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Campus Ministries at Andrews University planned a series of spiritual programs and services for our students this year known as “The Way.” They include chapels based on the book of Acts. Meanwhile, Dwight K. Nelson, senior pastor at Pioneer Memorial Church, will preach a yearlong sermon series based on the Gospel of John. The other gospels will be the subject of exploration in other campus worships and services. This focused approach to study and worship is intended to lead the students onto “The Way.” What does that mean?

We know from Scripture that Jesus’ early followers were known as disciples, meaning students or learners. His inner circle of disciples consisted of 12 men, but we also read of a much larger group of 70—most likely including both men and women—who also considered themselves to be disciples of Jesus. Some were secret followers of Jesus, such as Nicodemus (see John 3), but most followed Him openly. Jesus was their teacher, leader and master.

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the number of His followers grew rapidly. Most were members of the synagogue; but some, like Cornelius, were not. When asked to explain themselves, they at first used the term “The Way” to describe who they were (see Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:4; 25:22). “We are members of the synagogue,” they would say, “but we belong to those called, ‘The Way.’ We follow Jesus.” That became the very first name the earliest Christians used to explain to others who they were.

In time, the gospel was shared with Gentiles who, along with Jews, also became followers of Jesus. That happened in the city of Antioch, in Syria; and suddenly, it was no longer possible for them to identify themselves as members of the synagogue who followed The Way. So as more and more people joined from all walks of life, a name was given to them: “Christians,” meaning followers of Christ. Some were Jews, but also Romans, Greeks and others joined up. They were called Christians (see Acts 11).

The first name for the early Christians is particularly meaningful for it described those among God’s people who made a decision to follow Jesus in a very specific way. By using the name, The Way, they indicated three things about themselves:

First, The Way indicated a certain way of life for these early believers. No longer would they live for themselves, but for each other and for God. So they would not wander off each in his own way (see Isaiah 53:6); but as Enoch had done millennia earlier, they would walk with God (see Genesis 5). The Way therefore is a way of life.

Second, by choosing the name The Way, the early Christians also implied a way of understanding. No longer would they walk in darkness, but in the light of the knowledge of God. They would study His word, and it would become a light on their path (see Psalm 119:105).

Third, they indicated that by following Jesus they had become people with a purpose in life. They would not wander aimlessly about without hope, but would find direction in life, seek a future, find their destiny. They became pilgrims fixing their sight on a city built by God (see Hebrews 11:16).

It is the fervent hope of the faculty and staff at Andrews that all our students will find The Way and walk on it—a way of life, a way of understanding and a way of clear direction, a destination toward God and His future for us.

This year’s theme for our campus is a good one, and the name for it, The Way, takes us back to those early followers of Jesus who said about themselves: “Oh, we are The Way.” And I suspect that most likely they would have added, “Won’t you join us?”

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