

connection

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metamorphosis

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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) nonprofit 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 1,550 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.

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 the address below 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.)

Cover illustration: **Metamorphose by M.C. Escher (partly)**



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or visit Kinship's website at: www.sdakinship.org



From the Editor

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, one of the few companies in the United States that made their fortune was Hallmark Greeting Cards. They offered low cost ways to celebrate the holidays for people who were literally counting their pennies. The company had wonderful artists, pithy poets, and a diligent marketing team. Christmas cards became a hit. Easter greetings followed quickly. And then there was...Valentine's Day. Scheduled in the middle of a northern hemisphere winter, the holiday answered the human need to celebrate *something—anything—* between the end-of-the-year holidays and the beginning of spring warmth. Hallmark caught the idea and ran with it to the bank. All right, all right. I am not a total troll. I do like romance and candlelight and strolls on the beach. I am just positing this little history lesson to help some of us understand why Valentine's Day is not a major holiday in Europe, Africa, South America, Antarctica, and a few other non-U.S. locales. Hallmark didn't reach them as quickly as it did Des Moines, Iowa. Despite this geographic focus, we wanted to take a look at relationships this month, a variety of relationships and lenses on them. Joc Anderson sent us an excerpt on Valentine's Day from his new devotional. Our *Local Wisdom* looks at relationships from four different perspectives. For those of us who plan on being older someday, there is a short article on the benefits of community. One of our African members sent us an article on traditional lesbian marriage among the Kurya in Tanzania. We have a movie review about a gay Roman Catholic priest, our *Health Tip of the Month*, a show of marriage support from two rabbis in Minneapolis, and a report on those with the opposite view in Rhode Island. We end with an article from Mitch Tyner that takes a look at the very large picture of relationship and community that has to do with God and the church. Throughout this issue we've shared photos of Kinship couples. As we have put it together we have thought of you and hope that you will take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



Events Calendar 2011



April

- 28 - May 1 Rehoboth Mini-Kampmeeting



June

- 26 New York Pride Fest
- 26 Netherlands Open Day



July

- 17-19 Women & Children First
- 20-24 Kampmeeting USA



September

- 9 - 12 European Kinship Meeting Paris



October

- 20 - 23 The Book & The Beach



November

- 4 - 6 Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting



December

- 30 - Jan 1 First Night in Williamsburg, Virginia



Happy
Valentine's
Day!



The Tradition of Lesbian Marriage

By Dar es Salaam

Fifteen years after her husband died, Ana Mwita, greying and wrinkled, ventured once more into matrimony, this time with a young woman in accordance with an old tradition among Tanzania's Kurya people. Living in northern Tanzania, the Kurya allow elderly women to "marry" young women to bear them children with a male relative so as to carry on the family name and also ensure they and their livestock are taken care of.

The older women are either widowed, childless, or bore only daughters who married and moved away with their husbands, leaving them alone. "I married her

in 2005," said Mwita, referring to Johari, her 23-year-old "wife" who has since had two children. "My husband died more than 15 years ago, leaving me all alone without children while we had huge tracts of land and cattle. After 10 years of being a widow, I decided, in line with the tradition here, to remarry," said 65-year-old Mwita, holding a baby boy whose three-year-old sister ambled about the homestead of three mud-walled huts.

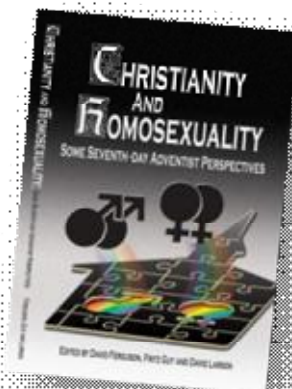
The children's father is Mwita's married nephew, whom she asked to "take care" of Johari. But the children are hers, according to the tradition. Remarrying for older

women, known as mkungus, is a costly affair by local standards, requiring them to pay a dowry, just as is customary with ordinary marriages. Nine cows, several jars of traditional gin and bundles of blankets was the bride price for Johari, who is full of praise for her "husband." "I am happy. I have what I need for me and my children and I have freedom," Johari said. Such marriages, found in Tanzania only among the Kurya, are tolerated by the authorities, although same-sex unions are theoretically illegal in the east African country which frowns on homosexuality. ▽

Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives

Submitted by Dave Ferguson

When *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* came out, we worked to have copies in Adventist college and university libraries. I have now had a request from Stanford University for the book and that made me realize we should work on contacting people we know at other institutions to see about getting it in other libraries both in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries. We are also working to make it available for Kindle. If you know anyone at a university who might request a copy for their library, please make that contact. We would, of course, like



to have them order the book from our website, www.sdagayperspectives.com. However, if you would like to make a gift to their library, that would be another option. If neither of those options works for the institution, let me know and I will work to have some copies donated to major institutions. You can contact me at churchrelations@sdakinship.org. ▽

Contemplation

By Joc Anderson

The history of Valentine's Day is shrouded in mystery. The Catholic Church recognized at least three different Saint Valentines, all of whom were martyred. Each has a different story of their noble deeds.

One Valentine was a priest who defied Emperor Claudius II's order to allow only unmarried men as soldiers. The emperor believed married men with children did not constitute better soldiers. Claudius ordered Valentine executed for disobeying his orders. Another Valentine priest was condemned to death for helping Christians escape from the harsh treatment they endured in Roman prisons. The other popular Valentine was imprisoned and before his death wrote a love letter to a young girl whom he adored and who had inspired him with her loyalty. He wrote and sent the first "valentine" greeting by signing his letter to her, "From your Valentine." Thus were the legends handed down to us of the evolution of Valentine's Day. In 498 A.D. Pope Gelasius officially declared February 14 Saint Valentine's Day.

Although the practice of Valentine's Day is not a tradition we sanction as a sacred day, February is considered the month of romance. Love will be expressed in so many ways. Some are so romantic they dine their loved one in a fine restaurant; some create a candlelight dinner in the privacy of their own home. There are more flowers sold during Valentine's Day than any other day of the year. Over a billion Valentine's cards are sent during this time of the year, making it the second-largest card-sending holiday. Eighty-five percent of the cards are purchased by women. Confectionary delights are also gifted during this day. The art of expressing one's love can affect your relationship for a lifetime. Are you ready to be someone's Valentine?

If you don't have a significant other to share this special day, choose someone who needs attention. This person can be a widow, divorcee, the elderly, or a disabled individual living alone. You will make anyone happy if you care enough to show them they are worthy.



The Author of Love is the originator of true love greetings. God promises to love



us, honor us, and cherish us regardless of our fallen state. God is faithful in His promise to us. He not only writes His love in nature but in the shedding of His blood so you might experience the love that was lost in Eden. God loves us beyond any measure of love you will experience here on Earth.

God bundled His love one night when He sent His Son as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. God loves us not just today but every day since before Earth's history began. He is faithful and ever present throughout our sojourn in this world. Don't be dismayed if Valentine's Day is "unfaithful" to you. God sends you a greeting of hope. His Son will return to take you home eternally. We shall celebrate each day with Him as the love of His life. We will enjoy eternal bliss and eternal love forever where every day will be a "Valentine's Day" experience, for He who promised is faithful. ▽



Joc Anderson was born in the Philippines and raised in both northern and southern California. He is the third eldest sibling of four boys and two girls. Joc's Seventh-day Adventist roots go back to his uncle, the late A.A. Alcaraz, who was the founder of the first Filipino Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Western Hemisphere. Joc is a graduate of Loma Linda University (B.S. Psychology, M. A. Counselor Education) and holds a doctorate of

Psychology from Southern California University for Professional Studies. His professional career has been in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Addictive Personality Disorders. Joc is an active member of La Sierra University Seventh-day Adventist Church in Riverside, CA. His interests include tennis, music, travel, and "feeding sheep."



Local Wisdom

We asked all Kinship members and our allies to share quick thoughts about what makes a strong and healthy relationship. Many thanks to the following people who took the time to share their wisdom.

Ingrid Schmidt - Frankfurt, Germany

I think a relationship is as unique as each person involved. Some 35 years ago a friend gave Frieder a little decorative wooden plate with an engraved quotation for his birthday. What was meant to be a mind-twisting joke became

meaningful to us over the years. It says, "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." Much is said about communication. What communication

boils down to is listening as well as making myself understood. This needs practice and patience. In transferring this concept to our relationship with God, I sometimes wonder if He doesn't look down on us puzzled over how we read His word.

Steve - Georgia, U.S.A.

I came up with 7 things that I think contribute to Al and me having a fun time and no disagreements in the years we have been associating together.

1. Enjoy differences.
2. Enjoy similarities.
3. Share friends.
4. Allow each to have time with one's own friends.
5. Be adventurous; try new things.
6. Be a good listener.
7. Be like God; allow time for whining.

This is when growth happens.



◀ Steven and Al ▶

David Coltheart - Queensland, Australia

David ➤

A relationship between two people is strong when there is mutual trust. You have to trust each other. Trust takes time to develop and is nurtured slowly. Trust can't be rushed and grows like a tree, with deep roots, strong trunk, and arching branches that spread slowly but confidently in response to water, nutrients, and sunshine. Trust grows in response to the love and nurture given by the other person, finds its roots in security, develops a strong trunk in adversity, spreads its branches to embrace the other person, and flourishes in the sunshine of mutual encouragement, joy, and open sharing. Trust is something intangible and comes only through constant communication,

remembering and reliving experiences, and building from one good experience to another. Trust develops as you learn more about the other person, believe the words spoken, see the promises fulfilled, and realise that you can depend on them. One moment of madness can break months or years of trust and undo all the many good experiences. Once broken, trust can take many long years to rebuild, if ever. How much better it is to never break trust! With trust comes commitment, whether spoken or unspoken. Commitment implies that, in good times as well as bad, you will be true and faithful. Commitment is a principle of action that defines what you will



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do, no matter what the circumstances. Commitment is unconditional and is the expression of what two people should feel about each other when following the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The photo of me was taken

in the rainforest near my house on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. I am standing on a narrow swing bridge crossing a small river. This is one example of trust! The swing bridge was suspended on wire ropes strung between the two sides of the gorge. The structure

swayed as we walked across it, and the gaps between the planks that formed the walkway showed more of the river below than I would have normally liked; but we made it across! We had to trust the bridge!



Rom Wilder – Virginia, U.S.A.

Often I see something that reminds me of an old friend who left too soon. In the split second between seeing it and knowing my thought cannot be true, I think, "Oh, Kathleen would love this!" or "I wonder if Caleb has a hat like this; it looks like something he'd wear." And then it's gone. It changes. It becomes something in the past, neither in the present nor in the future. Whether you call it dying or passing, I've lost them.

A friend pointed me to an author who, in spite of our theological differences, often writes the words that were waiting in the corners of my head, just waiting to be spoken. This quote from Frederick Buechner reminds me that I haven't really lost Kathleen and Caleb and Judi and Merlin and Jim and Ed, because I remember them. "When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with

you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, you will know me. It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart. For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost. When I'm feeling most ghost-like, it is your remembering me that helps remind me that I actually exist. When I'm feeling sad, it's my consolation. When I'm feeling happy, it's part of why I feel that way." ▽



We would like to honor and congratulate Kees Meiling and Ruud Kieboom who registered their relationship on February 14, 1994.



**Make someone feel important today....
..it's never too late to live happily ever after**

- unknown



Aging in Community

From: "Moving beyond Place: Aging in Community" by William H. Thomas and Janice M. Blanchard. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*. Summer 2009, 12-17.

Atruism in American gerontological literature is that most Americans want to remain in their homes for as long as possible. They do not want to move to a retirement community or old-age residence. Many projects related to aging are now designed to fulfill this dream. The authors of this article take another perspective. They chide people who hold living in place as the ultimate social good and suggest instead that, for many people, this goal is a mirage or a fantasy. "The bitter truth is that an older person can succeed at remaining in her or his own home and still live a life as empty and difficult as that experienced by nursing home residents. Feeling compelled to stay in one's home, no matter what, can result in dwindling choices and mounting levels of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom." The authors suggest that what is important is the actual quality of life one experiences, and not where it is lived.

They suggest that the challenge is to find another way to maximize the diversity of facets that a good life includes. The first step is to debunk the old American virtue of idealized independence and rugged individualism, which supports the notion that living alone at home is the ideal choice. Instead they suggest a third option they call *Aging in Community*. This approach involves the creation of "intentional communities." These living arrangements may be quite varied, but the idea is to create custom communities that combine private living quarters with shared communal spaces, such as dining room, library, laundry, and other communal spaces, such as lawns, pools, porches, and studios. Such communities are usually founded on similar spiritual, social, or political beliefs or other shared values or commitments. They include co-housing, communes, eco-villages, ashrams, kibbutzim, and cooperative housing. The co-housing arrangement is usually composed of 30 homes, with shared facilities, and shared responsibilities and resources. Today there are about 113 of these in the U.S. There are also spontaneous communities, such as the well-Beacon Hill neighborhood in Boston, in which neighbors came together to form a non-profit organization that helps support people living in their own homes. Included are systems for collaborating and helping one another to live almost independently. (Certainly the spirit of individualism is alive and well in Boston, if somewhat modified by current conditions and goals.) As the authors point out, such collaborative living arrangements are highly effective and much less costly than nursing home care, which depends on public finances to operate. Multigenerational living is also encouraged because each generation has something of value to offer the others, and living together may solve many problems that living segregated cannot. With the expanded numbers of the elderly, it is indeed time for such innovation. Elders today are forging a new future. ▽

Health Tip of the Month

if you want to stay faithful to your diet or lose more weight, eat a handful of nuts when you get the munchies. Despite their high fat and calorie count, nuts are the perfect diet food. Research shows that people who eat nuts lose more weight and are more likely to stick to their weight loss plans than people who don't nibble on this ultra-satisfying snack. Nuts boost weight loss efforts in three ways. First, they satisfy hunger, helping people to eat less later.



Second, research shows that eating nuts helps people burn more calories at rest. And finally—because of how the body digests them—nuts might actually deliver fewer calories than you think (in fact, fewer calories per serving than nutrition labels suggest). Yep, sounds like nuts just might be the superfood of all superfoods. ▽

Uganda Bars Media from Outing Gays

This was sent to us by a Kinship member in Uganda.

A Ugandan High Court judge has ruled that media companies in the country should not publish the identities of people they say are homosexuals. The decision was described as a “landmark ruling” by gay rights activists. The case was brought against the *Rolling Stone* newspaper [not the one published in the United States], which last year published several lists of people its editor said were gay. Many said they were attacked after their names and photos were printed. Homosexual acts are illegal in Uganda, and activists say the gay community still lives in fear. “The judge granted a permanent injunction against *Rolling Stone* from publishing these names,” lawyer John Francis Onyango, who represented the three gay rights campaigners who brought the case, told AFP. “But the ruling went beyond these applicants and extended to all media,” he added.

“Principled Step”

The newspaper argued that, as the three people who brought the case were known gay rights leaders, it could not be punished for saying they were homosexuals. But Judge Vincent Musoke-Kibuuke ruled that their lives had been threatened as they risked being attacked by vigilantes, Mr. Onyango said.

One of the articles published had the headline “Hang them” above a list of names and photos. The three were also awarded 1.5m Ugandan shillings (\$650; £430; 500 Euros) in compensation, and the newspaper was ordered to pay all associated legal costs. One of the petitioners, Pepe Julian Onziema, told the BBC’s *Focus on Africa* programme that she welcomed the ruling. “It sets precedent in this country, and across Africa,” she said. “A lot of the danger that we have been facing has been the result of the local media here. It’s basically set a standard for the media to begin treating us as humans, as part of the community.” Ms. Onziema said compensation was “not an

important factor for us,” and that it had been more a question of protecting lives. “We’d had enough because we were in lots of danger already—then *Rolling Stone* went a notch higher by calling for the hanging of gay people,” she added. “We had to put a stop to it.”

A coalition grouping together human rights campaigners said they were pleased the High Court had taken this “principled step.” “This ruling is a landmark not only for sexual and other minorities living in Uganda, but also an important precedent for other countries facing similar issues,” the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law in Uganda said in a statement. Last year, a local MP called for the death penalty for some homosexual acts. The proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill sparked an international outcry and a year later has not been formally debated by Parliament. ▽

Source:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12107596>

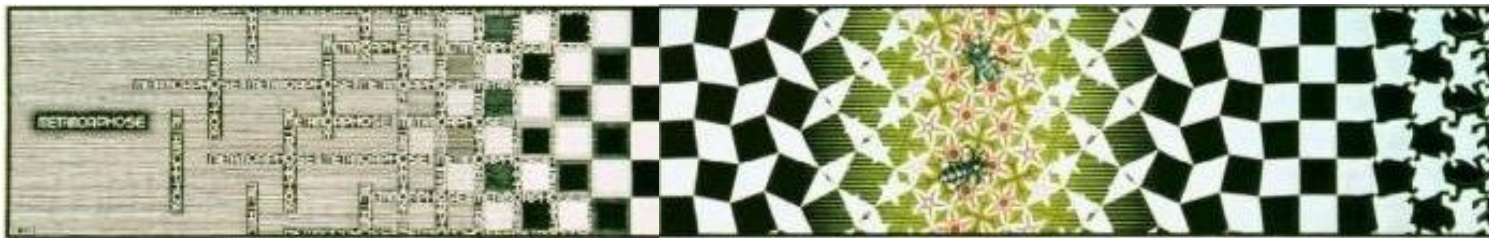
And from Rhode Island...

PROVIDENCE, R.I.

The local chapter of the National Organization for Marriage plans to launch a \$100,000 TV advertising campaign aimed at defeating the legalization of same-sex marriage in Rhode Island. The first TV ad scheduled for airing on Tuesday will challenge “Governor Lincoln Chafee’s claim to have a mandate to redefine marriage,” according to a news release issued by the group that misspelled new Governor Lincoln D. Chafee’s

name. “Lincoln Chafee got just 36% of the vote in the recent election, and fewer popular votes than the Cool Moose Party’s candidate for Lieutenant Governor,” Christopher Plante, executive director of NOM-RI, said in the release. “Our message is that getting 36% of the vote is no mandate to redefine the institution of marriage for all of Rhode Island society.” The ad was not available in advance for review. But Plante, in his news release, said the independent Chafee—who won office by

beating Republican, Democrat, and Moderate Party candidates—is “an accidental governor for Rhode Island, elected in the most unusual of circumstances.... Yet he expects legislators to follow him off the cliff in pursuit of same-sex marriage.” “If legislators in Rhode Island wish to redefine marriage, they should put this issue on the ballot where the people themselves can decide if they wish to abandon one of the most fundamental institutions of society,” Plante said. ▽



Metamorphosis: A Different “Change Ministry”

By Mitch Tyner

I was born before television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, photocopiers, contact lenses, Frisbees, and The Pill. There were no credit cards, laser beams, or ballpoint pens, no air conditioners, dishwashers, clothes dryers. The clothes were hung out to dry in the fresh air, and man had yet to walk on the moon. We never heard of FM radios, tape decks, CDs, electric typewriters (let alone laptops). Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and instant coffee were unheard of. We had 5- & 10-cent stores where you could actually buy things for 5 and 10 cents. Having a meaningful relationship meant getting along with your cousins. The term “making out” referred to how you did on the big exam. “Grass” was mowed, “coke” was a cold drink, and “pot” was something your mother cooked in. “Aids” were helpers in the principal's office, “chip” meant a piece of wood, “hardware” was found in a hardware store, and “software” wasn't even a word. A “gay old time” meant a really swinging party. “Kinship” referred to how close you were related to your cousins. It's called “life in the past lane.”

Other changes have come about in that same time span. Back then politicians bickered, but there was not the polarization in politics and society at large that we see today. We would never have seen blog postings such as “Burn the Koran,” “The president is a Muslim socialist,” “Jews control the media,” “Immigrants are invading America,” and “God Hates Fags.” As one commentator recently put it, “Hate has become an American voter value.”

Change has also come to the church. Back then 75% of the Adventist church lived in North America, not 6% as it is today. And if we foresaw that change, we saw it as something to celebrate, not a time when the rest of the world would block North American efforts to move the church in a progressive direction. Nor did we foresee a day when the great issues dividing Adventists would be creationism, women's ordination, and LGBTI acceptance—all three related

to a desperate effort to hold on to a literalistic view of scripture. But that is where we now are.

In the 1960s, many of us young seminarians had a dream—a dream of a church that would retain the best traditions and ideas of Adventism, while placing some of its practices originating in and appropriate to the 19th century in historical perspective. We dreamed of a church that would value human dignity and equality, and encourage its members to be all they could be without trying to change them into something they could not be.

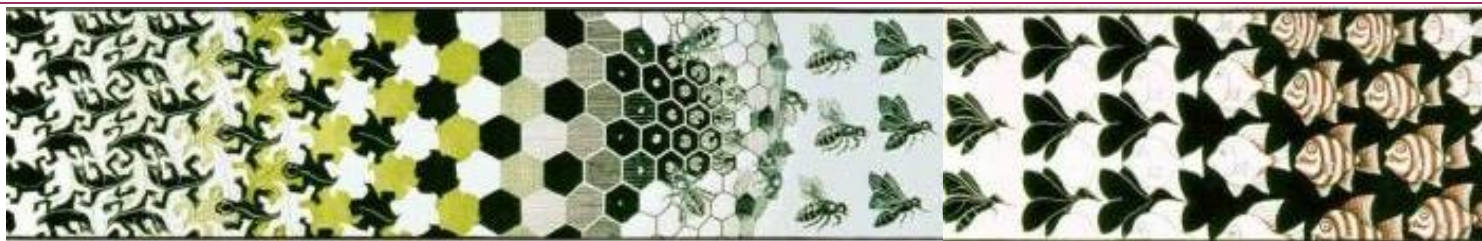
We've made much progress towards fulfillment of that dream—yes, we have—but we aren't there yet. Full attainment of the dream will require even more change. Let me say some things about change and then look at a biblical example of how the church has dealt with it.

First, change is inevitable. Change is not always good or bad, it just is; it happens because of us or in spite of us. Change can be managed, but it cannot be avoided forever.

Second, change brings winners and losers. Someone has a vested interest in keeping the status quo, and that person will usually perceive proposed change as a threat to his/her position, interests, or security.

Third, for the foregoing reason, change is threatening. As a young pastor, I once—and only once—saw an order of service that had not changed for many years and I suggested revisions. The older generation of members protested that “we've always done it that way.” For them that was a good reason to keep it the same; to me, at that time, the same words represented a good reason to update. They had a vested interest in the status quo, but I didn't. The passing years have made me far more understanding of their viewpoint.

Ultimately, change in our order of service occurred, as more and more younger members wanted it. That's what happens—change occurs. So the question is not whether to allow change in our lives, but how we should respond to it.



Fortunately, we have a biblical example of how the church should, and did, cope with divisive, emotion-laden change: the book of Acts, chapters 10 and 11.

This story occurs against a background of division and uncertainty. After the crucifixion and resurrection, the young church struggled to define itself. Its witness was at that time exclusively to other Jews. As they had been taught, the new Christians rejected Gentiles as equals before God. The church didn't know yet that it was not merely a renewal movement within Judaism, but a whole new creature, charged by God to take His message of equal acceptance to the entire world.

With that scenario in mind, let's allow the story to speak for itself:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"



The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my ➤



house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way

of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

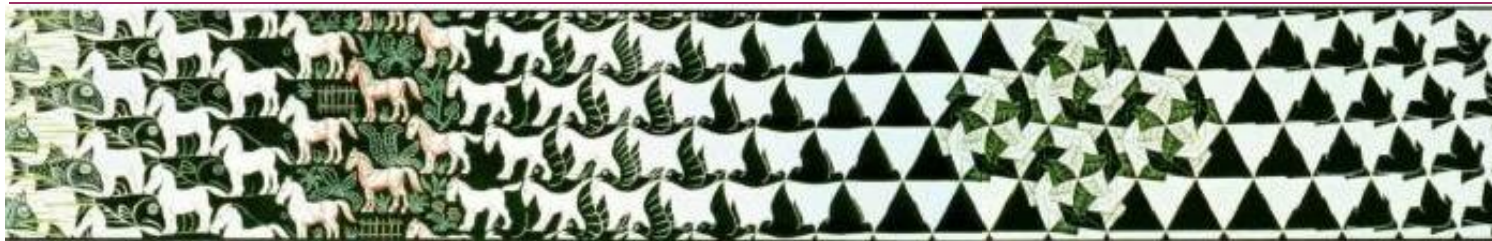
Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

When they heard this, they had no further objec-



tions and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

This was no small event! Luke has Paul repeating the story three times, just as the sheet was shown to Paul three times, to emphasize its importance. It was important; it changed the outreach and therefore the very nature of the nascent church!

But Paul's words to the believers in Jerusalem were hard for them to hear. They had a strong vested interest in the status quo. Paul's message upset their entire world view and their comfortable interpretation of scripture as giving them and those like them privileged status. They were forced to realize that their mission was not to remain in a comfortable enclave of special chosenness, but to proclaim the equality of all who would accept the gift of salvation. To their credit the "brethren" in Jerusalem heard Paul out and immediately discerned both the Divine origin and the transformative nature of his story. In a very real sense, the history of the Christian church began at that moment.

That change was difficult. Change to cherished positions is like that. But Luke's story shows that it can be done. Change altered the church and left it far better suited to carry out its mission. That kind of change is still possible. It is still necessary if the church is to properly proclaim the message of human dignity and equality in approaching God. It happened once, and it can and *must* happen again.

Remember the dream I described earlier? It is a dream of a church that retains the best traditions and ideas of Adventism, while placing some of its practices originating in and appropriate to the 19th century in historical perspective, a church that values human dignity and equality, and encourages its members to be all they could be without trying to

"change" them into something they could not be.

Sometimes the dream seems dim, especially when we see the church turn its back on those very ideals of equality and dignity. That dream is alive! And it is up to us to keep it that way! That dream can be fulfilled! It can happen; it must and will happen: the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the wider Christian church proclaiming that God is no respecter of persons, and that we dare not call any person common or unclean.

One final observation: Change in Paul's day took leadership, and it still does. That's where we come in. It is our task to witness to truth, to never give up, to cherish the dream, and to bring it to fruition.

Earlier this year Patsy and I spent a month in Iran. Two memories stand out. First, the utter lack of the anti-American animus we feared we might meet.

When governments and organizations are not in the way, people have an amazing ability to accept each other and get along. Second, a remark made near the end of our stay by one who shall remain anonymous but who is a close observer of the Iranian

scene. He told us that one of the first actions of the revolutionary government thirty years ago was to proscribe contraception. The unforeseen result of that ban is that the population of Iran has doubled. It now includes millions of young, educated, informed, and increasingly affluent professionals who care little for the dress codes and other restrictions placed upon them by the government. Our interlocutor said, "They are our hope for the future. They are the embers under the ashes."

Perhaps that describes our place. As we look around us and survey a church that too often seems to be moving to oppose that for which we dream, we must be the "embers under the ashes," keeping the fire alive and waiting for the day when the Spirit fans the flames into reality. ▽

Change altered the church and left it far better suited to carry out its mission.

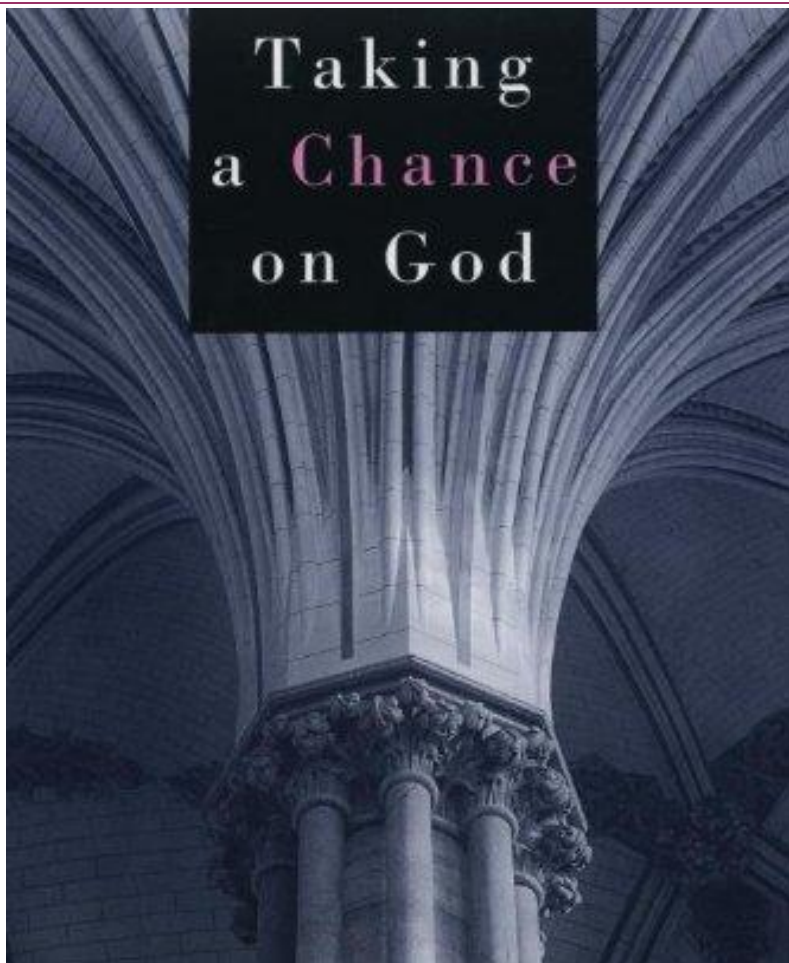


Silence to Speech Films Presents:

T*aking A Chance on God* tells the story of 85-year-old John McNeill, Catholic priest and pioneering advocate for LGBT human rights. The film traces his life from a childhood in Buffalo, his months as a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany, his call to priesthood, and his ongoing passion for justice and equality. In the 1960s, with fellow Jesuit Dan Berrigan, he was a herald for peace and nonviolence at the height of the Vietnam War. After the Stonewall riots of June 1969, John McNeill became a voice of liberation for gay people. In 1972, he co-founded the gay and lesbian Catholic group, Dignity NY. In 1976, he published the groundbreaking classic *The Church and the Homosexual*; and his coming out on the *Today* show in 1976, before millions, was historic. In the 1980s, he proclaimed hope, dignity, compassion, and respect for the gay community in the face of the despair and derision of the darkest days of the AIDS crisis.

On April 14, 1987, John's Jesuit superiors arrived at his apartment at 98th Street in NYC. In English and Latin they read to him the Vatican "Decree of Expulsion." John McNeill, Jesuit priest of 40 years standing, was expelled from his religious community because of disobedience to Vatican authorities; specifically, he had questioned magisterial Roman Catholic teaching on homosexuality. This expulsion was the final act of a drama unfolding since 1977.

In 1983, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and now Pope Benedict XVI, had sent an order of silence. When Cardinal Ratzinger issued the October 1986 *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, defining homosexuality as "an objective disorder" and "a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil," Dignity chapters were expelled from Catholic parishes. It was the height of the AIDS crisis, and the callousness of the *Letter* compounded untold suffering and distress. John McNeill broke the Vatican-imposed silence he had endured for nine years and refused to end his public ministry among the gay community. In conscience, he wrote to his superiors from the Abbey of Gethsemani; he could no longer be silent. He was dismissed, finally, in the words of the decree, because of his "pertinacious disobedience." Profoundly hurt, but without bitterness, John nevertheless continued his ministry as a therapist, a retreat director, and through his writing. On the road, or from his blog, John continues to be that same voice today, proclaiming same-sex love as holy, and encouraging lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons around the world.



In the film, McNeill is a natural storyteller, whether at a kitchen table or in his homilies and retreats. He details his life as a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany and the survival he owes to the kindness of a stranger, and chronicles the early days of lesbian and gay liberation through stories from the Gospel. McNeill is a figure who inspires some and frustrates others with his tenacious spirit of hope and trust. His scholarly books and articles, translated into many languages, reflect his brilliant mind and wisdom. He is a serious-minded psychotherapist and theologian, and those who know him well know too how readily he turns to laughter and song. There is a tenderness to John McNeill, easily felt in his warm and welcoming embrace.

Wherever he goes, John introduces and gives thanks for Charles Chiarelli, his partner of 45 years. *Taking A Chance on God* is a story of the heart; it is the story of John McNeill's love for his Church, his gay community, his Jesuit brothers, and his beloved Charlie. With honesty and emotion, he reflects on the challenges and joys of these defining relationships; and, in a particular way, that with Charlie. *Taking A Chance on God* gives a rare look into the heart of one inspiring man's journey, as he negotiates his life as a Catholic priest and as a gay man. ▽

An Important Message from Rabbi Latz & Rabbi Simon

Chanukkah 5771/December 2010

Dear Shir Tikvah Congregants & Friends:

We pray this finds you and your family well and your spirits brightened during our Festival of Lights.

We are writing to share a meaningful and important decision with you. This past Thursday night, Rabbi Latz shared with Shir Tikvah's Board of Trustees that he and Rabbi Simon will no longer sign civil marriage licenses and serve as agents of the state government that permits some couples to receive a legal marriage license and refuses a license to other couples. As your rabbis, we will continue to officiate at religious weddings of two loving adults, but we will not sign the legal marriage licenses until all couples in Minnesota can receive them.

We are grateful, humbled, and buoyed by the board's enthusiastic and emotional support. Several board members, some with tears in their eyes, said, "Thank you."

What does this mean? As your rabbis, we will continue to officiate at religious weddings (in which at least one of the two adults being married is Jewish), on the bimah, beneath the chuppah, signing your ketubah, and shouting "mazel tov" when you smash the glass! Heterosexual couples who wish to be legally married will need to make arrangements with the county to fill out the appropriate paper work to be civilly wed.

We have both spent years in reflection and prayerful discernment about marriage inequality in our society and what a grave injustice it is that the state will grant some couples a marriage license—and the 515 Minnesota state benefits and responsibilities that go with that license—and deny marriage licenses to other loving and committed couples. While we haven't been able to change the state policy yet, we will raise our voices and take this small step for justice. We now join with other clergy who refuse to be agents of state-sanctioned injustice and discrimination and we invite the rest of our fellow clergy to join us in our pursuit of liberty and equality.

The Shir Tikvah board was vocal and unequivocal in their support for our decision. This sacred partnership between the rabbis, board, and members of Shir Tikvah is an essential value of our history, our mission, and our vision for the future. Shir Tikvah has courageously taken stands in favor of full marriage equality and against any amendments to the Minnesota State Constitution that would enshrine discrimination and inequality. As Shir Tikvah's founders boldly proclaimed more than 22 years ago, "We are fully committed to a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, race, age, or sexual orientation."

Rabbi Latz reflects, "Over the years, I've spoken with many fellow clergy members, friends, colleagues, and congregants about my unease with signing legal marriage ➤

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licenses. I am grateful to each person who helped shape my thinking and this decision; I am especially indebted to Elaine Frankowski, whose stirring Rosh HaShanah Evening D'var Torah (sermon) this past September helped me realize that I could no longer waver nor wait." Being part of a congregation where members raise their voices so courageously illuminates the Divine Presence in our lives and makes both of us deeply proud to be your rabbis.



Adam Latz and Melissa Simon

Bivrikat Shalom ~ With Blessings for Peace,
Rabbi Michael Adam Latz, Senior Rabbi
Rabbi Melissa B. Simon, Director of Lifelong Learning ▽

You
are
my
Valentine



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