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CONNECTION

The Journal of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc.



On Love, Renewal and Insight

SDA KINSHIP INTERNATIONAL, INC.

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a support group which ministers to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well being of Seventh-day Adventist lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and their families and friends.

SDA Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of homosexual and bisexual Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation.

Founded in 1976, the nonprofit organization was incorporated in 1981 and has a board of 15 officers and 10 regional coordinators. The current list of members and friends includes well over a thousand people in 16 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 gay or lesbian has its roots in a misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

Kinship operates solely on contributions from its members and friends.

SDA Kinship supports the advancement of human rights for all people.

Support Kinship

Kinship depends on you. Kinship is supported solely by contributions. Help us reach out to more gay Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below. SDA Kinship, P.O. Box 7320, Laguna Niguel, CA 92607, (949) 248-1299.

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A Response to Newsweek

BY CATHERINE TAYLOR

On August 17, 1998, Newsweek magazine featured a cover story called "Gay for Life? Going Straight: The Uproar Over Sexual Conversion." The feature story focused on ex-gay programs.

The following is a response from an Adventist family therapist:

Dear Newsweek,

I am a Seventh-day Adventist family therapist. As you may know, this is a conservative evangelical church that, as an organization, does not support a gay or lesbian "lifestyle." Consequently, I have seen many Seventh-day Adventists who have enrolled in change ministries or who have spouses who have theoretically been "cured" by prayer or their work within those ministries.

In the last ten years of having clients with these experiences be part of my family practice, I have not seen one person who has experienced a lasting transformation to heterosexuality. I have heard stories from spouses who married in good faith and found their partner to be uninterested in them sexually for any length of time. I have heard many stories of same-gender sexual assault by staff taking place within change ministries. I have heard from people who have prayed and fasted and come to believe that God will not change their sexual orientation. I think, if you are going to present such dramatic stories as you did in your article, it would be only fair to report the other side.

Thank you.

Catherine Taylor, LICSW May 18, 1998

A Most Wonderful Invitation

BY RON LAWSON

The Savior issues
many kinds of
invitations.

As many of you know, I hold the position of church organist and choir director at an Episcopal church -- the Church of the Ascension in Mount Vernon, New York. This faith community is mostly Caribbean in a larger community deeply divided between African Americans, Italians, and Caribbean. This church is currently "between priests" -- a new one, chosen recently, will arrive in October. During this time, the congregation has solicited substitute clergy. Knowing that I am a chaplain, they asked me to fill in for a worship service. Because I am respected and appreciated for my musical contribution to worship, I was warmly received by this church audience. It was a thrill to be asked!

I thought you might be interested in what I said. For those not familiar with Episcopal service, I should say that I did not choose the scriptures -- they are chosen in advance according to that part of the "liturgical year" -- readings from the Old Testament, an epistle, and a gospel. I did not mention my background as a gay Adventist, but many are aware of my beliefs and heritage -- this lent further poignancy to my words and sentiments.

By inference, I think that many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people of faith will be able to extrapolate my sermon to the needs, issues,

.....
***"O Lord, my Strength
and my Redeemer"***
.....

and concerns of their own (my own) spiritual communities.

My sermon message continues as follows:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer."

Both you and I are probably surprised to see me standing here this morning -- we are so used to my playing a different role as the church organist. But you may be interested in knowing that I fill other roles in other places which sometimes puts me in pulpits of other churches. For example, I have been one of the chaplains at Columbia University for over 20 years, where I usually arrange for others to preach -- but do preach myself from

.....
***"I have decided to speak
about both the Epistle
and Gospel today"***
.....

time to time. I also teach sociology of religion at Queen's College -- dealing with such topics as what makes congregations grow or decline, how churches relate to their communities, the roles of religion in the lives of immigrants, and of immigrants in churches in the New York metropolitan area -- I have published extensively in this field. My research for the book I am presently working on has taken me to 55 countries, and I have often been asked to preach in churches as I have traveled -- indeed, I counted up recently and discovered that I have preached on every continent.

Since this is a Morning Prayer Service, which allows a little more time for the sermon, I have decided to speak about both the Epistle and Gospel today.

Because schools are just beginning another academic year -- I taught my first classes this past week -- I want to begin by speaking directly to our youth. How many of you have read the Bible through? I read it through twice while I was in high school, and

urge you to set out on this rewarding journey. It takes about four chapters a day. I learned quickly as I read that the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of writings spanning several centuries. It is important to understand the background of each document if we are to interpret it sensibly. We have all sorts of people using passages out of context, putting a verse here with a verse there, and arriving at misleading, even dangerous, conclusions. For example, some people try to solve problems by opening a Bible and seeing what phrase their eyes alight on. One man did this twice, finding "Judas went and hanged himself" the first time and then "Go thou and do likewise." This is not a sensible way to use the Bible!

We also need to understand what kind of literature each document is -- the Bible contains a great variety of documents, ranging from historical accounts (Exodus, the histories of Israel) and biographies (the gospels) through poetry (the Psalms) and proverbs and parables to letters (the epistles), prophetic writings (Isaiah and Jeremiah) and apocalyptic writings (Revelation). The third time I read the Bible

parts of the Bible have been misunderstood and misused.

Paul was in prison, writing to his friend Philemon, a Christian who was wealthy enough to keep slaves. One of these Onesimus, must have somehow escaped, had

and the Bible often reflects that. Christians kept slaves' the belief that Israel was the chosen people led them to look down on other people and races, which allowed the evils of nationalism and racism to raise their ugly heads; women

"There was plenty of oppression and unfairness in biblical times."

become a Christian, and had been serving Paul lovingly in prison. But although Paul greatly appreciated his help, he decided that it was wrong for him to keep Philemon's slave, and so, with this letter, he was sending Onesimus back to his master!

This letter was the main biblical document used by Christian churches in the American South during the first part of the nineteenth century to defend the institution of slavery. People embraced it, arguing that if Paul sent Onesimus back to his master, then slavery was obviously endorsed by the Scriptures. This is an example of how parts of the

were treated as second class and as the possessions of their husbands. Have you ever thought about the tenth commandment in that light? "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thy neighbor's wife ..." and then more possessions -- that is, the wife is listed among a man's possessions, and not even the first of them -- and the commandments says nothing against coveting someone's husband!

But the logic of the Gospel is that Christ died for us all, no matter who we are, and that puts us all on an equal footing. Indeed, Jesus chose to associate with the prostitutes, tax collectors and other "low life" of his time rather than those who regarded themselves as leading citizens. This radical equality is in fact right there in Paul's letter to Philemon: "I am sending him (Onesimus) back to you...no longer as slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother...receive him as you would receive me." This did no undermine slavery at that time, but 1800 years later some Christians took the lead in opposing slavery because this logical implication of the gospel had finally dawned on them!

I could list several other examples where misuse of the Scripture has continued to endorse repression in our generation.

"How many of you have read the Bible through?"

through, which was during my freshman year in college, I used a small Bible commentary, which proved very helpful because it gave me information about each document, placing it in its historical and literary context for me. I recommend that you obtain a Bible commentary along with a modern translation of the Bible -- and that you use them together.

Our reading from the epistle to Philemon is a good example of how

Bible can be used to support prevailing practices and views which are in fact at root, unchristian. It also provides us with a good example of the danger of simply taking a part of the Bible literally, without recognizing that each document is a product of its time and must be understood in its time before it can be applied to our time.

There was plenty of oppression and unfairness in biblical times,

See "Invitation" on page 6

When I was in South Africa I found that those supporting *apartheid* -- especially the largest church, the Dutch Reformed Church -- used an obscure passage in Genesis where it is said that God cursed Ham, the son of Noah, and his descendants, and claiming that his descendants were the Africans, used this to justify giving black South Africans third-class citizenship. When I was in other parts of Africa, I found that many churches use their refusal to accept polygamy as a means of forcing male converts to abandon their wives, who are often then forced into prostitution in order to survive. In the United States, many churches have refused to allow divorce, thus forcing partners to stay in abusive relationships, and have declared that if a member leaves such a relationship and finds happiness in a new marriage, they are no longer in communion with their church.

Remember. Jesus said that he was sending the Holy Spirit to guide us "into all truth" -- all the implications of the Gospel had not been realized by the time the last biblical document was written.

"The Holy Spirit is still with us in our generation ..."

The Holy Spirit is still with us in our generation, pointing out previously unrecognized implications of the radical openness and equality and concern of the Gospel.

I will not turn to the very strange passage that we had from the gospel of Luke today. Jesus is quoted as saying, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife

and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple...whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

When I was in college, studying a lot of history and sociology, I felt that my spiritual life would suffer if I did not give it at least equal treatment. So, even though I was not officially studying the Bible for credit, I put at least the

he had in order to buy it. Or the story of the farmer who discovered that there was a treasure hidden in a field, and sold everything in order to buy the field and thus gain the treasure.

As I see it, today's reading is making the same point. Jesus was not really telling us to hate our parents or spouses or children -- he could not have meant that, for he never overturned the ten commandments, one of which says, "honor your father and your mother," but said instead that he

"We are called to put Jesus first"

same amount of time into that as I did into one of my courses. I was greatly helped in this by the fact that while in college and graduate school, I played the organ four nights a week at a Presbyterian seminary.

As I studied the Bible, the first question that I set out to try to answer was what was the core of the teaching of Jesus, and I combed all four gospels, looking closely at what he said.

Jesus preached "the gospel of

had come to "establish the law." So, when we place today's reading in the context of the rest of Jesus' teaching, it must be again saying, in a very dramatic way, that we are called to put Jesus first.

If this were just a man making that claim, we would rightly decide that he is mad. But this was no ordinary man speaking -- he was divine. He promises that if we trust him, put our faith in him, which means putting him first, he will transform us.

He will, he says, make us "the salt of the earth." What does that mean? There are two things about salt. First, it makes food tasty. I remember being at a Christian conference while at university, and having a meal where nothing was salted and there was no salt to be found anywhere. At the meeting that night, we got the point, for the preacher focused his remarks on "you are the salt of the earth." Second, salt preserves. As you know, I am an Australian. In the early days, the journey from England by sailing ship took 6 months; the ships had no refrigerators or freezers -- what did the passengers and crew eat? Salt beef. So, Jesus says that Christians are to make a difference to our society -- we will change its taste, and help

the kingdom" -- that is, the good news about God's kingdom, which he said was to be established when he came back to earth, but which could also be, right now, in our hearts -- we could join the kingdom here and now if we respond to him with faith, choosing to put him first in our lives. He told many stories making that point.

For instance, there was the jewelry merchant who found a priceless pearl, and sold everything

preserve it. But we cannot be the salt of the earth if we stay in the salt shaker -- we must get into the stew, into society, making a difference. What are we at Church of the Ascension doing to be the salt for our local community, Mount Vernon -- individually and as a church? This is an important question, for we are called to be

member enroute to church was knocked down by a motorized trishaw; both the pastor and elder passed by in a rush, going to church, failing to recognize their bloodied member and unwilling to dirty themselves, but he was then assisted by a Hindu...

How should we turn the story around if it is to be most relevant

help of three men who were being beaten up by goons. He got stabbed several times, but saved a life. The broadcast called him a "good Samaritan." I think the news broadcast captured the point of Jesus' story.

What are we at Church of the Ascension doing to prevent our community from being beaten up? I urge you to think that question through.

Let me give you one suggestion. Many of my students struggle in college because they come there poorly prepared. In some ways, this is because of weak schools, but there are other important ingredients as well. Many of these students have parents who have not been educated themselves, and cannot help their children. They live in crowded apartments, where the television is on all the time, and have no quiet place to study. Moreover, they waste their afternoons hanging out on the streets before their parents come home from work. In some communities, churches are getting together to help provide a supervised place after school where homework can

"Jesus says that Christians are to make a difference to our society --"

the salt of the earth!

Jesus also said that if we follow him we will love God "with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength" (there it is again -- the call to put him first), and we will also "love our neighbors as ourselves" -- that bring us back to being salt.

Let me ask you the same question that was asked Jesus at that point -- who are your neighbors? Are they those sitting beside you at church, or perhaps also the nice neighbors who live next door to us? (It is so easy for us to focus only on our own) Jesus said no, our neighbors are really those in need, who might not look at all nice because they have been beaten up or are beating themselves up, and they might come from a group we have been taught to regard negatively.

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? When Jesus was asked the question about who was their neighbor by Jewish leaders, he told of a Jew who set out to go to Jericho where he was beaten enroute. The hapless Jewish traveler was ignored by two religious Jews who passed, but was tended to by a Samaritan, a member of a despised nationality. A few years ago, I was asked to preach at a Christian college in India, and I turned the story around to make it relevant to them -- a church

to us here in Mount Vernon? Who are those most in need? They may be from a different race or nationality from us, or a different social class. They may live in run-down buildings, and people around here may say that their condition is their own fault -- they have messed up their lives, perhaps by dropping out of school or getting involved with alcohol and drugs. Are we treating them as our neighbors? Are we loving them as ourselves?

I was told the story of a priest in Guatemala, a country where there has been great oppression, with killings and beatings. He went to visit a village in one of the worst areas, and read them the lesson for the day -- which turned out to be the parable of the Good Samaritan. Then he opened up a discussion, expecting to have the usual question about who as their neighbor. But no -- instead he was asked, "what would the Samaritan have done if he had come by not after the beating of the Jewish man, but while it was happening?"

This is a good question, isn't it? How would Jesus have answered that question? Would he have said to wait until the robbers had gone and then tend to the man's wounds? I don't think so! On the television news Friday evening, there was a story about a club "bouncer" who came to the

"Who are those most in need?"

be done, where extra tutoring is available, where the students receive encouragement to study. Is this happening here? This is an example of church members responding collectively.

Let us return to today's gospel. Jesus there commanded us to put him first in our lives. Are we doing that? Are *you* doing that?

Coming to church for two hours on Sunday morning is a step towards that, but if that is all the

See "Invitation" on page 16

Poetry

BY KINSHIP FOLKS

Poetic Reflection

Poetry. In a world of "sound bites", instant news, and constant media exposure, poetry almost seems anachronistic. Who has the time for reflection? Who has the energy to distill life's lessons into meaning? Poets do.

The following is a selection of poetry from our brothers and sisters. I will be collecting more poetry for later issues, so please consider sharing your creativity. These poems reflect a broad spectrum of diversity. The allusions reflect the complexity of our lives as people of faith and diverse sexual orientations. But it is about all of us — our loves, lives, and journey — and no one tells our stories except ourselves....

It Never Meant That Much by Angela Hubley©

When you told me it was over
I didn't believe it was true
But you turned and walked out the door
And now I'm feeling blue
But you never meant that much to me.

I didn't know what I had
Until it was too late
And you were out of my life
Walkin' out the front gate
But it never meant that much to me.

Your memory haunts me every night
I lie in bed awake in tears
When I think of what could've been
And the love that we shared.

When I think of your soft touch
I keep saying it didn't mean much
But I'm being a fool to think
It never meant that much to me.

With You by Angela Hubley©

I was drifting out to sea
Lord you came and rescued me
Your love showed the way
And that's where I'm going to stay
Safe and secure for the rest of my days.

Now I'm praising you everyday
Because your love leads the way
You gave your life for me
That I might be free
From sin and shame.

I'm on my knees again
Lord I need your strength within
The waves are pulling me again
Please Lord help me to see
That its with You I want to be.

The Son of Man
by **Pauline Wendy Phillips**

God left His throne above
and became the Son of Man.
He came down to Earth
to die for all mankind —
for you and me,
with great love,
came to die for humanity,
came to die on Calvary,
came to die on a manmade tree!

God took flesh and lived with us,
full of grace and full of truth.
He was in the world
which was made by Him,
and yet the world
knew Him not,
came to His who received Him not,
Light from God they would not see.

Christ is Truth and Life and Light,
Light that shines in darkest night --
And the dark of night
does not hide the bright Light
that shines so warm
on the world,
lighting all who come to Him,
that they might be kids of God.

Alone
by **Heidi Johnson**

You say my loneliness,
Though I was not alone.
You touched me with your lonely kiss
When we were alone.

I wished you'd taken away my loneliness,
Though I was not alone.
Instead we shared our loneliness
When we were alone.

To My Lover
by **Larry Hallock**

I remember
A certain date
In the winter
Of sixty-eight.
In a hurry
As I walked past --
Not a worry
That you would cast
A look my way
To catch my eye
Or try to say
So much as "Hi!"

But things went right
For soon we met
And on that night --
I can't forget --
That old hard floor
Where we had fun
And wanted more
When we were done!
That proved a clue
And each day since
My love for you
Grows more intense.

I Love You So Much My Life is Collapsing
By **Jim Stoicheff**

This is the fifth in a series of good-byes,
each one seemingly the last.
Like resurrected soap opera characters
played by different actors in each incarnation
I keep returning. Only I am always
the same actor playing different parts.

At the museum a week ago
we asked the guards directions to "The Storm,"
Cor's painting of a young couple running
from something the title just begins to suggest;
the man looking at the woman,
the woman looking to the distance.
The first time I saw it
I thought "Adam and Eve,"
I thought "running from God,"
I thought "sin, guilt, fear."
The man in the painting
looks like he doesn't care;
the woman looks worried.
We took turns playing both roles.

April Fool's Eve
at the Chinese restaurant
your fortune said
the wise prepare for the unexpected.
I knew we weren't prepared.

We came up with a title for a poem:
"I love you so much the bed is collapsing."
Makes one think of tragic acrobatic sex,
which isn't what this is about at all.
Bed is metaphor for rest and peace
and I have none of either.
Loving you knocked the slats
from the foundation of my life and
I am lying crumpled on the floor.

Someone said I could drink a case of you
and still be on my feet, which isn't true:
a sip leaves me knocked out for days.
And so I say good-bye. We say good-bye.
All of my various selves
have gathered for the occasion.
Not because I don't love you

but because this love has leaked
out of its natural reservoir
and I am drowning.

Today on Fire Island
I thought of you on Saint John:
same sun, different sand.
I am beginning to understand
the promises we made
to love each other no matter what
and to constantly seek God's guidance
These vows must be kept
and I am comforted to think
somewhere always you will be
perhaps not even consciously
loving me.

Produce
by **Jim Stoicheff**

"By their fruits ye shall know them,"
so I checked out your blackberries:
some were sun-dried, almost raisins;
the full one I ate. You warned me,
"If they don't come off easily, they're not ripe."
I told you I was reared in bramble.

Your feral green tomatoes
and tiny-spined cucumbers
were wilder than the goods
Janis brought from Farmer's Market,
dill, garlic, cilantro, zucchini, beets
and summer squash laid to rest
with a bouquet in a box.

That afternoon, you said,
you would search the arboretum
for succulents — prickly pears
and other thick-skinned seedy fruits.
Me? I slipped home with stained hands
to eat plums and nectarines.

On Thorns
by Will Petricko©

The thorns are there
Long before the rose will share
That graceless stem.

But even so
If thorns can make such beauty grow
Who dares condemn?

Hues
by Will Petricko©

God is the light and we are the colors
Making a rainbow of every hue
Red, green or blue, orange purple or yellow
Whatever the color, God's love will shine through.

Run and Hide
by Romilda Wilder

I hide in the crowd
On the train, in the street
From the self inside
That is sure of defeat
From the part of my being
Controlling the tears
From the child who's remained
In spite of the years
From the adult who knows
There's an ache inside
From all of myself
I run and hide.

Meditation

"It is extraordinary how extraordinary the 'ordinary' person is." George Will

When people of diversity have the privilege and favor of safe meeting, we may share our own stories. We often hear stories of the courage of rather ordinary members of "our tribe" — and it is joyful to hear about triumph against great odds to bolster our collective spirits. When we hear of a person's life being restored, we are witness to miracles. Our friends are heroes and so are we. As a person describes his/her passage from insanity to recovery (or from the "closet" to responsible freedom) we are moved — deeply.

Whenever we are truly open to knowing the people around us, whether at a safe gathering or simply getting to a know a charitable neighbor, we will see heroism. It is amazing that when we get to know most people — gay or not — and hear what their lives have been like, we find so much to admire and respect. It is a privilege to have such friends, families, and spouses. It is amazing that they can be so abundant when we open ourselves to them. And upon discernment and reflection, we may see the celebration of our Savior witnessed through others.

I am grateful when I think about the extraordinary people around me and the courage in each of them. I am grateful to be among them.

Ben Kemena
(based from Touchstones, 1986) ▼

On Gay Love, Labor, and Stewardship

BY BEN KEMENA

Sometimes it is
important to
inventory loss as a
step to comfort and
nurturing.

1998 will not be remembered as a banner year for gay acceptance in these United States. As a gay man, I find the work yet to be done colossal -- almost overwhelming. I have been stunned and saddened by recent events. Some events were expected. Ross Perot rescinded gay-rights benefits offered to his Dallas company employees. Senator Trent Lott compared homosexuality to kleptomania. Some events were stunning. Maine reversed its position as one of only eleven (now ten) states that protected homosexuals from discrimination in housing and employment -- the Christian Coalition took credit for this "moral victory." As a Christian, some events were exasperating. The Anglican community's Lambeth conference (meeting once a decade) condemned homosexuality, the United Methodist's Judicial Council institutionalized homosexual condemnation by policy, and the National Council of Catholic Bishops rescinded their landmark document, "Always Our Children," as a misrepresentation of church orthodoxy. Some events were simply cruel, ignorant and misinformed. The irresponsible American

"1998 will not be remembered as a banner year for gay acceptance"

newspaper advertisements coordinated by Gary Bauer's Family Research Council and James Dobson's Focus on the Family come to mind. And finally, the first President to recognize gays by name at an inaugural has become so embroiled in personal scandal that the acceptance he so wanted to extend is tainted at every turn.

Assaults against gay Americans must be considered in some context. It has not exactly been an exemplary year for American civility. There have been thinly veiled references to racially-inspired prejudice in California's bilingual education vote. There has been unspeakable racial hatred expressed this year in Texas with a crime suggestive of a previous century. The escalation of school

"Gays have not had it easy — but neither have many other Americans"

violence and catastrophic death begs us to reconsider the issue of gun control and family values. And in a number of states, the "near-celebration" of capitol punishment borders on the obscene and bizarre. Gays have not had it easy -- but neither have many other Americans.

My daily journey through social quagmires have been marked by serial losses and weariness. It has been difficult to find and maintain a sense of balance and renewal. I am not alone. 1998 is an election year that will be remembered as a time when thinking people suffered. I labor for tolerance but I dream of acceptance -- I admit it. I want to be accepted as an American citizen -- with my own identity and contribution to the "melting pot" -- full-fledged, franchised and valued. The "rub" is in knowing how to get "from here to there" while making sure that I survive the process with dignity.

Among some of my gay friends, I am seen as an "assimilationist." I live in a conventional urban home with Mike, my spouse. We have some security in a sexual orientation

anti-discrimination city ordinance. We have two dogs, try to pay our bills and taxes on time, and keep up the yard. We belong to our neighborhood civic association and we are active in a gay-embracing Christian church. Too white bread, too *bourgeois*, too lame — some say. Some gay peers think I'm rather

example, and goodwill, you can make a real difference. But it takes a lot of energy, particularly this year. I muse about the new vocabulary that my gay-accepting straight friends are using to describe me and my sexuality. The movies, the television shows — the courage of more gay people to live

in conversation with allusions as "God's punishment" against "those people" even by straights who otherwise genuinely try to "accept" my sexual orientation. I remind them that while "my gay tribe" is not perfect, viruses are completely indifferent. I talk to them about safe sexual behavior — straight or gay. I remind them that before they make assumptions about "God's punishment," they may want to reconsider "God's love" — and that grace is not meted out in fractions.

Some straight people still find it difficult to tolerate me as a gay person -- let alone consider a journey from tolerance to acceptance. But I sincerely appreciate their efforts to try to understand me and I respect our differences in opinion. Unfortunately, the events of this year have often derailed bridge-building dialogue. This has been the year when "gay intolerance" has been emboldened to find a voice. And it is a language of anger, hate, bigotry, and prejudice. It is not the articulation of virtue and enlightenment, rather, it is the voice of shame, confederacy, ignorance, and fear. This year, my

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boring, unrealistic, naive and misguided. I am accused of embracing the "heterosexual paradigm" as an implied betrayal of my "own tribe." I tell them that some heterosexual paradigms may have merit. Pushing 40 years of age, I am simply trying to make my way in a world as I ponder "meaning" and its inspiration. I wish that I could be more socially aware and active — I always wish for more vitality — but when I come home from work tired, I try to keep my eyes (open!) on other important things. Priorities like my partner, family members, close friends, church and my dogs come to mind. My strategy is not to "sell out," my strategy is to survive and to be as honest (and as gentle) as I can be in the process of living. For instance, I find myself working as the first openly gay employee in my office. There is little glamor in this type of "pioneering" but it needs to be done. Some of my gay friends understand, but others simply shake their heads genuinely believing that I should live a more "counter-cultural" lifestyle as a statement confronting heterosexual privilege.

Among my gay-accepting straight peers, I remain something of an enigma. That's an important position to consider carefully — because through explanation,

honestly and vulnerably — have helped and I am grateful. Yet, most of my straight friends still want to compartmentalize me as an "exception" to the "gay community." In other words, I am not one of "those people." I remind them that defining "gay community" is as difficult as defining "straight community." I remind them that I am one of "those people" — and that "we" are part of "us." They will often retort back that I cannot be "really gay" because ... they

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know me! They want me to fit a "type" complete with particular mannerisms, elan, movements, and dress. I remind them that I try to embrace people with respect unless proven otherwise on a personal one-to-one basis. That includes "drag queens" and other marginalized individuals. I explain the Stonewall riots as a turning point in American gay history with "drag queens" playing a central role. HIV and AIDS still come up

partner's parents, taking the lead of "moral examples" like Pat Robertson, James Dobson and Gary Bauer, informed us that we were no longer welcome in their home as a "couple" — this after several years of being welcome (within a process of dialogue and sharing). Mike's parents felt as though they needed to take a "Christian moral stand"

See "Love" on page 14

this year on homosexuality — emboldened by "moral leaders" to set love and family aside for something akin to judgment. What are the Christian values of that? With resignation in our hearts, we attempted to visit Mike's parents anyway. Our tenacity and goodwill surprised them. Their response was initially tepid, but

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"I will love well."
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love can still thwart ignorance. The setback in our relationship to Mike's parents remains frustrating, but loving our family is not something we will give up without a struggle. As a church-attending Christian, I find myself saying to God in my daily prayers: "Thank you for atheists and non-Christians for many have also embodied the loving spirit of Christ." Sometimes, I still have to remind myself that being a gay Christian is not an oxymoron.

Of course, the ongoing "mantra" of those who will not tolerate gay people even by degree, is to call them to "change." This is particularly true among some Christian groups. The media blitz overseen by Family Research Council and Focus on the Family (among fifteen groups) has been calculated and cruel. At a minimum, these organizations would like to see me "repair" and if that is not possible, insist on a lifetime of celibacy as the only "moral Christian alternative." They fail to mention the carefully considered professional positions of the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, or the American Medical Association that declare "change programs" (I deliberately refuse to call these programs "therapy" or "ministry") of no

value and potentially harmful. Dobson and Bauer (among others) suggest that these professional organizations are uniformly infiltrated by large numbers of gay people who bias scientific thought regarding homosexuality. It is interesting that these same men (and their affiliated organizations) also argue that the number of homosexuals is exceedingly small — funny how they work the same numbers to their advantage. And they fail to support the notion that "change programs" be better conducted through accredited academic research centers with bonafide investigational review boards to ensure that consent is genuinely informed and credible internal and external independent peer reviews to make sure the "conclusions" are accurate and impartial. Perhaps the most heinous development is the misleading "research organization" created in 1992 called the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH). This organization is firmly committed to a "cure" for homosexuality and closely tied to Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council. This association of "health care providers and other interested parties" is not a cross-section of professionals in pertinent health care fields. It is a group who believes *a priori* that

has biological and environmental determinants that do *not* change.

In the meantime, I will love well. I believe that we are called to relationship with others as a matter of sociology and spirituality. I will not be denied my "inalienable right" to maturity that is best honed and fostered through the challenge of intimate personal relationships. I will not be denied my birthright to love another person in responsible consensual long-term covenants. And with all due respect, I do not believe that such relationships constitutes a threat to the very foundation of Western civilization in general or the moral fabric of the United States in particular.

Fortunately, Christians do not represent a monolithic group of people who despise gay people. My gay-embracing Christian worship community is important to me — it is a place and setting that makes me think (and commune) beyond my *self*. It is one window to social injustice and it is an opportunity to participate in change. It is easy to get "caught up" in many good "gay causes" — and they are legion — but it is also important to consider issues like children without adequate food or clothing, racial and gender inequality, and insensitivity toward the physically challenged. It is more than looking at injustice against gays — it is about listening

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"change programs" are effective and will trumpet anything in the name of "research" to support their agenda. Despite the rhetoric and claims of NARTH, there is compelling evidence to suggest that homosexuality is not a choice and

and responding to injustices against all others. My worship community also affirms my need for maturity in relationship recognizing that we are called to grow spiritually in relationship to our partners, families, churches, friends, and God

(and to love another well is to see the face of God by whatever name). I crave the support to live accountably, responsibly, and honestly in a society which provides little affirmation for gay maturity. I am not saying that every gay person needs to attend church. I am saying that every person, gay or otherwise, does need to think and to find a nurturing community that supports thinking. Too many of us live inadequately

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"The enemy is more about ignorance than hate"

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reflected lives. I believe that reclaiming our spiritual birthright as gays is vital — whether it be Christian, Jew, Wiccan, Buddhist, Moslem, Humanist — we need a pathway that looks beyond ourselves and sees life as a process within a context of charity, goodwill, and wholeness.

Given circumstances, it is often alluring to ponder the prospects of "giving up or giving in." It is easy to become unduly burdened by the rhetoric of ignorance and language of hate. On the other hand, it is also very compelling to devote one's life so thoroughly to injustice as to fall prey to emotional, spiritual, and/or physical martyrdom. Particularly as gays, we are often experts in extremes: "running and hiding in closets" or "being the best little boy/girl in the world" hoping that our indelible sexual orientation will be dampened or unnoticed in a society of heterosexual norms. But the "process" of our struggle to nurture enlightenment against ignorance asks us to walk a path between the extremes of spiritual abdication and personal annihilation. We are called to build bridges of understanding between ourselves and our straight peers in good faith.

Change comes slowly to the human condition, particularly in a society governed by consensus aspiring to "a more perfect union." Despite faults, a better system than democracy is not obvious. But before "majority rule" is touted to excess, we should remember that the respect shown our most vulnerable subgroups is the "moral compass" of a just society. There are precedents for societal change in the United States. A historical perspective helps frame the struggle and challenge for justice and equality with different import and temporal appreciation. I must remember that after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, it was over a century before another significant piece of federal legislation was passed to protect minorities of race, color and creed. I must consider that the only significant legislation representing the voice of women in this century occurred in 1920 with women's suffrage — the Equal Rights Amendment failed ratification. I must ponder the fact that gay intimacy is a felony in many states — and it remains legal to deny gays housing and

employment in forty states simply for being gay. Challenging ignorance is arduous and time consuming. But this is not an invitation to apathy; rather, it is an invitation to patience and discernment. Most of life is about "getting ready" for the next step.

I will continue to live my life with quiet resolve. I will take advantage of opportunities to speak my mind on matters of conscience when risks are reasonable. I will stand up to bigots and bullies using the logic of love as a potent sword. And most importantly, I will endeavor to live well — to live a life committed to integrity, wholism, authenticity, sanity, health, and sobriety within a spiritual context. Ultimately, while I remain firmly convicted that many causes are worth the energy and effort, real sharing occurs on a one-to-one basis between individual people. It will be our witness more than any words uttered, that will inspire dialogue, bridge-building, and a willingness to reconsider inadequate paradigms. Such is the path from chaotic dissonance to a respectful acceptance.

To every creed, color, and ethnicity — male and female, gay and straight or those in spaces that our unsophisticated language fails to illuminate adequately — live and love well. Some may question your priorities as self-centered, but remember that your "outreach" is a function of your wellness. Live the most honest and integrated life that you can (and it is a process so be forgiving of yourself and others). Make personal stewardship a priority as you care for

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"Most of life is about 'getting ready'"

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your self — each one of us is special. Stretch when you can make a difference, but do not place your personal survival in peril. Commit yourself to a spiritual journey that values contemplative thinking over dogmatic religiosity — it will help frame celebrations and comfort defeat. Find people to love and offer your love freely — and let them love you. Building intimate personal relationships will be the most important measure of your life and the most certain font of renewal. Love genuinely and vulnerably. Never underestimate the power of your example and the poetry of your personal life story. The enemy is more about ignorance than hate — and when you really love someone, the truth is often beyond the telling, it simply is. There is still so much work to do. ▼

From the Editor:

I am always looking for creative writing -- poetry or prose -- particularly of personal human interest. The Connection is valuable to all of us because of all of us! Please consider contributing to the Connection. While I can't promise that I will print everything or anything, I will try to be reasonable and fair. Please contact me by e-mail at drbenke@dimensional.com or by regular mail: Ben Kemena, 1241 Olive Street, Denver, CO 80220. I look forward to hearing from you. And please send in an SASE should you need your work returned! ▼

From the Kinnet List Administrator:

Hi! My name is Floyd Poenitz and I want to invite you to Kinnet, a Kinship-sponsored "on-line" electronic "e-mail" communication forum. This forum is open to those of all sexual orientations with the understanding that members are supportive of same-gender attractions and relationships. Please contact me by e-mail at floyd@flash.net for further information. ▼

From the Kampmeeting 1999 Coordinator:

Hi! My name is Jim Chilson and it's not too early to be thinking about Kampmeeting 1999! While the details concerning Kampmeeting 1999 are still in the planning stages, it will be hosted in Region 2 -- in close proximity to Washington, DC or Baltimore -- during the summer of 1999. Naturally, your ideas are always welcome -- and I would appreciate any assistance in making this Kampmeeting special, spiritual, and affirming. Please contact me by e-mail at JDChilson@aol.com or by phone at 301-317-9279. Of course, I look forward to seeing all of you next summer! ▼

From the Kinship Office:

Our area code has changed. Our office phone is now 949-248-1299. ▼

Kinship Events

For further information contact the appropriate regional coordinator on page 2.

November 26. Region 9. Thanksgiving dinner, Altadena, Calif.
November 28-29. Region 8. Marsha Stevens concert
December 5. Region 9. Coffee Gab, West Hollywood, Calif.
December 19. Region 9. Christmas Party, Los Angeles area, Calif.
July 18-25, 1999. Kampmeeting, Baltimore, Maryland.

"Invitation" from page 7

time and energy you give to Jesus and to loving your needy neighbors, you are a long way from putting Jesus first. In this gospel, Jesus asks each one of us to examine our lives to see what we have really made the first priority -- and if we find that he is not first, to start making the necessary changes.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." ▼