connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 38, No. 4, April/May 2014

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.

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE
www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN
Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

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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.)

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST KINSHIP

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.

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

Last month the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held a summit on homosexuality in Cape Town, South Africa. As you know from Kinship's April *eNews*, the organizers diligently worked to make sure that no Kinship voices were present. Ted Wilson began the conference supporting some of the most socially conservative voices in the Adventist Church. What is interesting is how Ella Simmons, one of the General Conference vice presidents, chose to end the summit, even though the conference organizers cut her speaking time in half. You'll find her words on day four of Jeroen Tuinstra's report. It is also interesting that the North American Division plans to hold meetings next month to discuss ways to make the churches in that division more openly caring of their LGBTI members. In June the Dutch Union of Seventh-day Adventists has invited an entire Safe Places team to train pastors in their churches.

Last month we focused our issue on the voices and experiences of Kinship members. This month the voices will be those of our allies, some of whom have put their careers on the line to speak for us. Reinder Bruinsma gave the devotional "To Act Justly" at our Building Safe Places—for Everyone meetings last month. We have a story by the friend of a gay student at Andrews University. Jeroen's report is lengthy and has been shared in some other venues. Even so we wanted all of you to get a chance to hear what he said. We shared these reports with you because we want you to know that, even when you go through challenging interacttions with church members or family discussions or political bigotry, you are not alone. We have people we may never know of, much less meet, who speak out for us. Don't let the hurtful voices harm you or still your words. Take good care of yourself...for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

Calendar 2014

The Annual Pre-Kampmeeting Event

Women and Children First

July 11-15

Angels Rest in Fayetteville, Georgia (south of Atlanta)

Kinship's Kampmeeting Event

SDA Kinship Kampmeeting

July 15-20

The Lodge at Simpsonwood, Northeast Atlanta

The Annual European Event

European Kinship Meeting

August 28-September 1

St. Mark's College, Saffron Walden, England

Following EKM in Europe

EKM-Holiday

September 1-8

Merman Farm, Tideswell, Derbyshire, England

***"Visions of God"* Book and the Beach**

Mini-Kampmeeting

September 18-21

Nags Head, North Carolina

9th Annual

Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting

November 6-9

At the base of Okemo Mountain in Ludlow, Vermont

For more information about these events visit Kinship's website at

http://www.sdakinship.org/index.php/coming-events/

To Act Justly

By Reinder Bruinsma

> O people, the Lord has told you what is good and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.
> —Micah 6:8

O people—*Adam*—as the Hebrew reads—O people, whoever and wherever you are, and whenever you have lived or live; O people of Judah in the eighth century BC; O people in the 21st century AD.

Listen. This is what the Lord has told you so many times—this is nothing new. This is what he *requires*. It is not an option. This is what you *must* do. You must do what is *right*. As Peterson paraphrases in *The Message*: "You must do what is fair and just."

Micah 6:8 is one of the best known verses in the Old Testament. There is not much, however, to say about Micah. There is no introductory passage about his background or calling. We are only told that he comes from Moreshet, a village some 20 miles south of Jerusalem. And we know that he was a contemporary of Isaiah.

Micah addresses, in particular, the people in the southern kingdom of Judah, mainly during the reign of Jotam and Achaz. The prophetic book that he left us is structured somewhat differently from most other prophetic books. It contains a cycle of criticism and accusations on the one hand, and promises of hope and healing on the other hand. This is what we find in most prophetic writings.

But here it is not just one cycle, but it is repeated three times.

Each time the message, however, is the same:

- God hates the sin of injustice. Pious behavior cannot make up for that.
- He hates the rich whose only aim is to get more.
- He hates dishonesty and violence.
- He hates the false prophets, who only proclaim what people like to hear.
- He hates the priests who just do their job for money and status.

One particular issue is emphasized: The poor are deprived of their property; they are deprived of their land in particular. That is serious. It goes against the basic principle of Israelite society and upsets the entire social fabric. As a result, there are many who are left behind—many who are mistreated, in particular women and orphans.

Micah has a word of the Lord for those who are guilty: God does not so much look at external pious deeds. He does not weigh and count the sacrifices you bring and that may give you such a self-righteous feeling. He is not primarily interested in the cultic elements of religion, in particular when they have taken on a life of their own.

He wants you to *act justly*—to do *mispat*. That is, to practice the requirements of God's laws as they relate to other people. This means in actual practice:

- To give back to people what is their due;
  to deliver the downtrodden and the oppressed.
- In other words, to focus on what is ethical and relational;
  to build safe places for those who are often looked upon as second class citizens, or worse.

Act justly-today

What do we make of Micah's message about justice and integrity? What do these words mean today?

First of all, we are asked to *act*. Not merely to preach, write articles, read books, dialogue, have seminars—but to act. Theory must be put into *practice*. *Acting justly* presupposes intentionality. It presupposes knowledge of the norms and principles that are derived from God's law. It also presupposes inclusiveness: recognition of the fact that all people are children of the heavenly Father.

Acting justly often demands *courage*: sticking out our neck, refusing easy solutions, avoiding procrastination, and rejecting compromise. *Acting justly* may cause short-term problems and tensions. Nonetheless, it is the only way that will guarantee long-term *shalom*.

Just—justly—justice. These terms often run contrary to our own interests. They are not about success or profit, but about principles and people.

Acting justly impacts on all domains of life, globally, nationally, and regionally—also within the church and within our families.

We hear a lot about the Christian pursuit of global justice. Maybe we don't hear enough about it in the Adventist Church. Global poverty and inequality are a terrible shame! How can we sleep well when hundreds of millions of other human beings do not have enough to eat? How can we take an expensive vacation when hundreds of millions have no adequate health care provisions and no decent roof over their heads? How can we feel at ease while our part of the world becomes ever more affluent, while other parts of the world never seem to catch up and remain trapped in poverty?

Do you never ask yourself that kind of questions?

Even if *we* do not see the poverty, God does. Even though *we* do not hear the cry of the children that go hungry, God does. Even though *we* may forget the millions who must find shelter under a few rusty sheets of metal, God does not forget them for a moment.

It is no coincidence that the Scriptures refer to poverty more than 2,100 times. And remember: the only time Christ directly condemned people was when (in Matthew 25) He condemned those who overlooked and ignored the weak and the dispossessed.

Bono, the Irish lead singer of the band U2, was so right, when he said:

God is in the slums;
in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house.
God is in the silence of the mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives.
God is in the debris of wasted opportunities and wasted lives,

Act justly-globally

This is not just directed at governments and at multinationals. It is not just a warning for President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron. Or Chancellor Angela Merkel. But, yes, it is also for them, whether they realize it or not. Politicians do have a heavy responsibility. Some fifty years ago President Eisenhower said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, is in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."

But it is also a message for each one of us, in particular for all those who profess to be disciples of Christ.

To act justly is to understand that there are things that are totally and absolutely wrong, some things that are non-negotiable.

- To understand that the life we have is a gift from God and that we must be good stewards of that gift.
- To understand that the resources of this earth must be shared in a fair and equitable way.
- To understand that the farmers in Africa and South America must get a fair price for their coffee and cocoa.
- To be consistent—not just to sign letters for Amnesty or sign petitions to protest homo-rights, but also to refrain from investing our savings in funds that are invested in companies that oppress people or fabricate weapons.
- Of course, to support agencies that help people in need.
- And to make clear to our brothers and sisters in Uganda that they must protest the legislation that president Museveni recently signed into law.

But *acting justly* must also touch us closer to home. What about us as a church? Do we *act justly*? Do we know what it means to share our resources? Or do we only look after our own organization? Our own local church?

And what is more, do we look after the weak and the vulnerable in our congregations? Do we *build safe places* for all, or have we marginalized some who have received the gift of life in a different kind of package?

As an individual—in my family, towards my partner, my children, my friends—do I *act justly*? Can they rely on my support? Can they be sure of my unconditional love? Do I always do what is right and fair? Remember: This is not just *advisable*. This is what God *requires* of you and of me.

Micah is clear that bringing sacrifices is, in itself, useless. That was true in Micah's days and is just as true today. Also for us. Hear once more Micah's words:

People, all of you, listen:
This is what God requires of you:
not first all your sacrifices—
they mean in themselves very little.
They mean nothing when you do not first of all do what God requires:
To act humbly, to love mercy, and to walk justly with your God.

Adapted from a worship during the* Building Safe Places *meeting in Hassenroth, Germany, March 4, 2014

By Melodie Roschman

April 9, 2014, *Student Movement* (Andrews University student newspaper)

Until recently, I had never really thought about being straight—if you asked me who I was, I would tell you I was someone who adored books, talked a lot, wanted to move to Europe, and enjoyed gourmet cooking long before I even thought to mention that I liked boys. I experience straight privilege —I am allowed to have a life, not a "lifestyle." People treat me as an individual, not a representative of an entire group of people. Perhaps most importantly, I am allowed to be complex instead of defined by one aspect of who I am. The journey to realizing that this is unfair has taken most of my life.

In elementary school, "gay" was an adjective mostly reserved for homework. "This assignment is so gay!" someone would complain, as if a math worksheet could have a sexual identity. Of course, even at eight years old, I knew that when they said "gay" they meant "stupid, irritating, wrong." It wasn't until much later that I realized that was a problem.

Melodie Roschman

In 2005, Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. I listened to the adults around me making disparaging comments and proclaiming this to be another "birth pang" of the End Times; but when no one was watching, I looked at pictures in the newspaper of couples celebrating the new legislation. They didn't look freakish or depraved. They looked normal. They looked happy.

I think that was the beginning of my personal cognitive dissonance between what the church taught and what I was beginning to believe. Ever an observer and cataloguer of the world around me, I started collecting examples to support both sides of the rift forming in my mind. On the one hand—oft-circulated stories of child abuse, sexual repression, and promiscuity. The message repeated again and again that if you were gay, there was something terribly wrong with you. On the other hand? When I was fifteen, I remember watching an episode of the medical TV show *House* where a lesbian woman donated a lobe of her liver to her partner after an accident, even though she knows she cheated on her. The story moved me to tears, and I remember turning to my dad and asking, "Do you think that, in some way, gay people can really love each other? What she did was beautiful."

The deciding factor in my struggle was my friend Tom. One sunny Sabbath afternoon while we sat on the grass joking around and people-watching, he told me he was gay. I wasn't surprised, but I still felt the revelation subtly change the way I saw him. Before, he had been someone who always beat me at board games, who did hilarious impressions of teachers and celebrities, who would always offer me a ride when it was raining, even if it took him out of his way. Now, he was "Tom, my gay friend."

The problem was that he hadn't changed at all. I had, and it disturbed me to the core. Tom told me about how he wanted to get married and adopt kids from all over the world, so that they could learn that family is about more than just genetics. He wanted to go to Little League games and read his kids bedtime stories and take them to museums. He wanted to devote himself to someone and sacrifice for them, putting them above himself for the rest of his life. How could I tell him that his desire was wrong? How could it be wrong?

Tom is one of the most Christlike people I know. He is constantly asking questions and reaffirming his faith—and more importantly, he lives Jesus' love. He is the one who has been there when I broke down crying over a failed relationship, when I was stressed over school, when I was questioning how God could let my aunt die of cancer. Who am I to doubt his relationship with God? Who am I to tell him that I see a speck in his eye when there is a veritable forest in my own?

I've spent a long time wrestling spiritually over this, and I don't have an easy, simple answer. I don't think there is one. All I know is that we see through a glass darkly, but we will someday see face-to-face. I have to believe that I worship a God who is loving and welcoming to all those who seek Him, because they are His creations. Even as I write this now, I'm torn in a different way—between recoiling at how ignorant I have been (and no doubt still continue to be), and being afraid of proclaiming publicly that I support LGBTQ people. Then I'm hit by another wave of guilt, because being an ally is nothing compared to the pressure, fear, and judgment that LGBTQ people face every day, in the church and outside of it.

For a long time after I started to question how I felt about the LGBTQ community, I figured this was something I could keep to myself. It wasn't my business. I could stick to vague statements and modifiers like, "Regardless of how you feel about this issue…" and it would be fine. But this isn't just an "issue." It's a group of people who are the precious, beautiful, wonderfully-and-fearfully-made children of God.

When I became *Student Movement* editor, I realized that I had a power that few people on this campus do. I had the opportunity to be a megaphone to those who were quieted. I had a responsibility to the students of Andrews University–all of the students–to be their voice. With that in mind, we have created the first ever LGBTQ-centered issue of the *Student Movement*–and, I would suspect, one of the first of its kind in the entire church. These 12 pages are not here to start a debate. I am not asking you to change your theology. I am simply asking you to be willing to listen.

Furthermore, if you are part of the LGBTQ community, or you're still discovering who you are, I want to dedicate this issue to you. You are a valuable and valiant person beloved by God, and I am inspired by your courage in being honest about your identity. I am so sorry for how you have been hurt in the past by people you should have been able to turn to. My prayer is that together we can grow in our understanding and worship of our ever-loving God, a God for whom "There is no fear in love, because perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18). ▼

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

—Norman Vincent Peale

General Conference Summit on "Alternative Sexualities" Cape Town, South Africa

A report by Jeroen Tuinstra

Jeroen Tuinstra is the President of the Belgium/Luxembourg Conference.

Day 1: A Conversation of Hope?

March 17, 2014

After two days of wandering around Cape Town, South Africa, soaking up the sun, enjoying a good Springbok steak, being impressed by the beautiful sights of Table Mountain, and meeting the ever friendly and polite people of this town, I had to start the work for which I had really come. Tonight was the first evening of the General Conference (GC) summit, "In God's Image." In our welcome letter, which was sent a couple of months before, the purpose of this summit is to have "a conversation with key people in the global leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to gain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding alternative sexualities, and to counsel together regarding the challenges the church is facing in this area, in order to find a way to be redemptive as well as obedient to the teachings of Scripture in a more consistent manner around the world."

Before the summit started, it was already the center of some discussion, especially among the more supportive groups of the GC-coined term: alternative sexualities. A blog on the *Huffington Post* (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eliel-cruz/seventhday-adventist-anti_b_4942615.html) argues that the summit is just another "echo chamber" and only allows voices to be heard that follow the GC's party line. Kinship, an organization that tries to give a voice to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex Adventists, complained in an open letter to the chairman of the organizing committee, Dr. Pardon Mwansa, also general vice president of the General Conference, that they and other similar organizations were excluded from this conversation. Even a letter from an Adventist parent of a gay son, addressed to the same chairman, is floating around, pointing out that delegates to the summit will only hear stories from so called ex-gays, which are in no way representative of the stories of the many LGBTIs in our church.

So you could say that the summit is off to a good start. My hopes for an open conversation and a gain of better understanding were a little bit raised by the welcoming speeches of the respective presidents or representatives of the divisions, unions, and conferences. Especially the representative of the Cape Conference lifted my hopes; he suggested to the delegates that perhaps an unorthodox, yet very Adventist, solution was needed for this challenge. According to Mandla S. Lupondwana, the Cape Conference representative, we needed to move beyond names and labels. This was after the division president, Paul Ratsara, was happy that this summit took place in South Africa, the rainbow nation of Nelson Mandela. So at least our hosts seem to be open for this conversation.

Unfortunately, that was about all the hopes for an open and honest conversation about the topic for that evening. The General Conference president, Ted Wilson, tried to make sure that the outcome of this counseling together of key people in the global leadership was that we would not "revise our definition of brokenness" but that we renewed our "commitment to hold up God's biblical standard in all sexual behavior." So the purpose of this conversation and the gaining of understanding is to better, and in more friendly ways, condemn LGBTIs' behavior. In his opening speech, Brother Wilson made sure to emphasize that we were all sinners and that no sin was worse than the other, yet all sin could be overcome by the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't come "only to save but also to change."

The truth that Jesus can change even the homosexual, and that homosexual behaviour is sin (note being homosexual is not sin, but just acting upon the feelings is sin), seems to play, at least according to Brother Wilson, the key role in our discussions the coming week. I wonder how much of the truth will be left after we've heard the speeches on medical, psychological, and social perspectives and the testimonies of the change ministries.

Day 2: Shared Viewpoints

March 18, 2014

Conferences like these have the tendency to start the day very early, and I have to admit that I am definitely not a morning person. So when I arrived at breakfast, the meeting at the Cape Town International Convention Center had already started with a devotional by John Nixon. Luckily, I found myself in good company at the breakfast table with the president of Adventist University of France—Collonges, the president of the Swiss Union, and the secretary of the Inter-European Division.

By the time I did arrive at the convention center, a panel discussion was in full swing. Moderated by Dr. Pardon Mwansa, a discussion was held with the directors of the Family Ministries Department of the GC, the president of the Northern Australian Conference, an associate director of Human Resources at the GC, an associate professor of pastoral care at Andrews University, and the general counsel of the GC. You could say it was a panel in the heavy-weight league of the church, very capable of addressing the different issues facing the church. The discussion started with a map of the world with different markers indicating in green the countries which had some legal status for same-sex relationships and in orange and red the countries where homosexuality is criminalized or even punishable by death. Karnik Doukmetzian, general counsel of the GC, remarked that the church was facing many fewer problems in the orange-shaded countries than in the green-shaded countries, from a legal and employment perspective. The discussion was a very nuanced and open discussion about how to relate to our homosexual brothers and sisters. The president of the Northern Australian Conference, Brett Townend, said that he would baptize a homosexual; and that he finds it important that churches become safe places for LGBTI people. He strongly discouraged any sermons that would condemn their lifestyle [sic] as this would only place these people in a greater isolation or further in the closet. The General Conference, through the associate director on human resources, Lori Yingling, was ambivalent in its answer to the question whether people at the General Conference office could still be employed in supportive staff after they disclose that they are non-practicing homosexuals. In general it was her experience that people would leave church employment by themselves.

One red line through the discussions of this day was the insistence on the differentiation of the homosexual individual and homosexual activity. All people that have been presenting or were part of the panel discussions have tried to separate the two by insisting that we should love the sinner (the homosexual individual) but not the sin (homosexual activity). Each session followed a two-step trajectory. First, the panel or the presenter shared its presentation and, secondly, delegates could ask questions by writing them down and handing them to the different ushers in the hall. This seemed to be a very effective way of getting the delegates involved and also to gauge the sentiment in the hall. One of the questions I was able to ask the panel that morning was to define what a practicing homosexual lifestyle is? The answer given by Dr. Peter Swanson, associate professor of pastoral care at Andrews University, was both startling and very telling of the perception of homosexuality in the church. Dr. Swanson defined a

practicing homosexual as someone who participates in genital same-sex activities. Holding hands, kissing, cuddling, sleeping in one bed, living in one house are not seen as part of a practicing homosexual "lifestyle" as long as genitals are not involved.

The tendency of this summit is to reduce the issue of homosexuality or even define homosexuality as a sexual genital activity, as if a heterosexual relationship is only defined by or can be reduced to the mere act of having sex with your wife or husband. I hope my church, and especially the leadership of the church, realizes that intimate and loving relationships are more than simple sexual activities.

The second part of the morning and the first part of the afternoon were designated for the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. We were given a crash course in hermeneutics (how one reads or should read the Bible) by Dr. Kwabena Donkor. He rightly indicated that the discussion on how to interpret the so-called anti-gay texts in the Bible is really a discussion about hermeneutics. He continued to pit two general hermeneutical theories against each other, the traditional hermeneutics, also known as historical interpretation, and the more contemporary hermeneutics, also understood as the historical-critical method. It would require too many pages to explain the differences between the two; yet what was striking during the presentation, which seems to become the general attitude of the presenters associated with the GC, was the assumption that its audience completely agrees with their point of view. So the contemporary hermeneutics was laid aside without giving any proper explanation or argumentation. It was simply assumed that we all agreed that this hermeneutics (which the majority of theological scholars use nowadays) was invalid.

Dr. Ekkehardt Mueller, director of the BRI, had the difficult task of taking the audience through Old and New Testament Bible texts that seem to be explicit anti-gay texts. The presentation focused mainly on the texts in Leviticus, Romans 1, and 1 Corinthians 6. Dr. Mueller first dismissed the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as having anything to do with homosexuality, stating that this story merely dealt with inhospitality, rape, and abuse. Unfortunately, Dr. Mueller's further presentation was of a low scholarly and theological standard. His main argument was to recognize that the texts in Leviticus were mainly in the context of idolatry and were therefore dealing with temple prostitution; yet, without any further textual evidence or argumentation, he extended it to all homosexual relationships. He then used this argument to prove that Paul, in his letter to the Romans, was also talking about all homosexual relationships, because Paul was referring in his argument to Leviticus 18. And because Paul was referring to Leviticus 18 in his argument, Leviticus 18 was actually dealing with all homosexual relationships; you can see the circular argument here. Furthermore, he actually argued that the list of vices mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 included homosexuality, despite the fact that many translations translate the actual Greek words in more general terms as fornication. This is because scholars have a hard time determining what the actual Greek words mean. I believe the BRI can do a much better job of explaining these texts; yet, this would involve admitting that these texts do not say anything about loving monogamous homosexual relationships as we understand them today.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in a breakout session, not to be confused with a coming-out session. I was assigned the discussion on "global legislation, religious liberty, and alternative sexual issues." The main objective of this break-out session was to discuss the different implications and possible responses to differing legislation surrounding same-sex marriages. It was interesting to hear three lawyers talking about American legislation and their perceptions of the countries that have fully legalized same-sex marriages. The main concern of the church is how to protect their right to not perform these marriages. It was a relief to hear that the church was not interested in enforcing their particular view of marriage through civil legislation. Todd McFarland, associate general counsel of the GC, admitted that they didn't have any proper policies in place on how to respond legally to, for example, anti-homosexual laws in Uganda, especially as local union presidents have responded positively to this law and similar laws in other African countries. Even though the GC clearly opposes any violence and persecution of homosexuals, it reserves the right to be able to discriminate with regards to employment. Again the presenters associated with the GC assumed that all delegates were sharing the GC's point of view on homosexuality, insisting that all statements on homosexuality made by the General Conference were done so with complete democratic transparency, as we are used to getting from the GC.

The day closed with personal testimonies of three former homosexuals. The word "former" has to be understood as no longer practicing homosexuals, as all three admitted that they still have homosexual tendencies and, in their words, temptations. The stories of these three individuals are incredible testimonies of redeemed lives after an upbringing of sexual abuse, parental neglect, and drug-fuelled relationships. Despite the powerful changes that they expe-

rienced in their lives, their stories are in no way reflective of the average homosexual Adventist raised in a stable, loving family. In the end all they managed to do, which is by all means a great feat in and of itself, was to suppress their feelings and to despise their homosexual nature. All three presenters started their own change ministries and actually encourage youth not to accept their homosexuality, but to suppress it. Again their homosexuality is reduced to the mere sexual act; suppressing that act, according to them, is required by Jesus.

While the last presentations were received by the audience with applause, a large minority remained quiet during these applause sessions; yet it is not clear whether they didn't agree or were preoccupied with other things. After the presentation, I managed to talk to an associate dean for student affairs of one of our larger universities and asked him whether he would invite these ministries to his campus. He assured me that his university would not actively support change ministries and that actually most Adventist universities and its professors would not agree with what was presented that evening. Again, the General Conference assumes that its audience shares its point of view.

Tomorrow there will be another day with more perspectives, this time from a social, medical, and psychological perspective. I will try to wake up early this time.

Jeroen Tuinstra

Day 3: Professional Discomfort

March 19, 2014

The day started with two disappointments. When I opened the curtains this morning it was actually raining, or perhaps a better description would be that it was drizzling. The second, far smaller, disappointment was that I opened the curtains at 8:00 hours, at least 30 minutes removed from being ready to show myself to the world, or at least to the people at the breakfast table. Again, the first order of the day, the devotion by John Nixon, was already in full swing while I was brushing my teeth getting ready for another day of conversing, gaining understanding, and counseling together. My apologies.

Every day followed a similar course. It started with a devotion followed by a panel discussion and a plenary lecture; after lunch a breakout session and another plenary lecture, followed by dinner and a final plenary lecture. Whereas yesterday was mainly focused on the biblical and theological aspects, today the sciences (social, medical, and psychological) and legal employment aspects received our undivided attention – clearly fields that I and many delegates are no experts in.

Before I continue to give a summary and some commentary about today's proceedings, I have to tell you that I write these reports at the end of the day, mainly from notes and my memory. So if I wrongly quote or describe someone or a situation, please forgive me and contact me to see whether I can correct it–preferably in that order.

The day started with a presenter having perhaps the coolest name of the summit: Dr. Fox. Dr. Curtis Fox is the chair of Counseling and Family Sciences Department at Loma Linda University. When I arrived on Sunday morning at the international airport of Cape Town, both Dr. Fox and I shared a ride to our respective hotels. When we loaded our luggage into the car I asked him how long he was staying in South Africa. He answered that he had to take a flight back on Saturday evening, two days after I would fly back to Brussels. I asked this question because I had managed to squeeze

all my belongings into one suitcase which was small enough to be carried on board as hand luggage. Dr. Fox on the other hand, carried two massive suitcases, at least three times the size of mine, with enough space for a two-month holiday. For some this would qualify Dr. Fox, more than others, to be speaking at a summit concerning homosexual issues, besides his professional qualifications, of course.

Each presenter today wrestled with similar questions and tried to answer these questions from their respective fields of expertise. The first question to wrestle with was where homosexuality actually comes from and how is it developed, caused, or formed. The second question was whether homosexuality can or should be changed. And the final question: How should the church respond?

The presentation of Dr. Fox came from the social sciences' perspective and provided some very crucial information related to LGBTI issues. First of all, he stated that social sciences clearly indicate that sexual abuse, parental influence, and parental relationships are not factors in the forming of homosexuality. The last two factors, especially, are important for us to realize: homosexuality is not caused by wrong parenting or by homosexual parents. Apparently, children raised by homosexual parents score higher in social skills and intelligence. According to Dr. Fox, it remains a mystery, at least from the social sciences' perspective, how homosexuality is caused. He further went on to say that he would not recommend any reorientation therapy. From a professional perspective, any therapy in which the therapist decides beforehand what is to be the solution, is not considered to be therapy and can even be dangerous for the wellbeing of the "patient." Dr. Fox made it clear what his personal biblical and moral convictions were regarding homosexuality; yet, he made it also very clear that church pastors should have an open conversation with LGBTI people in their congregations. The conversation would be to help the homosexual reconcile his orientation with his own moral convictions. He emphasized that the objective of the conversation is not to steer the homosexual towards the pastor's "solution," but that we would help him or her to find his or her own solution.

Two other important points were made by Dr. Fox. First he discussed some myths about gays and lesbians:

- Most pedophiles are actually not gay; the majority of pedophiles identify as heterosexual.
- Gay relationships are not transient but are just as stable and committed as heterosexual relationships.
- Gays do make good parents; there is no study indicating that children raised by homosexuals are worse off.
- Gay parents do not make children gay, and being gay is not a contagious lifestyle.

Secondly, he shared different quotes from homosexual students he had interviewed, which he called "missing voices" of the summit. One quote read: "It is necessary to change the way we treat people. If the mission of the church is to save souls, then, you must approach them differently... It is hard to be in a place where it does not matter what you think or what you feel, you are lost, and you are not going to heaven."

Dr. Peter Landless was the next speaker after lunch and the panel discussion. He is probably the person with the most titles behind his name: MB, MMe, FCP, FACC, and FASNC, a true alphabet person. He is the director of health ministries at the General Conference and gave the delegates a crash course in the medical and biological aspects of conceiving a child, as well as the complications that can arise during that conception, particularly what happens if there are not enough or too many chromosomes fused together or when a child receives only an X or an XXY, as opposed to an XX (female) or XY (male) sex chromosome. The children born with these anomalies can be either genetically male (XY chromosomes) and biologically female (having female genitalia) or vice versa or have ambiguous genitalia (both female and male). Yet none of these factors, either genetically or biologically, explains the cause of homosexuality. Medical science accepts homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexuality. The presenter also did not support reorientation therapy; because, on medical grounds, one's orientation is so complex any change is likely to fail. Dr. Landless further showed that homosexuals have higher health risks, besides HIV, AIDS, or other STDs. The majority of these health risks, such as higher blood pressure, vascular aging, and diabetes, are caused by unsupportive environments or societal persecution. Landless was unambiguous about his moral and biblical standpoint on homosexuality. As with the previous presenter, he asserted the biblical viewpoints shared by the two theologians yesterday; yet he did call for a much more supportive environment in the church.

The final presentation of the day was given by Dr. Peter Swanson, associate professor of pastoral care at Andrews University Seminary. Dr. Swanson challenged the audience by asking them 19 questions sprinkled throughout his presentation. Even though the content of the presentation was very interesting, it was presented in a very monotonous manner. Luckily, the dry humor of the presenter kept us sharp enough to follow his presentation. Again, the cause of homosexuality could not be explained from a psychological perspective; it is not

a psychological disorder and it is seen by the APA (American Psychological Association) as a normal form of human sexuality. He also confirmed that results from change therapies are rare, likely to be unsuccessful, and very often result in harm for the individual. Some of the questions Dr. Swanson posed were:

- "Given that some of those seeking change have experienced harm, even when abusive and coercive practices were not employed during sexual orientation change efforts, what position should the religious community take with reference to reparative therapy as a means of changing individuals' sexual orientation?"
- "If sexual involvement and romantic interest are ruled out, what religious constraints are there against people living together that might apply to two men, two women, or to a man and a woman?"
- "Is the church in the business of regulating members' behavior, or is it responsible for creating a religious environment conducive to Spirit-directed changes in members' lives?"
- "Acknowledging that many of our churches are not viewed as safe and friendly places for non-heterosexual people to worship, how can we fulfill our mission to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tribe, and people, which obviously includes LGBTI individuals?"

These challenging questions should have been asked at the start of the summit, as they would have created more productive conversations and discussions.

I gave this day the title "professional discomfort," as all three professional presenters showed some degree of discomfort when they were asked in the Q&A section of each presentation how they reconciled the scientific findings of their respective fields with their own biblical and moral convictions regarding homosexuality. All of them responded eventually that their biblical and moral convictions actually took precedence over the scientific findings, or at least played a more important role in dealing with the issue of homosexuality. I believe this stand will cause the church serious problems in the future. If our moral and biblical convictions are not reflected in our experiences in life or in observed reality in general, we set ourselves up to cling to perceived truths in the order of the flat earth. Our biblical interpretations cannot be based solely upon theoretical deliberations, but also need a grounding in, or at least to be informed by, scientific findings in other fields and real life experiences.

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Not applying this principle I believe can lead to some disturbing conclusions in other areas of the church, as the panel discussion on legal and employment issues showed, in my opinion. The main thrust of the discussion was how to secure for the church, in relation to employment, the possibility to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation, especially in countries where anti-discriminatory laws against homosexuals are in place. Four lawyers and an HR director of the GC discussed at length how church administrators should make sure to get involved in the process of legislation to secure this right to discriminate. The majority of the panel concluded that, because of the teachings of the Bible on homosexuality, as presented yesterday by the BRI, and our duty to uphold the high standards of Christian living, the church or its institutions should not employ homosexuals. What the panel really asked from the church administrators is to fire or not employ people based on something they cannot choose or change, as social, medical, and psychological sciences showed; yet this is justified because we apply a biblical interpretation which we don't allow to be informed by these sciences. If we did allow these sciences to inform our biblical interpretations, I believe we would come to different conclusions on homosexuality; therefore, the need to discriminate would be greatly reduced.

The panel discussion did close with a very positive advice given by Dr. Nick Miller, director of the International Religious Liberty Institute: "Be a good neighbor before you need a good neighbor!" I hope that includes my homosexual neighbor.

Day 4: Last But Not Final Words

March 19, 2014

The day of departure is always more hectic than one expects. Getting myself checked in for the night flight to London Heathrow with a faltering WiFi connection and trying to squeeze everything in that one carry-on suitcase took more time than I expected. Therefore for a report of the morning

session by Dr. Miroslav Kiš, chair of the Theology and Christian Philosophy Department on Ethics and Ministry at Andrews University, you have to look somewhere else. Lawrence Geraty, in his blogs on the website of *Spectrum Magazine,* does an excellent job at giving summaries of each day (www.spectrummagazine.org). After a good cup of coffee, I joined the meeting during the presentation of the reports on the more than ten breakout sessions.

It would take too much space to cover the complete summary, and it would still do no justice to all that was said. Two things that were mentioned I thought were interesting, as it shows that the issues are far more real than we think and that our response needs to be careful and considerate. During the breakout session on "alternative sexualities and university campuses" a case study was discussed to show that Adventist universities and colleges also really need to be prepared to deal with issues related to transgender, transsexual, or intersex persons. A male person registered at the start of his studies at an Adventist college somewhere in Asia. I know Asia is big, but I really cannot remember the country and I don't want to speculate about it. During the course of his studies he underwent a sex-change operation and requested after his, and now her, recovery to be moved from the boys' dorm to the girls' dorm. The college ran into all sorts of difficulties as they never had thought about this situation. I have to admit, I wouldn't have either. The boys did not accept her any more in the dorm as they saw her as a girl, and the girls felt uncomfortable to accept her as they had a hard time seeing her as a girl. In the end the college decided to place her in a more private dorm, where there were fewer communal areas. However, as they were taken by surprise, they weren't able to

Dr. Ella Simmons

make the proper arrangements in accepting her back on campus.

The other summary worth mentioning was that of Dr. Fox's breakout session "relating to children and youth challenged by alternative sexualities." The breakout session basically stressed teaching parents to manage their emotions when they are confronted by a coming out of their son or daughter. Of course, not all emotions can be easily controlled; but he emphasized that parents should be the adult in the relationship when faced with these matters. This is especially important because these issues tend to surface at a critical time in our children's development, when the response of the parents can be either detrimental or supportive of the child's further development to stable adulthood.

The next, but not the final, item on the agenda was, for me, a little bit of a disappointment. Dr. Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, director of education at the General Conference, did an excellent job in explaining and taking us through the steps of the theory of learning. By telling us to write small one-minute essays on each of the goals of the summit we were compelled to go through the summit in huge steps. Unfortunately, this method is excellent for students to learn new material which does not necessarily have to be questioned. But it is not the right method to summarize a summit which raised many unanswered questions and caused considerable discussion among the delegates. I really looked forward to a presentation that would summarize, synergize, and perhaps draw some conclusions from all the presentations, breakout sessions, and panel discussions. Of course, this was a huge and perhaps impossible task; hence, my disappointment. Still I have to commend Dr. Beardsley-Hardy for her interactive manner of dealing with this presentation, even though it forced us to treat the presented material as uncontested.

Another presentation that I looked forward to, as I didn't know what to expect, was the "last word" by Dr. Ella Simmons, vice president, the highest-ranking female administrator in the General Conference. If I would say that this presentation was a pleasant surprise, I wouldn't do it justice. I hope her complete presentation will be available somewhere on the internet soon, as her presentation was cut short from 30 minutes to 15 minutes and the content was of a very high quality. This was a speech that one could expect from an administrator of the world church on this sensitive topic. She started by saying that the core of dealing with LGBTI persons, careful to not define it as "the gay lifestyle," is about how to live out the gospel. In the core it is not about others but about us; we all are facing issues of change and choice. She continued by saying that for many societies "normal" is changing and many societies are becoming increasingly

hostile towards Christianity and its values. We cannot ignore the challenges that face us; and these challenges, particularly the ones discussed during this summit, are not just found in the outside world but inside the church. "They are us, they are an integral part of us." Dr. Simmons could not have been more inclusive when talking about LGBTI issues. We are essentially talking about us as a church family and not just about "them" or "those."

To many a surprise, at least mine and people around me, she then continued to honor and commend Kinship for their ministry among gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex Adventists and former Adventists. She even quoted from some Kinship communication as to what this organization would really like to convey to the delegates at the summit. As soon as I get my hands on her speech I will post the quote here. For unclear reasons, Dr. Simmons had to cut her speech short; apparently it had something to do with people of the organization having to check out of their hotels and prepare for travel earlier than expected. I guess they hadn't skipped the early morning session. She wanted to show how in Mark you can find 13 ways in which Jesus lived out the gospel to broken and hurt people. In the end, she stressed that we, as a religious organization and believers, exist to promote understanding, peace, and friendship among all people. False and true teachings are determined in action and living. I must say Dr. Simmons made me proud again of my church and gave me hope that we as a church can find a way to address the challenges in a careful, loving, considerate, and humane way, without damaging, hurting or dehumanizing people. I am up for the next summit to deal with this issue. 2015? Texas? ▼

Cape Town, South Africa

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