

A Heart for Service

Andrews University Hosts Change Weekend

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A Change Weekend food giveaway on Sunday aimed to help community members in Berrien County affected by the COVID-19 crisis. (Photo by Darren Heslop, University Communication staff photographer)

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In its fourth annual campus-wide service opportunity, Andrews University hosted Change Weekend from Friday, Sept. 4, through Sunday, Sept. 6, 2020. Previously holding Change Day, the University took the chance to adapt to COVID-19 pandemic circumstances while still upholding its commitment to service. Over the course of the event, more than 250 students took part in the service projects offered by various organizations on- and off-campus.

José Bourget, University chaplain, explains, “Andrews University cares about our community. A pandemic doesn’t change that, it simply means we shift things around a bit. Change Weekend is doing things differently while our heart for our neighbors continues to beat strong.”

On Friday, Sept. 4, the University partnered with the Red Cross to host a blood drive in Johnson Gym. A participation request for five individuals from each campus department was sent out, and all 70 spots were filled with willing volunteers. Red Cross Southwest Michigan account manager James P. Lanning voices his gratefulness at the enthusiasm for the project. "I have always been proud of Andrews University when it comes to blood collection and this last blood drive did nothing to change that," he says. "Students are willing to give a part of themselves to save another which is amazing. We have canceled a lot of blood drives this year due to COVID-19, so to collect 150 lifesaving products is a big deal for us."

Those involved also expressed appreciation for the project. One of the donors, Chaelynn Lee, encourages, "It doesn't take much to help someone else out."

On Sunday, Sept. 6, Andrews University worked with local farms to host a drive-through food giveaway at the Berrien Springs Trinity Lutheran Church. The collaboration aimed to assist members of the community affected by COVID-19, offering fresh-picked fruit and vegetables to local individuals. Together, Bixby Farms and Kerlikowske Farms generously donated over 400 fresh ears of corn and 400 watermelons for the cause, making that goal a reality.

Over the three-day weekend, students were also given the opportunity to write encouragement cards to seniors living at Timber Ridge Manor in Berrien Springs and Pine Ridge Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Stevensville. Supplied with Bible verses, notecards and pens, participants wrote a total of 200 messages of strength and care to those who needed it, working to brighten the recipients' days.

In addition to these service events, other groups worked locally to bring positive change to the community. The mathematics and physics departments of the University came together in a joint effort to collect tombstone data, photos and GPS coordinates at Rose Hill Cemetery, Berrien Springs, in order to create a public digital database. Students lent their hands to beautifying the face of the Harbor of Hope church in Benton Harbor. Individuals from the student club AFIA (Andrews Filipino International Association) worked collectively to landscape the local Filipino-American church in Berrien Springs. A group also ventured to Silver Beach in St. Joseph, worshipping together and cleaning up trash from the Labor Day weekend.

Corrine Wilcox, who assisted in the beach pickup, recalls, "I loved that everyone took the time out of their lives to help others. Sometimes we get caught in our own lives and it feels good that we are all working together to be world changers."

In the wake of the uncertainty and obstacles of the past year, Teela Ruehle, director for service projects and Change Day coordinator, affirms that it has become all the more important to look outwardly and to serve others. "At Andrews University one of our goals is to develop world changing students. We want to lead out by inviting and showing students that we don't serve because it's easy or convenient, we serve because there's a need, and during this difficult year the needs have increased not decreased," she emphasizes. "We hope and pray that Change Weekend made a positive impact in the lives of the people in our community, and we will continue throughout this year and next to look for ways to give back and serve our local community."

Though service may have looked different this year, Change Weekend demonstrated the care and compassion still evident in both the Andrews University campus and community as a whole. Each project's contributions worked as a force for good in the midst of challenging times. As participant Kavya Mohanram elegantly concludes, "I have learned that I can make a difference no matter how small."