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# When

Women in Ministry and  
Higher Ed Leadership



# God Calls

They're college and Seminary professors, chaplains and pastors.

They're chief financial officers and university administrators.

These are the voices of women answering the call, *Here I am, send me.*

# Andrews

In the summer of 1902, a major barrier to learning at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC), now Andrews University, was mosquitos.

Since moving the year before from Battle Creek, Michigan, the residents of this new campus needed a well-ventilated, yet sheltering, new building. So Ida May Bauer Magan, wife of EMC administrator Percy Magan, donated her entire family inheritance of \$500 to build a screened pavilion in the Grove. A "...gift of love from Mrs. Magan," said one student.

The history of Andrews University is filled with stories of women who dedicated themselves to Christian education within the accepted norms of their time. Some women pushed boundaries to open new opportunities to serve their Church and University. Certainly, today is no different. More than 50 percent of Andrews' employees are female. Of that total, 31 percent hold administrative positions, and 47 percent are department chairs or departmental directors.

Of course, these numbers reflect the continued expansion of women in leadership throughout American society. This societal change toward equality and opportunity for women allows Andrews to pull talent from a larger and more diverse work force. Women in the church are seeking training for leadership, believing that



leadership positions will be available to them. The apex of this evolution came for Andrews University on October 25, 2016, when **Andrea Luxton** was installed as its sixth president. "I absolutely feel called," says Luxton during an interview in 2018. "I feel that my calling is to combine education and ministry by helping others find the best potential for their lives," she said.

Like Luxton, other women interviewed for this article experience a strong sense of calling and mission as they serve a new generation of Adventists. The purpose of this article is to examine the experiences of Andrews women who currently lead and serve every day.

## IN THE BEGINNING WAS CALLING

When it came time for college, a young Andrea Luxton attended a public university to study English. She found her educational experience to be immensely shallow. "I was missing the depth and value elements of Christian philosophy," she said. "I decided to study and work in a Christian environment. That was when I transferred to Newbold College. The quality was so completely different," said Luxton.



As a little girl, **Susan Zork**, assistant professor of religion, would preach a sermon at a tree stump in the woods by her home in rural Maine. "With my Bible and a copy of *Messages to*

*Young People*, I would visit that tree stump, which was the perfect size pulpit for me, and preach my sermon day after day," said Zork. After all four of Zork's children were in school, she decided to return to school herself. "I was sitting in an Andrews parking lot, praying about my future vocation, when my sermon at the stump came to mind. I had not thought of that in more than 20 years," said Zork. She felt a calling to minister as an adult and applied to graduate school in the Seminary at Andrews. Zork found local inspiration for her calling. "I looked at Esther Knott and thought, 'If Esther can be a minister, maybe I can, too,'" she recalls.



For **Connie Gane**, associate professor of Archaeology in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, her calling intersected with her highest and first priority, motherhood. Many women

interviewed for this article discussed the relationship between vocational calling and the calling of motherhood. “My number one responsibility was to raise my daughter in God’s grace,” said Gane. “My opportunities and calling came when my daughter was 4 years old. I remember praying by the lake at my parents’ house when I received a job offer from Andrews. I needed to know that this was from God, beyond a shadow of a doubt,” she said.



**Esther Knott’s** calling into ministry was a natural progression of her dedication to Christ. “It never occurred to me that I was doing something unusual or that there were not many women

in this field. I’d always been involved in spiritual leadership from the time I was in elementary school, so I was just following the natural progression of my life,” she said.

However, the first barrier came for Esther during her undergraduate years at Andrews when she interviewed to be a pastoral intern. “The interviews were interesting. I was asked if I wanted to be a Bible worker. ‘No.’ I wanted to be a pastor. I was told about a young man, the son of an administrator, who needed a wife. Was I interested in being a pastor’s wife? ‘No.’ That was a different job than the one I felt called to,” remembered Knott, who

is now the associate director for the North American Division Ministerial Department.



**Rahel Wells**, assistant professor of Hebrew Bible, has two degrees in biology. She always felt called to teach, but the content of her curriculum took a dramatic turn. “God did an about-face

in my life and made it very clear through my passions, dreams, trusted mentors, open doors and a host of other means that He was leading me to teach Old Testament,” said Wells.

Like so many women interviewed for this article, Wells experienced the gradual process of God’s guidance. “I feel, every day, the weight of the calling, and the privilege, and the joy. I am blessed beyond belief to get paid to fulfill my calling by God, and to use my biology training to teach bioethics, as well as contribute to the Church in the relationship between science and religion,” she said.



Several women at Andrews said their vocational choices were bound by history. **Teresa Reeve**, associate professor of New Testament contexts, and associate dean of the Adventist

Theological Seminary, discussed limitations. “It never occurred to me that I could go into ministry. But I think that God has a calling for everyone. I found Him leading me step by step in my life by opening doors and giving me opportunities that I never sought. I felt His leading to each new step,” said Reeve.



## Leona Running

*First full-time female seminary professor*



## Marsha Collins

*Illinois Conference’s first female pastor*

1956

1989



**Alayne Thorpe**, dean of Graduate Studies and dean of the School of Distance Education & International Partnerships, was building a teaching career in public edu-

cation when a friend and pastor encouraged her to work for the Church. She did so but always assumed she would return to public education after completing a PhD. Then, an encounter with an Adventist teacher changed the course of her career. "...I remember being in a classroom at an Adventist school talking to another teacher, giving advice, sharing resources with her. I gave her my contact information and was getting ready to leave when she thanked me profusely and said she felt less alone. I remember something clicking then. I felt as if the Lord was telling me, 'This is what I want you to do. You need to be here, in My garden, supporting teachers and students.' I felt called from that moment on. This is not just a career for me. I am clear on that," reflected Thorpe.

**BARRIERS TO MINISTRY: FIGHTING INEQUALITY**

**Hyveth Williams**, professor of Homiletics at the Adventist Theological Seminary, and lead pastor of The Grace Place, holds an important and unique position in Adventism — theological higher education.

"I know I'm called to serve as pastor and professor. When the invitation to teach was extended, I was experiencing a lot of success at my church, so I turned



it down. But when a friend from Boston, who was unaware of the offer, called and said she was compelled during prayer to tell me to go teach at Andrews University, all reservations melted

away. It was clear that's where God wanted me at such a time as this in my life, and my positive experience here has affirmed it," she said.

Currently, Williams is the only woman of color teaching at the Seminary. She also is the only female in her position without a husband in close, professional proximity. These combined elements give her a unique voice to speak for diverse populations.

"I have faced overt and covert prejudice, not because of my race, but as a woman in ministry. By the grace of God and strong support of many, I have overcome to the point of no longer processing the pain of such experiences," said Williams. "I'm delighted to say those days are long gone. I am trusted and respected by faculty, staff and students at the Seminary."



**June Price** was the first female appointed as a head university chaplain in the North American Division. She began her service at Andrews in 2014, where she is currently the only female on

the chaplaincy staff. With this milestone event come the challenges of change in a traditional institution and community. "My personal experience of overcoming



**Hyveth Williams**

*Prior to teaching at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, was first female senior pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, in California. Currently a lay pastor in the Indiana Conference.*



**Cindy Tutsch**

*First female pastor in Michigan Conference*



**Esther Knott**

*First female pastor at Pioneer Memorial Church*

1990

1990

1997

gender barriers includes consistently facing, and pressing forward through, systematic frameworks and ideologies which have shaped the way women are viewed — ideologies which breed beliefs such as men are more capable and more intelligent than women, or men are ‘godlier’ than women. While at times it is a struggle to walk alongside others who have accepted and function out of such ideologies, it also is a great honor to serve God in this capacity and to learn from, as well as educate, those who have been shaped by false and unhealthy gender constructs,” reflected Price.

Like Price, both Reeve and Gane face barriers of communication styles that favor the male voice. “An additional challenge I still face at times is the unconscious tendency many people have of not hearing or giving equal credence to the words of women,” said Reeve. Gane reflected on a similar experience. “There can be a prejudice at the colleague level that may illuminate itself in contexts such as committee meetings,” she said. “There is a distinction between the way men listen to each other and the way they listen to females. Suggestions are not always taken seriously, and sometimes there is the need to be overly aggressive to get my point across. I feel that much of this is unintentional among males who have a great desire to be supportive, but it’s hard for them,” Gane added.

**Lorena Bidwell** is the chief information officer for Andrews. In this position, she leads the University’s complicated and quickly evolving technology agenda. “In the field of IT, gender stereotypes can cause people to think that if you are a woman, you don’t have the technical knowledge they need,” said Bidwell. “In a small number of group/committee situations, I have



experienced people who do not recognize females to allow them to participate or who do not seem to hear their ideas unless they are expressed by a male member of the group,” Bidwell said.

“I have had a few situations where individuals were not willing to take direction from a female supervisor which, of course, made my work pretty difficult for a time.”

After a career that now spans 37 years, Thorpe reflected on the female journey in Adventist higher education. “I have faced many of the same barriers that other women my age have faced — questions about whether a woman can be serious about a career when she should be more concerned about a husband or children, assumptions about my interests, limitations, talents, that have nothing to do with me as a person. In the early years, I was often the only woman on the committee, task force or team. This always made me feel as if I had to represent more than myself until I realized you can never represent others well unless you are true to yourself. I also feel that I have been lucky to have one or two female mentors who helped me navigate through some of the more difficult challenges and a number of male cheerleaders who also provided support,” said Thorpe.

### TELL IT TO THE WORLD

“Andrews has embraced women in leadership and in pastoral roles,” said Luxton.

Embracing this type of diversity allows new voices to communicate about the future of Andrews University and how it will serve a 21st-century Church. “The quality of leadership greatly increases when diverse voices are represented at all levels. Women need to be encouraged



### Sabine Vatel

*First woman to serve as campus chaplain for an Adventist institution of higher learning in North America*

1999



### Lorena Bidwell

*First female Information Technology director/chief information officer at AU*

2003



### Lisa Isensee

*First female pastor in Wisconsin*

2004

and reassured that there is a place for them in Church leadership. I have spoken to too many young women who feel that there is no place for them,” said Thorpe.

For Reeve, the opportunity to be a student of theology, and then pursue teaching and leadership in the Adventist Seminary, was a joyful affirmation of her calling. “If I see an opportunity to serve, I’ll do it. It’s not a question of whether I’m a man or a woman,” said



Reeve. “To serve is the Christ-like way of going about things.”

**Frances Faehner**, vice president for Campus & Student Life, has served as an administrator at Andrews for more

than 30 years, first as dean of women and then in her present role. Her career represents newer opportunities for women who hold positions once only held by males. Faehner reflected on the importance of spiritual guidance in the accomplishment of her calling. “The wisdom found in Micah 6:8 has been a beacon to me. It reminds me that I (and all others around me) am mortal and flawed. And still, no matter what challenges swirl around me, I am called to boldly do what is right — to treasure mercy and to always walk humbly with my God.”

Wells summarized her philosophy of service, which is mirrored in the work of many other women at Andrews. “Focus on what He has called you to do rather than on whether others are recognizing it. Ask Him to shine out through you in mighty ways for His glory.” ■

*T. Lynn Caldwell, associate professor of Communication, Andrews University*

# Chaplains

On any given day, four extraordinary women can be found in Chicagoland hospitals — rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep.

They are never certain what they will encounter moment to moment, room to room, but they trust that God knows. They are Adventist medical center chaplains Alyssa Foll, Cristina Gryss, Aleksandra Tanurdzic and Tricia Trefl, each one called by God to bring peace, hope and comfort where fear, suffering and pain can overwhelm the soul.

Whether on daily rounds or responding to an overnight page, they rely on the Holy Spirit to help them share the love of Christ with each person, regardless of need or faith tradition.

Will one be called to pray over a woman with Down syndrome passing away with no family at her bedside? Or to comfort a mother crying out for healing for her



**Yvonne Collins**

*First female administrator in the Lake Region Conference*

2007



**Tricia Payne**

*First female pastor in the Lake Region Conference*

2011



**Teresa Reeve**

*First female associate dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary*

2014



young daughter? Perhaps one will hold the hand of a terrified teenage girl in the emergency room whose parents couldn't arrive before she was sedated. Or another may calm a man distraught that his room is next to one where his wife passed away the year before.

These women have ministered in all of these situations. In each experience, they believe God is using them to create a sacred space — a place where patients can talk about their doubts and fears, where someone will spend time listening to their story without judgment, a realm where patients, family members and chaplains alike experience the overwhelming love of God.

Because Adventist Health's mission is to extend the healing ministry of Jesus, chaplains don't play an ancillary role in these facilities; they are a critical part of the clinical team. Each has earned a master's degree and must complete four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in order to be eligible for board certification. The training program calls for hours similar to a medical residency, with long days and nights on-call. Although the work can be emotionally grueling, for these four women, it's an honor to be included in what God is doing in the lives of the individuals they meet.



### ALYSSA FOLL

Alyssa works in outpatient services including oncology, day surgery and behavioral health care. "It's a privilege to sit with someone who is trying to make meaning out

of their life and their current experience," she said. "I often talk to people who are trying to determine how to cope with pain, grief and distress. I let them know, 'I'm in this boat with you, even if it's far out.'"

She considers herself a good "story holder" — hearing someone's story, holding it for them and asking where they believe the plot line is going. "I join with a person to look for signs of hope and resources that will help them cope."

As a member of a research committee, Alyssa is working with other staff to demonstrate the quantitative or qualitative value of chaplaincy. "For instance, we might study whether there is a correlation between chronic pain and recent loss in a person's life," she said. "We can then design interventions or screenings for people seeking pain treatment."



### CRISTINA GRYS

A combination of degrees in music and theology means that Cristina uses the gift of music to soothe and engage with patients. She leads staff choirs at all four Adventist hospitals

who perform two concerts a year within the facilities. On Sabbath evenings, she leads a worship service in the lobby of one hospital, and sings or plays for patients privately. "Music is an instant connection," she said. "Many will be drawn to it, and that gives me a chance to talk and pray with people. Just being God's instrument in that moment is mind-blowing."

Christina has opportunity to bring joy and peace in the most trying of situations. "One young woman had incredible anxiety and struggled with self-injury, so I brought a guitar to her room and we sang praise songs for an hour," said Chaplain Cristina. "By the end of that hour, her anxiety was low and she asked me to come every day until she was discharged."



### June Price

*First female Andrews University chaplain*

2014



### Andrea Luxton

*First female president of Andrews University*

2016