

## “...a future not our own”

### ***Resurrection Envisions the Future of Spiritual Growth***

Tony Pichler, Mission Outreach Director, Resurrection Parish

On March 1, 2023, the entire leadership team from Resurrection Catholic Parish attended Envision’s ***World Futures Day*** at the KI Center in downtown Green Bay. Our minds were stretched as we learned more about artificial intelligence, bots that can create a speech and so much more, and other futuristic changes that were predicted on the *Jetsons* cartoon show sixty years ago. Yet, as our team listened, engaged, and grew, the same questions came to each and every one of us: Where is the *spiritual* in these signals of change? What does the future hold for religion, spirituality, and institutions and communities like ours that promote spiritual growth and development?

Six leaders from our community were invited to come to the table to discuss the signals of change for the world of religion and spirituality and strategize future steps necessary to move into that emerging reality. The team of trained Strategic Foresight futurists included:

Fr. Tom Reynebeau, Pastor of Resurrection Catholic Parish

Karmen Lemke, Director of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Green Bay

Dave Wegge, Ph.D., President of Wegge Strategic Research, Inc., and Past President of Envision Greater Green Bay

Fr. Paul Demuth, Senior Pastor for the Diocese of Green Bay and former President of Envision Greater Green Bay

Kevin DeCleene, Deacon of Resurrection Catholic Parish

Tony Pichler, Mission Outreach Director for Resurrection Catholic Parish

We wanted to build on the momentum of *World Future’s Day*. The goal of the group was to create a complementary experience to *World Futures Day*, but one focusing on the future of spirituality and religion in our world.

The Resurrection Parish team also was interested in continuing the upward thrust of *rising toward loving all God’s people all the time*, the parish mission statement that evolved from the Strategic Foresight training the parish team had attended in the spring of 2022. As part of the work from that training, the Resurrection Core team created a domain map that included various segments of the community. We focused primarily on the unchurched, divorced, people of color, women and LGBTQ persons in our community who feel excluded from any faith community, including from our own.

Envisioning a transformational future of a completely open and loving community, based on the ministry and lifestyle of Jesus, the parish set out to have an impact, not only on the Green Bay community, but well beyond that boundary – to the world. That future included a focus on *people*. Reflecting on *World Future’s Day* in March, it seemed that the connection between technology and how it affects us as human beings was not fully developed. Rather, technology

– and technological advances that had the potential to diminish the unique and central role of the human person – seemed to be the thrust of the day. If loving all God’s people all the time is our mission, our reason for existence as a parish community, how could we hold these two values together at the same time—technological advancement and the unique place of the human person in God’s creation?

What was needed was a unique opportunity dedicated to the exploration of the future of religion and spirituality: What does our future look like? What are the signals of change that indicate what that future evolution will look like? Finally, what would a day include that fits the needs of both groups—the community leaders who have a focus on the future through the scanning of signals of change, and the parish leadership team that has an eye on loving all God’s children all the time?

Through some brainstorming, networking, and good, old-fashioned hard work, the team developed a line-up of speakers for a morning at Resurrection Catholic Parish that would be called *Spirituality Future’s Day: Prophets of a Future Not Our Own. Whatsoever You Do, Inc.*, the local non-profit whose aim is to build a community of love through relationships of outreach, was solicited to serve as an event co-sponsor with Resurrection Catholic Parish.

The fruits of this labor were realized when *The Spirituality Future’s Day: Prophets of a Future Not Our Own* was held at Resurrection Catholic Parish on Thursday, October 12, with nearly 70 people in attendance.

Deacon Kevin DeCleene provided a welcome and prayer. The theme of the day, *Prophets of a Future Not Our Own*, came directly from the prayer, written by Fr. Ken Untener, later Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw, which ultimately became known as *The Romero Prayer*, named for Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was martyred at the altar in El Salvador. In the prayer Untener writes: “We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need future development...We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.” These words were fitting for a day in which our topic was the future, not knowing where religion and spirituality will be a decade or two from now.

Dave Wegge led off the presentations with an overview of Strategic Foresight (SF). He examined the trends in religion and spirituality and pointed out how SF provides a framework for scanning for signals of changes while allowing organizations and communities to develop plausible futures. Is the future of religion and spirituality one of decline and collapse? Or is there a hope for transformation? Wegge’s presentation provided a foundation for the day that served the audience well.

The keynote speaker, Fr. Ed Foley, Capuchin, professor emeritus of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, was next on the agenda. Using a little-known term, *chaordic*, Fr. Ed explained that the world of religion and spirituality is in such a state—between chaos and order. It is “chaordic.” He described our current age as liquid, not solid. Therefore, our church needs to be

a liquid church, one that responds to the needs of our world and our times in a fluid manner. Ultimately, Fr. Ed pointed out, the church needs to be a bridge builder between religion and humanity, and between humanity and God, because the church and religion are for people, for all of humanity.

The morning ended with two people who are currently actively ministering in various church roles to add their perspectives as religious and community leaders. Reverend Bridget Flad Daniels, pastor of Union Congregational United Church of Christ, spoke about her image of the church as a Hummel collector's piece. While the pieces were precious to a previous generation, the current generation holds the collector's items with little inherent value. What the church needs is a big garage sale to rid ourselves of the collector's pieces that hold no value in our current age.

Deacon Steve Meyer, Chief Strategy Officer at The Karma Group as well as deacon at his church of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, concluded the morning's line-up. Similar to Bridget's message, Steve called for us to let go of old beliefs, old structures, and old practices. As he stated, we all want to get to heaven. The problem is that no one wants to die. Some things need to die. The trajectory is a move away from institutions and toward a desire to go out and be for the people.

Finally, Fr. Tom Reynebeau, pastor of Resurrection Catholic Parish, concluded the day with a message of hope. He challenged those gathered to be agents of change. Rather than continuing to live the definition of insanity, to keep doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results, he challenged us to be people of action. We are called to *do* church – to *be* church.

*Our Spirituality Future's Day: Prophets of a Future Not Our Own* gathering served as a catalyst to change. The morning equipped participants with a lens and vision to scan the landscape of our culture for signals of change, to be open to the changes as they appear and are necessary for growth, and to become people for others, a church on the move, and change agents for the future.

What happens next? Fifteen key leaders who attended the Spirituality Future's Day are convening at the *Whatsoever You Do* House of Hospitality on Thursday, November 9, to discuss take-aways from the Spirituality Future's Day and next steps that will help us enact a positive future for religion and spirituality. This group will be charged with planting some additional seeds, watering them, and tending them so that a transformational future for religion and spirituality will be possible. We ARE prophets of a future not our own! Now we go into the future with hope!