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[EDUCATION NEWS]

Andrews University hosts forum on Adventist regional conferences

On March 7, Andrews University Student Association, Andrews University Adventist Peace Fellowship and Black Student Christian Forum, along with 13 other campus clubs, hosted a forum to discuss church organization based on race in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The two-hour event was well attended.

“Our hope is to create a space here where we can share our feelings and opinions,” said AUSA president Olivia Ruiz-Knott, “while accepting the possibility that we might be wrong.”

Ruiz-Knott, along with Adrian Marston, president of BSCF, and students Shastri Lloyd, Lukasz Krzywon and Merlique Blackwood led the event. Each stated their personal bias regarding the issue, while acknowledging that the purpose of the forum was to educate and that their personal opinions might change.

The audience was given a number for texting questions to panel members and a hashtag (#TwoChurchDoors) to use for comments on social media.

Blackwood shared the history, beginning in 1889 with Charles Kinney, the first ordained African-American minister, a subsequent vote in 1907 by one African American church to sever ties with the denomination, followed by the establishment of the North American Negro Division of the General Conference soon after. The turning point for the creation of separate African American conferences occurred in 1943 with the death of an African-American woman after being turned away from Washington Adventist Hospital. These events and others led to the decision to establish regional conferences with the goal to achieve greater soul winning among



Melodie Roschman, editor of the *Student Movement* at Andrews University, speaks during a panel discussion on Adventist regional conferences. The event was held on Andrews' campus in March, and was organized by student clubs who saw a need to discuss the important issues relating to the existence of these conferences.

African Americans, the first being the Lake Region Conference in 1945.

Panel participants included Shastri Lloyd, *Student Movement* columnist; Nicholas Miller, professor of church history at the Seminary; Taurus Montgomery, pastor of Harbor of Hope Church (Benton Harbor, Mich.); Dwight Nelson, senior pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church; Timothy Nixon, executive secretary of the Lake Region Conference; Michael Polite, associate chaplain at Andrews; and Melodie Roschman, *Student Movement* editor-in-chief. Marston and Ruiz-Knott served as forum moderators.

Nelson stated that he believes the church should be organized on the basis of unity. Nixon added that our structure should always reflect Jesus and facilitate fulfilling the mission he gave us. Roschman challenged the claim that “all are one” since there are still divisions in the Church.

Questions directed at the panelists included concerns, such as the continuation of racism and anti-Black policies after a reconstruction and whether people should be expected to forfeit their differences or should we learn to appreciate them. Nelson said

he believes that in order for change to happen, there needs to be an official apology from the General Conference.

Montgomery said he wants to see a conversation between younger and older generations of pastors and also a willingness to forgive. “We have to learn to forgive people even when they don’t say they’re sorry,” he said.

Roschman pointed out that not everyone sees everything the same way. “God loves us in our divisions and in our diversity, and because we are unique,” she said. “But if we lose sight of the fact that we are all here because we worship the same God, then what are we going to do?”

At the end of the discussion, the forum leaders made a request of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church: Either restructure the current system or clarify of why the system is the way it is. Each request included a timeframe.

To read the request and watch the forum, visit <http://weareausa.org/march-7-request>.

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