

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 40, No. 3, April/May 2016



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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 244 ♦ Orinda, CA 94563 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*
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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 SDA Kinship Int'l, PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

RESOURCES

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

From the Editor

This issue is about self-care, I think. When I talk about self-care I usually discuss exercise, Vitamin B complex, inner balance, rescue remedy, low-sugar intake, stress management, sleep, and conflict resolution skills. That's not my comprehensive list; but, hopefully, you've got a sense of what I mean. The self-care John McLarty wrote about is a journey toward living his heart ethics—and wanting others to understand him. Jerry McKay writes about the struggle and the very long road toward living wholeness. It is not easy to come to wholeness when we live in a context that wants us to rip out integral parts of our self. This can be about our orientation, our gender, our spirituality, our dreams and visions, or any number of qualities. Michele O'Mara's thoughts consider how we nurture our own identity while we simultaneously build a relationship with someone we love. Arlene Taylor's article is about forgiveness. I have read research that indicates bitterness and lack of forgiveness affect our immune system, not to mention our social systems. No one gets through life without making small and large mistakes. We're going to be pretty lonely if we don't learn how to forgive and be forgiven. And, if we have room, I've thrown in a piece about the sex/gender/orientation continua just so you can get a chance to understand yourself better. If Ruud didn't have enough room to include it in this issue, you'll see it in the next one. I think we spend our lives learning the depth of what it means to care for ourselves. However it is that you are learning to do it, we at the *Connection* would very much like for you to take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

 Catherine



Resources for Self Harm and Suicidality It Gets Better

<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>



The *It Gets Better Project* is an internet-based project founded in the United States by Dan Savage and his husband Terry Miller. Begun in Sep-

tember 2010, its formulation was in response to the suicides of teenagers who were bullied because they were gay or because their peers suspected that they were gay. Its goal is to prevent suicide among LGBTIQ youth by having gay adults convey the message through social media videos that these teens' lives will improve. The project has grown rapidly: over 200 videos were uploaded in the first week, and the project's YouTube channel reached the 650-video limit* in the next week. The project is now organized on its own website, *The It Gets Better Project*, and includes more than 30,000 entries, with more than 40 million views, from people of all sexual orientations, including many celebrities. A book of essays from the project, *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*, was released in March 2011.

*There is currently no limit to the number of videos allowed on a YouTube channel.



<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

The Trevor Project was founded by writer James Lecesne, director/producer Peggy Rajski, and producer Randy Stone. They are creators of the 1994 Academy Award-winning Young Adult Fiction short film, *Trevor*. This young adult fiction/comedy/drama is about a gay 13-year-old boy who, when rejected by friends because of his sexuality, makes an attempt to take his life. The Trevor Project is an American non-profit organization that offers an around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for LGBTQ youth. The project "is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community, and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive, and positive environment for everyone." Though the crisis line is not available outside the United States, the digital community and information about the advocacy/educational programs are. ▼

For more links see page 11

My People

By John McLarty

No. I will not. Don't bother asking. I will not do it. I know what the rule book says. I know about tradition. I know all the Bible texts. I know those who are urging me to do it speak from long-standing, venerable conviction. I understand all that. But I will not do it. I will not shut the door on my kids. I will not say to any of them, "not my people."

Over the decades, my parish has included adults who never left diapers, never mastered language, and were never baptized. Still, they are my children. If they go to hell, I'll go with them. If heaven has no place for them, I have no interest in heaven. How could any place be paradise if my children were excluded because they could not master the required tasks, could not obtain the required credentials?

My parish has included people who were abused beneath religious art hanging on the wall and in the kitchens of people employed by the church. The lingering effects of that abuse created barriers to the kind of faith we rightly celebrate. These victims of abuse are not "model Christians." But surely you do not imagine that I would add the final word of abuse: "not my people." "Not welcome here."

I have also known in the wide circle of the holy family called church, abusers. Men and women who grievously mistreated children, sexually and otherwise. Some have rightly gone to prison. They break my heart, these misshapen sons and daughters of God who damaged youngsters. I sometimes wish I did not know them, had not seen their faces knowing their deeds. You might imagine that I could justify disowning these abusers because I know and



The Last Supper (from The Passion of Christ: A Gay Vision) by Douglas Blanchard
Collection of Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art

love their victims, but I refuse. They are all mine.

My circle includes physicians who have lost their licenses and maybe their minds and certainly the religion of their childhood. And would you have me disown them now? Now, when they most need a home they cannot lose? Now, when they need to be carried after decades of carrying? They may not be safe for patients, so their licenses had to go. I get that. But really, do you think I would add that last damning word: You are not one of us? Don't ask me to say it. I won't.

My congregation includes biblical scholars, theologians, and scientists who are compelled by their study to dissent from some point or another of the Adventist creed. Their childhoods, educations, grandparents and cousins, and core religious identities are all Adventist. When I was younger these were first my teachers, then my sisters and brothers. Now, increasingly, they are my children. Do you think that I, with my own deep roots in this community, could add my voice to the shrill denunciations? Can you imagine that I would join the chorus of ostracism? You know I won't. I can't.

If you've tracked with me this far, come a little farther. What about my children who wrestle with questions of gender identity and sexual orientation? I will speak of men because I know their stories better. When one of my sons is born gay, would you have me pronounce the word of excommunication or disfellowshipment: Not my people?

Have you listened to his story? Have you heard of his relentless, desperate search for a cure? Have you felt the pain of fasting and visits to psychiatrists and Christian "change specialists"? Have you felt their desperate hope after being anointed, surely this time, finally, God will say yes to their lifelong prayer and make them like other men? Have you sat with them in that moment of suspense, at the apex of the arc of hope, afraid to wonder if it's up or down from here? Cured? Then the crushing, withering realization. God said no. Maybe hearing all the details of these stories, after you have cried with them, you will still be able to summon the religious zeal to pronounce the verdict of excommunication. I cannot. I won't.

The official policy of our denomination requires us to welcome homosexuals on the condition they pledge celibacy or come among us only as visitors. The requirement of eternal celibacy is a prescription almost as cruel as the now discredited prescriptions for "change." There are individuals for whom this is possible. There are individuals, heterosexual and homosexual, for whom this is God's calling. But the denominational policy was voted by groups of old men who have been married for decades. They were voting to impose on others a burden they would have never contemplated for even a minute carrying themselves. For most of us, a prescription of lifelong celibacy is as realistic as running barefoot up Mt. Rainier in shorts and a T-shirt. We won't deny that it's possible, just that the possibility excludes us and all our friends and children.

So I will not say it. I will not exclude from the welcome table of Jesus, my children who are gay. I will not impose on them a burden that I would never even consider carrying myself. I am personally committed to warmly welcoming my gay children, requiring of them the same kind of sexual continence we expect of one another—faithfulness.

I invite the members of this congregation to come stand with me in welcoming those whose sexual and gender identities are irregular.

We celebrate the human ideal pictured in the Genesis creation stories: a man and a woman forever together in a happy union that produces children. In a perfect world, this is how people would live. We also join God in compassionate accommodation to the realities of this world. Already in Genesis, not every union of man and woman is happy. Not

every union is monogamous. And so it is in our world. Not every couple has children. Not every adult marries. We do not ostracize the people who experience these departures from the ideal. We bend to less-than-ideal practical solutions for the human problems. Some relationships become so toxic divorce is better than marriage. In ancient times, this kind of practicality was expressed in laws regarding polygamy and levirate marriage as a way to make sure no woman was left without support and protection.

In our world, we even make allowances for single people—a category of human existence that appears nowhere in the Bible story. Everyone in the Bible was part of a household. Some of the households are crazily dysfunctional. Jacob and his four women and twelve sons and one daughter come to mind. But no one was single, not in the modern sense. No one had an apartment by himself or herself. In Seattle, forty percent of households are comprised of a single person living alone. And we welcome these single folk in the life of our church.

Still, according to the denomination's rule book, if a man is not suited for marriage in the traditional sense, we must say to that man, "pledge eternal celibacy or hear our word of excommunication: Not our people."

I cannot do it. I will not do it.

We are an Adventist congregation. Congregations do not make doctrine; the international denominational body does that. But we do make decisions about membership. We can offer membership to our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters who are called by God to be part of the Adventist Church without demanding they meet some theoretical standard of model humanity. We can learn and grow together.

I ask you to stand with me and say to all of the children of God, **"My people. My brothers and sisters. My children. All of them."** ▼



Pastor John McLarty pastors the Green Lake Church in Seattle, WA, USA.

Journey



By Jerry McKay

Part IX: Back in Canada and Alberta Bound

The return to Canada hit me hard. A lot of energy is spent preparing people for the shock of a new culture, but little is spent on preparing them for the return home. I left Tokyo late one evening, and I was back at my parents' home the next and in my old bed the next night.

That first morning, I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz waking from a fantastic dream. Everything was as it had always been, yet everything seemed totally different. Of course, I was the one who had changed. It was unsettling to realize that no one would ever understand what the last year had been like. All the letters I had sent home couldn't capture my experience. How could they? All I could do was to try to pick up where I had left off.

Some things had not changed—those themes. Being back at home, I was once again immersed in the dynamics of my family. I was intentional about my devotional life throughout the summer and my orientation remained right by my side. The only change was a unique summer job that brought with it an excellent illustration of my psychological state of mind.

Although I missed Japan, it was nice to be at home—sort of. I had for-

gotten what our family dynamics were like. Although living under the same roof, my parents lived separate lives. When dad was downstairs, mom was upstairs. When dad was at home, mom was out. Dad's drinking—usually on the weekends—affected us deeply. It didn't matter that I was twenty; I still felt the sadness associated with my parents' arguments. The mood in the house threw me back emotionally to childhood, and I remembered the fear that I might have been the cause of their marital problems. That feeling is hard to shake.

I was still the "religious" one in the family. Not only did I "have to" go to church every week, I was now the returning missionary. Although I didn't flaunt the fact, it added to the impression that I walked on water. The only thing I remember doing that irritated my father was playing religious music on weekdays. I think dad was concerned that I was becoming a religious fanatic. In addition to my regular Bible study and prayer, I found other ways to share my faith. That included talking about Japan.

The next best thing to being in Japan was bringing Japan home. With a slide show and a suitcase full of souvenirs, I shared my experiences

with anyone who would listen, whether at church or in a welcoming living room. I know I went on and on about Japan. If people were tired of listening to me, no one said so.

I made great effort to stay in touch with friends. Despite the cost—\$10.00 for a three-minute call to Tokyo in 1976—I contacted a few of my dearest friends. I also wrote letters.

Decades before Facebook and other social media allowed us to connect with hundreds of people instantly and simultaneously, I wrote letters. Letter writing served two purposes. It lifted me out of my mundane summer, as well as being an extension of my Christian witness. Each letter included some form of encouragement for people to persevere in their journey of faith.

At one point, I corresponded regularly with nearly 100 people. No one was forgotten as I recorded the date I wrote a letter and the date I received a reply. If too much time passed before hearing from someone, I would send off another letter.

I also put my faith into practice in another way. While I hated selling things door to door, I had no problem giving things away. I recruited a church member to go with me one evening a

week, or as our schedules allowed, to give out literature.

And there was Wednesday night prayer meeting. As they had been for decades, they were simple and predictable events usually in a church member's living room. I participated, but they were nothing like the Bible study groups in Tokyo. It was at those meetings that I missed Japan the most. Just when I was feeling the most homesick, however, Donna came for a visit with a Japanese friend of hers. Reminiscing over green tea and rice crackers lifted my spirits.

The most spiritually enriching moments that summer, though, were the few scattered hours spent back on my uncle's farm. When I walked in the fields or the forest, I felt at peace—the closest to God. Hanging out with the animals did more for my soul than most church services. When I looked into the eyes of one of the animals, and it returned the gaze, I felt connected to something beyond myself. During those few hours, the angst of my orientation melted away.

Because I didn't interact with many people that summer, my orientation was less of a burden, but it was always present. Occasionally, a tanned shirtless road worker or brawny farm hand working in a nearby field would trigger my angst. The greatest source of distress, however, was closer to home.

My sister, now sixteen going on seventeen, was dating. Although I was protective of her and had her spiritual welfare in mind—concerned that one of her suitors might lure her from the faith—her visitors made me anxious for a different reason.

Like some nosy neighbor, I would watch from behind my bedroom curtain when her male friends arrived. When one of them would take Marilyn for a ride on his motorcycle, it was envy, not concern that consumed me. I wanted to be the one on the back of that bike holding on to the guy for

dear life.

Right behind the envy were feelings of condemnation. "What normal guy," I repeatedly asked myself, "would be jealous of his sister's boyfriend?" Each time that happened, I felt I was adding a new twist to the 10th commandment. Thou shalt not covet thy sister's boyfriend!

Many times I was left standing behind the curtain with chest pains brought on by those "why" questions and feelings of abnormality. While this may seem a rather pathetic picture, it is easy to miss what was motivating my behavior. I was lonely and I longed for companionship. When my loneliness emerged, it was a male companion that I wanted. I couldn't explain why or change that fact. Of course, I told no one.

When I wasn't involved in church activities, I was working—with bees. That summer, I worked for a church member who managed hundreds of hives for a living.

I was never afraid of bees as a child, and curiosity often got the best of me. Like most boys, given the chance, I poked at a bee's nest a time or two just to see what would happen. Usually, the bees won. Managing bees as opposed to teasing them is a different story.

To achieve optimal production, we had to constantly monitor the hives. That meant occasionally examining them. Yes, opening them! That's when the fun began.

Knowing how bees behave works in your favor if you can trust theoretical knowledge. The secret is in knowing that warm sunny days make for busy bees, and busy bees are friendlier bees. That's when we could dismantle a hive with surprisingly little reaction. Bother them on a cool cloudy day, and we paid the price. The downside is that I had to work on the hot days. While Harry often worked unprotected, I was always cloaked in gloves, a hat, and netting.

Even then, the occasional bee worked its way onto my side of the veil! That was too close for comfort.

A fully loaded hive can weigh 200 pounds. Although we would lift the hives together, it didn't help that Harry was six feet tall and I was 5' 6" and all of 125 pounds. My lift was always more demanding. It was a "man's job," and I survived even though I would have preferred to be at home reading a book or setting an attractive dinner table.

One incident with the bees illustrates my state of mind in general.

One afternoon, I had to walk through a hive—so to speak. We needed to get a piece of equipment from a shed where we extracted the honey. To get the equipment, someone needed to walk through the shed all the way to the back. That would not have been a problem except for the fact that the bees had found the shed. Bees have scouts, and they had discovered where we had taken their honey. They weren't angry, just out in full force to reclaim what had been stolen. When I opened the door, thousands of bees were inside either crawling on everything or in flight coming and going in every direction.

With my knowledge of bee behavior in mind, I knew "theoretically" that I should be able to walk through all that activity retrieve the object and get back out safely. Bees brushed by me as I walked slowly to the back of the shed. I was focused on my task; they on theirs. It worked. It was an amazing lesson in the suspension of emotion. While suspending emotion helps to control the fight or flight response, it is damaging to one's emotional health if it becomes a permanent state. I made the connection years later when I started to get in touch with how I suspended my needs and emotions in order to manage the angst around my orientation. When I did participate in social activities, I was usually disconnected emotionally. I could be "one of the

group” physically yet detached psychologically. Like in that bee-filled shed, I passed in and out of life with numbed emotions. Understandably, the more I suspended my needs and emotions the greater my loneliness. This is what being “closeted” did to me.

By late August, my quiet bee-filled summer had come to an end, and I was ready to get back to school and friends I had left behind the previous year. I was anxious, though, because there had been a significant change, and that change meant a major relocation. While in Japan, the Church moved the theology program from Kingsway to its college in Alberta.

I drove the 3500 kilometers to Alberta with the beekeeper and his wife in his one-ton truck. It was loaded with beekeeping supplies destined for a bee-keeping relative in Edmonton. The drive was an experience in itself. Even though I had driven the truck, I was not used to using a standard shift on hills like those in northern Ontario.

At one point, we came to a complete stop on a steep hill because of road construction. Try as I might, when I wanted to move on, I couldn’t get out of first gear. Harry bit his lip a number of times as I ground the gears trying to get the truck in forward motion without rolling backward into the cars stopped behind us. To my embarrassment, we had to shut off the truck and switch seats. Although my ego took a hit, the incident didn’t add or subtract anything to my orientation. That was already well-established. On the prairies, the stick shift issue disappeared.

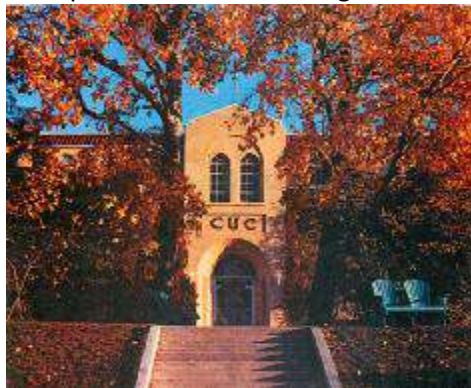
We arrived in Edmonton early on a Friday afternoon. We had enough time to deliver our load of supplies and make it to the college campus for worship as the sun set that Friday evening. One of the first people I met was my roommate Kelvin. He also moved to Alberta to continue his college education. I was pleased to be starting a new year at a new school with my “old”

roommate. As well, since it was an Adventist institution, I was at home with the culture and expectations. In addition to Kelvin being there, Donna was there, as well.



Located just outside of the town of Lacombe, Canadian Union College (now Burman University) sits on a hill overlooking Highway 2—the main route between Calgary and Edmonton. From that vantage point, I had an impressive view of the plains that eventually become the foothills that lead to the Rocky Mountains. It was the furthest north I had ever been.

During the summer, the sun came close to never setting. By the winter solstice, I would not see the sun if I were indoors between 9 and 4. Many mornings I watched the sun rise during a nine o’clock class. While living on that hilltop, I experienced my first Chinook and spectacular Northern Lights.



Like at Kingsway, I worked on campus. My first job was at the book bindery stamping the titles on the spines of newly bound books. Later, I finagled a cushier job as a monitor in the men’s residence.

Unlike Kingsway, I was now one among a larger identifiable group—the theology majors. While that may seem

like an obvious designation, it was a title that carried a loving but cautionary warning among the student body because we were the nerdy ones on campus—even beating out the science majors.

We wore not-so-coordinated suit jackets and ties and rushed about with briefcases full of very important theological texts and documents. Because of all the “God stuff” we had to master, we were a bit of a sober group. Although a part of that group, a few of us periodically defied those norms.

Even though my program was only at the bachelor level, the courses were interesting, and I enjoyed my studies. There were crash courses in Old and New Testament (NT) studies. NT studies included a race through the book of Romans. I don’t remember any comments on Romans chapter one; and, of course, I never brought up “those texts” for discussion or clarification. In 1976, the subject of homosexuality was still not on the radar of Adventist educational institutions, which may explain why the text was not explored.

And then there was NT Greek. Languages were never my strength to begin with. I had not done well in French with its masculine and feminine nouns and points of grammatical agreement. If two genders were too much to handle, Greek presented a greater challenge with its third gender—neuter. We were required to take two years of Greek. Although I earned an A the first semester, by the time I finished I could only muster a C. But a C was all I needed. I had a good sense, then, that I would not be pursuing a specialization in Biblical languages.

My program required electives to round out my studies. I bought a trombone and joined the band. I started taking piano lessons to fulfill a childhood dream. And, surprisingly, I signed up for a physical education class. No, not basketball or floor hockey. No potentially shirtless male team sports

for me. Fortunately, there were more options now from which to choose. I opted for cross-country skiing. The teacher was a little more rugged than I was, and I think he would have liked me to be more aggressive in my technique. I passed the course nonetheless. Yes, he was attractive in his mustache and sports attire!



Outside of class, I was involved in recruiting the next group of volunteers to be student missionaries, and for one semester, I was the Theology Club Executive Secretary-Treasurer!

Naturally, my spiritual life was full. Although I was majoring in theology, I never considered those studies an extension of my personal devotions. I regularly sought opportunities to have my thoughtful hour to contemplate Jesus' life. When I wanted more privacy than my dorm room allowed, I slipped away to a "secret place."

The men's dormitory was a very old building. Not long after arriving, I discovered a rickety staircase behind a nondescript door in the recreation room. It led to a storage space that resembled a basement. No one ever went down there except to store furniture or personal belongings most of which had long since been forgotten by its owner. You could barely walk around without stepping on something. What was actually a fire trap became my private sanctuary.

Under one 60-watt light bulb that dangled from the unfinished wood frame ceiling, I set up a small wooden table and chair I had found among the abandoned items. The stacks of boxes dampened any noise making it so quiet I could hear my heart beat. I spent

many hours that year cocooned there reading my Bible and praying for family and friends.

Once again, I emphasize my consistent intentional devotional life because it contrasts with the image people often associate with "the homosexual." So many have been conditioned to believe that homosexuality cannot co-exist with a vibrant faith experience.

Mine does, and my experience is by no means unique.

And again, I must emphasize that I had not yet named my experience or self-identified as anything in any way. I never prayed about my orientation specifically. My feelings and attractions were open to God only in unspoken ways; my heart groaning with those "why" questions. ▼

Loving You Without Leaving Me

By Michele O'Mara

Recently I opened an email in which I was asked, "How can I balance being true to myself while pleasing my partner?" That's what we all want to know, isn't it? How can I be in a relationship without compromising who I *am*? A relationship is an investment. In fact, I believe it is the most valuable investment we will ever make. We are essentially offering up ourselves to share with another person, believing that by doing so our life will be better. In order to have something to invest, though, we must acquaint ourselves with what we have to offer someone. This requires knowing who we are, what our needs are, and who we want to become in our lifetime. No small task, right? The good news is that investing ourselves in a relationship has many rewards when we invest wisely! By combining our strengths with our partner's strengths we are essentially expanding the resources from which we can both draw as we navigate life. Typically, the strengths we have to offer are complementary. For example, one partner may offer spontaneity and fun while the other provides security and stability. Sounds good, right? So why does being in a relationship seem more complicated than that? Well, probably because of a thing called the **Power Struggle**. This is a natural, healthy stage in relationship development that occurs when each partner works to establish his own identity within the relationship. The power struggle begins when differences start to surface. And herein lies the challenge. How do I maintain my independence and personal integrity while being a good partner?

In outstanding relationships, the question is never, will I be able to get my needs met? The question instead, is, what needs to happen so that we are both able to get our needs met without taking away from our relationship? The difficulty of course, is determining what exactly your needs are (not your wants, mind you—but your needs which support your highest good!). We must evaluate the requests made of us by our partners and determine when they are in our best interest and when they are not.

Cindy thinks her partner is controlling because she wants her to stop smoking marijuana. Is that controlling? Or is her partner tending to her most precious investment: her relationship with Cindy?

Kara says her partner wants her to open up and share her feelings more freely. Kara says she resents her partner's sudden interest in her being more open and shouldn't have to change who she has always been just to please her partner. Is Kara exercising self-care, or is she rejecting her partner's invita- ►

tion for her to grow?

Ed says his partner wants him to stop going to therapy because therapy is for the weak-minded. Is Ed's partner making a healthy request or possibly acting out of fear of the unknown of what might happen if Ed goes to therapy?

Often we confuse our highest high, with our highest good. Our highest high is that which feels good at any cost! Our highest good is that which moves us closer to being the person we want to be. In fact, behaving according to our highest good doesn't always feel good. Take Kara, for example. Because she is not used to sharing her feelings, it is scary and very uncomfortable for her to open up. Her fears and discomfort automatically make her think it's not a good thing for her to do. However, the pain involved does not mean it is not for her highest good; it simply means it is difficult. Just think about exercise! If we waited to feel good before working out, we might never run or lift weights! Likewise, just because something feels good, like smoking marijuana, for example, doesn't mean that we must cling to it in order to be "true to ourselves."

Knowing the difference between our highest good and our highest high is critical! Now in Ed's case, his partner wants him to stop going to therapy. He has decided it's time to really explore why he's unhappy. Therapy is an exercise in self-care for him, and because doing so does not take away from their relationship, Ed may have to confront the issue with his partner as an act of self-care.

Couples with outstanding relationships don't confuse their partner's healthy requests with efforts to change or control—they know that their partner is simply tending to her most precious investment: the relationship she shares with you.

What has your partner asked of you lately? Is this request something that will ultimately add to your life, or take away from your life? Is his request in line with the person you want to be, or does it conflict with who you want to be? Are you open to your partner's healthy requests?

Your challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to list the top three requests that you commonly hear from your partner, friends, and other loved ones, and identify one thing from that list that you can start doing differently today.



There is Hope

Floyd Poenitz reports about the AWA Meeting in Germany

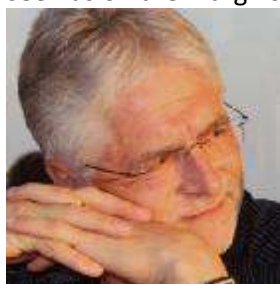
AWA (Adventistischer Wissenschaftlicher Arbeitskreis e. V.) met March 18-20, 2016, for its spring meeting in the Frankfurt/Main Seventh-day Adventist Church. AWA (<http://www.awa-info.eu>), much like *Adventist Forum*, covers a variety of subjects that are of interest to the church in Germany. The topic and focus of this year's conference were "Homosexuality: A subject for the Adventist church? Is our church a safe place for all people?"



The week before, I had been a co-facilitator at a similar conference called *Building Safe Places (BSP)*

(<http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org>), which was held just a few kilometers south of Frankfurt and is sponsored by Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. BSP is designed for Seventh-day

Adventist pastors and leaders to discuss how to make their churches a safe place for LGBTI+ as well as other members who are seen as on the margins of the church.



Frieder Schmid (retired pastor and conference president, also an AWA board member) invited me to be a part of the AWA conference and to share my story with the conference attendees as well as to tell a bit more about Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, an organization that has provided a safe community

for LGBT+ Adventists since 1976. I happily agreed.

On Friday night, the conference was opened and the Sabbath was greeted by Walter Bromba, the president of AWA. Frieder Schmid gave an overview of the subject that was going to be examined; and Dr. Rolf Pöhler from Friedensau University presented the topic, *Between Quoting Scripture and Zeitgeist*.

On Sabbath morning, the Frankfurt Seventh-day Adventist Church was filled to capacity and extra chairs were added to accommodate more seating. Dr. Rolf Pöhler brought the powerful message, "The Radical Jesus," bringing home the message that Jesus proclaimed a theology of inclusion. It was interesting that this conference was taking place on the heels of the General Conference President Ted Wilson's visit to Frankfurt just the week before to get the German unions to declare that they were on board with the church's official statements, especially regarding women's ordination. This AWA meeting was such a dichotomy to what Elder Ted Wilson was seeking to accomplish—free thinking as opposed to the uniformity that Elder Wilson was asking for. In contrast to the Cape Town conference a few years ago, this was a chance for the AWA members to dialog **with** those who identify as LGBT+ instead of only dialoging **about** them.

Sabbath afternoon, Dr. Michael Pearson, retired Newbold professor, presented *An Historical Look Back* on the subject of homosexuality in society and the challenges the Seventh-day Adventist church has had on this subject, including the formation of the supportive organization, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, the change ministry of Colin Cook and his exposure, to present-day challenges facing the church, including same-sex marriage.



Afterward, Tanja Koppers and René Tuchtenhagen, local Kinship Germany members, told their stories of how they were rejected by their former local congregations once it was found out that they were gay and had a same-sex partner. These were very emotional

accounts to listen to; but, fortunately, they both had positive endings and they are both still members of the local Frankfurt congregation and very much accepted and integrated into the church family.



Then I had a chance to relate my own story of growing up in a God-loving, conservative German Adventist family in south Texas, about realizing that I was “different,” and my challenge to discover what that actually meant and my quest to take God at His word. This included my marriage and divorce and journey to learn to accept myself as a gay man and an Adventist

Christian. Fortunately, my story, too, has a positive ending, with me now married to my soulmate and still able to attend my local church.

These three stories were very touching and had an impact on the audience. Afterward, there was time for the

audience to talk to us and to ask more questions to clarify what they had just heard about instances of pastors not handling the situation of being presented with these circumstances very well at all. Everyone hoped that a pastor would handle such situations much more compassionately.

On Sunday morning, Dr. Michael Pearson again spoke and presented the attendees with *Church as a Safe Place*. Some of his main points were: *Faith, Truth, and Gifts Are to Be Found on the Margins; Strangers Bring the Gifts We Need, Not The Ones We Want*; and, finally, *If the Church Is Not a Safe Place for Homosexuals, It Is Not a Safe Place for Anyone*.

Dr. Pearson suggested that we abandon the old concepts of conservative and liberal and strive for **truthfulness**. We create a flourishing community of faith when we have a diversity of gifts. Is our church courageous enough to have these needed conversations or will it continue to break the 9th commandment?

Afterward, there was a panel discussion where the attendees were able to ask questions of those who had presented over the weekend. It was quite obvious that this is a topic that folks want to discuss openly and are seeking honest answers. It is a topic that can no longer be swept under the carpet and ignored in any part of the world if the church intends to remain relevant.

As a side note, the Sabbath morning AWA Conference offering was equally divided between the local host church and Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International to support the mission of the organization to be a safe place for those members who are LGBT+ and are being marginalized.

I am very proud that AWA choose this subject as its focus for this conference, and I truly see that things are slowly changing for the better from the grass roots and local congregation levels. There is hope for our church. ▼

► Resources for Self Harm and Suicidality

► American Association of Suicidology Warning Signs of Suicide

<http://www.suicidology.org/resources/warning-signs>

► The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

A free, 24-hour hotline available in the United States to anyone in suicidal crisis or distress. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Learn more at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

► American Association of Suicidology Risk Factors for Suicide and Fact Sheets

<http://www.suicidology.org/resources/facts-statistics>



Four Sex-Gender Continuums

This portrays some of the current terminology and continuum illustrations that presently exist. It is foundational information and not designed to exhibit a theological or religious perspective.

1. Biological Sex



Biological sex includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, and fat distribution. These characteristics are objective in that they can be seen and measured (with appropriate technology). Although the

majority of human beings likely cluster somewhere near one of the two ends of this continuum, humans are represented across the entire continuum.

For example, the more central points represent intersex individuals (formerly labeled as hermaphrodites), who have combinations of both typical male and female characteristics. These

individuals may have both a testis and an ovary, or have XY chromosomes (the usual male pattern) along with a vagina, or exhibit features that are not completely male or completely female (e.g., possess a body organ that could be thought of as a small penis or as a large clitoris, or have an XXY or XXXY or XXXXY chromosomal pattern).

2. Gender Identity



Gender identity encompasses the way in which human beings think of and identify themselves. Unlike biological sex, gender identity is a psychological perception. It cannot be observed or measured—at least by current means—and must be self-identified and reported by the individual. Like biological sex, it consists of more than two categories. Those who identify as a third gender, both, or neither,

fall in the middle range of the continuum.

Language is lacking for the more central points of the continuum because all individuals are expected to identify unequivocally with one of the two extremes. Using empathizing (equated with the female brain) and systemizing (equated with the male brain) terminology, no one is 100% of either. Even the extreme female brain

has some systemizing abilities and the extreme male brain has some empathizing abilities. However, some individuals, fearing that having both masculine and feminine aspects of their psyches is abnormal, seek to purge themselves of one or the other aspect by acting in exaggerated and sex-stereotypical ways.

3. Gender Expression



Gender expression involves everything that human beings do to communicate their sex or gender to others: clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, way of speaking, roles taken in interactions, et cetera. This communication may be conscious and purposeful or subconscious and accidental. It could also be called social gender because it relates to interactions between people. Trappings of one gen-

der or the other may be forced on individuals as children or by dress codes at school/church or through guidelines and expectations in the workplace.

Gender expression is also a continuum, with so-called feminine characteristics at one end and masculine characteristics at the other. Individuals who are androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) and those that combine elements of the two (sometimes called

gender-bending) are plotted along the central range. Although gender expression can vary for an individual from day to day or in differing situations, most people can identify with a point on the continuum where they sense they belong innately and feel most comfortable. It is also acknowledged that some individuals appear comfortable exhibiting a wider range of gender expression than others.

4. Sexual Orientation

Attracted
to Females

Bisexual
Asexual

Attracted
to Males

Sexual orientation describes the types of individuals to whom one is attracted romantically, erotically, and perhaps emotionally. The ends of this continuum are labeled “attracted to females” and “attracted to males,” rather than “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” to avoid confusion in discussing the concepts of sex and gender. Bisexuality (attracted to both males and females) and asexuality (attracted to neither males nor females) fall

somewhere in the middle of this continuum.

The concept that individuals fall into one of the two extreme categories (whether they are straight or gay), with only a tiny minority being plotted across the continuum, appears to be invalid. Kinsey’s work showed that most human beings are not at one extreme or the other. Rather, they occupy points along the continuum

(although there are clusters at either end). Studies have also shown that depending on environmental circumstances (e.g., available options, the partner is pregnant, cultural or religious expectations of being a “virgin” at the time of marriage or of celibacy, incarceration), at least, some individuals seem able to move back and forth along the continuum quite easily. Others cannot.

Additional Comments

The four continuums are independent illustrations. The cultural expectation is that males occupy the right extremes of all four continuums (male, masculine, attracted to females) while females occupy the left extreme (female, feminine, attracted to males). But an individual with male anatomy might be attracted to males (gay male) rather than to females, or could have a gender identity of female (transsexual) or could have a feminine gender expression on occasion (cross dresser). And an individual with female anatomy might identify as a female but have a somewhat masculine gender expression and be attracted to females (butch lesbian). It’s a mix-and-match world and there are as many combinations as there are individuals on the planet.

For each continuum, the popular notion that there are two distinct categories, with everyone falling neatly into one or the other, is a social construct. The real world (*nature*, if you will) does not observe these boundaries. Looking at what actually exists, while there are clusters near each end of the continuum, few people are actually at either extreme end, and individuals are represented at every point along the continuum.

Gender identity and sexual orientation have been found resistant to change. Although there are not yet definitive answers to whether these are due to genetics, epigenetics, or a combination of both, they are established very early in life, possibly during gestation, and there are no reliable methods that have been proven effective for changing either identity or orientation. Some factors that compose biological sex can be changed, with more or less difficulty. These changes are not limited to people who change their sex. Many females undergo breast enlargement, which moves them toward the extreme female end of the continuum while some males opt for penile implants or enlargement to enhance their maleness. Gender expression is quite flexible for some people and more rigid for others. Most

people feel strongly about having the freedom to express themselves in ways that are consistent with their inner gender identity and experience some discomfort when prevented from doing so.

Because every brain on the planet is unique, these continuums cannot reflect the complexity of absolute “reality,” but likely they are closer than the old two-box system. Each of the four continuums could be divided into several smaller representations. For instance, **Biological Sex** could be separated into representations for external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, hormone levels, chromosome patterns, and so forth. An individual would probably not fall on the same place on each of these because **Biological Sex** is a summary of scores for several variables.



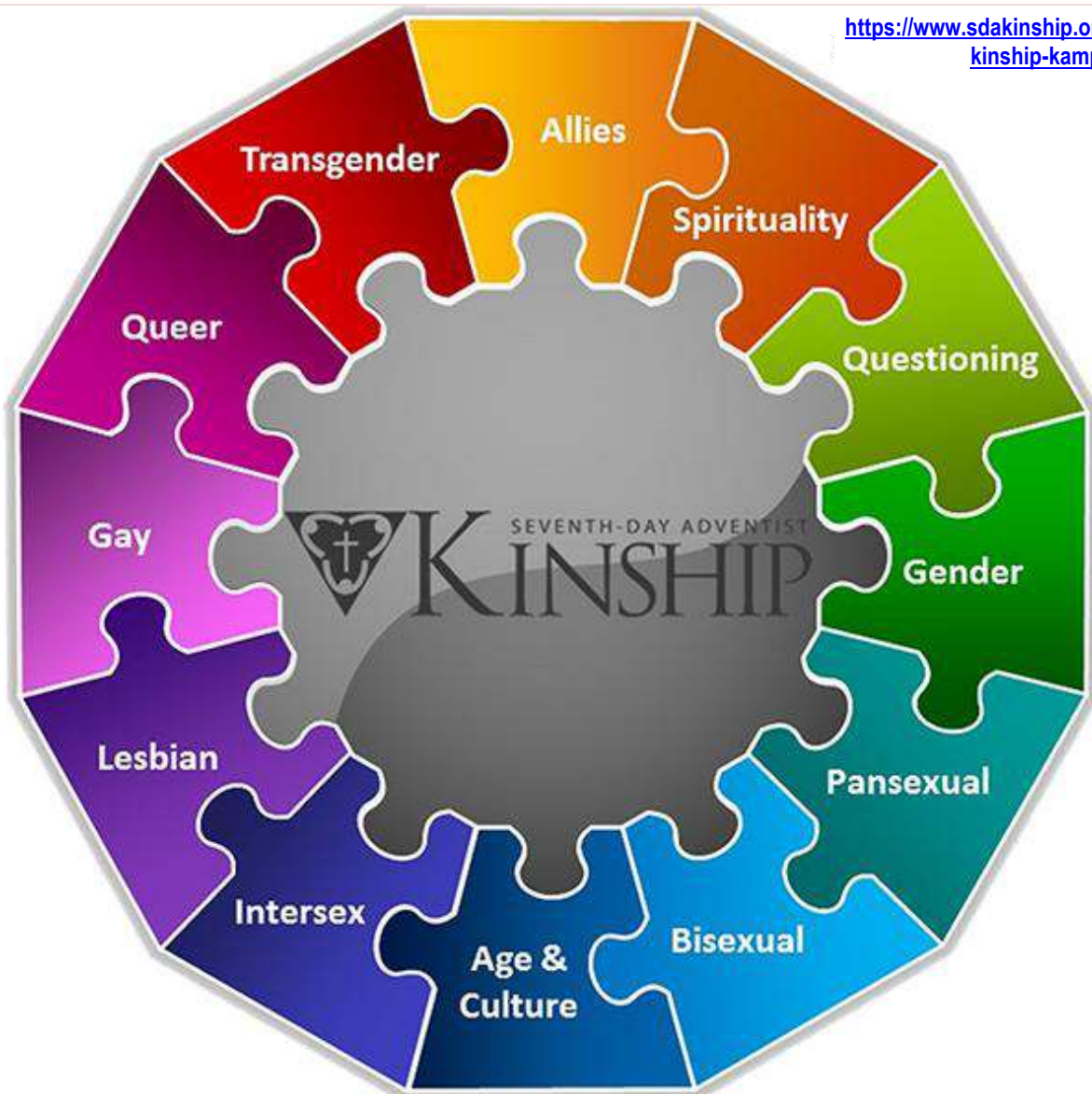
► Four Sex-Gender Continuums



Additional Note

Chromosomal combinations exist that don't fit anywhere on a continuum. Some people have neither the XX (typically female) chromosomal pattern nor the XY pattern typical of males. But it is unclear whether or not other patterns (e.g., X or XO, XXY or XXXY) belong on the continuum between XX and XY or require separate continuums. Furthermore, although portrayed as independent, continuums may not be entirely separate. For example, if a biological component for gender identity and sexual orientation is identified, then identity and orientation may overlap with the biological sex continuum. © CENTER FOR GENDER SANITY & A.TAYLOR

SDA Kinship Kampmeeting 2016 July 26-31, 2016



<https://www.sdakinship.org/events/sda-kinship-kampmeeting.html>

Kinship...Breaking down barriers for a healthier community!

European KINSHIP Meeting

European Kinship Meeting 2016 1-5 September in Seminarhotel Odenwald, Germany



We invite you to join us at the beautiful Seminar Hotel Odenwald near Frankfurt where Kinship has held both an EKM meeting and several Safe Places trainings.

[<http://www.seminarhotel-odenwald.de/>]



Our primary speaker will be Dr. Arlene Taylor, a brain development and function specialist, who has a very interesting way of talking with groups. She will be talking on:

- The Brain and Spirituality
- The Brain and Sex/Gender and Orientation
- The Brain and Sex Differences
- The Brain and Humor
- The Brain and How to Talk about Difficult Issues

Saturday night we will have a presentation of: *A Gay SDA Play*. For our Sunday excursion, Kinship Germany is planning a Magical Mystery Tour. We plan to have at least one German-speaking session. There are lovely walking trails and comfortable places to sit in the backyard and have coffee.

The cost will be: € 299.-

Information: write to Catherine Taylor, coordinator EKM2016 at katgurian@aol.com

Note: Registration for EKM-holiday is closed, but feel free to visit us and join us for day excursions.

connection

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

Welcome to Rehoboth Beach Mini-Kampmeeting

April 28-May 1, 2016

We will have the beach house from Thursday afternoon until Sunday morning, providing our attendees an extra day to play at the beach, boardwalk or outlet shops. Please register to stay onsite as soon as possible to make sure you get a room at the beach house! Once all spaces are filled, you will need to find your own room at one of the many hotels in the area. The cost for the weekend at the beach house, which includes a warm bed, Sabbath & Sunday breakfast, Friday evening supper and Sabbath lunch is \$125/person. The cost for the weekend if staying off-site is \$80/person (Register to stay offsite.). All other meals are your responsibility.

Our speaker this year is Pastor Al Konrad**, Brian's good friend!

For any questions, please contact Yolanda at region2@sdakinship.org.

I look forward to seeing you soon!
Yolanda

◀ Our speaker, Pastor Konrad, was born in a chicken coop in Chortiza, Ukraine during WWII. On the eighth day of his life, he, along with his mother, brother, and other members of the family fled Russia by railroad boxcars and then horse drawn covered wagons with a stops in Poland and Germany. In 1952 his family immigrated to the United States of America and in 1965 he became a naturalized citizen.

Al attended Andrews University and received a BA, in Theology in 1965 and an MA, in Religious Studies in 1967. He also attended Adelphi University, located in Garden City, New York, where he studied Organizational Behavior and Management in the School of Business.

Al is an ordained minister and for twenty years pastored various churches in Illinois, New York, and Maryland ranging in size from 25 to 1,500 members. In 1989 due to some health complications he took a medical leave from the ministry and for twenty years worked in the long-term care industry as a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator. After his retirement in 2009, he returned to the ministry and has been the pastor of the Grasonville Seventh-day Adventist church. This weekend marks his final retirement from active ministry. He is looking forward to cheering the younger folks on as they do the work of the Lord.

Al is the proud parent of two children, three granddaughters, and one great-grandson. His daughter, Anni, is a Dental Practice Administrator and his son John, was the Vice-President/General Manager of WGTS before his untimely death in January 2013.

The annual pre-Kampmeeting Event

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

July 22 - 26, 2016

**Damascus,
Maryland USA**



Register and pay in full now on

<https://www.sdakinship.org/events/women-children-first.html>

A special retreat for the women of Kinship held near Damascus, Maryland. Bring yourself (and your children, if you wish) and enjoy this time to rest your body and soul while cultivating the friendships that are so important to us!

connection