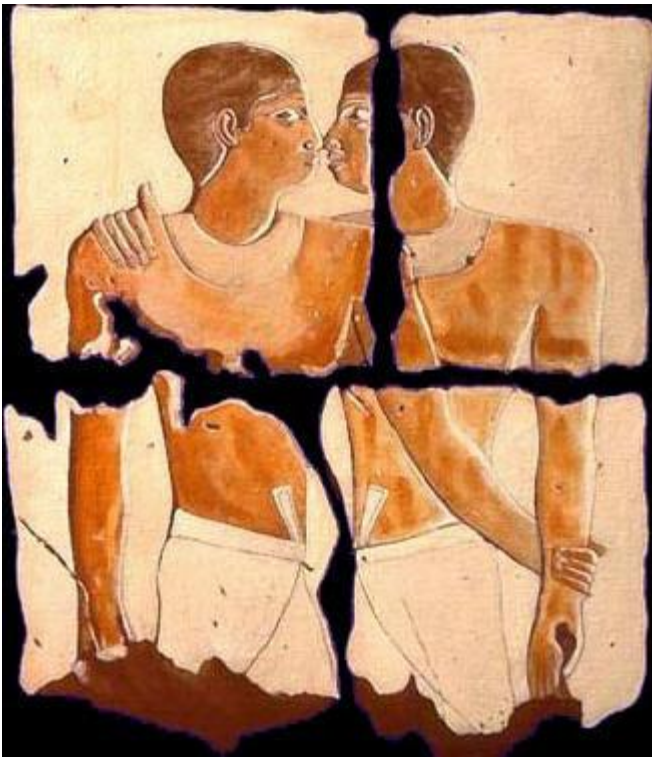


connection.

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 34 No. 6 – July/Aug. 2010

Homosexuality:



Seeking an Adequate Adventist Response

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The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression.
The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom,
to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.
That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom.

—Bell Hooks

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WHO WE ARE...

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

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 1,600 people in more than forty-three countries. SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

SUPPORT KINSHIP

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 SDA 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.)

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





From the Editor

Whew, July has been a busy month in terms of Kinship-related events. At the beginning of the month, Kinship members joined other Seventh-day Adventists at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia. They took surveys, handed out literature (like any good Adventist), discussed issues and possible programs with some church administrators, had reunions with friends, and met some we had not known before. You'll find Dave Ferguson's report in this newsletter. A week later, the Australian Adventist Forum held a conference in Sydney about Adventists and homosexuality. Kinship members were present there. Noel Thorpe sold copies of Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives and handed out "Eden's Gifts." Both Noel and David Coltheart contributed written reports about those discussions for this issue. Then, people from as far away as Korea and as close as Atlanta gathered together for our SDA Kinship's annual Kampmeeting, held this year in Atlanta. You'll have to wait until the next issue for more news about that. What these events tell me is that LGBTI Seventh-day Adventists are having an impact and affecting the church in ways we might not have dreamed possible thirty years ago. I am glad for SDA Kinship and all the hard work that it has done to help make our world a little safer. Even more, I appreciate the courage each one of you has shown to just live an honest life. It is you—the way you live and your story—that really changes the opinions of others. Take good care of yourselves for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



We'd like to introduce you to:

Rom Wilder was born in Los Angeles, California, at the White Memorial Hospital in January 1943.



That's true. Nine years and a dozen addresses later my first sister was born at that same hospital. In between came World War II, college, and medical school (for my father, not me!). Much like the Laplanders in my third grade reader (*If I Were Going*) we moved a lot. (I actually enjoyed much of the moving adventures; but looking back now, I wonder how in the world my mother did all that packing, unpacking, packing, unpacking, etc. ad nauseum?!?! No wonder she doesn't ever want to pack and/or move again!)

Nomads go to many schools. For me it began at Loma Linda in the Adventist elementary school there. Then came Lincoln Park Union School (Los Angeles), Glendale Union Academy Elementary, and my favorite - two years at the fabulous three-room Crescent City Adventist School. We moved to Worthington, Ohio, and I finished up grade school at my first, and only, public school, where I fell madly in love with my 8th-grade history teacher. (Not a PE teacher? Nope - history! Hated the subject, loved the teacher!!)

Academy came next. Mt. Vernon, Glendale (again), Lynwood, and finally my beloved Shenandoah Valley Academy, "where shines the big Virginia sun." I lost a year of school after a couple of months at Mt. Vernon. Hepatitis. (Evidently from the water in Mt. Vernon. I know that's what they all say, but there was quite an outbreak of infectious hepatitis there in the late 50s!) It was devastating, but it put me in the right age group (I'd skipped first grade); and, more importantly, it put me at Shenandoah ("where old Dominion's streamlets run") my senior year, and that changed the tapestry of my life forever. (I also learned that "streamlets" in the east are what we called "rivers" in California!!)

In 1995, thirty-four years after graduating from Shenandoah, I got my BA in Communications from Atlantic Union College. They say timing is everything. I don't think it is everything, but it definitely makes a huge difference in so many things in life. The Adult Degree Program at AUC was in its prime, with teachers second to none. Nobody - not the faculty, not the students - made the non-Adventist students in the program feel less than the others. Even an old third-generation Adventist, who had given up any belief in God more than a decade earlier, felt welcome and OK.



I taught church school for ten years. Even at five when I had yet to attend school, other than the occasional medical school class with my father (things were quite different in the middle of the last century!), I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I'd had moments when I thought I'd be a doctor or architect - because they seemed fascinating and being either one would have made my father happy. But in my heart I wanted to be in the classroom, doing it differently than most of my teachers had done it. And I did.

The word discipline means "to teach," and that's how I tried to approach it in my classrooms. I made up games for things like quietness in the classroom. I told the kids I trusted them, that if they could not be trusted they could come tell me or they could just show me. Otherwise, I'd assume they were trustworthy, honest, and responsible for their own behavior. It worked. They usually were!

My father spent an entire school day in my third- and fourth-grade classroom, my second year of teaching. At the end of the day when the students were gone he said to me, "If I'd had a teacher like you somewhere in my life, I would be a different man today." It was the first praise from him that I could remember. And the last. It was almost enough.

Can a life with a dozen types of jobs be called a life with a career? After ten years of teaching I spent twenty years working at a variety of jobs on both coasts before my current job, enjoying what I learned in each. OK, I admit I didn't enjoy my one day on the line, picking out bad green beans at the cannery in Stayton, Oregon. But even that one very physically painful moment taught me a lot!! If nothing else, I learned to learn whatever I needed to learn to avoid having to work at the cannery, because it was difficult and depressing and joyless. No job should be joyless.

One of my favorite jobs was as Assistant Manager for Resident Services at a retirement home in Arlington, VA. I loved it almost as much as I'd loved teaching, which had become an impossibility because of not having a degree and having left the Adventist church, a deadly combo for a teacher-wanna-be. When my mother moved into that retirement home (NOT nursing home!!) in 2001, it was another of those "not seeing the end from the beginning" epiphanies, because my having been there a decade earlier had paved a path, had made what had to have been a horrendous adjustment, a bit less painful; because even though I'd left a decade earlier, she was immediately greeted by some terrific people, and accepted as Rom's Mom. I'd had no idea my 5 years there had probably been for her - to assure she'd have a good place to live in her 80s (and hopefully 90s). I'd had no idea at the time!

In my heart I'm a non-profit sort of person. When I landed a job as an executive assistant at a large consulting firm in '96, having by then actually obtained a

A String too Short to Save

Rom Wilder

Sex Through the Eyes of a Child

Last week as they were collecting fireflies (lightning bugs), Akasha saw some of them copulating. "What are those bugs doing?" she asked, being a very curious and quite outspoken four-year-old.

Lynn, accustomed to children and being of quick mind, replied, "Oh, they're playing leapfrog." (Personally, I think she borrowed the idea from the soup bowls in "The Birdcage"!)

The child wanted to put them into her bug cage, but Lynn said they should be allowed to finish their game.

We have a release policy about wildlife. Bugs can be brought inside—in the bug cage—but they have to be released in a short while so they can be with their families. The only ones that get to stay longer are the fireflies. Akasha gets to take the bug cage full of fireflies to bed with her so that she has special night lights. She knows Aunt Lynn will come in and get them and release them after she falls asleep.

Tuesday night as they were collecting the bedtime fireflies, Akasha said, "Oh, please, Aunt Lynn, I want those for my bug cage." Since the child sees a lot of things our aging eyes don't see, Lynn asked her which ones she was talking about.

"Those right there. The ones that are butt-hugging."

I'm not sure whether she had forgotten the leapfrog story or whether she somehow knew it was a myth. Either way, she made it clear which ones she wanted. And we now have a delightfully descriptive new term: butt-hugging.

degree which wasn't required for said job, I learned that I did not have the mind or soul of an entrepreneur. But I found in that job something that had grabbed my attention every time I'd seen or read about them for 30 years. Computers.

It was ironic, in a way, that I had turned down an entry-level job offer working with computers in 1967 when the smallest ones still filled entire rooms. As I've said a few times lately, had I taken that job instead of teaching a few more years, I probably would have been comfortably retired by now and not be struggling along on an assistant's salary. Of course, I wouldn't have met my precious friends in Oregon, wouldn't have felt the joy of being at John and Sally's learning to spin the wool from the sheep on their hill, and wouldn't have experienced singing the Vivaldi "Gloria" (which I'd fallen in love with at Doug and Carole Kilcher's years before at Andrews) with the Oregon Festival Chorale and members of the Oregon Symphony.

In the stomach-grinding moments when I wish I were retired and think of what could have been if I'd only taken the computer job, I say to myself: *Hey, I could have been killed in a freak accident commuting to that job in 1967! Talk about early retirement!* Then I smile and am reminded that there are reasons for paths chosen and ignored.

Today I am an assistant at IBM, because the consulting firm I worked for merged with another, and later we were "acquired" (there's a word worthy of its own book!!) by IBM in 2002. This put me where my love of what could be done with computers grew, was nurtured and recognized, and made what could have become a mundane job become one of my favorites. It is the longest-lasting, highest-paying (which proves I was in non-profit work before!), lowest-stress job of my working life.

If I am going to work for a large corporation, which obviously I do, at least I work for one of the first ones to offer same-sex partners health

insurance the same as a heterosexual married partner, a place where anyone who calls me a dyke will be fired, where a man transitioned from male to female and his manager's reaction was to hire an expert to come in and tell the team what it all meant and how they could make **her** most comfortable.

These days I get to work from home 99% of the time (I hope that doesn't change!!!). In a given day I communicate with people from Tokyo to Sydney to Zurich to Rio. Most days two or three of my peers "ping" me with a question about the computer or one of the software programs we use. Once again I get to be a teacher. Sometimes I even (with their permission) get to take over their computer, even if they are a thousand miles away (way to go, computers!), and show them exactly what to do; then get to watch them do it and hear the words my ears love, "Oh, now I get it!!" I am grateful to somehow, at the age of 67, be combining two of my passions: computers and teaching!

As most people who have grown up Adventist will tell you, the Adventist church is more than a religion; it is a culture. In 1982, the year after I'd (finally) come out to myself, I heard of Kinship; and in spite of having become an agnostic, I was glad there were people in my tribe who were saying something besides what had been said about me in *On Becoming a Woman*. Unfortunately a lot of people, in and out of our tribe, still agree with that damning chapter. Sigh.

In 1983, after coming to the Washington, DC, area, I hunted for Kinship! Good hunting, Rom. Soon I wrote an article (or two) for the *Connection* under a pseudonym (coming out is a long, slow, repetitive process for most of us!), edited it for a while under my own name (oh, yes, she's out), and have tossed in my opinions here and there since then.

I think the name Kinship is perfect. It is the "kinship" which makes the organization so valuable to me. In the south, your family members are kin. Yes, that is it. Kinship - my kin. ▽

European Kinship Meeting 3 - 6 September in Neer, The Netherlands

kinshipeurope@sdakinship.org

Diversity as a Christian value

During the Kinship weekend the various talks on Friday and Saturday will focus on the value of diversity.

Our contemporary (western) world is impacted by so-called postmodern patterns of thought. What is this post-modernity? The main aspects will be briefly discussed, with special emphasis on the shift from an obsession with unity and harmony (as we saw in the recent past), to difference and diversity.

In the past decades, the Christian church in general has keenly felt the impact of this postmodern way of thinking, and so has the Adventist church, which has its "modern" and its "postmodern" wings. This worries many people, but it should not do so unduly.

Unity is a biblical value, but so is diversity. It was an aspect of life in the apostolic church and it was a characteristic of early Adventism. It

certainly is a fact of life in contemporary Adventism, as the wide diversity in beliefs and practices shows. And it will not disappear.

How do we deal with this challenge? We should welcome this diversity within the creative bond that keeps us together. What we need is dialogue, tolerance, and spiritual growth. While protecting our Adventist identity, we must, at the same time, celebrate the basic Christian values of freedom, difference, and diversity. ▽

✉ Letters to the Editor

"Eden's Gifts"

I want you to know that the article "Eden's Gifts" was a godsend to me. It made me free—free from guilt and free from embarrassment and many other things to allow me to feel comfortable in my own skin. I'd love to share "Eden's Gifts" with others who feel like I used to feel. I would like to share it with those in the church in Australia.

—R. Bernath ▽

I thank all who support the *Connection*. It connects us in a variety of ways. I will always think of the process we went through to pick the name every time I see it.

—Virginia (Ren) Reynolds ▽

▽ Kinship ▽ News ▽ Kinship ▽

Region 7, Blue Mountain Chapter

— Terence Rice

For those of us who could take a break from work and classes, Monday night, May 24, was a fun one! First we discussed what our objectives might be if a gay activist group like Souforce makes a trip to WWU and what ways Kinship can follow up by fostering meaningful dialogue that promotes respect and peace. Also we discussed about getting the Gay Christian Network's mini-conference sessions at a venue here in Walla Walla sometime next year, we hope.

Then it was movie time; we watched "Maurice," thanks to someone who opened up his place and provided the movie.

Another participant provided us a web resource he didn't mind passing onto us for another movie night perhaps next month:

<http://gaythemed-films.blogspot.com/>. Also there was an interest in attending the Gay Pride weekend June 18 in Portland. More to come this summer!

When Your

Daneen Akers



A few weeks ago, Stephen and I received a "cease and desist" letter from the Seventh-day Adventist Church claiming that our film title was an improper use of the Seventh-day Adventist trademark that infringes and dilutes the mark. Actually, the letter was from the law firm that represents the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists (GCCSDA), the legal entity that holds the rights to the trademark of "Seventh-day Adventist": "Your use and modification of the SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST mark in this manner is without permission of the GCCSDA and/or the church, and is likely to cause dilution by blurring the distinctive qualities of the SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST mark and by tarnishing the reputation of the mark. Your use of the mark in this manner is also likely to cause confusion among consumers who may mistakenly believe that the Church has authorized or approved your use of the SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST mark," the letter read.

While it was more than a little surreal to see the church I grew up in referred to and acting as a corporation and members as "consumers," I also found it hard to swallow that anyone would be duped into thinking the official church was behind a film entitled, *Seventh-Gay Adventists: A film about love, sex, and eternal life*. I gotta think the average member—ahem—"consumer" is a bit brighter than the church is giving them credit for.

I've always realized that the title was a bit flip and maybe even irreverent. And in some circles that has helped us gain credibility because people immediate-

Church Sends You a Cease and Desist

ly realized that the church was in no way connected with our project. In other circles, it went too far and seemed disrespectful.

Even I wasn't always a huge fan of the title. It was a working title, something that very succinctly and accurately got across exactly who and what the film was about. But the more I talked to LGBT Adventists, the more the title seemed a perfect description of the excruciating challenge they faced in trying to integrate their religious and sexual identity. We all know it isn't easy to be a gay Christian, but being a gay Adventist is an entirely more challenging proposition because, to most, Adventism is much more than just a belief system; it's an entire culture and community that's more like an ethnicity than just a church. As one religion professor said recently to a group of SDA Kinship members, "You have two incurable conditions—you're gay and you're Adventist. And it's awfully hard to stop being either one of those things."

Stephen also loves how the title *Seventh-Gay Adventists* gets at one of the themes of the film—who gets to define labels and who is in and out? How do those definitions get challenged or changed?

I've always asked myself if I thought that the title would keep anyone who should see the film from seeing it, and, so far, my answer has been "no." Those who are dead set against seeing anything that might open their hearts a little to the very real rejection that gay and lesbian members of the church face weren't likely to see the film no matter the title.

But does the church have a fair point? Are we infringing on their trademark? And first, let me say that while it is odd to think of a church as a corporation, it's a reality; and I understand that they want to protect their name. This strikes me as a wholly different situation. If we were starting a church, I'd understand the problem. But we're not. We're making a film.

There are a few points that our lawyer made in response, some of which hinge on the technicalities of trademark law that is best left to the lawyers. But here are the highlights:

1. The film isn't done yet, and nobody can watch it.

2. Back in 1991, the church sued Seventh-day Adventist Kinship (a support group for gay and lesbian Adventists) over the use of the name and lost because the presiding judge found the Seventh-day Adventist mark to be generic.
3. The title of a film is a preview to viewers of the film's subject—nobody is going to think the title denotes the maker of the film.
4. Most importantly, when the title of a literary work makes commentary on the trademark holder, then we're no longer talking about trademark law, we're talking about the First Amendment. And the First Amendment trumps.

And that's really the crux of it.

Yes, the title is an allusion (though it's clearly not identical) to the name of the church because that's the church our subjects grew up in. It's the church that most of them love dearly despite the marginalization, suspicion, and often outright rejection they have to deal with.

And the title gives those "consumers" a hint of what's to come. They're likely to realize that the film is about the Seventh-day Adventist Church's policies on homosexuality, or at least the experience of gay members of the church in the face of those policies.

This means, in the words of our lawyer, "The expression inherent in the title is protected by the First Amendment." We don't need to be ceasing or desisting.

The church may not like our title or the inherent identity and authority questions it raises; but because we live in a country where we are privileged to have the freedom to speak our minds and question our religious institutions, we aren't infringing on their trademark or copyright. We are making a commentary.

Just thought you'd like to know what's been going on behind the scenes over here in our production office. Did I mention the production office is a side-by-side desk in our kitchen? We're about as indie

a production company as they come; and we're producing this film out of our home office, which works pretty well except when our 18-month old flings her applesauce all over my laptop (hazard of small SF apartments in which offices have to be fit into kitchen nooks).

We'll keep you posted! ▼



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

At the General Conference Session

Dave Ferguson



Our ten days in Atlanta for the General Conference Session were packed. We arrived at the Exhibit Hall in the morning, took one break during the day, and left the Exhibit Hall when it closed at 7 PM. From there we either went to a service in the Dome or to a dinner meeting. I attended meetings with Union College Alumni, Andrews University Alumni, Kinship, SGA film project, and *Spectrum*.

Our survey had nine questions that focused on issues facing the church. All the questions had Yes or No answers, but lots of people wanted to discuss other possibilities which gave us good conversations. In the end, Floyd, Carol Grady, Carol Toay, and I did over 1000 surveys. The two questions that focused on homosexuality are probably of the most interest to this group: "Should homosexuals be allowed to have church membership?" and "Do you have a friend or relative who is LGBTI?" For the first question we had 52% say Yes and 48% say No. We defined homosexuals as *all* homosexuals, both practicing and non-practicing; so the percent would have been much higher if we had only included those who by the

church definition of celibacy were allowed to have membership. The second question showed 63% having homosexual friends or relatives versus 37% who don't. For most of the week, the percentage of those I interviewed who said No on the first question was within 3% of those who did not have a homosexual friend or relative. It helps to show the importance of being open about our sexual orientation at the church. It was interesting to note, as we began analyzing the data, that 74% of those who have a family member or close friend who is gay believe they should have church membership, while 26% do not believe they should. We hope to have a full analysis available soon.

I had the opportunity to speak personally with every college/university president in the North American Division about the possibility of starting a Safe Places program on their campus. There was unanimous interest in the program. "Safe Places" would allow students to talk with a faculty member about their orientation or other personal issue without fear of being kicked out of school. Between now and the November meeting of the Council of Presi-

dents, I will be preparing an outline for them to approve during the next month, and then a full manual and webinar outline for them to review at their November meeting. If it is approved, it will be implemented in all the colleges and universities at the same time across the country. Put this one on your prayer list and positive thoughts page each day. This obviously took lots of time, but it was very fulfilling to accomplish.

We sold or gave away to key leaders 24 copies of the book, *Christianity and Homosexuality*, plus nearly a hundred DVDs of the video *Open Heart*, *Open Hand* and dozens of copies of the booklet "Eden's Gifts" and the leaflet, "Homosexuality: Can we Talk about It?"

It was truly an amazing ten days meeting thousands of people. ▽

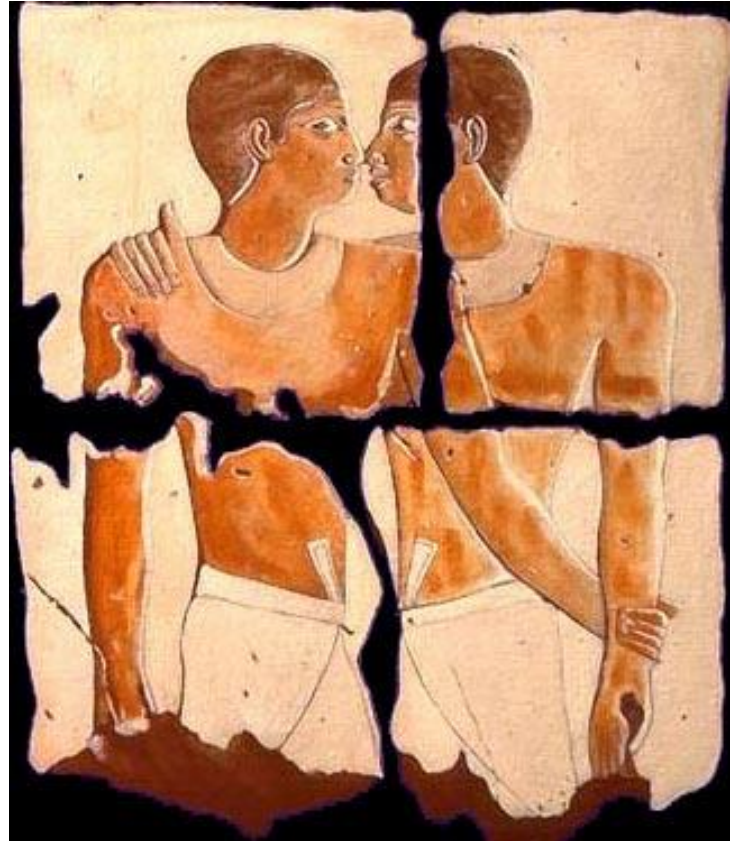
The world is not moved only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

—Helen Keller

Homosexuality:

Seeking an Adequate Adventist Response

On Saturday, 10 July 2010, the Sydney Adventist Forum sponsored a conference to discuss possible responses by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the issue of homosexuality. While the goal was to ask questions rather than provide answers, the conference aimed to raise awareness of the issues and point out that there is no simple answer. The thought-provoking questions raised by the conference will reach a wider audience with the release of audio and video recordings for download via the internet. The seminar was held in a public venue in the northern suburbs of Sydney, Australia, not far from the Sydney Adventist Hospital and the Seventh-day Adventist South Pacific Division headquarters office. Over 100 people attended, including a number of significant thought leaders, although no official church leaders were present. Many attendees travelled up to 100 km from the Cooranbong district, the location of Avondale College, to hear the presentations. Others flew long distances from Victoria and Queensland. In addition, many SDA Kinship members and other LGBTI people with Adventist roots showed their support and were keenly interested in the discussions.



David Coltheart

Bronwyn Reid, who has an MA in theology and runs a private relationship counselling practice, introduced the program. As a long-time advocate for LGBTI people, she spoke passionately about the importance of love and acceptance for all people. She unveiled a beautiful painting of a rainbow lorikeet (an Australian native parrot) painted by her husband, Steve Koncz, and suggested that the lorikeet could be an Australian symbol of the Holy Spirit, just as the dove is the Biblical symbol. The colours of the lorikeet remind us of the rainbow of variety across God's creation and represent all Christians, gay and straight. In her introduction, Bronwyn challenged us to be like diamonds, refracting light in a

rainbow of colours. She reminded us that God loved "the world" and not just good people.

David Potter presented a historical survey of gay issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church from the time of Ellen White onwards. Events involving various individuals from 1952 to the present day were enumerated, but the conclusion was that generally the church has avoided the issue on the premise that the terms "gay" and "Adventist" are mutually exclusive.

The featured morning speaker was Dr. Graham Stacey, an expatriate Australian serving as assistant professor in religion and ethical studies at Loma Linda University School of Religion in California, USA. Graham, a former conference youth director in Australia, agreed that homo-

sexuality challenges the church's understanding of God, Adventist concepts of inspiration and revelation, and the role of Scripture in making ethical decisions. He stated that Christian churches all agree on what the Bible says about homosexuality but disagree on what the Bible means.

Graham discussed Biblical interpretation as it relates to LGBTI issues and urged a broader understanding of not only what the Bible says, but also how the Bible communicates that message. He emphasised that God continues to reveal things to us as we grow in understanding, and dialogue is essential to resolve issues. He cited slavery as a topic that is no longer an issue because people came to understand the importance of justice, compassion, love, and respect for human ➤

rights. He presented the latest scientific evidence on homosexuality, concluding that no one knows the cause but that all authorities agree homosexuality is not the result of choice. He presented evidence that indicates genetic factors are the major determinants for sexual orientation.

In an attempt to provide a framework on how the church should respond to LGBTI people, Graham outlined a model of Christian ethics that views principles as being more important than applications. More important than mere rules is the "meta-ethic" that God loves us and that we should love each other. Since all other ethical principles are derived from this, Christians should accept all people in the same way that God does, acknowledging that the gift of God's grace extends to all.

The panel discussion that followed featured Dr. Graham Stacey, Dr. Arthur Patrick, retired Avondale College lecturer and former director of the Ellen G. White Research Centre, and Anthony Venn-Brown, a former Assemblies of God pastor. Dr. Lynden Rogers, president of the Sydney Adventist Forum, moderated the panel and added his own comments. He began by stating that the premise of the discussion was within the context of a permanent, monogamous ideal. The panel examined the six so-called "gotcha texts" commonly used to condemn homosexuality. The panel members were unanimous that the Bible nowhere addresses homosexual orientation, even though it does mention homosexual activity.

While understanding the reasons why the average Adventist reads the Bible texts according to the traditional interpretation, the panel insisted that the social, cultural, and historical context must be considered. The panel agreed that the Sodom incident

(Genesis 19) describes attempted rape by heterosexuals and is irrelevant to the discussion of homosexuality. The panel then discussed the two texts in Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) and agreed that these prohibitions were part of the Israelite Holiness Code. They pointed out that many prohibitions in the Holiness Code are not considered applicable to modern Christians: for example, the command for men not to shave their beards. Other sexual mores in the code are also ignored. The panel agreed that the context of the two verses is of ritual purity and separation from Canaanite fertility worship. The speakers urged caution in applying the standards from an ancient, patriarchal society to modern culture.

Time prevented a detailed discussion of all the New Testament references (Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; and 1 Tim. 1:9, 10); but it was clear from the general remarks that the panel agreed the texts did not specifically address issues relating to homosexual orientation but rather reflected

first century AD pagan worship practices. It is clear that the Bible assumes heterosexuality while condemning rape, abuse, promiscuity, unfaithfulness, and immorality, whoever is responsible.

More than one speaker urged a broader approach to Biblical interpretation regarding homosexuality. The panel emphasised that the church needs to be inclusive of all people and that Christians should live out the great themes of justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Christians must put into practice the command to love God first and foremost, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

After soup and buns in the nearby park, Dr. Wendell Rosevear began the afternoon session. Wendell is a well-known medical doctor from Brisbane who has been caring for AIDS and rape victims, drug and alcohol addicts, and prison inmates for the last 30 years. He was recognised for his work by being awarded the Order of Australia medal in 1998 and is often interviewed by the national media. Acknowledged as the



visible face of LGBTI people with an Adventist background, Wendell told his story with humour and enthusiasm. He recounted the difficulty of growing up in an Adventist home and realising that he was "different." He explained how he reconciled his gay orientation with his beliefs and how this restored his self-worth. He emphasized the importance of recognising the value of each human being as a person and spoke of the need for unconditional love. From a doctor's perspective, he explained the factors that make successful relationships, gay and straight, and emphasised that honesty is the most important attribute.

Dr. Ross Cole interviewed Anthony Venn-Brown. Anthony

was a prominent Assemblies of God evangelist who resigned from the ministry and came out in 1991, a story told in his autobiography, *A Life of Unlearning*. He is now self-employed as a life coach and is also convenor of the LGBTI support network, Freedom 2b[e]. Anthony recounted his life story, which included praying for 22 years that God would change his orientation. He told of his crisis of faith and his eventual return to God when he regained his self-worth. He said that even if one's sexuality is not a choice, personal morality is a choice.

Dr. Rogers interviewed Rebecca Scott, an Adventist woman who grew up in Cooranbong close to Avondale College. She described her teenage experiences and struggles before she came out to her family and friends. She explained that she and her partner now work for street kids and homeless youth. Her charity organisation runs three cafes in Melbourne and trains young people in hospitality skills while assisting them to find jobs.

The day ended with another panel discussion that included answering questions from the floor. The speakers reiterated the themes of acceptance and understanding, and expressed their desire that the Adventist Church embrace the LGBTI community with love. There was a general agreement that while basic truth is unchanging, our understanding and expression of truth must adapt to changing cultural and social conditions.

All the speakers were positive. The audience appeared receptive and accepting of the new insights. A spirit of harmony characterised the day. No one challenged any of the speakers and there was no hint of rancour or condemnation. Copies of the book *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* were

available for those who wanted them, as well as other literature. All the literature was very popular and most people took something away with them.

The people I spoke to, many of whom I have known for decades, were accepting and understanding. Gay people embraced straight people as well as each other. Everyone was open and transparent and shared their experiences freely. The Forum extended a hand of friendship and partial understanding to a largely invisible and often misunderstood minority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I hope I am not exaggerating if I describe the conference as "historic" but for me it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. At last, people in my church are talking about something I could never talk about for four decades! To merely describe the proceedings is to understate the emotional experience. For me, it was a day for laughter and joy in the frankness and honesty of the presentations. The accounts of injustice and persecution of some of God's children brought tears and sadness. There was brimming emotion as I thrilled to hear people say out loud what I have believed for years and experienced for a lifetime. The day was exhilarating, exciting, emotional, and fulfilling. The longer-term effects I am sure will be life saving. ▽

David Coltheart is a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor and union evangelist in Australia. Since coming out four years ago, he has been employed as a professional trainer by a company providing industrial and mining training services across Australia. He lives on the Sunshine Coast, north of Brisbane, Queensland, and attends his local Adventist church.

★★★★★★★★★★
**Australian Adventist
Forum Conference on
Homosexuality**

Those of you who might like to hear some of the conference can access it at:
<http://www.users.on.net/~benreuter/recordings.html>

Noel Thorpe wrote to say he believes the meeting went well. Many of the participants responded positively to "Eden's Gifts," the booklet by a Kinship member that addresses Biblical "clobber texts." Many copies of *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* were sold.

Two of the speakers spoke favorably of Kinship. Bronwyn Reid surprised Noel with a bouquet of flowers to honor him for the work he has done for LGBTI Adventist Australians.

Noel said that Graham Stacey was "a delight" and that his presentation was very well researched. Stacey spoke about the difference in our understanding of biology today and the understanding of the people who wrote the Bible. Homosexuality as an orientation is not present truth.

★★★★★★★★★★

Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella

This is part 2 of a diary from a German Kinship member written during his journey to Santiago de Compostella.

Joachim Duerling

May 6: I climbed the Cebreiro, the last mountain range before my goal, Santiago de Compostella. This range has steep, difficult-to-conquer slopes. In a very short distance I gained 2400 feet in altitude. The Galician town of Cebreiro keeps the Holy Grail of Galicia which is worshipped till today. I admired the grail and looked forward to some peaceful time to think. Unfortunately the town wasn't as peaceful as I expected on a mountain top. Television companies horded the area, installing equipment for broadcasting some. I fled to climb the hill to San Roque Pass, where I found a pilgrim's statue that symbolized changing weather. I was warned to take a rest before continuing. Galicia is known as a rainy region. It earned its reputation. For the next two days I was soaked as I reached my goals. I had a hard time sleeping because so many pilgrims had to hang their damp clothes in bedrooms that the hostel was full of mist. The last day, I had trouble even finding a place to sleep. The entire area was packed with pilgrims.



Furelos has a church with a peculiar cross and frescos from the Romantic Age. There I was followed by a troop of soldiers, on their way to Santiago to accompany the king in a procession on Ascension Day. More noise and more crowds. In O Pedrouzo I met a Scottish man from Dunblane where we once had our



European Kinship Meeting! He was also on the pilgrimage to Santiago—in kilt! The increasing number of people and commotion was quite a change after the silence and peace of the earlier part of my journey. The roadside was packed with advertisements for hotels and hostels; the sky was cluttered with the roar of airplanes.

At Labacolla, pilgrims traditionally take a bath before they take the final steps of the pilgrimage. On Mono Goze (Mountain of Joy) I enjoyed the first sight of Santiago and that strange statue of the Pope. I walked, accompanied by bagpipes, tambourines, and drums, until I turned the corner and found myself in front of the holy gate of the cathedral. *I had arrived!* I received my *Compostella* in the Pilgrims' office and continued to the square behind the Cathedral.

The area was closed off and I feared I wouldn't see the statue of the Apostle and the crypt. But I was blessed! A police officer noticed I wanted to visit the Cathedral as a pilgrim and not the shops as a tourist. He waved at me to come further. After the inspection of my bag (even here they fear terrorist attacks!), I stood alone at the statue at the altar and looked around quietly. In front of me the gigantic ship of the church was filled with pilgrims, full of expectations, and others who were awaiting the Spanish prince. I was alone at my place behind the statue. I was alone at the crypt and took the opportunity to thank God for everything and to pray for those who supported me to get here. Back on the square I met other traveling companions. We sat down together and enjoyed our arrival.



My *albergo* was very close to the church. It was inside a former Catholic Institute for Boys. The bedrooms looked like they were still waiting for young adolescents, but what more does a pilgrim need than a bed and a clean bathroom?

In the two days it took for me to arrange my flight home, I explored the city and bought the things any wanderer wants to bring home to their loved ones. The city of Santiago is built on many hills and it helps to have the trained legs of a pilgrim. I ate my evening meals at the Parador Hotel, next to the cathedral, and celebrated their wonderful tradition of feeding anyone for the first three days after receiving their *Compostella*. For this I had to go to the employee's entrance. The food was good and nourishing! After the delicious meal we went to the cathedral and participated in the pilgrims' service.



At six the next morning I woke up to the noise of people packing to return home or to continue on to Finistere. I wasn't going home that day so I got up and washed my clothes and headed into town for a breakfast of *bogadillo* and *café con leche*. After breakfast I went to the cathedral and met sixty percent of my traveling companions. We were very happy we had completed the trip! I went to afternoon worship with one of them and then on a walk. We ate dinner again at the Parador Hotel.

Unfortunately, I got robbed on my last day there. I went to the ticket office and explained that my ticket had gone with my wallet. The staff at the office told me they would give me a duplicate in time to leave. I checked the police station but no wallet. I had only my pilgrim's pass and some spare change. I did get my duplicate ticket, and the lady at the office wished me a safe journey home. Thirty-eight hours (and some new adventures) later I was home in Bremen, Germany.

I recommend this trip. You can do the entire eight hundred kilometers at one time or do it in sections. I wish you well.

Joachim the "Stadtmusikant"***

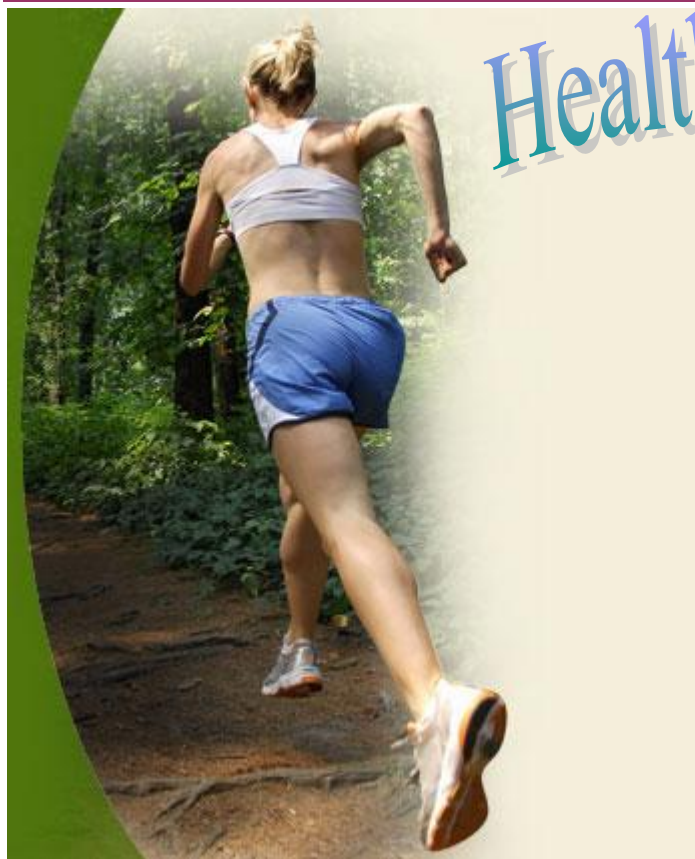


***Stadtmusikant refers to the story of the Town Musicians of Bremen;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_Musicians_of_Bremen ▼

*Do your duty to the best of your ability,
 without worrying about the results,
 remaining calm in both
 success and failure.*

—Bhagavad Gita, 2.48

Health Tips of the Month



exercising for 20 to 30 minutes a couple of times a week not only slashed Alzheimer's risk by as much as 60 percent in a study but also cut the risk of regular dementia in half.

In the study, midlife exercise appeared to be key in warding off mental decline later in life. And those who had genes that made them more susceptible to Alzheimer's reaped the greatest protective benefits from physical activity. People in the study didn't have to exercise hard to protect their brain, either. A couple of moderately intense workouts a week was all it took. Researchers suspect that exercise protects the brain by promoting blood vessel health and boosting the brain's ability to repair damage.

When you overdo it and down a day's calories in one sitting, your body's inflammatory processes go into overdrive. But here's a way you might counter it: Drink orange juice. In a recent study, people who had eaten a supersized fast-food breakfast experienced a much milder inflammatory response in their bodies when they drank OJ with the meal. Whatever you do, don't pair

that overindulgence with a soda. When researchers compared the effects that three different beverages had on the way bodies process big, fatty, inflammation-triggering foods, sugar water was the worst of the bunch. It seemed to exacerbate the inflammatory response. Plain water fared somewhere in between orange juice and sugar water. But it has the added benefit of being calorie-free. What makes orange juice so good at helping clamp down on the inflammation and oxidation that big, fatty meals cause? The heroes are likely two important flavonoids found in oranges—naringenin and hesperidin. These powerful antioxidants help tamp down body processes that can damage blood vessels and lay the groundwork for big health problems, like atherosclerosis and heart disease.



You could cut your risk of stomach cancer by a whopping 33 percent if you eat like a Greek. That means bulking up on fruit, vegetables, legumes, and healthy fats from olive oil, nuts, seeds, and fish. And taking it easy on red meat, dairy, and alcohol. These are all key characteristics of a Mediterranean-style diet. You've probably never thought twice about your risk of stomach cancer. It's not a terribly common cancer, but the prognosis is poor if it's found in the late stages. Still, like so many diseases, the ability to reduce risk is in your hands. While a recent 9-year study revealed the powerful stomach-cancer-thwarting potential of Mediterranean-type diets, limiting salt in your diet and not smoking are also helpful habits when it comes to stomach health. ▽

Media Advisory

May 29, 2010, Cape Town –

Today's order for the unconditional pardon and immediate release from prison of Tionge Chimbanga and Steven Monjeza by Malawian President and African Union Chairperson Bingu wa Mutharika is a welcome one. The two have been serving a sentence of 14 years' imprisonment with hard labor for their convictions under the Malawi Penal Code prohibitions on "unnatural offences" (Section 153) and "indecent practices between males" (Section 156). They have been in custody since their arrest in December. President Mutharika made the announcement in a joint press conference in Lilongwe with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

"We commend President Mutharika for arriving at a decision that prevents two innocent people from spending years in prison without just cause," said Cary Alan Johnson, Executive Director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. "This pardon should be seen as a significant challenge to laws and proceedings that are inherently unfair. However, it should not require a presidential intervention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Malawians to obtain justice."

"We applaud President Mutharika for this bold decision," said Gift Trapence, Executive Director of the Center for the Development of People. "As Chairperson of the African Union, his actions should set a precedent for African leaders to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all Africans, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. We hope that the President now pardons all Malawians imprisoned on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, that the judiciary overturns all such convictions, and that the government ensures the constitutional rights to equality and non-discrimination for all."

For more information, see the Malawi archive of IGLHRC at: <http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/region/44.html>. ▽

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**Forget injuries.
Never forget kindnesses.**

—Confucius

connection ▽

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Region One visiting The Cloisters in New York City

