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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
at the Covenant House Reception
Washington, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Nancy for that kind introduction, but more than that, for your leadership and concern on behalf of Covenant House and the children it is helping. Thank you, Your Eminence, for that prayer and for your leadership on behalf of issues affecting the children in this area. And thank you, Sister Mary Rose for your down-to-earth, common sense approach to reaching out to children, and giving them the support and love that they all need, even if they rebel against it.

I am delighted to be part of this celebration because that is what I think it is. All of us here this evening are here because we know that children, all children, not just those in our own families, or those whom we personally know, but every one of them is part of who we are as a nation, as a people.

I was pleased that the Cardinal referred to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, because I think too often, those of us who take a step back from our situation, and look at the problems in our country, despair, throw our hands up, think that there's really not much that can be done. And yet we know, and we've been told so many times, over and over again, through our own religious beliefs, through our own personal experiences, that love, and forgiveness, and help and that the kind of outreach that the Covenant House represents-- and that really that parable calls us to-- is always there for us to be part of.

I read an extraordinary narration about that parable, written by Andre Nowin (phonetic) that some of you may have read and know of, and there is much about that I commend to you, in line with the Cardinal's prayer, but there is a wonderful phrase that I have relied upon and think about so often, the "discipline of gratitude" -- and I think those of us who are here, we come from different backgrounds, we have different experiences, we may have different religious beliefs, and we certainly are not of the same mind about every issue of the moment, but we are bound together

in some way by the "discipline of gratitude" for our own lives, for the people who reached across and help us on our way.

Children today are burdened with more challenges than ever before. I sometimes wonder if I would be able to navigate adolescence and those difficult teenage years as well I was able to do, even with the support of a strong family, in today's times. That's why it is more important than ever that every one of our institutions, all of our families, all of our churches, all of our businesses, all of our civic organizations, every level of government be committed to making sure that as many children as possible are reached, and given the opportunity for safe passage to adulthood.

There is a great debate in our country today about the role of government, and it is in many ways, a false debate. Government is us. We are our government -- that's what it means to be a democracy. Government reflects who we are and what we believe, and government has a responsibility, acting on behalf of the rest of us, to help create the economic and social conditions that enable children to reach their full potential in life.

But governments cannot raise and care for children. Families must be responsible. That is why we have to assume the responsibility ourselves to ensuring that families be given the tools they need to be as effective parents as possible. Unfortunately, those of us who have lived long enough, as most of us in this room have, know that sometimes parents will not, or cannot be responsible for their children.

And it is in situations like those that vital organizations like Covenant House step in to help bridge the gulf. Along with government, these organizations do play a fundamental role in helping children who are vulnerable; by reaching out to those children that sometimes nobody else even wants to see. Covenant House reminds us we cannot turn our backs on any child in this country.

It is a great privilege to be a part, in any small way, of supporting the work of people who every day are on the frontlines caring about children. It is not easy work. It is often work that tries one's patience and one's faith, but there is no more important work.

Caring about children is not a political or ideological issue. It is a human issue. And when decisions are made affecting children, they must not be made on the basis of emotion or rhetoric or political positioning. They should be made on the evidence, the facts, and what our hearts tell us about what every single child needs and deserves to have.

We can all thank Covenant House, not only for its work and for its willingness to move here, to our nation's capital, to carry on that work in the shadow of our government, but we can thank Covenant House for reminding us every day that each of us can do a little more on behalf of the children we know and touch. That each of us can help be that bridge to keep the most fundamental covenant there is -- that is the covenant with the next generation. Thank you for doing that with us.

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