* Acknowledges and honors the cultural backgrounds of participants.
8. *Ensuring a culturally inclusive catechetical environment:* Creates a welcoming and supportive space for all.

Creating and sustaining interculturality through effective communication in SPRED involves a multifaceted approach that integrates cultural awareness and engagement practices. By fostering an environment where cultural diversity is recognized, valued, and actively engaged, SPRED not only supports individuals with IDD but also enriches the entire community. This comprehensive approach underscores the transformative power of cultural inclusivity in promoting spiritual and emotional growth, highlighting the vital role of effective communication in creating a supportive and engaged faith community.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In my research study, I investigated inclusive catechetical communication within the Special Religious Development (SPRED) program in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Employing a triangulation approach, I integrated thematic analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis to comprehensively understand the communication practices and their inclusivity towards persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

For this study, I conducted content analysis using SPRED newsletters, which served as rich qualitative data sources. These newsletters, written by catechists and disseminated monthly, provided detailed narratives on personal experiences, interactions during catechetical sessions, and observations on inclusive practices. I systematically examined newsletters from the past five years, amounting to at least 45 issues. Each newsletter was meticulously coded, focusing on descriptions of catechetical activities, inclusivity practices, and reflections on both successes and challenges. This analysis aimed to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing deep insights into the catechists' perceptions and experiences. Through this process, I discovered key themes such as (1) the importance of personalized communication

methods, (2) the challenges of adapting materials for PDID, and (3) the significant role of community support in fostering inclusivity.

In conducting artifact analysis, I examined various educational materials used in SPRED catechetical sessions in detail. I collected and cataloged physical artifacts, including catechetical books, pamphlets, visual aids, and tactile objects, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. Detailed descriptions and contextual notes were taken during my direct observations of catechetical sessions to understand how these materials were used and their effectiveness in engaging PDID. This analysis highlighted the importance of accessible design features, such as simplified language, large print, braille, and sensory-friendly adaptations. Thematic patterns identified included (1) the necessity for continuous adaptation of materials to meet the diverse needs of PDID and (2) the positive impact of sensory-friendly features on engagement and learning.

For the socio-spatial analysis, I focused on the physical environment of the SPRED center. I assessed how the layout and arrangement of catechetical settings influenced inclusive communication. During my observations of sessions, I noted modifications that promoted inclusivity and documented these through photographs and sketches, capturing the spatial layouts. This analysis revealed how accessible entryways, appropriately arranged seating, and strategically placed materials facilitated better engagement and interaction. Key findings included (1) the identification of physical barriers that could hinder inclusivity and (2) the importance of a well-organized spatial environment in supporting effective catechetical communication.

To cross-validate my findings, I employed triangulation, integrating insights from thematic analysis, artifact analysis, and socio-spatial analysis. This approach ensured a robust and nuanced understanding of inclusive catechetical practices. I shared preliminary results with catechists for member checking, ensuring the accuracy and resonance of the findings. The comprehensive narrative synthesized from these data sources provided actionable insights into effective inclusive practices and identified areas for improvement.

This study provided a holistic view of inclusive catechetical communication within the SPRED program. It highlighted the importance of personalized communication methods, accessible educational materials, and a supportive physical environment in fostering inclusivity for PDID. The findings offer valuable insights that can inform future strategies and interventions aimed at improving educational practices and promoting a more inclusive community within SPRED and similar settings. My comprehensive analysis contributes to the field of religious education and community integration, offering practical value to enhance the communal life of faith and inclusion within the church.

Friendship plays a crucial role in human relationships and social interactions, rooted deeply in cultural, emotional, and psychological contexts. This discussion delves into the various aspects of friendship, its importance in diverse settings, and the different models proposed through scholarly research, with a particular emphasis on inclusive catechetical communication for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Inclusive Catechetical Communication Framework

The model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication provides a comprehensive framework to understand and analyze the dynamics of friendship, especially among persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. This model emphasizes intimacy, inter-animating transformation, and interculturality, offering a multidimensional approach to fostering and strengthening friendships. By integrating personal engagement, emotional support, collaborative learning, reflective practice, empowerment, cultural awareness, and inclusive practices, we can deepen our understanding of friendship in various contexts.

Intimacy in Friendship

Intimacy in friendships is characterized by personal engagement and emotional support, which are crucial for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Personal engagement involves actively participating in each other's lives, sharing experiences, and providing mutual support. Active listening is fundamental to developing intimacy in friendships. Research indicates that high-quality friendships, characterized by deep personal engagement and active listening, contribute significantly to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Anderson & Fowers, 2019). For individuals with developmental disabilities, such engagement can enhance their social competency and emotional health. Emotional support within friendships offers a safe space for friends to express their feelings and receive empathy. This support is especially important for individuals with intellectual disabilities, who often face challenges in social interactions. Emotional support from friends can buffer against

stress and improve mental health outcomes, making a profound difference in their lives (Heiman, 2014).

Inter-animating Transformation in Friendship

Inter-animating transformation in friendships involves collaborative learning, reflective practice, and the empowerment of individuals. This dimension highlights how friendships can lead to personal growth and transformation, particularly for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Collaborative learning within friendships involves sharing knowledge and experiences to facilitate mutual growth. In inclusive educational settings, collaborative learning is essential as it helps children with disabilities develop social skills and academic competence. This collaborative environment fosters a sense of community and shared purpose (Dutta & Kundu, 2020). Reflective practice is crucial for personal growth within friendships. Engaging in reflective conversations allows friends to explore their thoughts and feelings, gain new insights, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and each other. For individuals with disabilities, reflective practice can enhance self-awareness and social integration (Shields, 2014).

Friendships that empower individuals contribute to a sense of agency and self-efficacy. Empowerment in friendships encourages individuals with disabilities to pursue their goals and aspirations with confidence. Inclusive settings that foster empowerment can significantly enhance the personal development and well-being of these individuals (Shushok, 2011).

Interculturality in Friendship

Interculturality in friendships emphasizes cultural awareness, inclusive practices, and dialogue. This dimension is crucial for building strong, supportive

friendships among individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Cultural awareness within friendships involves recognizing and appreciating the diverse backgrounds and experiences of others. Inclusive catechetical communication promotes cultural awareness by encouraging interactions among individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds. This awareness enriches the individuals involved and broadens their perspectives (Assan, 2023). Engagement practices ensure that all individuals feel welcomed and valued, regardless of their backgrounds. In educational and social settings, inclusive practices are vital for fostering friendships among children with and without disabilities. These practices promote social integration and mutual respect, enhancing the quality of friendships (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2020). Dialogue and exchange are fundamental to building intercultural friendships. Engaging in open, respectful conversations allows friends to share their experiences, challenge their assumptions, and learn from each other. For individuals with developmental disabilities, dialogue and exchange can foster understanding and acceptance, which are essential for maintaining healthy, supportive friendships (Thomas, 2019).

Friendship Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication

The SPRED program employs a range of inclusive catechetical communication strategies to engage and support individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). These strategies are crucial in addressing the diverse needs of participants and fostering a supportive community environment. The following responses explore various aspects of these practices: (1) how catechists reproduce and implement inclusive communication; (2) the multimodal strategies used in catechetical communication and their impact on the catechetical praxis as a

communicative act; (3) the ways in which catechists adapt and refine their communicative practices; and (4) the perceived benefits of these inclusive communication methods according to catechists. By examining these areas, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of SPRED’s inclusive catechetical practices

Table 5

Friendship Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication

Friendship Model of Inclusive Catechetical Communication					
Intimacy		Inter-animating transformation		Interculturality	
Personal Engagement	Active Listening	Collaborative Learning	Empowerment and Agency	Cultural Awareness	Engaging Practices
Emotional Support		Reflective Practices		Dialogue and Exchange	

Implementing Inclusive Catechetical Communication

Catechists in the SPRED program effectively engage and support individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities by (1) developing *intimacy*, (2) promoting *inter-animating transformation*, and (3) engendering *interculturality*.

Developing intimacy involves creating intimate, supportive relationships that foster trust and meaningful engagement. Catechists utilize non-verbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, and symbols, to effectively communicate with

individuals who may have difficulty with verbal communication. Simple acts like handshakes or lighting candles during sessions help bridge communication gaps. Building strong emotional bonds through shared personal experiences and fostering an environment of empathy and understanding ensures that participants feel valued and supported.

Promoting inter-animating transformation focuses on mutual growth and learning through interactions between catechists and participants. Reflective practices engage both parties in activities that promote mutual learning, allowing catechists to gain insights from the unique perspectives of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, thereby enriching their own spiritual lives. By fostering reciprocal relationships, catechists create an environment where both they and the participants can learn from each other, leading to deeper spiritual connections and mutual enrichment.

Engendering interculturality ensures that catechetical practices are inclusive of all cultural backgrounds and respectful of the diverse identities of participants. Catechists demonstrate cultural sensitivity by being mindful of cultural differences and ensuring that all practices and symbols used in sessions are culturally appropriate and inclusive. For example, in a catechetical session involving children from diverse cultural backgrounds, a catechist might include symbols and stories from different cultures to illustrate religious teachings. This approach not only makes the session more engaging but also ensures that every child feels seen and respected. For instance, incorporating stories from African, Asian, and Indigenous traditions alongside biblical stories can help children from those backgrounds connect more deeply with the material. Another example is adapting religious practices to respect

cultural norms. In some cultures, specific gestures or rituals hold particular significance. A catechist might learn about these practices and integrate them into the session. For example, in cultures where certain colors are associated with particular meanings or where specific forms of greeting are customary, catechists can adapt these elements into their sessions to show respect and acknowledgment of those traditions. Understanding the cultural contexts of participants and incorporating this understanding into catechetical sessions is crucial. Additionally, building strong community networks that enhance social inclusion and support is a key aspect. Catechists actively seek to create welcoming environments where every participant feels included and valued, regardless of their cultural background.

These strategies, which include non-verbal communication, emotional connection, sensory accessibility, and community integration, ensure that all participants can engage meaningfully and feel supported within the community. By developing intimacy, promoting inter-animating transformation, and engendering interculturality, catechists in the SPRED program effectively reproduce and implement inclusive catechetical communication. Catechists in the SPRED program effectively engage and support individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities by developing intimacy, promoting inter-animating transformation, and engendering interculturality. They employ various strategies that focus on non-verbal communication, emotional connection, sensory accessibility, and community integration. These inclusive practices ensure that all participants can engage meaningfully and feel supported within the community.

Multimodal Strategies in Catechetical Communication

Catechists in the SPRED program employ various multimodal strategies to create inclusive catechetical communication environments for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID).

Personal engagement is a foundational practice, where catechists form strong, trusting relationships with participants through active listening and the use of gestures and non-verbal cues. They listen attentively, acknowledging participants' expressions and responding appropriately, which ensures that each participant feels heard and valued. By using gestures, facial expressions, and symbols, such as handshakes or smiles, catechists enhance interaction and understanding.

Active listening is crucial for understanding the unique needs and expressions of participants. Catechists demonstrate empathy and patience, creating a safe space for participants to express themselves without fear of judgment. This supportive environment encourages participants to share their thoughts and feelings comfortably.

Collaborative learning involves engaging participants in interactive activities that require cooperation and mutual support, such as group discussions and collaborative projects. By encouraging the sharing of personal stories and experiences, catechists build a collective understanding and strengthen community bonds.

Empowerment and agency are also key components, as catechists empower participants by giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility in their activities. They allow participants to make choices about their involvement and celebrate their contributions and achievements, boosting confidence and self-esteem.

Cultural awareness is critical in creating an inclusive environment that respects and values diversity. Catechists demonstrate respect for cultural differences and

incorporate culturally relevant practices and symbols into catechetical sessions, ensuring that all participants feel included and respected within the community

Engaging practices are implemented to adapt catechetical methods to meet the diverse needs of participants. Catechists use sensory-friendly materials, such as tactile objects and visual aids, and make environmental adaptations to ensure spaces are welcoming and accessible to all participants, including those with mobility challenges. These multimodal strategies help establish a social order where social interactions and the use of symbols play a crucial role in constructing meaning and fostering inclusivity.

By facilitating meaningful engagement through gestures, non-verbal cues, and active listening, catechists create an environment where all participants can engage meaningfully, regardless of their communication abilities. Collaborative learning and shared experiences foster mutual respect and understanding among participants, reinforcing the community's social fabric. Recognizing and validating the contributions of each participant empowers individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, promoting their sense of agency and self-worth. Ensuring cultural sensitivity by respecting and incorporating diverse cultural backgrounds enhances the overall cohesiveness of the community. By employing these multimodal strategies, catechists in the SPRED program effectively create an inclusive catechetical communication environment that supports individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, establishing a supportive and respectful social order.

Adapting and Refining Communicative Practices

Catechists adapt and refine their communicative practices to better address the diverse needs of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities by focusing

on (1) emotional support, (2) reflective practice, and (3) continuous dialogue and exchange.

Emotional support involves providing robust training in emotional intelligence, which helps catechists recognize, understand, and respond to the emotional needs of participants, creating a supportive and empathetic environment where everyone feels valued and understood. Catechists also create safe spaces where participants feel secure to express their emotions without fear of judgment, ensuring their emotional well-being is prioritized through attentive and appropriate responses.

Reflective practice is a key element in refining communication methods. Catechists actively seek feedback from participants and their families to assess the effectiveness of their strategies. This feedback helps identify areas for improvement, allowing catechists to adapt their techniques accordingly. This may involve modifying activities, incorporating new materials, or altering the physical environment to enhance accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that the methods used are effective and meet the needs of all participants.

Dialogue and exchange are essential for sustained improvement. Catechists encourage open and ongoing communication between themselves, participants, and their families, fostering a collaborative approach to problem-solving and improvement. Engaging in collaborative learning with other catechists and professionals allows them to stay updated with the latest research and best practices in the field. This exchange of knowledge helps catechists continuously improve their methods and stay informed about new developments in sensory and cognitive accessibility.

Creating cognitively and sensory-accessible environments is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of participants. Catechists tailor activities and materials to meet individual needs, using sensory-friendly materials, visual aids, and tactile

objects to enhance engagement and understanding. They also make necessary modifications to the physical environment to ensure it is welcoming and accessible for all participants, including altering the layout of spaces, providing quiet areas for sensory breaks, and ensuring that all areas are easily navigable.

By focusing on emotional support, reflective practice, and continuous dialogue and exchange, catechists effectively adapt and refine their communicative practices. These strategies ensure that the diverse needs of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities are met, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where all participants can thrive.

Perceived Benefits of Inclusive Catechetical Communication

Inclusive catechetical communication significantly enhances the spiritual and personal growth of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PDID). Catechists observe that the use of sensory-friendly materials and symbols helps participants engage more deeply in catechetical sessions, promoting a better understanding of faith and spirituality and allowing individuals to connect with their beliefs on a deeper level. Both participants and catechists experience personal transformation through these inclusive practices, gaining new perspectives and insights that enrich their spiritual journeys. Additionally, inclusive catechetical communication fosters deeper emotional connections between participants and catechists by creating emotionally supportive environments that prioritize empathy and understanding. Shared experiences and mutual support within these environments help build trust and emotional intimacy, leading to increased emotional well-being and encouraging participants to express their emotions freely.

A profound sense of belonging is cultivated through inclusive catechetical communication, built by creating welcoming and accessible spaces for all participants. These inclusive environments ensure that everyone feels comfortable and valued, fostering a sense of community. By valuing and celebrating the unique contributions of each individual, catechists promote a culture of inclusivity, helping to reduce social exclusion and ensuring that all participants feel they are an integral part of the community. This inclusive approach facilitates mutual enrichment, benefiting both participants and catechists through reciprocal relationships characterized by spiritual transformation and continuous learning. Engaging with individuals with PDID allows catechists to experience spiritual growth and renewal, while participants and catechists learn from each other's experiences and perspectives, promoting continuous personal and spiritual development for all involved.

Inclusive catechetical practices play a crucial role in reducing social exclusion by creating supportive environments that include all participants, regardless of their abilities. The use of sensory-friendly materials and inclusive practices encourages active participation from all members, breaking down barriers to inclusion and promoting equal opportunities for engagement. Catechists highlight the importance of recognizing and celebrating the unique contributions of each individual by acknowledging their strengths and abilities, fostering an environment of appreciation and respect. This positive reinforcement boosts participants' self-esteem and encourages them to contribute more actively. Employing practices that accommodate the diverse needs of participants ensures that everyone's contributions are valued, promoting a sense of pride and belonging among participants.

Inclusive catechetical communication offers numerous benefits for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities. It enhances spiritual and personal growth,

fosters deeper emotional connections, and cultivates a sense of belonging within the community. By facilitating mutual enrichment, reducing social exclusion, and celebrating unique contributions, catechists create a supportive and inclusive environment that values and uplifts every participant.

Recommendations

To effectively implement multimodal strategies in inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PIDD), it is essential to understand the practices that support these efforts and how they establish social order within this context. The following recommendations focus on fostering an inclusive environment through structured feedback, collaborative planning, and ongoing training. By enhancing catechists' understanding of the diverse needs of PIDD and employing tailored multimodal strategies, these practices aim to create a supportive and engaging catechetical community.

Regular Feedback Sessions: Implementing regular feedback sessions with participants and their families allows for continuous assessment and improvement of multimodal strategies. These sessions should focus on gathering insights into how current practices are perceived and identifying any areas needing adjustment to better establish social order and inclusivity within the communication framework.

Collaborative Planning: Encourage a collaborative approach in planning catechetical sessions. By involving participants with developmental and intellectual disabilities in the planning process, catechists can ensure that multimodal strategies are effectively tailored to their needs, thereby enhancing social integration and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Training and Development: Provide ongoing training for catechists on multimodal communication techniques, specifically tailored to inclusive catechetical practices. This training should focus on the use of various modes of communication (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) to accommodate the diverse needs of PIDD and promote a structured social order that supports active participation.

Adapting and refining communicative practices is crucial for catechists to effectively address the diverse needs of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PIDD). To achieve this, catechists must employ strategies that are responsive to feedback, promote digital literacy, and provide ongoing support. The following recommendations outline key approaches to enhance communication practices, ensuring that they are inclusive, adaptable, and capable of meeting the varied needs of the PIDD community within catechetical settings.

Anonymous Surveys: Utilize anonymous surveys to gather candid feedback from participants regarding the effectiveness of current communicative practices. This feedback can be used to refine and adapt strategies to better meet the diverse needs of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Digital Literacy Workshops: Conduct regular workshops to build digital literacy among participants and catechists, ensuring that all members of the community are comfortable using digital tools that may be employed in catechetical communication. This can help refine communicative practices to be more accessible and inclusive.

Ongoing Support and Resources: Develop a robust support system for both catechists and participants, offering resources and assistance in refining communicative practices. This support could include technological help, access to

communication aids, and strategies for overcoming barriers to effective communication with PIDD.

Understanding the perceived benefits of inclusive catechetical communication from the perspective of catechists is vital for enhancing engagement and participation among persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PIDD). This section presents recommendations that focus on improving access to technology, advocating for supportive policies, and fostering critical thinking within the catechetical community. By addressing these areas, catechists can maximize the positive impact of inclusive communication, ensuring that PIDD individuals are fully integrated and supported in their spiritual journey.

Technology Distribution Programs: Ensure that all participants have access to the necessary technology to participate fully in catechetical activities. Providing devices and internet access can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of catechetical communication, making it more beneficial for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Advocacy and Collaboration: Advocate for policies that support inclusive catechetical communication and collaborate with other organizations to create a supportive network. By doing so, catechists can amplify their efforts to provide equitable access to catechetical resources and enhance the perceived benefits of inclusive communication.

Critical Thinking and Awareness Programs: Develop programs that encourage critical thinking about digital media and technology use in catechetical settings. These programs can help participants better understand and navigate digital content, enhancing the perceived benefits of inclusive catechetical communication.

By implementing these targeted recommendations, catechists can significantly enhance their approach to inclusive catechetical communication with persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (PIDD). Focusing on regular feedback, collaborative planning, and continuous training allows for the creation of a more supportive and responsive environment that caters to the diverse needs of all participants. Furthermore, embracing technology and fostering digital literacy are crucial steps toward bridging gaps and ensuring equitable access to catechetical resources. Ultimately, by prioritizing these inclusive practices, catechists can create a more dynamic and engaging catechetical experience, fostering a sense of belonging and community for all individuals involved.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample SPRED Newsletters Content Analysis

Table 6 - SPRED Newsletters from September 2019 to May 2020

Table 6.1 – September 2019 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"Our friend did not speak and that she is on the autism spectrum. The communication barrier was one of my main concerns about working with my new friend."	Barrier recognition	Communication Barriers	Acknowledging communication barriers is the first step in inclusive communication, emphasizing the need to adapt and find alternative methods to connect.
"She looked at me for a second and then offered her right hand to shake my hand."	Non-verbal cues	Non-verbal Communication	Understanding and responding to non-verbal communication fosters inclusivity, especially for those who may struggle with verbal interaction.
"My anxiousness and worries started to subside gradually while I was with her. I believe her calming presence helped me get over my anxieties."	Emotional attunement	Emotional Connection	Being emotionally attuned to the needs and presence of others helps create a more inclusive environment.
"In our Spred community many parents have shared stories about their sad and painful experiences of	Shared experiences	Empathy and Understanding	Sharing experiences of exclusion promotes

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
rejection and isolation because of their child's condition."			empathy and understanding, crucial components of inclusive communication.
"Our friends with disabilities may not have the same cognitive capacity as we have to understand prayers, hymns, gestures, and sacraments."	Cognitive diversity	Cognitive Accessibility	Recognizing and respecting cognitive diversity ensures that communication is accessible to all.
"We believe that through our Spred community of faith, our friends become more comfortable entering into the worship experience of the whole church."	Community support	Community Integration	Building a supportive community encourages participation and inclusion in broader social and religious activities.
"We cannot underestimate the power of being part of a community."	Community importance	Social Inclusion	Emphasizing the importance of community strengthens the sense of belonging and inclusion.
"Relationships are at the heart of the SPRED method."	Relationship building	Relational Communication	Building strong, supportive relationships is central to inclusive communication.
"Stillness is created by the group that arrives and prepares for the session, aware that preparation is more than just putting out activities."	Preparation and presence	Mindful Communication	Being mindful and present in preparation and interaction promotes an inclusive atmosphere.
"We all need an environment in which there is room for God to speak and be heard."	Environment creation	Inclusive Environment	Creating an environment where everyone feels valued and

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
			heard is essential for inclusive communication.

General themes across the September 2019 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Communication Barriers:* The newsletter acknowledges the presence of communication barriers, especially for individuals on the autism spectrum or those who are non-verbal. The recognition of these barriers is crucial for adapting communication methods to ensure inclusivity.
2. *Non-verbal Communication:* Emphasis is placed on the importance of non-verbal cues and interactions. Understanding and responding to non-verbal signals help bridge communication gaps and foster inclusivity.
3. *Emotional Connection:* Building emotional connections and being attuned to the emotional states of others are highlighted as key aspects of inclusive communication. This approach helps in creating a comfortable and supportive environment.
4. *Empathy and Understanding:* Sharing personal experiences of exclusion and isolation enhances empathy and understanding among community members. This empathy is essential for creating an inclusive environment.
5. *Cognitive Accessibility:* The newsletter stresses the importance of recognizing cognitive diversity and ensuring that communication and activities are accessible to individuals with different cognitive abilities.
6. *Community Integration:* The role of community support in promoting inclusivity is emphasized. A supportive community encourages participation and helps individuals feel more comfortable in broader social and religious activities.

7. *Social Inclusion*: The newsletter underlines the power and importance of being part of a community. Social inclusion is presented as a fundamental aspect of ensuring that everyone feels valued and included.
8. *Relational Communication*: Building and maintaining strong, supportive relationships are highlighted as central to the SPRED method. Relational communication helps in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion.
9. *Mindful Communication*: Preparation and mindful presence during interactions are emphasized as ways to promote inclusivity. Being mindful helps in creating a calm and supportive environment.
10. *Inclusive Environment*: Creating an environment where everyone feels valued and heard is seen as essential for inclusive communication. Such an environment allows for open and respectful interactions.

Table 6.2 – October 2019 SPRED newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"Pope Francis insists that the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized be put at the center of the Church's mission."	Prioritizing the marginalized	Inclusion Priority	Emphasizing the importance of prioritizing marginalized groups ensures they are not overlooked and receive the support and attention they need.
"We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God	Advocacy and friendship	Advocacy and Friendship	Advocating for and building friendships with marginalized individuals fosters a sense of belonging and

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
wishes to share with us through them."			ensures their voices are heard.
"It is not enough for a parish community to welcome the poor and marginalized. Parish communities must also be willing to seek out the poor and marginalized and bring the light of the Gospel to them."	Active outreach	Active Inclusion	Actively seeking out and engaging with marginalized groups demonstrates a commitment to inclusive communication and community integration.
"Spred does not merely provide a service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, it provides an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal for both the people with disabilities and the catechists."	Mutual transformation	Mutual Growth	Highlighting the mutual benefits of inclusive communication shows that both the individuals receiving support and those providing it experience growth and enrichment.
"In Spred we build small communities of faith precisely to develop and foster relationships with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities."	Relationship building	Relational Communication	Building strong, supportive relationships within small communities enhances inclusive communication and fosters a sense of belonging.
"We proclaim the Gospel to them and develop relationships with them to bring about a spiritual transformation."	Spiritual transformation	Spiritual Growth	Emphasizing the goal of spiritual transformation through inclusive communication highlights its deeper impact beyond just social interaction.

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"Through the relationships that we develop with our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we come to deepen our own relationship with the living God who is in our midst."	Deepening faith	Faith Enrichment	Developing relationships with marginalized individuals enriches the faith and spiritual understanding of all community members.
"Pope Francis writes that 'it is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits.'"	Recognizing vulnerability	Recognizing Vulnerability	Recognizing and addressing new forms of poverty and vulnerability is crucial for inclusive communication and ensuring all individuals are supported and valued.
"We adhere to this call to build relationships with the poor in Spred. In Spred we build small communities of faith precisely to develop and foster relationships with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities."	Building relationships	Relational Focus	Fostering relationships with marginalized groups within faith communities ensures inclusive communication and support.

General themes across the October 2019 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Inclusion Priority:* The document emphasizes the importance of prioritizing marginalized groups, including individuals with disabilities, within the Church's mission. This approach ensures that those who are often overlooked receive the necessary support and attention.
2. *Advocacy and Friendship:* Advocating for marginalized individuals and building genuine friendships with them are highlighted as key components of

inclusive communication. This approach helps ensure their voices are heard and their experiences are valued.

3. *Active Inclusion*: The document stresses the need for active outreach to marginalized groups. Instead of passively waiting for them to seek support, communities should actively engage with and support these individuals, demonstrating a commitment to inclusion.
4. *Mutual Growth*: Inclusive communication is presented as beneficial for both the individuals receiving support and those providing it. This mutual transformation fosters growth and enrichment for all parties involved.
5. *Relational Communication*: Building and fostering strong relationships within small faith communities is emphasized as a central aspect of inclusive communication. These relationships help create a supportive and inclusive environment.
6. *Spiritual Growth*: The document highlights the spiritual transformation that can result from inclusive communication. Engaging with marginalized individuals not only supports their spiritual growth but also enriches the faith of the entire community.
7. *Recognizing Vulnerability*: Recognizing and addressing new forms of poverty and vulnerability is essential for inclusive communication. This approach ensures that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, are supported and valued.
8. *Relational Focus*: The focus on building relationships within faith communities, particularly with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, underscores the importance of relational communication in fostering inclusivity.

Table 6.3 - November 2019 SPRED newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"The primary focus of our new evangelization efforts must be on those living on the margins of society."	Focus on marginalized	Prioritizing Marginalized Groups	Ensuring that the marginalized are at the center of outreach efforts promotes inclusivity by recognizing and addressing their specific needs.
"We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them."	Advocacy and friendship	Advocacy and Empathy	Advocacy combined with friendship ensures that marginalized voices are heard and valued, fostering deeper connections.
"It is not enough for a parish community to welcome the poor and marginalized. Parish communities must also be willing to seek out the poor and marginalized and bring the light of the Gospel to them."	Active outreach	Proactive Engagement	Actively seeking out and engaging with marginalized individuals ensures they are included and supported within the community.
"Spred does not merely provide a service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, it provides an ongoing experience of transformation and spiritual renewal for both the people with disabilities and the catechists."	Mutual transformation	Mutual Growth and Enrichment	Inclusive communication benefits both parties involved, fostering mutual growth and spiritual enrichment.
"We build small communities of faith precisely to develop and foster relationships with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities."	Community building	Relationship Building	Building small, supportive communities helps develop strong relationships and fosters a sense of belonging.
"Through the relationships that we develop with our friends with intellectual and	Deepening faith	Spiritual Growth	Developing relationships with marginalized

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
developmental disabilities, we come to deepen our own relationship with the living God who is in our midst."			individuals enriches the spiritual lives of all community members.
"Pope Francis writes that 'it is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ.'"	Recognizing vulnerability	Awareness of Vulnerability	Recognizing and addressing new forms of poverty and vulnerability ensures that all individuals are supported and valued.
"We proclaim the Gospel to them and develop relationships with them to bring about a spiritual transformation."	Proclaiming Gospel	Spiritual Outreach	Inclusive communication involves sharing spiritual teachings and fostering relationships that lead to spiritual transformation.
"Not only are our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities spiritually transformed through the Gospel message that is proclaimed to them, but we who proclaim that message and develop those relationships are also spiritually transformed."	Reciprocal transformation	Reciprocal Spiritual Enrichment	Both those who provide and receive support experience spiritual growth and transformation.

General themes across the November 2019 SPRED newsletter

1. *Prioritizing Marginalized Groups*: The document highlights the importance of focusing on marginalized groups, such as individuals with disabilities, to ensure they are included and supported. This approach aligns with the broader mission of the Church to prioritize those living on the margins.
2. *Advocacy and Empathy*: Emphasizing the need to advocate for marginalized individuals while building friendships with them fosters a sense of empathy and

understanding. This approach ensures that their voices are heard and valued within the community.

3. *Proactive Engagement*: Active outreach to marginalized groups is essential for fostering inclusivity. By seeking out and engaging with these individuals, communities demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and support.
4. *Mutual Growth and Enrichment*: Inclusive communication benefits both the individuals receiving support and those providing it. This mutual transformation fosters growth and spiritual enrichment for all parties involved.
5. *Relationship Building*: Building small, supportive communities that foster strong relationships is a central aspect of inclusive communication. These relationships help create a sense of belonging and support for marginalized individuals.
6. *Spiritual Growth*: The document highlights the spiritual transformation that can result from inclusive communication. Engaging with marginalized individuals not only supports their spiritual growth but also enriches the faith of the entire community.
7. *Awareness of Vulnerability*: Recognizing and addressing new forms of poverty and vulnerability is crucial for inclusive communication. This approach ensures that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, are supported and valued.
8. *Spiritual Outreach*: Inclusive communication involves sharing spiritual teachings and fostering relationships that lead to spiritual transformation. This approach helps integrate marginalized individuals into the spiritual life of the community.

9. *Reciprocal Spiritual Enrichment*: The document emphasizes that both those who provide and receive support experience spiritual growth and transformation. This reciprocal enrichment strengthens the bonds within the community and promotes inclusivity.

Table 6. 4 - December 2019 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"I have always known the value of a partner, a friend to accompany me through life."	Value of companionship	Companionship	Emphasizing the importance of companionship highlights the need for inclusive relationships where support and friendship are central.
"Faith was anchored in the experience of belonging to a family and finding security in love."	Family belonging	Sense of Belonging	A strong sense of belonging within a community or family is essential for inclusive communication, providing individuals with a foundation of love and security.
"High School broadened my awareness of God... I began to hear the call to 'be church and to engage with humanity.'"	Engagement with humanity	Community Engagement	Inclusive communication involves actively engaging with and supporting the broader community, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity.
"We were soon blessed with our first child who impacted our lives more than we could ever realize. Jennifer was a child	Impact of disability	Understanding Disabilities	Recognizing the profound impact of disabilities on individuals and families fosters

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
with a diagnosis of Down syndrome."			empathy and promotes inclusive communication.
"Through the gift of friendship within a community of faith and a magnificent process of spiritual enrichment, I found the unction to salve my wounded soul."	Spiritual enrichment	Spiritual Support	Inclusive communication is enriched by spiritual support and community, which provide healing and connection.
"Honoring my responsibilities of motherhood, I balanced my volunteer work in Spred with my teaching career at the parish school and a venture into home daycare."	Balancing roles	Role Balancing	Acknowledging and supporting the balancing of multiple roles helps create a more inclusive environment where individuals feel valued and understood.
"In communion with my husband, we gifted Spred to our parish, Queen of Angels, forty years ago."	Gift of service	Service and Contribution	Recognizing and valuing contributions to the community emphasizes the importance of service and inclusivity.
"Animation is the shared endeavor of all catechists. Enthusiasm is birthed especially from the spiritual enrichment of the community of catechists."	Shared endeavor	Collaborative Effort	Inclusive communication thrives on collaboration and shared efforts, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.
"We look to the future with optimism and deep faith. Change is inevitable as we respond to the new age of technology and the unfolding of history."	Future optimism	Hope and Adaptability	Emphasizing optimism and adaptability in the face of change supports inclusive communication by encouraging a

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
			positive and flexible outlook.

General themes across the December 2019 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Companionship:* The document highlights the value of companionship and friendship as essential components of inclusive communication. These relationships provide support, understanding, and a sense of belonging.
2. *Sense of Belonging:* Emphasizing the importance of belonging to a family or community, the document underscores that feeling secure and loved is crucial for inclusive communication.
3. *Community Engagement:* Active engagement with the broader community is seen as vital for fostering inclusivity. This involves reaching out, supporting, and being present for others.
4. *Understanding Disabilities:* Recognizing the impact of disabilities on individuals and families promotes empathy and understanding, which are essential for inclusive communication.
5. *Spiritual Support:* Spiritual enrichment and support within a community help individuals feel connected and valued, fostering an inclusive atmosphere.
6. *Role Balancing:* Acknowledging the multiple roles individuals play and supporting them in balancing these roles creates a more inclusive environment where everyone feels understood and valued.
7. *Service and Contribution:* Valuing contributions to the community and recognizing acts of service emphasize the importance of giving and receiving support within an inclusive framework.

8. *Collaborative Effort*: Inclusive communication thrives on collaboration and shared efforts, promoting a sense of community and shared purpose among members.
9. *Hope and Adaptability*: Emphasizing optimism and adaptability in response to change supports inclusive communication by encouraging a positive and flexible outlook, essential for navigating new challenges and opportunities.

Table 6.5 – January 2020 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"It is difficult to get anyone's personal attention, especially to talk about a ministry being offered in their parish."	Attention challenge	Communication Barriers	Recognizing the difficulty in capturing personal attention highlights the challenge of engaging people effectively, emphasizing the need for inclusive strategies to reach and involve everyone.
"People with disabilities are living in parish neighborhoods... They are waiting to be invited to belong to what is going on in the area."	Invitation to belong	Community Integration	Actively inviting people with disabilities to participate in parish activities fosters a sense of belonging and community integration.
"We must strive and ask for the grace to create a culture of encounter, of a fruitful encounter, of an encounter that restores to each person his or her own dignity as a child of God."	Culture of encounter	Dignity and Respect	Creating a culture of encounter where each person's dignity is respected and restored emphasizes the core of inclusive communication.
"We must choose to listen and not just hear. We must choose to stop and not just meet and pass by."	Active listening	Active Engagement	Emphasizing the importance of active listening and engagement ensures that all voices are heard and valued, fostering inclusivity.
"A kind word, a small or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship can	Small gestures	Kindness and Friendship	Small acts of kindness and friendship contribute significantly to creating

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
contribute to building a 'civilization of love.'"			an inclusive and loving community.
"We are called by our Baptism to spread the message of Jesus who invites us to go into the world to make disciples of all people."	Inclusive mission	Universal Inclusion	The mission to spread the message to all people highlights the universal nature of inclusion, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, is included.
"Our Baptism and the Holy Spirit will help us to witness to the message of Jesus in a way that involves being with others more than doing for others."	Being with others	Presence and Support	Emphasizing the importance of being present with others rather than merely doing for them fosters deeper connections and inclusive relationships.
"Spred's main work is to develop loving relationships with others. This is the door to being in a loving relationship with God who is always in a loving relationship with us."	Developing relationships	Relational Communication	Building loving relationships is central to inclusive communication, creating connections that reflect the divine relationship with God.
"The support of a Spred community of catechists and other families can give them what they need to care for their loved one."	Community support	Supportive Networks	Providing support through a community of catechists and families ensures that individuals with disabilities and their families receive the necessary care and inclusion.

General themes across the January 2020 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Communication Barriers:* The document highlights the challenges in capturing personal attention and engaging people effectively. Recognizing these barriers is crucial for developing inclusive strategies that ensure everyone is reached and involved.
2. *Community Integration:* Actively inviting people with disabilities to participate in parish activities fosters a sense of belonging and ensures they are integrated into the community. This proactive approach is essential for inclusivity.

3. *Dignity and Respect*: Creating a culture of encounter where each person's dignity is respected and restored is emphasized as a core principle of inclusive communication. This approach ensures that everyone is valued as a child of God.
4. *Active Engagement*: The importance of active listening and engagement is highlighted to ensure all voices are heard and valued. This active participation is key to fostering an inclusive environment.
5. *Kindness and Friendship*: Small acts of kindness and gestures of friendship are recognized as significant contributions to building an inclusive and loving community. These actions help to create a welcoming atmosphere for all.
6. *Universal Inclusion*: The mission to spread the message to all people underscores the universal nature of inclusion. This theme ensures that everyone, regardless of their abilities, is included in the community's activities and spiritual life.
7. *Presence and Support*: Emphasizing the importance of being present with others rather than merely doing for them fosters deeper connections and supportive relationships. This approach is central to inclusive communication.
8. *Relational Communication*: Building loving and supportive relationships is highlighted as the main work of SPRED. This relational approach is crucial for creating connections that reflect the divine relationship with God.
9. *Supportive Networks*: Providing support through a community of catechists and families ensures that individuals with disabilities and their families receive the necessary care and inclusion. These supportive networks are essential for fostering an inclusive community.

Table 6.6 – February 2020 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"Even the strongest of us need other people who can be relied on to show up and support us when we have to make a decision and are unsure what to do for the best."	Need for support	Community Support	Recognizing the universal need for support highlights the importance of creating a network where everyone feels supported and valued.
"Our Spred sessions need a scaffolding to hold them together. The scaffolding helps us when we are new to Spred."	Structural support	Structured Support	Providing a structured environment helps new members feel more secure and integrated, promoting inclusive communication.
"Relationships are at the heart of the Spred method."	Core relationships	Relationship Building	Building strong, supportive relationships is essential for creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels connected and valued.
"Stillness is created by the group that arrives and prepares for the session, aware that preparation is more than just putting out activities."	Importance of stillness	Mindful Communication	Creating a calm and mindful environment supports inclusive communication by allowing everyone to feel present and engaged.
"Trust builds community and without community there is no Spred."	Trust building	Trust and Community	Trust is fundamental to building a strong community, which is essential for fostering inclusive communication.
"Everyday God is the God whom we lead our friends to encounter in our Spred sessions."	Everyday experiences	Spiritual Inclusion	Integrating everyday experiences with spiritual teachings helps create an inclusive

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
			environment that resonates with all members.
"The sharing of our lives continues around our agape table. This too is a religious experience, evoking our Eucharistic celebrations."	Shared experiences	Communal Sharing	Sharing personal experiences in a communal setting fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity.
"Our friends have a way of seeing that looks past external appearances to look straight to the core of who we really are."	Seeing beyond appearances	Deep Understanding	Encouraging deeper understanding and seeing beyond appearances promotes inclusivity and respect.

General themes across the February 2020 SPRED newsletter

1. *Community Support*: The document emphasizes the universal need for support, highlighting the importance of creating a network where everyone feels supported and valued. This approach is essential for fostering an inclusive environment.
2. *Structured Support*: Providing a structured environment, or "scaffolding," helps new members feel secure and integrated. This structured support is crucial for inclusive communication, as it helps individuals navigate new settings and activities with confidence.
3. *Relationship Building*: Building strong, supportive relationships is at the heart of the SPRED method. These relationships are essential for creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels connected and valued.
4. *Mindful Communication*: Emphasizing the importance of stillness and mindful preparation, the document highlights how a calm and mindful environment

supports inclusive communication. This approach ensures that everyone feels present and engaged.

5. *Trust and Community*: Trust is fundamental to building a strong community. The document underscores that trust is essential for fostering inclusive communication and creating a supportive environment.
6. *Spiritual Inclusion*: Integrating everyday experiences with spiritual teachings helps create an inclusive environment that resonates with all members. This approach ensures that spiritual teachings are accessible and meaningful to everyone.
7. *Communal Sharing*: Sharing personal experiences in a communal setting fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity. The document highlights how communal sharing, such as around the agape table, mirrors religious celebrations and strengthens community bonds.
8. *Deep Understanding*: Encouraging deeper understanding and seeing beyond appearances promotes inclusivity and respect. The document emphasizes that looking past external appearances to understand the core of who people are is essential for inclusive communication.

Table 6. 7 – March 2020 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"After several years we were welcomed by the pastor of St. Irenaeus in Park Forest who offered us permanent space for Spred."	Welcoming support	Community Support	Highlighting the importance of welcoming support from community leaders ensures that spaces are provided for inclusive activities.
"We celebrated liturgies and sacraments with enhancements that help our	Enhanced liturgies	Accessible Worship	Providing enhancements for liturgies and sacraments ensures that

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
friends to give their own witness of faith."			everyone can participate and express their faith, promoting inclusivity.
"I remember one experience in which our Spred group, catechists and friends, attended the wake of a Spred catechist's parent."	Shared grief	Communal Support	Sharing in significant life events, such as grief, strengthens communal bonds and supports inclusive communication.
"Some of the residents who were elderly or had severe conditions that prevented them from being in a Spred group became part of the Ministry of Care program."	Ministry of Care	Inclusive Programs	Creating programs that cater to individuals who cannot participate in standard groups ensures that all needs are met inclusively.
"Spred is built on relationships."	Relationship foundation	Relational Communication	Emphasizing that SPRED is founded on relationships highlights the importance of building strong, supportive connections for inclusive communication.
"We support Spred catechists in their desire to host Spred Family Masses in their parishes at a regular weekend Mass."	Family Masses	Inclusive Worship	Encouraging and supporting inclusive worship experiences, such as Family Masses, promotes a sense of belonging and participation.
"Stillness is created by the group that arrives and prepares for the session, aware that preparation is more than just putting out activities."	Creating stillness	Mindful Preparation	Creating a calm and mindful environment through thoughtful preparation supports inclusive communication by allowing everyone to engage fully.

General themes across the March 2020 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Community Support:* The document highlights the importance of welcoming support from community leaders and members, ensuring that inclusive spaces are provided for activities. This support is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued.

2. *Accessible Worship*: Enhancements to liturgies and sacraments that allow everyone to participate and express their faith are emphasized. Providing accessible worship experiences ensures that all community members can engage meaningfully in spiritual activities.
3. *Communal Support*: Sharing in significant life events, such as grief, strengthens communal bonds. This shared support is essential for building a cohesive and inclusive community where everyone feels supported during important moments.
4. *Inclusive Programs*: The creation of programs like the Ministry of Care, which cater to individuals who cannot participate in standard groups, ensures that all needs are met. This approach highlights the importance of adapting to different needs to promote inclusivity.
5. *Relational Communication*: Emphasizing the foundation of SPRED on relationships underscores the importance of building strong, supportive connections. These relationships are central to fostering inclusive communication and ensuring everyone feels valued.
6. *Inclusive Worship*: Supporting initiatives like SPRED Family Masses promotes a sense of belonging and participation in worship experiences. Inclusive worship ensures that all members of the community can engage fully in spiritual life.
7. *Mindful Preparation*: Creating a calm and mindful environment through thoughtful preparation is highlighted as essential for inclusive communication. This approach allows everyone to engage fully and feel present during activities.

Table 6.8 – April 2020 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"The hope, the trust and the joy that characterize our Christian waiting are so important when it comes to our service to our friends in Spred."	Hope and trust	Emotional Support	Emphasizing hope, trust, and joy in service highlights the importance of emotional support in inclusive communication.
"We know that our friends, just like every other person, and indeed just like our Spred Centre amaryllis, need the right environment and the right nourishment to grow."	Right environment	Supportive Environment	Creating the right environment and providing appropriate nourishment are essential for the growth and inclusion of individuals with disabilities.
"We all need an environment in which there is room for God to speak and be heard. They need the experience of knowing that we are valued; that we are loved just for who we are."	Valued and loved	Sense of Belonging	Ensuring that individuals feel valued and loved fosters a sense of belonging, which is crucial for inclusive communication.
"Waiting then is not a barren time for us in Spred. Our waiting is punctuated by unexpected joys."	Productive waiting	Patience and Growth	Viewing waiting as a time for growth and unexpected joys emphasizes the value of patience and ongoing development in inclusive settings.
"The friends who were moving groups or waiting to join a group for the first time also had to wait."	Inclusive transitions	Transitional Support	Supporting individuals through transitions, such as moving groups, ensures continuity and inclusivity during changes.
"Our friends' families also wait. They wait for their sons and daughters to receive the support they need to take part in the life of their parish."	Family support	Family Inclusion	Including and supporting families in the process ensures that the entire family feels included and valued in the community.
"We can also take comfort in reminding ourselves that Spred is God's work, not ours."	Divine perspective	Spiritual Perspective	Recognizing the spiritual aspect of their work reinforces the idea that inclusive communication is part of a larger divine mission.

General themes across the April 2020 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Emotional Support:* The document highlights the importance of hope, trust, and joy in service. Emotional support is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where individuals feel encouraged and valued.
2. *Supportive Environment:* Creating the right environment and providing the necessary nourishment for growth are emphasized as essential for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. This approach ensures that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.
3. *Sense of Belonging:* Ensuring that individuals feel valued and loved for who they are fosters a strong sense of belonging. This is a core component of inclusive communication, helping everyone feel accepted and integral to the community.
4. *Patience and Growth:* Viewing waiting as a productive time filled with unexpected joys emphasizes the importance of patience and ongoing development. This perspective helps in appreciating the gradual progress and growth of individuals.
5. *Transitional Support:* Supporting individuals through transitions, such as moving between groups, ensures continuity and inclusivity. This approach helps maintain a stable and supportive environment during periods of change.
6. *Family Inclusion:* Including and supporting families in the process ensures that the entire family feels valued and integrated into the community. This holistic approach strengthens the sense of community and support.
7. *Spiritual Perspective:* Recognizing the spiritual aspect of their work reinforces the idea that inclusive communication is part of a larger divine mission. This

perspective helps in viewing their efforts as part of a meaningful and spiritual journey.

Table 6.9 – May 2020 SPRED Newsletter

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
"A few barely noticeable microphones hang from the ceiling allowing the observers to hear the quiet music and the simple greetings when a friend arrives and is warmly greeted."	Enhanced communication tools	Communication Aids	Using tools to enhance communication ensures everyone can be heard and understood, fostering an inclusive environment.
"Observers are often surprised by the quiet peace and they notice the focus on individual work over the prevalence of social interactions."	Individual focus	Individualized Attention	Focusing on individual needs and work highlights the importance of personalized attention in inclusive communication.
"Each person shares in the preparation of the table by bringing table mats, simple dishes, glasses and a variety of food and drink so each one can share no matter what diet restrictions they may cope with."	Inclusive participation	Participation and Inclusion	Ensuring everyone can participate regardless of their needs or restrictions promotes inclusivity and a sense of belonging.
"The leader continues to bring out aspects of this human experience, until she is convinced that each person can relate to the object or picture with a story or feeling."	Relating personal experiences	Relational Communication	Encouraging individuals to relate personal experiences fosters deeper connections and understanding.
"We return to our hospitality room to complete information	Reflection and feedback	Reflective Communication	Providing opportunities for reflection and

Key Phrases/Sentences	Coded Text	Themes	Explanation of Inclusive Communication
sheets and have the opportunity to gather our thoughts and feelings about what we have experienced."			feedback ensures continuous improvement and inclusivity.
"Observation has helped many parents to decide that their child could benefit from this experience of a faith community."	Observation benefits	Observational Learning	Observing inclusive practices helps parents and others understand and appreciate the benefits of inclusive communities.
"The feedback time is an opportunity to listen to the concerns of parents."	Listening to concerns	Active Listening	Actively listening to concerns ensures that the needs and worries of all community members are addressed, promoting inclusivity.
"The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results."	Trust in process	Faith and Patience	Trusting the process and having faith in gradual progress is important for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.

General themes across the May 2020 SPRED newsletter:

1. *Communication Aids:* The document highlights the use of tools, such as microphones, to enhance communication. This ensures that everyone can be heard and understood, fostering an inclusive environment where communication barriers are minimized.

2. *Individualized Attention*: Focusing on individual needs and work is emphasized as crucial for inclusive communication. Personalized attention ensures that everyone receives the support they need to participate fully.
3. *Participation and Inclusion*: Ensuring that everyone can participate, regardless of their needs or restrictions, promotes inclusivity and a sense of belonging. This theme is evident in the way communal activities are organized to accommodate all participants.
4. *Relational Communication*: Encouraging individuals to relate personal experiences fosters deeper connections and understanding. This approach helps in building strong, supportive relationships within the community.
5. *Reflective Communication*: Providing opportunities for reflection and feedback is essential for continuous improvement and inclusivity. This practice allows community members to express their thoughts and feelings, ensuring that their voices are heard.
6. *Observational Learning*: Observation is highlighted as a valuable tool for helping parents and others understand and appreciate the benefits of inclusive communities. Observational learning allows individuals to see inclusive practices in action.
7. *Active Listening*: Actively listening to the concerns of parents and other community members ensures that their needs and worries are addressed. This practice is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.
8. *Faith and Patience*: Trusting the process and having faith in gradual progress is important for fostering an inclusive environment. This theme emphasizes the importance of patience and trust in the ongoing journey of inclusivity.

APPENDIX B SAMPLE SPRED NEWSLETTER



SPRED

Archdiocese of Chicago

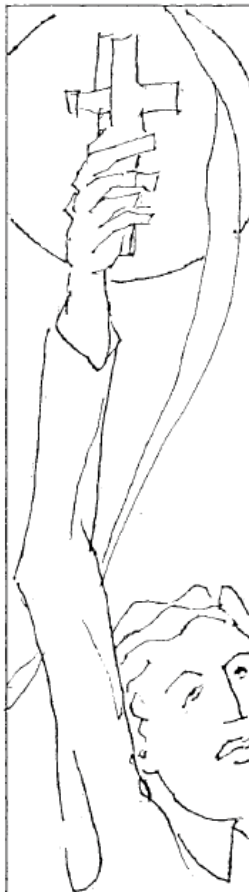


SPECIAL RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

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**LEADER
SHIP**

When we are comfortable with our families and friends, we enjoy sharing stories. We share memories from our childhood; where we lived, what our family was like, our experiences in school, our friends, sports, plays, music and classes. All of these memories, as well as more recent ones are anchored in a place, an exact place. The more we focus on an exact place, the richer our memories become. We become rooted again in sights, smells, texture, sounds and taste.

Over the years, Spred diocesan leaders have gathered together every three years to explore our memories and insights. We know that our memories have helped us to build our own identities and we explore memories that will help us to develop our identities as Spred catechists and Spred diocesan leaders. We do this exploration using the Method Vivre, which is a catechesis of memory.

Over the years, we have explored memories of water, earth, fire and air as doorways to symbolic awareness. We know from our experience with our friends with intellectual disabilities that while they may not be proficient in abstract thought, they may be at ease and very proficient in calling to mind their memories. This calling to mind of memories we call evocation and it is the basis for our catechesis. Evocation is the bedrock of symbolic knowing that open us up to a sense of the sacred. So our memories, once awakened, become the portal for faith development.

While our friends with intellectual disabilities may be at ease with evocations to enter into a sense of the sacred, the challenge for catechists is to be so as well. In this way the adult catechists attend to their own faith development. The more at ease with this mode of faith development the catechist is, the hope is that they may be more able to walk with their friends with intellectual disabilities in their faith development. After all this work then we can really call ourselves communities of faith.

With this in mind, this June, diocesan leaders worked in private and in small groups on their memories of space, personal space. We focused on the first day of our conference on our memories of the space for our childhood. On the second day we focused on our memories of our teen years and on the third day we evoked space as we lived our adult years. We asked ourselves where we were, what was it like, who else was there, what happened? From time to time, we passed around a box of kleenex. It was like our adult preparation sessions for catechists, so no one probed or commented. Each shared what they wanted to.



As the leadership teams worked on evoking their memories, they put their evocations into the framework of a Spred Session. First they had to be able to distinguish between an evocation and the event itself. The event can give pure facts. An evocation takes place later after the facts have taken place. Then the facts that are remembered are placed in a rich bath emotion. Only then can a symbolic process begin. Symbolic awareness cannot happen without memories being evoked along with emotion, feelings. When we articulate what these feeling are, we call that the interiorization phase of a session. We cannot name the feeling unless it is present! There is no use saying that we are all full of wonder, unless we are! So each of the leaders tried to get a grip of the predominate feeling that was flowing from their evocation of space as lived in during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. As Fr.Paulhus always said "up to this point you have poetry, but not yet catechesis."

Catechesis properly so called begins with the liturgical evocation. When have I experienced this same inner movement or feeling in liturgy as I did in the evocation of the human experience? It is very difficult to do this unless there has been a true evocation of a human experience and a very clear sense of the inner movement, the interiorization. If the session is still all over the place, frustration sets in. The leader has to be adept at naming what is happening within and placing it next to liturgical memories or evocations.

So the diocesan leaders often placed how they felt as children, next to their experiences of their parish church, or their families saying grace, or night prayers. As adolescents and adults their liturgical memories were more varied. It is only when a clear sense of the sacred is awakened through the liturgical evocation, that it is possible to have a solid biblical evocation that resonates in oneself and in a community. The liturgical evocation prepares for the reception of the Word of God in the biblical evocation. If there is not an interior symbolic movement, catechesis fall back into an instruction mode and most present become very bored.

Finally, the leaders settled on a message, what does Jesus say to me today, not just in the biblical evocation? Given the progression of a session, it has to come to a clear focus at this point and the clear focus can then be rested in during the personal expression.

At this conclusion the feedback from the leaders indicated that they appreciated the members of their small groups as they learned from one another and above all trusted one another with what was most precious, their lives, their faith. Each one was amazed at the richness of what they themselves had put together. Each one was amazed at the dynamic in the small groups where each one listened deeply to one another and accepted what was offered with respect and gratitude. The one word that returned time and again was the word **trust**. Trust is both a gift and a requirement for evangelization. It reduces fear, anxiety and apprehension. Trust opens the way for faith.

What contributes to this sense of trust? Naturally the location, the space provides a sense of being safe and secure. The process used has clear boundaries. Everyone has a sense that they are being respected and appreciated. No one is afraid they will be laughed at, corrected or shamed. Everyone becomes gradually at ease with themselves and with all the others. Then the work at hand can take place in an ambiance of trust. We met in a retreat house in Larne, near Belfast, N.Ireland. This beautiful place put us at ease for faith.

The Spred leaders attending Project Peer Support came from Australia, Malta, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of South Africa, Scotland, and the United States. We met from June 11 to 15, 2018.

In informal gatherings during and after Project Peer Support at Drumalis, questions arose about the feasibility of some norms or standards for Spred Diocesan leaders that would support trust and the work of faith development. The following suggestions were made with the understanding that they await further feedback, clarification and development.

1. Witness

Spred diocesan leaders form a core team for the diocese in which they work. They all belong to a Spred group made up of adult catechists where all participate in adult preparation sessions so that their leadership is on the level of pastoral relationships more than on management procedures.

2. Competence

Having achieved competence themselves through appropriate education, they provide training, supervision, workshops, enrichment experiences and coordination, to foster competence on the parish level for the good of children, teens, young adults and adults who live with their families or apart from their families in facilities and group homes.

3. Communication

The leadership team makes known the work of Spred through all forms of media. They report to families, residential staff, parish leaders, other diocesan leaders and the bishop. They further relationships through sharing written insights and participation in conferences and project peer support.

4. Outreach

The leadership team recognizes the needs that exist and so develop new Spred communities of faith for children, teens, young adults and adults with intellectual disabilities in each parish in the diocese. This requires the recruitment of adult volunteers who command the respect and trust of families, parish priests and diocesan bishops. The Spred diocesan leaders maintain a diocesan vision. This requires long term planning.

5. Leadership

Competent diocesan leadership has several requirements:

- a central location to welcome visitors, families, volunteers, calls, questions, complaints, mailings
- a process for reports, budgets, evaluations, plans
- a location for data, where are all the parishes? who are the pastors? who is in Spred? where? what parish? sacraments? deaths?
- a central location for observation and development of sessions
- a place for developing catechist competency through training, workshops, etc.

With all this work to be done to set up systems and environments, it is easy to get caught up in details and forget the goal: to support the work of faith development through symbolic awareness. Sr.Mary Therese Harrington, Spred Staff Chicago

