

## **Nobel Peace Prize Winner Speaks to ND Community**

By Sr. Virginia O'Brien, SU

The Notre Dame School community was fortunate on Friday, November 13th to have an opportunity to speak with Nobel Peace Prize Winner Leymah Gbowee via Zoom. Many of our readers know that Leymah won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for helping to bring to an end the 14-year war in Liberia. Leymah, as well as about 15 faculty and staff members, were all panelists on the Zoom meeting. The panelists were able to ask Leymah questions directly, and the 300 others on the webinar were able to write in questions. I want to share with you some notes I took from her inspiring talk.

Leymah asked a question, "Do we stop to see the humanity of others?" She reminded us that in engaging with others, we need to be able to see their humanity. She further reflected that when she looks at another, she sees their humanity and asks them, "Do you see mine?" Taking time to see each other's humanity is the basis for all collaboration when we work towards a particular goal.

To illustrate this, Leymah told a story about a woman who lived across the street when she was growing up. Leymah and her sister thought of this woman as a "witch." Her grandmother invited Leymah to go across the street with her to visit their neighbor. At the first visit, Leymah realized that the woman's daughter was ill, and that the woman spent her time caring for the daughter, which is why she rarely left her home. Further visits showed Leymah that the woman was a terrific cook and a no-nonsense disciplinarian. By engaging with this woman, she saw another's humanity. Their relationship helped Leymah to love tenderly, act justly, and walk humbly with her God.

Leymah encouraged the girls to look beyond race, creed and social class when interacting with others. She said that we are all "linked" and not

"ranked." She reminded us that all of our blood is the same color, crimson red. We are called to step out of ourselves and see the humanity in everyone. We are called to tear down walls and to use those bricks to build bridges. She noted that we cannot walk on tiptoe when doing this work, but we need to leave a footprint. She encouraged each girl to use her many abilities to promote truth and justice and to always be kind.

Several of our Anne's Leaders were present during the meeting. She gave these students and all Notre Dame students some of her insights on what it means to be a leader. I found much of her advice helpful, including that a leader has to link all people together. A leader needs to show up to each event early and to be the last to leave. A leader needs to be clear about her own limitations and transparent with others about them. A leader needs to be as invested in the people, as much as one is invested in the cause.

Leymah was an inspiring presenter for me and for the students, faculty and staff. In these challenging times, Leymah encouraged us to be persevering and not to sit on our accomplishments. She was only 39 when she won the Nobel Peace Prize, and every day she sees reasons to keep working towards peace. She encouraged us all to remember the origins of our passion for the mission of education and to rekindle that passion daily. I am most grateful to one of our Notre Dame Trustees who is like a "sister" to Leymah and invited her to do this webinar. Leymah was impressed by the comments and questions our students raised and agreed to return and host another webinar in the new year. It will be a gift for us to welcome her in person to Notre Dame when the pandemic ends.