The Story Continues

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I came to Andrews University after completing a BA in English and theology at Newbold College, England. My future path was clear: I would take an MA in English at Andrews and then return to teach in England, as my father had done and my mother was still doing. I had made that decision at the age of 4 and the story of my life to that point was living out that decision and pursuing that future plan. My experiences had already been rich and I thought the rest of my “story” would unfold as I had envisaged. Then came the conversation.

What was I going to do when I finished? Go back and be an English teacher at secondary school in England. That was good, but had I considered I might want to….? And my mentor faculty who was asking me that question, without undermining my current dreams, identified other possibilities that could take my commitment to education and to service in the church in other directions.

So the conversation ended. I did go back to England. I did teach English in the Adventist secondary school. It was four of the best years of my career. Yet the seed had been planted, the connections made that led ultimately to my decision to be a university-level teacher, then administrator, then travel to Canada, then to Andrews and now to be president. It was not just the words in that conversation that made the difference—it was the reality that as I shared in what it was to be at Andrews University as a master’s degree student, that my story developed multiple more possible endings than I had ever imagined.

So as I become president now at the University I am conscious of the power for good and for change that this University can represent: to individuals, to the church, and to the wider community. What does that mean in 2016? What can Andrews University do to build on its great story and traditions and reach into the future with relevance, offering hope to this generation? What is my vision for this campus?

I would like to express my vision in three ways. First, what type of community do I want Andrews to become? Or put another way, what is the institutional culture that represents the best of Andrews University? Second, I want to focus on how we respond to some of the environmental factors that impact higher education in North America. Finally, I want to create a vision for you of what Andrews University might perhaps be in the future.

I started this article with a story—my story. In the editorial at the beginning of this magazine I talked about story too. And that is where I want to start in describing the type of community I want Andrews to become.

When students come to Andrews, each comes with a story. A story partially told. Here they come into contact with hundreds of others, thousands of others, who also have a very real story. Some may have already included chapters of significant pain, others have seen little but success. The stories of cultures meet each other. The story of the city and the farm. The story of Africa and Asia. The story of the
faithful and those who are searching. And amidst all of this is the story of Andrews—its values, its history. How will all these individuals, with all these backgrounds help us do something more than “business as usual?” How do we let students fulfill their dreams, or discover new ones? How do we understand difference and be global citizens in the truest sense of the word? I want an institutional culture at Andrews that instinctively values each person because we are listening to them. I want a culture at Andrews where each person feels they have a voice and have the responsibility to make a difference by being at this place. I want a culture where to share faith, grow in faith, is always a part of this University’s fabric, where the Christian story, the Adventist story is inescapably heard. Where academic excellence and prowess in research becomes integral to the campus story. My story, your story will be different because we were at Andrews. And Andrews’ story is also different because I am here and because you are here. When a community listens and engages they are richer for the experience, there is more opportunity for great ideas to surface, more likelihood of individuals discovering new opportunities and deepening their faith. That is what I would like for our Andrews’ community.

This may all seem a bit abstract written on paper, but what this means is that we will have a commitment within our administration to do what we can to create an environment of faith and community that is so attractive, students will hear about it and will want to be part of the unique Andrews experience.

Of course, 2016 in itself presents higher education with increasing challenges. Increased federal demands for accountability, demands for accreditation in multiple programs, all put pressure on universities to perform better, provide more information and do so more cheaply. Students and parents see community college as a way to start university-level education inexpensively. The cost of living at a distance encourages increasing numbers of students to stay home for as long as possible, and maybe use online learning as an alternative to the campus experience. And so the challenges continue.

While these pressures have impacted Andrews University enrollment in recent years, I believe we are poised to move strongly into the future. This requires flexibility in delivery, and the growth of our online programs testifies to the potential success in that area. This will mean reaching down in high schools and academies and providing a seamless education experience for students. Creating more models to make that happen are part of our future and we have already begun to do this through our high school program and newly introduced Early College Experience that we ran late this summer. Responding to the current environment also requires us to be innovative, and think outside the box. What will innovation look like at Andrews? It will be rooted in our core values, summarized so well in our motto, “Seek Knowledge. Affirm Faith. Change the World.” However, it requires that with those roots we consider new ways of doing old things—perhaps new structures, perhaps new
collaborations both internal and external, perhaps rethinking program designs to best meet the marketplace. It requires us to look at our arts, social sciences and humanities programs and give them a new voice. Ideas are already emerging on all of these ideas—future editions of FOCUS will roll out some of these initiatives. In the current environment we also need to be responsive to the marketplace beyond our campus. Many of our graduates do extremely well, with many of our programs reporting 100 percent employment and acceptance into graduate schools. But to employers, internships and engagement in the real-world environment are critical parts of what they expect from a graduate. We can still grow here.

I could say more of our exciting plans, but for now let me turn to the future—five years from now, seven years from now, what will Andrews University be?

Let me share what I hope it will be. We will still have a strong focus on our core values as a Seventh-day Adventist institution and as a Christian community. We will be unapologetically Adventist. We will tell that story well. We will also have created a network of education opportunities and partnerships so that Andrews University will in continually new ways educate and deepen the faith and knowledge of thousands of students each year. From business, to education, to theology, the Andrews brand will be international and national. So that means we will be on the cutting edge of new technology, stepping into new opportunities, thoughtfully but deliberately. Our Berrien Springs campus will also remain strong—there is nothing like the campus experience for personal growth, especially if we can create the culture I describe above. That strength may be in the context of different demographics, as we recognize the move nationally towards more transfer students and more adult learners, but the education process will remain excellent. And it will be a campus with some new buildings. The Health & Wellness Center will be built and be a hub of activity for students. A new Health Professions building will house multiple health programs, including state-of-the-art nursing facilities that include a simulation center that will serve many different programs. The Howard Performing Arts Center will be expanded to house the music department and a small concert hall for chamber or solo concerts. The Architecture building will be renewed to meet best practice. The rapidly growing STEM programs will be supported by a STEMplox building, with new spaces to keep pace with innovative opportunities.

I hope you are still with me as I reach the end of this vision for our future. This vision is by no means exhaustive of all the possibilities. And I admit that all these dreams may take longer than five to seven years to come to reality. But I want you to be excited with me at the possibilities. There are challenges ahead, but there are also many opportunities. Creating the right campus culture, responding proactively to the current educational environment and then imagining a strong and biblically faithful future for the University—that is my plan. But of course, I cannot do that alone. My colleagues, our church, the students, the alumni—you are all part of this vast exciting network of Andrews’ people.

Thank you as you support us as we move into the future.