



12/1/2023

Dear Administration,

Pursuant to my contract terms and having no desire for my contract to be extended or interest in applying for the posted new position, this letter serves as a 30-day departure notice. I will use my accrued 13 days of vacation beginning December 10th, which makes my last in-office day December 8th.

Contributing to this decision are various demeaning, dismissive, and harmful practices demonstrated by the new administration, the new chair of the Andrews University Board of Trustees Student Experience & Faith Development Subcommittee, and the Board Chair. These behaviors have eroded trust and psychological safety, creating an environment that fosters a lack of inclusion.

I have had multiple encounters in which these detrimental practices were experienced. One included failing to address the inappropriateness of recording employees without their consent and using those recordings to handle grievances. In my case, a presentation I made on campus was recorded without my knowledge. That recording, bereft of the presentation's entire context, was given to the new administration, who used it to question me on the meaning of a statement made within that presentation. After clarifying the context and what I meant, the new administration asked me multiple times about my personal beliefs on the topic.

This questioning of my beliefs concerned me because I had not made public or private statements contrary to the institution's policies, core values, or beliefs. It was also disturbing because asking employees about their personal beliefs has not been a practice of the University, nor is it appropriate. Even more troubling, after sharing my grievance with the new administration, my concern was met with a revisionist version of events. Additionally, the new administration took no accountability for the inappropriate questioning and disregarded my perception of the encounter. My grievance is that using an unauthorized recording and questioning employees' personal beliefs is unethical and harmful.

The new chair of the Andrews University Board of Trustees Student Experience & Faith Development Subcommittee has also engaged in harmful and demeaning practices. On Sunday, October 22nd, while presenting my office report to the Subcommittee, the chair interrupted my presentation and verbally disregarded it. Although my report reflected the work given within my job description, the chair said it was "not relevant to the committee and student experience." Despite many members on the committee intervening to convey to the chair the history of the reporting and that his sentiments were unfounded. Altogether, his attitude toward me, the report, and the office was dismissive, disrespectful, and somewhat hostile.

The chair's behavior was so concerning that everyone in the Subcommittee approached me separately to apologize and express concern about the encounter. Although multiple individuals have made the new administration and the Board of Trustees chair aware of this incident, they have yet to address it or acknowledge the harmful behavior. Their silence and inaction demonstrate a lack of concern and tacit approval, fostering an environment that promotes a lack of respect and civility.

Yet another action with potential harm to individuals at the University is the recent decision to replace the Vice President for Culture and Inclusion position with the new Assistant to the President for Mission and Culture. Although this risk maybe unintended, it is nevertheless present for two reasons.

First, the new job description and responsibilities narrow the scope of diversity to multicultural issues, dismissing and ignoring other vulnerable social identities, such as those related to race, gender, age, economic status, ability, and first-generation student status.

The dismissal of these and other groups within the scope of diversity signals and creates an institutional ethos that ignores historical and current equity issues attached to these social identities.

- It ignores that low-income students cannot afford to participate in the University's international learning experiences or incur even more debt while striving to do so.
- It dismisses the institutional climate surveys on which students with visible and invisible disabilities have communicated that the campus ethos is not conducive to students with differing abilities.
- It disregards the absence of significant racial and ethnic diversity within its faculty population and the challenge of tokenism, exclusion, stereotyping, emotional exhaustion, and being spread thin by underrepresented faculty.
- It overlooks the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating that representation influences our perception of what is attainable.

Finally, it fails to acknowledge that diversity is not just the presence of various identity groups but also the recognition and engagement of these groups. True diversity reflective of biblical principle is about seeing people, whether they are hiding in the sycamore tree like Zacchaeus, pressing namelessly through the crowd like the woman with the issues of blood, or sitting on Jesus' lap while He encouraged his followers to be welcoming of all His Children. True diversity is intentionally seeing people and working towards uplifting all, especially the vulnerable.

Second, the decision to replace the Vice President for Culture and Inclusion and create a new position heavily void of an equity focus ignores historical and current equity issues attached to the various social identities highlighted above. These equity issues correlate to systemic, environmental, and financial barriers that lead to a lack of opportunities and access, influencing students' well-being and educational outcomes.

Many studies highlight the disparities in opportunity and achievement between social identity groups. Though this educational attainment gap has decreased over the years, it is still wide and has existed for decades. Many think these disparities are a function of genes, culture, effort, or a lack of will. However, history and data show that one of the leading causes for these gaps is decades of racist, ableist, sexist policies and privileged ideologies.

Some within marginalized communities have been able to excel despite inequitable conditions and pull themselves up by their bootstraps. However, there are others, like me- with the history of being an undocumented immigrant- who would have not made it to college and graduate school unless my church family, with an equity-focused mindset, noticed that my life conditions were not conducive to access and opportunity. These church people weren't able to change the system, but they used their resources and gave me access so that I could have the chance to pursue my calling and dream.

I am highlighting research and my story to demonstrate equity's meaning and work. Equity recognizes that we do not all start from the same place and have the conditions for access and opportunity. It is a biblical concept demonstrated throughout the Bible, such as in Leviticus 23, where field owners were encouraged to leave the corners of their field for the vulnerable and minority populations like the poor and foreigners to glean.

Another example is found in Deuteronomy 26: 12, where Moses commands the children of Israel to use the tithe to support disenfranchised populations like the foreigners, the poor, the fatherless, and widows. The New Testament also emphasizes a message of equity. James 1:27 says true religion is to care for orphans and widows. Thus, although we are all one in Christ, the Bible reflects that we still navigate the world with our social identities and the inequities sometimes attached to them. These are not to be ignored. Instead, believers should make intentional efforts in the form of relief, empowerment, development, and systemic change to help marginalized identities experience abundant life.

Lastly, I want to highlight the new administration's decision to exclude the voice and input of diverse perspectives on campus when creating this position. I particularly want to highlight one group not consulted: the Institutional Diversity, Inclusion, and Action Council (IDIAC). This committee, comprised of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, tasked for many years with advising the president and ensuring that the university culture supports human and cultural diversity. A subcommittee of this council was also entrusted with focusing on solutions to assure equity representation, diversity, and inclusion across the University's operations, including its hiring practices. However, it was not invited to the table to discuss the removal of the Vice President for Culture and Inclusion position.

Furthermore, the responsibility of chairing the IDIAC was not included in the job description of the new position, leaving the committee in limbo. Such a decision indicates the administration's disregard for the committee's voice, diverse perspective, expertise, accountability, and the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in fulfilling the University's mission of producing world changers. This decision demonstrates not only the lack of inclusion but also a lack of trust and disregard for a committee that has for years worked with Administration and on behalf of its beloved university to enhance the success and well-being of all employees and students.

I am saddened that after having a meaningful working experience as an employee of Andrews University for nearly four years, my ending experience has been met with such harmful, demeaning, and dehumanizing practices.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Pilgrim', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Danielle Pilgrim, PhD

Interim Chief Diversity Officer
Andrews University