

CONNECTION

JANUARY, 2018 | VOL. 42, NO. 8



A PUBLICATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST KINSHIP INTERNATIONAL, INC.



Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a nonprofit 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 LGBTIQ 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. 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 43 countries.

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 LGBTIQ has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? –Micah 6:8 ESV

The church I attend is in the midst of a series of sermons based on the text Micah 6:8. I appreciate this text because it talks about what God says is good for us: to see that justice is done and to be fair to other people, to love mercy or to love kindness and loyalty, and to live humbly walking with God. When I think about this verse, I think about our relationship with others. I see the social injustices all around me and it makes me want to do my part to make sure the world is a more just place for everyone.

You only have to listen to the news to realize how unfair, how unjust our world is. The poor and middle classes get poorer, and there is little equality between men and women, the powerful and the powerless, White people and people of color, rich and poor people, the straight and LGBTIQ communities, citizens and immigrants, those who care for the environment and those who don't. Whoever we are, it's good to look out for those who are mistreated or in need of a helping hand. When we see injustice around us, we need to get involved.

Kinship exists today because LGBTIQ Adventists needed to connect, to know they were not alone, and to be cared about and cared for when families and

churches wouldn't. Although there are so many positive changes for our community, we still have some of those same needs today in Kinship. Any within the Adventist denomination are standing beside us, supporting us, and caring for us, but the wider church has a long way to go. And it's not up to me if the church ever gets there or not. We only need to live our lives in a healthy and happy way.

Those of us who choose to remain in a denomination that doesn't value who we are have a few congregations that stand with us and support who we are. I wish there were more. And those who have moved beyond

Adventism hopefully still find friends and community within Kinship. We still need each other. Kinship has gone through some transitions this past year. We've elected some new board members and several leadership staff have moved on. We've added

some new projects and discontinued others. We have some great new plans for 2018. And in my next column, I will be covering some of those plans. Until then, I just want to let you know that we need more members who have certain talents and skills. We are still looking for a Director of Development.

We also need someone who would be willing to lead a new project that involves online media expertise. If Kinship has ever touched you in a way that makes you want to give back, please contact Floyd or myself today. We want to work with you and get Kinship ready for a great 2018!



Yolanda Elliott
President

SDA Kinship International



Last summer we came together for our 38th annual Kampmeeting in beautiful San Diego, California under the theme “Celebrating Our Journey”—and celebrate we did! We told stories, remembered those we’ve lost, and shared life’s pains. We laughed, we cried, we embraced, and we danced. Above all, we saw that each person’s journey is unique, full of its own blessings and struggles.

The Kampmeeting presenters and topics this year highlighted the diversity of the Kinship family. All members were taken into consideration, and we had helpful conversations about gender, exploring how gender is shaped by society, what it means to be gender fluid, and more. We also highlighted bisexuality and the unique experiences of the “B” members in the LGBTQ+ community.

I was delighted by the terrific job that the three coordinators did! They made sure everything ran smoothly and helped everyone stay engaged during the sessions. They went above and beyond to help all of the attendees feel comfortable and welcome. Thank you, Dr. Reg, Ronoldo, and Kristina!

We tried out several new things this year for Kampmeeting, such as a different format and more technology. Registration didn’t include lodging or meals this time, which gave attendees more flexibility in cost. Several attendees split Airbnb rentals to save money, while others preferred the convenience of staying at the

hotel. Either way, this new option seemed to work well! One technological advance I really liked was the opportunity to do the session evaluations immediately via the link emailed or texted to us. I’m glad technology is being used more and more each year!

I heard many positive comments about the Family & Friends lunch on Saturday. For those of you who may not know, each year we have a special time for family members and friends (allies) to get together and talk about their experiences. They may share things they’ve struggled with or that helped them along their own journey, or they may ask questions. It’s a safe space for family and friends to express what is on their hearts. I’m so grateful for our allies who attend faithfully each year! They make our time together even more special.

It was wonderful to catch up with so many long-time members, and I truly loved meeting all the new attendees too. There were so many younger folks this year! I enjoy seeing new faces and watching the Kinship family grow year after year. It reminds me of why Kinship is here and how important our mission is.

Together, we form a strong community where we can support one another. This is our journey, so let’s celebrate!



39th Annual Kampmeeting
BALTIMORE

JULY 11-14, 2018

KAMPMEETING IS SDA KINSHIP'S ANNUAL
CONFERENCE WHERE WE COME TOGETHER TO
RENEW FRIENDSHIPS, MAKE NEW FRIENDS, ENJOY
ENTERTAINMENT, RENEW OUR FAITH, AND MORE.
REGISTER AT WWW.SDAKINSHIP.ORG



DON'T GIVE UP
IT GETS BETTER



Kinship Kampmeeting 2018 is July 11-14

***Kinship Kampmeeting 2018
is July 11-14, and our
Women and Children First
Retreat is July 6-11 in
Baltimore, Maryland, United
States!***

Kampmeeting takes place at the Homewood Suites at BWI, and our Women and Children First Retreat takes place July 6-11 at a place near downtown Baltimore, Maryland, United States.

Kampmeeting is Kinship's annual conference where we come together to renew friendships, make new friends, enjoy entertainment, renew our faith, and more!

This year it takes place in beautiful Baltimore, a city in Maryland, the United States, known for Oriole Park, Baltimore Inner Harbor, and close to the historic attractions of Washington, DC and beautiful Annapolis.

This year Kampmeeting will be the same format as last year, but it will be different in format from Kampmeetings prior to 2016. The registration fees DO NOT include meals and hotel accommodations.

We want to make sure that everyone who wants to attend can afford to do so.

For pricing, registration and other details, visit sdakinship.org.



Women & Children First Retreat
BALTIMORE

JULY 6-11, 2018

REGISTER AND GET MORE DETAILS AT
WWW.SDAKINSHIP.ORG



WOMEN & CHILDREN FIRST RETREAT 2018

July 6-11 in Baltimore, Maryland, United States.

SDA Kinship's Women & Children First retreat is held every July (and is directly followed by Kampmeeting.)

The 2014 retreat was held in Atlanta; 2015 was in Arrowhead, California; 2016 in the Baltimore area, and 2017 was in San Diego.

This year we are back in Baltimore, Maryland. Space is very limited and registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. Registration is now live on the Kinship website with price.

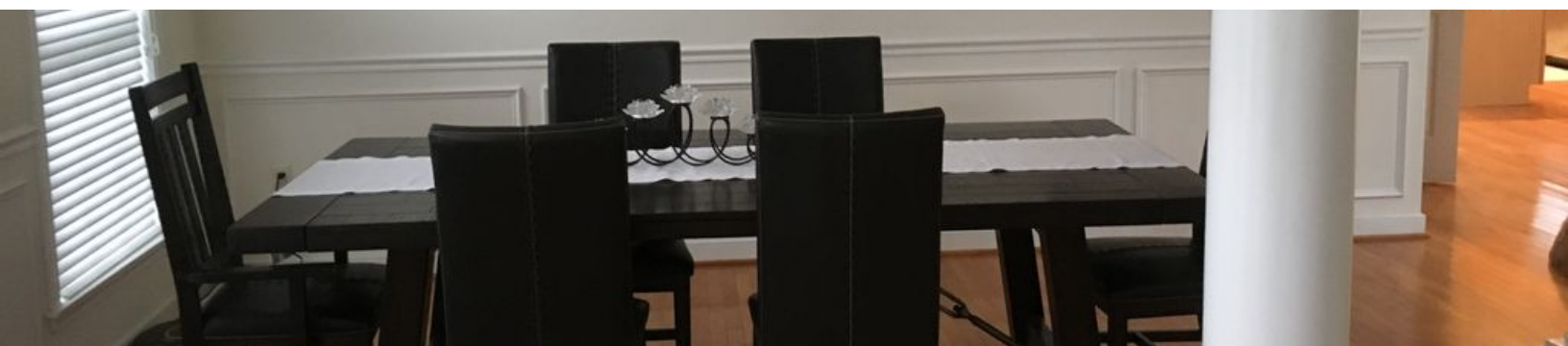
We are happy to announce that, due to generous donations, we are able to keep the prices lower again this year. For those still wanting to register after the house is filled up, you can still attend on the commuter rate but will need to find alternate accommodations.

Your full registration fee includes: accommodation, food (breakfast and supper), group activity, and a keepsake item. We all work as a team/family in preparing the meals, set up, and clean up. (Commuter fee does not include accommodation.)

Attendees are responsible for their own transportation to and from the event. However, we do our best to arrange rides from the closest airport and either back to the airport or to Kampmeeting.

This event is open to all Kinship women. As I have found in the past, it is a great place to get to know other Kinship women and form close and long-lasting relationships.

For details on how to register, plus an opportunity to look at pictures of the house visit
www.sdakinship.org





Alicia Johnston

Have confidence in yourself. You are loved. You are valuable. You have a whole community behind you, cheering you on.

Advice

from a former adventist pastor



Last April I went from a closeted Adventist pastor to an out bisexual Adventist ex-pastor in the most intense way possible.

I certainly didn't have any concept that my coming out video would be viewed 50,000 times in the first month, or that it would be picked up on national news. I don't think I was ready for the intensity of the situation, the people who would turn to me in gratitude, confusion, and anger, and the weight of knowing the suffering of closet LGBTIQ people in the Adventist church.

One thing I was ready for is being completely and totally out. Doing the whole thing in one fell swoop was the best thing for me personally. I was ready to be able to be honest about who I am, speak my convictions, and do work I believe in. The stress of living in dishonesty was greater than I had realized. The relief of settling into a life of integrity was more powerful and life-giving than I could have guessed.

No matter your walk in life, I encourage you find healthy and safe ways to be as out as you possibly can. If you are considering a career or a life decision that will make it difficult for you to be out, I caution you. You cannot be your best self if you cannot be yourself at all. If you want to be more out tomorrow than you are today, I encourage you. For me, it has been more than worth it.

Though I will add this important piece of advice I came across early in my process:

- Come out only when you are ready.
- Do the work yourself, in private and safety, before you face the reactions of others.
- Be grounded and confident in who you are.
- Have a plan. Have support.
- Have confidence in yourself.

You are loved. You are valuable. You have a whole community behind you, cheering you on.

JOIN SDA KINSHIP

You can join Kinship's online community today!

Membership is free and all your information is kept confidential.

Visit sdakinship.org for details on connecting with people just like you, or send an email to Members Services at memberinfo@sdakinship.org for details on being a member of SDA Kinship.





KINSHIP WELCOMES NEW FAMILY & FRIENDS COORDINATORS

John and Carolyn Wilt are practicing Seventh-day Adventists, having been married for 57 years. They have three children, including a gay son, the late Aric Wilt, who unexpectedly passed away at the age of 49.

Having discovered that their son was gay, the Wilts, as is the case with many Christian families, were faced with a lack of resources on how to deal with the subject of sexuality as it intersects with their faith, their personal feelings, and their relationship with Aric.

They were introduced to Kinship by Carrol Grady in the early 90s. Grady is the author of the book *My Son, Beloved Stranger*, where she shares her experience of having a gay son. In this book, Grady shares the struggles of being part of a minister's family as they learned to cope with and understand their youngest son's homosexuality.

The Wilts have since attended many Kampmeetings (Kinship's annual conference) where they made many connections with other families and Kinship members. It

is there, there found ways to support their late son, and other members of the LGBTIQ community.

In between Kampmeetings, the Wilts hope to use this experience in their new role to create active and safe connections, and support for families and friends coming to terms with the sexuality of a loved one.

Yolanda Elliott, Kinship's president is thrilled to work with the incoming family and friends coordinators: "I think they will be amazing in that role," she shares.

John and Carolyn hope to build on the foundation laid by Debbie and Kris Widmer. The Widmers served as Family and Friends Coordinators at Kinship for two years. "We have had a wonderful time serving the Kinship community for the last two years. We are excited to see John and Carolyn step into this role. They come with experience and a passion and we look forward to seeing the avenues they will take and blessing they will be to so many."

Over the next several months John and Carolyn will be working towards improving communication and understanding of the needs of families (and friends), and those who are LGBTIQ.



Support the mission of **SDA Kinship:**

- Donate **Online:** sdakinship.org
- Donate by **Mail:** PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 USA
- Donate by **Shopping:** smile.amazon.com



As I was writing this I was reflecting on Cher's song 'Believe.' Sometimes it's hard to believe in the love the song talks about. We see people in the highest power in government say very hurtful things to our Trans and non-binary brothers and sisters, especially to the 15,000 plus transgender people who are currently serving in the U.S. military and the 134,000 plus who are veterans.

As someone who is navigating what their gender identity is, my heart goes out to each one of you. I send you all a big Canadian hug. As a summer intern at Oakridge Adventist Church in Vancouver, British Columbia I have started a summer Sabbath school ministry called On Top Of The World. Our theme is to Love Others Well, Love Yourself Well, Love God Well.

A few words of advice if you are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two Spirited or part of the plus community:

♥ Love yourself well, love others well, and Love God well.

♥ Embracing who God created you to be is the most beautiful thing you can do each day of your life.

♥ Open your arms and heart unconditionally to those who are different to you is the best way you can show God's unconditional love for humanity.

♥ Thank God overwhelmingly for making you the way you are: a person of faith, a person with a disability, a person of color and even a member of the LGBTQIA2s+ community.

None of us are broken, but beautiful and created in God's image and He loves us no matter how different we are. Lady Gaga says "God does not makes mistakes, we (as a LGBTQIA2s+ Christian community) are born this way.

As the winter goes on and leads to spring remember to believe in love.

JUST LOVE

Jaden Rajah, Kinship Youth Director



OUT SPOKEN

A new short documentary film series
from the producers of *Seventh-Gay Adventists*



Watchfire
FILMS

#BeOutspoken

www.watchfirefilms.com/outspoken

OUTSPOKEN FILM SERIES FEATURES LGBTIQ ADVENTISTS

Daneen Akers

The “Outspoken” film series is a collection of short documentary profiles featuring LGBTQ Adventists (most current but some longer identifying as Adventist) and Adventist parents of LGBTQ children. These short films are being released online the first Friday night of the month in 2017, and the first four have gotten an incredible response. We felt like it was the right time to have short profiles available easily through social media to help share these stories more widely.

The last “Outspoken” short film features Camilo Nazar (watchfirefilms.com/outspoken), a senior film student at Pacific Union College who also was the president of their unofficial GSA last year and is the new president for the IAGC (Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition). He's passionate about better media and film representation for queer people of color like himself, and he also makes a powerful argument for why these campus GSAs need to be official.

The “Outspoken” before that (watchfirefilms.com/outspoken-widmers) featured Pastor Kris and Debbie Widmer talking about their journey once their daughter came out as transgender has been the most watched so far (43,000 views and counting), and several media outlets have picked up their story, including NBC News and Teen Vogue, giving this film a lot of exposure. Several trans advocates have contacted us to say that they are using the film to help parents understand and respond better to their transgender children, and teachers have been writing saying that they are using the film in their classes. All three of the current “Outspoken” films have been widely seen on social media, but I think this one especially resonated and struck a nerve because it's just such a unique perspective. We so rarely hear from LGBTQ people of faith that their parents are also very isolated and under-heard. The “second closet” that Debbie Widmer talks about them going into is real. As another mom of a queer Adventist said, “Often that second closet is the only door open to us.”

This insight from Debbie Widmer in particular from the extra reporting done in the excellent Teen Vogue article is one I wish every Christian parent could read and absorb: “Initially, I went

through a phase of praying for a miracle (which I believe in), but when the miracle I wanted didn't come, I started questioning my own heart,” Debbie told Teen Vogue. “I spent two years studying only the Gospels, looking for an answer in the life of Jesus. When I quit asking for God to change our 'son' and started to ask God to change me (in whatever way He chose to), then I got my miracle. God began working in my heart and opened up a spigot of love.”

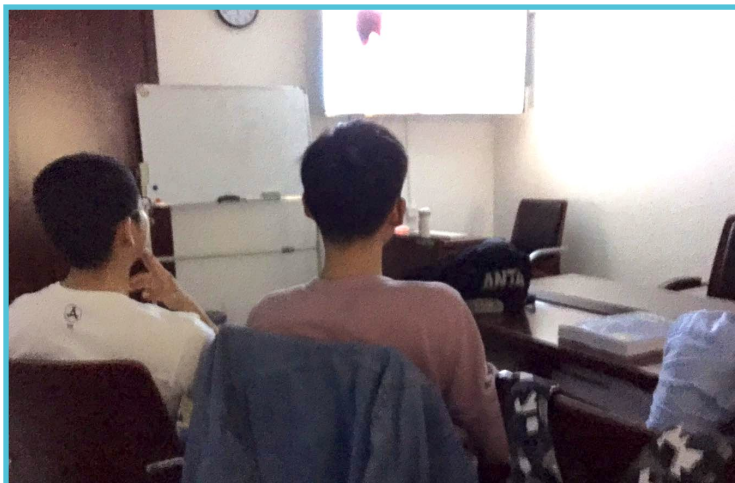
In addition to broad media coverage, feedback like this has been incredibly meaningful. I also passed this on to the Widmers and their daughter because it is really hard to put yourself in such a vulnerable position to share this story, knowing that some people are going to be critical. But these are the transformations that are also possible.

“I just watched the Outspoken segment featuring the Widmer family. So powerful. Thank you a hundred times. You're changing jerks like me. I remember a time when a transgendered person was just a punchline to me. Teagan is God's child just like I am. Thank you a thousand times for your ministry.” - A major lay leader in a local Adventist church

Of course it's always nice to have great media coverage, but that's not why we are so thrilled with all of these articles. What this coverage means is that the likelihood of a LGBT young person (or their parents) coming across these films is higher, and seeing a story like these when you are struggling is a huge help in realizing you are not alone. One of the trans advocates who wrote said directly, “This film will save lives.”

We continue to be grateful for the grassroots community that makes these films possible. We thoroughly enjoyed getting to fellowship with our Kinship family earlier this month for Kampmeeting in San Diego (where we are based now). Love and courage, and a special gratitude to those who are participating in the “Outspoken” series and sharing their stories. Stories really do change hearts and minds. You can find all four of the current “Outspoken” films (watchfirefilms.com/outspoken) on our website or the SGA Facebook page. (fb.com/sgamovie)





Seventh-Gay Adventists Translated to Mandarin

On a Sabbath evening in June, Rey Lee hosted a screening of the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists (SGA)* at Mu-En Church in Shanghai, China. *Seventh-gay Adventists*, produced by Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers, explores the stories of LGBTIQ Seventh-day Adventists. Rey who lives in Shanghai, China, had previously met the Akers when he traveled to California, United States in 2016.

While in California, the Akers happened to be hosting a screening of another film at the Glendale City Adventist Church. It is then Rey, who teaches English in China, offered to translate SGA into Mandarin. The process took eight months to complete.

Rey describes Shanghai as being both highly developed, yet “socially conservative,” this includes the Adventist church he attends. In spite of this, he shared that he was excited to show the film to the fellowship group that he leads. “Some people in my fellowship also invited their friends in our church. Because screening films on Sabbath is not so common in a conservative church like ours, they all felt excited.”



One word Rey used to describe the attendees’ experience was “awakening.” Many were moved by the stories of the characters in the film, even expressing compassion for them. This was especially for the story of one of the characters, David, who had undergone 5 years of therapy to change his sexual orientation. “Some boys said they’ve never known that the LGBTIQ community suffered so much; it felt like seeing this film was an awakening experience for them.”

Meanwhile, there were those who had expressed skepticism, including one attendee who shared that the “church has a right to its own standpoint” (on the subject).

When asked how he felt about the screening, Rey shared: “I feel so great. This translation project was my gift to the LGBTIQ community. Yet, there’s a long way to go. So I’m thinking what more I can do next.”

“We are thrilled that SGA is now translated into Mandarin,” shared Daneen. The SGA movie is also available in Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Russian, Italian, and they are still looking for assistance in translating the German version. For details about the film, or to arrange a local screening, visit www.sgamovie.com.



European Kinship Meeting
AUSTRIA

SEPTEMBER 6-10, 2018

*register and get
more details at sdakinship.org*



SDA Kinship Commissions Creation of New Logo

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, International, Inc. (SDA Kinship) has initiated the process of creating a new logo that best represents the organization in the digital age. This is part of a greater rebranding effort as we work towards enhancing our print and online presence.

“We wanted to engage our members throughout the process so that we have a consensus on what the logo should look like,” Says Clinton Sorzano, Director of Communications at SDA Kinship.

This was done by surveying our members. Close to 200 completed the survey; and while most respondents dislike the

existing color (what we often refer to as Kinship Blue), most wanted to keep the color blue. Our guess is a different hue of blue.

The triangle was the most popular shape, and the most popular graphic elements include people, a rainbow, and a cross. The preferred layout is a graphic separate from the text resembling a seal or badge.

So, what's next? We are looking for volunteer graphic designers who are willing to offer their expertise so that we can drive this project to completion. Is this you or someone you know? Send us an email at info@sdakinship.org

WE'RE LOOKING FOR

LANGUAGE TRANSLATORS

WE'RE EXPANDING OUR TEAM SO THAT WE CAN REACH THOSE
WHO DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH AS THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE.

SEND AN EMAIL TO
COMMUNICATIONS@SDAKINSHIP.ORG
TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN JOIN OUR
AMAZING TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS.

OUR JOURNEYS MATTER TOO

For 40 years, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International has provided a safe spiritual and social community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex current and former Seventh-day Adventists around the world.

Our mission, always, has been nothing more and nothing less but to affirm that diversity because of this important truth—everyone is created in the image of God.

If you belong to this community, our pledge is to stand with you, no matter where you are in your journey, because we believe this truth: Your journey is important, too, your voice should be heard, and you should never be mistreated or discriminated against because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

If ever you need someone to talk to, we are here to listen.



THE DAY AFTER, PART II

BY JERRY MCKAY



A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

If you are reading my story for the first time and you feel you are missing some context, I suggest you start at the beginning with the May 2015 issue of *Connection* magazine. Why am I writing my story in such detail? In short, I am answering questions while hoping to educate. Over the years, I have been asked the same questions over and over by friends, family, and church members. The answers to those questions are found in different decades of my life. I'm grateful to *Connection Magazine* for giving me this space to share my story. Publishing as I write is a great motivator!

After years of suppressing relationship longings, fearing and over-analyzing every thought and feeling, my world seemed different the day after reading the Ministry magazine interview; even the sunlight was different. Naming my experience instantly altered my perception of the world and divided it into before and after. While most prior themes remained and/or evolved, new themes emerged. Overnight, I became preoccupied with changing my orientation. At the same time, I felt driven to seek out other LGBT people as a means of understanding myself. Not all new themes were pleasant. I would slowly learn what others—church members in particular—thought of “the homosexual”—of me. My circumstances notwithstanding, I was as naïve as any heterosexual about the broader experience of LGBT people. I had no idea what was ahead of me. I had just eaten from the reparative-therapy tree of knowledge of good and evil, so I would have to experience all the consequences for myself.

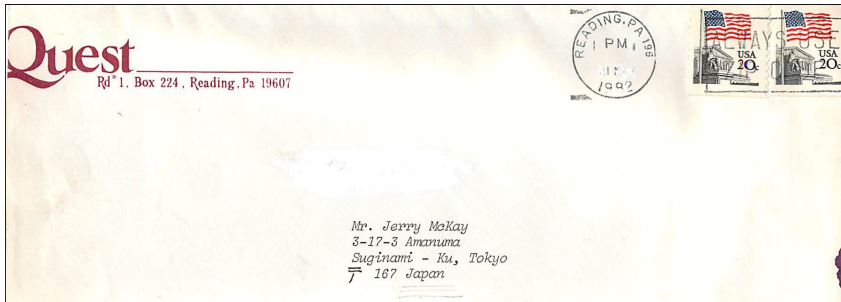
With hundreds of requests pouring in from distressed homosexuals, as Mr. Cook indicated in the Ministry interview, I needed to know more about Quest Learning Center. It took a week to draft my response because every edit meant rewriting my letter. This was, in effect, my coming out. Signing my name to a letter linking me to homosexuality was disconcerting. Though it was anxiety-producing, once my letter was in the mailbox, there was a strange feeling of liberation.

Because it would be weeks before hearing back from Mr. Cook, I kept re-reading the interview. I was in awe of what I believed he had accomplished: moving from one orientation to the other that culminated in a two-year marriage and a son. I was also fascinated by his theological and psychological explanation of cause and cure. In short, the theological cause, according to Mr. Cook, was Adam's sin. In that single event, all humanity experienced alienation from God, self, and the world.

The psychological cause was more personal. It was my distant father and/or my dominant mother—whichever applied—in conjunction with my response to both, as a child, that resulted in my attraction to the same sex. My distorted view of self and the world, Mr. Cook insisted, had “worsened to the point of homosexuality.” While this was a gloomy picture, I was to take heart because a correct understanding and application of the gospel would heal all my distortions and bring freedom from homosexuality. To say I embraced this theory is to understate how thoroughly I started to incorporate it into my belief system. After all, based on my family dynamics, this explanation seemed made to measure.

On February 1, 1982, I received a response. I was relieved the only marking on the envelope was “Quest” and the return address. With my letter in hand, I sought out an unoccupied room to read in private. I was so anxious that I felt as if I were about to do something sinful. After a few words acknowledging receipt of my letter and an appreciation of the risk I had taken to reach out for help, Mr. Cook continued:

From what you are telling me, I think it wise to advise you that it would be an excellent idea for you to come to the Learning Center next year. It is a regular thing for us to receive people from out of state who take up residence in Reading to learn the deliverance of Christ from homosexuality and the healing of their emotions.



He explained that Quest was not a live-in center, that people come to Reading, set up accommodations, and find a job. Attendees were expected to commit to staying for at least six months and preferably one year. The letter included an information pamphlet describing the seven-service Quest experience. In words that tugged on my spiritual sensitivities, Mr. Cook continued:

I think that at your age this is an ideal time to begin to get this problem forever behind you. Many a time God begins to work with a man. He gives him a pause in his life, a period of wilderness time, in which he deals with our past and present in order to prepare us for our future calling. This may be your time.

Mr. Cook also recommended that I purchase a series of tapes mentioned in the brochure. He suggested that the tapes, studied carefully one per week, would be a great help until I could come to Reading.

Naturally, I was moved by his final words of encouragement.

I wish you hope. Homosexuality is changeable. You can be healed. You can know the true love of which God has brought into the world. You can have the hope of a family life. Looking forward to hearing from you again.

Sincerely, In the Service of Christ,

Colin D. Cook

After reading the letter, my spirit was both full and empty. I was happy and sad. I was hopeful and terrified. I needed to talk to someone, but my only confidant in that moment was the portable gas heater hissing beside me as it struggled to warm my secluded room that midwinter afternoon. It was oddly comforting.

Within a week, I had written a second letter to Mr. Cook. I shared a bit more of my story and indicated I might like to come to Reading at some point later in the year. I also ordered the cassette tape series, *Homosexuality and The Power to Change*, from American Cassette Ministries. Once again, I returned to reading the Ministry interview and waited.

As I waited, I thought a great deal about my future. Although I had been praying about June, when my two-year term ended, I did not know what to do. I don't think I would have reached out to Perry, the language school director, except that we had had several intimate conversations in previous months about my 16PF score and my "distinctive" personality traits. Because of this, I felt safe enough to risk disclosing my problem. I asked to meet with Perry several weeks later during our student-teacher ski camp.

Despite the pleasant distraction of a day on the slopes in the Japanese Alps, I was acutely conscious of my impending meeting with Perry. Because I wanted to be as relaxed as possible when I met with him, I quit skiing early and headed for the lodge. I wanted to get in and out of the public bath before anyone else arrived. Although changing my orientation was now my preoccupation, I was still attracted to men. It would have taken only one handsome man, strutting about naked in the public bath, to slide me into an anxious state of shame and agitation. My plan worked. The bath was empty.

Later that evening, Perry and I met privately. He remembers me sitting on a cushion on the tatami floor with my arms wrapped around my legs. He said I looked noticeably conflicted—quiet, somber, and deep in reflection. I just remember feeling nauseous. Talking to Perry face-to-face was harder than I expected. After a few awkward moments, I told him I "had a problem with homosexuality." I tried hard to rise above all my shame and fear and speak with a new confidence derived from the hope Mr. Cook's letter had given me, but I didn't do so well. "When you finally 'said it,'" Perry told me, "there was a look of terror on your face."

ON BECOMING A PEBBLE: THE NAME GOD GAVE SIMON

Catherine Taylor

As far as I can tell, it happened only six times in the Bible. For God to personally name a mortal is a rare and significant event. In the Hebrew culture, names of children were usually indicative of either the time in history when they were born or wishes for the development of their character. Later, the use of family names became more common. When God chose to give a particular name to someone, it seems to have been a response to a specific event or issue in their life as well as an object lesson for the rest of us.

Adam or adama means red earth. What does it say to you that the first human name created on this planet is a descriptor of the soil from which mortals were formed? Abraham means father of many, a millennia-large promise to a barren couple and a reminder to the rest of us that nothing is impossible with God's grace. Jacob's name literally means follower. It became proverbial for one who is deceptive. Fleeing from Laban and afraid of Esau, at night by the Jabbok he wrestled through the dark hours with God. At daybreak, God renamed Jacob Israel, he who struggles "because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." God named the infant Solomon Jedidiah, friend of God, at a time when many might have considered him cursed because of his father's multiple betrayals. And then Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem: Jesus means Yaweh saves "because He shall save His people from their sins." Christ is translated anointed one, smeared with sacred oil in a ceremony of dedication. The name was a divine empowering of task and office.

The renaming of Simon was no less pivotal. When Andrew brought his brother to meet Jesus,

Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John. You will be called Peter (petros) (John 2:42). Petros describes a small individual stone, a pebble. Linguistically, the term can be used in contrast to petra, the bedrock. Notice the prophetic nuance in Jesus' language. Jesus is saying that Simon will someday grow into the name Pebble. He is not ready for it yet. Later in time when Peter acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, his Lord would say to Simon,

And I tell you that you are Peter (petros), and on this rock (petra) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).

In the Psalms, God is referred to as a rock, sure: a focus of stability, a place of security and safety. Jesus called himself the Cornerstone or Foundation, petra. He is the Rock on which the church was built. He is the One who could not be overcome. From their introduction, Jesus knew that Simon would come to understand the role of the Christ and the role of the follower: Foundation Stone and small part of that stone. He also understood it would take Simon quite the journey to get there.

I believe Peter was already being led by the Holy Spirit when he met Jesus. How else could this Roman-hating, impulsive, muscular, net-lugging, Galilean team leader of a fishing fleet choose to build a relationship with, and follow, Someone who had just predicted that he would end up as a pebble? That said, most know Peter's journey to understand his connection with his Friend and Savior—that he was a pebble part of the Foundation Stone, would be... well.... would be interesting.

With the rest of the disciples, Peter saw the miracles, heard the parables, learned to see the sophistry of the Pharisees, participated in the witnessing internships, helped feed several thousand people (twice), faced demons, and increasingly grew to better understand Heaven's values. Four events stand out for me as turning points in Peter's individual journey: his walk on the water, his acknowledgement at Caesarea Philippi, his denial in the high priest's court, and his restoration by the Sea of Galilee.

Soon after the death of John the Baptist and the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sent the disciples on a journey to Gennesaret by boat.

They became buffeted by wind and waves. Right before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:26-31).

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ON BECOMING A PEBBLE: THE NAME GOD GAVE SIMON

continued

Clearly, I cannot read Peter's mind. That said, I think the answer to Jesus' question may have been, "I thought with your invitation I could walk on water. I realized I couldn't do this on my own. I got scared. I had to call for help. I am glad You were there." He wasn't different from many of us who, because we are Christians, take on tasks or adventures without realizing that the goal is not dependent on us but on the One who is leading the larger project. What I appreciate about Peter is that he didn't let his probable embarrassment get in the way of his growing relationship with, and understanding of, Jesus. I think that was a large step toward understanding what it means to be the small stone in the protection of the Foundation.

Later, when Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" they replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-17).

At this point Jesus changes a prediction to present tense. I tell you that you are Petros and upon this Petra I will build my church (Matthew 16:18).

Peter's understanding and acknowledgement of the truth that his friend and rabbi is the Divine Anointed One was another step toward a clear perception of their relationship. There is a gift in being a small stone that is part of the Larger One; it comes with understanding and acknowledging our fragile need and, at the same time, God's power to meet it.

I wish that Peter could have held on to his revelation that Jesus was the Cornerstone, the Safe Place, the One who could not fail, the One who would protect, and the One who loved him. Like many of us in dangerous times, on crucifixion Thursday, in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter regressed. He forgot that he was only a pebble who did not have to be in charge of his own safety. He denied his relationship with Someone he loved because he was afraid it would cause himself harm. I can't judge him because I, like many of us, have done something similar. What I appreciate about the impulsive fisherman is that he went outside and wept bitterly and yearned for restoration and reconnection to the Cornerstone...

...which was granted.

On the Sea of Tiberius, in a near exact replication of an event three years earlier, the resurrected Jesus filled a

fishnet and cooked breakfast. He then went on to officially restore Peter's relationship with Him and to clearly reinstate Peter into his former place in the community of disciples. Addressing Petros by his old name, Jesus said:

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus said, "Simon son of John do you truly love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time He said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). Three affirmations for three denials. An acknowledgement of love before an assignment of task. An understanding of Who was in charge before a fitness to be an under shepherd.

A willingness to be a pebble in the work of the Cornerstone, to rest in the leadership, guidance, and safety of the One who is stability and security.

Peter was humbled to face the lessons of the future where he would learn the prejudice he must set aside. This growth helped him develop into one of the safe leaders for the new church. Much later he began his second letter by acknowledging what it means to be a small part of the Cornerstone:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3,4).

He could feed the sheep because he had learned what it means to be part of the Cornerstone: a pebble.

Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:26-31).

CHURCH RELATIONS



Recently, the church held a world congress in Budapest for Children's Women's and Family Ministries. The topic of homosexuality was only covered in the Family Ministries break-out sessions. The key note speaker for this was Eckerhardt Mueller from the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

He had previously presented his views at the conference on homosexuality at Andrews University in 2009 and is said to be the main author of the recent Transgender position paper. While no one from Kinship was invited to this congress, we were able to get information from an ally who was in attendance. As one would expect from the person making the presentation, this was not a meeting that provided much hope for our community. One would wonder if the location was chosen because of the very fundamental approach to Scripture from that area of Europe.

None-the-less there appeared to be a number of positive conversations with various world leaders around the tables at meal-times. A couple of questions were presented to one group and later shared with all those attending the breakout session. Here they are: "I know believing SDAs who live their homosexual love, how about their stories?" "How could it be possible to sit with those from the Kinship community at one table at a meeting like this?" As a result of these questions, it was shared with the audience who Kinship was.

This led Elder Mueller to state that we can learn from everyone. Because of the great work of Catherine with the Safe Places program in Europe over the last four years and a growing number of pastors in Europe, the North American Division and Australia, we are seeing more congregations wanting to be sure that they are providing a safe place for members of the LGBTIQ community to worship and become involved.

It used to be that Adventist colleges and universities were places that occasionally had a student who was willing to provide some leadership in creating conversations about homosexuality. More recently, the Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition has created regular conversations on many campuses in the U. S. It was rumored that after years of resistance, these groups might finally become official clubs on several campuses. However, no one seems to know exactly why this forward movement has been delayed, though on one campus the conversations seemed to stop after a visit from the GC President. Is there a connection? We're still trying to find out.

Dave Ferguson
Director of Church Relations





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We understand what it is like to be an Adventist struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity because we each had similar experiences.

And we also know that this struggle is often painful, frightening, and discouraging. Kinship is here to help and provide support.

If you are feeling lonely, depressed, or suicidal, or if you need a professional counselor who is supportive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender concerns, chances are we know someone in your area who may help.

Be assured that we are sensitive to your need for confidentiality. If you wish, we can also refer you to an understanding Adventist pastor, teacher, or other professional we know who is sensitive and informed about sexual orientation and gender-identity issues.

Above all, please know that we care. We understand that you need to think through what your sexuality means, what to do about

it, what it may mean to your loved ones, and whether it is possible to be LGBTIQ and Seventh-day Adventist. We will not try to determine your conclusions if you reach out to us. We will endeavor to understand and help you while you make those important decisions about who you are and God's plan for your life.

We want to respond in the most helpful way. We are people of diverse ages and backgrounds, so please let us know the type of person to whom you feel most comfortable talking. For example, a woman rather than a man, someone who came out while being married, or someone with a similar background or profession. You may also be more comfortable talking to someone who speaks your native language.

If you are a pastor, teacher, counselor, or parent, please know that we welcome all inquiries and that we also respect and honor your need for confidentiality.



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