

# CONNECTION

December, 2019



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SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
**Kinship**  
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*Happy  
Holidays*



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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Many people deal with depression that can be amplified at this time of year because of the holidays. Some people find this is their least favorite time of the year because of loneliness, anxiety, grief, medical issues, big family or social events, and other kinds of stress.**

When we have partners, siblings, or other family and friends to lean on, it can be a little bit easier to handle things like these or the pressures of the season. But what about those who have been disowned by their families and churches and have nowhere to turn nor anyone to turn to?

I hope that each of our members can always feel that they have someone to turn to here in Kinship, and that if we no longer need that support for ourselves we can offer it to someone else.

If you need someone to talk with, you'll find others in the community on our private Facebook pages. You can also contact your coordinator or email [info@sdakinship.org](mailto:info@sdakinship.org) to be referred to one of our chaplains. Kinship is here for you.

There are also times when we may need professional assistance, including counseling or medication, to get ourselves more balanced and on a healthier footing. I don't think that seeking professional help as well as the social support Kinship offers is ever something to be ashamed of: everyone needs a hand sometimes!

As we all navigate the end of 2019 together, let's remember there are lots of resources that can help us with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, stress, self-harming thoughts, and any other concerns we might have. Here are a few resource lists that may help you outside of Kinship. (Many of these resources are US-based. There may be others in your country: Talk to your local coordinator to find out.)

- LGBTQ Crisis Hotlines and Services (oSTEM): [bit.ly/ostemhotline](http://bit.ly/ostemhotline)
- National Alliance on Mental Health: [bit.ly/natalliancementalhealth](http://bit.ly/natalliancementalhealth)
- National LGBT Health and Education Center: Suicide Risk and Prevention for LGBTQ People: [bit.ly/riskandpreventionbrief](http://bit.ly/riskandpreventionbrief)
- Vanguard STEM: Choosing a Therapist as an LGBTQ Person of Color: [bit.ly/vanguardstem](http://bit.ly/vanguardstem)

Each one of us is valuable and important.

Lean on your Kinship family to provide the love and support you so deserve. And if you need more than Kinship can provide, please reach out to one of the resources above. Share resources that have worked well for you!

*You are loved!*

Yolanda Elliott  
President  
SDA Kinship International



*European Kinship Meeting Highlights*





# EUROPEAN KINSHIP MEETING 2019

## *OTHONA CENTER, WEST DORSET ENGLAND*

*Catherine Taylor*

I am told, repeatedly, that each year I say “that was my favorite.”...So I won’t. But...

It could be that the site is on a coast line with gorgeous pathways and clouds that could have their own gallery.

It could be that the Othona community wrapped us into their family by setting us up to do kitchen chores in small groups. We found ourselves talking in ways we never would have otherwise. We thought we would resent the imposition and then found the chores were one of the top things enjoyed when we gave our feedback.

It could be the meeting room with comfortable cushioned chairs, sofas, and a fireplace.

It could have been the food and way we shared it. Or it could have been taking part in their morning meditation.

It could be the intimacy that gets built in a small group that cooks, eats, walks, and brushes teeth together. It’s been years since I leaned against a window ledge and talked to a man while he was shaving.

It could be having a group where there are representatives from the first European Kinship meeting and people who met us for the first time. There is something about a group helping a first-time person get over the jitters of meeting us.

It could be that we had a powerful and gentle mix of invested allies and the rest of us on the alphabet spectrum.

It could be that Floyd sets us up with a WhatsApp group that allows us to “travel” with everyone as they make the journey to our EKM home. Or that Ingrid adds artistic touches that help us connect with and remember each other throughout the following year. Or that Tom found us a wonderful place. Or that Ruud fills in gaps that some of us don’t even remember to consider.

It could be that Helen and Mike Pearson brought an atmosphere of sharing and thinking together. Their presentations were an invitation to talk about ways we can heal ourselves and our community while we build ourselves and our community. There were some there who wanted more of a speaker presentation. They were gracious even though they didn’t get their own wishes.

Oh yes...and then there is the trip to Exeter: sightseeing in the underground tunnels, wandering the Cathedral, hugging park trees, exploring Roman walls, enjoying our great tour guide, and dining in a middle eastern restaurant decorated like the One Thousand and One Nights.

It could be and was all of those things. The only missing part was you! Next year, we meet in the Netherlands...you are most welcome to join us!



*European Kinship Meeting Highlights*





# KINSHIP WISDOM

*By Helen Pearson*

I was brought up at the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist community. My father was a paid and ordained minister for forty-four years. Working with equal commitment to the church, my mother was an unpaid pastor (eventually ordained as an elder). But my parents never tried to hide either their own imperfections or those of the church. They taught us to be “boundary dwellers” to look for truth everywhere —both inwards into the church and outwards into the wider and very real world. They also taught us the core Adventist value of “present truth”—the idea that new truths are revealed to the people of God at different times in history. They taught us to look for and seek to discern that truth wherever and whenever we could find it. I believe I heard some of that “present truth” last weekend at European Kinship Meeting.

Some years ago, when I was first invited to a meeting of Kinship which describes itself as a “safe community for LGBT Adventists and allies,” I found myself in a new community of people, many of whom are or want to be part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of course, they are not all paragons—but neither am I and neither are the people with whom I sit in church every week. It’s so important never to forget that.

I have listened at various Kinship meetings, and in my work as a counsellor and therapist, to so many stories. I have heard in both places the stories of serious women and men who seek to be faithful to God and honest with themselves about who they are. And as I have listened to them, I have been impressed by many of them who have struggled greatly on the journey to be true to God and true to themselves in the face of misunderstanding and intolerance.

Some of them have worked at lot harder at being honest with themselves than I or some of my straight friends have done. And so many of them have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of powerful and sadly ignorant church people who claim to be following Jesus of Nazareth but succeed only in perpetuating fear and prejudice. In the face of all this, some Kinship members have become wise and thoughtful people who have so much to offer the wider church.

As I sat with the group at Kinship Europe meeting last weekend, they agreed that, before they parted, they would offer each other some of the skills they have learned in being “boundary dwellers” on the edge of a church which offers them so little welcome.

They had so much wisdom to offer. Here are my top ten of their rules for being boundary dwellers:

- Be authentic—be yourself. Be willing to share your story and experience.
- Listen and try to be open to others’ stories. Be non-judgmental.
- Don’t expect everyone to like you. Don’t try to please everyone.
- Open your home to people. Build community with all sorts of people.
- Contribute informally and do as much for your church as you can.
- Remember you have the power to choose your reaction—don’t play the victim.
- Answer criticism quietly.
- Use humor to disarm people
- Don’t make too big a deal of “your issues”—other people have issues, too.
- Use your support network.

If only everyone would follow just some of this advice, not only with Kinship members and their like but also with everyone they meet. If only!



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN



[sdakinship.org/kampmeeting](https://sdakinship.org/kampmeeting)



*By the end of the first week of September 1982, I had decided to relocate to Pennsylvania for counseling.*

The first thing I had to do was to call Perry in Japan, because my decision would require his finding a teacher to replace me on short notice. At \$3.00 per minute, our call was brief. Perry said that any inconvenience my decision might cause did not concern him. Rather, he was concerned for me. After sharing a few details about my visit with Colin, I thought I had put Perry's reservations to rest. That was not the case. Two days later, Perry called back.

Perry feared that my life—in fact, my whole identity—would become organized around homosexuality instead of a bigger paradigm—my maleness within a Christian framework. He was concerned that by going to Reading, I would establish and reinforce my identity through a sexual framework by being with and talking to other homosexuals, day in and day out. I thought Perry's concerns were legitimate, but my ship named "Identity" had already set sail.

Instead, Perry wanted me to return to Japan, believing we could work on things together. I was tempted because I trusted him and loved my life and work in Japan. Colin, however, had won the battle over who I believed could best help me, despite there being red flags. No one, not even Perry, could have competed with what I thought was most important in my decision: the knowledge and experience I believed Colin possessed with respect to change. This second conversation was my opportunity to talk about those red flags, but I did not take the bait. It is astonishing to me now that I could tell Perry that, from what I had experienced, I did not believe there was any reason for concern. My portrayal of events was as misleading as those outlined in Ministry magazine. Everything I shared was edited or understated. In the same breath, I described my visit as the most beneficial experience in my life while making no reference to the abusive aspects of Colin's behavior. I expressed hope about eventually dealing with my "H problem" while neglecting to tell him that I already had doubts about being able to follow Colin's lead and act-as-though my way into heterosexuality. Desperation fostered my denial.

At the end of our conversation, Perry told me that he was going to have a special season of prayer about my decision. He wanted me to let him know if I had any new impressions. In retrospect, this conversation offered the new impression I should have heeded.

In a recent conversation we had about that time in my life, Perry made a comment about forming identities that highlights to me how different our worlds were. He said, "If you would have asked me, 'Perry, what is your identity?', I wouldn't have given you an answer anywhere close to including a sexual definition. My identity would have been formed around a set of values, not a behavior or sexual orientation."

Broadly speaking, Perry, like other straight friends, experienced his world as heterosexual and, therefore, normative. "Normality" has a way of affording one the luxury of forming an identity primarily around values instead of around life-altering experiences like...

## A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

*If you are reading my story for the first time and you feel you are missing some context, I suggest you start at the beginning with the May 2015 issue of Connection magazine. Why am I writing my story in such detail? In short, I am answering questions while hoping to educate. Over the years, I have been asked the same questions over and over by friends, family, and church members. The answers to those questions are found in different decades of my life. I'm grateful to Connection Magazine for giving me this space to share my story. Publishing as I write is a great motivator!*

CLICK TO READ THE REST OF THE  
STORY AT [BIT.LY/JOURNEYCH20](https://bit.ly/JourneyCH20)



*European Kinship Meeting Highlights*





# FINDING MY SPIRITUAL HOME WITH KINSHIP

By James Appel



*I've been trying to figure out why a straight, cis-gender male like me is finding my spiritual home with SDA Kinship, a Seventh-day Adventist LGBT+ community.*

*Here's what I've figured out so far after having just come back from the European Kinship Meeting at Othona Retreat Center in the southern UK:*

First, because it's a community, something I haven't really found in any other Adventist organization. I've found

meetings, services, camp meetings, outings, get-togethers, events, potlucks, reunions, campaigns, camp-outs, etc., which are all fine, but I've never found community. By community, I mean a group of diverse people, with faults/habits/tics/etc. who somehow manage to get along being open and honest and yet still loving and accepting each other, not in spite of the quirks and differences, but because of them. In other words, the community is the body of Christ celebrating the fact that each different part is important and has something unique to contribute to the overall well-being of the whole. I've found that in Kinship—especially in the wonderful group that met this last weekend on the southern coast of England.

Second, as an Seventh-day Adventist with some non-traditional beliefs that might get me ex-communicated if I were ever sat down in a dark room with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling and grilled by a member of the General Conference about how I feel about the 28 fundamental (great word) beliefs. So, in a sense I'm hiding what I truly think about many things out of fear of what many Adventists might say or think about me. At Kinship, with a group that understands way better than I ever will what it means to be oppressed and on the margins, I can truly be myself and not worry about what anyone will think.

Third, as a white, straight, cis-gender, American Christian male, I've always been at the top of the pyramid (through no thought or choice of my own). What that means is that my role models have typically been macho, power-hungry, ladder-climbing, feelings-suppressing, over-compensating, lonely, isolated men. I need some new mentors. And one thing that has struck me about Kinship is that most men I've interacted with are sensitive, vulnerable, in touch with their feelings, accepting, affectionate, loving, kind, self-deprecating males. In other words, men modeling themselves after Christ instead of Rambo. It's refreshing and inspiring.

There's a general feeling of freedom, fun and laughter. When you combine all of the above, it creates a safe place to enjoy life. Plus, when you've been oppressed and had to fight just for basic human rights while struggling deeply with your sense of self and your beliefs and spirituality, if you come out unscathed on the other end (unfortunately, many don't—suicide rates among LGBT+ people are way higher than other groups)—you tend to not take yourself so seriously and be willing to laugh and joke about yourself and with others.

So, once again, thank you Kinship for helping me to continue trying to be a better person by introducing me to real community and inspiring me to have fun in the process.

This is part of the reason why not only does Kinship need the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs Kinship; otherwise, both are handicapped and incomplete.

**NOT ONLY DOES KINSHIP NEED THE  
SDA CHURCH, BUT THE SDA CHURCH  
NEEDS KINSHIP...OTHERWISE BOTH ARE  
HANDICAPPED AND INCOMPLETE.**



# JOIN SDA KINSHIP

***You can join Kinship's Online Community today!***

*Membership is free and all your information is kept confidential.*

*Visit [sdakinship.org](http://sdakinship.org) for details on connecting with people just like you, or send an email to Member Services at [memberinfo@sdakinship.org](mailto:memberinfo@sdakinship.org) for details on being a member of SDA Kinship.*





***SDA Kinship honors the memory of Ben Pickell, Jr who passed away on November 11, 2019 in Palm Desert, CA. Ben was one of the founding members of SDA Kinship.***

Ben was loved and appreciated beyond measure by all who have been touched by the mission of SDA Kinship, (which he helped shape) providing a safe spiritual and social community for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex current and former Seventh-day Adventists, their families, and those who support them.

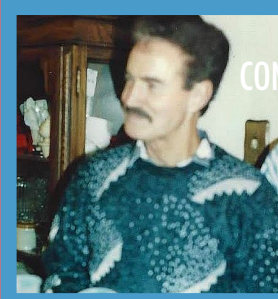
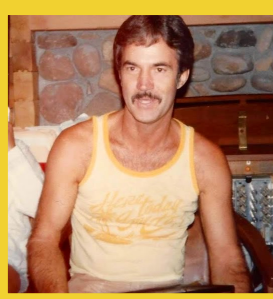
“We stand on the shoulders of giants like Ben who worked tirelessly to raise awareness of LGBTIQ issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and beyond. The loving memories he's created in and through our community from its founding, will forever be cherished in our hearts and memorialized in our continued work for better treatment of LGBTIQ people in the church and beyond.”

Yolanda Elliott,  
President, SDA Kinship International.





## Reflections on Ben's contributions to SDA Kinship



CONNECTION | DECEMBER 2019

In the mid-to-late 1970s at least three lonely gay Seventh-day Adventist men set out to try to find an Adventist partner by placing an advertisement in *The Advocate*, a national LGBT weekly newspaper. I was one of those, and my ad said something like “Gay Adventists write to me.” Those of us who placed the ads did not know one another, and our motives were personal: we longed for a partner, and wanted him to share our Adventist faith. I was taken aback when I received about 40 replies. The problem to me was that while I lived in New York City, the replies were all from West of the Rockies. But I guess that should not have been a surprise, for the *Advocate* was then based in San Francisco. I am very embarrassed to have to admit that I contacted only three or four of those who wrote me.

Ben Pickell, from Palm Desert in California, was one of the others who placed an advertisement during those years. His was in the late 1970s. When he also received many replies, and had contacted a few of them back and had called a meeting, these conceived of the idea of forming a support group for gay and lesbian Adventists. This was the first step that led to the formation of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. The fellowship was at that time limited to Southern California. Ben was the first to hold the title of president of that group. Meetings were mostly in the homes of those involved, and these involved potluck meals and discussion. One of the key issues discussed and worried about was whether, after discovering that they were irretrievably gay, God would accept them. They expanded their numbers by placing notices in *The Advocate*, and later marching with banners declaring that they were gay and lesbian Adventists in gay pride parades: Adventists watching shyly on the sidewalks would then come running to join them in the march and to seek information.

In 1979 the group conceived the idea of sponsoring a conference (now known as Kampmeeting) for gay and lesbian Adventists as a step towards taking the new support organization national. Since that idea was suggested by a member in Arizona, the first Kinship Kampmeeting was held in Payson, AZ, in August 1980. It was not many years, as the internet developed, before Kinship had an international membership. As time passed it was to support

not only gay and lesbian Adventists, but also bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer Adventists also, as well as their parents and other family members. It was inevitable that the first issue that Kampmeetings addressed, with the help of invited Adventist biblical scholars, was whether or not it was possible to be both LGBTIQ and Christian. The scholars brought us much joy and relief, after studying the issue at our request (because none of them had previously done so), and by unanimously assuring us of God's love and acceptance.

Thank you, Ben Pickell, for seeing that many responses to your advertisement suggested that there were many gay and lesbian Adventists longing to meet one another, and for helping to see in this fact an opportunity to found a support group that has proven so important to us.

*Ron Lawson, co-founder of SDA Kinship*

— — — — —

All of us in Kinship mourn the passing of Ben Pickell, one of the organization's founding members and a wonderful, caring friend. Ben played a huge role in the earliest days, reaching out to find other LGBT folk in southern California during the 1970's when many closeted Adventists thought they were the only lesbian/gay Adventists in the world. He had the courage to open his home so those people who responded could meet, get to know each other, and begin the process of healing. He provided a safe, warm environment when there were very few other options that weren't bars or clubs. Ben supported Ron Lawson's efforts to pull together a meeting with church officials in 1980 (what we now view as Kinship's first Kampmeeting) that led to the creation of the national organization we know today. And he remained a constant supporter of Kinship in the decades since. Attending many Kampmeetings, particularly those on the west coast. Kinship owes a great deal to Ben's vision and willingness to act. But, mostly, we will miss the quiet laugh, the gentle counsel, and the caring that never stopped. We will miss you Ben.

*Bob Bouchard, former SDA Kinship president (and current treasurer) who served alongside Ben.*





# SUPPORT THE MISSION OF SDA KINSHIP:

- DONATE **ONLINE**: [SDAKINSHIP.ORG/GIVE](https://SDAKINSHIP.ORG/GIVE)
- DONATE BY **MAIL**: PO BOX 244, ORINDA, CA 94563 USA
- Donate by **Shopping**: [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)



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