

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 37, No. 9, October 2013



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WHO WE ARE...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA

or visit Kinship's website www.sdakinship.org/resources for information about

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

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE

www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN

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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.)

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

Front Cover picture: a street in Porto, Portugal

From the Editor



Here in Virginia it's pouring rain. A month ago Kinship Europe was enjoying dry Portugal's 38° C. weather. Next month the San Francisco Bay Area will host our board meeting. I just read a Facebook note from Rena in Kenya. I am about to ask for an article from David in Australia. There are times, if I am up at 5:00 a.m., when I can be working with Jacquie on the United States west coast and Ruud in the Netherlands. Kinship has made my world simultaneously intimate and huge. I don't sit down to write to you without thinking about the ways our words will sound to people reading English through the lenses of (at least) 20 other languages. My passport has become my most valuable possession. The trouble with all of you is that when I go to visit, I want to go back. I am almost hoping we don't get any members in Antarctica. We are relatively tiny: 2,500 members at the moment. Yet we affect people and policy and thinking on six continents. Our stories cross borders and time zones and boundaries of the heart.

This month's *Connection* is a reflection of us. Jacquie is half Filipino. Linda is from North Carolina. In August they were married by a Brazilian pastor, who took a plane the next week to speak to Kinship in Europe. At that meeting people representing nine countries spent time talking about how the God of the universe speaks to those of us "on the margins." Frieder brings us a story about how his love for Kinship members and the film Daneen and Stephen made are changing the way pastors in Germany think. Beth writes to us about "NEST" building. And we have an article from the Andrews University student newspaper about a gay student who has the courage to be "out" on a conservative campus. That campus sends pastors to the world.

Margaret Mead wrote, *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.* Robert Kennedy wrote, *Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.* How amazing you are that you are part of this, just by living your life. Don't forget how important you are. Don't give up. Take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



European Kinship Meeting Portugal





A Marriage Ceremony Message for Jacquie & Linda

By Marcos Apolinario

Welcome!

In the name of the Hegarty-Wright family I want to thank everyone here today for joining us and showing your love and support! Jacquie, Linda, and Church 1.0 appreciate that.

Some say this ceremony will destroy society, annihilate the core of all principles, ruin families throughout the United States, Uganda, Russia, and the rest of the world, melt down the ice caps, bankrupt capitalism, spread out the gay virus to every corner of the earth, and corrupt innocent little dogs!

Following the same line of paranoia, today, as a minister who is part of the LGBT community, I prophesy that this marriage will destroy our country...and the gays will come and do a fabulous restoration! Linda and Jacquie are way more powerful and have more influence than you know!

Jokes aside, we are here to celebrate because now gay people can legally marry in California! There is much more to be done in the journey towards equality. We work together for and celebrate together each inch of liberation!

One of the sayings around here from people who are looking for a spouse is, "The good ones are gay or married." Now they can be both!

Now wedding planners can plan their own marriage! Right, Naveen?

During the last few weeks at Church 1.0 we have been learning how to look at the Bible from the perspective of the oppressed. Reading the Bible without this lens keeps us blind to many things that can enrich our understanding and our lives. I have always been fascinated to find that two of the most powerful declarations of love in the Bible are between people of the same gender: David and Jona-

than; Ruth and Naomi. The Ruth and Naomi story is one of the most used texts in opposite-sex marriage ceremonies around the world.

Naomi, like all women of her time, is acknowledged only through her husband Elimelek. Together with their children, they move from Bethlehem to Moab. Their two sons marry local non-Jewish women, Ruth and Orpah. Elimelek and their two sons die. Naomi sends her two daughters-in-law back to their families. Ruth declines to go. She will not leave Naomi's side. She says these classic words of love: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16-17, KJV).

If you look at this text from a traditional perspective you will say that Ruth is refusing to go back to the pagan gods of her home culture and is converting to the true God of Israel. But if you look at this text from the perspective of the women of those times, from the perspective of Ruth, you can wonder about all the facts that influenced Ruth to make her decision. Let's look at her decision from two perspectives.

There is a history of strong women in Israel. Why am I going?

- *If I go, as a widow, I will have no status.*
- *First I was a virgin and belonged to my father. Then I belonged to my husband. I have no children. I belong to no one.*
- *I have no market value; I am on my own.*
- *Nobody will protect me, but I am free.*

For the first time I make my own decisions. Why am I going?

- *I will stay by Naomi's side, but not because she is a weak and vulnerable widow.*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side, but not because I think she needs protection.*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side, but not because she is in pain and calls herself Mara (bitter).*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side, not because we are weak but because we are targets—of abuse and oppression.*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side because we are family.*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side because her people already "are" my people and her God already "is" my God.*
- *I will stay by Naomi's side because I love her.*

The interpreters in English tried to make it sound poetic and changed the tense of the verbs "to go" and "to be" to be consistent with the flow of the phrase, but that changed the meaning of the text because, in this case, "your people" already were

"my people" and "your God" already was "my God." The fact that Ruth already had Naomi's people as her people and Naomi's God as her God helped Ruth decide when the crisis came. That is important because Ruth was not making a decision based on a relationship that was going to develop; she made a decision based on a relationship that already had a history.

Since the bond between Ruth and Naomi is commonly used as a reference for married couples, I want to emphasize that their relationship already had a history and it was just being tested and entering into a new, deeper phase because of the crisis.



In the same way, a marriage ceremony is a recognition of something that already took place—a bond, connection, compatibility, complicity, wholeness, partnership, understanding, acceptance, unconditional love, realistic expectations, forgiveness, compassion, nakedness—however you want to define it.

So the community is acknowledging the blessing that is already present and celebrating with you what you have built together that has blessed all of us. For years we have been blessed by your individual uniqueness, which came together to create your uniqueness as a couple.

There is no other couple out there like you, and our lives are enriched by your touch that has to do with your love for children, technology, music, flowers, Jesus and God, and Barley on the bosom.

I am saying that, because we love you, our love for you is whole. We love the Wright side and the Hegarty side and the Barley side. We love you in the same way you still love each one of us after knowing each one more and more. That's the beauty of a community that helps us to accept ourselves and each other as we are, because it is a community of whole human beings.

Today Linda and Jacquie are in fact not only saying "I love you" to each other, but "I love you more." They don't love each other in the same way they loved yesterday, or last month, or last year, or years

ago when they had a religious ceremony. They love more.



This is our opportunity to stop and think about the reasons why, after many years in a relationship, we also can say "I love you more."

- I love you more because you have seen me waking up and you still love me.
- I love you more because I have seen you sick and vulnerable and in need of help. That makes you more human.
- I love you more because everything we have together we owe to...Visa credit card and that reminds me I am not alone against capitalism.
- I love you more because you are getting older and that reminds me of my own mortality and how happy I am for spending my days with you.
- I love you more because every day we write together another page of our unique story.
- I love you more because when I look around I see attractive ones out there and I remember that I have an attractive one at home waiting for me.
- I love you more because when people are mean I remember how lucky I am to have you waiting for me and I want to get back to your arms.
- I love you more because you, too, struggle to find the meaning of life.
- I love you more because we try to use scores just to count points against those who attack us, not against each other.
- I love you more because every night when I go to bed I remember that I am in the warmest and safest place in the world with the best person in the world and I wouldn't change that for anything.
- I love you more because you have seen flaws that I have been trying to conceal and you are still by my side.
- I love you more because I am used to your snoring and it is not really a big deal. After all, if you live in California, you are used to the shakes.
- I love you more today because you are a better person than yesterday.

- I love you more today because I want to believe that I am a better person than I was yesterday.
- I do! I love you more!

I am so happy you are getting married once again, and it is my hope that you and many other couples in our community keep getting married every now and then.



Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, intersex, and their families need to have the validation, support, and love for them constantly renewed. Because, while heterosexual couples are expected and supported to be together by the hetero-normative society, LGBT couples are not; and they bravely live every day showing they made it through another day against the pressure to pull us apart.

So let's get married! Please get married! Have a gay marriage! Have a gay marriage again with the same person, even if you already have had one!

Have a same-sex marriage and try not to have the same sex every time! Or even if you are marrying someone of the opposite sex, have a gay heterosexual marriage! Help us destroy the world, so we can create a more inclusive gayer one! ▼



Homosexuality: A Difficult Subject

Pastors' Convention at Friedensau Adventist University September 18-19, 2013

By Frieder Schmid

On Wednesday my alarm clock rang at 4:00 AM. I hit the road by 5:00 a.m. 600 Kilometers later I arrived at Friedensau Adventist University.

Thankfully, I made it on time for the start of the annual, two-day Pastors' Convention of the Berlin-Central German Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and was introduced by its president to more than 60 colleagues from five federal states of Germany: Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.

I had been given two ninety-minute slots in the program on both days and the evening meeting on Wednesday for the presentation of the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*.

The main theme of the convention was homosexuality in general, its relevance in an Adventist context, its psychological and theological connotations, how the official Seventh-day Adventist Church treats (or should treat) this subject, and how Adventist pastors should (or should not)

deal with LGBT people in their communities and churches.

Two other speakers, a non-Adventist psychologist/therapist from Dresden and a knowledgeable Adventist pastor/theologian from Berlin, had also been invited to share their informed insights with a highly attentive audience. Each presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period. The allotted time was never long enough to satisfy the need for discussion and exchange.

We had excellent meetings in good spirits. Many pastors expressed their gratefulness for this opportunity to learn and to unlearn, to be confronted with oftentimes new, sometimes comfortable, sometimes disturbing, facts and viewpoints concerning the subject of homosexuality.

I was able to present my "unofficial" personal convictions publicly as well as in confidential conversations. What I shared was well-received and honestly appreciated. (Not surprisingly, more than one pastor admitted to having a

non-heterosexual child or family member!)

I could explain in detail why SDA Kinship exists, what it stands for, and why we need this organization for Adventist LGBTs. The film *Seventh-Gay Adventists* left a deep and lasting impression on the viewers, including two professors of the university's theology department!

After a safe return trip I arrived back home on that late Thursday night, happily thankful for the privilege I had been given to meet with the pastoral staff of the Berlin-Central German Conference.

Thank you all for your support and your prayers! ▼



During my daily spiritual reading...

I have included the following three quotes from Ellen White in relation to my 2013 goals between my wonderful partner and me. I feel that others might find them encouraging as well, so I share them with you, in case you may need any column fillers in an upcoming issue. I believe they are equally applicable to all couples, and families, straight or gay.

"Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind." *Adventist Home* 50.

"Home should be... a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another." *Adventist Home* 15.

"Jesus did not enforce celibacy upon any class of men. He came not to destroy the sacred relationship of marriage, but to exalt it and restore it to its original sanctity. He looks with pleasure upon the family relationship where sacred and unselfish love bears sway." *Adventist Home* 121.

Have a wonderful day!

A.K.





EUROPEAN KINSHIP MEETING

AUGUST 29–SEPTEMBER 2, 2013

LISBOA–OEIRAS, PORTUGAL

Becoming God's best version of you!

We gathered from Brazil, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Austria, and the United States in the beachfront community of Oeiras (pronounced (y)ou-way-ras (don't pronounce the "y").

We shared meals, laughter, discussions, walks on the beach, prayer, tai chi, communion, tours of Belem and Lisbon, more laughter, inside jokes, more food, and the pleasure of just being together.

We were delighted that Marcos Apolonio was able to travel all the way from the San Francisco Bay Area to be with us. Here are some of his perspectives on reading the Bible from the margins.



Pictures of God – From the Margins

By Marcos Apolonio

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10. His focus was on showing the true picture of God, in a place and time where that picture was being distorted by the religious leaders.

Now, as then, what we believe about God shapes our whole spiritual experience. In your own personal journey, which characteristics come to mind when you think about God?

The writer of Psalm 146 asked, "How do I know there is a God who is greater than any human being? Where can I find this God so I can praise God?"

He answers the question differently from many religious leaders. He does not give any of the traditional proofs of God. Instead, he asks, "Where do you find God?" and answers, "Wherever justice is meted out to the fatherless, wherever people share their bread with the hungry, extend freedom to the oppressed, lend a hand to the afflicted, the lonely, and the stranger, God is present."

Praise God. Praise God, my soul. I will praise God all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.

When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in Yahweh their God.

God is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.

God remains faithful forever.

God upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.

God sets prisoners free, God gives sight to the blind, God lifts up those who are bowed down, God loves the righteous.

God watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but God frustrates the ways of the wicked.

God reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise God!

One thousand years later, John shared *his* picture of God. The context of John 10:10 is a time and place where the common people were being margin-

alized by the dominant religion. The Jesus John described stood with those who were vulnerable. "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber." The gate was for those who cared for and nurtured the vulnerable ones. Jesus chose to stand in solidarity with those who were oppressed. John's Jesus focuses on righteousness and justice. His God equated redemption and solidarity.

God calls us to reflect Heaven's priorities. We do that by understanding the God of Heaven. His character is reflected in Isaiah 58:

Isaiah 58

*Is this not the fast I choose?
to release the bonds of injustice,
to untie the ropes of the yoke,
and to let the oppressed go free,
and tear every yoke to pieces?
Is it not to break your bread for the hungry?
You must bring home the poor, the homeless.
When you see the naked, you must cover him,
and you must not hide yourself from your relatives.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall grow quickly.
And your salvation shall go before you;
the glory of Yahweh will be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and Yahweh himself will answer.
You shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am!"*

Reading this text, I want us to take a look at Jesus/God from a variety of perspectives and see how this shifts or changes your view of God. Emmanuel is "God with us." What does it mean that God is "with us" in the margins of society?

What do you learn about God from The Poor Christ?

- "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but we have nowhere to lay our head?"
- A baby is born in unsanitary conditions
- I face hunger
- I am common - Here is a picture of how "the poor Jesus" might have looked.



Using skeleton bone structure and reconstruction techniques this is how archeologists think a first century Jew, like Jesus, would have looked. How does this affect your view of God? (*the skin pigmentation and hair color based on third-century frescoes of Jewish faces*)

What do you learn about God from The Immigrant Christ?

- Despierta mi amor –
- Salvation is found "south" of our comfortable borders
- God is a foreigner

What do we learn about God from A Native Christ?



- His homeland has been invaded.
- He is treated as "less" because of his beliefs, habits, culture
- Conquerors and missionaries disregard or harm his family/families.

What do we learn about God from The Asian Christ?

- What does it mean if we think He is exotic and different?

- What does it mean if we see him as Minjung – 'min'=people and 'jung'=mass (Korean)?
- What does it mean if we have a Minjung reading of the Bible: "these words are for all people"?



What do we learn about God from The Black Christ?

- What does it mean that we are all made after God's image?
- What does it mean that all colors are part of God?
- What would it mean if Jesus could not pass the "One Drop" rule?
- What does it mean that Blackness is the color of oppression?
- What does it mean that Jesus is Black; not necessarily in genetics but in solidarity.



What do we learn about God from The Female Christ?

- You think you can possess me for your own benefit.
- I am a vessel to carry seeds of men.
- I have been used; I understand Mary of Magdala.
- I have been abandoned. I understand the Samaritan woman at the well.
- I am the God of those who have heard, "Thank you, God, that I'm not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."

- I am Diakonia – the one who serves.
- I understand that freedom is not becoming equal to the oppressor but different.

What would we learn about God from The Queer Christ?

- Mathew 25:40 – “The least of my people”
- I am not understood
- I am mocked.
- I am bullied.
- I am beaten up.
- I am killed.
- I may not be queer in terms of sexuality, but I am in solidarity



From these pictures I have learned that Jesus, as our major revelation of God, suffered with us out of solidarity. He is our God that understands us. God gained the experience of living under oppression in order to completely relate to all of us!



Finally I want to look at one of the ways God gives to us who live in the margins. I call it “More than Enough.”

Paul wrote:

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” 2 Corinthians 12:5-10 (NIV).

When we are faced with difficulties, how long does it take to find and accept a new perspective? God says that His grace is *sufficient*. This means that our God:

- Acknowledges our need
- Goes the full extent of the situation
- Provides everything
- Suffices
- Covers everything
- Is more than enough
- Is comprehensive

- Is adequate to the situation

Sufficient comes from the Greek word “**ARKEO**” which means:

- Empowered
- Encouraged
- Validated
- Valued

This is the God who loves us. He has experienced life in the margins. He reaches out to value, encourage, validate, and empower us. This is a God who gives us dignity.

Jack Kornfield, in *A Lamp in the Darkness*, wrote, “As you face loss, frustration, hurt, and conflict invite a sense of your dignity, sit up and stand up tall, have a sense of respect for yourself and patience and compassion; with these you can handle anything” (p.15). ▼

EUROPEAN KINSHIP MEETING

Getting to know You (Better)

One of our priorities at the *Connection* is to help us all meet and get to know each other better, even though we are scattered all over the world. At EKM we asked ourselves:

1. How many times have you been to EKM?
2. Why did you decide to come?
3. What do you enjoy most about EKM?
4. What were the high points for you these last twelve months or what were the high points of EKM for you this year?
5. What message would you like to give to the Adventist church?
6. Before I die I want to...

Reino (Finland/Sweden)

I have come to EKM twelve times to meet my Adventist friends. Seeing them here and knowing people with experiences similar to mine is always one of the high points. I appreciated the presentation Marcos gave. It was very important for me that Marcos could speak from the perspective of being a gay Adventist pastor. This quality helped me have a sense that I had someone speaking with me and not to me, that Marcos came from a place of shared experiences. I would like to tell the Adventist Church, “I hope you trust God, who is so powerful, to take care of even us homosexuals.”





Ingemar (Sweden)

I come to the meetings so Reino doesn't have to go alone. Since I have either come with him or hosted a meeting, I have also been here twelve times. I like the international atmosphere. My favorite part of the meeting was Saturday's talk and discussion.

Note: Reino and Ingemar have been together for 42 years and hosted the first EKM.



Stefan (Germany)

I have attended nine EKMs. I come here to find fellowship, community, and a spiritual experience. I like meeting people whom I consider part of my family. We have a great time together. I would tell the church to "Upgrade! We need Seventh-day Adventism 2.0! Your vision of the world is outdated." Before I die I would like to be true to the people I lied to and comfort the people I have ignored so far. I hope I will have the time to do this.



Ingrid (Germany)

I have come to six EKMs because I feel part of the family. I most enjoy the fellowship and acceptance. Getting to know the people here opens up my spiritual horizons. This year I most enjoyed spending Sabbath afternoons with our children and grandchildren and their 93-year-old great-grandmother! I would like to tell the Adventist church

to "Wake up! See how discriminating you are. Look at the wonderful people on the margins. God loves us." Before I die I want to get a better sewing machine so I can do professional sewing for my children, grandchildren, and me!



Paul-Eric (Denmark)

I have come to three EKMs to find and be part of a Christian fellowship. I like meeting old and new friends and sharing the bread and the wine. I would like to tell the Adventist church that "God is love!" Before I die I want to live in Jesus.



Leif (Norway/Denmark)

I have been to three EKMs because I want to know gays and lesbians with Seventh-day Adventist backgrounds. What I like most is to be in a spiritual environment where I am finally respected, accepted, and loved. This year at EKM I most liked the talks and discussions Marcos led. I enjoy that I am growing more into the Kinship fellowship.

What I would most like to tell the Adventist Church is, "God is love. Jesus died for all of us. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should reflect God's love by being inclusive and forgiving. The church is not God and should not play God."

Caroline

This was my first EKM. I came because I want to learn how to be a better me. I really liked the sharing times in the meetings. Having the opportunity to attend EKM has been one of the high points of the year for me. I would tell the Seventh-day Adventist Church to read *Selected Messages* by Ellen White, page 205. "One night a scene was clearly presented before me. A vessel was upon the waters, in a heavy fog. Suddenly the lookout cried, 'Iceberg just ahead!' There, towering high above the ship, was a gigantic iceberg. An authoritative voice cried out, 'Meet it!' There was not a moment's hesitation. It was a time for instant action. The engineer put on full steam, and the man at the wheel steered the ship straight into the iceberg. With a crash she struck the ice. There was a fearful shock, and the iceberg broke into many pieces, falling with a noise like thunder to the deck. The passengers were violently shaken by the force of the collisions, but no lives were lost. The vessel was injured, but not beyond repair. She rebounded from the contact, trembling from stem to stern, like a living creature. Then she moved forward on her way." Before I die, I would like an Adventist girlfriend.



Mike Lewis (England) – Note:

Mike joined us on holiday but could not attend EKM. He wanted to answer two of the questions.

I want to tell the Adventist Church to open up your hearts and minds to the needs and gifts of LGBTIQ Spirit-led, God-searching Jesus followers. Before I die, I want to see more of my friends find God. ▼

KINSHIP EUROPE ON HOLIDAY



Each year, after EKM, Kinship Europe goes on holiday. The numbers have ranged from seven to twelve. There are the regulars. Each seems to have his/her role: the home finders, the cleaners, the cooks, the dishwashers, the photographers, the diving board divas, the iguana esk sunbathers who will pass up a trip to Spires in order to get one more day at the lake. This year, for the first time, three people who did not attend EKM met us at the airport as we all negotiated the rental car conundrums and headed north.

Someone in America found our holiday country home on FlipKey. Someone in the Netherlands negotiated the stay. Turns out the owners were also Dutch. Ruud has artistically included photographs, but they really don't do the house justice. It is stone and wood and tile and glass with a pool and a patio. Following our recent four-year tradition, it was once a stable. Each morning, Joachim would bring fresh figs to the breakfast table from the trees that dotted the yard. We ate dinner under the feathery branches of the olive trees. We had the requisite flies and mosquitoes. We decided to consider them part of the ambiance. The pool was a beautiful color of green, full of stubborn algae.

To describe our weeklong estate as *in the country* is to make a small understatement. It is so rural that we got lost, for the first three days, getting from the grocery store to our back yard. A 17-kilometer trip

took a very scenic hour. The GPS (global positioning system) could not find its way out of a paper bag. We did see recent ruins and flora and fauna we would not have noticed otherwise. We are all still speaking to each other, despite our attempts to be "helpful" as we negotiated the roads home. Another Kinship miracle.

You might want to Google Tomar. It only has 20,000 people but it is an exquisite little town. It is home to the Convento de Santo Cristo, a mammoth castle/monastery used by the Knights Templar (bless Google. You can look them up too). We could see the Moorish influence with the beautiful tiles. The Convento is in the process of being renovated, and you can see how remarkable it must have been. Melanie, Ivan, and Catherine did tai chi during lunch in the courtyard, probably a first for the Convento.

We found the oldest extant synagogue in Portugal (up a tiny street, down a back alley, look for the Star of David outlined in blue pompoms over the door). There were seven languages represented in our five people. We were sure we could have a wonderful conversation with the gracious woman who keeps her spiritual home alive. None of us spoke Portuguese.

"Hebrew?" Kees asked hopefully.

"No, sorry."



"Yiddish?"

"No."

"English?"

We were relatively certain that Dutch was not an option. Finally, Catherine used her remarkably rusty kitchen Spanish and Kees used his highly skilled Latin and we all used smiles to get a tour of this place that survived the Inquisition, being a local prison, housing the town hay supply, and with 500 years of neglect, until it was returned to its original intent.



We visited the town square and lots of churches. We ogled cast iron balconies with clothing hanging off the balustrades. Melanie and Ivan got us to the Museu dos Fósforos (44,000 match box covers from around the world and several decades). Across the courtyard we happened to notice a little workshop of tilemakers. We wandered through clay and bisque and little shelves of finished product. We helped support the economy of Portugal.



Make sure you see Porto sometime. We all did—but not for the usual tourist reasons. Joachim began his second pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela from Porto and the entire holiday group went to give him dinner, hugs, and a Kinship send off, and to make sure his hostel accommodations (behind the fire station) were comfortable. Turns out, we didn't have pilgrim passports and couldn't go in. Joachim took a photo for us.



Porto has a lovely waterfront. We found the gay district. It doesn't wake up until midnight. We were home by then. The architecture and churches are beautiful. The river tour is enjoyable and historic. We dined at a waterfront eatery with a waiter who is just beginning his six-year college career. We gave him an outrageously large tip and considered it a scholarship donation. We got lost, again, on the way home.



Each day we would say, "If this were the last thing, it would be perfect. But you really must see the aqueducts—and they were the last things we saw. Mike said they were definitely not lovely; they were only magnificent: hills and trees and height and history. Magnificent.

As usual, we left our house so clean I really continue to be surprised that people don't pay us to stay there. Thanks Melanie. I didn't expect to fall in love with Portugal. I'd fly back tomorrow. [CT] ▼

Strength from Stories:

Student Movement Person Profile

By Mercedes McLean

“People need to realize that we [the LGBT community] have stories.... Just be willing to open up and listen without giving judgment,” advises Jonathan Doram, a sophomore at Andrews University. Jonathan is a familiar face to many around campus, especially since being interviewed at University Vespers about how his sexual orientation influences his identity in Christ. Same-sex marriage and LGBT concerns have been controversial subjects on campus for years, but Jonathan’s goal is to remind everyone that for many people these subjects are not just topics to be debated, but an important part of their personal story. “When you can see a human face and know their story, then it brings your understanding to a deeper level,” he explains. (Jonathan recently had the opportunity to hear more ideas and stories regarding interactions between Christian churches and LGBT Christians. From September 18 to 21, he attended a leadership conference for the Reformation Project, a group that, according to their website, is “dedicated to training LGBT Christians and their allies to reform church teachings on sexual orientation and gender identity through the teaching of the Bible.”

When asked what made him interested in attending the conference, Jonathan says, “I signed up for the Reformation Project because it had so much infor-

mation and went in depth about so many important issues. We have had to read over two thousand pages of scholarly articles, research papers, and books about homosexuality and the Bible. It’s really important for me to become more educated on the topic.” Jonathan expounds on the issue of lack of understanding and education on the topic of LGBT interactions within the Church and the Bible, and explains that he thinks many people form their judgments based on second-hand, often biased, information. He believes strongly that people should be investigating the Bible for themselves and learning how to determine cultural context and modern applications.

Jonathan desires a new openness on campus that would make Andrews a more “uplifting [place] for LGBT Christians who for so long have thought that God hates them, or the Bible hates them. When in reality the Bible doesn’t hate anyone, and the verses in the Bible shouldn’t be used in hateful ways.” He expands on his views of Biblical interaction by saying, “The Bible can be used in two ways, to build a fence between people, or to build a bridge between them. And I think a lot of times we use the Bible as a fence, as a way to damage or hurt people. Instead it should be used as a bridge to connect people, to show our similarities instead of our differences.” Jonathan has acted upon his beliefs by talking openly about his sexual orientation and

his struggles in finding acceptance. By sharing his story, he encourages others to understand, to share stories of their own struggles, and to realize that, as Christians, we have more things in common than we have problems to debate about.

Jonathan makes it clear that he believes our campus is ready to engage in “honest, authentic dialogues” that allow people to go beyond scholarly debates and bring out the incredibly important human element that lies at the core of these disagreements. Because, many times, we neglect the people behind the issues that we debate so intensely. Jonathan gives advice on how to approach difficult topics, saying, “I think it would be helpful when people talk about this to take the standpoint of *I just want to hear your story, let me just listen without judging*. Because the hardest thing is feeling like I’m not being valued. A lot of us in the LGBT community feel like our humanity is not being valued, that we’re just terms, or examples, or issues.”

“I think people have a thirst for hearing people’s stories,” Jonathan says a number of times during the interview. Jonathan hopes that hearing his story will whet people’s appetites for more stories, for more study, for a higher degree of compassion, and for a better connection with both God and our fellow humans, no matter their sexual orientation. ▼

Building a NEST

By Beth Patterson

About two months ago, I launched and started having meetings with a new local group called *NEST- LGBTQ Christian Community*. NEST is a group where LGBTQ people of faith and their allies can worship, study the Bible, and support each other. The name NEST is meant as a symbol of the protection and security that we can experience in Christ and within Christian community.

For many years, finding a fulfilling Christian spiritual community where I have felt comfortable being open about my sexuality has been a goal I have not come close to reaching. Having grown up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it has been difficult for me to feel comfortable in a different church; and now going into an Adventist church also feels foreign. I've been left without a spiritual home, yet all the while God has been telling me not to give up on finding spiritual community. I grew up around Andrews University, steeped in Adventist culture, and would never have thought that I would start a non-denominational Christian LGBTQ group like NEST. I also wouldn't have guessed what a blessing it would be.

NEST started with meeting another lesbian Christian at a general LGBTQ event in my town. She agreed to accompany me with visiting a group called *Gays in Faith Together* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, approximately one hour from my home. I enjoyed the fellowship at the group, but the phenomenal thing that came from attending was realizing that I could replicate this type of experience in my own town, Kalamazoo. So I recruited my new friend to co-lead the group with me. Having another person to initiate the process with me and help me develop my Bible study facilitation plans has been extremely helpful.

I've already learned a few lessons since our meetings started. Simplifying the Bible lessons and allowing more space for people to tell their stories and express their emotions have made people feel more comfortable with the topics and each other. And, even though I'm in my thirties and haven't been very interested in social media overall, I really can't deny how much it has helped us to tell people about the group and to stay connected between meetings. Our group is still fairly small but the members are dedicated to NEST and to each other. Another key part of our success so far has been that we've engaged group members and asked them to take ownership of the group. With a committed core group of people we hope the group will continue to expand.

I recently said to one of the NEST members that I felt satisfied with the group and wanted it to stay the same. He responded, "But what if there are more people that need it?" That response helped me to recognize some of my own selfishness. My hesitation about the group getting bigger is/was based on my own fears about a larger group being

connection

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harder to run and more members changing the group's relationship dynamics. I have decided to trust God and the group with meeting these needs as they arise.

NEST is not just about meeting individual needs but about being a haven, a nest if you will, for other LGBTQ people of faith and also for those in the LGBTQ community that might be searching for faith. An LGBTQ Christian might be the only Christian that many in the larger LGBTQ community may ever be open to listening to about Jesus.

In my exile/departure from the SDA church I have caught more of a vision of the larger body of Christ. Despite the pain that I have gone through in this process I feel very thankful for this vision.

*From the highways and the byways bring My sheep.
From the north and the south they are coming to Me.
Fill the house; there is room for all.*

This dinner was never meant to be small.

– Song excerpt Beth Patterson

If you're based in or near Kalamazoo, Michigan, or would like to contact me about the group, you can email me at glbtq.nest@gmail.com or find us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/575737509135804/>).



EUROPEAN KINSHIP MEETING 2013

