

Cathedral Center  
Woman of the Word 2010  
November 4, 2010

Thank you. Rabbi, Donna, and Cathedral Center's Board of Directors.

I never in my life expected an honor such as this. Tikkun Ha-Ir is a major part of my life and Cathedral Center is a major part of Tikkun Ha-Ir, which encourages the Jewish community to address the basic needs of Milwaukee's most vulnerable residents.

Last spring, I was preparing for the Jewish holiday of Shavuot when I received a phone call from Donna. "Is this a good time?" she asked? I was preparing to serve a meal to 13 people that evening, my dinner wasn't ready and my house was a mess. "Of course" I answered. I was nervous, because when the Executive Director of another agency calls out of the blue, I expect the worse....a problem when we last hosted or something.

But no, Donna asked me to be the Cathedral Center's 2010 Woman of the Word. I was amazed and almost said no. Then I stopped and realized that the reason why I was preparing for Shavuot was not the dinner but the fact that holiday celebrates when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and we received the Ten Commandments. One of the ways that they are described is the TEN WORDS. So, how could I say no?

So, I have been thinking about words for months. We take them for granted. Yes, they are a major source of communication, but they are so much more. Words can welcome or they can set up barriers. They can be kind or cruel. They can be helpful or difficult. They can flatter or hurt. What we say, how and when we say them can make huge differences in the lives of other people.

The guests at Cathedral Center are at their most vulnerable. But I know that they are welcomed with kind and encouraging words. That their stay is characterized by attention to their individual needs with dignified, professional and positive words. While the guests are weary by the evening, most seem at home...temporary but safe. Other important words.

I must add that as volunteers, we too are affected by words. I have been a professional director of volunteers for over 20 years, and I have rarely been involved with an organization that takes its volunteers and their feedback as seriously as does Cathedral Center. I have seen great changes because the staff listened to our words. These changes have directly made the lives of the guests a little easier.

So, I thank Board of Directors and Staff at Cathedral Center for this extraordinary honor. I would like to introduce Rea Katz, President of Tikkun Ha-Ir, and Robin Benedon, our Cathedral Center scheduler and meal coordinator extraordinaire. Robin is amazing & it's wonderful to have a caterer plan the meals! Debby Rubinstein is my friend who innocently asked several years ago if her mother could do anything for Tikkun Ha-Ir. I suggested knitting hats and scarves. Between Debby, her family, friends & students (she became a knitting instructor) and other knitters (like Arlene Mann and Peggy Glaser who are also here tonight) THI provides a set of hand knit hats and scarves to every guest at Christmas. In fact last year we distributed over 150 sets to Cathedral Center and three other shelters.

I would also like to thank my mother Bernice and my late father, Solly, for teaching me the importance of words and of standing by them. My husband of 43 years, Steven, for building a partnership based on loving, attentive and often guiding words. Our children, Laura and David, who taught me that people do listen to words even when you thought that they weren't paying attention!

Thank you & let us hope that in the future "homelessness" will be a word that has no meaning at all.