

VISIONING AND CREATING OUR SHARED FUTURE by Sr. Brenda Walsh, O.P. (Racine Dominican)

In recent times, reading the daily news does not offer much hope. As people of faith, we need to articulate a vision for a more hopeful and sustainable future for all God's people.

Creating a vision of our shared future is not only the work of creative people from various fields of research and discovery, but it is also the responsibility of each one of us to contribute to shaping, sharing and living the vision of a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

I believe the most important element is to reclaim our spiritual heritage and gifts that give deep meaning to life and are a source of motivation and energy to work for the common good, not only locally but globally. This will give us hope that "a different world is possible" and definitely within our reach. Spiritual and moral values are not a separate department of life. They are an integral part of every phase and aspect of our lives. They will help us create a world that is less grasping and fearful, less hateful and polarized, less power-hungry and revengeful, and more caring, compassionate, just and peaceful. People of all ages and cultures are searching for hope, meaning and purpose in life. Choosing an integral path can offer opportunities for all to get involved, including children and youth, in creating such a future.

Other important aspects of visioning and creating a shared future must include the following:

ENGAGING THE WISDOM OF ELDERS

There is a growing population of older adults that can offer and use their gifts to restore balance and harmony, as well as a concern for the common good to a world often sharply divided by power and greed and lacking hope, meaning and purpose.. At a recent Global Conference on Aging, participants heard a strong call from Irene Hoskins, president of the International Federation on Aging, to policy makers to think in terms of building a society for all ages that allows elders to participate in all aspects of life and to offer their wisdom and experience in a variety of ways. Such an approach would give a new understanding of themselves to the older population and enable them to live safe, happy and productive lives.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN SHAPING THE FUTURE

Involving young people is another very important aspect of futuring. How we approach them is critical to our success. Do we see and approach them as people who have ideas and gifts to offer, and not just view them as problems to be solved? Do we listen to their agenda, their hopes and longing, and then find ways in which they can share across generations, in various aspects of life. All across the country and in other nations, large crowds of youth are gathering to find a meaningful spirituality as well as ways to get involved in serving the most vulnerable populations and improving their lives.

Engaging youth in this way will help them be part of a growing movement to make our world more respectful, compassionate and just. This will also benefit young people to gain a sense of purpose and of making a meaningful contribution to a hope-filled future for all people.

They can use the arts – poetry, music and art – to express the future and engage people of all generations in the effort.

INCLUDING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

We also need to include the vulnerable populations in our society and allow them to contribute to the shaping of a positive future for all people. Often we have labeled and excluded them from positive participation in daily living. They are not just cheaters, loafers, or a burden on society. Moving in this direction will call all of us to be people of a second chance and create a space for gifts and talents of young people. All have a vital role to play.

INCLUDING PEOPLE OF ALL CULTURES AND WOMEN

Connecting across cultures and creeds will lead to a broadening of our vision and enable all to share a rich cultural heritage. Such an effort will require us to address racism and prejudice in its many forms, personal and institutional. By growing in understanding, we can begin to look at new ways of solving problems in peaceful ways and not just think of war and violence as the first option and way of responding.

Women also need to be involved in all aspects of futuring. In many cultures, they are viewed as second class citizens and given subordinate roles to play. Both feminine and masculine gifts are needed to bring balance and wholeness to our world, and to grow beyond the model of domination to one of partnership. This too will demonstrate that “another world is possible.”

INCLUDING ALL OF CREATION:

Mapping a future for study and practice must also include the whole of creation. We are on the verge of environmental destruction because of our style of living and relating.

Care for earth and responsible stewardship of the earth's resources is essential to our very survival. Appreciating the beauty and wonder of nature can add to joy and peace in our world.

In conclusion, we have the ability to change the tide of the time. The question is: "Do we have the individual and political will to bring about a future that is whole and hope-filled for all people." Let us begin today courageously, believing that "another world is indeed possible." As believing people, let us live what we hope to accomplish.