

## LCWR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AWARD

Acceptance Speech by Anita Baird, DHM

August 10, 2018

THANK YOU, THERESA. GOOD EVENING!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY! TO GOD BE THE GLORY! TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE THINGS GOD HAS DONE!

I CANNOT BEGIN TO GRASP THE REALITY OF MY STANDING HERE BEFORE YOU IN ALL HUMILITY AND AWE AS I ACCEPT THE 2018 LCWR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AWARD.

I WOULD NEVER HAVE DREAMT THAT I WOULD BE NUMBERED AMONG SUCH PROPHETIC WOMEN AS JANET MOCK, PAT FARRELL, ELIZABETH JOHNSON, SANDRA SCHNEIDERS, AND JOAN CHITTISTER, TO NAME JUST A FEW, WHO HAVE RECEIVED THIS HONOR.

MY FIRST THOUGHT WAS, "WHY ME"? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO RECEIVE SUCH AN HONOR?

MY SECOND THOUGHT WAS TRULY INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND **SHE SAID...YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO RECEIVE THIS HONOR ON BEHALF OF ALL THE BLACK WOMEN RELIGIOUS ON WHOSE SHOULDERS YOU STAND.**

THEREFORE, IT IS IN THEIR NAMES THAT I HUMBLY ACCEPT.

NO ONE COMES TO SUCH A MOMENT AS THIS ON THEIR OWN. SCRIPTURE TELLS ME THAT: **"ALL THE DAYS ORDAINED FOR ME WERE WRITTEN IN YOUR BOOK BEFORE ONE OF THEM CAME TO BE."**

IT WAS ORDAINED BY GOD THAT MY ANCESTORS WOULD KEEP THE FAITH DURING THE MIDDLE PASSAGE, THE BRUTALITY OF

SLAVERY, THROUGH CATASTROPHIC DISPLACEMENT AND OPPRESSION, AND FROM JIM CROW LAWS AND LYNCHINGS TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT...TRUSTING IN THE GOD OF THE OPPRESSED TO HEAR THEIR CRY AND TO SET HIS PEOPLE FREE.

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT I WAS BORN TO ROBERT AND MARCELLA, WHO GAVE ME UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, SACRIFICED TO GIVE ME A CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND RAISED ME TO WALK HUMBLLY WITH MY GOD.

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT ALTHOUGH BORN INTO THE LUTHERAN FAITH THAT I WOULD CONVERT TO CATHOLICISM AT THE AGE OF SEVEN AND ENTER RELIGIOUS LIFE.

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT I WOULD JOIN THE SOCIETY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE HEART OF MARY, A CONGREGATION FOUNDED IN 1791 TO LIVE OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ALL KINDS OF SITUATIONS WITHOUT HABIT OR CLOISTER; KNOWN AND UNKNOWN AS RELIGIOUS IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD, SERVING IN 31 COUNTRIES ON FIVE CONTINENTS.

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT I WOULD PREACH GOD'S WORD. AS MY BELOVED AUNT, FELICE GAINES, TOLD ME BEFORE SHE WENT HOME TO THE LORD THAT I WAS CALLED TO PREACH. WHEN I TOLD HER THAT WOMEN DID NOT PREACH IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, SHE SAID...

" I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE CATHOLIC FAITH BUT THIS I DO KNOW. IF GOD HAS CALLED YOU AND ANOINTED YOU, YOU MAY NOT PREACH IN THE PULPIT, BUT YOU WILL PREACH ON THE STREET CORNER FOR GOD'S WORD WILL NOT BE SILENCED. AND I HAVE TRULY BEEN BLESSED TO PREACH THE WORD OF GOD IN CATHOLIC PULPITS AROUND THE COUNTRY.

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT CARDINAL FRANCIS GEORGE WOULD APPOINT ME TO SERVE AS HIS CHIEF OR STAFF AND LATER AS THE FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE, WORKING ARDUOUSLY TO ERADICATE SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO.

*FOR BEFORE I WAS FORMED IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB ALL MY DAYS WERE ORDAINED FOR ME AND WRITTEN IN THE MIND OF GOD BEFORE ONE OF THEM CAME TO BE.*

IT WAS ORDAINED THAT I WOULD BE THE VESSEL THAT GOD WOULD USE TO HONOR BLACK WOMEN RELIGIOUS THIS NIGHT.

FOR I AM THE SPIRITUAL DAUGHTER OF THE SERVANT OF GOD ELIZABETH LANGE; THE VENERABLE HENRIETTE DELILLE, AND MOTHER THEODORE WILLIAMS, WHO FOUNDED THE OBLATE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE, THE HOLY FAMILY SISTERS IN NEW ORLEANS, AND THE FRANCISCAN HANDMAIDS OF THE MOST PURE HEART OF MARY.

THESE VALIENT AND HUMBLE WOMEN TRUSTED IN THE LORD. PUTTING THEIR HANDS ON THE PLOUGH THEY NEVER TURNED BACK.

THEY AND THE WOMEN OF COLOR WHO FOLLOWED THEM BORE THE HEAT OF THE DAY, THE PAIN OF RACISM, SEGREGATION AND REJECTION. BUT THEY NEVER DESPAIRED. THEY TRUSTED IN THE LORD, BECAUSE AS THE OLD NEGRO SPIRITUAL SAYS, "THEY TOLD JESUS IT WOULD BE ALRIGHT IF HE CHANGED THEIR NAMES.

IT IS BECAUSE OF THEIR UNSWERVING FAITH IN A GOD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT I STAND HERE TODAY ALONG WITH ALL THE BLACK WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN THIS COUNTRY FILLED WITH GRATITUDE FOR THE LEGACY THAT IS OURS.

TWO WEEKS AGO, AN HISTORICAL EVENT TOOK PLACE IN NEW ORLEANS. THE NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE AND THE NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC CLERGY CAUCUS CELEBRATED OUR 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY.

FOUNDED IN 1968 SHORTLY AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLACK WOMEN RELIGIOUS CAME TOGETHER IN PITTSBURGH TO ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO THE URGENT NEED FOR THE CHURCH TO CONFRONT HER SIN OF RACISM AND TO EMBRACE HER CHILDREN EQUALLY. THEY CAME TOGETHER TO PROCLAIM A GOSPEL OF LIBERATION AND HOPE IN ANSWER TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S CALL TO WORK FOR JUSTICE.

IT WAS A BOLD AGENDA IN 1968 AND SADLY, IT IS STILL AN AGENDA THAT WE MUST CONTINUE TO WORK TO ACHIEVE IN 2018.

I KNOW THAT ON BEHALF OF SISTER ROBERTA FULTON, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE, AND OUR MEMBERS I CAN EXPRESS OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO LCWR FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND GENEROSITY.

AS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO RECEIVE THIS LEADERSHIP AWARD, YOU HONOR NOT ONLY ME BUT EVERY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN RELIGIOUS AS YOU BEAR WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT **BLACK RELIGIOUS LIFE MATTERS!**

AS WE HAVE GATHERED THESE PAST FEW DAYS WE HAVE BORNE WITNESS TO THE "PRESENCE OF LOVE" THROUGH "THE POWER OF COMMUNION."

IF OUR NATION AND WORLD HAS EVER NEEDED SUCH A POWERFUL WITNESS IT IS NOW, MY DEAR SISTERS.

I BELIEVE THAT THROUGH THE MANY YEARS OF JOURNEYING AND DISCERNING OUR FUTURE WE HAVE FINALLY FOUND OUR RAISON D' ETRE.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN OUR DARK WORLD AS WE NAME AND CLAIM THE SINS OF OUR DAY AND STAND AS THE PROPHETESSES OF OLD, CRYING OUT FOR JUSTICE.

I COMMEND LCWR FOR YOUR CONTINUING COMMITMENT IN ADDRESSING THE SIN OF RACISM THAT FOR TOO LONG HAS PLAGUED OUR CHURCH, OUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES AND OURSELVES.

WE MUST GIVE MORE THAN LIP SERVICE TO THIS HORRIBLE DISEASE. WE MUST BECOME SURGEONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS USING THE SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS OF OUR FAITH WITH GREAT PRECISION TO CUT OUT THIS CANCER THAT LIVES IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTINUE TO SEARCH YOUR HEARTS WITH COURAGEOUS HONESTY; SEARCH THE HEARTS OF YOUR COMMUNITIES; FIND THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS THAT NEED TO BE CHANGED.

SEEK THE FORGIVENESS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR THAT YOU HAVE FAILED TO SEE AS YOUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS...AS YOURSELVES.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO ACTIVELY INVITE WOMEN OF COLOR TO JOURNEY WITH YOU AS YOU SEEK TO BROADEN YOUR TENTS AND BEAR WITNESS TO "THE POWER OF COMMUNION."

WE MUST CONTINUE TO CRY OUT IN RIGHTEOUS ANGER WHEN THE LIVES OF YOUNG BLACK MEN AND WOMEN ARE GUNNED DOWN IN OUR STREETS AS LOUD AS WE DO WHEN AN INNOCENT

LIFE IS ABORTED IN THE WOMB; FOR ALL LIFE IS PRECIOUS...ALL LIFE BELONGS TO THE CREATOR.

WE MUST EMBRACE THE STRANGER AMONG US, THE NAMELESS BROWN AND BLACK FACES THAT CRY OUT IN DESPERATION TO BE FREE; TO BRING THEIR FAMILIES TO THIS COUNTRY IN SEARCH OF A BETTER LIFE.

LET OUR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND HOUSES BECOME SANCTUARIES OF HOPE FOR THE "HOLY FAMILIES" OF OUR DAY.

WE CANNOT RELENT OUR VIGILANT WATCH UNTIL EVERY FAMILY SEPARATED AT THE BORDER HAS BEEN REUNITED.  
REUNIR A LAS FAMILIAS!

BY THIS WE WILL BEAR WITNESS TO "THE PRESENCE OF LOVE AND THE POWER OF COMMUNION" IN OUR TIME.

AS WE ACCEPT THE CLARION CALL TO STAND IN SOLIDARITY AS ONE FAMILY WE ARE KEENLY AWARE THAT NO ONE STANDS ALONE. WE ALL BELONG TO LIFE'S INTRICATE CIRCLE OF BELONGING. WHETHER ITS FAMILY, FRIENDS OR SIMPLY THE PERSON, WHO EXTENDS THEIR HAND IN FRIENDSHIP ALONG THIS JOURNEY THAT WE CALL LIFE. ALL ARE PART OF GOD'S MASTER PLAN. SOME OF THOSE PEOPLE, WHO HAVE SUPPORTED ME ALONG THIS JOURNEY, ARE HERE TONIGHT AND I WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THANK THEM.

I WANT TO THANK THE DAUGHTERS OF THE HEART OF MARY, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO TRAVELED CROSS COUNTRY TO BE HERE TONIGHT TO SUPPORT ME. I CANNOT ADEQUATELY EXPRESS IN WORDS WHAT THEIR PRESENCE AND AFFIRMATION MEANS TO ME.

I WOULD ASK THEM TO PLEASE STAND.

I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE PRESENCE OF SISTER JOAN MCGLINCHY, VICAR FOR RELIGIOUS FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO, AND SISTER ROBERTA FULTON, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE. WOULD YOU PLEASE STAND?

I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE MY FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, WHO HAVE LOVED AND SUPPORTED ME UNCONDITIONALLY AND HAVE TRAVELLED FROM AS FAR AS CALIFORNIA AND TEXAS AND FROM RIGHT HERE IN ST. LOUIS TO BE WITH ME ON THIS VERY SPECIAL OCCASION. WILL MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS PLEASE STAND?

AND I WANT TO ESPECIALLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE WOMAN, WHO WAS MY SECOND GRADE TEACHER AT ST. ANSELM SCHOOL IN CHICAGO. IT WAS SHE, WHO, AS SISTER MARY DOLORITA, INSPIRED MY VOCATION AND NOW, AS JANICE SCHAFFER, IS ONE OF MY CLOSEST AND DEAREST FRIENDS. THANK YOU, JAN, FOR BEING HERE TONIGHT.

I ALSO WISH TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO JEANNIE MASTERSON, MARLENE WEISENBECK, DAWN TOMASZEWSKI AND MARY ANN ZOLLMAN FOR PLACING MY NAME IN NOMINATION; AND TO THE REGIONS AND THE NATIONAL BOARD OF LCWR FOR YOUR AFFIRMATION.

I AM ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL TO ANNMARIE SANDERS AND CHRISTINE BECKETT FOR THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT AND PATIENCE AS THEY GUIDED ME THROUGH THIS PROCESS.

ANNMARIE CAN TRULY WORK MIRACLES...TAKING THE FEW SCRAPS OF MY LIFE STORY AND TURNING IT INTO A BEAUTIFUL TASPESTRY FOR TONIGHT'S VIDEO PRESENTATION.

THANK YOU, ANNMARIE AND CHRISTINE.

TO ALL OF YOU, THE MEMBERS OF LCWR, I WANT TO EXPRESS MY DEEP APPRECIATION. YOU CONTINUE TO INSPIRE ME AS YOU LEAD YOUR CONGREGATIONS INTO A NEW DAY...RESHAPING AND RENEWING RELIGIOUS LIFE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PROPHETIC VISION AND WITNESS. THANK YOU FOR LETTING YOUR LIGHT SHINE THAT THE WORLD MIGHT OVERCOME THE DARKNESS AS YOU CONTINUE TO BE THAT VOICE OF HOPE FOR THE VOICELESS. MAY FUTURE GENERATIONS CALL YOU BLESSED.

FINALLY, LET ME END AS I BEGAN BY GIVING ALL PRAISE AND HONOR TO GOD FOR ALL BLESSINGS RECEIVED FOR LIKE MARY MY HEART IS OVERFLOWING WITH JOY AND...

**(SING MARY'S HYMN OF PRAISE)**

***TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE THINGS OUR GOD HAS DONE!***

THANK YOU!

###

**Anita Baird, DHM**