



**ABOVE:** Andrea Luxton, president, Andrews University; Clifford Jones, president, Lake Region Conference; Don Livesay, president, Lake Union conference; Carmelo Mercado, vice president, Lake Union Conference

# *Journey to Healing and Understanding*

*Lake Union Conference hosts discussion about race relations in the church and at Andrews University*

**ON SATURDAY, OCT. 1, THE LAKE UNION CONFERENCE OF** Seventh-day Adventists hosted “Journey to Healing and Understanding,” a formal discussion about race relations within the Adventist church. The event, a follow-up to Lake Union Conference president Don Livesay’s apology for the failings of the church delivered at last year’s Lake Region Conference campmeeting, was held at the Village Seventh-day Adventist Church. The opening panel, moderated by Livesay, included the following individuals: executive secretary of the Lake Union Conference, Maurice Valentine III; Lake Region Conference president, R. Clifford Jones; and Andrews University president, Andrea Luxton. An additional Q&A program also introduced Taurus Montgomery, pastor of the Harbor of Hope church; Hyveth Williams and Nicholas Miller, Andrews University professors; William Lee, pastor of the Capitol City Church

in Indianapolis; and Carmelo Mercado, general vice president of the Lake Union Conference.

During the first half of the program, Luxton apologized for the racism displayed at Andrews University in past years. Her remarks during that session as well as her concluding thoughts are shared on the following page. In regards to continuing the discussion, Carmelo Mercado stated that four similar convocations were in development for Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit and Indianapolis. Andrews University is committed to continuing the process toward healing and understanding among all of its constituents.



Watch the entire presentation at <https://vimeo.com/186091265> or go to the Andrews University Youtube page.

When we look around us, we don't have to turn on the news for long to see what is happening. Colin Kaepernick drops to his knees as the National Anthem is played on September 1 at a San Francisco 49ers game, and now myriads of sportsmen and women at all levels have followed his example. From Oklahoma, to North Carolina, to California we hear of riots and demonstrations on police shootings of particularly, often unarmed, black men. At American University, students demand the suspension of two white students accused of throwing a banana at a black woman in a dorm this month, not the first event of its kind in that dorm. Many of us read of these almost daily events and they leave us bewildered that in 2016 we appear to remain plagued by the stranglehold of racism. We instinctively want to keep these events of protest and tragedy at a distance from us. But today we acknowledge that in our own history and our own present realities, we too have been guilty of the bias, insensitivity and racism that rocks this country.

I want to thank my colleagues for sharing some part of the African-American story as experienced at Andrews University. If we had more time, and more stories, we would likely end up at the same place we are after hearing our two speakers today. As an organization we have been guilty of racial bias, of making African-American employees and students feel "less than." We have not listened well. We have not been sensitive and have not taken action when action should have been taken. For that I am profoundly sorry. It is not good enough for us to see ourselves simply mirroring or being the victim of the challenges and conflicts of society at our point in history. As Christians, as Seventh-day Adventists, we must always have greater expectations of ourselves. We never have an excuse to devalue, make assumptions of another because of their race. We have no excuse not to be open to understanding our own sinfulness and bias as we ask God to "search us and see if there is any wickedness in us" as the Psalmist expresses it.

So African-American friends, fellow Christians, colleagues, I apologize to you for any experiences in the past where Andrews University has not treated you with the dignity, respect and equality which is your right. I do appreciate the title of this program, chosen by the Lake Union, and particularly the word, "Journey." I know sadly that we still have not yet arrived at where we should be. But I can tell you that we are fully and unequivocally committed to continuing the journey towards healing, understanding and biblical justice. That will continue to mean educating more, listening more, being more vulnerable, and intentionally seeking increasing ways to dialogue. Our campus must ultimately be one of safety to all races, where meetings such as this one are not just gestures but meaningful occasions of ongoing reconciliation, healing and transformation.

So I ask all of us here today who have connections to Andrews University to make a personal commitment with mine, because the commitment to growth and a journey forward must be a journey for all of us. Let us open our minds to recognizing our bias, including, and especially, our ongoing implicit biases which we do not readily acknowledge or understand. Let us open our hearts to the stories of our African-American colleagues and students. Let us open our souls to the

**“So African-American friends, fellow Christians, colleagues, I apologize to you for any experiences in the past where Andrews University has not treated you with the dignity, respect and equality which is your right.”**

truth of the gospel where racism has no place. And let us ask God for his spirit of love, compassion and forgiveness.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

Serena Williams, international tennis star, was in a car with her nephew driving. She saw the police watching from the side of the road and became fearful for her nephew, and by extension all young black men. She blogged, "Why did I have to think about this in 2016? Have we not gone through enough, opened so many doors, impacted billions of lives? But I realized we must stride on—for it's not how far we have come but how much further still we have to go."

There is so much I believe in that statement. Have we not gone through enough? Opened so many doors? Impacted billions of lives? And you know that should be enough.

When I think about Andrews University, when I think about our church, when I think about this country, how many African-Americans have made significant, huge achievements. Benefited so many people, changed the world for the better. Surely that should be enough, but as we've recognized today it appears it hasn't been enough.

Yes, we have much to thank our African-American colleagues and students for at Andrews University. Their skills, talents have brought much to the community. We are stronger for their presence, past and present, for their stories touching our personal stories and the story of Andrews University. Shouldn't that be enough for us? Shouldn't that be sufficient to drive out bias and racism in any form? Sadly it appears that this has not yet been enough. Yes, we have made strides forward. But we do still have further to go. And we must go there... We must go to a place of safety, where all voices, all experiences, all lives are valued and treasured, especially those of our African-American friends.

And I hope for all of us here, and all of you here from Andrews certainly, that is a pledge we can make. To continue that path very intentionally, to make our place safer.