Andrews University Holds Panel on Social Justice with Mark Finley

By Ante Jeroncic: "On Thursday, January 29, a panel discussion including Mark Finley, Nicholas Miller, and Sherine Brown-Fraser, was held in the lobby of the Howard Performing Arts Center at Andrews University. The panel answered questions centered on the topic: “The Role of Seventh-day Adventists in Social Justice.” (link)

Hollywood SDA Church: Where God’s Spirit Continues to Change Lives

By APF: “In our church community, we seek to encounter God’s presence in what He is actively doing in people’s lives and our surrounding communities. One aspect of our search for God’s activity is through our Peace and Social Justice lens.” (link)

Adventists and Muslims Resolve Land Dispute in Ghana

By Jeff Boyd: A land dispute between an Adventist congregation and their Muslim neighbors turned violent in mid-February. After a regional security council mediation, the Adventist church decided to give the land to the Muslims. In return, the Muslim community has said it will rebuild the destroyed Adventist mission house in a new area. (link)
Andrews University holds panel on social justice with Mark Finley

On Thursday, January 29, a panel discussion including Mark Finley, Nicholas Miller, and Sherine Brown-Fraser, was held in the lobby of the Howard Performing Arts Center at Andrews University. The panel answered questions centered on the topic: “The Role of Seventh-day Adventists in Social Justice.” Questions included: What social justice issues should the SDA church be or not be involved in? Are ethnically separate conferences a social justice issue? What social justice issues do you (directed at the panel) find pressing? Brown-Fraser, being the Chair of the Department of Public Health, Nutrition and Wellness, stressed food disparity. Miller, a professor of church history, noted that Adventists were once vocal on topics such as abolition and temperance, but lost their social gospel message and became silent on issues such as Civil Rights. Now, Miller mentioned, Adventists say little on race, torture, immigration, and sex trafficking. Finley, Assistant to the General Conference President with regard to global evangelism, pointed to creation as the basis for social justice. Finley pointed out organizations such as ADRA that do such works as digging wells. When a woman who walks three miles a day to get water sees a well gushing in her own village, “that’s social justice,” Finley said. Education seemed to be the preferred method of fixing social injustice, but the overall appeal of the panel to the Andrews University campus was that each person would find the issue that “gets their heart beating” and work towards justice.

By Łukasz Krzywon, AU APF student leader
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Hollywood SDA Church: Where God’s Spirit Continues to Change Lives

(The following article was contributed by Cher Blue and Mireya Chaffee, who are co-coordinators for Adventist Peace Fellowship initiatives at the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church in Los Angeles. Hollywood SDA is one of five Adventist congregations that have passed official motions to become certified Adventist Peace Churches.)

The Hollywood Adventist Church is located in the heart of Hollywood. We take our urban context seriously and actively seek to discover what our role is in our community. We believe that God loves the city and therefore invites us to love the city on God’s behalf. We also love our city by simply being involved in its life, eating in local restaurants, shopping in local stores, listening to and being in relationship with our neighbors, and participating in community and civic life.

At Hollywood Adventist Church where our unspoken creed is, “Where God’s Spirit is given space to change lives,” we are committed to the ongoing work of making that space fully inclusive.
We accept that God’s love is broader and deeper than we can fathom. Fellowship and membership in His church should, likewise, be open and generous. The redemptive power of Christ’s love extends to everyone regardless of age, race, class or sexual identity. All are welcome in our church.

We embrace the challenge of being a diverse community, which encourages dialogue and welcomes questions, as we continue to identify the ways God is at work in all of our lives. We believe this will ultimately enrich us and transform us to be a witness for and a foretaste of the kingdom God intends to establish in the earth made new.

In our church community, we seek to encounter God’s presence in what He is actively doing in people’s lives and our surrounding communities. One aspect of our search for God’s activity is through our Peace and Social Justice lens.

For example, in Los Angeles County and Hollywood it is very difficult for low income and homeless members of the community to experience life and community without dire hardships. Meeting even the most basic needs such as finding a place to rest during the day or use the bathroom is often impossible. By law, police officers in the City of Los Angeles may detain and ticket individuals for loitering (including standing or sitting) on sidewalks and other public right of ways between 6am and 9pm. For our homeless friends and neighbors, it is impossible to obey this law since you can’t just disappear during the day. Individuals often end up getting tickets which cannot be paid because these individuals don’t have any money to begin with. If the person has tickets that remain unpaid for a certain length of time they turn into warrants which then get them arrested and in jail.

The Hollywood Adventist Church is committed to provide a safe space to come off the street Tuesday through Friday. Once a guest rings our bell they are greeted by a staff member or volunteer who directs them to our service counter. At the service counter, first time visitors fill out our new guest form. Each day, guests are offered the ability to sign up for the currently offered programs and services, like access to showers or may be referred to other local services provided by other community agencies.

Genuinely caring and building a trust relationship with our new friends has opened many opportunities to minister and provide for the needs that we may have otherwise missed.

Our staff is intentional about getting to know our guests, learn their story and understand their needs. Genuinely caring and building a trust relationship with our new friends has opened many opportunities to minister and provide for the needs that we may have otherwise missed. A lot of our homeless neighbors feel forgotten by society. Many feel they will live out their life as invisible people walking the streets of our city. We have designed our effort to support our homeless friends in such a way as to get in touch with their immediate needs and provide them a place of safety and belonging. We remain available for spiritual conversations, counseling, and extend an open invitation to participate in any aspect of our church community but do not impose our beliefs. By taking this approach, we seek to be a part of the solution to end homelessness and take on a role and responsibility not currently being offered by other agencies that support our homeless neighbors. This is one aspect of faith-based social justice that our church has practiced for more than 7 years.

This aspect of the church’s peace and social justice, currently provides 200+ showers each month for our homeless neighbors. When a person visits us for a shower we provide them with a clean towel, body wash, and shampoo. Our lobby is available Tuesday through Friday for those waiting for the shower or that just need a safe place to rest. In the lobby our service counter offers the opportunity to sign up for our services as well as information on services provided through our community partnerships.

Several months ago, our church administrator was approached by some of the 25+ homeless young adults that we...
serve on a regular basis. They asked if there was any way the church could assist them in obtaining their GEDs. The church staff collaborated with one of our community partners (which partner, add link). Through this partnership, we were able to start offering GED classes to our guests. Each Thursday one of our staff takes 4 people in their car to GED tutoring.

As we continue in our journey to be active participants in what God is already doing in our neighborhood, we both wait and are active in seeking His Leadership for us individually and collectively as a part of the body of Christ in our community.

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Adventists and Muslims Resolve Land Dispute in Ghana

A Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Ghana has had an on-going land dispute with neighboring Muslims, reports Adventist Today (link). The conflict became violent in mid-February when 12 Muslim youth apparently incited a group of more than 1,000 Muslims to destroy the Adventist property. Excerpt from Adventist Today:

The initial investigation revealed that twelve Muslim youth “spearheaded the misunderstanding between the two religious groups,” reported GNA. The Daily Guide described the destruction of property on February 13, reporting that a crowd of more than 1,000 Muslim young people “stormed the SDA church premises near the Atebubu Government Hospital on Friday afternoon after the mid-day prayers with guns and offensive weapons.” The crowd then “set the newly built mission house ablaze and further brought down the walls around the church and demolished the temple.”

The destroyed mission house “accommodated close to 20 teacher trainees who are doing their teaching practice in the school. They lost valuable items such as laptops, cellular phones, books and certificates, among others,” reported Ghana Nation. (link)

After a regional security council mediation, both sides have signed a peace pact. Adventist leaders forgave the youth and gave the disputed land to the Muslims. In return, the Muslim leaders said they will build a new mission house for the Adventists elsewhere.

SOURCES

- Muslims and Christians at Atebubu smoke peace-pipe (Ghana News Agency, 23 Feb 2015)
- Muslim Youth Burn Church At Atebubu (Daily Guide, 14 Feb 2015)
- SDA abandons church after Muslim youth attack (Ghana Nation, 16 Feb 2015)


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