



Safe Places

July 2013

Contents

Visions of God and the Church

Mitch Tyner—Getting the Salt out of the Shaker

Recent Research

Two Karolinska Institute Studies on Scent, Brain Function, and Orientation
Genetics Has a Role in Determining Sexual Orientation in Men

Stories of the Heart

Reino Kullervo Korhonen—Living Joy

Dear Colleagues,

July 2013

We hope your summer is going well. We know that this can be a busy time of year and hope you are also able to get rest and have some holiday time.

This issue of *Safe Places* begins with a devotional by Mitch Tyner. Mitch is retired legal counsel to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Earlier he was associate director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. Before his legal studies, he was a pastor in the United States. While his article describes a context focused in the United States, the principles he shares fit many venues.

Our *Recent Research* section begins to share studies about sexual orientation and the brain. The two similar studies reported in this issue were done consecutively at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. A third article on genetics and orientation reports on research done by Sandra Witelson and her team at the Michael G. DeGroot School of Medicine at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada.

Reino Korhonen, who lives in Ostra Tunhem, Sweden, is featured in *Stories of the Heart*. He is a retired biology teacher, one of the founders of the Finnish Seventh-day Adventist Church of Stockholm, an avid gardener, and one of those bird watchers who will go to the edges of the arctic circle to see an unusual species. He and his partner Ingemar celebrate their 40th anniversary this October.

If you know of anyone who would find this newsletter helpful, please feel welcome share it. If you know of someone who would like to be on our regular mailing list, also feel welcome to let us know. We will add them to our address list. We welcome your questions, suggestions, and comments. You can reach us at katgurian@aol.com.

We wish you many blessings,

Catherine Taylor



The *Building Safe Places – For Everyone* Team
Frieder Schmid, Ingrid Schmid, Floyd Poenitz, Elodie Souil, Ruud Kieboom,
and Catherine Taylor

Visions of God and the Church

Getting the Salt out of the Shaker



By Mitch Tyner

Change is one of life's few constants. When we're young, we treasure and pursue it. When we're older, we tend to resist it just as passionately. Sometimes we forget that change is an inherent part of a good Adventist concept: Present Truth. Present Truth has always been truth. It becomes present truth when it is finally noticed and receives proper attention. It is a change in our emphasis or understanding.

Change can be good or bad, exhilarating or annoying. Occasionally, change is so significant, so filled with implications for the future, that we can properly call it momentous. One such change has now reached those proportions: the place of and respect for religion in our society. Many of us remember when religion provided the backbone of American society, the ethical framework that displayed our mutually held values. Religion was respected. We did not always agree on doctrinal specifics; but we agreed that religion, per se, was a valuable thing for a community. Sadly, that attitude has changed. Today, we find ourselves in a time when religion has been both polarized and politicized.

Many are willing to forgo all we have learned about tolerance towards other beliefs. They now advocate tearing down the "wall of separation" between government and religion that has produced so much religious freedom. It seems that we are closer to a theocracy in this country than at any time since the era of the Pilgrims in New England in the 17th century.

Membership in religious organizations is at an all-time high in the United States. During the American Revolution, only seventeen percent of Americans citizens claimed church membership. Now, that figure stands at sixty four percent. Simultaneously, many educated, sophisticated, and thoughtful people are suspicious of religion. They consider it dangerous and threatening, something that must be controlled. Kevin Phillips, in his recent book, *American Theocracy*, observes:

Few questions will be more important to the 21st century political hubris. Will organized religions be carried on the nation's books as an asset or a liability? While sermons and rhetoric propounding American exceptionalism proclaim religiosity an asset, a somber array of historical precedents—the pitfalls of imperial Christian overreach from Rome to Britain—tip the scales toward liability.

How did we get from a place where organized religion was an asset to a society to where it is seen as a liability? While multiple reasons exist, let us consider five of the most prominent—and serious.

1. *Secularism, cynicism, and unbelief.* Many see these as the major culprit, but let's be clear that many secular people lead quite moral, ethically responsible lives. And it is not only secularists who do not attend church. A recently identified trend is that religious people are leaving churches because they are not fed there. They prefer to pursue spirituality alone or in small groups.
2. *Terrorism, specifically the attack of September 11, 2001.* In the wake of 9/11, people say, "Very religious people fly airplanes into tall buildings; very religious people are dangerous." One of the important, though little-understood casualties of 9/11 is the doctrine of religious neutrality. The way we keep peace in America, in a multi-religious society, is to require governmental neutrality (and strongly encourage societal neutrality) to all religions. Many are taking advantage of the current situation to advocate the abolition of neutrality.
3. *The rise of fundamentalism.* Fundamentalism is, among other things, a flight from the insecurity that is often produced by societal change. In that sense, it is a negative response to modernity. It is also, all too often antirational. A bumper sticker says it well: "God said it, I believe it, and that's that." So, "Don't confuse me with facts; I know the truth." The human brain, God's second greatest gift to us after His Son, is left out of the equation. Religious exclusivity is a component of fundamentalism: "We have the truth... we know more than anyone else... we are right." This attitude indicates that truth can be encapsulated and is something that doesn't change. This attitude is in direct conflict with the concept of present truth. This attitude leads directly to religious hostility, and is, as much as any other facet of fundamentalism, a turn-off to more broad minded people. Fundamentalism exists in all religions, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One of my greatest fears for my church is that it is hurtling father and farther down the road towards fundamentalism, thereby building walls between it and large segments of the societies to which it must witness.
4. *Another cause of antipathy to religion is what I must call religious hypocrisy.* In January, on a flight from Atlanta to Little Rock, I sat next to a music dealer—a talkative one—who discovered that I am a lawyer who represents an organized religion. He told me of a pastor who ordered a great deal of equipment for his church. When given the invoice for \$12,000, the pastor asked, "What's in this for me?" Puzzled, the music dealer asked what the church representative meant. The pastor replied, "Bill the church \$14,000, give me the difference, and we'll call this a deal." The music dealer was obviously negatively impressed with man's brand of religion, and is unlikely to respond positively to pleas to protect the special status of religion in society. There's more. Pedophile clergy prey on those they vow to protect. Sixteen billion dollars will be embezzled from churches this year, mostly by church treasurers or other staff. There is the spectacle of feel-good entertainment masquerading as so-called "worship." We might describe these and many, many more examples as instances of "ridiculous religion." I can only imagine what they do for our credibility, our impression on others, and our claim for tolerance in society.
5. *A final and highly controversial reason why organized religion is being seen as a danger is connected to human rights.* Until recently, religion in the United States was a key element in the effort to "lift the heavy yoke" of Isaiah 58. The first abolitionists were religious people; the effort to achieve social justice has been motivated by religion and staffed and funded by religious people ever since. But in the last decade, organized

religion has come to be seen as a major source of discrimination, not part of the solution to it.

Since the Supreme Court's *Smith v Oregon* decision in 1990 took away most of the protection formerly provided by the First Amendment's Free Exercise of Religion clause, virtually all religious organizations have agreed that corrective legislation is needed. A broad coalition sought to draft mutually agreeable legislation and had considerable success until the late nineties. At that point, the coalition shattered over this question: "Should sincere religious conviction be the valid defense to a charge of violating the equality rights of others?"

Many who advocate religious freedom will instinctively answer that it should. Let's examine that supposition. Imagine that someone has a sincere belief that his racial group is superior to all others and that he should not hire or rent to members of other racial groups. Should his sincerely held religious belief trump claims of equal access to jobs and housing? Heard this way, most will say no; religious belief must yield to equality. But the problem that brought up the question was not about race; it was about homosexuality. One side in the discussion wants religious belief to take precedence over equal rights. Many thinking people believe that viewpoint has led to organized religion changing a centuries-long position of defending human rights and shifted to a locus of attacking those very rights. I believe the Bible, correctly understood, would never lead us to attack the equal rights of others.

How should we react to these things? Not by joining those who seek political power for religious reasons; who seek to impose their understanding of morality by force of law. Our reaction must be thoughtful, principled, and Biblically informed.

Two simple, core Biblical principles come to mind. Both are found in the Gospel of Matthew. The first is in chapter 7. The Golden Rule commands that we treat others as we would want to be treated. Give those with whom we fundamentally disagree the same equality rights we would want. The second passage is from Mathew 5. During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are to be those who enlighten and preserve until the Master returns.

How do we do that? We must understand that we are in but not of the world. We must love and resist the world: love the people, resist much of the culture. We must have a constructive engagement with society. We must have a clear understanding of our own values. What do you value most? Money? Position? Power? God? Adventism? Family? Heritage? We must face ourselves, brutally if necessary, and be very clear about what we value. *And* we need to be sure that our values are in harmony with God. We must clearly and consistently demonstrate those values to the world.

The world is far more likely to be moved by a silent demonstration of our values than by sermonizing. At the time of the Rwanda genocide, Carl Wilkins was ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) director for Rwanda. When the civil war broke out, he was told to leave Rwanda for his own safety. Although he sent his family to safety, he refused to go himself. He knew he was needed in and by the people of that country. As the bullets began to fly around and through his home he went inside and found shelter behind an upturned table. For days he stayed there, avoiding the shrapnel flying all around him. As soon as the gunfire abated, Carl was out on the streets working to save the lives of untold numbers of people. Carl Wilkins didn't orate about the value of human life, he didn't seek the spotlight; he just quietly and effectively demonstrated the value he put on human life.

Being salt and light will require that we confront the charge of exclusivism. We will not be able to claim a special place or privilege because “we have the truth.” These foci will lead us to confront current instances of discrimination and will require that we be in the forefront of those demanding equality for all God’s children. The Adventist Church of The Netherlands and the Glendale Seventh-day Adventist Church in California are taking a lead in these matters. Thank you for being out in front, demonstrating the way to a more consistent demonstration of essential Christianity.

We live in a time when religion is seen by many, not as the reflection of God and the epitome of humanity’s highest aspirations, but rather as a dangerous egotism that must be hedged about and restricted for the good of humankind. In the midst of this, our task is to demonstrate the necessity of freedom and equality. We must show by example that these two facets of society are God-given priorities. Rarely has been being salt and light more challenging. May God make us equal to the challenge.

To be salt and light: this is our calling.



Thinking Points

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.” —John 16:12

“There is no excuse for anyone taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed and that all our expositions of Scripture are without error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close examination.” —Ellen G. White, “Christ our Hope,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 20, 1892

Recent Research

Two Karolinska Institute Studies on Scent, Brain Function, and Orientation



Sexual Orientation: In the Brain

Scientists trying to sniff out biological differences between gay and straight men have found new evidence—in scent.

It turns out that sniffing a chemical from testosterone, the male sex hormone, causes a response in the sexual area of gay men’s brains, just as it does in the brains of straight women, but not in the brains of straight men.

“It is one more piece of evidence...that is showing that sexual orientation is not all learned,” said Sandra Witelson, an expert on brain anatomy and sexual orientation at the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada.

Witelson, who was not part of the research team that conducted the study, said the findings show a biological involvement in sexual orientation.

The study, published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was done by researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden.

They exposed heterosexual men and women and homosexual men to chemicals derived from male and female sex hormones.

These chemicals are thought to be pheromones—molecules known to trigger responses such as defense and sex in many animals.

Whether humans respond to pheromones has been debated, although in 2000 American researchers reported finding a gene that they believe directs a human pheromone receptor in the nose.

“The Swedish study was one of a series looking at whether parts of the brain involved in reproduction differ in response to odors and pheromones,” lead researcher Ivanka Savic said.

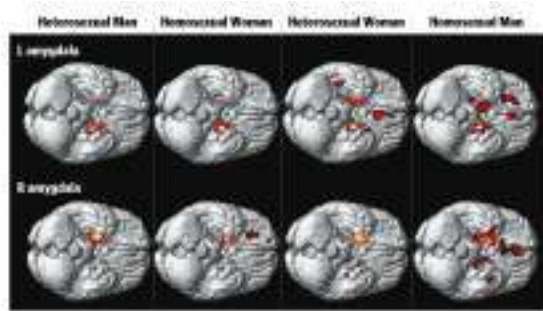
“The brains of different groups responded similarly to ordinary odors such as lavender but differed in their response to the chemicals thought to be pheromones,” Savic said.

The Swedish researchers divided 36 subjects into three groups: heterosexual men, heterosexual women, and homosexual men. They studied the brain response to sniffing the chemicals, using PET scans. All the subjects were healthy, unmedicated, right-handed, and HIV-negative.

When they sniffed smells like cedar or lavender, all of the subjects' brains reacted only in the olfactory region that handles smells.

But when confronted by a chemical from testosterone, the male hormone, portions of the brains active in sexual activity were activated in straight women and in gay men but not in straight men, the researchers found.

Follow-up Study by the Karolinska Institute



Homosexuals' brains respond differently from those of straight men and women when exposed to sex hormones, but researchers now say the difference is less pronounced in lesbians than in gay men.

Lesbians' brains reacted somewhat, though not completely, like those of heterosexual men, a team of Swedish researchers said in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

A year ago, the same group reported findings for gay men that showed their brain response to hormones was similar to that of heterosexual women.

In both cases the findings add weight to the idea that homosexuality has a physical basis and is not learned behavior.

The research team led by Ivanka Savic at the Stockholm Brain Institute had volunteers sniff chemicals derived from male and female sex hormones. These chemicals are thought to be pheromones—molecules known to trigger responses such as defense and sex in many animals. The new study shows a similar, but weaker, relationship between the response of lesbians and straight men.

Heterosexual women found the male and female pheromones about equally pleasant, while straight men and lesbians liked the female pheromone more than the male one. [Straight] men and lesbians also found the male hormone more irritating than the female one, while straight women were more likely to be irritated by the female hormone than the male one.

All three groups rated the male hormone more familiar than the female one. Straight women found both hormones about equal in intensity, while lesbians and straight men found the male hormone more intense than the female one.

The brains of all three groups were scanned when sniffing male and female hormones and a set of four ordinary odors. Ordinary odors were processed in the brain circuits associated with smell in all the volunteers.

In heterosexual males the male hormone was processed in the scent area; but the female hormone was processed in the hypothalamus, which is related to sexual stimulation. In straight women the sexual area of the brain responded to the male hormone while the female hormone was perceived by the scent area.

In lesbians, both male and female hormones were processed the same, in the basic odor processing circuits, Savic and her team reported.

Each of the three groups of subjects included 12 healthy, unmedicated, right-handed and HIV-negative individuals.

The research was funded by the Swedish Medical Research Council, Karolinska Institute, and the Wallenberg Foundation.

Genetics Has a Role in Determining Sexual Orientation in Men

Canadian scientists have uncovered new evidence that shows genetics has a role to play in determining whether an individual is homosexual or heterosexual. The research was conducted by Dr. Sandra Witelson, a neuroscientist in the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine at McMaster University, and colleagues at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto who studied the brains of healthy, right-handed, 18- to 35-year-old homosexual and heterosexual men using structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).

About 10 years ago, Witelson and Dr. Cheryl McCormick, then a student of Witelson's, demonstrated there is a higher proportion of left-handers in the homosexual population than in the general population—a result replicated in subsequent studies which is now accepted as fact. Handedness is a sign of how the brain is organized to represent different aspects of intelligence. Language, for example, is usually on the left; music on the right.

In other research, Witelson and research associate Debra Kigar, had found that left-handers have a larger region of the posterior corpus callosum—the thick band of nerve fibres connecting the two hemispheres of the brain—than right handers.

This raised the hypothesis for the current study—whether the anatomy of the brain of the subgroup of right-handed homosexual men is similar to that of left-handers.

They found that the posterior part of the corpus callosum is larger in homosexual than heterosexual men. “The size of the corpus callosum is largely inherited suggesting a genetic factor in sexual orientation,” said Witelson. “Our results do not mean that heredity is destiny, but they do indicate that environment is not the only player in the field,” she said.

While this is not a litmus test for sexual orientation, Witelson said this finding could prove to be one additional valuable piece of information for physicians and individuals who are trying to determine their sexual orientation. “Sometimes people aren’t sure of their sexual orientation.” The researchers also undertook a correlational analysis which included size of the corpus callosum and test scores on language, visual, spatial, and finger dexterity tests. “By using all these variables, we were able to predict sexual orientation in 95 per cent of the cases,” she said. The research was reported in the online edition of the *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* prior to the release of its printed version.

Living Joy



By Reino Kullervo Korhonen – Ostra Tunhem, Sweden

I was raised a Seventh-day Adventist in Finland. It was so long ago that I have forgotten any negative things about my upbringing. As a child and teenager, I went to a Seventh-day Adventist school. At twelve or thirteen I began to realize I was different. I knew that, *somehow*, I was attracted to the same sex. It was not in any way concrete. It was just a feeling, but I became more and more conscious of that feeling. For me it caused quite a lot of talking with my God: *What do you want?* In some way I was already bothered by the future. I wondered how life would be. Sometimes I thought that maybe I could work in the church. As I became older I understood that it would be impossible if I were attracted to men. I didn't know how I would manage everyday life, even in the Scandinavian society.

Despite these questions, I accepted myself as a gay person when I was fifteen. It was a religious experience for me. I remember being on a Finnish hill, overlooking the water. I remember saying to God, *Well, You made me this way. You are just going to have to help me live with it.* It was my deal with my God. I left the whole issue with Him. That has been very profound for me in my experience. I was totally convinced that this is how God wanted me. I believed it then and I believe it now. From that moment on the hill I have never thought I was somewhat inferior to other people. Over all these decades, in good political times and in difficult ones, I have felt God's presence and have known He was leading me.

During the fifties and the sixties, homosexuality was not something about which we could speak. I did not want to live a lie even though there was a time when I thought I must. In my Adventist school, I didn't talk about this issue to anyone. That said, even though my friends might have seen signs that I was different, no one ever teased me. At that school, we built friendships that have lasted all my life. Most of my classmates still live in Finland where I am able to meet them sometimes. Many of us attend our academy reunions. There I am totally open and talk about my life with Ingemar, just as they talk about their wives and children. We enjoy being totally open with each other.

I studied at the public University in Turku. There, I was very active in the large Adventist youth group on campus. I was involved with our church programs and had never met any other person that I knew was gay. Eventually I came to understand that a teacher leading out in some of my courses was gay. He was the first person I had ever talked to about the issue of homosexuality. My eyes were opened. I understood that I was not alone and that there were lots of people like me around me. This university teacher introduced me to other gay people. He had grown up in Turku and knew a lot about the homosexual community there. I got to

know some of them but I did not date any of them. I have not had any contact with them since then, after I finished my studies and moved to Stockholm.

In those years there were lots of young people, including Adventists, who moved to Sweden. A group of us started the first Finnish congregation in Sweden. In the beginning we just had a Sabbath school class. Later we began to have worship services. Now the Finnish group is its own Adventist congregation. During my first years in Stockholm, I was very active in the church as a Sabbath school teacher. I liked that time very much.

I almost fell in love with someone I met, but I quickly understood that this was not a relationship I wanted. I tried to find people to date or with whom I could be involved. Sometimes I had strong feelings for them, but there wasn't anything to convince me that there should be something other than strong feelings.

Through some gay persons I knew in Stockholm, I met Ingemar. I didn't speak to him when I first saw him at events. Finally, one time when I went to a Sara Leander concert (one of those that she gave every year saying, "This is my last concert,") and I saw Ingemar again. We started to have conversations. I had gotten to know quite a lot of persons but I knew "this is something" when I met him. Later, I understood that this was, "Oh, wow!"

Our first date was on a Thursday. On Friday he went to his country home in Ostra Tunhem, without me. When he came back on Sunday he called me. We met on Monday. We slept together and all the rules collapsed. I was really surprised. I had never planned it to be like that! I thought I would meet someone with some friends and then we would meet several times and get to know each other very thoroughly and then after five years maybe we would be serious. All my well-thought-out rules vanished. This was in October 1973. We got a new flat together in March of 1974. He was the first and only person I ever dated seriously.

Even before I met Ingemar I knew same-sex couples that lived together. I knew this part of life was possible. One of my friends was going to be a priest. When he fell in love with his partner he changed his occupation. They both were long-time friends and good examples for me.

By 1974 homosexuality was no longer considered a sickness. The Swedish Parliament gave a ruling that the love between persons of the same sex is equal to the love of persons from opposite sex. There was quite a strong gay movement working for this equality. Of course there was much to be done. All of this inspired me very much. In 1976 or 1978, I was one of three people who started a gay Christian organization. I immersed myself in working towards gay rights.

There was a tremendous response to our gay Christian organization in Sweden. When we had our first meeting in the Cathedral of Stockholm, it was packed; there were around fifteen hundred people. There were some gay Adventists who attended but they were deep in the closet. They did not dare to come out. These Adventists chose to live a lie and keep good contact with the church.

My Adventist congregation disapproved of my new focus. It became a problem with Seventh-day Adventists for Ingemar and me to speak about our lives. One of the church leaders told us, "The church is not ready for this. If you had been silent it would have been okay." He did not say anything about God, just that it would have been okay if we had been silent. But I had this deal with my God and me. I was and am still convinced that God would not have made me

like this if He did not want me to live like this. The pastor of my Finnish congregation proposed change therapy. I said “No, thank you.” I had taken some studies in psychology at the University of Stockholm and had studied aversion therapies. I understood that these change therapies are aversion therapies and they are not good for you. It is not good to have anyone make you something else other than what you are.

I think the Swedish gay movement has been healthy and has done very good work. I have followed the progress keenly but could not be part of every group because I was more focused in this gay Christian organization. I know many people in the more secular organizations but only go to their meetings once every two years. I believe it is because of these gay organizations that Swedish opinion has totally changed. Our larger society is on our side. Even the Swedish church is on our side. The leaders of many of the other organizations are on our side. All the Swedish bishops voted for this blessing of the partnership to be held in the Swedish church so that partners get exactly the same rites as married couples.

My relationship with the Adventist church shifted when they understood that I lived with a man. No one wanted to discuss the matter with me. No one was listening. I think they were afraid. Even the gay persons who were members of the Finnish congregation did not discuss my relationship with Ingemar with me. The young gay Swedish Adventist pastor did not dare to discuss the matter with me. When he met a guy and fell in love, he left the church. Now he pastors a Lutheran church in Skona. My Adventist school friends from Finland are different; they have wanted to listen and they have come to visit Ingemar and me in Stockholm and at our home Tunham.

The Finnish Adventist congregation that I helped found kicked me out of the church. Despite this, the next pastor and I became good friends. She was distressed by the church’s reaction to my committed relationship with Ingemar. She was very distressed that the church board struck my name from the books. We had an open meeting after Sabbath school where we discussed this matter. The church board proposed that Ingemar and I separate. That was laughable. I got to hear all those texts from the Bible. I knew the texts already. I had read a book by McNeal on *The Bible and Homosexuality*. He went through all those texts very carefully. He not only reputed the clobber texts, he talked about the gifts gay people bring to humanity.

I lost my optimism for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. No one even listened to me. No one said they wanted to hear my thoughts and study, even though there must have been some people who would like to have listened to me.

I didn't lose my God. That was the most important thing. I could see the human frailty in these things we call churches. When I visit the biggest Adventist church in Stockholm, there are people who recognize me and come to speak to me but nothing more. Maybe this has caused some kind of shift in my thinking about the church. Maybe it began even before the troubles with the church. I understand that no church is perfect. It is made up of living human persons who are not perfect. In this way I can forgive the church. I do not need to hate. They are human beings like me.

I do have some difficult questions. Why can't these persons act humanely to each other? Why can't they accept us all as Christians should do? Our God is loving, accepting, and invites us to the feast. Why does the Seventh-day Adventist Church demand the right to determine who is welcomed?

I spent decades yearning for a gay Adventist organization. It took me till the Internet became

popular to be able to do the research to connect with SDA Kinship International. Kinship is good because I meet Adventists there who listen. I also have contact with ecumenical groups for persons who are homosexual. In Scandinavia we use the word homosexual for both gay and lesbian people. Now we have so many letters (LGBTI which describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people). I think it is good that we include and care for all the persons described by those letters.

I believe that, even though it has not been easy. I can love the church because I recognize that I am human and the church is also human and makes mistakes. As gay Adventists, we have an opportunity to consider which components of Adventism are worth keeping. We can decide what it is that makes us Seventh-day Adventists. I believe that every thinking person must address these issues. I think the gospel is preached in many different denominations; but I grew up in the Adventist church, and I find the gospel more easily there than in other churches.



Other parts of my life with Ingemar have been relatively easy. In Stockholm, Ingemar and I were open in our workplaces. All my colleagues knew about our relationship. I never experienced any negativity towards us. I think Ingemar may have been more scared about his parents, the people around here, and his co-workers than I was; but I believe that opinions in Sweden have changed and we have nothing to fear. We can lead normal lives. Our gayness is nothing. It does not need to separate us from our neighbors. We do not need to live in a gay ghetto. In a big city sometimes it is easy to become isolated and meet only gay persons. In city life we are freer to choose people with whom we will be in contact. Even in Sweden it might be possible for gay people to isolate themselves from those who are not gay. In rural areas, like where we live, that is just not possible. We have both straight and gay friends and colleagues here.

I told my Seventh-day Adventist parents about our relationship soon after I met Ingemar. That first visit I went alone to Finland. Ingemar had given me a book about being “in the closet” about our Christian beliefs. There are still lots of persons who are scared to confess that they

are Christians. I sat on the boat to Finland and read this book. I become more and more convinced that there was no reason to hide my belief and my gayness from my family.

I was already thirty when Ingemar and I met. I knew they had been thinking, “Why hasn’t my son married?” I figured that was a good way to begin the conversation. When I got to Finland I announced that I had something quite exciting to tell them. “I am finally in love! I have been waiting to meet the right person... He just happens to be a man. You never have to worry that I will be unhappy!” Of course, at first it was not so easy for them. I had told my sister earlier. She had no problems; but, in the beginning, it was difficult for my parents to speak about my newfound love.

Forty years ago there were very few places where our families could read about lesbian and gay issues. I think it is very important that we give something to our parents that they can read. I think churches should give much more support to parents who have gay children. Eventually my parents accepted our relationship. I think their acceptance came because of my attitude. I felt so good as a gay person that they must have come to believe that this is not a bad or dangerous thing. When my parents call me, they say, “Tell hello to Ingemar.” We have relatives in the very small congregation in Finland where my parents are members. They know that I am gay. Often they ask me to lead in Sabbath school. Now, every time I go to Finland, I have to make sure that I prepare to lead the Sabbath school lesson.

I am of course glad when I hear the gospel preached in any church. But when I hear it preached in Adventist churches I am even more delighted. Sometimes I think the best gospel comes when the person who preaches knows me as a gay person and gives this gospel even to me. That way I am included. That is why I made the theme of our 2006 European Kinship Meeting “The Inclusive Church.” This is a very important theme to contemplate.

Note Reino’s article mentioned his concern about therapies that propose to change the sexual orientation of gay and lesbian people. On 21 June 2013 Exodus International, the oldest and largest organization dedicated to “helping” homosexuals change their sexual orientation, closed down after 40 years. Its founder, Alan Chambers, apologized to members of the gay community for the pain Exodus’ teachings and practices might have caused them.

