



Spirituality in the 21st Century A Brief History

Prairiewoods' signature annual event was initiated by Karen Flottmeier, FSPA, in 2001 and continued by Ann Jackson, PBVM, from 2003–2013 and by Laura A. Weber, Ph.D., from 2014–2023. Each speaker has approached *Spirituality in the 21st Century* as a way to enlighten and engage participants about the ways in which our new understandings of the Universe Story impact how we discover the Divine in the world and understand our role as humans. This unfolding of the meaning of the Universe Story is a major way in which Prairiewoods gives public voice to the depth and scope of the Prairiewoods mission.

2001 *Story and Spiritual Consciousness* John Shea
Stories from Scripture tell of a living God, a God of relationship, of community. God invites us to a mature relationship, one centered on freedom and concern for the common good.

2002 *Awaken and Embody the Celtic Spirit* Joyce Rupp
The ancient Celts were a people who found the sacred in almost every aspect of life. They celebrated this with awe, joy and gratitude through song, poetry and storytelling.

2003 *Spirituality for the Third Millennium* Diarmuid O'Murchu
A spirituality that does not befriend our world and the God who is creating within that world leaves us with a sense of alienation and exile. By outgrowing some of our previous mindsets regarding God and the world, we build bridges between the sacred and the secular.

2004 *Spirituality in the 21st Century* Brother Wayne Teasdale
Interspirituality is a world-changing force made possible by the openness of people who have a viable spiritual life as well as the capacity to commit to the inner search across traditions. There are ways to live one's own personal faith in a mature way that includes orientation and dialogue with other faith traditions. Mysticism is a direct, immediate experience of the Divine Presence, and this experience is meant for all people.

2005 *Setting the Table in a Divided World* Father Joseph Nassal
The table symbolizes God's desire that we live in communion with people. Reconciliation is about restoring relationships. It reflects our desire to live in right relationship—the Hebrew understanding of *Shalom*—with God, with one another, with all of creation. Reconciliation encourages us to recognize the spirit/image of God in oneself and in each person.

2006 *Seeking Wisdom: A Feminine Approach to Healing the Planet* Elaine Prevallet, SL
We face many challenges as we try to listen to Wisdom, as we integrate Scripture, theology and the new cosmology into our faith and our sense of Christian identity. This includes how the discoveries of modern science affect our world view and change the way we relate to one another with a new sense of solidarity and collaboration for the good of the whole.

- 2007 *A Tale of Two Christianities: The Church in the 21st Century* Marcus Borg
Another way of seeing Christianity in the light of an “emerging paradigm” has been developing for over a hundred years and has recently become a major grassroots movement within mainline denominations. Positively, it is the product of Christianity’s encounter with the modern and postmodern world, including science, historical scholarship, religious pluralism and cultural diversity.
- 2008 *What’s Really Going on in the Universe? Evolution and Faith: What is at Stake?* John Haught
Our religious ancestors knew nothing about biological evolution. Scientific discoveries have provided a plausible understanding of God that is consistent with traditional beliefs and core ethical aspirations. Our understanding of God can be consistent with the reality of evolution.
- 2009 *An Invitation to Radical Amazement* Ilia Delio, OSF
A fundamental evolutionary shift is occurring in human consciousness. Our spiritual lives are enriched with new images for reflection on the Holy, new metaphors for understanding the significance of our lives. Persons who live in what may be called *unitive consciousness* live in the awareness that “all is one.”
(*This was the year in which Judy Cannato was invited to speak on An Invitation to Radical Amazement. Judy could not keep this commitment because of illness.*)
- 2010 *God, Jesus, Prayer and Ritual in the New Universe Story* Michael Morwood
In understanding God and coming to know Jesus, we receive challenging and significant insights as we consider the implications of an expanding universe. Our expanded image of God, always present and everywhere active in an unfolding universe, draws us into new ways of praying. We no longer address a God who is elsewhere.
- 2011 *A Point of Divergence: Connecting the Dots, Reconnecting with God* Barry Donaghue, cfc, & Sara Thomsen
A new point of divergence helps us move into the future in a way that tunes us back into our own life and the living universe. We re-connect with God through both science and the spirituality of the poets.
- 2012 *Coming of Age in the Milky Way: Spiritual Transformation and Creative Hope* Father John Heagle
Evolutionary spirituality is not a passing theological fad. It is the context of today and of all our tomorrows—the agenda that the cosmos itself is revealing. The transformative path of evolution leads us clearly toward deeper awareness and reflective consciousness. We are challenged to take responsibility for the care of the earth, to be compassionate toward all our sisters and brothers.
- 2013 *Engaging Community, Narrating Change* Walter Brueggemann, Peter Block, John McKnight & Barbara McAfee
We have a path to a better future, one that emerges out of community, neighborliness and vision for the common good. It is possible to co-create an abundant, sustainable community, restoring a citizen society rather than a consumer society. Relationships are at the core.
- 2014 *Rooted in Compassion: Cosmology, Eco-justice and Empathic Wisdom* Marc Ian Barasch & Drew Dellinger
Compassion is the holy impetus for reaching out and connecting with all that is rooted in our common humanity. This is a time of changing paradigms. Domination and subjugation are being replaced with eco-centric awareness, human rights and circles of collaboration. This is the Ecozoic Era when our great work is to join in renewing Earth, to spend our energies for healthier soil, air and water. We welcome the wisdom found at the heart of many spiritual, religious and philosophical traditions to find a common path in this human journey.

2015 *Evolutionary Consciousness: Somewhere to Begin*

Gail Worcelo, CP, & Sara Thomsen

In the face of devastated ecosystems, mass extinction of species, polluted water reservoirs, unbreathable air, toxic Earth repositories, rampant poverty, violence and terror, how do we begin to do the great work of renewing the face of Earth? Like caterpillars undergoing the astounding metamorphosis from imaginal cells to butterflies bursting forth from the cocoon, we actualize our evolutionary potential. When we go to the edges of evolving consciousness on behalf of Earth and all Earth's creatures, we find somewhere to begin. We find hope.

2016 *Everyone in the Circle: Toward a Spirituality of Inclusivity*

Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC, & Peter Mayer

What challenges are involved in discerning and adopting a spirituality for the 21st century, embracing the cosmic and planetary horizons that engage us at this time? The Gospel call to radical inclusion compels believers to widen their circles of trust and compassion in times of crisis and desperate need. Reflecting the "Pope Francis effect" from his eco-encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, the call to radical inclusion extends even further—to ALL members of the global community. It is a universal plea, mirroring the complex, inter-connected relationships of the web of life throughout the universe. We need everyone in the circle to celebrate life to its fullest!

2017 *Consciousness & Christogenesis: Mind, Matter & Emerging Wholeness*

Ilia Delio, OSF, & Sara Thomsen

The spirit, philosophy and intellectual genesis of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, continues to offer hope as well as challenge to the human community today as evolutionary consciousness becomes more recognized. In the process of evolution, we are being drawn forward into a deeper understanding of the Cosmic Christ and the expanding of consciousness that is taking place within the human community. Our journey forward rests on how we learn to live in a universe that is inter-connected and alive.

2018 *Cosmic Spirit: Planetary Spirituality for All*

Miriam Therese Winter & Sara Thomsen

We live in a quantum universe and are now experiencing a major shift in consciousness, a shift difficult to explain, a paradoxical shift. Elements of this shift involve our understanding of the Sacred and how God is at work within the world. Our minds have been opened to a new concept: paradox merging with doxology, hence *Paradoxology*, the linking of spirituality with science. We now live out our own sacred stories within a newly emerging global consciousness. We are being invited by the Spirit, the living God, to connect with one another and to become co-creators of our common future.

2019 *Living in the Mangle: Coming to Life in a World Alive*

Bayo Akomolafe, Charles Eisenstein & Sara Thomsen

In this time of chaos and uncertainty, we are struggling to find our way into a new way of being. A new story is emerging, one in which we are full participants. It requires engagement in an emerging spirituality, a growth in consciousness allowing us to overcome our destructive estrangement from one another. As we journey together through this liminal time, we open ourselves to the new story, a celebration of inter-connection and inter-being.

2020 *Courting the World Soul*

Sharon Blackie & Sara Thomsen

The old mythologies and philosophies of the West are rich and complex, offering unique gifts to each of us. We are invited to uncover our own part in the unfolding of the World Soul through our own relationship with and participation in our beautiful animate Earth. Learning to venture more deeply into the dark forest of our own psyche/soul where we must let go of what is lost or a hindrance to our growth, we also learn to engage the mythic imagination and explore pathways to "court the World Soul (*Anima Mundi*)."
Imagination is the conduit and key to soul-making. When we cultivate our imaginative practices, we enter more fully into the complex fabric of spiritual deepening and transformation.

2021 *Flaring Forth into Fullness of Life*

David Abram, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Kathleen Rude
& Sara Thomsen

Prairiewoods celebrates its 25th Anniversary year with a comprehensive sweep of our eco-centric approach to spirituality. Focusing on the Universe Story (Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim), we trace the arc of Prairiewoods' founding impetus, placing the universal principles of "interiority, diversity and communion" at the center of our spiritual awareness through the emergent cultivation of "active hope," ala the work of eminent eco-philosopher Joanna Macy (Kathleen Rude), toward the exploration and nurturing of the wider "We" (David Abram). From Prairiewoods' founding until 2021, our mission has been framed with the Universe Story, a 13.7-billion-year journey that celebrates the wild fecundity of life from the Great Flaring Forth forward. As the story continues to unfold, we recognize, celebrate and lean more intentionally into the fullness of life, the journey of the universe that Berry called a "single gorgeous celebratory event."

2022 *Spirituality & Stories of the Land*

Jim Enote & Sara Thomsen

Jim Enote, CEO of the Colorado Plateau Foundation, farmer, Zuni tribal member and thought leader, explores the deep resonance of interior (spiritual) mapping with the land's own stories. Jim's tradition offers a spellbinding account of creation from the perspective of tribal lands, where its deep time journey weaves tales of mysterious emergence, intersecting with humanity's journey of discovery of its embeddedness in the tale of creation. While listening to the land's own stories, we encounter our own interior meanderings, mountains of transformative insight, rivers of energetic flow, forests of profound wonderment, and fissures of fierce brokenness. How the land shifts and groans, wanders and erupts, caresses and lulls, attracts and terrifies is all part of our understanding of our BIG story, the Universe Story and our wider "We."

2023 *Weaving a New Story of Meaning*

Jeremy Lent & Sara Thomsen

Author and integrator Jeremy Lent, described by *Guardian* journalist George Monbiot as "one of the greatest thinkers of our age," helps us explore compelling questions such as: *Who am I? Where am I? What am I? How should I live? Why am I?* and *Where are we going?* We begin with a brief introduction regarding how we construct our worldviews. Then we explore the implications of a worldview of deep interconnectedness and discuss an integrated framework for well-being and spiritual groundedness.