

Good afternoon. My name is Miriam Parson and I am privileged to be here. I have had tremendous and intense experiences with community through Gettysburg College. We are here today reflecting on our community because reflection is vital to understanding the guidance that these experiences offer to our lives. I have learned that guidance most powerfully comes from consciousness-building action. So I'd like to speak from my own experiential lessons because they inform my future actions in our future communities.

We have all participated in community here in Gettysburg, whether it is Greek life, community service, study abroad, or simply living with roommates. These shared spaces integrate both the challenges of community and the triumphs. I have been inspired by my work with the Center for Public Service, by my involvement in campus sustainability initiatives, and by my time studying abroad. These are poignant encounters with consciousness-building community action. These segments of my community are the hub of my process to become an informed actor.

With the Center for Public Service I have organized events and campaigns and tutoring programs with community partners such as LIU #12, the United Way, and Generación Diez. I have learned from my CPS mentors and peers that mutual learning can generate positive change, and so we must invest ourselves in others' words as we listen. I have learned that partnerships across communities better enable this mutual learning, and so we must seek out and connect to those who are separate in order to learn both from within and from outside our community. I have learned that my community identity molds the unseen privileges and the unseen oppressions that I experience, and so we must utilize our individual privileges to uproot our community's oppressions.

I have learned from partnership and leadership in sustainability programs at Gettysburg that sustainability is all about community. In spring of 2007 a group of students from across the Gettysburg Community drafted a Sustainability Proposal to the administration, prompting an administrative Sustainability Committee that unites and expands our environmental initiatives on campus. Sustainability is about this kind of community-wide cooperation because we are responsible not only for our well-being in our current context, but we are also responsible to our community members who feed and clothe us from another part of the world. We are responsible for feeding and clothing coming generations. And we are directly responsible, to both our immediate community and to our global community, for the example that we demonstrate given this knowledge. My decisions are far-reaching; my decisions effect others' decisions and other's abilities to make decisions. Enabling sustainable action, however, still places responsibility in the community's hands. And so our actions must be sustainable because we directly affect the sustenance of our current and future communities.

I have learned some my greatest lessons about community and about informed action from my time studying abroad in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. I spent a semester studying sustainable development and political action in these Central American countries, visiting a variety of communities organizing themselves around sustainable livelihoods. And, as all of us would say about our experiences at home and abroad, I met incredible people who demonstrated to me their responsible commitment to informed community action. There are challenges. As I said before, community integrates both its challenges and its triumphs. I will speak to the triumphs because my friend Sister Peggy, who is a nun from New Jersey who has lived in Copopayo, El Salvador for

over 20 years and who dug trenches with her community during the civil war, told us to always celebrate the successes and what we've learned from them. As a person who processes information through language, I have kept with me the words of my teachers. I have learned a few phrases in Quiché and I have learned that my nahual is the plumed serpent. I bring these connections with Guatemalan indigenous communities to my own community. I have learned through repeated conversations in each of these countries, with people my own age, younger, and older, that solidarity, *solidaridad*, is the basis of informed action between separate communities. I bring desire for solidarity to my own community. I have learned that Oscar Romero's words articulate true solidarity: "We must be the voice of the voiceless." I bring a voice to my community.

My consciousness-building experiences in these different but connected parts of our Gettysburg Community have revolved around specific themes. Through reflection, I find that these themes consistently intersect at a need for justice. Social, economic, political justice. This requires recognition of our privileges and devotion to uprooting oppression both in our communities and in our neighboring communities. It requires decision-making in the interest of long-term sustainability, both as individuals and as local and global communities. It requires solidarity through informed action, both with my Gettysburg neighbors and with my Nicaraguan neighbors. It is this action that is the sticking point. Consciousness-building must be followed by action, I have learned. Inaction is collusion. A man in Nicaragua said to us that, "We should be outraged. It should be as if there are boils on our butts so that if we try to sit down we must stand up and cry out."

I am called to responsible action because I have known our intense and inspiring community. I inhale Gettysburg and I exhale my community's words and my community's actions that have absorbed into my blood. We have each known this community in different ways through different experiences, and for this we are always connected so that our actions will always reflect upon that connection. I want to say thank you for the privilege of joining this community, for acting with you, and for learning from you.