



Address at the 26th Annual MLK Breakfast

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on January 13, 2017**



This speech was presented to attendees of the 26th annual Martin Luther King Breakfast held at the Graham Center Ballrooms on January 13, 2017.

Good morning and welcome! We start this New Year on an uplifting note! We set our compass on the life and teachings of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our keynote speaker is Dr. Charles A. Bonner. He has made it his life's work to defend others – and upholding what is right. We are honored to have you here today, Dr. Bonner.

A special thank you to Dr. Dorret Sawyers – and thank you to all of the students, faculty and staff who have made this commemoration possible! This is the 26th year that we've gathered to honor Dr. King's legacy. Because of you, we're an institution that carries on Dr. King's work – not just one day of the year, but always.

We celebrate our institution by whom we include, rather than whom we exclude. In this new year, there may be new challenges but there is also the opportunity to find new solutions – and make the world a better, kinder place.

Out there: continuing violence; exclusivity and divisiveness; rising anger, uncertainty and frustration! We can't go back; we can't turn back the clock. We are not going to just sit things out; wait for time to pass and for others to make the change that we want – or do not want.

Dr. King helps us here – listen to his words: "Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals."

He understood well that the future is in our hands. We sculpt and form the future. We are the creators; we lead the tireless efforts. We are the dedicated individuals who bring progress. Not them and not the hands of time!

Knowledge is the first step. It is the open door leading to awareness. Today, FIU's role is more critical than ever. This gathering reconfirms our commitment.

We are all here because we know our work paves the way forward – each stone in our learning pathway leads away from stagnation, and toward progress, hope and opportunity. FIU – our faculty, staff and students who embody this amazing institution – sees itself as a steppingstone.

At our recent commencement ceremony, we recognized FIU volunteer and adviser Al Dotson. Al is a chairman emeritus of the Board of Trustees, and a former longtime member of our FIU Foundation. There is, perhaps, no living community supporter who has stood with our institution for as long as Al. We are grateful to him, because he is fond of reminding us of something very important: our obligation to build a better world.

He often quotes popular verse that asks an important question — whether we intend to be a stumbling block or a steppingstone.

Hear me, please! Here is what Al repeats: “Isn’t it strange that Princes and Kings and clowns who caper in stardust rings, and common people like you and me are builders for eternity? Each is given a set of tools, a shapeless mass, and a book of rules, and each must make, ere life has flown, a stumbling block or a steppingstone.”

Being a steppingstone means committing to a good life — and doing what is right!

Indeed, over the past 26 years, this breakfast has grown into a well-deserved celebration of Dr. King. There is the MLK Day of Service — where nearly 700 students will participate in service learning projects that uplift our communities, and, of course, the Youth Forum & Peace Walk, and the MLK Day Parade held in Liberty City.

These — and so many more — remind us of everything Dr. King believed in. Love over hate. Forgiveness over blame. Hope over despair. I urge you to get involved! To be a steppingstone!

Now, we have a permanent reminder of this. Some of you might remember, at last year’s breakfast, I announced that we’d commissioned two special commemorative sculptures of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. That day has come! We now have a permanent symbol of our commitment to Dr. King’s legacy on our campuses. Many thanks to Ysmelio Lopez for making this happen!

It is our hope that everyone who passes the sculpture draws strength from Dr. King’s words that will guide us all into a better, brighter tomorrow. Thank you for being a part of our celebration.

Right after today’s breakfast, please join us for the ribbon-cutting of our new MLK Commemorative Bust! We will be on the lawn between GC and the Green Library! See you there!