

## What is SPRED?

**SPRED** or Special Religious Development is a program for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities begun in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the early 1960's. **SPRED** founder and director, Fr. James McCarthy was driven to find a way to enrich the life of those living with developmental disabilities by stirring an awareness of GOD in the midst of ordinary moments of their everyday life and bringing forth an awareness of themselves as persons of dignity who are loved by GOD. Sr. Mary Therese Harrington and Sr. Susanne Gallagher joined Fr. McCarthy in researching methods of catechesis and education and discovered the Method Vivre, a research project defining how persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities could grow in faith. **SPRED** is the practical application of the Method Vivre. Since its inception, **SPRED** has continued to evolve and grow through the direction and oversight of the founding **SPRED** staff.

Today in the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond, the **SPRED** Agency sets up a contractual arrangement with a parish or another diocese. The **SPRED** Agency provides training, supervision and materials in the form of a syllabus of sessions. The parish sets up a program for a given age group in accordance with **SPRED** standards. Each **SPRED** center has a team made up of volunteers: a chairperson, leader catechist, activity catechist and helper catechists (sponsors). Each helper catechist becomes a partner in faith for a child or adult with developmental disabilities. **SPRED** small communities of faith are comprised of up to 14 persons: 8 catechists and 6 friends. This ensures a personal experience for all. A welcoming space, the bonds of friendship, the proclamation of the WORD and inclusion in the sacramental life of the parish are essential for growth in faith.

### SPRED Staff Receives 2013 Laetare Medal Award at Notre Dame



Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, Fr. Jim McCarthy and Sr. Susanne Gallagher receiving the 2013 Laetare Award with Notre Dame President Fr. John Jenkins in recognition of 50 years of SPRED.

In a press release, University President Fr. John Jenkins praised SPRED's commitment to educating people with disabilities. *"Insisting that a developmental disability neither tempers Christ's invitation nor restricts one's right to respond, they have ushered countless people to their rightful place at the Eucharistic table."*