

Good morning, everyone.

Pastor Wilson, thank you for that kind introduction.

It's my good fortune to serve as the president of Ball State University, and it is an honor to speak to you on this special occasion.

I'd like to begin by thanking the many people who organized today's breakfast. Thank you to the committee members who not only planned this breakfast but the various youth programs that are scheduled for today. I also want to thank my colleagues from the Multicultural Center, Student Center, and Office of Inclusive Excellence. And many thanks to our friends from the City of Muncie, Muncie Community Schools, Juneteenth Muncie, and the Concerned Clergy of Muncie. I am grateful to all of you for your hard work and your dedication in promoting diversity and inclusion in our community. I also want to thank our catering staff for preparing our breakfast and for their service—today and everyday—to our University.

And thank you—all of you here today—for joining us to honor the life, the legacy, and the courage of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my colleague Wilisha Scaife for serving as our speaker this morning.

I also want to thank Ball State graduate Brandon Allmon-Jackson for serving as our Unity Week speaker. Brandon will speak at 7 p.m. tomorrow in Pruis Hall. Before he does, he will join me for the recording of the next episode of my podcast, *Our Call to Beneficence*. If you'd like to hear my conversation with Brandon, our episode will be released later this month.

[PAUSE]

In preparing my remarks for this morning, I was thinking about the significance of today. And while I know my role is to welcome you to this breakfast, I feel moved to share some additional thoughts with you. Would that be okay?

[PAUSE]

Later today, we will inaugurate President Trump as the 47th president of the United States.

I know that some of you did not vote for him. And so, you may be feeling anxious about his plans for our country.

But I suspect that some of you did vote for him. And so, you look forward to his leadership.

[PAUSE]

Irrespective of how you voted, we all now share one thing in common: We know that our country is deeply divided.

People are angry.

People are losing trust in our institutions—and in the women and men who lead them.

Over the last few decades, the American people have becoming increasingly sad—and mean.

So, if you're like me, you've been asking yourself—and your friends: Who will be the next leader who will guide us? Who can unite us? Who will inspire us—all of us?

Who is the next Martin Luther King? The next FDR or JFK? Or Nelson Mandela? Or Mother Teresa?

As I have gotten older, I have come to realize that, perhaps, no one is coming to bail us out. No one is coming to save us — to save us from ourselves.

[PAUSE]

Now, I know what you may be thinking: that sounds pretty depressing. I thought we gathered for a celebration.

[PAUSE]

But my thoughts have been influenced by a book that I recently read by Dr. Eddie Glaude, Jr. Some of you may already know of Dr. Glaude, but for those who don't, permit me to tell you a little more about him.

Dr. Glaude is a Black man of humble roots. He was born in the late 1960s into a working-class family in rural Mississippi. His father was a postman and his mother was a custodian. He has shared in interviews that he grew up without any books in his home, because they were a luxury his parents couldn't afford.

Fortunately, Dr. Glaude found books in his school and in his local library.

And his resulting love of words shaped his career aspirations. After graduating from high school at 16, he received his bachelor's degree from Morehouse College, his master's degree from Temple University, and his Ph.D. from Princeton University. He is now a distinguished professor of African American studies at Princeton. Dr. Glaude is also a political commentator and the best-selling author of many books.

In his newest book, Dr. Glaude asserts that we, as a Nation—we have relied too much on heroes to bear the responsibility of building a better society.

What we need to do, Dr. Glaude argues, is to step out from under the lofty shadows of historic leaders like Dr. King and Mother Teresa. Because, to quote Toni Morrison, “the fate of the world is in our hands, after all.”

[PAUSE]

Throughout the book, Dr. Glaude weaves the writings of Ms. Morrison and other great thinkers into a narrative that inspires us to believe that all of us—all of us—have what it takes to solve the problems we face today.

In his own words, Dr. Glaude writes: “No matter the darkness of the days, we have the capacity, if we only imagine it so and dare to act, to transform our world.”

To emphasize his point, Dr. Glaude invokes the legacy of one of his heroes: civil rights leader Ella Baker. For like Ms. Baker, whose ideas were key to Dr. King’s work, Dr. Glaude believes in a world in which ordinary people, full of self trust—self trust—see themselves as the leaders they have been looking for.

Indeed, the title of his book is *We Are The Leaders We Have Been Looking For*.

Dr. Glaude concludes this way: “We are the prophets we’ve been looking for. No more waiting for rainbow signs. Our imaginations can point the way toward a better world.”

[PAUSE]

Indeed, our imaginations can point the way forward. [PAUSE AGAIN] And is there any better place for our imaginations to flourish than right here, on a college campus as vibrant as ours—and in a city as diverse—and as kind—as Muncie.

For, and again in the words of Dr. Glaude, “when we fly and when we acknowledge the wind beneath our wings, we become the hope this dark world desperately needs.”

[PAUSE]

At Ball State, we know a little something about what it means to fly.

And so, we have been called. And like any calling, it’s a challenge. It requires hard work, determination, and courage.

It's why our Christian sisters and brothers say that we have been called to pick up our cross. Our cross to bear. It's a burden.

But this challenge, this burden, this calling should give us hope.

And that hope should be buoyed by the everyday heroes who lived among us—heroes like Vivian Conley and Hurley Goodall.

Some of you may know that, in the 1950s, Ms. Conley helped to desegregate our city pool. As the longtime education coordinator for Trinity United Methodist Church, she directed more than 150 students to college, including many to Ball State. And while attending Ball State herself, Ms. Conley founded the Nontraditional Student Association. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in gerontology.

Today, our University awards a scholarship in her name to honor non-traditional students who are committed to bettering their communities.

Mr. Goodall was a local trailblazer who became the first Black person to serve on the Muncie Fire Department and the school board of Muncie Community Schools. For 14 years, Mr. Goodall served as a member of the Indiana House

of Representatives, where he founded the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus. In his retirement, he became a public historian and a visiting scholar for our University's Center for Middletown Studies. He received an honorary degree and the President's Medal of Distinction from our University. Today, an award in his name is given to faculty and staff who assist the Multicultural Center in the development of our students.

Ms. Conley and Mr. Goodall were two ordinary people who changed our University and changed our city for the better. That's why I am grateful that, last month, in this same room, our Board of Trustees accepted my recommendation to rename our Multicultural Center in recognition of the extraordinary, positive impact they had on the lives of other people.

[PAUSE]

I look around this room today and know that, in our midst, are more role models like Ms. Conley and Mr. Hurley—courageous, inspirational heroes who are capable of leading the way for our friends and neighbors.

As I reflect on my own colleagues and on the students I see every day on our campus, as well as the people in this community Jennifer and I have met over the past eight years—as I reflect on this small army of good and strong people, my heart is filled with hope today.

I have come to know you, and I have come to know them. So, I believe in a brighter future—a future in which our community, our country, and our world will be more peaceful and more just.

And as I conclude my remarks this morning, I'd like to leave you with a few final words of encouragement from Dr. Glaude: “Do not let people, and most of all do not let yourself, crumple your feathers ... Believe that the wings of hope and change belong to us, still ... Now, fly!”