

CONNECTION

JANUARY/MARCH 2017 | VOL. 40, NO. 8

A PUBLICATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST KINSHIP INTERNATIONAL, INC.



Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a nonprofit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends.

Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTIQ Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976, the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than 43 countries.

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 that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTIQ has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

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PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 USA

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info@sdakinship.org

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

As 2017 begins, Kinship continues moving forward, and we're anticipating great things!

One thing we are doing now is strengthening our leadership around the world. We are always looking for members who are willing to be contact people or region or chapter coordinators. Quite a few of these posts are open now, and I would love for you to contact Member Services and let us know you'd like to help! Just send an email to memberservices@sdakinship.org. Your participation will help our organization grow.

A new marketing and PR approach from our Communication team led by Clinton Sorzano has really brought needed energy to our organization. This was reflected in our #GivingTuesday campaign, for example. And the new format of our *Connection* and *eNews* publications has brought renewed vitality to the Kinship community.

Member Services has been working on ways to engage members as soon as they join Kinship. We've been encouraging the leaders of the women's group, regional coordinators, and other team leaders to contact new members as quickly as possible to make sure that they feel welcomed into the Kinship family no matter where they live!

With the help of our organizational consultant, we're looking for better ways to fund our programs and campaigns. Early this year, we will meet with grant funders who support nonprofit LGBTIQ faith

organizations like ours. Finally, we've been searching for innovative ways to plan our annual Kampmeetings. Kinship members who have attended the Gay Christian Network (GCN) conferences have asked if Kinship could try the same format that GCN uses.

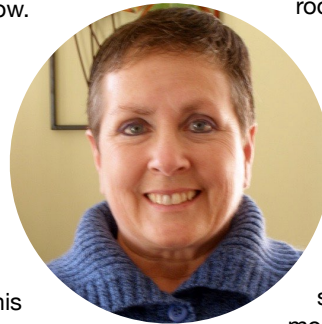
So, this coming summer, we will offer the first Kinship Kampmeeting with that model. You can find all the information on our website: where to go, when to arrive, and how to budget for Kampmeeting 2017!

All costs are very reasonable and the earlier you sign up, the more likely you are to get hotel rooms at SDA Kinship's special rate. Check out all of the details now! Our Family & Friends group will have some special programming just for them during Kampmeeting, so stay tuned for more of those details, too.

If there are other things that you would like to see Kinship doing in 2017, please feel free to contact me and let me know what you think. I'd love to hear your thoughts and get more suggestions on how to make our awesome organization even better!

May 2017 bring you and the special ones in your life more joy and happiness than you ever imagined!

Make 2017 sparkle!



Yolanda Elliott
President
SDA Kinship International

MEET JHONNY



TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF

Hi, my name is Jhonny. I am 25 and a medical student at Montemorelos University, an Adventist institution in Mexico. I was born into an Adventist family that later turned away from it; however, as the Scripture says in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I was baptized at the age of 18 and I have continued my life as a member of the church.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

I realized that I was different since I was 8, because I liked a classmate whom, innocently, I bothered whenever I could. It was during my adolescence that I managed to understand everything that was happening to me, but it was not until about two years ago that I accepted myself as gay.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE GROWING UP?

During my childhood, when I realized that I liked boys and not girls, I tried to find help to "cure" myself. When I read the Bible or asked for support from a pastor, it was traumatic to hear that "God loves the sinner but not sin," and a whole biblical exegesis of why I shouldn't be gay. I remember when I came to Montemorelos University, I sought support with a psychologist, with whom I underwent "change of thoughts" therapy. I wrote in a notebook the reasons why I wanted to be heterosexual. I will never forget what I wrote: "I want to be heterosexual because I want to go to heaven and I do not want to be lost for all eternity." On more than one occasion I thought about suicide and, yes, twice I tried to hurt myself. Thank God I'm still here. For these reasons, I cannot say that it has been easy to be gay and Christian.

WHAT HAS YOUR LIFE BEEN LIKE SINCE THEN?

Despite all my insecurities, I came out of the closet. A little more than two years ago, I told my mother I was gay. She has been a great support for me and my spiritual life. Later on, I started coming out to my close friends and in my social networks. It was not easy since many of the people who knew me were from church or met me when I was a colporteur, selling religious books and other material, or when I preached at church. I have, however, maintained a firm position on my sexuality and faith.

DO YOU CURRENTLY ATTEND CHURCH?

Yes, I go to church. I do not think I can stop going because it is a necessity in my life. I must say that when I came out of the closet, I left the ecclesiastical community, because I feared the looks and what people would say. However, today I know that God loves me. When I go to church, I am not meeting with members, I am meeting with God and His great love. Thanks to Him, I have found much support from great Christian friends and especially my mother. They keep me spiritually grounded.

IF YOU COULD TELL CHRISTIANS SOMETHING ABOUT THE LGBTIQ COMMUNITY, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

I would tell them to not use the pulpit to promote hate speech but to teach that God loves us just as we are. Yes, God loves the sinner and we are all sinners, but where sin abounds, grace overflows. Being homosexual does not make me less of a son of God, and being heterosexual would not make me a saint. On the contrary, both heterosexual and homosexuals, holding the hands of God, will be able to reach our celestial homeland together and say: "Thus far the Lord has helped us."

\$5,700

Raised on *#GivingTuesday*

For nearly 40 years, SDA Kinship has been providing a safe community for LGBTIQ individuals who are current or former Adventists.

Whenever we've come to you asking for support, you've never let us down—this is why we are still around today. Thanks to your generous support during Giving Tuesday on November 29, our best days are ahead of us!

With your support, we can and will continue to:

- share hope with LGBTIQ Adventists who feel alone.
- proclaim this important truth: that they are loved by God.
- create and distribute the resources current LGBTIQ Adventists need to be strong in the face of adversity.
- be a voice for those who are unable to share their stories.

We're so grateful that you stood with us on Giving Tuesday in our commitment to make all these things happen. More than 60 donors raised a total of \$5,700! Wow! We are humbled by your support.

This is not the end. We still have a lot more work to do, but it became much easier because of you.

*Thank
YOU!*

Continue to Make a **Difference:**

- Donate **Online:** sdakinship.org
- Donate by **Mail:** PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 USA
- Donate by **Shopping:** smile.amazon.com

JOIN SDA KINSHIP

***You can join the SDA
Kinship online
community today!***

Membership is free and all your information is kept confidential.

Visit sdakinship.org for details on connecting with people just like you, or send an email to Members Services at memberinfo@sdakinship.org for details on being a member of SDA Kinship.

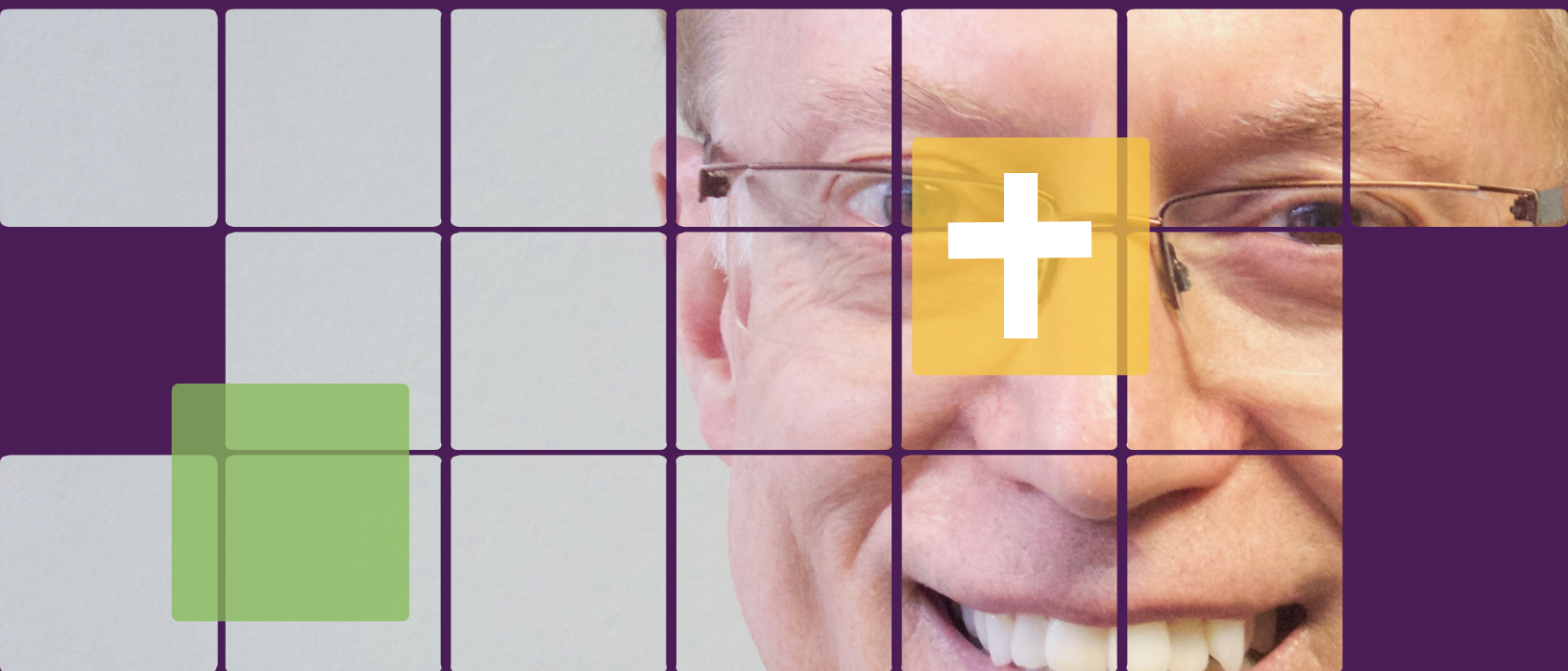


MINI KAMPMEETING

Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, United States

SAVE THE DATE! APRIL 27-30, 2017





THIS IS MY JOURNEY:

I grew up Adventist knowing God loved me and called me to ministry, but the church wouldn't accept me or my ministry. **My #JourneyInterrupted** was when I learned God still loved me and created me for ministry to those in the LGBT community. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be gay **and Adventist**.

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

KAMPMEETING 2017

SAN DIEGO

SDA Kinship's annual Kampmeeting takes place Thursday, July 6 to Saturday, July 8, 2017, at the Courtyard Marriott Mission Valley.

Kampmeeting is Kinship's annual conference where we come together to renew friendships, make new friends, enjoy entertainment, renew our faith, and more! This year it takes place in beautiful San Diego, a city in California, United States, known for its beaches, parks, and warm climate.

This year Kampmeeting will be different in format from previous years, and the registration fees do not include meals and hotel accommodations. We want to make sure that everyone who wants to attend can afford to do so. Visit www.sdakinship.org for info on special discounts and more.





SDA KINSHIP KAMPMEETING 2017

Dates: Thursday, July 6 - Saturday, July 8, 2017

Place: Courtyard Marriott Mission Valley, San Diego, CA

Register: www.sdakinship.org

RATES	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	FULL KM	SALE ENDS
EARLY BIRD 10% Discount	\$54	\$72	\$72	\$180	Mar. 31, 2017
REGULAR	\$60	\$80	\$80	\$200	May 31, 2017
LAST MINUTE	\$66	\$88	\$88	\$220	Jun. 30, 2017
AT THE DOOR	\$66	\$88	\$88	\$220	-

We want to make sure that everyone who wants to attend SDA Kinship Kampmeeting can afford to do so. This page explains our ticket prices, discounts, and scholarships.

Sales end at 11:59 PM Pacific Time on listed dates unless otherwise specified. The cancellation fee is 10% until May 31, 2017, and nonrefundable after that date. If you must cancel, think of it as supporting an organization you love.

SPECIAL DISCOUNTS

- **First-Time Attendee Tickets** If this is your first time to Kinship Kampmeeting, you may register at the discounted rate of \$100.
- **Student Tickets** Student tickets at \$100 (full Kampmeeting only) are available to currently enrolled students (undergraduate or graduate level). Kinship reserves the right to require verification of enrollment in order to receive this rate.
- **Evening Tickets** For those who can only come to Kampmeeting after dinner, the price is \$40 per day. If you register before March 31, 2017, you can receive a 10% discount and only pay \$36 per day.
- **Scholarships** Each year, financial challenges prevent many people from attending SDA Kinship Kampmeeting and experiencing the incredible love of being with this community. For those individuals, we offer a limited number of scholarships to help make attending the conference more manageable and affordable.

This year, we will only be providing a partial or full scholarship for the Kampmeeting ticket only. We are not able to provide for food, lodging, or transportation. Scholarship recipients may be required to volunteer for several hours during Kampmeeting.

We work hard to keep the cost as low as possible so everyone can attend. If you can afford to give more, please donate to the Kampmeeting Scholarship Fund at www.sdakinship.org or by mail to PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563-0244 USA to make it possible for others to attend—they need your help!



Celebrate Love

this Valentine's Day season

It's important to acknowledge the huge steps that the LGBT community has made in the past several years. And this year we want to especially celebrate all the beautiful shades of love that exist in our community. So this Valentine's Day, we ask that you take a picture of yourself with someone you love, whether lover, friend, sibling, parent, pet—whomever has that special place in your heart, take a picture with them and let's celebrate love together!

Tag your pictures with the hashtag [#SDAKinshipLove](#) on all your social media platforms, so we'll get a glimpse into each others' lives and see how many wonderful ways to love there are.

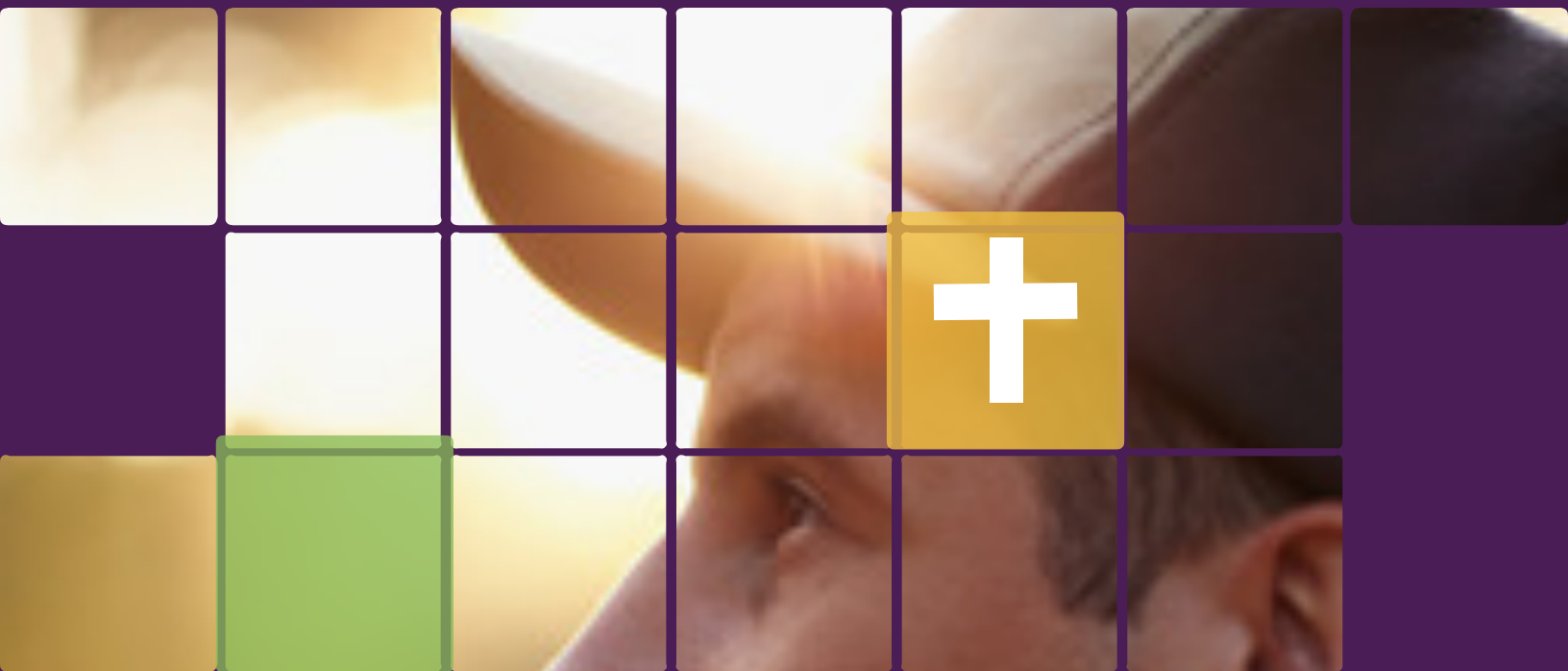
#SDA
KINSHIP
LOVE

@SDAKINSHIP



**SUPPORT SDA KINSHIP
THIS VALENTINES SEASON
BY USING
[SMILE.AMAZON.COM.](https://smile.amazon.com)
0.5% OF YOUR TOTAL
PURCHASE WILL GO TO HELP
KINSHIP FULFILL ITS
MISSION.**





THIS IS MY JOURNEY:

For years, I cried myself to sleep, begging God to change me. I am gay, and I love God and His church—a lot. My **#JourneyInterrupted** was when I found a loving, affirming Adventist church. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be gay **and Adventist**.

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

FAMILY

LOVE FIRST, LOVE ALWAYS

When my oldest child informed me that she was transgender, I cried. I was confused. I didn't even know where to turn to talk to anyone, because I knew my church wasn't prepared to touch the issue. So I started praying and reading.

It's been a couple of years now. My daughter Amy is happier than she ever was during her years of living as a boy. Her teenage siblings accepted her without question; their oldest sibling was simply "regenerating" like in *Dr. Who*—the same person inside with a different outside.

I didn't have any relationships with transgender persons prior to my daughter. I was ignorant of trans issues. I can't say I understand what it is to be transgender, but I also don't understand what it is to be Asian or Black. I don't have to understand to love and accept.

I now fight for transgender rights, for basic human rights and acceptance, and I attempt to educate those people who are ignorant of the challenges facing transgender individuals. My daughter is beautiful, kind, generous, and strong. I love her dearly, and I encourage other families to accept and love the LGBTQIA humans in their lives.

Considering transgender individuals have a suicide rate TEN TIMES that of the general population, I'd much rather accept a transgender daughter than bury a cisgender son. My family and friends, my Lord and His ways: these are at the heart of who I am.

Bekki Ortiz



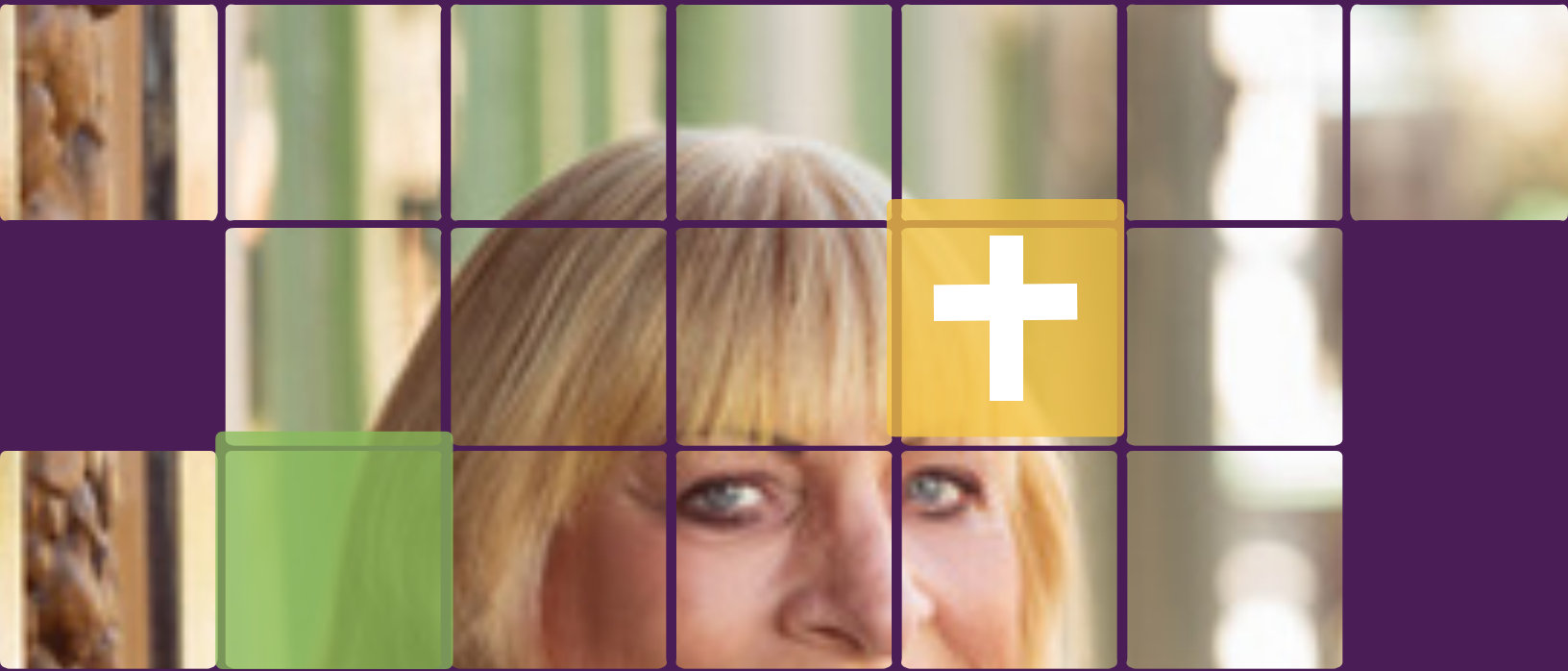
KINWOMEN CHAT WITH US

FIRST FRIDAY EVENINGS OF THE MONTH: 5–7 P.M. PST (8–10 P.M. EST)

If you are not on Facebook, please feel free to contact me for the login and password. You can join at any time and leave at any time. You do not have to be there for the full two hours. Chat is a safe place where members can share anything on their hearts.

What is said in chat is not shared outside of chat. Kinwomen can be reached at women@sdakinskip.org.

Debbie Hawthorn-Toop
Director of Women's Interests



THIS IS MY JOURNEY:

I was married for 5 years to a woman—each year hoping God would change me. It caused my ex and me so much pain. **My #JourneyInterrupted** was when I found freedom in living as who I was created to be. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be transgender **and Adventist**.

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

WE'RE LOOKING FOR

LANGUAGE TRANSLATORS

WE'RE EXPANDING OUR TEAM SO THAT WE CAN REACH THOSE
WHO DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH AS THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE.

SEND AN EMAIL TO
COMMUNICATIONS@SDAKINSHIP.ORG
TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN JOIN OUR
AMAZING TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS.

OUR JOURNEYS MATTER TOO

For 40 years, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International has provided a safe, spiritual, and social community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex current and former Seventh-day Adventists around the world.

Our mission, always, has been nothing more and nothing less but to affirm that diversity because of this important truth—everyone is created in the image of God.

If you belong to this community, our pledge is to stand with you, no matter where you are in your journey, because we believe this truth: Your journey is important too, your voice should be heard, and you should never be mistreated or discriminated against because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

If ever you need someone to talk to, we are here to listen.



Ronnie was born in 1992 to a family devout to the Adventist faith. He lived what he called the “typical Adventist” life, attending denominational schools, sang in the church choir, was a member of the Pathfinder club (a co-ed scouting group), and even preached during youth sabbath programs in his native Uganda.

Uganda is a deeply conservative, landlocked country in East Africa, more recently known for hostility and violent attitudes and acts toward those in the LGBTQ community.

Ronnie was well loved and respected by everyone he knew, but this all changed in 2014 when his father discovered that he was gay. He was 21 at the time.

His father called a meeting of family members. “They took turns insulting me, even threw water at me; the worst was when they started beating me. It was one of the worst nights of my life,” he recalled.

Fearing for his life, later that night he ran away from home. With no place to stay, and with just enough money from selling his laptop

computer, he bought a bus ticket and left his homeland, and embarked on a twelve-hour journey to Nairobi, the capital city of a neighboring country, Kenya.

In Nairobi he met someone he befriended on Facebook. “Even then I was really scared,” Ronnie shared, “I left my home, everyone and everything I knew, to go to a foreign country where they spoke a different language, and used different currency.” For the first time in his life he was on his own.

“Life in Kenya has been hard,” he shared. “It is difficult to find work without the proper papers.” He added that he often contemplated suicide but was always rescued from those thoughts by good-natured, well-placed friends and his faith in God.

Ronnie shared that he has not since spoken to or seen his family ever since leaving Uganda. His dad has all but disowned him after discovering his sexuality.

Through this experience, though, he maintains that love wins (he still loves his dad) and that God loves us all no matter what our sexuality is.

While in Kenya, Ronnie has been going through the asylum process, praying that he is eventually allowed entry to the United States where he can start a new life. He remains hopeful that one day he can reconcile with his family and even friends he left back in Uganda.

SDA Kinship shares the value that the journeys of LGBTIQ Adventists matter in the wider narrative of what it means to be LGBTIQ and Adventist. *Our Journeys* is a series of stories, highlighting the lives of LGBTIQ Adventists around the world, our experiences, triumphs, and failures, our low and high points.

OUR JOURNEYS

By Clinton Sorzano



THE YEAR OF BEFORE AND AFTER, PART I

BY JERRY MCKAY



A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

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

As my graduation approached, I should have been contacting conferences in Canada for a pastoral internship position. I was not. Instead, I returned to Japan, the only place I felt I could serve God and avoid the stress my yet unacknowledged orientation was creating.

While my return was an acceptable option, it did not come from a place of strength. Distress was a common private component of my life. However, this trip to Japan would be unlike any other. Halfway through my two-year term, a life-defining moment occurred.

I arrived in Japan just in time to attend the baptism of a dear friend. During my final year of college, Mitsuko wrote to tell me of her decision to give her heart to Jesus. On August 3, 1980, Mitsuko was baptized in a beautiful, tree-lined mountain stream an hour west of Tokyo. English teachers, church members, her husband, and I gathered as she waded into a pool of water with the pastor to seal her commitment. I was thrilled to be part of this celebration because I never expected to be there. The day after, I rushed off to Osaka. Although my heart was in Tokyo, I had reluctantly agreed to start my work in Osaka because they needed a teacher.

Osaka Center was the largest Seventh-day Adventist English school in Japan. At its peak, 500 students studied English weekly. This was the school I had not wanted to teach at during my first year in Japan. In addition to multiple classrooms, the four-story office housed the local church, administrative offices for the language school system, and an apartment for two male teachers. Unlike the quiet suburban location of the school in Tokyo, Osaka Centre was on a busy street. One redeeming feature was its proximity to Osaka Castle. I could retreat to its peaceful grounds in just ten minutes.

I was supposed to be in Osaka for only a few weeks. "Supposed to" often ends up being something different. When I was asked to stay for the year, I was torn. I really wanted to be in Tokyo. Although I had returned to Japan to escape issues like dating expectations, I was still fully committed to mission service. For several weeks, I prayed for guidance. I think everyone, my friends in Tokyo especially, was surprised when I announced my decision to stay in Osaka.

My year in Osaka was much like my previous two years in Tokyo—30 hours of language teaching per week and as many Bible classes as I could create. I lived with several other guys on a mission compound 50 minutes west of Osaka. As always, my orientation intruded into all aspects of my life.

Sharing accommodations with male teachers was awkward at either end of the day when everyone was in a different state of undress. Additionally, many charming male students captured my attention and stirred up unwanted romantic feelings. Interactions with women also kept me aware of my orientation but for different reasons. Before the year was over, several women had made hopeful advances. One woman, to my astonishment, directly and forcefully proposed marriage. Had I been attracted to women, I might have accepted a proposal because living in Japan appealed to me very much. All advances created more stress than happiness, however.

Constantly shutting down feelings for male friends while politely ignoring advances from female friends stood in sharp contrast to my increasing longing for companionship. Even in Japan, I was frequently reminded that "it is not good for man to be alone!" During especially lonely moments, I grieved the loss of Donna's friendship acutely. At the same time, memories of my brief moments of intimacy with that male friend during the previous summer haunted me whenever my touch-deprived existence overwhelmed me.

Spiritually, the year was typical with respect to my daily devotions. I did, however, add one element to hopefully address my anxious concern about my orientation.



Jerry in 1981



Friend's baptism



Jerry doing a presentation

A Moody Press publication I bought in Osaka played a significant role in my prayer life. *The Adversary* dealt with a popular concern: the Christian versus demonic activity. The book was full of stories of deliverance from demons and came with sample prayers I could use to “overcome the flesh” and “appropriate the Holy Spirit.” I photocopied two of the prayers and pasted them into the back of my Bible to access anytime—for my Bible always went with me.

I had a specific “fleshly lust” in mind when I earnestly prayed:

Heavenly Father, I enter by faith today into death with the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. I appropriate all of the benefits of the crucifixion which is mine because of my union with Christ. I count myself dead to my old fleshly nature and all of its workings through my union with Christ at the cross. I recognize that my old nature always wants to resurrect itself against You and Your will for my life, but I wish to let it remain dead in death with my Lord on the cross. I am thankful that this absolute truth can be my subjective experience. I recognize that appropriating the death of my flesh is an essential step to victory over these fleshly temptations which buffet me. Amen.

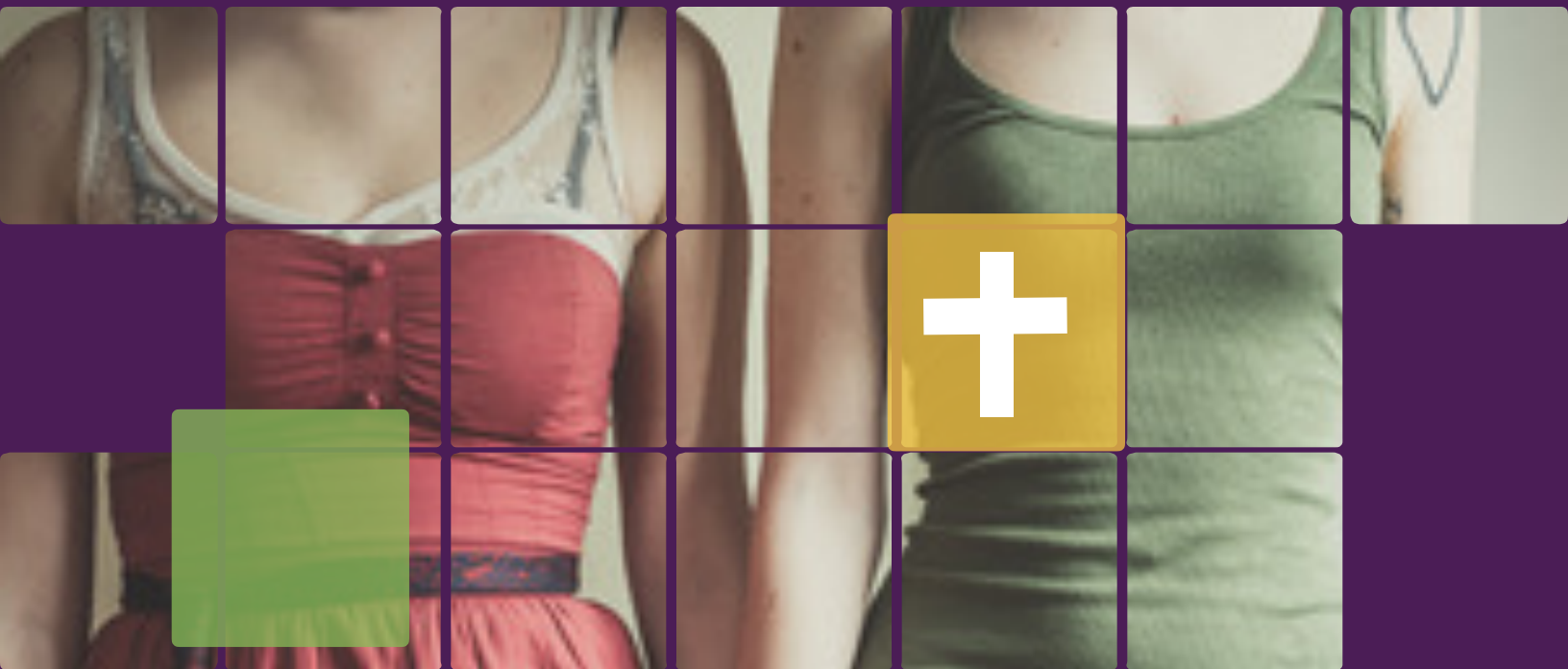
The second prayer was similar but focused on appropriating the Holy Spirit. To protect me from deceiving spirits and bring me to victory, I prayed:

Blessed heavenly Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I desire the Holy Spirit to bring all of the work of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ into my life today. Enable me to respond to Your grace and to be sensitive to Your voice. Grant me discernment to avoid being deceived by false spirits. I desire that the Holy Spirit fill all of my being with His presence and control me by faith. I trust my victory over the flesh today completely into the hands of the Holy Spirit as I let Him take control of me.... Amen.

When I read these prayers now, I can feel the heaviness associated with that time of my life. Like some kind of spiritual formula, I repeated these prayers on a daily basis. When I read them, often aloud, I did so with an underlying assumption that some demonic activity must be operating in my life. This assumption added to my spiritual angst. I was as sincere as I could be about exercising full faith, and I expected victory. I was not concerned about fleshly lusts resurrecting themselves because they had never died! I just wanted my attractions to men to go away and in their place experience what I perceived as “normal” feelings for women.

With my moment-to-moment attractions tormenting me and seemingly unanswered prayers for deliverance ascending to heaven daily, I offered to take on a project that would be the highlight of my work in Japan. I wanted to present a series of talks at the Osaka Center church and in Tokyo. Once given the go-ahead, I hid away in a quiet room just off the church sanctuary for hours on end. My ambitious task was to demonstrate how the story of Jesus was the unifying thread from Genesis to Revelation—and do it in nine nights. Being a visual learner, I wanted to illustrate this salvation history. To do so, I created panels with symbols inspired by the simple yet beautiful art of the Swiss artist Annie Vallotton whose work is featured in Good News translations of the Bible. My artwork was amateurish by comparison, but the ten panels helped link elements of my presentation as I built my salvation timeline over three consecutive weekends. I was excited about presenting the series in Tokyo to a familiar group of church members, friends, and former students. I believe the meetings went well, but I know I pushed the translators—usually language school directors—to their limits.

Constantly shutting down feelings for male friends while politely ignoring advances from female friends stood in sharp contrast to my increasing longing for companionship.



THIS IS MY JOURNEY:

I was told that I could no longer serve in my local church because I am a lesbian in a loving relationship. This was heartbreaking because the church is all I know. **My #JourneyInterrupted** was when I discovered true love. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be lesbian **and Adventist**.

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

One sentence flows across a black granite wall in Montgomery, Alabama: *We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.* Paraphrased from the book of Amos and engraved on a Civil Rights monument, this statement crosses millennia to underscore unchanging lessons for humanity. Today, I will look at three Old Testament teachings about the way mercy, justice, and blessing contribute to safe and benevolent communities: Abraham's blessing, the Sabbath commandment, and Isaiah 58. I will then share some thoughts about how these notions of justice, mercy, and blessing can affect us and our Adventist communities today. You will probably note that my focus on the concept of justice is an emphasis on "justice for," not "judgment against."

After sin, after the Flood, after the tower of Babel, God began to rebuild an intentional human community. *He called Abram and said, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing"* (Genesis 12:2). He and his descendants were to be a blessing, wherever they went, with whomever they interacted. Their success and the longevity of their extended community depended on their choice. It was that simple: Be a blessing. It was that difficult.

Later, in restructuring the Hebrew community at Sinai, the principles shared with Abram became more concrete. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:4-8) encapsulates some of them. *The seventh day is the Sabbath.* From grammatical emphasis in the original text, I infer a level of importance placed in the lessons it teaches. The commandment was a gift of the God who had rescued them from bondage and protected them from a scorching desert sun. He lit the darkness at night and fed them in the morning. With the Sabbath, God offered yet another blessing. He reminded the community that He would make sure they were fed and that their crops and produce would be safe in the twenty-four hours they were not "in control." Israel was to learn another aspect of trusting God.

Nourished by this blessing, God's Hebrew community was to respond on the seventh day by being a blessing, by showing justice and mercy not only to those who were vulnerable among themselves but also to those under their power. I believe that lesson was to be infused into Israel's consciousness and actions. Children, servants, animals, and the sojourner who was "within their gates" were equal recipients of the mercy of God and should be equal recipients of the blessing of community. The future of the young nation depended on their understanding of, and choice to live, this lesson.

Hundreds of years and many wrong decisions later, Isaiah began to write. His work is packed with critique, counsel, and promise.

In Chapter 58, the conditions for community blessing are concise:

- Loose the bands of wickedness; undo the thongs of the yoke. (vs. 6)
- Let the oppressed go free; break every yoke. (vs. 6)

TO BE A BLESSING: LESSONS ON JUSTICE AND MERCY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY CATHERINE TAYLOR

•Share your bread with the hungry; bring home the homeless poor. (vs. 7)

•Cover the naked. Don't hide from your family. (vs. 8)

•Take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing finger and malicious talk. (vs. 9)

The wickedness, described in preceding lines, includes:

•Seeking own pleasure; oppressing workers (vs. 3)

•Quarreling, fighting, and hitting with wicked fists. (vs. 4)

I find it interesting that the justice and mercy focus of this week's lesson was also the focus of God's accusations. Wickedness was a lack of justice for oppressed workers. Wickedness was a lack of mercy played out in the field of neglect and violence (quarreling, fighting, hitting). While this message was certainly to be heeded by individuals, God's focus, through Isaiah, was also on the community.

We can think of ancient Hebrew as a "visual language." It was highly metaphorical and, as we know, metaphors have hidden layers for the observant reader and listener. The brass serpent on the cross meant more than antitoxin in a crisis. The sanctuary in the desert meant more than a ritual religious bonding. Jesus, talking to the woman at a Samaritan well, discussed more than liquid refreshment.

I am certain that most readers or listeners to Isaiah's scrolls could think of instances when they had seen opportunities to share their bread with the hungry, care for their families, and clothe the naked. I believe they had also seen the effects of "the pointing finger and malicious talk." I believe that Israel had some understanding of the extended meanings of Isaiah's pronouncements.

Our twenty-first-century community of Seventh-day Adventists has much to learn from these Old Testament pictures. If we are to be the ones who "raise up the foundations of many generations...are called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in," if we are to "delight in the Lord" and "be fed with the heritage of Jacob" our father, we need to embody the lessons described in the texts we read this week.

Since we claim to be spiritually descended from Abraham we also have his mission: "You will be a blessing." A blessing to whom? The texts in Genesis don't restrict that blessing to particular individuals, populations, beliefs, systems, or lifestyles. There was no limit. There is no limit.

If we are to bless like Abraham, we need to be open to the world. That's difficult. Do we draw limits with those for whom we seek justice and mercy and blessing? With liberals? Conservatives? The people who might be converted if we are nice to them? Our family? Immigrants? Refugees? Hard workers? Slackers? The lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender Adventists with whom we come into contact? The same group if they are celibate? Our church leaders? Our church leaders if they agree with us? The people of our town or province or country? The Adventists who are in favor of women's ordination? The Adventists who are not? The Adventists who believe in a six-day creation? The Adventists who do not?

Continued on the next page...

Daniel Duda recently said, “The church exists for one purpose: to create a community of unconditional acceptance.” I go over the list of people and groups in my purview and realize how different my life, my church, and my community would be if we lived these words and Abraham’s promise.

Under the umbrella concept of Abrahamic blessing, there are details. The Sabbath commandment and Isaiah’s sermon teach that we are to have rest if we allow that rest to include those who are vulnerable to us. At Sinai, the list included children, servants, animals, and guests harbored within Hebrew homes from desert dangers. I consider 21st-century corollaries.

All over this world today, untold numbers of children live in dangerous or abusive circumstances. Those contexts can range from poverty and neglect to sexual abuse or life in the killing fields of Syria. Resiliency theory teaches that if such children have one person, just one, who is safe, caring, accepting, and nurturing, that child has a high chance of building a healthy life. The one person can be as varied as a parent, school janitor, youth leader, bus driver, or neighbor. There is power in one. Do not underestimate the effect you can have on one life.

From another perspective, we must think carefully about how we will be with the children and youth we encounter. How do we share mercy toward, and insist on justice for, the children who tell us they have doubts about God, use drugs, are having sex, are gay or transgender, have parents who abuse them, are angry in Sabbath school, or run away from the community they have known? What about the children who say they are religiously conservative and want to know how to be with others? How will we be a blessing?

We may not have live-in servants. We may have cleaning help. Or people who mow our lawns. We may have people on our committees at church. We may have employees or teams we supervise. We may have influence over policies and procedures. We may be elders or deacons or denominational administrators. The lessons of mercy, justice, and blessing apply to all of us. How do we live them?

In this 21st century, the meaning of “stranger within our gates” is broad and varied. What is clear is that the person being described is not personally known to us and can come from any place. Who is this stranger? Is it a fellow traveler in our spiritual world? Is it a drunk? A military veteran? A child? A refugee? Are they fragile because they have eating habits or a lifestyle we would question? Are they a teen who was kicked out of their house because...? Are they just lonely? Are they old? What do they mean to us as individuals? To us as a local spiritual community? To us on the larger scene? Do we feel safe having strangers in *our home*? In our country? How do we deal with those we don’t understand who want to find sanctuary in our church? How broad are our gates? How do we live the mercy, justice, blessing that are our Abrahamic mandates?

Adventists have done a great job of literally following Isaiah’s instruction to *clothe the naked*. I remember folding second-hand garments in third grade. They went someplace beyond my geographic knowledge. I remember the days Dorcas rooms opened their doors and the days volunteers boxed emergency clothing



shipments to disaster areas. Being physically naked is a vulnerable way to live. So is being socially naked—our secrets out for everyone to see. The Samaritan woman’s solo trip to the well at the hottest time of day shows the life-threatening consequences of being socially naked. What about the suicidal teenager who has his secrets blared across social media? How about the times we have publicly failed in a church duty? Or a job? Or invested our retirement funds in a Ponzi scheme? Or made investment mistakes with church resources? How would you like your church community to be just with you, to be a mercy to you, to be a blessing for you?

I have never heard a sermon about the promise that includes “if you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing finger and malicious talk.” I have never seen church discipline for it. But I have seen pointing fingers and malicious talk destroy individuals, relationships, and communities. I think a lot about Ellen White’s quote, “Do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of scripture a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them.”*

At the moment, we Adventists are dealing with at least three divisive issues: women’s ordination, sexual diversity, and creation. We also live with cultural differences, family stressors, abuse of various kinds, refugees, hunger, and war. We are a cauldron of viewpoints, opinions, values, hopes, and fears. As he considered how pastors care for their communities in the midst of these crises, Gerard Frenk wrote, “In such a cacophony we run the danger of not hearing the two most important voices: our own and the voice of someone who, in the middle of all the noise, asks your attention for his or her personal story.”** Justice, mercy, blessing are individual acts that affect larger communities.

We are a “people of the Word.” We say we want to follow that Word. As in the issues mentioned above, a challenge to our community relationships often comes when our readings of texts in the Word differ. Even our theologians and scholars disagree on exegesis and hermeneutics. Given our conundrums and the effect they have on our personal and corporate communities, I very much appreciate Jeroen Tuinstra’s observation: “When a text has multiple ways to be explained, one chooses the explanation that causes the least harm, shows the most patience, and expresses closely the fruit of the Spirit.”

And the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22, 23

Mercy, justice, the fruit of the Spirit.

How will you and I and the even larger “we” live these building blocks of a community of blessing?

NOTES:

*Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, 123, 124.

**Gerard Frenk is secretary emeritus of the Dutch Union Conference. The quote is from his paper, *A Pastor Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

***Jeroen Tuinstra is president of the Belgium Conference of the French Union.

Many thanks to Gerard Frenk for taking the time and patience to edit this paper. Much appreciation to Jacquie Hegarty and Carrol Grady for proofreading it.

EUROPEAN

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GOD AND TIME

By Regina Araujo

A cold December night more than 2000 years ago is the reason why 2.1 billion Christians celebrated Christmas just a few months ago. For Christians, that night—a minuscule fraction of time in this world's history—forever changed Humanity, echoing the prophet's inspiration: Emanuel's presence became a reality.

I would like to think about that time a bit. But first, a question: *What is time?*

Until the last century, scientists believed that time was eternal and absolute. Why not? After all, everything around us is governed by time—from the powerful sun to the tiny cell. All have a beginning and an end, all are *chained* to time.

Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the famous discoverer of gravity, believed that time was eternal. And this belief lasted for more than 200 years in the world of physics. At the beginning of the 20th century though, Einstein's general theory of relativity established relations between matter & space-time and between energy & space-time, indicating that the universe had a beginning.

In 1970 British physicist Stephen Hawking, along with Roger Penrose, published the first relativistic space-time theorem. This publication proved that the cosmic beginning was not only the beginning of matter and energy, but the *beginning of space and time*.

I want to pause here: *The beginning of time...* What is time for humans? Because humans are bound to time, where time is linear and cannot be interrupted or inverted, the idea that anything could exist *before* time baffles the imagination!

WHERE IS GOD IN TIME?

Both Old and New Testaments, being unique among the pre-modern texts, refer to the activities of God "before the beginning of time."

Scripture refers to God as being independent of time. For example, in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8, the Bible says that

the time of God may be arbitrarily long or short compared to the human experience of time. In other words, God has complete freedom to *compress* or *expand* time, because He is free to operate beyond, or transcendent to, time. Unlike our experience with time (which is linear and irreversible), for God, temporal experiences are *not* linear!

Let's continue in our exploration. The Biblical text says that God is both *present today* and *eternally* as well as *transcendent* over time (Jeremiah 23:24 and Colossians 1:16-17). *He lives in the eternal present, past and future!*

This means that God *is* in our past, in our present, and in our future—all at once! As the book of Hebrews states: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Because of that, He is *now* in your and my past, working to heal our wounds and sorrows. Because He is the LORD of time, *He is already in your future!* God *will not* be with you in the future. He is already *there*. This brings tremendous relief when we think about the New Year's unknowns, don't you think? He was already in 2017 before we were—all the way to the end of the year.

One of my favorite quotes fits here: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us...in our past history."

WHAT DID GOD PLAN BEFORE TIME BEGAN?

Biblically speaking, GOD *inhabits eternity*. In other words, eternity is HIS dwelling from where HE can intervene at will in the universe: *From the beginning I predicted the outcome; long ago I foretold what would happen. I said that My plans would never fail, that I would do everything I intended to do.*

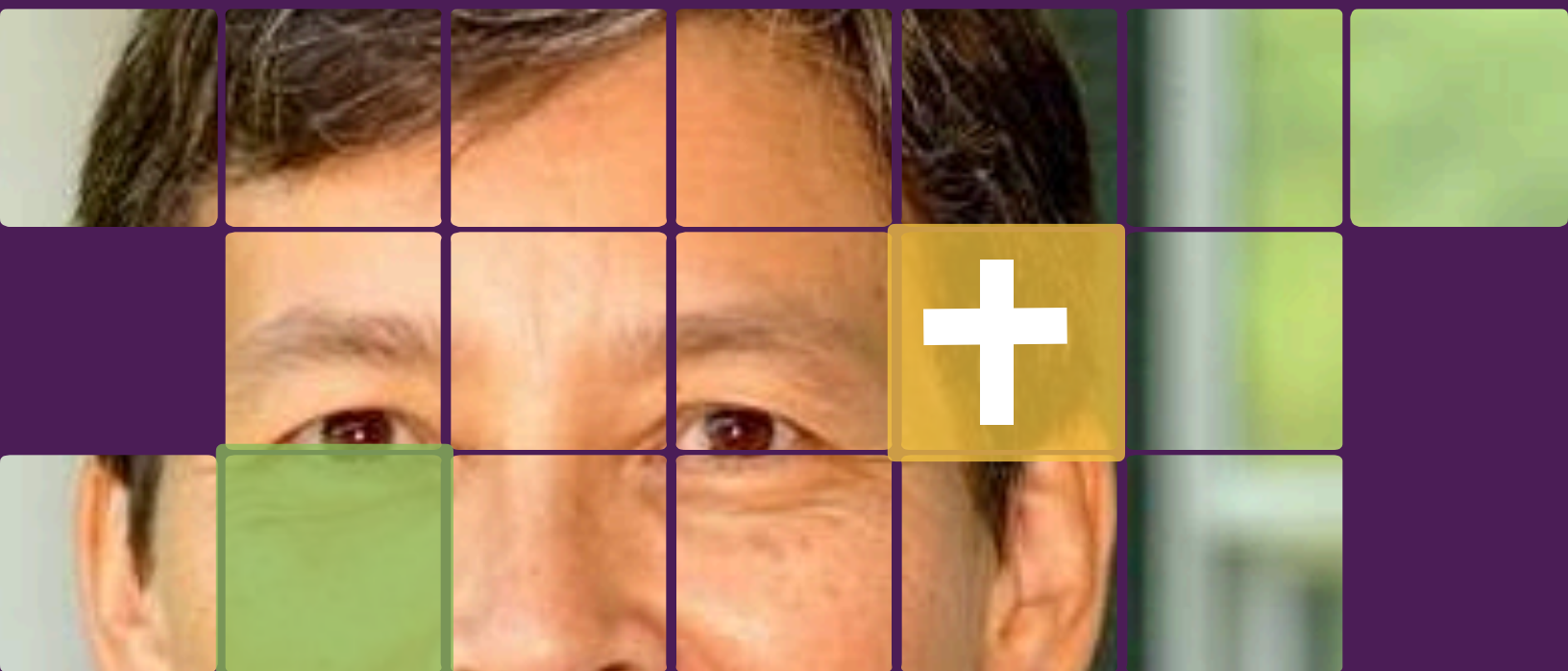
Here again, we are given an idea of what God was doing *before He created time* 13.8 billion years ago (using time reckoning based on our latest scientific discoveries). HE was planning LIFE with YOU, *for eternity*—life in HIS realm, free of the linear *time* which can never be stopped or reversed!

He was planning *that night in Bethlehem*, with all its glorious details. One night when He shrunk *time* in this planet by 1/1.66 trillion in order to change Earth's *history of time* forever!

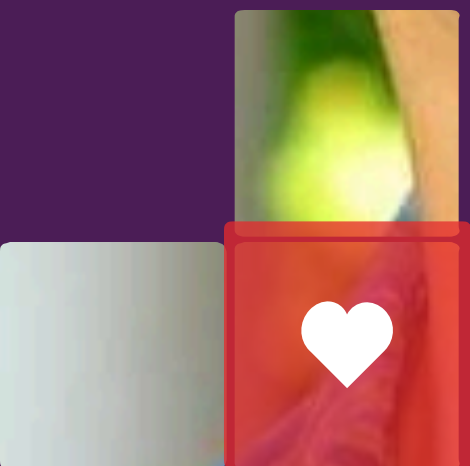
He was planning that moment in time, when He would make Himself vulnerable, and enter into our dimension, becoming limited by time and space, and embracing our time chains so we could have the hope of tasting His eternal dimension without *time*.

REFERENCES

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23; Titus 1:2 (NIV); Hugh Ross, *Why the Universe is the way it is*, BakerBooks, 2008, p. 128; Ross (Ibidem); Hebrews 13:8; TEV, *EGW, Life Sketches*, p. 196; Isaiah 57:15; Isaiah 46:10 (GNB)



THIS IS MY JOURNEY:



I struggled with being a lesbian and an Adventist. **My #JourneyInterrupted:** when God told me He created me this way and to celebrate the life He gave me. That having a loving partner was how He designed us. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be lesbian **and Adventist**.

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

CHURCH RELATIONS



Last December was an incredible one for the Adventist LGBT community. I was in Orlando, attending a reception for the National Religious Leaders Roundtable (NRLR) and Equality Florida clergy.

I had opportunities to have initial conversations with Rea Carey, the Executive Director of the National LGBTQ Task Force; retired Adventist pastor Jim Coffin, who now heads an interfaith LGBTQ organization in Orlando; and Randi Robertson, a former instructor at AU who has now transitioned to female.

At one of our lunch gatherings, four members of the pastoral staff at the Florida Hospital Adventist Church joined the group. Late in the afternoon, most of the members of the NRLR went to the site of Pulse Nightclub. It was a very emotional experience to be at the site where 49 young LGBT people were senselessly killed last June. We held a vigil and read the names of each of those who were killed.

As there were not a lot of opportunities for me to have conversations with some pastors and others not being able to attend the meetings, we scheduled a lunch meeting prior to my return to L.A. Three of the pastors from the Florida Hospital church attended, and the Brazilian pastor of the Orlando Central church joined us. I shared with them copies of the book *Christianity and Homosexuality* and of the film *Enough Room at the Table*. The Florida Hospital Church, I was told, has planned their diversity Sabbath for 2018 with a focus on the LGBT community with an LGBT person preaching at the worship service, and Chris Blake will be presenting his three-hour seminar in the afternoon. I was definitely in the clouds long before my flight took off!

Randi Robertson shared with me that she had been invited to present the paper she had been working on for the North American Division (NAD) meeting on transgender Adventists. This meeting was kept quite confidential, with Randi not even being told the location until she received her flight details. She reports that the meeting was very positive. It was attended by NAD administrators, two union presidents, and at least one university president.

In other news, recently, Loma Linda University presented a panel discussion titled, "Religion and the LGBT Community." Dr. David Larson and Daneen were both members of the panel. It also included a gay resident in psychiatry, a pediatrician who also teaches ethics at LLU, and Jan Pallien, Dean of the School of Religion. The moderator was Jim Walters. It was a very positive presentation that had been actively promoted by the university. There were several hundred in attendance.

With all the other things happening, it is really great to have some good news!

Dave Ferguson
Director of Church Relations





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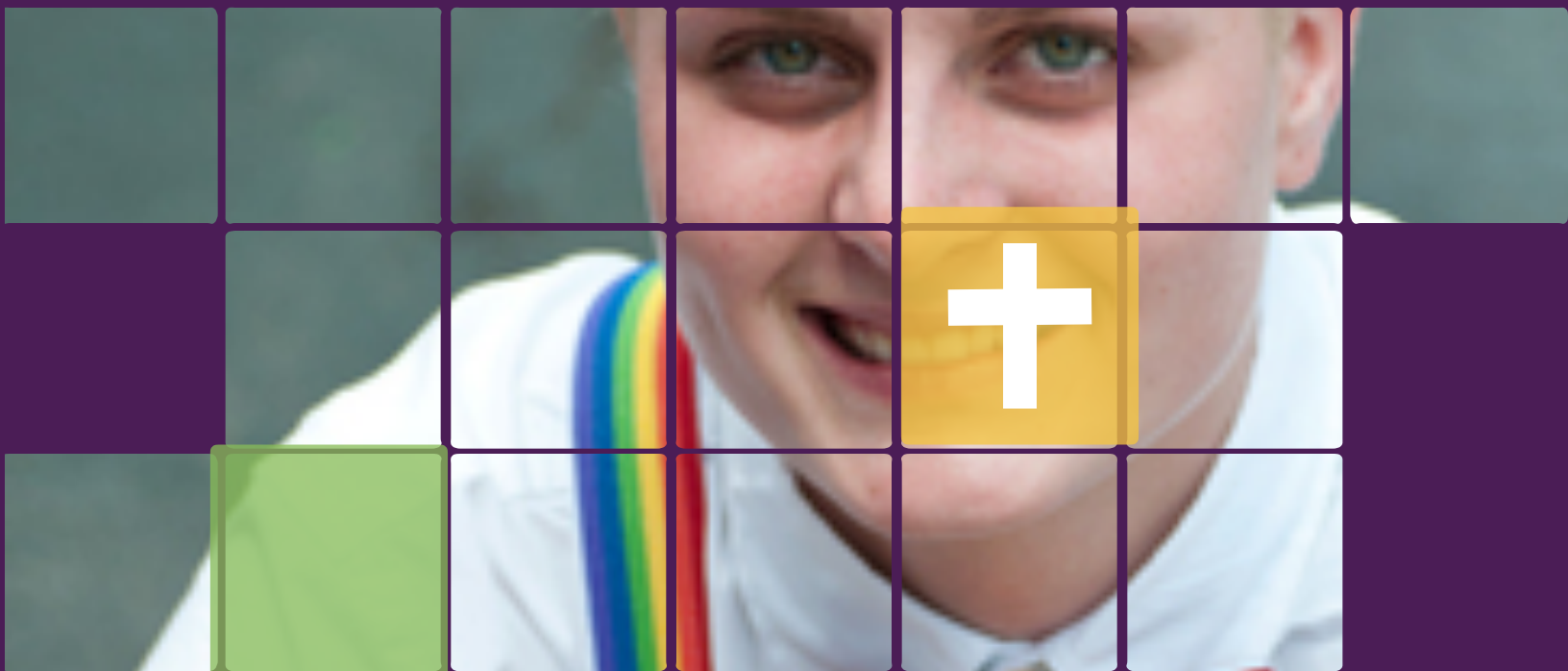
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THIS IS MY JOURNEY:

I feel confused, alone, and sometimes depressed. I have not yet accepted that God loves me as a transgender man because of what I heard in church growing up. **My #JourneyInterrupted:** I'm learning to love myself. For me, this is what it **truly** means to be transgender **and Adventist.**

Share your journey: info@sdakinship.org

RESOURCES RESOURCES RESOURCES

We understand what it is like to be an Adventist struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity because we each had similar experiences.

And we also know that this struggle is often painful, frightening, and discouraging. Kinship is here to help and provide support.

If you are feeling lonely, depressed, or suicidal, or if you need a professional counselor who is supportive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender concerns, chances are we know someone in your area who may help.

Be assured that we are sensitive to your need for confidentiality. If you wish, we can also refer you to an understanding Adventist pastor, teacher, or other professional we know who is sensitive and informed about sexual orientation and gender-identity issues.

Above all, please know that we care. We understand that you need to think through what your sexuality means, what to do about

it, what it may mean to your loved ones, and whether it is possible to be LGBTIQ and Seventh-day Adventist. We will not try to determine your conclusions if you reach out to us. We will endeavor to understand and help you while you make those important decisions about who you are and God's plan for your life.

We want to respond in the most helpful way. We are people of diverse ages and backgrounds, so please let us know the type of person to whom you feel most comfortable talking. For example, a woman rather than a man, someone who came out while being married, or someone with a similar background or profession. You may also be more comfortable talking to someone who speaks your native language.

If you are a pastor, teacher, counselor, or parent, please know that we welcome all inquiries and that we also respect and honor your need for confidentiality.



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