

Global Poverty Project
Dr. Beth Tyson Lofquist, Interim Provost
September 7, 2011

Good evening---My name is Beth Tyson Lofquist and I have the privilege of being WCU's Interim Provost.

I welcome you to the official launch of a campus wide initiative to assist in the termination of extreme poverty---The Global Poverty Project. In my 37 years of affiliation with WCU I don't think I have ever been so touched or so proud of a WCU initiative....the efforts to weave service, teaching, and scholarly activity into such a humane endeavor as the Global Poverty Project is at the core of what an engaged institution should be about.

But none the less I have really struggled with composing my remarks to you this evening. What do I know of extreme poverty?

I know that my mother dragged me as a small child to visit families in our community that she felt needed attention---many of these homes would be rat and flea infested, but we sat on that furniture anyway and visited like we were all somebody---and I learned that you needed money to be clean----and I learned that valuing human dignity did not cost money.

I know that reading Angela's Ashes, by Frank McCourt---one of the most powerful books I have ever read---depicted dire poverty from the viewpoint of a child. I learned the messages that are often sent to children about religion and love are so often the unintended messages---God loves and takes care of those that do good? Did Frank deserve his poverty at 4 years of age? What unintended messages did he receive about God and love?

I know that reading Ishmael, by Constance Quinn, people were categorized into two groups---givers and takers. I learned that one of my life's challenges is finding the balance of being a giver and a taker.

I know that teaching in a developing and impoverished country with 60 people in a classroom---a classroom meant for 25 people-- made me irritable and uncomfortable---and I learned that maybe the poverty that creates over crowdedness can also be a reason for crime and dissension.

No, I don't know extreme poverty first hand, but when I weave together these experiences in my own mind it causes me to pause and ask myself a fundamental question ----and I think we all need to ask it of ourselves: Is basic human care a right or a privilege? My answer to that question is that basic human care is a right---not a privilege ---and regardless of how people have found themselves in the situation of extreme poverty---it doesn't change their plight and it doesn't change my responsibility to help----that's how I've answered that question for myself. You have to answer that question for yourself.

I welcome you to exploring the human plight and your own personal beliefs about extreme poverty as part of your WCU experience....and I thank Hugh Evans, John Whitmire, Jennifer Cooper, The Global Poverty Project Steering Committee, our community members and all of you for this important journey of educational and personal development.