

# **Multicultural Student Luncheon**

**Welcome**

**Good afternoon, and welcome to the first-ever and hopefully last-ever Multicultural Student Luncheon under the COVID tents. I am happy that you have chosen to spend the next 90 minutes with some of your classmates, whom I describe as among the brightest and most accomplished students on campus.**

**Though we had an opportunity to gather at the first of the semester to get to know each other, we weren't quite sure about this COVID thing then, so we did it virtually, on Zoom. This time, we are venturing out a bit more, still cautious, still wearing our masks, and still remaining socially-distanced, but we're here, and this time, for those of you who are on campus in person, we have food.**

**I'd like to thank Bernice Leveque and my assistant, Brittany Vaughan for organizing and making this event happen on such a beautiful fall day. I also want to thank all the student and staff leaders who are here to meet, greet, and support you.**

**So welcome people. As a group we represent many identities. We are African, we are African-American, we are multi-racial, Caribbean, LatinX, Asian, and Asian-American, and even more. We are from the East, West, North, and South. We are gay, we are straight, we are trans, and even more. We are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, atheist, agnostic, and even more. We are first generation educated, and we also are second and third generation educated, and even more. We eat sushi, and we eat collard greens, too. I don't know what acting Black, Asian, LatinX, or Gay, or Christian is, but one thing I know is that we are all of this, and all of this is what we are, and even more.**

**Today is not a day to sit idly in a corner and not take advantage of all the wealth of knowledge from other students and administrators who have taken time out of their weekend to be here. Please greet each other in an appropriate, socially-distanced way, introduce or re-introduce yourself and get to know other people under the tent. We want you all to know that**

**we care about you, and we want to encourage you to get all that you can get from your Sewanee education.**

**There are a few thoughts that I want to share with you today, as I think about your Sewanee experience and beyond. I'm going to say a few things about belonging, resilience, and then finally about the practice of gratitude.**

**First, I'll start with belonging. I've had a relationship with Sewanee since 1982 when I arrived as a first-year student. I'll pause for a few seconds, so you can guess how old I am. Through the years, I've heard from countless students of color who attended Sewanee and who felt that they didn't belong. The funny thing is, I've also heard the same sentiment from white students, perhaps for different reasons, perhaps not. It really doesn't matter, because both groups carry this heavy and depressing burden of not feeling like they belong. And through the years, I've learned that we, ourselves, often invite that feeling through our own actions, and that's not good.**

**So, I'm going to share this thought that I and other thinkers whom I consider my own mentors believe, so listen carefully.**

**We must once and for all stop walking through the world looking for confirmation that we don't belong; You know why? Because we will always find it. Why? Because we've made it our mission to look for it.**

**We also must once and for all stop scouring people's faces looking for evidence that we are not enough—people like our professors, our friends, our classmates, and our foes, for example. Do you know why we must stop scouring other people's faces for evidence that we are not enough? Because we will always find it, because we've made it our goal to look for it.**

**We don't have to bargain for or negotiate true belonging and self-worth. True belonging and who we really are belong in our hearts, and we all must go to great lengths to protect our hearts against the constant evaluation of people who know**

**nothing about our hearts or our intentions. No student belongs at Sewanee, any more or any less than you! So, I urge you to stop allowing others to live rent free in your heart.**

**The second thought I'd like to share pertains to resilience. When I think of this term as it relates to your Sewanee experience, I think of your being able to master the ability to confront challenges with perseverance and self-discipline when they are presented to you. When you are resilient, you have chosen to fully commit your time and energy to a particular endeavor, like your school work, or athletics, or a lab assignment, or a club or organization, and that means you must give up other things in order to pursue the passions that will advance your life's goals. You are staying on task. Therefore, you are NOT spending your time doing things that aren't productive, and you yourselves know what those things are, because we all are guilty of wasting time and procrastinating.**

**People who have resilience have a deep commitment to whatever challenge lies in front of them. And don't for one second underestimate the power of your own attitude when it comes to whether you are resilient or not.**

**So, when you are faced with a major obstacle, and you're feeling a resilient deficit, here's a mantra that I want to share. I learned about it and adopted it into my own life when I attended an Oprah Winfrey workshop this past January. It's a mantra that you can repeat over and over to yourself, and you also can say it to anyone who ever doubts you. Here's what you can say: "I can, and I will, watch me." I can, and I will, watch me!**

**The final thought and challenge I want to share with you is the practice of gratitude. I, personally, have actively kept a gratitude journal for many years, and if you aren't into this practice, I encourage you to consider it. To me, gratitude is the way one expresses appreciation for what one has, rather than what one wants. There are many benefits of practicing gratitude,**

**and science has revealed that people who are persistent in practicing gratitude and who take time to reflect upon the things they're thankful for experience more positive emotions, are known to feel more alive, they sleep better, express more kindness and compassion towards others, their well-being and life satisfaction increase, and those who practice gratitude are known to have a stronger immune system. Researcher and author Brené Brown says, "If you are really practicing gratitude, you don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find it—it's right in front of you if you're paying attention."**

**As I close, I'll share an excerpt of my own gratitude journal.**

**Here's what I'm grateful for:**

**"I am grateful for my freedom, and for those who fought for it. I am grateful for family and friends. I am grateful for the wisdom of my elders, and for the wisdom to listen to them. I am grateful for opportunities, those I seek, and for those that seek me. I am grateful for second, third, and fourth chances. I am grateful for**



**dinner parties with my friends that last into the wee hours of the night, where the conversation is more nourishing than the actual meal. I am grateful for roads less traveled. I am grateful for prayer, meditation, reflection, and introspection. I am grateful that I have the ability to make room in my heart to forgive people who do wrong against me. I am grateful for unconditional love and acts of random kindness. I am grateful for the ability to be able to change my mind, regardless of the outcome, and I am grateful for now, and not now."**

**Thank you all for coming to today's luncheon. My name is W. Marichal Gentry, and I am the proud son of William and Annette Gentry.**