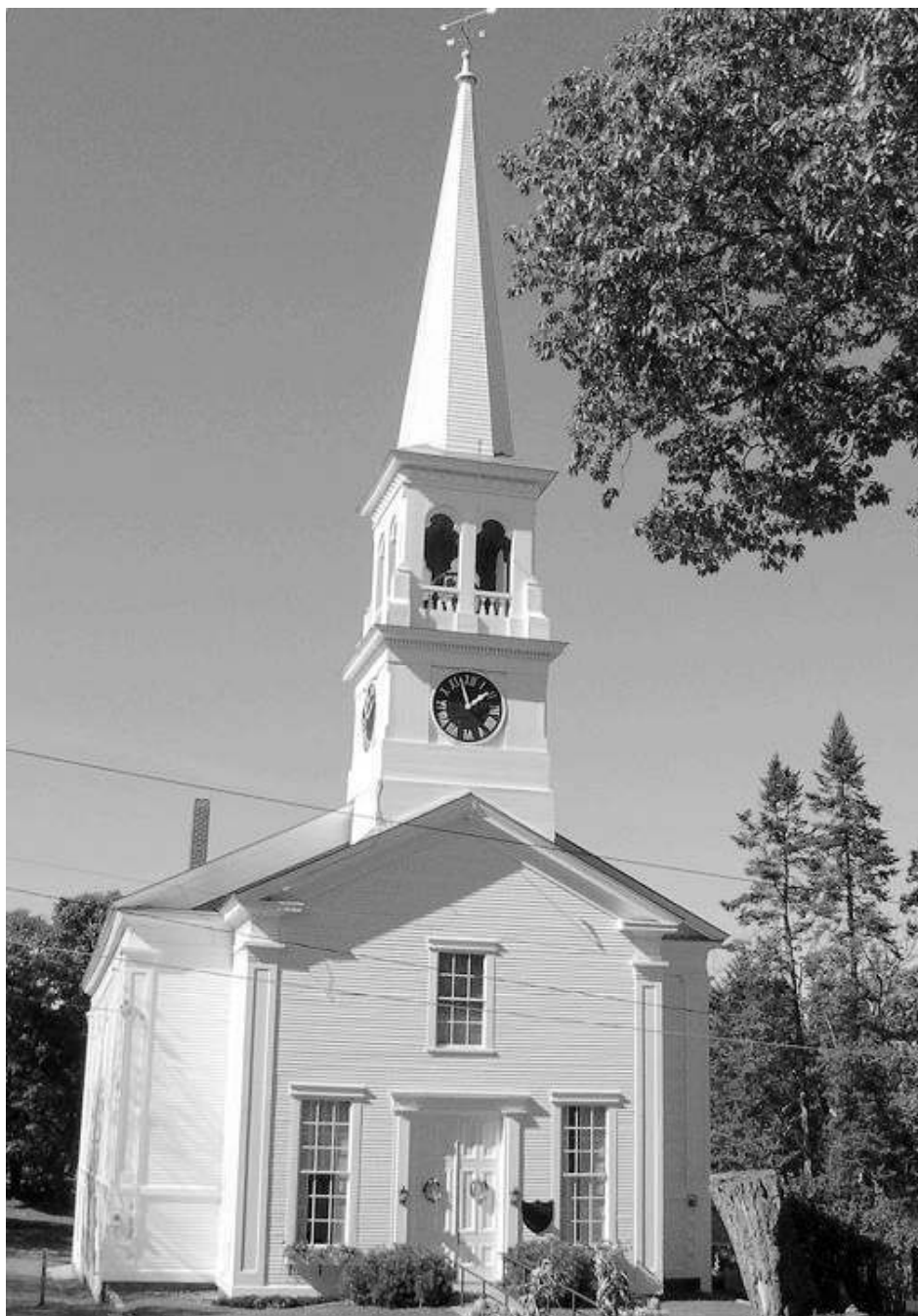


connection ▽

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Homosexuality and the Seventh Day Adventist Church - A Workshop

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. (Kinship) is a non-profit support organization which ministers to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of Seventh-day Adventist lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is an organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people.

Founded in 1976, the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the US. Kinship has a board of up to 15 officers and 13 regional coordinators. The current list of members and friends includes several thousand people in 43 countries.

SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn, or even mention, homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts, which are often used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBT has its roots in a misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

Support Kinship

Kinship operates solely on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBT Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below. (You can also donate, using your Visa or Master Card, by contacting Karen Wetherell at treasurer@sdakinship.org. She will phone you so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

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There's a Sweet Sweet Spirit in This Place

During the weekend of January 13-15, Seventh Day Adventist theologians, exegetical Bible scholars, ethicists, pastors, parents, periodical editors, Family Ministries Directors, college presidents, doctors, parents and gay/lesbian members gathered in Ontario, California for three days of presenting and discussing papers, sharing meals and conversations, worshipping and singing, book building, vision gathering and healing. All of us who were there found it to be an extraordinary event. Each day began with a personal narrative: Leif Lind, Sherri Babcock and Carrol Grady. The Connection issues for February, March and perhaps April are going to focus on excerpting the papers presented and sharing reactions to this gathering and its outcomes. The book for which these papers were prepared is scheduled to be published around the end of 2006. Since each paper was between 16 and 36 pages long what we can give you here is barely an outline but... we just could not keep that outline from you. We are excited that you will be able to read each writer's work in its entirety soon and we will keep you in touch with our progress on the book and other projects.

On the Road to Ontario

Carrol Grady

It's been 16 years since I first learned my youngest son is gay, and the issue of homosexuality took center stage in my life. These have been sixteen years of continuing education about a subject on which I was once completely ignorant; sixteen years of growing realization that my church desperately needs to be educated on this subject, too.

I am overjoyed about the January workshop on homosexuality that the Association of Adventist Forums is sponsoring. Because of the stature of some of the presenters I believe church administrators will not be able to ignore it. It is my hope that this workshop will lead to a meaningful dialog about, and careful study of, homosexuality and the related problem of homophobia in our church.

Several other denominations have published collections of essays representing varying viewpoints on the theological issues concerning homosexuality. But the book that will be produced from this workshop is the first of which I'm aware that will also



include a denomination's look at a variety of related issues, such as legal, sociological, etiological and ethical concerns.

As one of the thirteen presenters, I feel a bit intimidated because I am one without a Ph.D. or an M.D. after my name! But on the topic assigned to me, "Homosexuality and Seventh-day Adventist Families," I think I'm perhaps uniquely qualified to represent the nearly 600 families with whom I've become acquainted over the past ten years.

As I worked on my presentation,

I once again relived our family's long journey and the journeys so many other parents and family members have told me about, the many tears, heartaches and prayers we have shared, and my sadness as I've watched dear friends leave or distance themselves from the church. I have tried to convey this in such a way that people who have never had this experience can feel some of these emotions. I would like homosexuality to become more than just theoretical to my hearers.

Before reaching its final form, I've asked a number of people to critique my paper – my Adventist Writers' group, a lesbian therapist, an academy classmate who has two gay nephews, and those on my online support group for friends and families.

I've incorporated suggestions of more felicitous ways to express my thoughts and tried to clarify parts that others didn't understand or agree with. Since my facility is in writing, not public speaking, I especially appreciated the coaching of my academy classmate on how to improve my speaking style. And most of all, I have spent time praying that I will be a channel through whom God can speak. ▼

A Pastor's Perspective: Growing Up Adventist And Gay

Leif T. Lind

I worked as a pastor and a missionary for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 20 years, on three continents. I am the father of two grown children who, like me, have lived and worked in several different cultures and countries.

I am gay.

It took me years before I could say the word, even to myself. As a pastor and a married man I struggled for years in a private hell from which there seemed no escape. As a minister I felt I had no one to turn to and, as far as I knew at the time, I was all alone in a frightening and traumatic dilemma.

I came from a loving, two-parent family where my parents were proud of me. I grew up essentially as an only child; my two sisters were out of the home by the time I arrived. Because my parents were Norwegian missionaries in Kenya and Uganda (where I was born), I had wonderful opportunities for getting the experience that only travel can bring. Growing up and going to school in eight different countries, while disconcerting at times, was largely a beneficial experience. My father served in numerous church leadership positions, from mission director to division president — a legend in his day.

I was straight-looking enough that I did not attract the negative attention that sometimes torments gay youth growing up. My childhood asthma provided a convenient excuse for not participating in some of the more active school sports, a school opportunity that I didn't particularly enjoy. I realize from early childhood impressions that I considered men to be good-looking and attractive long before I had the vaguest notion of sex. I had a gradual, sickening

awakening to the fact that I simply wasn't the same as others. I assumed I was "doing the right thing" by asking out or going steady with a girlfriend or two; I was probably unable to distinguish between simple friendship and genuine inner bonding.

I don't believe I knew or fully understood who I was when I made the decision to marry. I was at the time working as a pastor in Norway while corresponding with my fiancée in Canada. I had never engaged in premarital sex — straight or gay. I had high ideals for marriage (I still do), and wanted to make a happy home for my wife and children. The option of not marrying simply did not occur to me.

Quite apart from the sheer terror of facing my orientation head-on was the overriding concern I had for Biblical integrity. For me this was paramount. How could I possibly understand the handful of scriptural references to homosexuality without seeing in them an outright condemnation of my very being? I avidly, in secret, studied scripture and read books on the subject, sometimes disagreeing with both the "traditional" (conservative) and "progressive" (liberal) viewpoints. I had to know in my own mind what I believed and why. Years later I was to prepare a 35-page



biblical study for myself, summarizing my own understanding on the subject.

It was first in the early 1980s that the concept of the existence of other gay Adventists dawned on me, after reading a special issue on the topic in *Spectrum*. I read and reread the experiences of other gay church members, hardly daring to believe their stories. It still seemed too remote for me, however. North America was a world away from me, and all the stories came from there. The pressure inside me was mounting, however. I began to realize that it was draining an enormous amount of energy to be continually living in fear, while trying to deny an essential part of my core being.

I will never forget the day I finally decided to come out to my wife of nearly 20 years. I had compiled a list of books, tapes, websites, and personal phone numbers to help her cope with what I knew would be traumatic for her. I would wait until a week after she had graduated from nursing school, so that the news would not affect her studies. I planned to tell our two teenagers a few days later. It was without doubt the hardest thing I have ever done. I was literally sick to my stomach for months before the date I had chosen. Knowing my tendency to joke, she didn't believe me at first. When it finally hit home, we both sobbed on each others' shoulders for what seemed to be an eternity. We talked until the early hours of the morning, and then again for most of the next day. For her it was the beginning of a nightmare; for me it was as if the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders. To her credit, never then or since has she blamed me for being gay or tried to convince me that I could change my orientation. That she was disappointed in my years of deception was to be expected.

When a "well meaning" parishioner told the church about my orientation, even though I had never had a gay relationship, I was

summoned to appear before the conference leaders. What I did not inform them, however, was that I would be attending with someone they knew very well: an attorney who had previously been terminated from denominational service for being gay. While this approach was foreign to me, I felt trapped and afraid. I remained unemployed for about two years, retraining while I was looking for work. During that period I received unemployment insurance for as long as I was eligible, as the government believed my version of the story that this was a case of being “fired” rather than “resigning”. My termination letter from the conference had guardedly stated.

I was now on my own. The family had separated, with my wife relocating thousands of miles away and the children, 15 and 17, going off to church boarding schools. I felt, as I know they did, that the world had fallen apart. I moved a few miles and started attending a local Adventist Church where I was warmly accepted by the pastor and his members, and was even permitted to regularly teach the adult Sabbath School class. I found a two-bedroom apartment in town where I could share the rent with another man. Through this whole process, I was relieved to find that many local church members were very supportive of both my wife and me during this difficult process of coming out. Probably the hardest part of the coming out process, after having come out to my wife and children, was the effect this had on my other relatives.

By early 1998 my partner and I, who had now been together for a few weeks, decided to move to the Washington, DC area where we both found work. We had met through a support group for Adventist gays and lesbians, and we both felt a commitment to the Church in which we had been raised and worked. We started attending one of the Adventist churches in the area. ▼



Psychiatry, Anti-Homosexual Bias, and Challenges for Gay and Lesbian Youth

Harry Wang M.D.

In July 2005, the Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) approved the following statement in support of same-sex marriage:

In the interest of maintaining and promoting mental health, the American Psychiatric Association supports the legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage with all the rights, benefits, and responsibilities conferred by civil marriage, and opposes restrictions to those same rights, benefits, and responsibilities. In its statement, the APA reiterated its “longstanding interest in civil rights and legal issues that affect mental health as well as a code of ethics that supports and respects human dignity. Educating the public about lesbian and gay relationships and supporting efforts to establish legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage is consistent with the Association’s advocacy for minority groups.” (Hausman 2005)

The first scientific views of homosexuality in the 1800s were heavily influenced by the religious traditions of the day, which had long viewed non-procreative sexuality as a sin or vice. These religious beliefs led to centuries of criminalization of homosexual

acts. By the later part of the nineteenth century, medicine and psychiatry began to vie with church and state for authority in the area of sexuality. This led to the definition of homosexuality as an illness or pathology, rather than a sin or crime.

The first clinical, scientific paper on homosexuality was published in 1869 by Carl Westphal, a Berlin psychiatrist. Westphal coined the translated term “sexual inversion” and developed a classification of behaviors associated with homosexuality based on over two hundred case histories. In his case study of a lesbian woman, he concluded that her condition was congenital in origin (Bayer 1987, p. 18, 19).

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychiatry, is often portrayed as anti-gay, perhaps unfairly. He did not believe homosexuals were “degenerate” and Freud welcomed homosexuals into psychoanalytic societies. In his famous “Letter to an American Mother,” he wrote:

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. (Freud 1935; Bayer 1987, p. 27)

Freud viewed homosexuality as a phase in the psychosexual development of all children. These early homosexual tendencies remain, he believed, even after one becomes heterosexual. Thus, Freud felt that everyone has a constitutional bisexuality.



In the 1940s, after Freud's death, psychoanalyst Sandor Rado began to question Freud's views on homosexuality. He rejected both Freud's concept of bisexuality and the congenital etiology. Rado believed homosexuality was caused by a "phobia" of members of the opposite sex that could be remedied through treatment (Bayer 1987, p. 28-30). This was a significant shift in thinking which led psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to believe they could change the sexual orientation of homosexuals. Alfred Kinsey (1948) shocked the public through his groundbreaking empirical study on the sexual behavior of American males. Kinsey found that homosexuality was more widespread than commonly believed, with 10 percent of males reporting same-gender sexual behavior for at least three continuous adult years. These findings startled a public who believed that homosexuality was deviant and/or sinful. Kinsey also rated sexual behavior on a continuum from zero to six, with zero for exclusively heterosexual behavior to six for exclusively homosexual behavior.

Psychologist Evelyn Hooker (1957) was the first researcher to study the psychological functioning of non-clinical gay men. Psychiatrists had previously based their findings on homosexuals in treatment. Sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, Hooker's study did not find any significant differences on Rorschach and other projective testing between non-clinical gay and heterosexual men. These findings began an important change in the mental health profession's thinking about homosexuality. Numerous subsequent studies have confirmed Hooker's findings—that being a homosexual does not, by itself, equate with psychopathology (Freedman 1971; Friedman & Downey 1994; Gonsiorek 1982, 1991).



At the 1972 APA meeting, a gay psychiatrist by the name of John Fryer spoke as part of a panel on homosexuality. Fearful that he would never be able to obtain future employment, he adopted the persona of "Dr. H. Anonymous," wearing a wig, a mask, and a multi-colored oversized tuxedo while speaking with a voice-distorting microphone. Dr. Fryer had already been fired from two psychiatry residency positions because of his sexual orientation. He informed the audience about what it was like to be gay and a psychiatrist and made an enormous impact at the meeting. (Kirby 2003; Lenzer 2003; This American Life 2002)

At the 1973 APA meeting in Honolulu, there was lively debate among psychiatrists about homosexuality. Activist Ronald Gold was invited to speak on a panel and titled his presentation "Stop It, You're Making Me Sick!" (Stoller 1973). He said: To be viewed as psychologically disturbed is to be thought of and treated as a second-class citizen; being a second-class citizen is not good for mental health...I think you're prepared to agree that my previous illness was at least in part a direct result of the crimes perpetrated on me by a hostile

society. You have been willing accomplices in such crimes. Six months later, the APA Board removed homosexuality as a diagnosis. This decision was subsequently endorsed by the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers. In 1974 the APA developed a position paper on homosexuality deploring all discrimination and seeking civil rights legislation.

Despite the changes in the official position of organized psychiatry, society continues to hold biases toward homosexuals. Peer relationships provide a sense of belonging through the mutual sharing of activities, ideas, and emotions. Friendships for lesbian and gay youth are complicated by feelings of isolation with an awareness of being "different" from peers, often by the age of four (Fisher 2002). Identity formation is the end result of answering the question "Who am I?" One's beliefs and values are a large part of this, but identity formation also encompasses ethnicity, culture, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. This process can be compromised if important parts of one's identity (e.g. ethnic or religious) reject one's sexual orientation as "wrong," "sinful," or "depraved." Finally, teens need to set goals and make plans for their future. The support of friends, parents, and mentors can be invaluable if they are available. Homosexual youth often struggle with uncertainty and doubt about their future knowing that they face personal and professional challenges because of their sexual orientation.

There have been at least five theorists (D'Augelli & Patterson 2001) who have described developmental pathways for the sexual identity formation of lesbian and gay individuals: Cass (1979, 1996), Coleman (1981-82), Sophie (1985-86), Troiden (1988; 1989, p. 43-73), and Rotheram-Borus and Fernandez (1995). I will describe Troiden's



model with the understanding that it serves as a guide only, since development is always fluid and may not be linear. In the first stage, sensitization, gay or lesbian children perceive being different and feel marginalized. They may take an atypical gender role and may not feel that they fit in with their peers. The hallmark of the second stage is identity confusion. This occurs when the lesbian or gay adolescent begins to question if they are homosexual. Cognitive dissonance develops because of altered perceptions of self, inaccurate information about homosexuality, and societal anti-homosexual bias. In stage three, identity assumption, gay or lesbian individuals come to accept their sexual orientation, often by late adolescence or early adulthood. This leads to increasing contact with other homosexuals and explorations of sexuality. Commitment, stage four, is the integration of sexual orientation in all aspects of one's life. There may be disclosure to heterosexuals, friends, and close family members. Some may reject heterosexuals as a legitimate reference group, while others may be able to value supportive heterosexuals with less anger and alienation.

The main internal and external challenge for gay and lesbian youth is to cope with biases toward their homosexuality. They may have internalized self-hatred and low self-esteem. At times this is acted out behaviorally through high-risk sexual behaviors or the use of drugs and alcohol (Garafalo 1998). Many teens attempt to hide their feelings and questions because they fear being discovered. While this may offer some protection from rejection and abuse, isolation results. Lesbian and gay individuals of color belong to a "double minority" and must also deal with the biases of their ethnic group toward their homosexuality as well as societal bias toward their color. Those who are also part of a religious community with anti-homosexual bias belong to a "triple minority" and must also face being rejected by God and by their church group. It is no wonder that anxiety and depression is common, occurring three to four times more frequently for gay and lesbian youth than for heterosexual youth (Fergusson 1999). Suicide is the third leading cause of death for all youth aged ten to twenty-four (MMWR 2004), but it is believed by some to be the leading cause of death for lesbian and gay youth (Gibson 1989, p. 16; Kulkin 2000). Many studies have shown that gay and lesbian youth attempt suicide at two to three times the rate of heterosexual youth (Faulkner 1998; Fergusson 1999; Garfalo 1998).

When parents provide support and understanding, lesbian and gay youth experience less stress, have improved self-esteem, and are more accepting of their sexual orientation (Hershberger & D'Augelli 1995; Savin-Williams 1989). Unfortunately, not all parents are supportive. Over one-third of LGB youth report verbal abuse by family members and 10 percent report physical abuse (Pilkington & D'Augelli 1995). As many as 26 percent of gay youth are forced to leave their home because of conflict over their

sexual orientation (Gibson 1989, p. 5), and it has been estimated that gay youth account for 25 percent of homeless youth (Kruks 1991).

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network recently conducted the first nationwide survey of over three thousand thirteen to eighteen year-old students and one thousand high school teachers on the subject of bullying in schools (Harris Interactive and GLSEN, 2005). The most common cause of bullying reported was about one's physical appearance. The second most common cause was about actual or perceived sexual orientation. The survey found that LGBT students were three times more likely than non-LGBT students to feel unsafe at school (22 percent versus 7 percent). Furthermore, 90 percent of LGBT students (versus 62 percent of non-LGBT teens) reported being harassed or assaulted during the past year because they were or were perceived to be LGBT. Being bullied by peers causes gay and lesbian teens to have negative attitudes about school, and 28 percent of gay students drop out of high school because of discomfort and fear, according to a 1987 study (Remafedi 1987).

Once we become fully aware of our biases, we need to provide accurate information about homosexuality to all health care providers, educators, clergy, youth, family members, and our communities. For example, the current seventh and eighth grade science textbook for North American Seventh-day Adventist schools refers to homosexual orientation as "part of Satan's effort to sabotage God's plan for men and women" (Ritterskamp & Wyrick 1996). This text, and others, needs to be revised or replaced with more accurate information. If we do not do all that we can to stop anti-homosexual bias, we will continue to be responsible, in part, for the pain and deaths of LGBT individuals. ▼



Biological Determinants of Homosexual Orientation

Homosexuality: Is it a Choice or Innate – Biology or Sin?

L Ben Kemena, MD, FACP

In 1984, Richard Green began a series of reports following a group of boys for more than 12 years. These boys were identified in his study as so-called “sissy-boys” – boys that did not play, explore or interact as aggressively as other boys their age. Green noted that in his group of “sissy-boys”, their testosterone levels were lower than in their “non-sissy” peers. Furthermore, in his 12 year follow-up period, about 2/3 of the boys were eventually identified as homosexual. Given societal views regarding homosexuality, many parents of the “sissy-boys” wanted their sons treated for this “condition”. At the insistence of their parents, many of the boys were subjected to behavioral therapies and hormonal injections from a very early age – but whether “treated” or untreated, the “sissy-boys” of either group were later identified as homosexual at the same percentage rate. This lent more credence to earlier reports that hormone levels alone were not the causative feature of homosexuality. It was also noted

that none of the young boys (ages 3-7) ever appeared to have made a conscious choice about their sexual orientation – and that it had been apparent for some since very early childhood. In a follow-up to Green’s study, a group of American researchers examined whether hormonal levels across populations might be used to predict sexual orientation. They found that neither testosterone levels nor other endocrine tests could be reliably used to predict sexual orientation. In other words, while most “sissy-boys” matured as homosexuals, most homosexuals were not identifiable in childhood as “sissy-boys”.

In 1988, American researcher R C Friedman published a large series of family studies. His studies revealed that neither “castrating mothers” nor “detached fathers” are necessary or sufficient causes for homosexual orientation. His studies were a deliberate follow-up on the theories of Berger and Bieber. Friedman strongly suggested that homosexual orientation was much less a matter of “environment” or family nurturing than had been previously proposed.

The research of Green and Friedman initiated a new round of discussions and research strategies. Surveys of gays and lesbians revealed that most felt “different” from their peers at a very early age – often before age 5. Childhood follow-up studies such as Green’s suggested that sexual orientation was probably established by early childhood. Neither homosexual nor heterosexual research subjects could identify the moment when they made an actual “choice” about their sexual attractions. Neither hormone levels or hormonal manipulation seemed to change or impact homosexual desire (though large doses of progesterone could obliterate libido, the emotional desire remained unchanged). The ultimate conclusion of this discussion led to the following speculations: homosexuality,

while possibly influenced by hormones, must have a basis far more complex than previously appreciated. A new strategy was born to investigate the possibility of a genetic basis for sexual orientation. Specifically, new research was directed at looking at genetics (twin studies) or body structures (brain, ear, hand studies) with a genetic basis that might offer new clues.

The 1990’s heralded the first positive biological outcomes research after years of “pertinent negative” hormone research. In 1991, British-born California researcher, Simon Levay published research suggesting structural brain differences between homosexual and heterosexual men. Differences in brain structure – directed genetically – lent support to a genetic basis of sexual orientation. Furthermore, in the same year, Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard published a study of gay twins. An identical twin brother was much more likely to be homosexual if his brother was homosexual than if he was a fraternal (non-identical) twin. This research has been confirmed by others. In 1999, Texas researchers noted that differences in otoacoustic sound emission from lesbian ears were statistically different from heterosexual women. All of these publications continue to link differences to human structure to sexual orientation –





and by obvious inference, to the genetics directing these developments.

In 1993, Dean Hamer investigated homosexual brothers. In 33 of the 40 brother pairs examined with known maternal homosexual relatives, 5 gene markers in the region of Xq28 were shared on their X chromosome (contributed to every male by their mother). For many, this has marked the scientific moment of resolution. Homosexuality was more than likely to have a genetic basis rather than the consequence of conscious sinful choice. Researchers were quick to point out that human sexuality is an exceedingly complex issue – and that genetics are likely combined with environmental factors to create a spectrum of human sexual desire. Hence, the notion that homosexuality has a genetic predisposition has become a useful descriptive term. The “nature” (genetic) versus “nurture” (human experiences) arguments are likely linked. For instance, we know that those that are raped or subjected to violence are altered in their sexual behavior. Life experiences clearly have an impact on sexual expression. This may help explain why 7 of the 33 brother pairs did not possess that particular genetic factor. And – it might also be

suggested that the eradication of gay people through “genetic engineering” may be difficult to achieve.

At this time in medical history, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of Social Workers and the American Bar Association – along with numerous professional groups from Europe and around the globe have come to view homosexual orientation as a normal variant of human sexual expression. These organizations have established ethical guidelines for the professional care and inclusion of homosexuals into society as gay men and women – honest, whole, integrated and authentic. Furthermore, as a sexual orientation, homosexuality should not and does not carry the stigma of innate pathology – homosexual orientation is not an illness. Homosexuals do face other mental illnesses like their heterosexual peers – but much of what they face can be linked to the trials, bigotry and prejudice they face from society at large. Indeed, Gary Remafedi, a Minnesota pediatrician, published a study in 1991 revealing that a disproportionate number of gay youth attempt or commit suicide as a reflection of social cruelty they face on a daily basis. Some of the worse adolescent crime sprees (such as Columbine High School in 1999) can be linked to homosexual epithets.

For a church denomination such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church – which is committed to a responsible healthcare message, scientific training and charitable evangelical mission – current church policy is antithetical to the scientific evidence and ethical conduct. There are now likely more than 1 million gay and lesbian Adventist “refugees” – either living dishonest “closeted” lives or purged from church

society. This is a human tragedy of epic proportion. Just as one might find the image of God cast as White or Black, man or woman, Jew or Gentile – it should also be said that gay children remain created in the same image of an unfathomable and loving God. May we pray for change in the institutional church – and may we also understand that until the Word of God is presented to gays and lesbians in a way that is recognizably Christ-like, the promise of a Second Coming will remain unfulfilled. ▼



The Caring, Welcoming Church?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its Homosexual Members

Ronald Lawson

In 1983, Charles Bradford, who was then the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, came up with a new slogan for the Church, which was disseminated widely: the Church styled itself as “The Caring Church.” Some 20 years later, the newly re-elected President of the world church, Jan Paulsen, preaching on the final Sabbath of the General Conference Session in 2005, laid out his vision of a

"welcoming church." "Throughout his sermon, Paulsen frequently referred to the need to open the church's doors." He "encouraged the widely diverse church to welcome everyone into the church, not keep them out because of their differences": "'God has set before us an open door, which is not our privilege to close and keep others out... I have a word of caution to anyone who is looking for bad grapes in the church: only God can safely grade people. God loves all people globally... I want the Adventist family around the world to be known as a compassionate family" [July 9, 2005].

One excellent test of the truth of both the slogan and the vision is to what extent the church welcomes and cares for members who are stigmatized by society. This paper considers the history of relations between the Adventist church and its homosexual members.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church largely ignored the topic of homosexuality until the early 1970s. The Church prophet, Ellen White, never referred to it directly in her vast published works or correspondence. The Church never saw reason to commission a study of the topic; its Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, published during the mid-1950s, merely repeated the traditional interpretations of the passages that have been used by conservative Christians to condemn homosexuality; otherwise, its publications rarely mentioned the topic.

Church leaders assumed that there were no homosexuals among their members: the categories "Adventist" and "homosexual" were regarded as mutually exclusive. This assumption was wrong. However, most homosexual members were deeply closeted, living lonely lives. Their discomfort caused many to exit the church, while those who were discovered often faced rejection by their families and their church, expulsion from church schools if



they were students, loss of their jobs if they were church-employed, and guilt, shame, and humiliation. One notable example of this was the fate of Vernon Hendershot, who was President of the Adventist Seminary when it was located at the General Conference complex in Washington, D.C. He disappeared over-night after being arrested during a police raid on a gay meeting place in the early 1950s. Such experiences were repeated throughout the global Adventist Church: for example, a student at Avondale College, in Australia, who confessed to being homosexual between his final examinations and graduation, was not allowed to graduate and was never awarded his degree. Church entities were concerned primarily with protecting their purity and their reputations rather than with supporting such members. I was told many stories of expelled or guilt-ridden students and members committing suicide.

It is not surprising that when gay and lesbian Adventists in North America first met for a "Kampmeeting" in 1980 that the most emotional experience was telling one another their personal stories, which they quickly dubbed "the horror stories." One after another told of the isolation they had felt because almost all had been convinced he or she was the only gay Adventist in the world; of years of unavailing struggle and unanswered prayer for a miracle

that would make them heterosexual; of overwhelming guilt and self-rejection, of consequent promiscuous patterns, difficulty in establishing relationships, and more guilt.

Adventist pastors, evangelists, and publications seized on the emergence of the Gay Liberation Movement in 1969 as a sign of the end of the world and of the imminent return of Christ [Adventist Review, July 15, 1971; Insight, Dec.14, 1971]. Most of these publications assumed that the issue they addressed was exterior to the church; however, they elicited several letters to editors that suggested the presence of many homosexuals among its members... Almost as if to confirm this, a number of gay Adventists in southern California, emboldened by the gay movement to seek out their own for mutual support, formed an organization in 1977 which they ambitiously named Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. By following networks and placing advertisements in gay and lesbian publications, Kinship began to expand around North America and to reach out overseas.

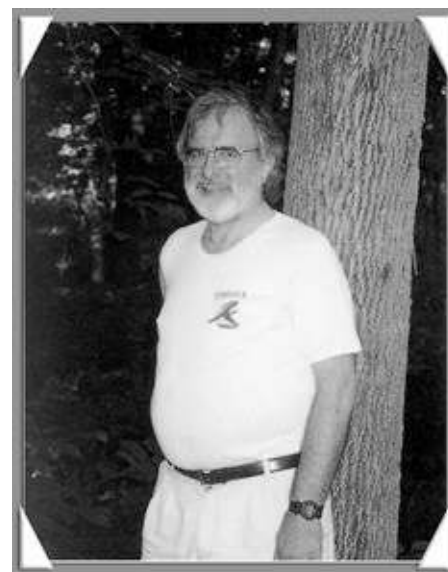
In 1979, James Londis, Pastor of Sligo Church in suburban Washington, D.C., spoke to groups of clergy in southern California and around Washington, D.C. about the plight of gay Adventists. His sensitivity to the issue had been raised by the trauma experienced by a gay sibling. Estimating that there must be tens of thousands of gay Adventists in North America, he questioned the two solutions usually offered homosexuals within the church when he suggested that it was not possible for most to live lives of sexual abstinence and stated that he doubted whether cure was possible for all. Reviewing modern biblical scholarship which disputed traditional interpretations of key biblical passages, he urged that scholars study the issues thoroughly and that the Church

prepare itself to minister to its gay children.

Church leaders were forced to address the issue of gay Adventists early in 1980, when Kinship invited three seminary professors and two pastors to participate in its first national "Kampmeeting." Searching for spiritual nurture and help in answering their most agonizing questions, Kinship leaders had turned to prominent figures. However, when three of those who responded positively found that they were from the Seminary, they concluded that they could not attend without first asking permission. Neal Wilson, President of the General Conference [GC], responded sympathetically, perhaps because he is reputed to have two gay members within his family. When he found opposition to the request on the President's Executive Advisory Council [PREXAD], he avoided taking a vote there and took responsibility for the decision himself.

The biblical scholars had been asked to help answer the question from Kinship of whether or not it was possible for gays and lesbians to be Christians, and thus researched what the Bible had to say about the topic for the first time. They concluded, as a result of their study in advance of the Kampmeeting, that the Bible was silent about persons with a homosexual orientation and that the little that was said there was directed to heterosexuals who might like to broaden their sexual repertoire. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, were called to faithfulness within a committed relationship and to chastity outside of such a relationship. Its proscriptions were also the same for homosexuals as for heterosexuals: sexual exploitation, promiscuity, rape, and temple prostitution. Wilson probably did not anticipate such an accepting response. The clergy were deeply moved by the stories they heard at the Kampmeeting of the trauma of growing up as a gay Adventist.

Church leaders were much more comfortable with the approach of Colin Cook, the self-described "recovered homosexual", who had formally founded the Quest Learning Center late in 1980. His program proclaimed "deliverance from homosexuality," and brought homosexuals together in Reading, Pennsylvania, for a year or more of counseling and involvement in a mutual support group called "Homosexuals Anonymous" [HA]. A few months later the General Conference opted to fund Quest, providing more than half of its budget. The Adventist Church thus became the first denomination to fund a "change ministry" for homosexuals. While the GC was careful to keep Quest structurally separate from the church, Duncan Eva became the chair of its board and church officials made up a majority among its board members. In casting their lot with Cook, church leaders were in effect saying that the only acceptable homosexual was one struggling to change his/her orientation and who remained celibate in the meantime. (Fourteen participants in the program, when talking with Ron) told him that their efforts and hopes turned out to be a nightmare experience for them--one they did not describe in their testimonies before church leaders. Suddenly they found that they were no longer the only homosexual Adventists in the world--isolation was replaced by community, a community under stress because its members were trying to change their orientations and yet were often attracted sexually to one another. The immediate result was confusion, turmoil and considerable sexual contact with one another. Their confusion was greatly heightened when Cook, the director of the program, made repeated sexual advances to them. Not one of the interviewees reported that his sexual orientation had changed, nor did any of them know anyone who had changed. Indeed, 11 of the 14 had come to accept their



homosexuality. [Lawson, 1987]. I decided that I could not allow such a pattern of sexual exploitation to continue. Consequently, in October 1986 I wrote a letter to GC President Neal Wilson, telling him of what I had unexpectedly found at Quest [Oct.23]. I copied the letter to 29 leading pastors and academics in an attempt to make sure that Wilson would act on it. Cook admitted my findings were correct, and was removed within a week; shortly afterwards a decision was made to close the Quest counseling program, but to continue support services for HA chapters. While church officials made no attempt to justify Cook's actions, they continued to defend his methods.

In a further effort to distance the Church from SDA Kinship, the GC demanded later that year that all traces of the name of the church be deleted from Kinship's official name: "The problem is the use of 'Seventh-day Adventist' and 'SDA' in conjunction with 'Kinship International.'" Church leaders feel strongly that the combination implies official endorsement of Kinship International, and those leaders object strongly to that implication" [Nixon to Lawson, Nov.7, 1985]. In December 1987, the General Conference of

Seventh-day Adventists filed a suit against Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. for "breach of trademark." Because the suit had to be shaped to address commercial law, it did not even mention that Kinship members are homosexuals and Adventists. Its prime claim was that by using "Seventh-day Adventist" or its acronym as part of its name, Kinship was likely to cause confusion and so attract funds which donors think are going to the church and to harm the church's business activities.

The GC hired two major law firms to present its case, and has since admitted that it spent over \$200,000 on the suit. Depositions were taken in the Fall of 1990, and the case was argued in the Federal Court in Los Angeles in February 1991. The legal proceedings were traumatic for Kinship members. However, in its verdict, which was announced in October 1991, the court rejected the suit, thus allowing Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. to keep its full name. Church leaders accepted the advice of their lawyers not to appeal the decision. ▼

To be Continued.

Reactions to the Workshop: Homosexuality and the Adventist Church:

Dave: I am exhilarated and uplifted. This is the most exciting thing in years. People here who have been willing to present put their careers on the line. There has been incredible work done on the papers. I am grateful to have these wonderful friends. I love organizing and I have gotten to do something that is making history. Willie Oliver has been open; I am grateful for him. He is willing to dialogue. I appreciate Ray from the General Conference, Harry Knox from the HRC. We have people who are ready to help us with the next part of our process; publishing the book. This is a

dream come true. We will have a list serve by Wednesday. With this kind of group there are only two degrees of separation.

Ruth: My first encounter with Kampmeeting was an experience of unusual authenticity, of compassion and of loving interaction. This was another opportunity to meet with people who I have felt were very open. Hearing the stories at that Kampmeeting made all the difference to me and changed how I felt about this issue.

Carroll: This weekend is a dream that I have had for many many years. I wanted us to have a conversation and dialogue with the church. This is better because it is more open than a conversation with the General Conference might have been. It has been important for me to hear the other papers to validate conclusions I have come to from my own study. It is great to find all the supportive people here who were interested in attending.

Keith: I think this is a large group of people with different views



coming from all over the US and other countries. These people are willing to share their trials and experiences to unite for a common goal.

It seems like this has helped me find understanding and peace. I grew up in a conservative congregation where issues were black and white. There was only one view on issues allowed. There was no opening for questioning. We did not question. I grew up alone and isolated. There was no one to reach out to or understand what I was going through. I knew to keep my mouth shut. I had accepted that "this is the way I will respond in my experience with the church." Now I see a much different side: I see love, acceptance and grace. By that grace I am covered from the

multitude of things that were told to me; that the door was shut. I was told there was no way to have salvation. I know I am not alone any more. Every other place I looked was empty because I thought there were no Adventist options. Social settings do not understand my conservative qualities or where I am coming from.

Mitch H.: For us to talk our theology without living what the Bible says is like Mohammad Atta learning to fly a plane and not being interested in learning how to land it. If we do not land our theology in our



life we are becoming as much a group of terrorists as those men who were not interested in landing those planes on September 11, 2001.

Benji: I think it is important seeing the uncloseted liberals. It is good to see church leaders and influential church people who have a different view of things.

Dave: I am excited to see the involvement from so many different levels of the church and from lay people.

Steve: This experience has been



great. I think this has exceeded my expectations. I have appreciated seeing the number of people and the level of senior leadership in the church...thought leaders.

Leif: I think this weekend is exciting even though it is on an unofficial basis that we are discussing these issues for the first time. This is a dream come true. I am encouraged to note the spirit of unity that is with us even when we disagree.

Stanley: It has been important for me to see so many thinking people united in a compassionate exchange of ideas about an issue that has historically not led to compassionate discourse. It has been really significant to hear how people have responded warmly and supportively to the stories. The connection between the stories, the history and the sociology has been helpful in my deepening understanding of the issues.

Aileen and Carl: The stories and meeting the people behind the stories has been powerful. We have met new friends. Our understanding of this issue has been immeasurably enhanced. The program has been well organized, on time, well documented, thoughtful. People have spoken with the authority of good research and good thinking. This has been a class act. I have appreciated that in spite of the pain that I hear in the stories there continued deep desire to be part of the church that they love and have grown up in. I stand in admiration of that, despite the treatment that has occurred.

Bob: I think seeing the wide variety of people in different places in



their lives, engaging with each other, thinking and caring and discussing what is the best way to move our church into a

more compassionate space has been the most important thing for me. Hearing in one place the amount of information, current updated information has also been valuable. Having an opportunity to share that with readers is a gift.

Mike: I feel privileged to have been invited as a representative of Kinship Europe. I have been both fascinated and horrified to hear of the oppression of so many LGBTI people in the USA generally and in the American SDA church in particular. It has been gratifying



and humbling to witness the open dialogue that is now starting to take place between the church and their LGBTI

family. I am encouraged to continue in the battle against oppression in the UK. I leave here with the assurance that God is moving to bring all His children into His kingdom.

Mark: Meeting people of a different sexual orientation; eating together, hearing their stories has been a powerful part of this weekend. As we get to know other, people who are different than ourselves, we are drawn in to the fact that we are all human. It has been important to hear some of the struggle with the scriptural text. My preconceived understandings and my cultural biases have pushed against the acceptance of homosexuality. Without explicitly addressing those texts most of the congregations in the country will have a difficult time accepting. One of the friends of our daughter believes that he is gay. It has been interesting to talk with my children about how they are positioning themselves around this issue. When I was in ninth grade I don't remember these kinds of conversations and I went to public school. This is now part of the conversations. I personally have been more drawn to this friend of my children because I know he is struggling. And I have been trying to help my daughter.

Colette: I think I am not a scholar. I am a church member. I wanted to be here because I have some friends in France who are gay and in the church. I always have been friendly but I did not know what to tell them or advise them or how to help them. Being here is certainly

helping me to understand more what it is like. I do not have all of the questions. Even if I am not convinced of everything I am glad to be part of the process.

Charles: My soul is always renewed whenever I find myself in a community of prophets. Prophets are always by definition optimistic, even though they face great odds.

Martha: The circle is widening but not broken.

Harvey: I have enjoyed seeing a lot of people that I have known in my past life. For some it was a surprise and a delightful surprise. Here, all the threads are brought together in one place. Some of the presentations brought new insight. The Babylon piece was new and had great thoughts.

John: Wow. This has been a totally amazing weekend. I think the highlight has been everyone here in one room: gay, straight, Kinship, the General Conference. We are in accord. There does not seem to be us and them. I will walk away with Carrol Grady's grace and presence. It touches me. The exegetical talk had me almost in tears in terms of what the redemptive purpose is.

Todd: The most important thing has been the openness of the people. I have only experienced this in one other community. People's willingness to be open and wholly who they are. I have enjoyed the mix of personal plus intellectual. And, I see people from Loma Linda here. There is not hostility even when there is disagreement. ▼





Looking Back

David Fergusson

We made history this weekend in many ways. The Workshop by all accounts more than met the expectations of those who planned it and those who participated. As you know we received a grant of \$25,000 to help with the Workshop and the subsequent book to be published. The real work is just beginning, but here are a few of the highlights from my perspective. We had stories to begin each day. These set the tone and helped participants to see the need for the work that was being done. A big thanks to Leif, Sherie, and Carrol for the marvelous job they did in telling their stories in a way that helped to prepare for the things that were being done each day. You will also note that we had presentations from Ben and Ron. Bob and I served as Moderators for several of the sessions along with David Larson. Most of the other speakers are members of the Kinship Advisory Board and have been working since the planning began nearly three years ago to put this Workshop together. A number of them are denominational employees and put their careers on the line by participating. Because of their involvement with the Advisory, they all have a strong

desire to see things change to provide a more welcoming environment in the church for LGBTI members. Another wonderful blessing for our workshop was the presence of the new director of the Faith and Religion from HRC, Harry Knox.

Here are a few highlights from my perspective:

* We have wonderful material for the book that we want to publish and we will be making every effort to have that released by October 10 of this year, Coming Out Day or by the end of the year.

*The director of the GC department of communication told me he will be meeting with his staff to ask them what things each of them will do to help make the church a friendlier place for us.

*The director of the NAD Family Life ministries has asked Sherrie Babcock to serve on a committee to help his department reach their goals for the coming five years. One of those goals is to include an initiative for gay youth. The director also asked Mitch Henson for permission to list his name as a resource for pastors who have gay members. We discussed the possibility of having gay stories listed in his website and for doing a survey in North American churches now and at the end of this five years, so he could measure the effectiveness of the work he is doing in all areas of family life including any changes in acceptance of gays and safety of gay youth in our schools.

*The Presidents and Board chairmen of all of the colleges and universities in North America meet annually in February. The presidents of two of those institutions, Kettering and La Sierra were present. They are scheduling next year's meeting to look at safety issues for GBLTI youth on all of the campuses. Carrol Grady will present the story of the harassment her son experienced at PUC with threats to his life.

*The director from the HRC is working with us to provide help in several areas. He is helping us to

locate foundations where we can apply to for grants to publish the book. I will be joining him in Denver in February to meet with the Gill foundation. He is, at his expense, bringing leaders from 5 other denominational groups to meet with five of us in April to plan the release of our book. We would like to avoid some of the mistakes that have been made in the past with books that have come out in other denominations. Harry is also working with us to help with marketing the book by announcing the release of the book on the HRC website and getting ads in the Advocate nationwide! And, he will be joining us in Orlando for Kampmeeting.

I guess that's enough excitement for one writing! I'm still on a high from the weekend. Thanks to each of you for your prayers, financial support and continuing support as we seek to make a difference. ▼



Kinship News:

Australia: Noel Thorpe

SDA Kinship Australia is having a stall at the Carnival on the 12th of February. This is the Melbourne Midsumma GLBTIQ Festival in the Treasury Gardens from 12noon. Those of you who are in the

country are most welcome to come along and say hello. SDA Kinship Australia is having a stall at the Fair Day on the 19th of February. This is the Sydney New Mardi Gras Fair in the Victoria Gardens Camperdown from 10 am. Together we can let others know of a support group for former and present SDA people that identify as being GLBTIQ.

Uganda; Joseph Brown

Although it now estimated that there may be about 2 million gay or lesbian people in our tiny land-locked country there is little evidence on the surface that we have any gay life at all. Politically, economically and socially life is difficult for us because homosexuality is still considered a criminal offense and we risk fourteen years in prison if we are convicted for loving someone of the same sex. We also risk being expelled from our clans and churches, even if there is only a suspicion of our orientation.

Humanitarian organizations and social services risk having their work cut off if they are connected to GLBTI people. Recently an organization lost its license to work here because in the USA it supports GLBTI rights. Last year a radio station was fined 2,000 dollars for hosting a group who supported health services for the GLBTI community. In spite of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there is no clear program for gay or lesbian people who are infected. In 2002 a retired Anglican Bishop was expelled from the church for accepting gay people and saying they needed help. It is difficult to imagine that we could be married like we saw Catherine and Karen getting married last year.

Kinship Calendar

February 11 - Region 1 meeting at Bob Bouchard's home in New York City. We will be meeting with the Adventist Forum for services at 11AM. We'll share a potluck lunch and then discuss the recent workshop on "Homosexuality and

connection

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

the Seventh Day Adventist Church". A field trip is planned for later as well as dinner with any of you who would like to join us.

Region 8 Meeting in Oakland

February 18 – Region 1 and anyone else who can attend is invited to meet with the Adventist Forum where our speaker will be a lesbian doctoral candidate at Union Theological Seminary, whose topic is "Queer Theology: What About Paul?" 11:00 am at St Mary's Episcopal Church, 126 St between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, Manhattan.

March 4 - Region 1 Meeting in Boston at Sean's home.

March 11 - Region 8 Meeting in Oakland

March 17-19 - SDA Kinship International Boardmeeting; Redlands, California

April 1,2 - Kinship Africa

Kampmeeting

April 21-23 - Mini Kampmeeting in Rehoboth Beach Delaware

April ? – Kinship Germany Weekend Meeting

June 30-July2 -SDA Kinship Women and Children First - Orlando, Florida

July 2-9 - SDA Kinship International Kampmeeting

July 14-16: Kinship Europe Meeting in Sweden

July 17-22: Kinship Europe Holiday gathering

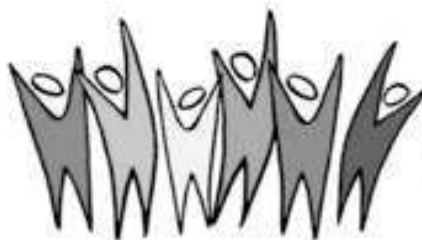
September 30-October 2: Australian Kampmeeting

November 3-5: Region 1 Mini Kampmeeting. Windsor Vermont.

December 31: Region 2 and Region 1 First Night in Williamsburg, Virginia. ▼



NO ONE LIKE YOU CELEBRATING UNIQUENESS
27th Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship Kampmeeting, Orlando 2006



Let's celebrate!!