

9-15-2016

Carlisle's Story

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Recommended Citation

Sutton, Carlisle, "Carlisle's Story" (2016). *Fall 2016*. Book 1.
<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/stories-2016-fall/1>

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Carlisle's Story



A few years ago, I read an Ellen G. White quote that has stuck with me: “There is a picture representing a bullock standing between a plow and an altar, with the inscription, ‘Ready for either,’ ready to toil in the furrow or to be offered on the altar of sacrifice. This is the position of the true child of God—willing to go where duty calls, to deny self, to sacrifice for the Redeemer’s cause” (Ministry of Healing, page 502).

I have always felt called to serve in the church. While only 5 or 6 years old, I recall telling my grandfather I wanted to be a pastor. However, in my teenage years I rebelled against that calling. I hated the sacrificial life I came to associate with ministry. However, in spite of my rebellion, I always felt God's call. Interestingly, I could never clearly define what that ministry would look like, for it was not like anything I had ever observed.

In 2013, left a COO position in Barbados to enter the Seminary. One of my classes, SEEDS (Church Planting) with Tom Evans, exposed us to a piece of software called Ministry Profile which generated demographic data for communities by ZIP code. One ZIP code changed my life: 49022.

Benton Harbor, Michigan—49022—is a small city about 15 miles from Andrews University, with a population that the most recent census stated had a number of felt needs that were higher than the national average. Major issues facing this community include: Lack of food, drug and alcohol abuse, relationship abuse, racial prejudice and need for spiritual leadership. This community has an interest in religion 11 percent higher than the national average, but where the national average for affinity

to Adventism is 0.5 percent, Benton Harbor has an affinity to Adventism of 0.3 percent. I was shocked that a community so close to my school, which had such a rich Adventist heritage, views us so poorly.

I firmly believe the promise that when Christ is lifted up, He will draw all men to Him. So I began to pray. One Sabbath morning as I opened my eyes, the idea was given to me to address the issues in Benton Harbor by sharing the resources of Andrews University. I know many people have been praying for a solution and I believe H.E.L.P.—the Human Empowerment Life Project—is an answer to prayer.

I quickly recognized, however, that what I dreamed of achieving was outside of my present capability. While I had experience in management and leadership, I did not have the technical skills to be able to perform the needs assessments, policy writing, program evaluations, grant writing, etc., that were needed to build an effective intervention. So in fall 2015, I began working toward a Master of Science in community and international development in addition to my seminary degree.

Finally, H.E.L.P. was off the ground.

Volunteers with H.E.L.P. aim to enhance literacy in Benton Harbor by reading to Grade 2 & 3 students, then discussing with them what they just heard before passing out art supplies for the students to illustrate what they learned. Our goal is to engage the students by identifying key words in the story to expand their vocabulary and help them articulate their understanding of the story. Then we offer them an opportunity to be creative.

The responses of the children, the teachers, the principals, the school district administration of Benton Harbor and the participating Andrews University volunteers have been encouraging. The excitement of the kids when our volunteers walk into the classrooms and the satisfaction you can see on their faces as we collect their artwork and congratulate them on a job well done is really rewarding.

This experience is a weekly reenactment of the story in Matthew 19:13–16, when Jesus blessed the little children. These small acts of kindness are touching lives and reminding the community that we are present and here to make a difference. We are not there to run a baptismal class or to seek new converts but just to say, "I see you. You are important. I am here to help."

I dream of a day when every campus department, every student and, indeed, every Adventist church believer, asks the question, "What do I have, and how can these means be used to add value to the community in which I live?" I believe it is making a difference in the daily lives of those around us that we are afforded an opportunity to tell of the love of God. I am hopeful that as we continue to acquire knowledge centered around Christ it will affirm our faith, and we will be moved by both to change the world. The only limit to what we can achieve lies in our inability to envision it.

For more information on how you can be a part of H.E.L.P. email human.empowerment.life.project@gmail.com.