

# **Presidential Remarks**

## **Women's Power Breakfast, benefiting Gleaners Community Food Bank**

**May 3, 2022**

- Good morning, and thank you for this special opportunity to talk about the collective power of women in philanthropy at this....the Women's Power Breakfast, an annual event that's been held since 1994.
- While this morning, some of us are in person and some of us are meeting virtually, I think all of us feel a special and close bond to each other and a deep connection to the mission of Gleaners Community Food Bank.
- The work of Gleaners, its partners and the many volunteers is inspiring....
  - Each of us knows, when you have a relationship with Gleaners, you are privileged to act in a deliberate and purposeful way to improve the living conditions for people in southeastern Michigan, and beyond.
- When considering this group of women who are gathering today, I am in such awe of your enormous passion, dedication and commitment to making a difference in the lives of others, regardless of where you have come from and the work that you do.
- The range of the women gathered here is incredibly impressive.

- Each of you has had an important impact in your respective professional fields and in your personal lives.
- But all of us have much more in common than our individual achievements.
- We share a passion for caring about the “common good” and we share a belief that we have a responsibility for each other...and that we can and must make a difference in the world around us.
- My own mother grew up in extreme starvation and barely had enough food to survive her childhood.
  - And, it has caused me to wonder.....what is the difference between those people who have more than enough to eat ——— each and every day — and those who do not.
- Have you ever really thought about what differentiates you from someone who really needs your help?
  - Were you born to the “right” parents and was that other person born to the ‘wrong’ parents?
  - Were you born in the “right” country and that person born in the “wrong” country?
  - Were you born speaking English and that person born speaking another language?
  - Were you born with a light skin color or dark skin color?
  - Were you born with “good health” and that person was born with “poor health” or a disability?

- Was your family generous and kind and was that person born into an abusive family?
- What are the underlying causes that contribute to hunger, poverty, and disease in America and around the world?
- We often claim that the causes include a lack of education, economic disparities, dislocation from homelands, wars and other violent conditions, including catastrophic natural disasters and environmental injustice.
- But, at the end of the day, any one of us – our parents or our children – could have been hungry or homeless...
  - ....and, although it might seem hard to imagine, the distance between YOU and THEM is a very short one.
  - For me, it is one generation.
  - Were it not for the generosity of starving neighbors who shared the little food they had with my widowed grandmother and her four little children (one of whom was my mother), I would not be here today.
- Gene Gonya, who co-founded Gleaners in 1977, which, at the time was one of the first food banks in America, made it his life's mission to feed the hungry. What began with Gleaner's plan to solicit, store and distribute food has become a blueprint that has been followed across the country.

- The people of Gleaners believe that the problem of hunger in America can be solved. The basic principle behind Gleaner's is faith in the "possible" and a commitment to humanity. It's a faith rooted in making a difference. And, they have developed an incredibly efficient and effective method to run a food bank.
  
- The principles of Gleaner's reflect a faith in the possible, and a commitment to humanity. It's a faith rooted in making a difference.
  
- The Gleaners principles include:
  - A belief that people are worth investing in...
  
  - A belief that "child" and "hunger" are two words that should never go together...
  
  - 
  - A belief that everyone benefits from a hunger-free community...
  
  - A belief that real change takes courage...
  
  - A belief that complex problems take collaborative solutions...
  
  - A belief in the dignity of every person in the community...
  
- While these beliefs reflect a faith in the possible and a commitment to humanity, we must be realistic – the status quo is not acceptable.
  - Too many people DO go hungry...

- Too many people in need ARE ignored...
  - Too often we do not take the time to FOCUS on improving our communities...
- But working together, we can DO something about hunger, homelessness and poverty.
- More money must flow to those organizations on the frontlines of making sure people are fed, and do not go hungry.
- While addressing these underlying causes can be complex, there is another path to deal directly with the injustice of poverty and hunger in the communities around us.
- And that is simply by making “feeding the hungry” a priority....just like it is the priority at Gleaners.
- We must realize that our leadership, actions, words and philanthropy can inspire people to give whatever they can to benefit those who are hungry, and who, often, are unaware of when their next meal may come.
- We don't have to look far for our inspiration.

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- You are my inspiration.
- Our leadership is needed so we can raise awareness and money to support nonprofit organizations that are working tirelessly to address the myriad needs of those in need.....

- ...organizations like Gleaners, which has built the model of collaboration connecting with more than 550 partners in feeding families in Detroit and the surrounding area.

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- Imagine what will be accomplished when we act collectively in our philanthropic efforts.
- Around the world, women philanthropists are leading in big and bold ways.
- The headlines focus on extraordinary contributions of philanthropists like Melinda Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Mackenzie Scott, and Laurene Powell Jobs.
- Great wealth certainly makes a big impact.
- But the beginning of becoming a philanthropist who is determined to make a difference comes with imagining a more just world.
- And, it doesn't start with those who have GREAT wealth....it starts with YOU!
- Those of us who are engaged in philanthropic causes and campaigns know that effective philanthropy is not what you give but the way in which you give.
- Each of us must be a catalyst and influencer.
- There is wisdom in the simple, often-repeated phrase:
  - Be the change you want to see in the world.

- Your philanthropy is an investment that will give you joy by knowing the difference you make in the world.
- When you find your joy in philanthropy, an amazing thing happens: You discover that it deepens your soul.... and your humanity.

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- Today's Gleaner's Women's Power Breakfast.... comes with a challenge that may not be so subtle.
- If each of us is indeed a woman with power, then the question is: What are we going to do with ALL THAT POWER?
  - If you believe people are worth investing in...
  - If you believe change takes courage...
  - If you believe complex problems take collaborative solutions...
  - ...and if you believe in the dignity of every person in the community...then the answer is obvious.
- Your philanthropy is an extension of your values....
- And the best measure of your power and our collective power is what you do with it!
- I challenge each and every one of you to use your power to make someone else's world better. When you do, your world will be better too!
- Thank you.

