

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 38, No. 9, November 2014



Thanksgiving 2014

The Blessings of this Year

KINSHIP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Yolanda Elliott
Vice President: Naveen Jonathan
Treasurer: Karen Lee
Secretary: Rosemarie Buck
Director of Church Relations: Dave Ferguson
Directors of Women's Interests:
Debbie Hawthorn-Toop and Betty O'Leary
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Marygrace Coneff (Parents, Family, and Friends)
Floyd Pönitz (Intl. Growth and Development)

WHO WE ARE...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit 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 LGBTI 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) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. 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 forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist 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 LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
or visit Kinship's website www.sdakinship.org/resources
for information about

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
- *Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*
- *Living Eden's Gifts*
- Previous *Connection* issues
- ... and more.

CHAIRS

Executive Committee: Yolanda Elliott
Finance Committee: Bob Bouchard
Kampmeeting Committee: Linda Wright & Kristina Burgos
Communications Committee: Jonathan Cook
Governance Committee: Rosemarie Buck
Member Services: Naveen Jonathan
Int'l Growth and Development Committee: Floyd Pönitz

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Office Manager: Member Services Team
Web Administrator: Linda Wright
Connection Editor: Catherine Taylor

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE

www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

CONTACT/INFORMATION

info@sdakinship.org

SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to SDA Kinship Int'l, PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94653 or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

RESOURCES

www.someone-to-talk-to.net
www.buildingsafeplaces.org
www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org
www.sgamovie.com
www.facebook.com/sdakinship
... and more

From the Editor

I just finished editing 25 stories of blessing. How amazing is that? Some are one sentence. Some are several paragraphs. Some are written from a place of joy. Some are written in a time of stress. There are more coming. I didn't stop people who are writing. I'll include their thoughts as holiday gifts in the next issue. I hope they touch your heart and give you hope. In this issue, we included written reports given by our Kinship Board and leadership team. We want you to have a sense of the work and the hope that is part of this community. The leadership group just finished two days' worth of meetings in the San Francisco Bay Area, focused on building a strategic plan for the next steps to be taken by Kinship.

You won't find him writing here, but we want to take some time to tell you a little bit about a man who is an extraordinary blessing to this community. He wears many "hats." Good thing he is from Texas. They seem to have a predilection for headgear—and boots. If you have joined Kinship any time in the last few years, he was one of the first people with whom you came in contact. He answered your questions, took your information, wrote you a letter of welcome, sent notes out to regional leaders to make sure we also greeted you, and let you know you can always write him. He told me recently he is in contact with Kinship members on Facebook all day, every day. I travel with him sometimes and have seen him on the computer at 2 a.m., dealing with a Kinship issue, and then again at 8 the next morning. I really don't know when he sleeps. He is one of the people who supports our websites. He is one of the people who catches the hate mail and works to figure out ways for the rest of us to get it less often. He is one of the people who regularly listens to the pain and fear experienced by some of our members. He is one of the people who makes sure we cushion and welcome our new leaders. He is one of the people who has the stamina to go to General Conference sessions and interview attendees and hear what they think about us. He was one of Microsoft's team managers, and he continually pushes us to reach out more, improve our systems, and think big. He is able to "manage" some of us who are not so easy to curtail and somehow we love him for it. He is the coordinator for international development and works to stay in contact with regional and local Kinship folk all over the globe. He brings your concerns to us all. He is a pivotal member of the Building Safe Places—for Everyone project. He let me cry on his shoulder for an entire weekend in Germany when I thought the project had gone down the tubes. And when it turned around and grew in unexpected ways he pushed and pushes us to dream big. As I type this he is pushing the Communications team to build a more complete archive. I can only imagine what he does on the Member Services Committee. Those of you who read these editorials know my regular sign-off and I mean it for each of you. But this month, I want to say in a very special way, "Take good care of yourself, Floyd Pönitz, for you are infinitely valuable."

Catherine



Not an unkind or discourteous word, defensive or offensive, should escape our lips or be traced by our pen.

—Ellen White (letter 18, 1895)

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.

—Mahatma Gandhi

In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

—George Orwell

It is more often from pride than from ignorance that we are so obstinately opposed to current opinions; we find the first places taken, and we do not want to be the last.

—Francois de la Rochefoucauld, moralist (1613-1680)

My mind is a garden. My thoughts are the seeds. My harvest will be either flower or weeds.

—Mel Weldon

Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living, the other helps you make a life.

—Sandra Carey

By Andrew Dykstra

Why do I remain in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, when the General Conference administration and so many of the congregations are not affirming or even able

to lovingly accept me? Not so easy answer: I receive hope and affirmation from some people. I say not so easy, because those who consider themselves allies can receive the same kind of reception as those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Here's an encouraging e-mail I received from someone who was unable to attend a homosexuality forum at my church last Saturday afternoon.

Hi, Andrew, thank you for your email. I love your details; I feel like I am having a conversation with you and you took me right there. I have checked online; only the morning service is available to watch, not the afternoon session, as you guessed. I am very glad Robert spoke; it is very easy for us to make comments, share opinions, and say hurtful things until we are face to face with a child of God on the other end who is hurt by them. I hope I can meet him one day. But I am sorry the afternoon went the way it did.

I have been asked by a number of members as to "Why do we even need to talk about it?" It makes me angry and sad at the same time. My response was that if there was a family member in their house that was hurting because of the way they were being treated, their family would talk about it. Well, here at Immanuel, one of our members is hurting, so we must talk about it until the love of God helps us to all be united as one. In my understanding, our bond as a church family should run deeper than even our ex-

tended families at home.

My hope is that one day very soon you will feel loved and respected and accepted at Immanuel. God will use your amazing talents and gifts for His glory in ministry to others. I want you to feel a part of the church family and not shunned by it.

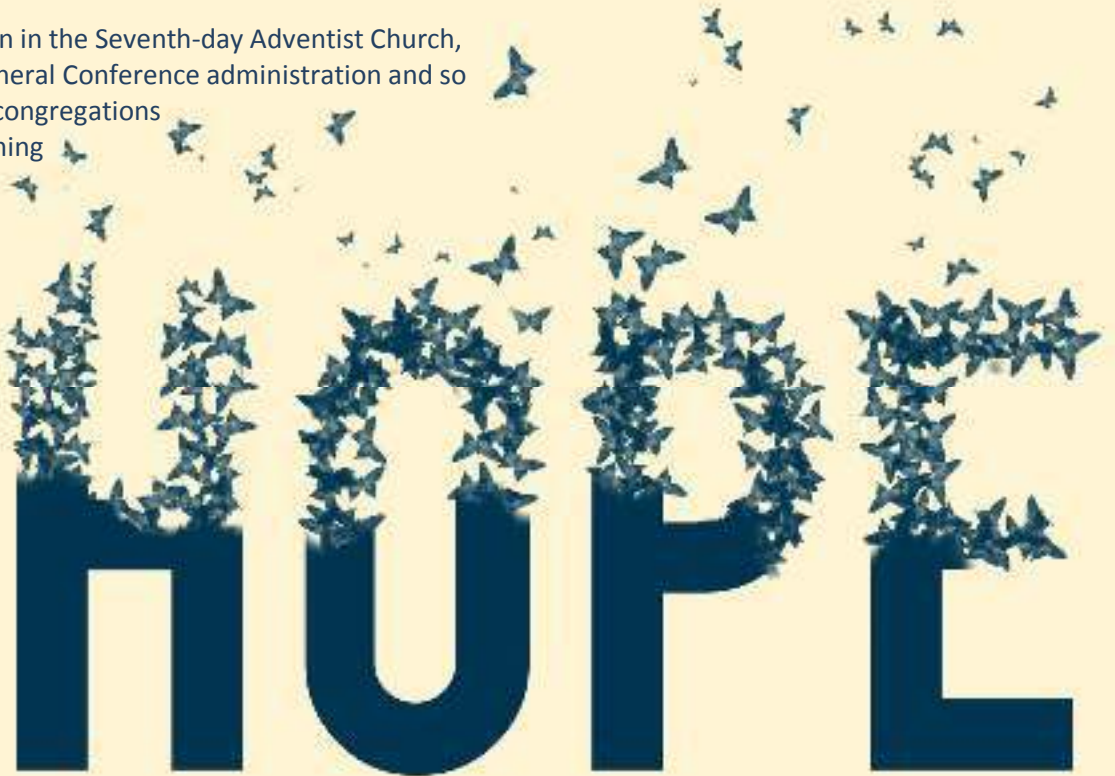
Let me be honest with you on where I stand with homosexuality. I do not believe that being gay or lesbian is a sin, just as some are born blind, lame, or with childhood illnesses due to the sin in the world that has changed even our very makeup. I believe there are truly some born gay, more now than ever before. I believe there are hormone and DNA changes that can make a man look like a man on the outside, but not feel what Adam felt towards a woman. This is not a sin; it's not a disease either. It's just the way you are; and God will use you, bless you, and love you all the same.

Where I struggle a bit is what I believe we disagree on. Just as the act of

fornication is a sin, I believe the sexual acts (be it between straight or gay people) is where the sin is. Is it fair to expect a gay person to be single all their life and not have companionship when their God-given desire is to be with someone? No, it's not fair, it's not fair at all. But I don't believe it's right. So this is my struggle and something I am praying about for God to give me clear direction and understanding.

I have quite a few friends that are over 40 or 50 who are straight and single. They long to have a companion, but it just has not happened yet for them, so they have lived as a single person all their life. That is not fair either, but it's the road they must travel.

So I'm not yet convinced that it is okay with God for a gay person to have a gay partner. I'm not there yet. But being homosexual is not a sin; and it really, really gets to me when I hear our members act like it is a sin and something you have chosen and can just jump out of at any time.



As members, we need to be more sensitive and realize that that kind of attitude is hurtful and not from God. It's also incorrect and an unfair way to label homosexuality. I know this is not a "lifestyle" choice you made. I truly believe you were born gay and truly believe that God can, will, and probably already has "used it for good," as his Word promises us.

You should be embraced, loved, and involved in the church Sabbath to Sabbath without any fear of rejection. I'm praying that it will not be long before you feel this love from us, as a church, and feel like you can participate and take part in the service. Most of all, I want you to feel like you are truly a part of the family of God. I don't think you feel that way right now, but I'm praying we can all get there.

Know that, from me to you, you are loved, respected, and thought of highly. I think you are incredibly intelligent, spiritual, thoughtful, loving, and just fun to be around. You still have a child-like innocence about you that takes joy in the simple beauties of God. I really admire that about you. You are being very patient with your church family, taking a lot of heavy blows. I know God is giving you great strength and you are setting an important road before us that will allow many others who will come after you to tread down safely.

I'm blessed to know you, Andrew, and appreciate you always staying in touch.

I disagree with my correspondent's belief that I should be *celibate*. That belief takes away my hope for companionship and all the benefits that come from being in a loving relationship. That said, I don't mind talking with people with whom I disagree on some issues, as long as they are able to accept my decisions in life that harm no one, and do not exclude me because of them. I am incredibly moved by this email. This person, writing to me in his loving honesty, gives me hope. ▼



**Roseli De Paula Marques,
Illinois/Brazil**

Everything happens for a reason? Are we so special that every step, every event, every breath that comes to us is somehow related to a great good guardian extraterrestrial event protecting us? Something like "God"? Are we "that special"?

I did not used to think about this much until about two years ago when my life changed. I used to be a perfect picture of happiness. I was married to the love of my life, had a great job, beautiful house, brand new cars, and a lovely dog.

One day everything vanished. My wife decided to divorce me. She left. I lost my house, my cars, and only barely kept my job! I did not know what to do or think. I tried to understand, but I could not. I decided to just believe, without understanding, "everything happens for a reason."

Last year was the year of chaos. This year everything changed. My wife and I got back together. After a few months we realized that we could not be happy being apart. Our love got stronger. I went back to Brazil. We got married there. Thanks to Obama, I can give her a green card. We are anxiously waiting for her to come back home.

I quit my job and opened a business. I bought a car of my dreams and an apartment. Our emotional and financial lives became stronger.

If she had stayed none of this would have happened. We would have been living the same life as before. I believe everything happened for a reason, a reason to bring us together, a reason to make us better, a reason to make us stronger!

Thank God for 2014. Every single step, every single event, every single breath exists to protect us, always for better, even when we can't under-

stand. Now I can say for sure that we are "that special." Amen.

Suzi Sullivan, Idaho

Blessings in my life over the past year focus on my wife Stefanie Farley-Sullivan. She had major surgery. Because of the complications that followed she had to have surgery a second time in less than three months. I am grateful to God that she survived as they found a 9.5 cm blood clot and another smaller one. Stef is all healed up and finally getting back into a routine. I am also very grateful to my wife for being there for me over the past 3½ years. She is an invaluable support as I deal with the trauma of having my ex kill herself. Stef has been very patient and helped when and where she could. Her support has been a major part in my healing.



Naveen Jonathan, California

The blessings that stick out the most to me this year are:

The opportunity to spend my grandma's 99th birthday with her in India. The time was particularly special because she passed away two months later. I have a new publication on same-sex couples' therapy that will be released next year. It is entitled, "Building a Circle of Care in Same-Sex Couple Relationships: A Socio-Emotional Relational Approach."



Felix, Malaysia

I'm grateful for my parents, who are in their seventies, and for their health. My mother has recovered from TB. I'm thankful that my ex-boyfriend was resettled in the USA in May as a Burmese asylum seeker under the UNHCR. We have had a very difficult relationship for two years which involved alcoholism. He applied for resettlement because of his HIV status and after a year and a half of waiting, he passed all the requirements, and it was only through the grace of God that his case was processed so quickly. I'm happy that he is in a better place now and relieved that

I'm free of the heavy burden attached to the relationship. We may have broken up as partners but we continue to be brothers for life. For this I am thankful. I'm grateful for the fact that I'm free of HIV even after coming into intimate contact with two persons in the past five years who later tested positive. I'm more convinced than ever that safer sex includes regular screenings.

Denise Proulx, Maryland

I am grateful for God's unconditional love.



Angel Rivera, New Jersey

This past year I had the pleasure of celebrating my ten-year anniversary with my partner. When one door closes in my life, I find God has something even better in store for me. I have been blessed to open my first atelier this coming year as well as see my company grow. God continues to provide me with my needs, wants, and more than I can even imagine. I give all the praise and glory to Him!



Mike Lewis, Scotland

So far ... 2014 has been a year of great blessings.

I survived another birthday (March).

I passed my exams (May).

I moved to a new house (again)—easiest move ever (June).

I had great days out on the Scottish mountains (June-July).

I went to EKM with its wonderful highlight of a beautiful communion service (August).

This semester I've been blessed listening to Professor Tom Wright on the life and writings of Paul (September).

Last week I was blessed hearing Dr Moffitt lecturing on Christology/Soteriology in Hebrews—powerful insights! (October)

This morning I was blessed going to a majestic university chapel worship service (today).

I am blessed in having many good friends (now).

I am constantly blessed by my amazing God (always).

And so I want to be a blessing to others (throughout eternity).

Now back to my assignment. Hope you are blessed as much, if not more!

Marge Doyle, Southern California

I have been blessed with health following a nine-month battle with breast cancer. I am blessed with a wife who loves me unconditionally. I am blessed to do work that I love that makes a difference.

Amlee Roundfield, New York City

I have a wonderful, patient, and long-suffering spouse.



Denny Samen, Pennsylvania

I am blessed to be in the City of Brotherly Love (Philadelphia) and to have a wonderful apartment. I am blessed to be able to do what I do best: a newsletter for my building and the Women's Veterans Center! I am blessed to be able to help out with PFLAG Philadelphia.

► to be continued on page 11



Sharlett Daniels Reinke, Nebraska

Blessings abound! I am married to Randail. I have fun and funny grand-kids. Gay marriage is becoming legalized! Hooray!

Randy Walvoord, Nebraska/Texas

I was blessed to have married Sharlett Reinke on September 14, 2014. I was also blessed to meet some spectacular people at my first Kampmeeting in Atlanta, where I saw the future of the Adventist Church if they allow the most talented youth not to be marginalized by their orientation.



KINSHIP BOARD MEETING



Kinship Leadership Team Reports

Member Services Team – Floyd Pönitz, Naveen Jonathan, Yolanda Elliott, Linda Wright

- Process new member requests:
 - Receive notification, email new members, search for them on Facebook or the internet, notify Linda to activate, send notification to coordinators and demographic leaders, follow up with members, “friend” them on Facebook, and add them to the appropriate groups.
- Update database as needed with contact corrections and process mail returns from the Kinship office as they are forwarded to me.
- Send member lists to coordinators twice a year and as requested.
- Participate on Member Services WebEx calls with agenda items and discussion.
- Chat with, encourage, and answer questions from members on Facebook, Messenger, email, WeChat, and WhatsApp.
- Receive, forward, and respond to both internal and external emails that come from the Kinship website.
- Assist coordinators in Regions 1 – 9 as well as chapters and individual members as needed.
- Using Survey Monkey, we create member surveys for demographic leaders to help get a feel for what our members’ needs are, how SDA Kinship is doing, and obtain a satisfaction rating.

Church Relations – Dave Ferguson

We have been working on several projects.

- IAGC (Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition) has elected new officers for the school year and is planning their annual summit at Kampmeeting 2015. That team works with an executive committee and other campus leaders in the decision-making process.
- Dave represented Kinship at the annual Adventist Forum Conference and presented a talk on “Why I am still an Adventist.” He was able to talk to several allies and potential Kinship allies while there.
- Both LGBTI members and straight allies at Glendale City Church participated in the Los Angeles AIDS walk.
- Several Adventist campuses are developing gay-straight alliances.
- The *Connection* is now being sent to Adventist college libraries around the world.

Kinship Development – Keisha McKenzie

- We will be signing Kinship up for Giving Tuesday (December 2, 2014) as part of the end-of-year campaign. As in 2013, we’ll use the Razoo portal as the primary page (with graphics and updates). The website will be accessible as normal during that period.
- On Twitter, we continue to follow and be followed by US-based and international LGBTQ and intersectional LGBTQ accounts including @BiWOC (a Boston-based group for bisexual women of color), @MuholiZanele (a South African lesbian photographer and activist), HRC’s Sharon Grove, and our own IAGC and KinYouth students. Our follower count is now up to 435 from 300 in the spring (+45%). We follow just over 200 accounts. Tweets continue to include any informative and “safely provocative” articles, blogs, news items, or thoughts relevant to the Adventist LGBTI community.
- The SDA Kinship blog has been up for 6 months.

Communications – Jonathan Cook

I was elected to this position in July and am learning my new role. I take this responsibility with humility and gratitude.

We are developing a video-sharing project called *In God’s Image*. With the administrative support of Linda Wright, we continue to develop both the Kinship website and the Building Safe Places website. We plan to

expand our use of social media, nationally and internationally. The electronic *eNews* has continued to go out each month. The *Connection* continues to have 9-10 print issues a year.

Member Services Report – Floyd Pönitz, Naveen Jonathan.

• We have: 2674 “Active” Members

- 43 Seventh-day Adventist Libraries
- 274 Allies (Friends and Family)

The breakdown of our Active Members is:

- 1571 Male (960 in the USA)
- 716 Female (547 in the USA)
- 34 Transwomen (26 in the USA)
- 16 Transmen (14 in the USA)
- 6 Intersex (4 in the USA)

Our male members identify in the following ways:

- 1349 Gay
- 155 Bisexual
- 34 Questioning
- 9 Other
- 8 Not Sure
- 7 Asexual
- 4 Heterosexual
- 2 Queer

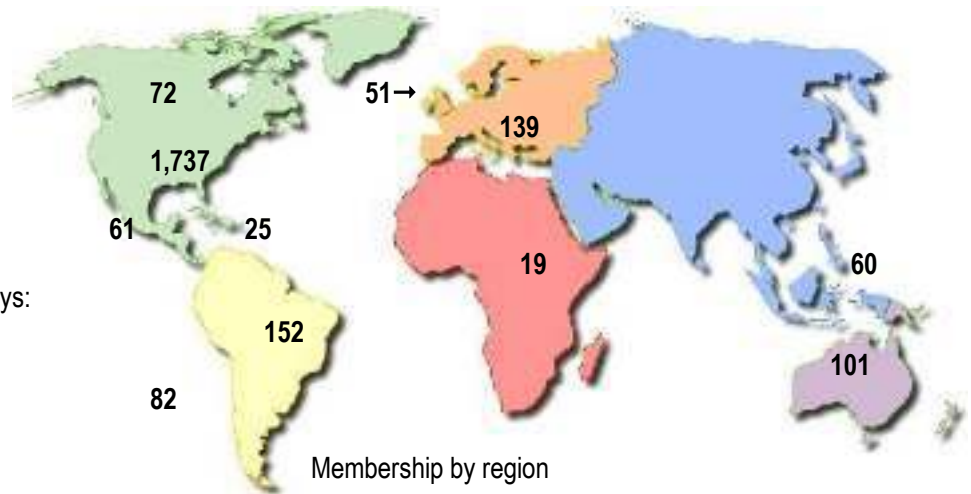
Our female members identify in the following ways:

- 568 Lesbian
- 95 Bisexual
- 27 Questioning
- 5 Not Sure
- 4 Asexual
- 4 Other
- 3 Queer
- 3 Gay
- 2 Heterosexual

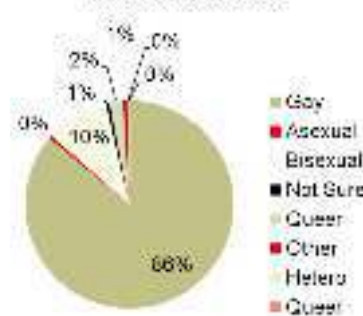
• The populations of our Regions

Our age spectrums are:

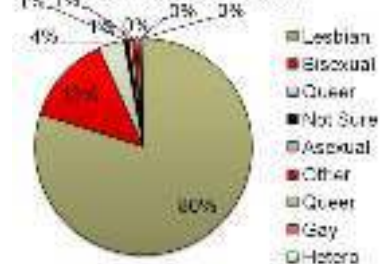
- KinYouth (<31) (born in 1984 or later)
 - 503 Total
 - 257 are International
 - 337 Male
 - 160 Female
 - 6 Trans
- Older Adults (>64) (born in 1949 or before)
 - 160 Total
 - 21 International
 - 109 Male
 - 46 Female
 - 5 Trans



Male Orientation



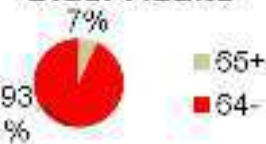
Female Orientation



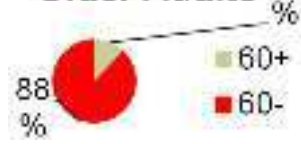
KinYouth



Older Adults



Older Adults



Kinship Family and Friends – Marygrace Coneff

- We have added approximately 20 people to our list of members since July 2014. All people in this group have access to the Kinship Family and Friends Facebook page where we post items that may be educational or of interest.
- We had a wonderful Family and Friends meeting at Kampmeeting where we focused on providing support for family members going through transitions.

KinWomen – Debbie Hawthorne Toop & Betty O’Leary

- Over the last two years we have found that sharing a house is a big hit with the women of Kinship who attend our Women and Children First weekends. Debbie is working on finding the location for next summer. She has some leads and we will share details as we finalize them.
- Our Friday night chat is still going on every Friday night from 8 to 10 p.m. Eastern Time (US). Turnout varies from week to week. We have women from several countries who take part in the conversation.

International Growth and Development – Floyd Pönitz

- We include the international coordinators as a team to advise what SDA Kinship can do to make the organization better known and to assist with building member community in each of the international regions (8 major regions divided into smaller areas consisting of countries or groups).
- Currently we have coordinators in each of the major areas and most of the smaller groups.
- Australia has had meetings in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and, most recently, in Brisbane
- We have a new coordinator in the Philippines and a stronger emphasis will be planned for the Asian countries over the next year.
- Europe completed EKM14 in Saffron Walden UK. The next one is planned for Italy.
- Six African countries have leaders, with a Kampmeeting being planned in the next 12 months.
- Canada continues to be active, with a renewed emphasis to be placed on Eastern Canada.
- Mexico is very active and local groups meet frequently.
- We are developing a focus on the rest of Central America to get them as active as Mexico.
- The Español Facebook page is very active with members from not only Central and South America, but also with Spanish-speaking members all around the world.
- We need to (re)focus on getting more Spanish-speaking materials available. The C&H book has not materialized. The SGA movie is available in Spanish subtitles, but we need more materials to be translated.
- Brazil continues to be active on the Facebook group and members in São Paulo and Brasilia meet with each other. We would still like to plan a Portuguese-speaking Kampmeeting.
- While in London recently, I met with two of the Brazilian members to build good will and better understanding of the diversity of Kinship as an organization and its members.

Kinship Youth – Rebby Kern

Having recently been elected into this position, I have spent time this fall to train, evaluate, strategize, and predict how KinYouth is organized and how it functions. It has been made clear that there are challenges to be overcome, including communicating with youth, as well as providing content for engagement. Former Director of Youth Interests, Ronoldo Appleton, has been a great resource to this training and insight.

Some goals for the upcoming quarter include:

- Increase activity on KinYouth social media, including Facebook and Twitter
- Create personal conversations among youth on social media and email
- Develop relationships with KinYouth
- Gain interest of new KinYouth members to be a key stakeholder in the group
- Work closely with KinYouth leadership to execute strategy for growth

- Continue relationship with IAGC in order to solidify youth networking opportunities
- On-time welcome messages to new KinYouth members via email and social media.

I look forward to learning more about my role in the organization, meeting my support system, and continuing the great work put forth before me with KinYouth. ▼

Report: Building Safe Places—For Everyone – Catherine Taylor

- Coordinating Team:
 - Frieder and Ingrid Schmid
 - Pastoral Team Europe
 - Floyd Pönitz
 - Board Member and International Development Coordinator
 - Dave Ferguson
 - Director of Church Relations
 - Catherine Taylor
 - Program Coordinator
- Building Safe Places for Everyone Meetings:
 - First Conversations

In response to the original request to talk with other Adventists about ways to better care for LGBTI people in their environs, this meeting is held primarily in a narrative, local-wisdom format. Sample ques-

tions are available on the website (www.buildingsafeplaces.org)

→ 2015:

- * January, Nags Head, North Carolina
- * February, Palos Verdes, California
- * March, Hassenroth, Germany

→ Team Support

For people who have already attended *First Conversations*, these two-day meetings are designed to offer attendees the opportunity to discuss their interactions with LGBTI people and to share about their interactions with various Adventist institutions as well as the church at large. We plan to include time to develop ways to better care for themselves under stress. Each year we have a specific training topic. In 2014 we discussed the

practical and spiritual implications of biological development, specifically intersex. In 2015 Arlene Taylor will present “Communicating with Different Brains” as a pathway of better learning how to communicate with church leaders and congregations.

- Safe Places-Didactic
- Using a variety of speakers as well as narrative formatting, this training includes scientific data on brain development, sociological issues faced by LGTBTI Adventists and their allies, and discussion of Adventists and social justice and pastoral issues. The team from the training at the Dutch Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is listed on the website under “Training and Consultation.”

Building Safe Places

- Training for new Team members:
Designed for people who would like to help in Building Safe Places—for Everyone trainings, this component includes attendance at a variety of Safe Places meetings, consultation on the narrative/local-wisdom model of discussion and community building, shadowing of other leaders, and reading materials. Herb Montgomery has recently committed to this process.
- Newsletter – *Safe Places*:
 - Catherine Taylor – editor
 - Ruud Kieboom – layout editor
 - Jacquie Hegarty and Carrol Grady – proofreaders
 - Linda Wright and Jacquie Hegarty – formatting and distribution
- Research Project:
 - Based on requests by BSP participants, this component is in the data collection phase of its first qualitative research.
 - Rene Drumm – consultant
- Website – www.buildingsafeplaces.org:
 - Linda Wright and Floyd Pönitz – administrators
- Grant Building:
We are currently in the early process of applying for an ARCUS grant.
- Financial:
At present, the primary costs for Building Safe Places—for Everyone are for training and are based on the costs of venues and transportation for presenters and facilitators.
BSP bases its programs on donations given specifically for the project. With the exception of the website costs, Kinship has contributed nothing from their general fund for any part of the project. If we do not have the funds pledged or in hand, we do not plan the meetings.
- Requests:
 - 1 We would like regularly updated reports of the amounts available on the BSP line item in the Kinship funds.
 - 2 We would like reimbursement for expenses incurred while developing training sites but only up to the amount of funds that are presently on that line item in the Kinship account. ▼



► continued from page 7



Claudia Leuqar, Massachusetts

I am blessed that I have been able to continue attending college part-time as an adult learner despite several medical issues. I am close to graduating, thank goodness.

J and D, Canada

In this year of challenges, both in work and personal life, D & I want to take the time in this season that reminds us to be thankful, to express our deepest heartfelt thanks to our community, our Kinship community, and friends whose unwavering support made it possible to not only survive, but to also heal and grow.

They also pointed us back to the source of our power and strength reminding us that our heavenly parent has not abandoned us nor is punishing us, but is continuing to love us as His/Her children.

God has also blessed us and given us the opportunity during our struggles to see and share the struggles of others and allowed us the opportunity to, in turn, help them.



Carrol Grady, Washington State

I am always thankful for my 15 precious grandchildren and almost seven adorable great-grandchildren, not to mention my three fine sons who got them all started! Well, actually, I'm extra thankful for my wonderful husband who, with me, really started it all. I am thankful to God for his grace and mercy and patience for me. I am thankful for the progress I never expected to see in my lifetime on the acceptance and understanding of my LGBTI friends in society, and even in more and more areas of the church.





Kevin Rabe, Australia

I am looking out my window and breathing in the wonderful fresh morning air of a typical spring morning in Sydney. God has given me unexpected blessings beyond what I really need. When I was lonely, friends from *Inter-Stat* picked me up for a day of exploring and fun along one of our local beach suburbs. New friends at church welcomed me and showed me God's unconditional love. They totally accept me and openly greet me with a hug when they see me. I'm blessed by the excitement and thrill of my grandson who absolutely adores his Opa. I'm grateful to keep my job despite my spinal pain and sight problems. They worry me but God is in control and has His hands over me. I'm grateful to my wonderful Kinship family who share their messages and pictures on Facebook!



Betty O'Leary, Virginia

I have been very blessed this year. I found my forever person and we started our life together. I put my house on the market to move south to be with

my partner. It sold in one day! We just finished remodeling our new home and life is good!



Rom Wilder, North Carolina

What do you say when thank you isn't enough? How do you print the quietness in your heart that is peace?

You know how sometimes someone looks at you from across the room and silently mouths "thank you," and you silently nod you're welcome? That's sort of how it has felt, this thank you that isn't enough.

However, He has assured me that my silent thank you *is* enough. He even says *I am enough*. Just as I am. Seriously.

What can I say, except thank you.



Jaqueline Lemi-Hegarty, Northern California

2014 held many blessings for Linda, Barley, and me, not the least of which was being able to attend Kinship Kampmeeting in Atlanta. This year was truly the best Kampmeeting we've ever

had! (Although we say that every year.) In conjunction with that, Linda and I were able to spend five weeks on a cross-country road trip with tent camping in beautiful places and spending time with our respective sons in Texas and North Carolina and their families (including our two grandsons). This fall we've had the blessing of our daughter staying with us to attend college classes locally. We're looking forward to wonderful family holidays!



Sheri Sinaga, California

I came out two years ago. Chaplain Marcos referred me to a local lesbian therapist and I spent the first year dealing with my own internal homophobia and learning to love and accept myself.

This year, I struggled with whether I could be myself at church; where was God in the ways the Seventh-day Adventist Church interacted with our community? Early June, in the midst of my struggle, I said to God, "Ok, I'm done! Unless you can show me love for gay people in the Seventh-day Adventist community, I will leave my beloved church and attend the local gay-affirming church. I'm done with pretending at church." The next week, my dear friend, Pearl Pangkey, reached out to remind me to come to Kinship Kampmeeting. A complete newbie, I came to with low expectations and a slightly cynical attitude.

Boy, did God blow me away! Herb Montgomery grabbed my mind and soul by reiterating that Jesus died for all. Pastor Todd Leonard called his church open and affirming for all. To see Kinship members be so passionate about Jesus and graceful to others despite rejection, brought me to tears. God did show me that He is still sovereign in the lives of His people.

I came back rejuvenated. Within a week, I came out to my pastor of seven years. He was personally affirming and willing to support me continuing as an elder. I also started to attend the Glendale City Church where I've met wonderful new Kinship friends. Thank you, David Ferguson, for your friendship.

The big hoorah for me was to come out to my mum in Malaysia. She lives in a Muslim country with no context for healthy gay relationships in the popular culture. No "Ellen" or "Modern Family." This made me fearful that she would not be accepting. How wrong I was to underestimate my mother's capacity for compassion and love. Her acceptance simply because I was her child brought my soul to peace.

So thank you, Kinship! You have given me courage and love with your stories. The loving kindness you showed through your prayers and online support has walked me through this summer and widened my "Circle of Trust." You have been a blessing to me. Continue your service in helping one life at a time. Showing the grace and love of Christ is a gift from on high.

The only way on earth
to multiply happiness
is to divide it.

—Paul Scherer



Gay Goree, North Carolina

Even as I was told I had breast cancer, I found a place of healing, a special Kinship group of people who laid their hands on me and asked God to be with me through the radiation and the chemo. I have never felt so supported. I knew I was in good hands. I could feel the prayer during every chemo treatment. Radiation was a little bit different. I got tired but I was able to rest, thanks to my partner, Carol. She look over as my caregiver, as long as I promised not to throw up. I managed to keep that promise.

Losing my hair allowed me to buy new hats. I enjoyed not having to worry how my hair looked. I just jumped in the car, ready to go.

I had hoped to lose more weight but I never lost my desire to eat. At one point I thought I would miss Christmas celebrations but chemo did not stop me from going to spend time with our family a little after December 25. It was still Christmas when we got home.

There was never a time I did not know in my heart that prayers were being said for me. I trusted God's plan for me.

Here I am a year later, healthy and cancer-free. I am grateful for this. Most of all I am thankful for the prayers from my Book and the Beach friends.



Carol Marts, North Carolina

They are everywhere, little pink ribbons. They are cute. Cancer is not. I wear the ribbon now for my partner.

At first I wished it could have been me. Then, I knew God made the right choice. I make a better caregiver than patient, as long as I can always call for help. I had all the right cell numbers in my phone and my phone was always close by. I did call the doctor to check on appointment times, to check on meds refills, or to ask if they were necessary. The nurses became my best friends. We looked forward to chemo day because the hospital served free lunch while Gay got her treatment and I looked on.

Friends from Kinship were very encouraging. There were phone calls, emails, and one member sent a calendar as a statement: *Let's look forward to another year.*

That year has gone by. We can look forward to many more cancer-free years. I still wear the ribbons because there are others in treatment. The pink ribbons are cute. God answers prayer.



Dahlia Holmes, New York City

I am grateful for marriage equality for without it we wouldn't have the insurance to take care of James through his cancer journey. And I am grateful for a wonderful wife that provided the insurance.



**Peter Stickney,
Bay Area of California**

I am thankful for ...
The grace that God gives me.
A loving and supportive life partner.
Friends and family that love me unconditionally.
The loving and supportive community of Church 1.0.
Working at a company that sees all forms of diversity as an asset.

I'm an evangelical minister. I now support the LGBT community — and the church should, too

By David Gushee



For Christians, the LGBT debate has always been framed as a question of sexual ethics. Our argument has centered on six or seven biblical passages that appear to mention homosexuality negatively or appear to establish a heterosexual norm: the sin of Sodom, the laws of Leviticus and the list of “the unrighteous” in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. For most of my career, these ideas formed the foundation of my views and teachings as an evangelical minister and professor of Christian ethics. I co-authored a popular textbook that stated this position flatly: “Homosexual conduct is one form of sexual expression that falls outside the will of God.” I wasn’t mean about it. But I said it.

In recent years, my moral position has shifted. It has dawned on me with shocking force that homosexuality is not primarily an issue of Christian sexual ethics. It’s primarily an issue of human suffering. With that realization, I have now made the radical decision to stand in solidarity with the LGBT community.

Working through this issue has taken me back to the very roots of my faith.

In 1978, when I was a hopelessly confused 16-year-old ex-Catholic kid, I stumbled into a Southern Baptist church near my Virginia home. I was looking for something — anything — to make sense of life. Four days later, I was a newly minted born-again convert. I was attracted by the vibrant faith, moral certainty and loving spirit of the people I met in that church. My life was transformed. By 1993, I had been ordained in a Southern Baptist church and received a doctorate in Christian ethics from Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Union Theological Seminary is a school in the liberal Protestant tradition, though at the time I remained firmly anchored as a Southern Baptist. But I was initiated into an ethical tradition that revered those very special human beings who stood against majority opinion in their era to follow God and conscience, as they understood was required of them — come what may. Teachers like Glen Stassen of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (later Fuller Seminary) and Larry Rasmussen of Union taught me about Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, the silence of most “good” Christians amid the slaughter of the innocents, and the few, great resisters such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a hero to these mentors and to me.

Studying race and black theology in a context blessed by the presence of James Cone and Cornel West, and hearing about the largely silent white church during the harrowing days of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, I came to believe that silence in the face of majority contempt for a minority is just as immoral as direct perpetration of evil. Too often, people are silent when minorities are being victimized, because majority opinion is powerful. It is hard to cut against the grain of your entire culture, and courage is costly.

Since the 1960s, when the gay rights movement began in America, Christians and their leaders have struggled to figure out how to respond to the growing tolerance of same-sex relationships. Most in Christianity have responded by offering endless debates over how to interpret that handful of biblical passages. Books erupted. Congregations fought. Denominations split.

For me, the answer to this debate has become simple: There is a sexual-minority population of about 5 percent of the human family that has received contempt and

discrimination for centuries. In Christendom, the sexual ethics based in those biblical passages metastasized into a hardened attitude against sexual- and gender-identity minorities, bristling with bullying and violence. This contempt is in the name of God, the most powerful kind there is in the world. I now believe that the traditional interpretation of the most cited passages is questionable and that all that parsing of Greek verbs has distracted attention from the primary moral obligation taught by Jesus — to love our neighbors as ourselves, especially our most vulnerable neighbors. I also now believe that while any progress toward more humane treatment of LGBT people is good progress, we need to reconsider the entire body of biblical interpretation and tradition related to this issue.

Put simply, it finally became clear to me that I must side with those who were being treated with contempt, just as I hope I would have sided with Jews in the Nazi era and with African-Americans during the civil rights years. With that realization, I began working on my new book, “Changing Our Mind.”

It is hard to describe exactly why my moral vision shifted in this way. But undoubtedly, it had much to do with my move to Atlanta in 2007 and my growing contact with LGBT people, especially fellow Christians. I hardly knew anyone who was gay before that move, but afterward, they seemed to be everywhere, and a few became very dear friends. It became clear to me — in a deeply spiritual place that I will allow no one to challenge — that God was sending LGBT people to me. The fact that one of these LGBT Christians is my dear youngest sister, Katey, has made this issue even more deeply personal for me than it would have been. The fact that one place where she developed a deep struggle with her sexuality was in evangelical churches has contributed to my new moral commitment to make evangelical families and churches safe places for LGBT people.

Evangelical Christians, such as Denny Burk and Robert Gagnon, are criticizing me because I’m now “pro-LGBT.” They want to shift the discussion immediately to the debate on same-sex relationships and the proper interpretation of those six or seven most cited Bible passages. I want to move right back to what really matters the most to me — loving this particular 5 percent of the population in exactly the same way that Christians are called to love everyone. That means attending to what most harms them and doing something about it. And that means offering full acceptance of LGBT people, ending religion-based harm and contempt, helping families accept the sexual orientation of their own children, and helping churches be a safe and welcoming place for every one of God’s children. For this reason, I have accepted invitations to contribute to the work of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Family Acceptance Project.

I am pro-LGBT in just the same way I hope I would have been pro-Jew in 1943 and pro-African American in 1963. I stand in solidarity with those treated with contempt and discrimination. And I do so because I promised in 1978 to follow Jesus wherever he leads. Even here. ▼



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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press
Association.

Blessings of this Year



Australian Kinship Meeting Brisbane, October 3-5

Marcos, Obed
and Ronaldo at the
US Kampmeeting;
Obed survived
a heart attack



connection