



CATHOLIC CHARITY APPEAL
Supporting the work of the Church

December 2017



The Gifts of Christmas

Advent is upon us! And with Christmas Day just a few short weeks away, we are given a chance to look up from our busy lives and celebrate the many joys of this wonderful season. We celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. We celebrate the time we're given to spend with family and friends.

We celebrate the years that have quickly passed, and those we miss, while looking forward to the new year that's ahead. And we celebrate the many gifts God has given each of us, gifts that allow us to serve God by serving one another.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we accept His many gifts...the gift of hope, promise, love, faith, and generosity, to experience the true, deeper meaning of Christmas. Because it is not about

excess or lavish gifts or the latest gadget. It's about the spirit of giving and the relentless power of love and caring for one another, in the name of God.

That's why our generous Catholic community is always there for our neighbors and friends, when they have a need not only during the Christmas season, but throughout the entire year. When we put God's gifts to use, to serve others the way He asks us to, we are able to take care of our Rhode Islanders who need us.

Christmas Spotlight: Special Religious Education (SPRED)

Of the many ministries and programs supported by the Catholic Charity Appeal, **Special Religious Education (SPRED)** is of great importance, serving children and adults with developmental disabilities. Along with their families, persons with disabilities are offered sacramental preparation and community formation in a comfortable liturgical setting.

“Our main goal is for all persons with disabilities to be integrated into our liturgical experience like everyone else.” -Irma I. Rodríguez, Director of Apostolate for People with Disabilities

Originated in 1980 in the Diocese of Providence, SPRED, an international ministry, assists parishes in deepening the faith of persons with disabilities, helping them fully participate in the work and liturgical life of the church. Each participant in the program is prepared for full participation in the Holy Mass, and becomes integrated into the larger faith community.

Research and experience prove that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are educable in faith, if faith is seen as experiential. They can realize, sense and experience the sacred, Church and God. SPRED offers them this experiential education, providing the opportunity for engagement in the Church community.



A Deaf Parishoner at Assumption Church (Providence)

The diocesan SPRED office helps to awaken a desire in parishioners to reach out and welcome persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities into the life of the parish. And as a resource to the parishes, SPRED provides training, observation, a curriculum, SPRED Newsletters, enrichment opportunities, mentoring, supervision and a network of support to catechists and families as a lifelong experience of Faith Development.

Age-appropriate curriculum and catechetical training are provided to prepare persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities for the reception of The Sacraments of Initiation and Reconciliation in their parish.



Michael D'Spirito's First Communion
at Saint Anthony's Church in Woonsocket

SPRED catechesis allows persons with disabilities inclusion in the local Church experience of worship, providing opportunities for each individual to share and witness faith among parish members. This inclusion in our parishes is not only a sacramental program but provides Faith Development as a lifelong experience.

SPRED catechesis combines the Method *Vivre*, with Symbolic catechesis and Montessori elements, leading one to develop a sense of the sacred, a sense of the Church, a sense of the Christ and a sense of God. The process used helps each one to enter into communion with Jesus Christ within the Christian community of faith.

The National Directory for Catechesis states:

“Persons with disabilities...are integral members of the Christian community. All persons with disabilities have the capacity to proclaim the Gospel and to be living witnesses to its truth within the community of faith and offer valuable gifts. Their involvement enriches every aspect of Church life.

Persons with disabilities are not just the recipients of catechesis, they are also its agents.

All persons with disabilities or special needs should be welcomed in the Church. Every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness.”

“Speaking as a mom of an autistic son, SPRED brings together sensory experiences that he loves—quiet time, music, community time. He loves church and equates SPRED with church, so he enjoys Mass. He knows the time at SPRED is his time and always looks forward to going.”

-Linda Lawrence

“The structure and the routine of the SPRED program is so wonderful that the kids fall into it. The love of God is evident in all we do together.”

Deborah Sullivan

“SPRED has been wonderful with both our children, Franchesca and Brandon, in so many ways, especially with their Sacraments of Communion and Confirmation. They both truly enjoy and look forward to going on Saturday mornings. The entire SPRED community is fabulous. We are very grateful.”

DeAngelo Family

Prayer for Inclusion

Creator God, we are your people. We look to the future with optimism and with faith in You, as we pursue our call to provide justice and fullness of life for all people with disabilities.

We pray that every man, woman and child may develop their potential and meet You in themselves and in one another.

May we enjoy a totally welcoming community, with You as our center, joined hand in hand with our sisters and brothers.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Based on the Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities

SPRED responds to the needs of individuals on the Autism Spectrum, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Seizure Disorders, as well as other diagnosis. If you would like to learn more about SPRED, please contact Irma I. Rodríguez, Director, the Apostolate for People with Disabilities, by calling 401-278-4578 or by emailing irodriguez@dioceseofprovidence.org.