

ATJ CLOSING
Chief Justice Cornelia A. Clark
January 21, 2011

By now we hope our call to action is clear. If you believe, as I do, that a community is only as strong as the justice it provides to its weakest citizens, then you know there is much to be done.

What can we do to improve the odds of justice for our least-advantaged citizens? Today we have heard hundreds of answers. But if you are a lawyer, the answer is simple---remember our basic obligation as lawyer-citizens. The comments to Rule 6.1 are instructive. "Every lawyer, regardless of professional prominence or professional workload, has a responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay, and personal involvement in the problems of the disadvantaged can be one of the most rewarding experiences in the life of a lawyer."

On the day you received your license to practice law—or, as Doug Blaze reminded us, from the day you arrived at law school-- you joined an honorable and unique profession. Ours is the only profession I know which creates by conduct code a regular expectation of free service to those whose needs are great and whose means are limited. Bill Robinson and the ABA call it Lawyers Giving Back. If we are truly to live up to the "common calling to promote the public good"; if we are to have any hope of providing liberty and justice for all; then we must embrace, and celebrate, our obligation to devote professional time and civic influence on behalf of our brothers and sisters who need our help. The Tennessee Supreme Court believes that pro bono service is critical to each attorney's fulfillment of his or her obligation to the profession.

But not everyone here is a lawyer. Support of pro bono efforts by other community leaders is also necessary if we are to be successful. As Dave Yoder noted in a breakout session, "Justice isn't just us." So I know the nonlawyer business and professional leaders who are here also appreciate their obligation to live up to the common calling to promote the public good.

I applaud all of you in this room who step forward today to take up the cause of justice for all persons and carry it proudly to your colleagues in the wider community. I challenge each of us to do our duty as lawyers, and our duty as community leaders, to celebrate the opportunity to advance those ideals which can truly make our community better: to promote justice and the public good. As you leave here today the power of pro bono is in your hands and in your heart. I am confident you will carry it well as you help lead the rest of our world not only to where they want to go, but also to where they need to be.