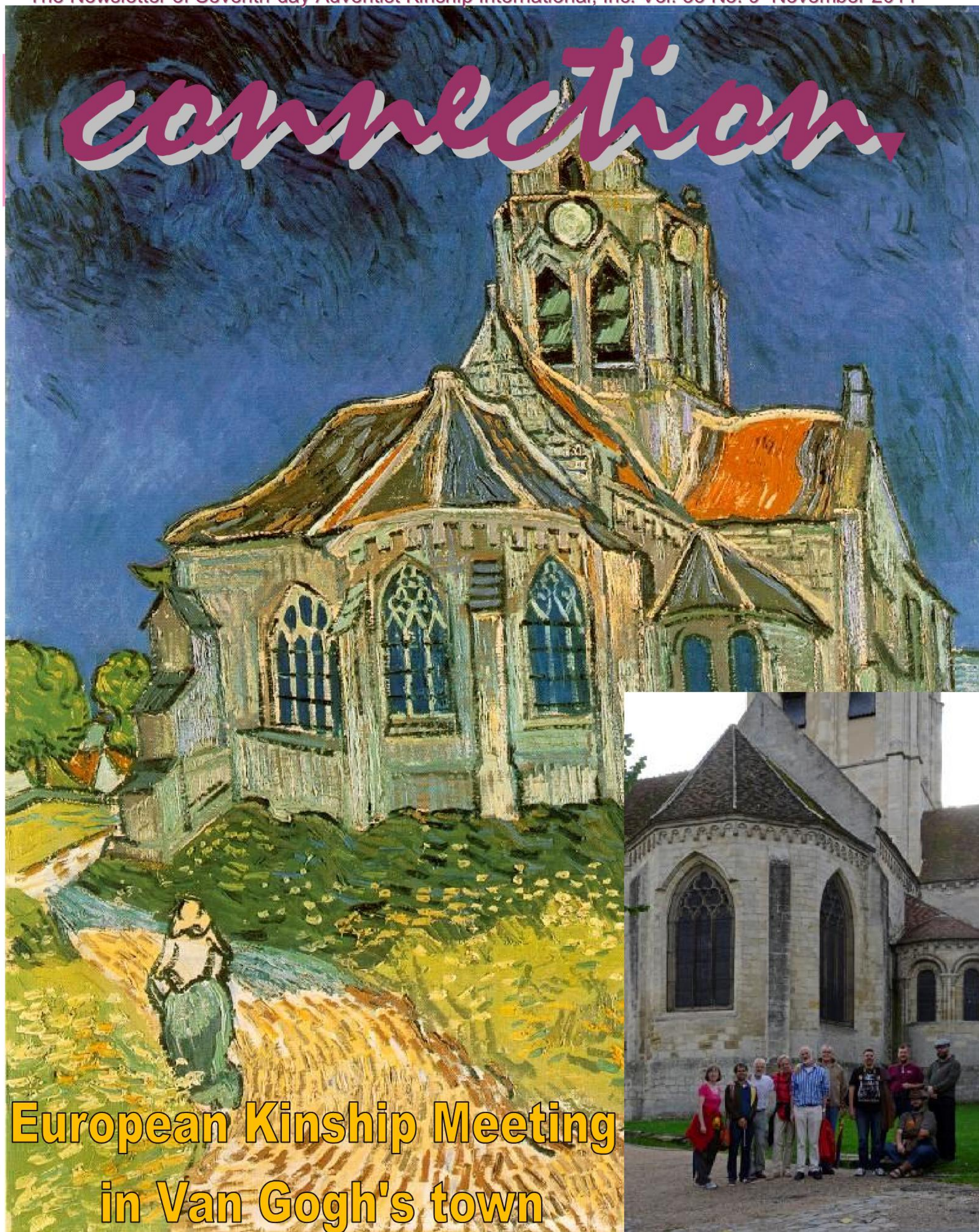


connection



**European Kinship Meeting
in Van Gogh's town**

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region2@sdakinship.org
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region3@sdakinship.org
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AFFILIATED INTERNATIONAL REGION COORDINATORS

Australia & New Zealand:
kinshipaustralia@sdakinship.org
 Brazil: Itamar Matos de Souza,
kinshipbrazil@sdakinship.org
 Canada: Jerry McKay,
kinshipcanada@sdakinship.org
 Central & South America:
kinshipsuramerica@sdakinship.org
 Europe/UK & Eire: Ruud Kieboom,
kinshipeurope@sdakinship.org
 Asia: Jonathan,
kinphilippines@sdakinship.org

OTHER COORDINATORS

Transgender/Intersex: Christian Bryan,
intersex@sdakinship.org / transgender@sdakinship.org
 Older Adults: Ren Reynolds,
olderadult@sdakinship.org
 IMRU? (Young Adults Under 30):
 Ronoldo Appleton (USA, world), imru@sdakinship.org
 Itamar Ahsman (EU), kinshipeurope_imru@sdakinship.org
 Webmaster: Linda Wright,
webadmin@sdakinship.org

CHAPLAIN

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

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.)



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
 or visit Kinship's website at: www.sdakinship.org.

From the Editor



Courage and Community:

Editing the stories this month leaves me with these two concepts floating in my thoughts, like headlines in a newspaper. It never occurred to me to write a letter like Elodie's to any church officer, much less to every one of them in my country. What kind of person does this? I think of the courage it takes for a church leader to break from the *Adventist Church Manual* and promote the ethics of compassion instead of self-protection or self-righteousness. I think of the power of their care and their pastoring. I am learning from those who walk into the Red Sea before it has parted. I think of the people who staff booths for Kinship because our presence is needed, even when they are people who do not like angry confrontations. I think of Ren's decision to love (and in the middle of an Adventist ghetto!) in the two decades before Stonewall. Through another faceted lens I have been seeing the effects of courage on community. Interviewing the people in these pages ran the gamut between poignant and humorous. Leif's description of using AA to heal his way back to spirituality was quietly powerful. Trying to interview the Open Day team (in a group at the breakfast table) was like trying to have a discussion with a horde of hamsters. They could not organize themselves or their thoughts because they were giggling so hard. They kept answering each other's questions. They offered opinions about my editorial style. I had to clarify answers because we couldn't hear ourselves for the giggles and the side comments in four languages. Oh, and I almost forgot to write to you about the searching and care that went into having a baby shower for Elodie! How many French lesbian new mothers get a blanket featuring the Texas longhorns from a lovely gay man? Or fancy expanding onesies from a German pastor's wife. Or... The list could go on. Courage is founding the Kinship community. Laughter is part of the healing. All of you reading this are part of the building. Because of that, I want you to take care of yourselves for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

November

- 3-6 Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting
- 4 Region 2 Vespers

December

- 2 Region 2 Vespers
- 17 Boston's Gay Men's Chorus Holiday Concert
- 30 1st Night in Williamsburg

* For more information about the Region 2 Vespers, write to region2@sdakinship.org

Kinship Announcements

Performances on YouTube

Fred Casey and Terry Phillips performed with the Portland Gay Men's Chorus in New York City as part of the 9/11 Memorial. You can find the performance on YouTube at *Portland Gay Men's Chorus New York*.

Ruud Kieboom and his octet Mannenkoorts can also be found on YouTube under *Mannenkoorts*.

Connection Request for your Thoughts

December Holiday Issue —We would like your holiday recipes, stories of holidays that have been special to you, or articles on how you think being LGBTI affects the way you celebrate. We would like your thoughts by November 10, but you can send them any time now. We're already working on that issue.

February —Love doesn't always have to be about romance. For this issue we would very much like to hear your appreciations of your beloved, stories of how you met them, stories of the way the loving acts of others have touched your life, stories of your parents or your siblings or your friends who are family, and stories of professionals who have gone out of their way to be loving. You can send these in at any time. We're already collecting material. The deadline is January 7.

New Year's Eve

Region Two and Region One would like to invite you to join us in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia! For more information, you can contact us at region1@sdakinship.org and region2@sdakinship.org. ▽

Elodie's Letter

Hello,

I am sending this letter to you and to pastors of the two French federations in the Adventist church for whom I have found e-mail addresses, to begin a dialogue in our country about homosexuality and the place of homosexuals among Adventists.

I grew up in an Adventist family and was baptized into the Adventist church when I was fifteen. Some of you may know me.

I am now thirty-seven. I live with my partner of seven years. I stopped attending church eight years ago when I asked about the church's reaction to my orientation. At the time, this difficult decision was the only way I could find to live my life without feeling judged and/or rejected by those who had formed a family for me. Being separate from my Adventist family, while giving me the freedom to live, also removed a lot of my stability and my serenity. I became more distant from God.

Three years ago, via the internet, I discovered Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, an association that supports and encourages LGBTI (lesbians, gays, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and intersex people) Adventists in their struggle for acceptance within the church. I needed to try to reconcile two parts of myself: my faith and my homosexuality.

The people I met through Kinship helped me realize the importance of fostering a dialogue about homosexuality in the Adventist church. Adventist homosexuals, especially young people with whom I worked, rarely found in the church space or freedom to openly and safely speak about the issue of sexual orientation. I think that, as human beings, especially as Christians, we have a responsibility to be attentive to those who need help and to reach out to them. On average, one young gay man in four has attempted suicide. I am convinced that the lack of dialogue plays an important role in these self-destructive acts.

I want the topic of homosexuality and, more broadly, the issue of sexual orientation, to cease being a taboo subject in the Adventist church in France. I hope we can engage in a dialogue about it.

Fraternally,
Elodie Souil

P.S. You will find attached to this mail some documents that may give food for thought:

A history of the Kinship organization and the brochure "Homosexuality: Can we talk about it? An appeal to heterosexual Adventists." These documents are available on the website <http://sdakinship.org> (in English and seven other languages). A recording of the show "I love you like," broadcast on France Inter on August 21, whose theme was "Homo, believing, and practicing."



Interview with Elodie Souil Coordinator European Kinship Meeting 2011

In February I decided to send this letter to every French pastor in the French/Belgium Union (including the presidents of the two federations) for whom I could find an email address. I knew a few years ago that this was something I wanted to do—eventually. Coming to Kinship over the last couple of years helped make this decision a reality. Organizing the European Kinship Meeting (EKM) near Paris this year helped me decide to send the letter now.

Four or five years ago I began to reconcile my faith and my homosexuality. I said to myself, *I have to contact the church*; but I didn't know how. I knew this step was important for me even if I might not be able to attend church. It was important because I want to begin a dialogue about homosexuality with the French Adventist church. My inability to talk about my spirituality and my orientation had weighed on my mind. When I was alone in my mind, the burden almost became too hard to carry.

As the letter went into the cyber mail, I was happy I had sent it and proud I was able to make this big step. I was angry, in advance, at the thought of some of the answers I might receive. I did not know how I would react.

I received about fifteen answers to the eighty or ninety emails I sent. They were



divided into three groups.

1. Pastors I had known responded in a very kind way. They did not speak of my homosexuality but thanked me for my letter and told me it was nice to hear from me.
2. Two or three pastoral emails were difficult to read. They read something like, "I understand your problem but the Bible is clear. Perhaps you can choose to interpret the Bible as you do, but I don't think your interpretation is accurate."
3. Ten answers kindly indicated they understood the issue I was addressing and acknowledged that the church should also address it. Some of them wrote that they were ready to meet with me and discuss the issue. Some told me I was courageous to write my letter, even though it must have been difficult. I was surprised by these responses. I did not expect these attitudes.

Another of the responses of the French church was to send the coordinator of their ethics committee to EKM 2011. They also referred Luca Marulli from Collonge-sous-Salève to be the speaker there.

I have not responded to every one yet. Now that my work for EKM is done, I want to take time to answer each person. I also want to see if there is a way to talk about Kinship in a French Adventist paper or newsletter. I want to contact other LGBTI Adventists, but I haven't figured out how to do it yet. I plan to talk about this next step with the president of the union. When I saw him, he told me he is open-minded and would like to have me work with him on these issues instead of acting on my own.

In May I received an email from his secretary that read, "Good morning, Madam, I write to you in the name of the president. He would like to meet you. These are three dates when he would be able to have an appointment."

It was a very official email, like the ones I receive at work. My first reaction was to forward this email to my family and say to them, "Wow, I don't know what to expect of this kind of meeting but I think it is positive."

And they responded, "Yes, we think it is positive."

I chose a date and asked where we should meet. On the appointed day I was a bit nervous, but I was serene also. I was

very happy to have this opportunity and this responsibility. The meeting was just between me and the president. I didn't know who I could bring so I went by myself. It was a great meeting. At the beginning I told him my story. It was difficult for me to tell my story because it always difficult for me to tell my story and share the reasons why I left the church. The president was very understanding. He said to me, "It is difficult for the church to find a good way to walk between what the church says it believes and the changes in society."

The president said, in the name of the church, he is ready to go with me on my journey and to accept and help me if I want. He did not want to force me to join my church but he respects my story. He is ready to talk with me and ready to know more about Kinship.

I was really surprised by this meeting. I did not expect so much support. I know there are many people in the Adventist church who do not understand homosexuality. I was very surprised the president could say that, in the name of the church, he is here and ready to work with me. I continue to be surprised by his reaction.

He asked me to forgive the people who hurt me. He said sometimes we hurt each other even if we don't intend to. When I heard that, I said to myself, "I have to forgive people, especially one individual from my church." I really did not want to forgive her, because when I am angry I can fight; but if I forgive her, how can I continue to fight? But this was a thing in my life that was an obstacle in my personal growth.

This year is a special year for me. This is a year when many things are happening in my life. I have organized a European Kinship Meeting. My partner and I are having a baby. I think God is telling me to move on and not stay in the same place. I think I have known this for a while, but now I am ready to do it. God used the meeting with the president to appeal to me. I am better with God and with my faith. I don't have to wait for someone else to help me on this journey. I would have liked it if my partner shared this change with me, but I understand why she does not. This is my need and my story, and I have to move on.

I would really like to share my faith and my experience with other gay people in France. I know I am not the only French gay Adventist who has had these questions. I am surprised that there are no other people in my country who have found Kinship. I would like to know how other French gay and lesbian Adventists have dealt with their faith and their homosexuality. I wonder if they are still in the church. I wonder if they are still living with their homosexuality. I would like to know how they have done in their life. I would like to speak with them and to understand them. I can speak with other members of Kinship, but the attitude of the church toward lesbian and gay people in the church is different in each country.

Without Kinship I would not have been able to make the decision to write to the pastors, because I felt alone in my situations. Now I have met other Kinship members. I am not alone. This is very, very, very helpful. ▽



Like a Mustard Seed

by Luca Marulli,
Guest speaker European Kinship Meeting

A woman was at work when she received a phone call that her daughter was very sick with a fever. She left her work and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication. She got back to her car and found that she had locked her keys in the car.

She didn't know what to do, so she bowed her head and asked God to send her some help. Within five minutes an old rusty car pulled up with a dirty, greasy, bearded man who was wearing an old biker skull rag on his head. The woman thought, *This is what You sent to help me?* But she was desperate, so she was also very thankful.

The man got out of his car and asked her if he could help. She said, "Yes, my daughter is very sick. I stopped to get her some medication and I locked my keys in my car. I must get home to her. Please, can you please help me to unlock my car?"

He said, "Sure." He walked over to the car, and in less than a minute the car was opened.

She hugged the man and through her tears she said, "Thank you so much! You are a very nice man."

The man replied, "Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison today. I was in prison for car theft and have only been out for about an hour."

The woman hugged the man again and with sobbing tears cried out loudly, "Oh, thank You, God! You even sent me a professional!"

Maybe for the first time, this man had been genuinely appreciated for something considered a blemish by the society at large. How often have we been tempted to desert the church, to avoid fellow committed Christians? How often have we felt out of place in a Seventh-day Adventist environment? On the other hand, how often have pious Christians felt uncomfortable because they are disturbed by the presence in their midst, in our midst, of people who are not as we wish they were?

Jesus said, "What is the kingdom of God like, and

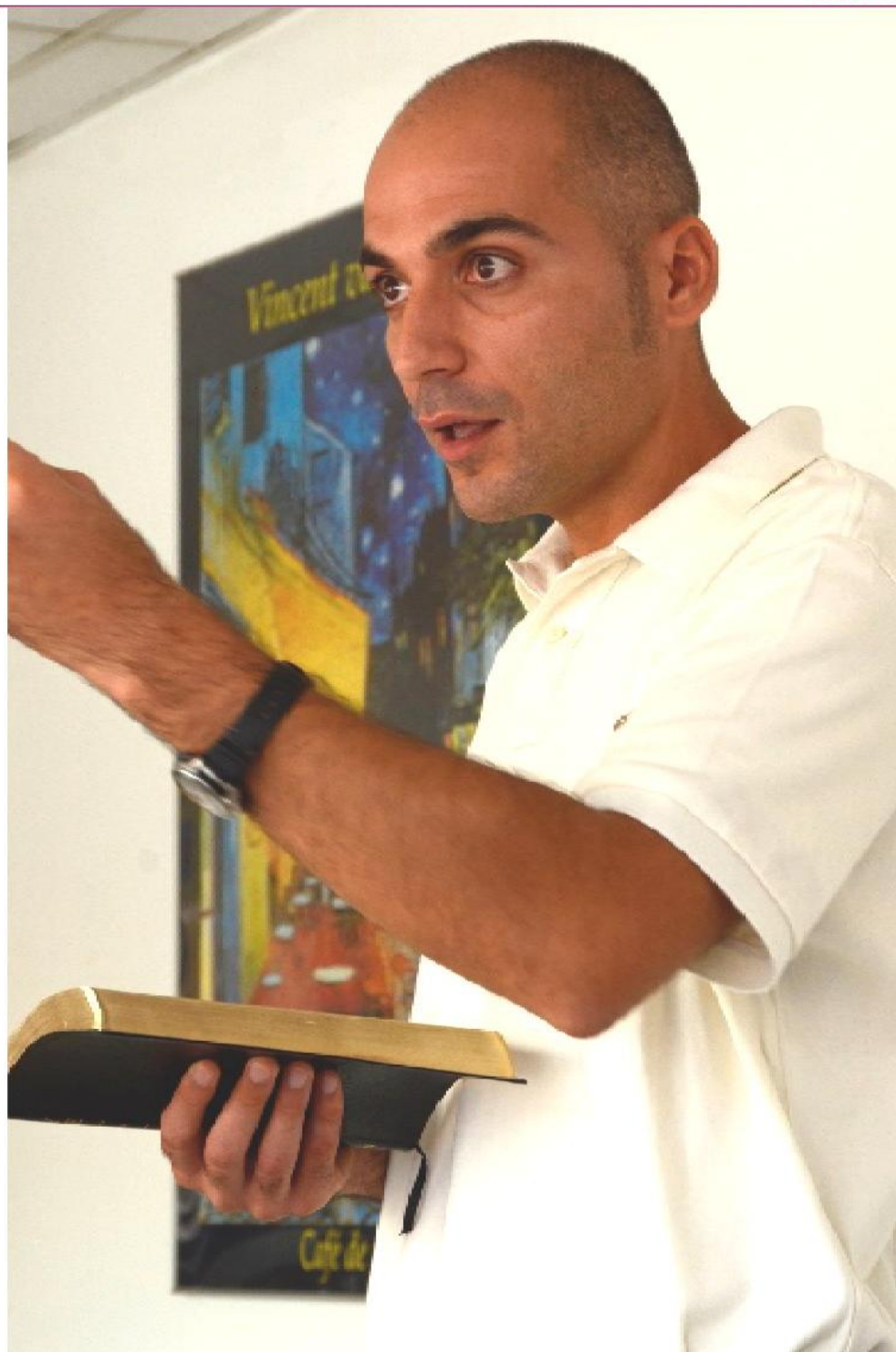
to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches" (Luke 16:18-19). We have already seen that when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, He's not only describing the new order God will bring in the universe, but is also describing how this future reality is already at work in our everyday life. In the same gospel of Luke, only one chapter later, we find this meaningful saying: "For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21).

When the parable starts with, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it?" Jesus is likely referring to something that is happening here and now. To what does He compare the Kingdom? What is He trying to tell us about how we should facilitate and recognize God's action in our midst?

A mustard seed is proverbially known for being very, very small. It measures about 1 mm. Jesus is then talking about something that is considered little, insignificant in people's eyes. The mustard plant is an annual. It grows wild and comes in three varieties, of which the most common in Palestine, *sinapsis nigra*, is a plant that normally grows to four feet, although at times more. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), a contemporary of Jesus Christ, was an ancient author and natural philosopher of some importance. He wrote in *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History): "It [mustard] grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand when it has once been sown it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once." We are dealing here with a plant that has a high speed of germination and spreads rapidly.

Now remember that our first concern is, *Where can a person who's struggling with crisis find help and restoration?* The parable of the mustard seed, I believe, responds to this question. In this very short parable of a tiny seed, we find at least two anomalies. We cannot perceive them anymore because we live some 20 centuries after the parable was told. If we think as the original Palestinian hearers thought, we will discover some interesting things.

The first anomaly of the parable is found in verse 19: "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden." If we were Jewish people



of the first century, we would find the word *garden* inappropriate and even shocking. Why? In the Torah there are laws that are called by, "The Rules of Different Kinds." An instance of this law is Leviticus 19:19: "You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together." The purpose of the rules of diverse kinds was to bring order into the disorderly world. The creation of order in this world replicates the division between the sacred and the profane. The places where things could not be planted or mixed together were important for the maintenance of purity boundaries.

The mustard figures prominently in the rabbinic discussions of "diverse kinds." Now, according to the teaching of the rabbis, in the Mishnah Kilayim 3.2, we read, "Not every kind of seed may be sown in a garden-bed, but any kind of vegetable may be sown therein. Mustard and small beans are deemed a kind of seed and large beans a kind of vegetables." Con-

sequently, *a mustard seed could not be planted in a garden*. Planting a mustard seed in a garden was believed to be the same as planting something profane into a pure reality. To emphasize his point, Jesus does not say a man planted a mustard seed in his garden. He says instead, "A man took and *threw the seed* into his own garden." *Threw* is here clearly meaning that the man was performing an act that he didn't want other people to see. He *threw* the seed, because the act of planting a mustard seed into a garden was not socially and religiously accepted.

The second anomaly in the parable is: "...and it grew and became a tree." Why does Jesus describe the mustard plant as a tree, when botanically it is a shrub? Jesus was aware of the difference between a shrub and a tree. Again, in the Mishnah Kilyaim, we find this rabbinical writing, "Where trees, vegetables, and shrubs are dealt with in distinct groups, *mustard is clearly classified with shrubs*." Using the word *tree* is manifestly wrong. We have to realize that when Jesus tells a parable he often tries to shock the audience. How it is possible that somebody could be stupid or blasphemous enough to plant a seed of mustard in a garden? How can a shrub become a tree? There is more. The shrub not only became a tree, but Jesus says, "...and the birds of the air nested in its branches." These apparently superfluous words are in fact a quotation of the Old Testament. And this quote gives the key to unlock the parable.

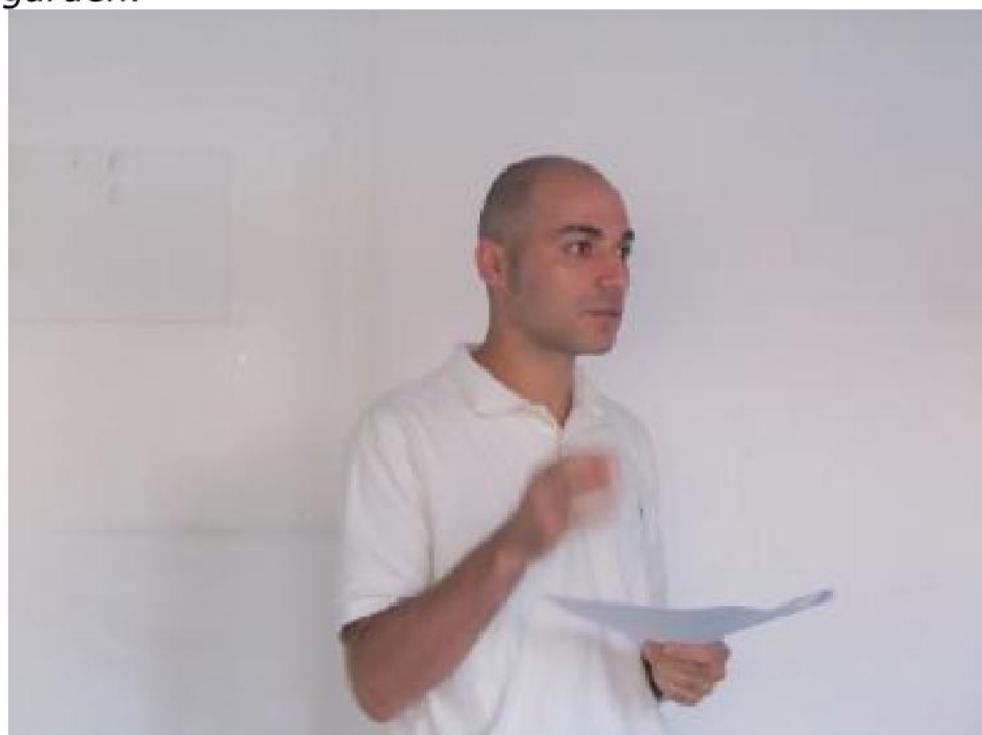
In Ezekiel 17:22-24, we find a prophecy against the people of Israel who despised the covenant with God. However, the Lord makes a promise comparing every man and nation to a tree:

I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it.

Jesus' hearers were aware of this text. When Jesus talked about a little shrub like the mustard plant becoming a tree able to shelter birds, their minds were drawn to Ezekiel's prophecy.

What, then, is the meaning of this parable? The parable begins with a metaphor of impurity. A little unwelcome seed is thrown into a well-kept and "socio-religiously correct" garden. I believe that Jesus here is talking about people who are facing crisis—people who are struggling with moral, physical, and/or spiritual sufferings—but also about people who are not considered a blessing by most pious church members or by the society itself. Those people, Jesus tells me, are like the little mustard

seed: considered by many unwelcome, not fitting the picture, a contaminant more than an asset. But Jesus says *the little mustard seed has its place in the garden*.



Actually the garden is the place in which they need to stay, they need to be welcome, they need to have a chance to develop in order to become much more than you would expect.

What would you expect from a mustard seed? A shrub or a tree? Jesus reassures us, "If put in the right place, which is among you, this little shrub can become a beautiful and fruitful tree. Yes, in God's economy, the mustard seed grows into a tree, as every person grows into an accomplished child of God."

Some are struggling with addictions. They belong to the body! Some feel far away from what God has in mind for them. They belong to the body! Some believe their life is a mess. They belong to the body! Others simply feel unwelcome. They are part of the body! We all are like a mustard seed. The church is the garden. We all need to be invited to grow in the riches of its soil.

The strong message for those who consider themselves *believers* is that the church must become the place that most reflects the welcoming heart of Jesus. The church must become the place where strong and healthy relationships are built. The church must become the place where mustard seeds can be planted safely.

Several pastors I know have expressed shame about the degree of ignorance they display on the subject of homosexuality. An Italian pastor wrote, "How can we still tell homosexual people that they must become heterosexual? How can we tell them that the church loves you and always will, but you can become a member only if you become heterosexual or if you live a life of celibacy?"

It seems to me that there are at least three forms of homosexual behavior:

1. Somebody can choose to have homosexual intercourse as a sexual practice that is simply lascivious and oriented toward going beyond all boundaries.
2. Somebody else could have homosexual intercourse in situations where there are no heterosexual options. This can happen in prisons or during war.

In both cases, knowing the Lord and/or changing the context can help people abandon those practices.

3. However, there is what I call "natural homosexuality." We don't know why, but some people are simply *created* homosexual.

I cannot ask them to become different. I cannot ask them to become celibate against their will. I know the Catholic church asks its priests to become celibate. I also know few of them actually remain so. There may be miracles; but to ask every single homosexual to become celibate against their will is, I think, the heritage of a deviant Christianity imbued with sex phobia.

Look at Adam. As he was admiring the beautiful creation, he could not help feeling sad and lonely. Only in Eve could he find a deeper taste for life. "At last! Finally!" he must have exclaimed. From that moment forward, men and women have uttered, "At last! Finally! There you are!" when they succeed in conquering the heart of their loved one. Like Jacob, people have worked fourteen years to be able to say, "At last! Finally!" Others have taken life-threatening risks. Some have gone to jail. Some have endured torture. The power of being able to say, "At last! Finally!" transcends time and obstacles.



How can I, as a pastor, tell people who love with this kind of love, "We will accept you only if chaste"?

Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46, NIV). I think

we require of homosexuals the ability to repress their sexuality that we, heterosexuals, don't normally have nor want.

I want you to know that the "body" (church), or at least some of the members of this church, have come to understand that more needs to be done in order to become as welcoming as the welcoming heart of Jesus. Many confess the hypocrisy, and many strive for a more radical love.



There is a long way to go. The situation is not easy nor will it be. Given that, I want you to know that we need you to keep our mind and our heart going towards where the Spirit of God is leading us. I want you to know that it is important to keep loving God, and his people, and that is important to seek reconciliation, from both sides.

Each one of us, heterosexual or homosexual, is a mustard seed that has been planted in this garden. This is the place we need to be in order to grow and make the garden beautiful. Don't feel out of place, because nobody is out place in God's garden. ▽



European Kinship Meeting 2011—Paris



After Ten Years

By Reino Korhonen

In 2002, Reino and his partner Ingemar hosted the first European Kinship Meeting at their home in Ostra Tunhem, Sweden.

I have seen Kinship grow and ripen. We are not just working with other gay and lesbian Adventists anymore. We are expanding our work with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we are finding our place among other Christians. The meetings we have here in Europe once a year are giving us powerful food for our spirituality and intellectual understanding of our opportunities. We have really become stronger. This was my dream.

Being with all of our friends at the European Kinship gathering meets our human needs. Here we continue to build our understanding that we are on this road together. For more than forty years I was an isolated gay Seventh-day Adventist. I yearned for these times. Because I was kicked out of the Adventist congregation I founded, these yearly Kinship meetings are a homecoming. The *Connection* really is the connection to *home* for me throughout the entire year between EKM's.

I can say that I have never lost my internal spiritual home. I have found a guest house in other Christian circles. They have the same problems and the same questions. But I think it is very important that Kinship works for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is our home.

To make real changes, we need to continue to develop and build good influential contacts within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We need to work together with church leaders and take the time to have personal relationships with them. I think inviting these leaders to our meetings is a good way to do this.

Reactions to European Kinship Meeting 2011



Leif Haugvik is a retired Danish medical doctor who attended EKM for the first time this year.

I liked everything about this meeting. Being together with homosexual Adventists is fantastic. I have been thinking about Kinship for many years, but I didn't know how to find you. Recently I got in cyber contact with Robert Londis and he put me in touch with you.

This new beginning is really important for me. I am already looking forward to seeing each of you again. I am going to have to learn to use Facebook. I am euphoric. I

caught a cold but it was worth it. I want to get to know you all and that is why I hope to see you next year. As my grandmother would say, "If I have life and health, I will be there."

My grandmother prayed for me as long as she lived. I believe that my presence here is an answer to her prayer. I look back and I see all these miracles. When I left the church and began to live as a gay man, I became an alcoholic. After four years my ex-lover found Alcoholics Anonymous and sent me a letter to share his experiences. I had moved twice and I still got this letter. He thought I might need this program but he didn't want to push me. He shared his experience and said, "Do you know anybody in Denmark who might be interested in hearing about AA?" That letter was for me. I am alive. Without AA I would have been dead. Twenty-seven years ago we started the only gay AA meeting in Denmark. We share a spirituality. We are family to each other. We are angels. We give each other help. And now I have found you. You are the next new beginning.



Stefan is a computer systems administrator from Bremen, Germany

It has been amazing to see people I now consider good friends. I miss them in the year between meetings. This reunion is always a great pleasure. The talks and lessons are great growth, a spiritual adventure, and a welcomed experience. At EKM it is important to share experiences, knowledge, and tips for influencing our church. I think it is also important to make plans to reach out to other LGBTI people in Europe and to talk with pastors and conference members.

This year it was very important for me that we had a speaker who offered us acknowledgement and support. This attitude is always a miracle to me. I appreciate the risks allies take to sup-

port us. I appreciated the conversations I had with Luca this weekend. I really appreciated getting in touch with, and meeting, new members. It is nice that Kinship Europe is still growing. Since what I have heard about the church this year is more negative than positive, meeting allies is amazing. I like meeting new members who share like beliefs and faith. I am not alone.

Melanie is a clinical psychologist in The Netherlands

I liked the speaker very much. He is an open-minded, nice guy. He is eager to learn and to gain experience. I like that he is a people person. I like that he invests in relationships more than getting his teachings across. Relationships are more important than teaching.

I really liked that we had Elodie's sister and her partner over to cook for us. They took into account all the dietary wishes: vegan, vegetarian, and meat. We have an interesting group around this issue. They made special dishes for every diet. I really loved that Ruud was relaxed during this EKM. Elodie was dependable. Ruud didn't even get his traditional headache.

I don't come to EKM to be spiritually enlightened. I am here for relationship-building and getting my mind off my daily work and chores. It is a real vacation for me. Each time I come to EKM, I settle in more quickly. Because I know more and more of the people who attend, the only new aspect I have to get used to is the surroundings. It was easy this time. It was easier for me to take it all in. I liked the trips around Auvers-sur-Oise to see the Van Goghs on the very site where he painted them. I updated my knowledge of art. This was a whole experience of "Oh, yes" about the history of art. I really like the humor we are developing as a community.

Dan is a member of IMRU? who has come to three EKM gatherings from the Czech Republic

I enjoyed the group. I liked spending time together. I missed Mike this year. Being at EKM this week helped me quit smoking. I hope I will be able to stay off cigarettes. EKM has reminded me again of how much I want to do something for LGBTI Czech Adventists and our allies.

Kees Meiling is a Dutch/Hebrew translator from The Netherlands

I like the company. I regret that Mike from Scotland could not come. I liked meeting new friends, like Leif and Paul-Erik. We had nice talks. We could talk on the same level and the same frequency. I have the feeling we can understand each other. I feel at home, with family. That is all I have to say, but it's enough, I should think!

Ruud Kieboom is a program administrator for the Dutch Council of State

This was a special EKM for me. Our speaker, Luca Marulli, affected me strongly. When he wrote his introduction for the *Connection*, I worried that he might not be the right person for our meeting. I was concerned when he wrote that the subject of homosexuality was one that should be addressed in the church and with the LGBTI members, and then wrote that he was accepting of LGBTI Adventists but that he also supports the church's policy towards homosexuals. Listening to his talks, I discovered a huge change of thinking and attitude in Luca. Being invited to speak at EKM led him to think, study, and learn more about the subject. He seems to have developed an attitude beyond gay-friendly and gay-accepting. He said the topic of homosexuality and Christianity

isn't even an issue to him anymore. He said, "All should be welcome in the 'body' (the church) to find refuge, acceptance, and healing (but not from orientation)."

His unconventional approach was uplifting and, at times, heart-touching for me. The little he shared of his private experiences and the ways they affect how he sees the Bible affected me. His personal revelations and spirituality were down to earth. Luca brought a strong spiritual tone. His tone helped bring that spiritual tone to me. We shared some personal experiences from our childhood. He was very relaxed about LGBTI issues. I admire that Luca



On the picture from left to right:
Dan, Kees, (Catherine,) Melanie, and Ruud

is able to feel and share emotions without imposing them on others. It was a privilege to have a personal prayer with him during the session in which we prayed for those who hurt us and for our new-found friendship. I hope and wish that Luca and we who were at EKM will meet more in the future, whether it is at EKM or some other gathering. I am grateful that we have him as an ambassador at the Adventist University of France.

The meeting center was simple but very good for our gathering. It has an atmosphere that added to the openness we shared with each other. We had privacy, even though the hostel is also a riding and boarding stable. Being in the painter's town of Auvers-sur-Oise was wonderful and inspiring.

Coming to EKM has always had two sides for me: meeting friends, having joy and laughter on one hand, and having stress and tension on the other hand. This leads to my traditional Saturday evening headache. Because I have been co-organizing most EKM, I have a feeling of responsibility for the well-being of the attendees and the process of the program during the weekend.

This year was different. Elodie and I worked closely together. Often we were in daily contact. As a team we solved problems and found answers to financial and organizational questions. I felt confident EKM was going to be a wonderful gathering. Elodie has grown during the last year (not only because of her pregnancy which makes her quite beautiful!) and has become an ambassador for Kinship in France. She wrote a powerful letter to the French church leadership that was well received. Her letter led to the attendance of a representative of the church ethics committee at our meeting! She managed to "catch" a wonderful speaker from the church's school in Collonge-sous-Salève in France. Last but not least, she found a great holiday house (with swimming pool!) in which we are having our EKM holiday and from which I am writing my impressions of EKM. I am full of gratitude towards Elodie for her courage and talents.

This year at EKM, I learned to pray again. In my past roles at the church, I was often told that my prayers touched the hearts of many people. Because I have been out of church office for time, and for other personal reasons, I have not been able to pray in the way I did in the past. This year, having a peace within myself and having such a wonderful personal experience during the meeting, I found words to pray that came from my heart and were meant for all present. I thank God for that special blessing.

Organization for EKM 2012 is already taking place. Again, I am confident this is going to be another great experience. We have a place and a speaker. Ita Ahsman, our IMRU? (young adult Kinship members)

coordinator for Europe, has a lively Facebook conversation going on with IMRU? members. He has suggested some additions to EKM to attract younger European members. We had four IMRU? attendees this year. With Ita's leadership, we are planning on more next year.

I believe Kinship Europe is now capable of developing more activities because we have more members (and allies!) who are willing to give some of their valuable time to the organization. It has long been my wish that Kinship Europe could go on whenever the time comes for me to resign as a coordinator. (No, I am not planning to resign now. This is for the future.)

Thank you all who are working with me for the well-being of LGBTI people in the church. Thank you to those who came to EKM, old and new friends! It was great seeing and talking to you there. Keep in touch and come again next year because, as the *Connection* editor always says, "you are infinitely valuable!" So take good care of yourself.



Joachim Deuerling is a school bus driver from Bremen, Germany

I have gotten to see my friends that I miss all year. I wish I could have also seen Roy and Mike. I am sorry they were not able to be here. I liked exchanging ideas. In this place I am able to be myself, just myself. I do not have to hide in some way. I don't have to control what words I am using. This is a safe haven.



Ingrid Schmid is the wife of Frieder, a retired pastor in the Frankfurt area, Germany. She and her husband will coordinate EKM2012

It was a great privilege for Frieder and me to be with you at EKM in France!

The town Auvers-sur-Oise with buildings that were erected in the Middle Ages, the surroundings, the countryside, and the culture that is attached to that area made us marvel and want to drink in the beauty of the area. Thanks to Elodie we had a nice meeting location and mouthwatering food, French style. I still remember the dessert with oranges and mint leaves. Delicious! Thanks for taking such good care of us. We enjoyed Luca's studies very much, but most of all

we treasured meeting and chatting with you, and getting to know each one of you a little bit better.

We are looking forward to seeing you all next year in Germany! Please let us know your suggestions, wishes, needs, and ideas, so we can put them into our planning to make EKM 2012 also a blessed time to remember.

Take care and God bless every one of you in a special way till we meet again.



Paul-Erik lives in Copenhagen, Denmark. This was the first time he attended EKM with his friend Leif

What a pleasure to meet in Auvers-sur-Oise. Thank you for beautiful days, filled with love and open hearts. Thank you for including me and sharing your EKM with me. I am so grateful to have met

you all, and I am really looking forward to the next year's EKM in Germany. I cannot fully express how it was for me to be at the EKM in Auvers. I am still very touched, and I thank my Lord Jesus that he showed me how to find you. Thank you for sharing bread and wine at the Lord's table on Sabbath.





We'd like to introduce you to...

Nathaniel King

I was born December 20, 1981, in Seattle, Washington. I have one whole brother and twelve half brothers and sisters from the same father. My mother and I are the only Adventists in our family. The rest of my family is without religion. I went to a public high school and then attended Andrews University. Now I am studying international law at the University of Geneva (Switzerland). I enjoy learning and speaking other languages, games (board, video, and computer), traveling, reading, and hanging out.

My favorite color is green because no one ever wanted the green Popsicle® when I was little. My favorite music is Michael Jackson; I got attached when I was young. My favorite movie is *Do Começo ao Fim (From Beginning to End)*. My favorite movie is *Rainbow Boy Stories*. My favorite food is pasta.

I learned about Kinship from Carrol Grady's book, *My Son, Beloved Stranger*. This organization has offered me a haven from the fast-paced, pretentious, material world of secular gays.

My mom struggles with me dating. Otherwise, my family accepts me. My friends are accepting even though they still struggle. I am single.

I have a very intense and real relationship with God. I can speak one-on-one with Him and be brutally honest.

was born. After returning to Angola, he continued to work on the mission infrastructure. He managed the dairy and farming operations and did lab work.

My younger sister and I were born after the family moved back to Angola. I grew up in what I consider a paradise. We had great physical freedom, lots of outdoor activity, and a strict Seventh-day Adventist surrounding. It was during my 11th year that I was diagnosed with an intersexed condition and treated with surgery at the Red Cross Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa. When I was 13, civil war broke out in Angola, and my sisters were sent to Helderberg to go to school. Six months later, my parents wrapped things up and left Angola.

I worked for many years as a graphic designer at Color Press, then owned by Walla Walla College. I also worked as a software tester and program manager at Microsoft.

I am now attending Washington State University and am in my final year of studying animal science with a concentration on dairy cattle production and management. I work at the university dairy. I am a watercolor artist, photographer, writer, and knitter. I also enjoy travel and international development.

My favorite color is red. I enjoy choral music, alternative rock, classic rock of the 70s, classic country, and a few current artists like Adele. My favorite movies are *Out of Africa*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and most documentaries. My favorite book is *Middlesex* by Geoffry Euginidies. I love all food except for water chestnuts and overdone cheesy American fare.

I learned of Kinship on the internet. The organization was helpful in getting me to meet some other LGBTI people who understood where I came from. It was most helpful in introducing me to my wife, Jude. Jude and I were married in Vancouver, BC, last July on our eighth anniversary together. We live in Pullman, Washington, where I go to school and Jude works at the local airport. My parents and two sisters all live in the Pacific Northwest, and we enjoy the unconditional love and support of our family. I have two wonderful nephews who are now in Adventist middle and high schools. We have no children of our own. We do have a lovely cat at home called Thabo.

For a few years Jude and I stopped attending church all together. We had become increasingly convinced that the Seventh-day Adventist church was not a safe or accepting place for us. We could no longer lend our physical or financial support to an institution that belittles our responsible and healthy relationship. Culturally, I am still a Seventh-day Adventist; but in the last few years I realized that I was never a believer. ▽

Carolyn Parsons



I was born at Bongo Mission, in the central Angolan province of Huambo, Angola. My grandparents arrived there in the beginning of 1931, and my dad was born there a year later. My grandpa was a physician and my grandma a nurse. They took over a very small, two-hut

clinic and built a hospital that was known throughout Angola for quality medical care. As a young man, my dad helped build a dairy, dairy-worker housing, new wings on the hospital, and several other projects. My dad was educated at Helderberg College in South Africa and at La Sierra College in Riverside, California. At La Sierra he got the education he needed for becoming a medical laboratory tech. He and my mom met there as she was getting a degree in education. While my dad finished his clinical education at the White Memorial Hospital, my older sister

A Baby Shower for Elodie (at EKM)



connection

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Editor : Catherine Taylor
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