

A Conversation

At

**LaSalle Street Church
Cornerstone Center, Leslie Hall
1111 N Wells Street, Chicago, IL**

October 30, 2014

My Identity, My Faith, My Relationships, My Actions

Recognition and Appreciation

I have the blessed honor this evening to recognize and express our profound appreciation to several individuals and groups: First, to Pastor Laura Truax, the elders and members of La Salle Street Church in Chicago for graciously affording us the privilege of hosting this book signing event of: “It Is Time for Change”; Second, to all of you distinguished personalities who have sacrificed to be present and participate tonight; Third, to Northwestern University’s Program of African Studies, where our son, Maavi Allen Norman is pursuing a PhD Degree, for sponsoring the refreshment for the occasion. Coincidentally, I am proud to share that Northwestern is my alma mater, where I was inspired to be an agent of positive change as I studied and attained a Master of Science Degree in School Counseling and Vocational Guidance in 1968. Fourth, to the Sagamore Institute for its committed partnership in our initiative as we establish the William R. Tolbert, Jr Foundation that promotes change while “building bridges” and “bridging gap” in the service of Liberia’s transformation. Last, but not

the least, to God, who promised to be present and help us in all situation, we give honor, praise and glory.

Warm Greetings

As mayor of Bentol City, it gives me pleasure to extend very warm greetings to you wonderful people, on behalf of the Council members of the Bentol City Corporation (BCC) and the people of beautiful Bentol, the capital City of Montserrado County, in Liberia. Be assured that , when it is convenient, we will be honored to host you in Bentol City where we will reciprocate your kindness while showing you the typical Liberian hospitality, Bentol style!

The Purpose of Today

We are here to celebrate the book: “It Is Time For Change” and to autograph copies for you honorable participants at this event. On occasions like these, usually I share testimonies about my life, my motivations and inspirations, or I give reflections about Liberia, highlighting its vulnerability and valuable achievements in history.

Today, I am moved to have a **conversation** about: Identity, Relationships/Partnerships, and Responsible Actions that Facilitate Positive Change.

Our conversation could be about the most popular topic in the world today, the microscopic virus called “ebola” and its related global crisis. “Ebola” has become synonymous with “Liberia” – the “epic center” of the ebola crisis today. Instead, I choose to be a non-conformist and direct our conversation to topics not generally discussed in public or professional settings.

Because of time constraints, guided by wisdom, courage and conviction, we will focus and proceed to the point of our conversation.

My Identity

My identity, which is based on my faith, not only helps me to maintain relationships, but also inspires my actions to be an agent of positive change and make a difference in life.

Today, I was introduced as having several identities or endowments. Indeed, I am the daughter of President William R. Tolbert, Jr., the grandson of an ex-slave from the United States of America, who became the 20th President of the Republic of Liberia, the first black Republic in Africa founded 167 years ago; who as he served as the President of the Baptist World Alliance (1965 to 1970), uniting Baptists on every continent resulting in an increased membership from 19 to 27 million by the end of his tenure ; who was the first and only black African leader invited to address the United States Joint Session of Congress in 1976 during the US Bi-Centennial Celebration. On that occasion, Tolbert challenged the US Congress to respond to CRISES in Liberia, Africa and the “Third World”; who also served as the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity in 1979. Yes! I am proud to be the daughter of a loving and great dad, who established a significant legacy that has inspired me and many others around the world.

My claim to fame is not that I am President Tolbert’s daughter. It is not that I am a renowned educator who co-founded the IADSM School in Paynesville, Liberia and founded an NGO called Restoration of Educational Advancement Programs (REAP) in Liberia. It is not that I am a social activist serving as an agent to positive change in society. My

ultimate claim to fame, my eternal identity, who I really am on the inside, is that: **“I am a Child of God”!**

All the other identifications of Christine Tolbert Norman have already or will come to pass one day. But, that I am a child of God is eternally established. It is this identity that gives me inner peace, self-confidence, assurance of my security and significance. It motivates me to love and serve others.

My parents and grandparents were people with a heritage of Faith; my dad was a devoted pastor. Their blessed gift of Faith, bestowed on me at an early age, has nurtured me throughout my life. It is my Faith, profound and unwavering, that has provided me the assurance, peace, strength and courage to endure crises over the years: the assassination of my dad in 1980, my imprisonment at that time, my state of destitution and time in exile from Liberia for over 20 years, my cancer experiences, and even to withstand the crises of today.

Relationships and Partnerships

That’s where relationship comes in this conversation. I believe that it is God who has provided for me some loving, caring, supportive and encouraging relatives and partners, including some of you here today. I am grateful to God for my husband, Laurence Cecil Norman who is here today, our children represented here by Maavi Allen Norman, our old friends and devoted partners, the Thompsons with their children, represented by the Molenhouse . (The Thompsons were missionaries who helped to establish the ELWA ministries in Liberia during the 1970,s. Today, ELWA is playing an outstanding roll in the fight against

ebola in Liberia). We are grateful for the presence of our Uncle Alex and Aunty Musu Gbayee (They have served Liberia and humanity sacrificially, as council general of Liberia in Chicago, since the 70's). We praise God for our dedicated helper and new partner, Heather Andrews, and all of you who have responded to our invitation and will become partners with our initiative.

While I believe it is God who brings us together to provide opportunities for relationships and partnerships, it is **OUR** responsibility to form them, to nurture them, to maintain and sustain them. To do so requires commitment. All relationships, all partnerships are based on mutual understanding and trust, on common values and principles.

All of us here this evening, we all are connected by a shared commitment and a conviction to transforming lives.

I have 2 short anecdotes about relationships that I'd like to share with you. The first pertains to my matriculation at Northwestern during the 1960's. It was because of friendship with, Dr. Dorothy June Newbery, my professor at Cuttington University College, who was my mentor. She recommended either going to Northwestern or the University of Chicago. For fears of being too close to Al Capone and gangs I heard were active on the South Side, I choose to go to Northwestern. I think it was a great choice. After 48 years, our son in at NW and we still enjoy a relationship.

The second incident occurred right before the 1980 coup. There was a very poor lady in our neighborhood with several children whose husband had deserted her. We helped her send one of her son to IADSM School and regularly provided assistance for her that helped to complete a small home, installing electricity and running water. She

constantly requested to a refrigerator. Finally on Friday, April 11, I gave her \$100.00 and offered to give her my jeep to pick up the refrigerator on Saturday morning. The military coup d'état happened that night. While hiding in bushes with my children, Maavi was only 8 months old, I was guided to go to this lady's home to seek shelter because I was certain that the soldiers wouldn't come searching there. When we arrived she welcomed us warmly and told us that immediately after hearing news over ELWA Radio, she took the \$100 that I had given her and went out and bought, rice, sugar, milk, coffee, and canned sardines for her family because she didn't know what was in store. She said to me, "Sister, if you had bought the refrigerator, we would have ice water to drink."

Since then and throughout my life, I have come to realize that when you do good for others, you are invariably doing good for yourself.

My relationships currently span the globe. And if it weren't for them, many of the initiatives and pursuits that I have undertaken wouldn't have come to pass. We really are a global village, and it certainly takes meaningful relationships to bring about and sustain progressive change.

My Call to Action

In my conversation, I have shared how my identity, that is based on my faith, not only helps me to maintain relationships and established partnerships, but also inspires my actions and initiatives to be an agent of positive change and to make a difference in transforming lives.

Whether for the love of God or Faith, or for the love of humanity or compassion for humankind, together, as faithful partners, we can take

action that will bring changes in the lives and situation and ultimately establish a good future for the people of Liberia.

In closing, I invite you to purchase copies of the book entitled: “It Is Time for Change,” that was first published in 2002 and republished in 2014. Some of the proceeds from sales will help support the Foundation. The book is an anthology of carefully selected speeches by Dr. Tolbert during his life, from 1934 when he was 21 old until 1980, at age 67 year. He was assassinated 2 days before he actually delivered that speech which was prepared and bound for distribution on April 14 at the centennial anniversary of the Liberian Baptist, Missionary and Educational Convention (LBMEC). His speeches offer some enlightenments, lessons and principles about the challenges confronting Liberia, Africa and the developing world while also providing inspiration for solutions

We also invite you to become a partner and patron of this noble initiative, geared to restoring the dignity of a people and nation.

As I close this conversation, I pray and trust that your life will be blessed with genuine, productive, and meaningful relationships.

Together, we can effect change. Together, we can make a difference in Liberia, in Africa... and in the world. **It Is Time For Change!**