

Parents all over the world do their best to give their children great opportunities. They work to give their children every chance to pursue their own dreams.

However for too many parents, their dreams of giving their families better lives are dashed. In the United States, their children don't get the education they need to succeed in life. In the developing world, their children succumb to diseases that have long since been eradicated in rich countries.

Years ago, when we began to learn about global health, we were especially shocked to read that one highly preventable disease – rotavirus – was killing half a million children every year. Airplane crashes are always front-page news, yet here was a killer of half a million children every year, and most people couldn't put a name to it, much less put a stop to it.

We have committed the vast majority of our assets to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help stop preventable deaths such as these, and to tear down other barriers to health and education that prevent people from making the very most of their lives. Our animating principle is that all lives have equal value. Put another way, it means that we believe every child deserves the chance to grow up, to dream and do big things.

We have been blessed with good fortune beyond our wildest expectations, and we are profoundly grateful. But just as these gifts are great, so we feel a great responsibility to use them well. That is why we are so pleased to join in making an explicit commitment to the Giving Pledge.

The idea of the pledge came out of discussions we had with other givers about what they were doing, about what had worked in philanthropy and what had not worked. Everyone shared how giving had made their lives richer. Everyone who attended was inspired by listening to the others' passion and encouraged to do even more.

For the two of us, because we see amazing progress every day, but also, how much more work remains, we're honored to be a part of this pledge effort.

For example, to us, vaccines are miracles, tiny vessels of hope and promise. And the world has made progress in vaccinating millions of children. But there are still millions more who die of preventable diseases.

So we want to make sure lifesaving vaccines reach everyone who needs them, and that the world develops new vaccines.

We've seen similar progress in America's education system. We have visited schools that are breaking down old barriers and preparing every child for college and life. These are great schools—but there are not nearly enough of them. Now the task is to make sure that every student gets the same opportunity to succeed in college and in life.

Both of us were fortunate to grow up with parents who taught us some tremendously important values. Work hard. Show respect. Have a sense of humor. And if life happens to bless you with talent or treasure, you have a responsibility to use those gifts as well and as wisely as you possibly can. Now we hope to pass this example on to our own children.

We feel very lucky to have the chance to work together in giving back the resources we are stewards of. By joining the Giving Pledge effort, we're certain our giving will be more effective because of the time we will spend with this group. We look forward to sharing what a wonderful experience this has been for us and learning from the experience of others.

Best wishes,

Handwritten signatures of Bill Gates and Melinda F. Gates in black ink.

Bill and Melinda Gates