

connection ▽

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...Of Sunshine and Souls

Rom Wilder - Virginia, U.S.A.

I didn't realize how much it mattered to me. The sunshine. It's not like it had been gone for a long time. It's not like I didn't know it would be back. I knew.

What surprised me was how wide my spirit smiled when the sunshine returned. I guess I hadn't been paying enough attention to realize how much the sunshine meant to my spirit.

I started to pay attention. I found out that my spirit smiled at a lot of things.

- A teenage dog with a strong will and velvet ears
- Two adult geese being followed by a long line of fuzzy goslings
- An eight year old peeping over the top of the counter at my desk on take your kids to work day.
- Three green signal lights in a row.
- Finding a stack of orange cover stock paper at the top of a box labeled basura.
- Getting an invitation to my nephew's high school graduation, with a new photo of him enclosed.
- Hearing an old song by Carly Simon.
- Finding a 20-dollar bill in the pocket of a jacket.
- My little sister turning 54 and telling us how glad she is to be 54.

Now that I'm paying attention, I'm discovering more and more things that make my spirit smile.

I'm looking forward to more sunshine. ▼

...Of Patterns and Beads

Kenneth James - Maryland, U.S.A.

I regret it now. I stayed in the closet far longer than I really needed. I regret missing my first Kampmeeting opportunity. I chickened out at the last minute. Fear of the unknown. I had no idea you were such a supportive family. You would have welcomed me sooner, if I had allowed you. My Rehoboth weekend taught me that our Church is not whole and cannot be healed without its gay members. Zak said the church makes a terrible mistake when she rejects the talent, gifts, contributions and very humanity of its gay members. He prays for change. My Rehoboth weekend helped me meet thirty amazing people; as diverse as the hues of the rainbow and as singular as the brightness of white light itself. You gave me certainty. You gave me comfort.

I had hoped for the presence of my special someone. I was prepared to leave the weekend at a moment's notice; meeting him at the end of a flight from Ireland. I was in the group but alone; the solitude palpable at times. I wanted to cry, at times. But the hugs; the compassionate understanding. Those hugs made it possible to smile.

What else can I say about Kampmeeting? Shared experience. Healing balm. Hope. Comfort. Solace. Direction. Validation. I AM gay. I am gay because I was selected, chosen, delegated, as one of the honored few of God's children, to be an exemplar of the diversity in God's family. I have been chosen to share in a special kind of love. ▼

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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.)

SDA Kinship, P.O. Box 49375, Sarasota, FL 34230-6375, or call toll-free in the U.S. 866-732-5677 or toll from outside the U.S. 01 (941) 371-7606, or visit SDA Kinship's Web Site at: www.sdakinship.org.

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Making Love

Michele O'Mara - Ohio, USA



On a sunny Saturday afternoon, Amy arrived ten minutes before her partner, Barbara, for their couple's session. While waiting for Barbara, Amy tells me "I don't think I love her anymore." She explains, "There's no spark, no excitement left." Then came the familiar words I've heard a hundred times before..."She feels more like a friend than a lover."

And the band begins to play... *You never close your eyes Anymore when I kiss your lips. And there's no tenderness Like before in your fingertips. You're trying hard not to show it, (baby). But baby, baby I know it...You've lost that lovin' feeling, whooah that lovin' feeling*

Okay, back to reality. Have I ever mentioned that **love is a VERB**? Though it is much easier to view love as this thing that we either have or don't have, it's actually an experience that we either create, or we don't. **Love is the result of action.** Hence the term, "Making Love!"

The degree to which we feel love is determined by the degree to which we behave in loving ways. Love is actually much more than just a feeling. Love is the outcome of actually doing something loving. In order to express love, we must first possess love. We've all heard the old saying, "You must love yourself before you can love another." This makes sense if you consider that in order to give anything; we must have it to give.

When we lose that lovin'

feeling, chances are we've lost sight of our own lovin' behavior!

I asked Amy, "When is the last time you have behaved toward Barbara like a lover and not just a friend? The last time you interacted with her in a loving, passionate way?" "Hmmm," she replied, "But I don't FEEL loving, so how am I supposed to BE loving?" Then Amy asks, "Isn't that like lying - to show love when I don't feel loving?" To this I say, "Amy If you possess the desire to love Barbara - to continue being in love with her, but you have lost that 'lovin' feeling' that you used to have then **it is not a lie for you to behave in accordance with your wants.**" I continue, "Is it a lie to work out if you don't FEEL like exercising?" Quickly she replies, "If I waited until I **wanted** to workout I might never work out!" With a heavy sigh, she says, "Okay, I get where you're going with this, **I don't have to feel loving to be loving,** I just have to want to be loving and

know that being loving is the right thing to do if I want our relationship to work." I say, "That's exactly right." And I added, "If you behave in loving ways, regardless of how you feel, you will likely begin to feel more loving. The best way to get what we want, be that kindness, love, passion, excitement... is to give it."

Think about all of the things you do throughout the day that you do because they need to be done in order for you to get what you want. The simple things like brushing our teeth so they won't fall out, putting gas in our cars so we can get from point "a" to point "b," doing laundry so we have clean clothes to wear. The list is endless. We do many things we don't FEEL like doing because in the end we want the reward we'll receive by doing so. To be sure I am clear, I explain to Amy, "If, on the other hand, you MAKE THE CHOICE to stop loving, or you have decided you don't want to love Barbara anymore, that is a different story. That is a choice to NOT love."

Loving someone is a choice.

Who we find attractive is not - that happens with or without our consent! I think most of us have been attracted to someone at some point about whom in retrospect we wonder, "What was I thinking!?" What we do with our attractions is up to us. The attraction is not the issue - it's how we respond to it. This is an important concept for folks who are tempted to have affairs. Developing an attraction is not

the actual "problem" - it is the choices you make around that attraction, but that's another newsletter!

Love does not take care of itself. We take care of love. If you have recently fallen in love, do not fool yourself into believing that it will continue to self-renew without your input and work. If you have recently fallen out of love, do not fool yourself into believing that you will find another love that will self-renew. When we take responsibility for the love that we feel (by creating it ourselves!) we can create endless amounts of love. **Love truly is an endless resource that can be generated in the blink of an eye - literally.** [wink]

When Barbara arrived she greeted Amy with a hug and apologized for being late. Barbara smiled at Amy with a hopeful look, and as we walked back to my office I heard Amy whisper to Barbara, "You look beautiful today." Genuinely surprised, (as was I!) Barbara responded simply with, "I love you." Though this is just the beginning, I smiled a quiet smile. For in that moment, Love was in the Air - and when we string enough of those moments together, we can get love back in our life and in our hearts.

My parting thought is this: **Love is not something that we have, it's something that we are.** Be love!

If you are partnered, I encourage you to **consciously** behave in at least one loving way toward your partner every day. This could be as simple as greeting him or her with a smile and a big welcome kiss and hug when they come home. Or it could be as involved as writing a long letter to them explaining all of the reasons you love them. If you want to spice it up with a little more passion and romance, by all means do! ▼

The Gospel

Andrew Dykstra - Ontario, Canada

When I was a teenager, I became subject to seizures. Our family doctor did not initially believe I had epilepsy and prescribed some medication consistent with what he thought was wrong. I took the medication as prescribed before going to bed. In the morning I was unable to lift my head off the pillow. This remedy may have been a solution for something, but not for me.

The gospel can be expressed in numerous ways; each of them only a facet of the whole. What we believe about the gospel ("good news") depends on how we perceive the problem. The gospel is God's solution to something. If the gospel is God's remedy, then what is the "bad news" for which it is the solution? The answer begins with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even those of us who do not understand a theological formula can appreciate a good story. In simple narrative, the story of Eden gives insight, first to the problem and then, in very germinal form, to God's solution.

When God first placed us on earth, we were created into an ideal environment. God was openly accessible to Adam and Eve. Everything they could ever need or want was readily available. There was harmony between God and creation,

between Adam and Eve, and between humankind and all of nature. God did not crowd the pair. The Creator is portrayed as a friend who came by frequently, evidently sharing their pleasures, such as walking in the garden in the cool of the day. (Gen. 3:8) Adam and Eve were not immortal, but continued to be dependent upon God for food and drink and life. God hoped they would want to continue their friendship with Him, but wisely made it possible for them to choose otherwise.

All good relationships come with boundaries. God had only one, clearly revealed, boundary. God provided everything needed (Gen. 2:16). Adam and Eve were asked not to eat of one specific tree. (Gen. 2:17) Did God risk causing doubts by withholding something from them? As far as we know, God did not provide explanations. Here though was an opportunity for our first parents to be true to their relationship with the Creator. Though they did not understand the reasons, they could have trusted God based on past experience. Their lives were not diminished by this one prohibition.

Eve did not seem to find anything unusual in talking serpents. Neither did she think it odd that one of God's creatures stated, as fact, an idea that directly contradicted what God had said. Something was very wrong. The enemy's attack came in three steps. First, he cast doubt (Gen.3:1) "...Did God really say?..." When Eve misquoted God "...you must not touch it..." (Compare Gen.3:3B, to Gen. 2:16,17) the enemy did not pause to correct her, but

Michele O'Mara will be offering a workshop during Kampmeeting. Later in the year she is willing to schedule a weekend of relationship building for Kinship couple members, if there is enough interest.

proceeded to contradict God: "You will not surely die...Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God...Gen. 3:4,5

A statement made centuries later enlarges our understanding of what happened in Eden. The prophet Isaiah reassured Israel by calling out God's judgment upon the King of Babylon who had held God's people captive. But in pronouncing doom on the King of Babylon, (Isaiah 14:12-14,) the message seems also to allude to another. "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north! I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!" The prophet uses epic language - beyond immediate political context, and into territory where it seems to refer to one more ominous than Babylon's King, to another larger enemy of Israel - Satan himself.

The serpent enticed Eve into believing that if she ate the forbidden fruit, they too would be like God. The evil one insinuated that God was selfishly holding humanity back. What happened in Eden was a violation of trust. God was not consulted before they acted. God was not given a chance to protect His reputation. The original pair behaved in every way as though the lie about God's motives was true. The word of their Friend was exchanged for the slander of an unproven stranger. Their eyes were opened all right. The first thing they saw was shame. The pair blamed each other, the serpent and, ultimately, God. Human relationships went down

the spiral ending with murder. The harmony between God, humanity, and the earth was gone. It looked like nothing would ever be the same again. God knew He could gain nothing by mere counter claims. God had the more difficult task of regaining trust through another means: time, love and shared experience. The gospel is the story of what God did.

God shares with the pair the fate of the earth, caused by those who believed a lie rather than God. Life would become filled with conflict and great burden. Humanity would be allowed to see, in a limited way, the results of their choice. For a time, the consequences would continue. However, one day, God promised, a descendent of the woman will do great damage to the cause of the serpent and indeed to the serpent himself. This descendent will sustain injury from the serpent. This is the gospel contained in a single kernel.

The promised descendent proved to be none other than God Himself. He would take upon Himself humanity's predicament by taking on human form. He would share to the fullest degree in our fate. God does not hold back. God does everything to reconcile us to full trust in Him. God is so motivated by love that nothing is withheld. God's "remedy" is not to "punish" His Son until humanity has paid its debt. Rather, Jesus is God's Gift to mankind. God empties all the resources of Heaven and invests them in our salvation.

We had been tempted to aspire to divinity. We felt it was our right. God's surprising answer was not to raise us to divinity, but to take upon Himself humanity. God, in the Person of His Son, took upon Himself the effects of a broken relationship He had never

caused. He took upon Himself the fate to which we condemned our self. Without sin, God lived the life of humanity, including the ultimate fate of death.

The gospel is a sign of the end. The generation following Jesus' resurrection thought they were the last one because God Himself had invaded history. Not since the Exodus had God done something so startling. In the Person of Jesus, the long awaited Kingdom of God had broken into the present. Somehow, God had done something new. The old order was gone. Everything may have looked the same, but all bets were off. "And I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach....saying, fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come." God has been on trial in the great controversy over His character and His name. We will more truly reflect his character when we speak the truth about our God.

Ellen White wrote, "The time of test is just upon us, for the loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth. For it is the work of every one to whom the message of warning has come, to lift up Jesus, to present Him to the world as revealed in types, as shadowed in symbols, as manifested in the revelations of the prophets, as unveiled in the lessons given to His disciples and in the wonderful miracles wrought for the sons of men. Search the Scriptures; for they are they that testify of Him." (Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 362).



Public Policy Issues Involving Homosexuality: An Adventist Response

Mitchell A. Tyner - Maryland, USA

Homosexuality - more particularly, the status of homosexuals and their relationships before the law - has become one of the most confrontational, divisive topics of our time, both politically and theologically. Recently, numerous jurisdictions have moved significantly toward legal equality for homosexuals, including listing sexual orientation as a protected category in local or state human rights statutes and recognizing homosexual marriage or domestic partnership. The most significant judicial move was the 2004 decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Lawrence v Texas*, ruling that anti-sodomy laws could not be applied to homosexuals but not heterosexuals.

How do we, corporately and individually, relate to the religio-political questions involving homosexuality that are currently producing so much heat and so little light? What are the considerations that should be involved in the formation of an Adventist response to such public issues? Consider four, the first two scriptural and timeless, the last two more contemporary. The list is not exhaustive; it should include but is not limited to the following.

Does the proposed position maximize human freedom?

To be faithful to scripture, our positions on public policy issues should work to maximize human freedom to the highest

appropriate level. Arguably, the most revealing scripture passage involving freedom is Luke 15, the passage that I call the story of the Waiting Father. A young man, raised on an affluent but remote farm went to his father and said "Dad, I'm bored. I'm tired of living way out here. I want to experience the world for myself, I want to go to the big city, I want to do my own thing. And Dad, I want you to give me an advance on my inheritance to finance the trip." Nothing in either Jewish or Roman law gave the father any obligation to grant that request, but he did. The son left, wealth in hand, headed for the bright lights.

As long as the money lasted, so did his social status. But soon he found himself in a descending socio-economic spiral. His money gone, he was forced to earn his livelihood by doing something most hateful to a young Jew: feeding hogs. He awoke one morning in the pigpen, looked around him and said, "What a miserable state of affairs! What a genuine wreck I have made of my life." He sat there in the mud and composed the speech he would offer to his father. He would say, "Father, I have sinned before you and before God. I am no longer worthy to be called your son - just hire me and let me live out in the bunk house with the hired hands." With that, he started home.

The father had never given up on his son's return. One day, far off down the road, he sees a pathetic figure limping along.

He's lame, he's ill-kept, and he's dirty. But the father immediately recognizes him as his son. He hurries off the porch, down the path, through the gate and down the road to meet his son. As they meet, the son begins his prepared speech of contrition: "Dad, I've blown it, I'm not worthy to be called your son" and he never gets to finish the speech. It's as though the father said, "Son, I know, I understand. We'll talk about that another time. For now, all that matters is that you're home. Come inside, we'll celebrate your return!" With that, he covered this filthy figure with his best cloak, put a ring on his finger, and led him to the house, where the celebration began.

The older son heard the sound of the celebration and asked one of the hired hands what was happening. He was told, "Your brother's back and your father's throwing a party." But the older brother refused to join the celebration. Eventually the father came to him and said, "We're celebrating your brothers return - come in and join us!" The elder brother said, "Look, Dad, I've been with you all these years. I have obeyed your every command. I have done everything you have asked but you never threw a party for me. Now this son of yours comes home after wasting your money and his life and you expect me to celebrate? Why should I?" Notice that the elder brother was factually correct, which merely shows that one may be quite correct but very wrong as to the

correct interpretation and application of those facts. Notice also that the elder brother referred to "your son", not, "my brother." The father replied, "Your brother was lost, and has been found; he was dead and he is alive to us again. It is proper that we celebrate!"

Who was right in that story, the father or the son? The father, of course. The father represents God, our Father. The son represents us, for each of us has at one time or another wandered away from our spiritual home. The father allowed his son to leave because, ultimately, he was interested in his relationship with his son. He wanted a relationship with his son that was possible only when the son was ready to enter into it voluntarily. The Father would not be satisfied with coerced obedience.

Here is a parable that illustrates an important facet of the great controversy between good and evil, a key historic Adventist teaching. God could have created us in such a manner that we could not have sinned. He didn't, because He wanted a relationship with us based on our choice to establish it. He refused to coerce us. But doing that cost Him dearly. It cost Him the life of His son at Calvary, paid so that we could relate to Him freely. Every person is free to relate to God freely, according to their conscience, not someone else's.

What are we to learn from this story? First, that God put a tremendous value on freedom. He could have prevented Calvary, but didn't, because He would not coerce our obedience. Second, that we have no business, like the older brother, being more judgmental with each other than our Father is with us. Third, we have been given an example that speaks to our own attitudes and actions: If

God went to that length to not coerce us, then how dare we, his children, coerce each other?

Does the suggested position maximize equality?

Again, to be faithful to scripture, our positions on public policy issues should work to maximize human equality to the highest appropriate level. Consider the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10. Jesus was confronted with a questioner - a lawyer, a young scholar of religious law who had heard of Jesus and wanted to put Jesus' teaching on the record. The dialogue went something like this:

Lawyer: Rabbi, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus: What do you read in the law?

Lawyer: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus: You read well. Now go and do that and you will live.

When confronted with an unwanted answer, one may acquire at least a little wiggle room by seeking to further define one or more terms used in the answer. So the lawyer replied, "And just who is my neighbor?"

Knowing that his questioner was not amenable to a straight answer, Jesus chose to answer indirectly, through a story, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

"A certain man", said Jesus "went down from Jerusalem to Jericho..." At the end of the tale, dialogue between Jesus and his interrogator resumed.

Jesus: Now, which of these three do you think acted as a neighbor to the injured man?

Lawyer: Obviously, the one who stopped to help.

Jesus: Exactly. Go and do likewise.

Isn't it interesting what Jesus did not say to the lawyer? He did not say to him, "Go and study the scrolls. When you can properly and coherently exegete the prophecies and explain Ezekiel's vision of the wheels within wheels, then come back and we will discuss your future course of action." Jesus spoke nothing of what the questioner should know or believe, only of what he should do. He spoke not of orthodoxy, but of orthopraxy. He simply said, "Go and do likewise."

Four characteristics of the Samaritan's response bear emulation. First, it was a caring response. The Samaritan obviously cared enough about the injured man's predicament to endanger himself in order to help. Second, it was an involved response. Third, it was a committed response. The Samaritan not only bound the wounds of the victim, he volunteered to financially underwrite his care for an indeterminate period. Now that's commitment! Fourth, it was a relevant response. The Samaritan got immediately involved, and did what needed to be done at that moment.

Perhaps most importantly for this discussion, all of this was for someone with whom the Samaritan would have been in profound disagreement theologically, politically, and otherwise. There was no pondering of theological convergences, of historic ties, of cultural affinities. There was no consideration of public opinion or of the opinion of other Samaritans, no mapping of potential geopolitical consequences. The Samaritan did not see a Jew (or an Edomite or a Roman or Greek or whoever the victim was), he just saw a

Continued on page 10...



NO ONE LIKE YOU CELEBRATING UNIQUENESS

27th Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship Kampmeeting, Orlando 2006
July 2-9, 2006 - San Pedro Center

LAST DAYS OF REGISTRATION -> WWW.SDAKINSHIP.ORG/KAMPMEETING2006.HTM

Peterson Tokano
Comedian
(ex-ex-gay)



Daver Baker-Hargrove
&
Linda Potkovic
Orlando Gay Lesbian Center



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**Christianity &
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Gospel Singers

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Human Rights
Campaign



**Orlando
Gay Chorus**



Kinship Buddies

Michele O'Mara
"The Importance
of Boundaries"



Register, pack your stuff and come to Orlando. Bring your kids, Linda has a great program prepared to guide them to get to know Mother Nature better and have fun with sessions of movies, slide shows, crafts, music, and more. Don't leave the children behind! Come and fill your space, put your puzzle piece in this Kampmeeting. we are waiting because there is "No One Like You".

Our theme for Kampmeeting 2006 is Uniqueness and I would like to share with you how we are planning to use this concept so that we can work as a team to achieve our goals for Kampmeeting. We, Kinship members spend a great portion of our lives dealing with church and society pushing ourselves to fit in, to look the same. And now the celebration of uniqueness in our lives presents many challenges.

Celebrating Uniqueness is a celebration of each one, of the self, of who I am, the valorization of my talents and gifts. It is the celebration of the right of being happy and thankful because my personal characteristics are combined in a way that have never occurred, and never are going to occur again in history. It is the beginning of the process of being accepted by others because it starts with accepting and embracing myself as a whole person. To include our gayness in the process of self acceptance is especially difficult because it comes with so much prejudice,; but the act of celebrating reminds us that the problem is not with me, but with the ignorance of others.

Our gayness is a great thing to be celebrated since it determines the way we will experience intimacy in the deepest levels.

We hear about celebrating diversity a lot and I spent some time thinking about the meaning of that. The celebration of uniqueness is not the same as celebrating diversity, although they are sometimes replaced by each other. Celebrating uniqueness is the step before celebrating diversity, and the celebration of diversity makes no sense without the celebration of uniqueness. For example, how can I try to accept others when I am not accepting my different and unique self? I need to understand who I am, what role I have in this life, what my singular characteristics are, and, accept and celebrate them. Then I will be able to start to respect, accept and enjoy other people's uniqueness and celebrate diversity. I need to feel that I am loved unconditionally, to love unconditionally. I need to see myself as someone who is what God intended me to be, to accept that other people are what God intended them to be.

Celebrating uniqueness is the remembrance that I am created by God with value, that to love myself is part of the great commandment as a prerequisite to loving others. Loving myself before loving others is like celebrating uniqueness before celebrating diversity.

I am sure that your uniqueness is going to be extremely helpful for every Kampmeeting attendee taking part in our great celebration that this Kampmeeting intends to be. Kinship is going to be honored having you there.

Thank you so much for being a part of our Kampmeeting this year again.

—Marcos Apolonio



Public Policy *(from page 7)*

person in need and recognized that he had the ability to meet the need presented.

How does this story inform our response to such questions as equal rights for homosexuals - or anyone else? It says that our response must be caring, involved, committed and relevant. It must not be deterred by the approbation of many for the object of our care, or by the potential threat to our own standing. We must be prepared to evenhandedly aid those for whom we can be of service, regardless of their agreement - or lack thereof - with our beliefs and interpretations. How could such considerations ever lead us to deny equal rights to homosexuals, or anyone else?

In the current context, a consideration of the interrelationship of freedom and equality is necessary, for equality rights not infrequently act as a restraint on freedom. We do not exercise our freedom in a vacuum, but in the context of social relationships. As Paul said, "None of us lives to himself." Paul also observed, "All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient." A responsible exercise of our freedom always considers the effect of our actions on the rights and needs of others.

Since the late 1990s, there has been, within the church-state community, a running discussion concerning whether or not sincere religious belief should constitute a valid defense to a charge of violating the equality rights of others. What was this discussion really about? Homosexuality. The question was whether a sincerely held religious belief that one should not employ or rent to homosexuals should be a valid defense to a charge of violating

protected rights. Difference of opinion on that question is so deeply held that it has prevented the religious community from achieving broad based protection for free exercise of religion since that time.

How do we answer that question? Should our religious beliefs allow us to discriminate? When we put the question in the context of race, the answer is clear for most people: Just because a person sincerely believes that he should not hire or rent to a person of color should not relieve him of the duty of non-discrimination. In this instance, the equality rights of one trump the religiously motivated practice of the other. Few will argue against that position - until they recognize that it cannot be distinguished on any principled basis from the question of equality rights of homosexuals. It simply comes down to the fact that one is generally accepted in our society, the other is not - yet.

Is the proposed position informed by our history?

For Seventh Day Adventists to be responsible, our positions on public policy issues should take cognizance of the applicable lessons found in our own history. We have experience with the negative results of efforts by well-meaning people to enact their views and religious convictions into law. Consider the effects of the national Sunday law drive of the late nineteenth century. The national bill was stopped, but the effort to enforce Sunday observance was not. Rather, the scene of activity shifted to the states.

During 1895 and 1896, at least seventy-five Seventh-day Adventists were prosecuted in the United States and Canada under state or provincial Sunday laws. Some were fined; a few were acquitted or were lucky

enough to have their cases dismissed. But twenty-eight served jail terms, aggregating 1,144 days. Those prosecuted were targeted not just for their conduct but for the reason behind it, the choice to worship on the Seventh Day Sabbath.

The 1890s may have been the high-water mark in the prosecution of Sabbatarians, but the flood did not recede immediately. In 1923, three Seventh-day Adventists were arrested in Massachusetts and fined for painting the interior of a house on Sunday in order to get it ready for occupancy the next day. In 1932, a deputy sheriff of Washington County, Virginia, arrested two Seventh-day Adventists for Sunday work: one, a crippled mother who walked on crutches, for washing clothes on her own premises, and the other a man who donated and hauled a load of wood to a church to heat it for religious services. As late as 1938 a Massachusetts storekeeper was arrested for selling fresh eggs on Sunday, at a time when it was legal to buy cooked eggs, beer, and liquor and to attend sports events and movies.

Beginning in 1940, a line of Supreme Court cases established that the First Amendment, including the religion clauses, had indeed been made applicable to state and local governments via the Fourteenth Amendment, thus opening the door to Sunday-law challenges based on those clauses. In 1961 those challenges found their way to the Supreme Court. The questions raised by the *R. M. King* case in 1891 would finally be answered by the High Court seventy years later. It's just as well that King didn't live to hear the answer: Sunday laws were upheld as no longer religious in nature. That claim would have been impossible to make with a

straight face in 1891.

The point? Adventist activism of an earlier day averted two bills in Congress, and came very close to producing a fundamental change in the law. Our own history should teach us what we can accomplish in the area of human rights when we put sufficient resources into the effort. Our own history teaches us that when even sincere, well-meaning people seek to use the law to enforce their views of morality on others who do not share those views, bad things happen to good people. That lesson, coupled with an awareness of the potency of our advocacy, rightly motivated and focused, should place us in the front lines of those defending equality rights today.

Is the proposed position in the best interest of the church?

Certainly the best interest of the church is a valid consideration. None will wish to jeopardize the church by advocating, in its name, a particular position. Some will argue that the best interest of the church is served by keeping a low profile on social and political issues. They will cite Ellen White's advice that the church in the south should remain segregated, at least for the time, and that we should not publicly oppose Bible reading in the public schools. Those statements must be read and understood in the context of a time in which the church was fragile and vulnerable. Public opinion was such that advocacy on those issues would have cut off almost all avenues of witness.

Is that true today? Would advocacy on behalf of equality rights for homosexuals negate the ability of the church to witness to society? On the other hand, will continued silence on the issue negate our ability to communicate with thinking people who espouse a

principled view of the matter? Our society is no longer monolithic on these issues; we do not face a situation analogous to the times in which Ellen White wrote.

More fundamentally, how can it ever be in the church's interest to act other than in accordance with scriptural counsel and instruction? The Bible clearly tells us that God puts a tremendous value on human freedom. Our divinely given example is one who rendered aid where it was needed, not as a 'respector of persons.' Our own history shows the dangers that follow the legislation and imposition of religious beliefs and religiously-based moral convictions on those who do not share them. To act on these principles cannot be other than in the best interest of the church. Indeed, to fail to do so would be an indictment of the church, an irresponsible neglect of the church's best interest. ▼

Mitch recently retired from his position as Legal Council to the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists. This article was excerpted from his presentation at the Workshop on Homosexuality and the Seventh Day Adventist Church in January 2006.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Connection,

William Sloane Coffin has just died. He was a powerful advocate for GLBTI people. You might want to read the article about him that can be found at: <http://www.soulforce.org/article/453>. He was our support for more than thirty years. We got permission to use one of his talks in the Connection around 1983. You can read even more about his life at Wikipedia...

Continued on page 14...

Kinship News

Australia - Noel Thorpe

We continue to work on our meeting planned for the end of September. Our speakers are now listed on the web. We will have a media release in early August to advertise the Kampmeeting in Sydney. Kinship Australia, in Brisbane is involved in having a Network group for GLBTIQQ Religious leaders. This groups aims are to support one another in our roles by networking together. To those of you in Kinship Australia: we want to stay connected. If you have a new address, new phone number, or email address please let us know so we can keep our records up-to-date. You can send the new information to us by snail mail or email. Money: please help to keep our events going by your support in giving to Kinship Australia. We want to reach as many hurting people as we can. Your donations help us do the work. I am getting ready to leave for the Kampmeeting in Orlando and will be staying a couple of weeks in Florida before hand. I am going around the world while taking in the US. I plan on going to the UK, Ireland and Hong Kong before Home. Mervyn, my other half, will not be coming with me this time, as he does not want to leave home. ▼



Kinship News

The Philippines- Jonathan Coo

The "hot"/sunny season is almost over in Manila. By June, we will be experiencing rain showers, floods, and storms. Ergo, there will be no Saturday night life in "Malate" during the months of June and July. Our group decided to hang out last month while it's summer time. The picture shows Bojo, myself, Zip, DJ, and Jam on a Saturday night out in the most fabulous district in Manila (Orosa and Nakpil Streets!). I made a point to bring my camera so that our new members (DJ and Jam) and my partner (Zip) can have photo opportunity to show our members worldwide (of course, with permission from each member). Zip is not an SDA but he joins our church choir together with Jam. DJ was my nurse when I was hospitalized and I am glad he was not afraid to open up. Our church is very friendly and non-judgmental. If you happen to be in the Manila area, visit us at the Manila Adventist Medical Center Church. Just ask where the choir members are and you'll be singing with us in no time! My new email/friendster: jonathantenor@gmail.com ▼



European Kinship Meeting 5 - Reino

We are almost ready!! Plane flights are booked. Train tickets are purchased! Café Cecelia is planning the menu and the meeting space. Hotel Olaf is ready for guests. Our speakers are chosen. We've got some wonderful ideas for walks and tours and talking with each other. Our cameras are primed. We will share our stories in the Summer issue of the Connection. ▼



IMRU? - Naveen Jonathan

The IMRU? group is looking forward to Kampmeeting 2006. We are excited about seeing friends from past Kampmeetings, Regional meetings and events. We are planning on making many new friends as well. IMRU? members will be coming from various parts of the country and the world to Orlando. We will be extensively, involved in the Kampmeeting program. Members of our group will be leading in a special program on Friday, July 7: a program that will feature IMRU? members facilitating a discussion on bridging the gap between the generations of Kinship International. We plan to share our talents in various parts of the program throughout the week. Many thanks to Kampmeeting Director, Marcos Apolonio for allowing us to be involved in the program this year. For further information on IMRU?, please contact us at IMRUgroup@gmail.com. ▼

Kinship News

US Region 1

Travis Roe sent us this report of his participation in the Boston AIDS/HIV fundraising walk.

"After walking 10K (6.2 miles) on June 4 I'm still able to walk, so I guess I wasn't as out of shape as I thought. It was a great day (though it was a bit drizzly at points) and there was a good turn out. As some of you may know, today is the 25th anniversary of the first reported case of HIV. We've come a good way. People are living healthier, longer lives with the new HIV drugs, but the fight's not over. A couple of months ago one of my clients passed away. We have to keep fighting, we had to try and I thank you all for your support of this cause which becomes more important to me every day."

In May Bob Bouchard hosted a wonderful day in NYC that began with services at the SDA Forum, lunched Chinese on 95th Street, and had a grand tour of the city in Springtime that ended up at the park waving to the Statue of Liberty.



US Region 2 - Yolanda Elliott

Harrison Andrew

Moyer-Rickman was born on the evening of May 17, 2006. He weighed in at a hefty 9 pounds and six ounces and was twenty inches long. His mothers report that he popped out like a little man on a bungee rope. "Our lives have not been the same since his arrival. Katie and I are so blessed to have this amazing life in our lives." After an exciting healthy birth, we ended up in the hospital with him over the weekend due to jaundice. But we're all back home and well now, recuperating from being (seemingly) constantly poked, prodded and pricked. Thanks for all your well wishes and encouragement.

Congratulations to Katie and TJ.



Women's Weekend Orlando -

Yolanda Elliott

The T-Shirts and good weather have been ordered. The hotel reports we are going to enjoy new carpeting and bed linens. There are ocean walks, and boardwalk hikes, great meals and friendly conversations. It is still not too late to reserve a spot. You can register at yselliott@aol.com.



US Region 9-Bruce Boyd

We will be holding a weekend Mini Kampmeeting centering on the GLBTI Sabbath, August 19 at the Glendale City Church. Mitch Tyner will be the guest speaker. We will be having a fellowship dinner. All of you are welcome to join us!



Building a Book:

Tim Lale says that Pacific Press is interested in a positive narrative. We are collecting stories of our journey toward wholeness. Catherine will be interviewing people during Kampmeeting in Orlando, Kinship Meeting 5 in Sweden, and in other venues where people might be willing to share their lives. If you would like to write or would like to talk feel free to contact her at katgurian@aol.com



Resources:

Dave Ferguson writes that he has just received a notice from HRC regarding a new program they have available to Pastors who would like to look at Scripture with an accepting viewpoint toward the GLBTI members of their congregation. It is called Out in Scripture. If you know a pastor who would like to subscribe here is the address: <http://www.hrc.org/scripture>.

Heartstrong.com is an organization focused on helping GLBTI students who attend parochial schools.

Carrol Grady's web supportive website for families of GLBTI people is:

<http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net/>



**US Region 8- Obed Vasquez
Bay Area Chapter Activity in
Berkeley**

On May 1, six of us had an opportunity to view the new documentary, *God and Gays: Bridging the Gap*. It was the first film to be shown as part of the week-long film festival of the Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Producer Kim Clark and Director Luane Beck attended, and we had a nice conversation with them after the film. The film could be compared to a Christian version of *Trembling before God*, the documentary on Hasidic gays and lesbians. The producers take a personal look at the topic by starting with their own experiences and expanding the story to include others. While the usual stories of rejection and expulsion are there, they take the documentary on a more positive and affirming path. They contrast the story of a suicide with the conversion journey of the parent. Instead of focusing on the rejection of members from their congregations, they told stories of deliverance and celebration. They show how parents and their gay children can stand together and work towards a more inclusive understanding of the gospel. Obed writes, "I found it interesting that it did not matter which particular church each belonged; all were traveling a spiritual path towards a greater understanding of God in their lives and in the lives of others. It certainly is a message we want to convey to those who are struggling with their homosexuality and their place within Christianity!" We have made arrangements with the producers to show it during Kampmeeting in Florida in July. More about the movie...
<http://www.godandgaysthemovie.com/> ▼

connection ▼

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

Letter from page 11...

...<http://wikipedia.org>. This man was a mover of just causes. I admire him tremendously! His passion causes me to remember the beginnings of freedom movements.

I take great pride in being involved in Gay issues long before Stonewall. I'm certain that I have records of the movement in some area of my home that hasn't been cleaned out yet. Each time I find a box of old materials I relive GLBTI history. There is a lot of memory in those tucked away places. Recently I found some advertisements from the 1980s in Sojourner that Kinship's PR director and I placed. I started this activity in the 1950s when I was chosen Council member from my

school and wrote the by-laws for our lesbian/gay group called ARC. Well, that is probably enough history for you all now; possibly too much.

We've got a gangbuster's group coming to this Kampmeeting. Thank you Marcos. I grinned all the way through the May Connection! Well, I often do that. You are a fantastic editor and I appreciate all that you do for OUR PAPER and all that Ted does to make it appealing. I was reading the back page and fell into tears while I read Ken's piece. It was very much like receiving a note from the principal of the elementary school in Ukiah, CA where Judy Fell did a week of work with K-6th grades this spring.

Best of care and love to you!
Ren ▼

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Zak Plantak

What picture comes to your mind when someone mentions Christian Church? Do you see a Victorian Gothic building surrounded by a waste-land; strangely out of place in a modern shopping street? Does your mind conjure up a funny man in tweeds with a genuine, permanent, rather toothy smile? Do you sense a somewhat bedraggled army with a few zealous troops in front, a large demoralised centre, a load of camp followers bringing up the rear? Have you experienced the Inquisition?

Paul had many pictures in his mind when he thought about the newly commissioned Christian church. For him, the most important was the view that we are a **BODY**; a healthy, growing body. I Corinthians 12 provides the clearest picture of his living metaphor. In that chapter Paul makes several points about the Christian church, and therefore, by implication, every community of Seventh-day Adventists.

His first lesson is that we are ONE despite any differences. Paul did not try to disguise the differences found among Christians. He said we are gifted in different ways. This variety of gifts is designed to be used for different jobs within the church. All these gifts are inspired by one Spirit who has given them to us as He wills. Paul did not deny that there are differences in cultural background. He knew that Christianity was moving into both a Jewish and Hellenic world. He understood social and class differences. There were Christians who were free and those who were slaves. He was well aware of the way sex and

gender affected how people were viewed in the society of his day. For Paul, all of these were nothing compared to the great unifying factor that there is a common experience of the Spirit: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit"*. We all, each one of us, have been brought into the body of Christ, into the church, by being, if you like, blessed by God's Spirit at our baptism. He believed that each of us is connected to the other through Christ and through the Holy Spirit. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. This includes all of you who are lesbian/gay/bisexual/Transgender or Intersex. Each of you has been brought to the church by Christ. Each of you, and the gifts you bring, is indispensable to the church and to the community of Heaven.

The Corinthian Church needed and the Seventh Day Adventist church needs to know that we are One, despite our differences. For the Corinthians the "gift of tongues (or languages)" was a point of jealousy, particularly for those who didn't have that gift. Paul wrote: 'NOT AT ALL'. There are differences but there is one body. We too need to be reminded of this truth.

The Kinship community is probably quite aware of the differences in our church. There are national, cultural and language differences. There are social differences: class, family background, education, gender,

orientation. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, that these differences pale into insignificance of the common experience of being embraced by the Spirit when we give our lives to Christ. Kinship members need to remember this and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, as a whole, needs to learn this. Paul's difficult metaphor of the body is that the church is made up of one motley group of people but that we are **ONE DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES**.

In verses 14-20 Paul reminds the church that we are made up of various members. He uses the body metaphor to point out that each of us, however humble or ostracized is absolutely necessary to the creation of a healthy organism. *"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing, if the whole body would be an ear, where would be the sense of smell."* In fact there would be no real body at all. Verse 19: *"If all were a single organ, where would the body be?"* Because, verse 19 says, as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them as he chose. We as individuals and the church as an organization need to realize that without the presence and activity of each of its members, the body is not whole. Paul understood what it meant to be devalued as a member of the body. He spoke of it to the Corinthian church and to us today.

If you have the gift of hospitality you are invaluable. If you have the gift of music you are invaluable. If you have the gift of faith you are invaluable. If you are a competent treasurer, you are invaluable. If you see the grand vision you are invaluable.

Unity from page 15...

If you are particularly good with details, you are invaluable. If you can speak in a way the moves the hearts of people, you are invaluable. If you have the gift of healing you are invaluable. If you can teach you are invaluable. If people feel cared for when you are around them, you are invaluable. Paul says that all of our gifts, however humble they may seem, are inspired by one and the same Spirit. The Spirit has given us our gifts in a way that God knew was best for us and for our spiritual community.

Paul's third point in verses 21 and 22 is that the **CHURCH MUST RESPECT the CONTRIBUTION OF EACH PART**. Here, Paul turns from those who feel inferior to those who know very well they are the more prominent members of the body. He reminds this group that they cannot exist without the other members of the body. *"The eye cannot say to the hand 'I have no need of you'. Nor*

again head to the feet 'I have no need of you'. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." When the administration of the church ignores or dismisses its GLBTI members because they consider them a weaker member of God's people, those church leaders are ignoring Paul's voice of God's command. But in Kinship as well as in the church, there are those of you who are obviously gifted. We may have looked around us at times and think there are people in our midst who are "dead wood". We may have moments when we become jaded. Paul reminds us to be careful of our judgments. He reminds us to look for the small or quiet ways that people contribute to our body. He reminds us to always honour the power and importance of the seemingly less important limbs of our body.

God created human body in such a way that it has the natural instinct to lavish a great deal of care on what might seem like the least worthy part.

Look at verses 23 -26. *"If one member suffers, all suffer together. If stomach is upset, the whole body is thrown out in joint with it. If one member is honoured, all rejoice together."* If arms or legs have lifted weights or run a distance, the whole body feels good as a result. In the human body all the limbs know very well that they are not independent entities. They belong together in one body. **WE ARE NOT INDEPENDANT ENTITIES, WE BELONG TOGETHER.**

"There are many parts, yet one body". It's a rich picture, this portrait of a church as the human body. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is an extraordinary collection of different people. We must allow each individual their unique qualities. We need to care for others in their weaknesses and their strengths. We need to know that the church is richer for the gifts of its GLBTI community. We must never lose the vision or the portrait.



Zak Plantak is Chair of the School of Theology at Columbia Union College

