

International Students Featured at Special Services

Annual International Student Sabbath was a blessing

[Agenda](#) | Posted on April 16, 2015



Kolia Afamasaga, Seminary student and a Samoan living in Australia, gave the congregational prayer. (Photo by Darren Heslop, IMC staff photographer)

On Saturday, March 21, Andrews University held its annual International Student Sabbath at Pioneer Memorial Church. As the second most ethnically diverse national university in the United States, Andrews enjoys hosting students from 92 countries around the world.

Special services at 9 a.m. and 11:45 a.m. recognized the unique contribution these students make toward the Andrews experience. The Office of International Student Services & Programs (ISSP) presented videos, musical numbers and readings by international students.

One of the videos included clips of students from around the world offering a tiny glimpse into their experiences at Andrews. Comments included:

“It’s very diverse here, similar to where I’m from. I appreciate that.”

“I feel welcome on this campus.”

“It’s been a blessing to be a part of Andrews University and get to know people from all different parts of the world.”

“Being able to attend classes with and get to know people from around the world, I see things with new perspective.”

“Andrews University is open-minded. You get to see the world here.”

One student even gave a shout-out to ISSP in the video: “People here are warm no matter what the temperature, and the International Student Services staff are very supportive. They’re always checking in to make sure things are going alright.”

While Andrews may seem like a good home away from home for many international students, it’s not always easy being so far from the familiar. The video also highlighted some of the challenges students face coming from very different backgrounds and cultures to the U.S.

These challenges include weather, misunderstanding cultural norms, food, language, living arrangements—living with other people in the dorm—being lonely and missing home, conflicts between thoughts and ethics across cultural lines, among other things.

A second video featured personal experience stories from President Andreasen and Provost Luxton, both of whom arrived at Andrews as international citizens.

“I came here many years ago and was quite overwhelmed by what I found at Andrews,” began Andreasen. “Things are not the same here as they are in Denmark. I had to figure out how to find my classes and a place to live, figure out what to eat and how to make friends. I’d always attended a small church and this one is quite large. I enjoyed it, though, and was blessed by it. I hope that is your experience as well.”

During the Sabbath program, several students presented cultural elements from their own countries of origin. Kolia Afamasaga, Seminary student and a Samoan living in Australia, gave the congregational prayer.

“It was a privilege for me to represent my country,” he says. “I was able to display the Samoan Talking Chief role of speaking on behalf of his clan and village on an important occasion.”

Although Afamasaga chose to pray in English rather than his mother tongue, he still was glad to demonstrate his native culture before he began to pray.

Sonovia Mcfall, a first-year graduate student in speech-language pathology from The Bahamas, “felt honored to be used in whatever way possible to lift up the name of Jesus.”

“The purpose of International Student Sabbath is to celebrate the fact that we are created equally to worship our Creator God no matter our background,” says Robert Benjamin, director ISSP. “We add a beautiful variety to our worship experience that showcases our diversity, but focus on coming together as one people to give us a small taste of what heaven will be like.”

The provost shared her own great experience at Andrews, even as different as it is from her home in England. She spoke specifically about the positive worship experience and environment at Andrews.

“Particularly on a Sabbath like this, when we’re celebrating international students on our campus, it’s important to remember that God is at the center of what we do,” she said. “It doesn’t matter where we’re from, we’re of great value to God and therefore of great value to each other.”

Andreasen went on to share thoughts on how the Andrews experience removes the labels of “international” and “national” but instead creates an extended and expanded family.

“I like to imagine that students who graduate from Andrews and move on will never meet a stranger,” he said. “That they’ve learned to view other people as God’s children.”

Luxton concluded, “When we worship together, pray together and study together, we enrich each other because of our backgrounds, individualities and languages. That’s what it is to be at Andrews University.”

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