

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL INITIATIVES

by Desmond Murray

*In its second year of operation, the **Community Engagement Council** continues to fulfill its mission to broaden and deepen Andrews University's presence and impact in our local community under the watchwords of connect, engage and empower.*

In April 2018, Andrews University officially became a member of the Michigan Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council (MGSSLC) with President Luxton concurrently appointed to its board. The Leadership Council consists of leaders and individuals from across the business, education, government and nonprofit sectors of Michigan's Great Southwest who bring expertise and passion for advancing the vision of making the area a vibrant and prosperous region to live, learn, work, invest, grow, play and retire for everyone.

Most of the work, planning and accomplishments of CEC is done through its subcommittees. The current active subcommittees are: Change Day (see page 20), Community-based Research, Diversity, Equity & Culture, Education, Health, Interfaith, and Restorative Justice. The following are some of their accomplishments:

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Four principal outcomes were achieved by the Community-based Research subcommittee:

- 1) Collaboration with the Research and Creative Scholarship Council for inclusion of service-oriented and community-focused experiences at the annual Celebration of Research.
- 2) Collaboration with Lakeland Health on its Community Health Needs Assessment study.
- 3) Collaboration with Berrien County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority on its \$600,000 coalition grant proposal submission to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.
- 4) Over the last two years, a team of researchers in the Department of Public Health, Nutrition & Wellness conducted a study into the prevalence of metabolic syndrome and chronic diseases among African American women in Benton Harbor, Michigan, who experience a high incidence of obesity. The Andrews' team worked with the "Strong Women of Faith" cancer group in Benton Harbor, Michigan. This study will be presented at the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters (MASAL) Conference in March 2019.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & CULTURE

The Diversity, Equity & Culture subcommittee planned and accomplished the following:

- 1) The Benton Harbor Community Listening Tour was held on Sept. 20, 2018, at the Benton Harbor Public Library. The purpose was to engage and listen to Benton Harbor residents about their experiences with and perspectives of Andrews University. The valuable insights gained from Benton Harbor residents will assist Andrews University to broaden and deepen its connections and relationships with this local community.
- 2) Worked with International Food Fair organizers to enhance local community attendance and participation.
- 3) Joined with the Community Engagement working group of the Diversity & Inclusion Action Council. This minimizes duplication of effort and leverages personnel and resources.

EDUCATION

In 2018, the accomplishments of the Education subcommittee include:

- 1) Expanding the weekly classroom literacy intervention H.E.L.P., which started in 2015, to include all students of the

- grades 1, 2, 4 and 5 classrooms of the Benton Harbor Area Schools (BHAS).
- 2) The Department of Nursing conducted a health education mentoring program with students from Benton Harbor High School. Nursing students went to the high school and taught the students hands-only CPR as well as tips on bleeding/wound care stabilization prior to the coming of first responders.
- 3) Offered two cohorts of a seven-week parenting course, Successful Parenting Strategies (SPS). SPS was designed to build community among parents in Benton Harbor, and help them develop effective communicating skills and evidence-based parenting strategies that work to create positive self-regulated students. The zero-credit program is being expanded this year to include programs that improve employment opportunities for Benton Harbor residents.
- 4) Developed the pilot Summer High School Advancement Program teaching Algebra I for credit recovery for BHAS students.
- 5) Hosted the second annual Career Fair where approximately 400 Benton Harbor High School seniors and juniors met with Andrews University



Andrews students interact with BHAS elementary school children at the annual H.E.L.P. holiday musical production

- departments to learn of the career opportunities available.
- 6) Inviting and hosting the elementary school children of the BHAS to a third annual holiday musical production at the Howard Performing Arts Center. The program again exposed students to various musical genres, different musical instruments, and a values-based skit that reinforced the need for respect, kindness and mindfulness.
 - 7) Organizing and hosting, in partnership with the James White Library, a community discussion, “Changing the World: The Next Step.”

HEALTH (RENAMED WELLNESS)

The Health subcommittee of the Community Engagement Council is now merged, to avoid duplication and maximize efficiency, with the Andrews University Wellness Council. In 2018, University Wellness (often in collaboration with other departments/entities on campus), connected with and impacted the community in the following ways:

- 1) Ongoing Wellness Menu offers classes/opportunities on the campus of Andrews University, many of which are available and open to the community.
- 2) Working on establishing partnerships with: a) the Rotary Club in Berrien Springs, b) Lakeland Health Care, c) YMCA Southwest Michigan, d) Direct Fitness Solutions and e) Thrive Psychology, and several more.
- 3) In October 2018, under the leadership of Gretchen Krivak (leader of the Community Engagement Taskforce for the University Wellness Council), the “Health & Fitness Expo” sponsored by Andrews University was held at the YMCA in Niles.

- 4) The Jackie Film is public and available on Amazon.com.
- 5) The Andrews University Wellness Transformation Guide is available free online.

INTERFAITH

The Interfaith subcommittee successfully worked on putting together the following events:

Interfaith Prayer Vigil—Following the tragic shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on Oct. 27, 2018, the Interfaith Committee expressed solidarity with leaders in the local Michiana Jewish community. The committee worked together with Temple B’nai Shalom to plan an interfaith prayer service on Nov. 5, 2018.

Dinner-and-Dialogue—These events are meant to bring people from different faiths from across Berrien County to grow in common understanding and dialogue on how we can work together from a place of shared values to effect change and meet needs that would uplift our local community.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The newly minted Restorative Justice Action Council (RJAC) brings together various disciplines and faculty across the University in collaboration with local community restorative justice practitioners. A specific event currently being planned focuses the 2019 Social Consciousness Summit on the topic of restorative justice. However, more broadly, the RJAC will explore and develop an Adventist faith informed approach to restorative justice for broad application across the University and church.

Reflections on Paradise, California

by Teela Ruehle



We took a group of 10 students and staff from Andrews University to the Paradise Seventh-day Adventist Church, who has joined with the Chico Adventist church. We were invited to encourage and love on the members—95 percent of the church members had lost their homes. They all shared with us their stories of having only 10–15 minutes to

get their families and leave.

We offered family counseling, children’s programming, vespers and Sabbath School while there during the first week of December.

They are a beautiful example of church. They are loving on each other, providing for each other, sharing supplies and encouragement in the midst

of their loss and pain. What an inspiration!

Campus Ministries and University Wellness teamed up and sent encouraging notes and water bottles to Chico State University, where many of their students were affected by the wildfires.

We hope to continue to encourage our brothers and sisters affected by the wildfires.

I was reading a Bible story to my daughter one night, about a little boy who brought his five loaves and two fish to Jesus. Jesus miraculously took the small amount and multiplied it to feed everyone. It hit me—that’s all Jesus asks of us, to give what we have.

I didn’t go to Paradise to make a huge difference. I went because it was all that I could do. We took a team who gave all they could, which seemed so small, to help even one person work through the craziness that had just become their whole reality. I went to make a difference in even one person’s life, and my prayer is that we did.

Lindsey Pratt graduated with her Master of Divinity in August 2017 and currently works at the Center for Youth Evangelism.

The trip to Paradise, California, reminded me to be happy with what I have. Talking to innocent children who have lost everything impacted me. I am not talking about just losing their house and their toys but losing their parents and loved ones. These precious children were affected for the rest of their lives. They woke up that morning not thinking this would happen to them. Let us not wake up each morning and ignore the beauty we have in front of us. Let us not wake up and walk by our loved ones without giving them a hug or a kiss. Let us wake up every morning and thank God—because of His grace and mercy we are all still here.

Jharony Fernandez-Gibbs is a graduate student pursuing a master’s in social work and youth & young adult ministry.