



**A Conversation With Andrea Luxton, PhD, President Emerita Newbold College (1997-2001); Canadian University College (2006-2010); and Andrews University (2016-2023)**

**By Bordes Henry Saturné and Andrea Luxton**

*After serving as an English teacher, professor, education director, and principal, as well as holding several church departmental appointments, Andrea Luxton accepted the call to serve as president of Newbold College (now Newbold College of Higher Education) in England, a position she held from 1997 until 2001. From 2001-2003, she served as vice president for academic administration at Canadian University College (now Burman University) in Alberta, Canada, until she was elected to serve as associate director of education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., from 2003 to 2006. During her tenure at the GC, she also served as executive secretary of the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA). In 2006, she returned to Canada, this time to serve as president of Canadian University College, a role she held until she transitioned to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. as provost in 2010. In 2016, she was appointed president of Andrews University.*

*Andrea Luxton retired from Andrews University in 2023. She is now an associate director responsible for higher education at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, located in Columbia, Maryland, U.S.A.*

**Bordes Henry Saturné (BHS): What is the contribution of Adventist colleges and universities to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How can they do that more effectively? Andrea Luxton**

(AL): Let us talk first about the contribution. It is vital. The reason we started higher education was initially just to make sure we had people educated to work for the church. That is still a very important role today, but it is even more than that: The church needs to facilitate the development of an educated laity. It is important to simultaneously enable their professional, academic, and faith growth. That makes the church stronger. That is what transforms the church. The ideal place for that transition to happen is in Adventist edu-

cation. It is a place where church members can explore their faith within the context of difficult questions in our own academic environment. It brings a depth to their Christian experience and their faith journey. Further, higher education has the mission to reach out to new individuals on campus and in the community.

How can we be more effective? One big thing is a much deeper understanding and partnership between church and higher education. Sometimes, neither understands the other. Traditionally, we talk in higher education about “town and gown,” referring to the uneasiness between the university and the town in which it exists. Further, there is a risk in the Adventist Church for that to be a tension between “pulpit and university” or between “gown and pew.”

There seems to be a real lack of understanding of higher education in parts of the church in spite of the fact that we are doing the same thing and committed to the same mission. We have so much to share to enrich each other, but sometimes, there’s a little bit of tension.

**BHS: What are the most critical challenges currently facing Adventist higher education in North America and around the world? What can leaders do to mitigate them?**

AL: Every country is going to be slightly different. So, I’m going to start with North America. First, there may be a lack of understanding in the church about why higher education is so important. Therefore, it is not being embraced in a way that would encourage more people to be part of Adventist higher education. The second challenge is the changing demographics. Many of our members may not have the capacity to afford Adventist higher education. It is not accessible to them. That may cause significant pressure on enrollment in the number of Adventist students. It is true that enrollment remains high in many institutions in other parts of the world, but in those places, often the percentage of Adventist students is quite low.

Another source of tension is globalization. Everyone is much more mobile, and technology allows access widely from one place and another, yet Adventist education, like other forms of higher education, has grown up historically from a single model of campus-bound student base.

When you consider all the different modalities and different options currently available, that changes things. This puts demands on us to be on the cutting edge of moving things forward if we are going to stay

in touch with what is happening and really be responsive to the needs of the church.

**BHS: What could the church do to better prepare future presidents for our colleges and universities?**

**AL:** There needs to be a more intentional development of leadership capacity at the middle level or even for young potential leaders in higher education, as well as some other areas. There are some very specific leadership needs in higher education. We have a church system that operates largely by election. We shy away from encouraging people to develop leadership skills. I've always had the personal philosophy that you open as many doors as you can, and then God helps you decide which one you're going through. Leadership development is like that: not putting promises on the table, but enabling people to have more doors open for them. If there is the right fit for them to move into leadership, then they're ready to go. When you have people coming in cold without leadership experience, it's a rough ride for them.

We are in an environment, especially in North America, where the turnover of a [university] presidency in the country is now once every three to four years. That is because of the significant pressures that are put on presidents from all directions. There is a need to build capacity for leadership, to have more longevity, to have people understand the church, and to know Adventist education.

**BHS: What do you think prepared you to be a college or university president? And looking back, do you think you were prepared for that responsibility at Newbold, Canadian Union College (CUC), or Andrews?**

**AL:** Diverse experiences prepared me for the task. Some leaders trusted me in various ways and gave me the opportunity to grow, expand, and experience things. Having said all that, you are never totally prepared until you hit the position of being the person in authority and having the final responsibility.

Newbold was the first place. That's where I made the most mistakes. That's where you learn, most of it the first time, and then you keep having other opportunities to refine things. It is interesting, however, that looking back on it, I spent six years in the British Union outside of higher education that were significantly formative. It was so helpful to have the experience of being a secondary school teacher, a secondary principal, and a union departmental director. That was



**Andrea Luxton standing beside the J. N. Andrews Legacy of Leadership statue by Allan Collins.**

huge because it helped me connect to so many different types of individuals with different experiences. It enabled me to better understand how the church works than if I were in higher education only.

**BHS: What could be the role of former university presidents in the Adventist system?**

**AL:** Presidents learn a lot in these positions. Hopefully, they have got a little bit of wisdom that they can pass on to help those who are just moving into those positions. In the church, in general, they may have some important areas of leadership that they might be able to use for others.

**BHS: Now, looking back, do you feel that you have sacrificed your family, your friends, and/or your loved ones for your career?**

**AL:** I don't regret any of the decisions I've made or where I've been. Does it take a personal toll on you? Yes. I have not gotten married, and maybe that's one reason why I never did. I would put the question more in broad terms. Has my personal life been impacted? Sure. It's the cost you pay. And for those who have families, I know that it's a cost that families pay. You accept the cost because you believe very much in the importance of what you're doing. I'm not sure that that is completely avoidable. There may be some ways in which people can navigate processes and make sure that they give time and space to the important people in their lives. They must do that, but even for those that I know have done that, there is always a cost to the family.

**BHS: During your presidency [at Andrews], with the pressure of the position, were you able to take care of your health? Or to take a vacation?**

**AL:** I early on learned, even before I became president, that I had the capacity to fill all my days with students and whatever else work-wise that I was doing. I couldn't say, "I'm doing something this weekend with my children," or "I'm doing something with my spouse." So, I soon discovered that I had to write in time in my schedule in order to look after myself, and so I would block off times and just put "Busy." That is to just give myself time to think, to just get in touch with myself, and to spend some time with God more personally. You've got to find time to do that.

There were times, however, when everything was so intense that even that time. There are times as I look back, whether three months, four months, or occasionally, an even longer time when there was nothing else but work. I was just 100 percent, 150 percent fully involved in what I was having to do, but I did try to protect my health. And I did try to carve out time for God.

**BHS: What was the role of personal devotions or spirituality in your life and during your presidency [at Andrews]?**

**AL:** Very important, but again, it had to be very intentional. So, there were times when it was just normal devotional time, but often, I would have to literally go away, go off somewhere. I had to carve out that time when I could develop more depth in my communication with God.



**President Luxton plants the presidential tree outside of the Sutherland House during her inaugural celebration on October 25, 2016.**

**BHS: According to Selingo et al.,<sup>1</sup> the college or university president should be an academic and intellectual leader, storyteller, strategist, and communicator. Could that be a fair description of your presidency?**

**AL:** All those four are very important to me. But you'd have to ask other people how well I've succeeded in all of them. Certainly, at Andrews during my presidency, I ran very much on the storyteller idea because how you create the story out of the realities of who you are is very important for the university, for people to feel a part of that story, to be engaged with it.

The communicator goes very much along with the storytelling and strategy. So here, I've called the strategy

at Andrew's "storylines" because a strategy is best expressed in terms of where the story is going next. I tried to combine the academic and the intellectual leader. You have to be able to seek to raise the university to the highest level. You have to set high intellectual and academic expectations, and you have to be able to talk effectively in that environment. In the Adventist environment, you also must add a fifth critical leadership quality to these four, which is the spiritual leader, who will lead with biblical and Adventist values, and to drive that to the heart of everything at the university.

**BHS: If you were to give three pieces of advice to a new college or university president, what would you say to him or her?**

**AL:** [First is] listen, listen, and listen. You have to know your campus. So that's the listening piece.

Valuing your people is number two. All your team not only have to feel valued but also have to be valued truly. That's where you're going to get the best out of them. When together, you can go much further and take the university much further than you're ever going to be able to do on your own.

Number three is to make sure you are clear on your principles and your values, and never let them slide. That is the lighthouse that you never let go off in an Adventist environment. Part of that relates to things that are core to who we are as Adventists, but it's a little bit broader than that as well to meet those principles and values that are just immovable. The administration needs to be a little bit like a rubber wall, you have to have some flex, you can't be tight and rigid. When it comes to your principles and values, however, that is the core that is not something that flexes.

**BHS: Would you consider the issues associated with diversity a serious threat to the unity of the church? And what would be your suggestion to church and university leaders to alleviate them?**

**AL:** It is a threat. It also has great potential and possibilities. Our diversity is so rich, and it gives us such tremendous opportunity. My philosophy is the more diverse my team, the stronger we will be, whether it's gender diversity or cultural diversity, or racial diversity, because each person inevitably comes with a slightly different perspective, and his or her voice adds an additional richness to the whole conversation. Diversity is a huge strength, but it is a risk because it is a threat to people.

*Diversity* has become a bad word, but there's nothing wrong with it. I'm an English teacher. I just take the word *diversity* as meaning exactly what it means. Same thing for the word *inclusion*. Why has *inclusion*

become a bad word? Why should we not recognize the realities of wrongs that have happened to different diverse groups? Why do we have a problem doing that? That wrongs have happened is true. It's happened. It's a problem. Why can we not see ourselves as part of that healing solution? In my view, it is a risk because we are allowing some of what is going on in the public conversation to overtake our mission.

**BHS: How did you support the health and work/life balance of the employees on campus?**

**AL:** That is difficult because, as Adventist professionals, employees are so mission-focused that they don't instinctively choose a work/life balance. I did try with my immediate team, like during COVID, when everyone was working for a while at 18 hours a day. To start with, we met every day we met virtually at four o'clock or five or at the end of the day. As things eased off, I said to all of them, "I need you to go home. You need to find the time to take off." I really tried to push them to do it. Did they all do it? No. I did also say to them, "Now, please go and work with your team, the people you're responsible for, and pass on that same message." Do I feel I succeeded all the time? No. Was it something I tried to do? Yes. But it's one of those things where there was probably a gap between my desire—and the things I would say—and the realities.

**BHS: How did you provide or support professional development for yourself, for your faculty and staff?**

**AL:** That is something I've always felt very strongly about. Both at Newbold and in Canada, the appraisal processes were focused on much more formal things and not on professional development. At Newbold, I remember one of the first things I did was to establish a professional-development committee, and we proactively sought to ensure that we pooled funds in order to channel and support development of faculty and staff. And in Canada, I changed the appraisal process to make the focus on professional development and growth rather than on pure appraisal. Looking at all of your employees, you must recognize that you have a responsibility for their development and their growth. One of your responsibilities is to take care of each person's personal and professional growth. It's not up to them to fulfill everything. It's up to you to help them find a pathway and then enable that to happen.

**BHS: How did your leadership influence student life on campus?**

**AL:** With student life, the situation was different

in various places. When I was at Newbold, I was the dean of students and president. I really enjoyed student life. There wasn't a separate person [for the position of dean of students]. It fell under the presidency. In Canada, there was a separate person, but I would do everything. I was very intricately involved in everything: Saturday night programs, concerts, music programs, basketball games, everything, unless I was out of town. Because I was basically very present, I was therefore involved in any policies that were developed at Newbold. And I was largely responsible for developing them in Canada, [although] we always had a very close team. At Andrews, I was always involved in anything that was critical, and in any policy development. I would have loved to go to everything at Andrews, but that was impossible. I tried to make enough connections to still feel that I was hearing students. To start with, I had pop-up tea parties around the campus to try just to involve anyone who wanted to come along just to chat, just to engage. COVID made it a little bit more difficult.

**BHS: How did you seek to prepare the next generation of leaders to serve the institution, or did you have any leadership succession plan?**

**AL:** I always try, whether successfully or not, to look at my immediate team, and see them as what might be possible for them next; and I help and encourage them to do what is needed to position themselves for that, or for me personally to mentor people. That's the best you can do. You can never promise anything to anybody, but you can at least try to encourage them and, in your evaluations of them, seek to help grow them to the point that they're ready for another position, should that open up. That's been very much part of what I believe in doing.

**BHS: Do you have any regrets about your presidency, whether at Newbold, CUC, or at Andrews?**

**AL:** Actually, I do. How many can I share with you? Let me share with you one from Newbold. That's the furthest one away. It was a small campus, but there were some internal conflicts. I talked about being a bridge builder, and one can be a positive bridge builder, but sometimes you can build bridges that are unhelpful.

And I think that my instinct as a young leader was to be the bridge. What happened when I left? The bridge wasn't there! After I left, I look back on it, and I realized that I didn't *build* a bridge. I *was* the bridge in some situations. A regret I have is that I didn't take the opportunity to do the harder thing, which is to build the bridge, because that stays after you.



**President Luxton at the 2022 commencement for the College of Education & International Services and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.**

**BHS: Do you feel that you owe an apology to anyone because of what happened during any of your presidencies? Some decisions that you made or failed to make?**

**AL:** I don't know, I hope that I've apologized as I've gone along. If I have felt there's a need to do that, I wouldn't have a problem apologizing. I think that, as humans, we make mistakes. We get things wrong sometimes, but normally something at the time you can say, "I'm sorry, I got that wrong."

I can't off the top of my head say, "These are things that are still outstanding there." I remember [a] *Focus* article [where] I stated: I am sorry for the times that we failed you, where you expected something of us and we didn't live up to that and you left us or even

left the church disillusioned because of what we may or may not have done.<sup>2</sup> There is room for apologies even when you may not be directly involved, or even if you are, you weren't aware. We sometimes do damage to each other, and we need to recognize that.

**BHS: How did you know when it was time for you to move on from your presidential responsibilities?**

**AL:** You go through a cycle of doing something. Then you take a pause, after which you can take off again. At Newbold, it was [when I was] at that moment of pause that I was invited to go somewhere else. That's when I prayed, and I just felt this was right. There is no other way I can put it. Same with Canada. I kept saying, "No, no, no, no, no." When I stood back, I realized that although I loved what I was doing, it would probably not be good for the college—a small institution—or me to stay there for the rest of my career.

So, at what point in time if I was going to move from there [in Canada], would I move? The call from Andrews seemed to be a persistent call, and I just had to say to God, "OK, this is what You want." Then, I knew certain things needed to happen to make it work. And they all fell into place. With Andrews, I always had in my mind, when I became president, that there would be a certain point in time when I felt that I would want to pass the position on to someone who was willing to do the 150 percent that I had been doing.

I could tell retirement was calling when my resilience levels and my energy levels were peaking. They were the max, and I thought, "I can carry on, but I'm not sure that I'm going to be so effective. I think it's now time to pass it over." So, I signaled a year beforehand that that's what I was going to do. And that's what I did.

**BHS: Anything you would like to say as a conclusion? Do you wish to share a message?**

**AL:** All my three [presidential] experiences have been amazing. I feel very blessed. I've worked with some amazing people. I felt God's blessing in so many unique and different ways throughout all the three presidencies I've had, and I'm glad I had all three. I'm glad, too, I did it in the order I did it. I needed everything I gained from the smaller institutions when I came to Andrews with all its complexity, but all of

them were at the right time in the right way. That's the way God does it, and I feel good about that.

---

*This interview has been condensed. An extended version is available at <https://www.journalofadventisteducation.org/en/2024.86.2.9.full>. Minor editing has been done, but the verbal style has been retained.*

---

**Bordes Henry Saturné, PhD**, serves as Interim Vice President for Strategic Enrollment, Marketing, and Communication and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. At the time of coordinating this issue, he served as Chair of the Andrews University School of Leadership.

**Andrea Luxton, PhD**, is President Emerita of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. She earned her BA in theology and English from Newbold College, an MA in English from Andrews University, and a PhD in English from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She also holds a post-graduate diploma in institutional management and change in higher education from the University of Twente, Netherlands.

---

**Recommended citation:**

**Bordes Henry Saturné and Andrea Luxton**, "Leadership in Adventist Higher Education Series: A Conversation With Andrea Luxton," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 86:2 (2024): 46-51. <https://doi.org/10.55668/jae0076>.

---

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Jeffrey J. Selingo et al., *Pathways to the University Presidency: The Future of Higher Education Leadership* (New York: Deloitte University Press, 2017), 9.
2. These articles contain statements made at various forums in response to race relations and reconciliation at Andrews University. See "Journey to Healing and Understanding," *Focus* 52:4 (Fall 2016): 24, 25: <https://d261v9hbk78yno.cloudfront.net/focusapp/pdf/2016-4.pdf> and "#ItIsTimeAU: The Inside Story of Two Online Videos and the Five Days In-Between," *Focus* 53:1 (Winter 2017): 16-21: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/focus/75/>.