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.