connection.

Kampmeeting 2011 Photo Impressions

God’s Love is Free

“The Stream Was Alive With the Sound of Music”

New York City Pride and Celebration of Marriage
First Kinship Mexico Gathering

& a Wedding at Cape Cod
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WHO WE ARE...
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 LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 1,550 people in more than forty-three countries.

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

SUPPORT KINSHIP
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

Kinship
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or visit Kinship’s website at: www.sdakinship.org.
From the Editor

Celebrations

As I wrote in the electronic Kinship eNews, the Connection issue after Kampmeeting used to be mostly reports about our annual gathering and business meeting. But things have changed in Kinship. We have so much copy for this issue that we have held thirteen pages over for the October issue. We’re delighted to share Bruce and Eddie’s report on New York City pride and their thoughts on New York State’s passage of the bill that will allow same-sex couples to marry. After fifty-one years of Bruce and Eddie being together, we hear there may be a wedding in the works. Kinship Mexico just had its first meeting and sent us photos. We have our first report from Kinship Korea. The Walla Walla, Washington, Kinship chapter shared their enthusiastic report about Diversity Day in their area. Speaking of weddings, well, you can read this issue. What lovely gardens! There is news about the Seventh-Gay Adventists documentary. Take a look at the mini-Kampmeetings that are coming up this fall. And, of course, we have a Kampmeeting sermon, reaction, and lots of photos. By the time many of you read this, our European Kinship Meeting will be taking place in Paris. All over the world, Kinship is active. Thank you to all of you who quietly or exuberantly live lives of courage, honesty, and integrity. We are honored to share your stories. We are glad you write for us and to us. We are glad you enrich our community and the area where you live. Take good care of yourselves for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

First Kinship Mexico Gathering

Alejandro Gomez Pasco

A little over a month ago, a group of Seventh-day Adventist gay men gathered in Mexico City. For some of them it was the first contact of this kind. Abner Vela had to make an eight-hour journey to be at this meeting. The men were a variety of ages, from differing backgrounds, and follow different paths. All of them had a strong desire to share their story and their present or former link to the Seventh-day Adventist church. All of them were proud to bear the name of SDA Kinship-Mexico on their profiles and their identities. They discussed ways to reach out and be supportive of other LGBTI Adventists, and what it means to be part of our first group of Kinship members in Mexico.

Abner, Guillermo, Alejandro, and Oakley
Friday night, June 27, we were with a huge crowd in front of the Stonewall Inn. More than ten TV and cable trucks lined Seventh Avenue and were taping the orderly but anxious crowds that continued to grow and overflow into the park across from Stonewall and into the adjoining streets as the evening went on. At 10:30 p.m. the place went up in cheers, whistles, howls, kisses, hugs, and tears of joy as the deciding vote to pass the bill was cast. The weather was great for Pride weekend and was made so much better as New York became the sixth state to allow same-sex marriages. We plan to fill out the paperwork.

The euphoria continued through Saturday and into the Pride March festivities on Sunday. Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Mike Bloomberg, Speaker of the NYC Council Christine Quinn (an out and vocal lesbian, who holds the most powerful position after the mayor), and other City Council members received loud and long cheers and were one of the early groups to be in the line of march. They were immediately followed by a spontaneous throng of at least 1000 marchers.

Any of you who want to know about the modern beginning of the gay rights movement might find this link illuminating:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonewall_riots#Police_raid

According to an article, “The Thin Line Between Church and State,” in The Capitol, a paper that covers the politics of New York state:

New York Adventist Key to Marriage Equality Victory

Assemblyman Nelson Castro was one of three religious Democrats who changed their position last week as the Assembly passed a gay marriage bill 80-63 and sent it to the Senate.

“I think marriage should be between a man and a woman, but I don’t have the right to prohibit others to have the right to get married,” said Castro, 39.

Negotiations on the marriage bill continued through the weekend, as opponents talked with the Cuomo administration about what religious exemptions would make them not feel compelled to assist marriages they cannot support. Advocates indicated they would not oppose those changes, and several wavering Senate Republicans have said religious concerns are their main objection to the bill.

Castro, who represents a western Bronx district, is the only Seventh-day Adventist in the state’s legislature. Raised Catholic in the Dominican Republic, Castro voted “no” on a same-sex marriage bill in 2009 for religious reasons, but talks with gay activists, constituents, and his pastor changed his mind this year, he said.
With his pastor, Castro “spoke about the fact that I thought it was the right thing to do. But religiously I was definitely torn. He said to me, ‘Look, civically, you have a responsibility to represent your community. That has nothing to do with God.’”

The bill’s language makes some exemptions for religious institutions – they aren’t required to officiate the vows of same-sex couples. Those exemptions allowed two other former Assembly “no” votes, Karim Camara and Nick Perry, to vote for the bill, Castro said.

According to Nelson Castro’s Assembly member profile, he is a graduate of Andrews University, “where he obtained a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Holding true to the mission of his Alma Mater to “Seek Knowledge, Affirm Faith, Change the World,” Nelson Castro returned to New York City with these sentiments in mind.

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* http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2011/07/01/new-york-adventist-key-marriage-equality-victory
* http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Nelson-L-Castro/bio/

Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely. -Auguste Rodin

Moments of Silence for AIDS victims

The photo from the Pride Parade, shows NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg, City Council leader Christine Quinn (out lesbian, and second in command to the mayor), and New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, who struggled and fought to get the bill passed.

From a Newspaper

EDINBURGH, August 12, 2011— Bishop Christopher Senjonyo from Uganda, a courageous advocate of the rights and dignity of LGBT people in Africa, is speaking at three events in the 2011 Edinburgh Festival of Spirituality and Peace this weekend. As Uganda considered a bill that would make homosexuality a capital offence, Bishop Christopher was one of those in the church who stood out against the anti-gay tide and campaigned against what he calls “sexual apartheid.” As a result he has been the target of death threats and condemnations, but vows to continue his counseling and advocacy work. The bishop will engage in a public question-and-answer session after the 5:45 p.m. showing of the film “Coming Out,” which examines the plight of gay people in Africa today, at the Filmhouse Cinema, Edinburgh, on Friday, 12 August. On Saturday, 13 August, from 12:30 p.m., he will be interviewed at St John’s Church, Edinburgh, by John Watson from Amnesty International at a meeting entitled “The Worst Place in the World to Be Gay?” Bishop Christopher then preaches at Evensong at...
St John’s Episcopal Church at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, 14 August. “The debate about sexuality within the churches has often been mean and vituperative. Much more attention needs to be paid to those like Bishop Christopher Senjonyo, who articulate a strong Christian case for compassion and justice towards the persecuted LGBT minority in Africa, both inside and outside the churches,” commented Simon Barrow, co-director of the religion and society think-tank Ekklesia.

Bishop Christopher Senjonyo was last year named by the Huffington Post as one of the “ten most influential religious figures in the world.”

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From the Treasurer

**Dear Kinship Family:**

On behalf of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, International, I would like to thank you for your generous gifts of time, effort, prayers, and donations. Your contribution makes it possible for us to provide a safe spiritual and social community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex current and former Seventh-day Adventists. This past year has brought many new things to Kinship; with the addition of the Kinship Facebook group, our membership is becoming closer than ever. We also just completed Kampmeeting. With the help of a few members, we were able to "stream" many of the meetings online for viewers all over the world. Our new interactive component made this Kampmeeting unique. We are able to provide support in a remarkably expanded way. All these exciting things would happen if it were not for each one of you.

*Thank you again!*

*Brian Durham, Treasurer*
String Too Short to Save

“The Stream Was Alive With the Sound of Music”

By Rom Wilder

I’m going through withdrawal. I miss my Kinship brothers and sisters and the incredible Kampmeeting programs. The magical technology that has enabled me to work from home proved magical again in July when it took me to Kampmeeting.

My cheeks are still hurting from smiling Saturday night at the talented and wacky entertainers. My heart is still warm from hearing a Seventh-day Adventist pastor affirm me and all my LGBTI brothers and sisters in Kinship! Who gets to hear a Seventh-day Adventist ethicist you had as a professor more than 40 years ago say the LGBTI members of Kinship are a blessing to him? I did.

At 9:00 a.m. sharp in California (OK, it was not so sharp—it was, after all, gay time), members of SDA Kinship International were ready (almost) for their morning devotion. At noon in Virginia a happy, old lesbian started her lunch hour with her computer tuned to the URL for that same devotion. Live video streaming, it’s called. Wow! At 2:30 p.m. in California a workshop began. It was 5:30 in Virginia; and that same happy, old lesbian signed off her work computer, turned on her home computer, and joined her brothers and sisters at Kinship Kampmeeting as it was streamed live.

I missed the meals—that special bonding time when you get to know people you didn’t already know. I missed the hugs and seeing old friends (and young, old friends). But technology and three awesome young men made sure those of us who were geographically far away weren’t left out. In fact, with only inches between my face and the screen, I was in the front row, a place I never sit! I got to see Linda and Barley and their lean, mean, get-around machine. I got to pick a hymn (thank you, Rondolo and Linda!). I got to hear people call out “hi” to me. I even got to “whisper” to the person next to me—via texting. (Shhhh.) I was virtually there!

At 2:00 a.m. Sunday it was over. Sigh. And I miss all of my Kinship family so much! Next year I plan to get the hugs in person, but I will be doing what I can to be sure anyone who cannot be there in person will get to be there like I was this year. What a blessing it was!
God’s Love is Free

God shares with us infinite, unconditional, unending love. If this love is really free, how come it costs us so much in the long run? The question is important and the answer is even more important. I propose to think about this with you and you to think with me these five affirmations or theses.

1. God’s love really is free.
   
   Phillip Yancey hit the nail on the head with What’s So Amazing About Grace? He said, “There is nothing we can do to make God love us more”—not serving the church, witnessing to our neighbors, “standing for the right though the heavens fall.” All of these activities are good and often necessary, but they are useless ways to get God to love us. They are too late because God already loves us. He has already accepted us. More significantly, Yancey insists that “there is nothing we can do to make God love us less”—not our self-centeredness, not our disrespect for others, not our thoughtlessness, not our exaggerations. One way you can test honesty is to ask, Have you ever exaggerated? If anyone says no, you can be certain they are lying. Even our statements of fact are sometimes said in ways that mislead. All of these things do not change God’s love for us. That love just is and is unconditional and everlasting. We don’t deserve it, earn it, or qualify for it. God’s love is just there. As Yancey puts it, “God loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love and it’s a love that can never let us go.”

2. We are called to love the people in our lives.

   We are called to love because God loves us. We are called to love as much as is infinitely possible. John’s command is to love one another as God has loved you. Martin Luther said every Christian is to be a Christ to our neighbor. James Row wrote the words to a song that we used to sing in Sabbath school. Be like Jesus this my song In the home or in the throng. Be like Jesus all day long. I would be like Jesus.

   In those days I thought, obey my parents, be ready for Sabbath School on time, and always tell the truth. Now I realize this is not how Jesus lives. From His earliest years He had one purpose. He lived to bless others. That’s what love is about. John says whoever does not love, loves not God because God is love. The person who does not love shows that they don’t know about God. God is our model for living, our ultimate reality, our ultimate goodness. Our true calling is to do like God does. Thirty years ago, just about the time of the first Kinship Kampmeeting in Payson, Arizona, pastors in Australia were criticized for preaching too much about love. I wondered how that could be a problem. Didn’t Jesus say to love one another? Didn’t our prophet tell us the strongest argument is a loving and lovable Christian?

3. Love is something we do.

   It is not just kind, warm, affectionate feelings. God loved the world. He poured out blessings from the beginning of Genesis. Incarnate, He gave from
his earliest years—practical, everyday, and also miraculous gifts. Jesus lived to bless others. Love is active.

A few months ago the School of Religion at La Sierra University was criticized for putting too much emphasis on the social gospel. How odd, given the amount of time and energy Jesus spent caring for the marginalized, the disadvantaged, the rejected, and the abused. The criticism seemed to be concerned that our teaching wasn’t Adventist enough; that we should be emphasizing beliefs that make us different from other Christians. The critics indicated that if we preach any doctrine or practice held by other Christians that we are watering down the Adventist message. The critics got it wrong.

Our Seventh-day Adventist heritage has a good deal to say about love and justice. Ellen White told us to memorize and practice Isaiah 58. The complete Christian character includes the impulse to help others that springs constantly from the work of the Holy Spirit inside of us. Making justice a reality is part of who we are. Living up to the ideals of love and justice is far more demanding than simply paying tithe, eating right, and avoiding tobacco and alcohol.

From my perspective of a life in the church, I think the reason so many of us become legalistic, rather than focusing on the way of love, is that it is so much easier to go by the rules. Follow the rules and you’re in; even better, you know you are in. Despite the fact that most of my education occurred in public schools, I’ve managed to keep the rules very well. I have been a pretty good Seventh-day Adventist. I’ve worked for the church for 59 years. I pay tithe, am a vegetarian, serve on the church board, and lead the Faculty and Friends Sabbath school. Frankly it’s not all that hard. But when it comes to being a loving and lovable Christian—oops!

I befriended a colleague at La Sierra who is way ahead for me with this impulse to help others. She’s the personification of thoughtfulness. She not only lives love to those around her, she thinks things most of us wouldn’t think of. When my beloved Marsha was very sick and dying, I didn’t know who had been to visit her. My friend brought a guest book for people to sign so that I would know who had been there. I couldn’t think of such a plan at the time but she did. She is a saint. She goes way beyond the rules, way beyond her job description. Unfortunately I’m not in that category. I still have a lot of growing up to do. This would be discouraging if it weren’t for Affirmation #1. God really is love.

4. Love is inclusive.

Inclusive includes our enemies. Some people are fairly easy to love. They treat us with respect. They are comfortable to be with and live with. They have intelligence and good insights. Hey, they are like us! There are other people who aren’t like us. They sometimes think we are dumb or evil or both and they let us know it. They are sometimes rude, crude, or abusive. They make our lives more difficult. They don’t like us and frankly we don’t like them much either. The love of God calls us to love them anyway.

The people who are good at loving those who mistreat them: they are you, my Kinship family. You are a very important part of the family of God. You have worked on and communicated in a community of faith that has not been affirming and accepting. You are an example and inspiration to me. Seventh-day Adventist Christianity is blessed by your presence and your witness. No one has authorized me to speak for the institutional church. However, I do speak for a growing number of Adventist Christians who want you to know that you are regarded with admiration. We appreciate what you have taught us about grace.
5. Love in the family of God can be a very expensive investment.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man asked, What should I do to gain eternal life? Jesus answered, You know the commandments. The young man replied, I have kept all these since my youth. Jesus said, You lack one thing. Go sell what you have and give the money to the poor. Then come follow Me. The young man went away grieving because he had many possessions. It’s a lot easier and safer just to play by the rules. Tithe is only 10% and maybe another 8% for other offerings. Jesus asked a lot from this young, highly positioned man. He asked him to put everything on the line.

This is the way of Jesus. He said, There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. He knew this because He did it. Putting your life on the line doesn’t necessarily mean dying; it can mean giving everything that you’ve got. Madeline Mills is a transsexual woman who talks about the love of her wife Samantha. Samantha learned of her then-boyfriend’s crisis of gender identity before they were married. They watched a documentary about trannies. The following night Madeline told Samantha she felt like those people. Samantha accepted the information. She accepted her fiancé.

Madeline reports that she wanted to find an option that did not require transitioning but after eight years she realized it was her only sane option. Samantha agreed. Samantha has never considered herself a lesbian but the couple is committed to loving and respecting each other regardless of what the future holds. This is a touching example of genuine love. You never know how much it is going to cost.

If God’s love is really free, how come it costs us so much in the long run? I remind you God’s love really is free. We can’t say or do anything to make God love us any more or less. Let it permeate our lives. We are called to be like God and to love the people around us. Love is something we do. It is for the people in our lives that don’t like us, as much as for the ones who do. It usually is expensive. Love costs more than we ever dreamed. But it is always a good investment. It’s the kind God made and continues to make in each of us.

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thanks to Heidi Johnson
Iris Yob and Estelle Jorgenson, both originally from Australia, reconnected and fell in love in 1986 while they were pursuing advanced degrees in North America. This year an estate planner explained that their home state of Indiana’s unfriendly policies towards same-sex couples could result in a significant loss of their retirement savings to taxes. So Iris and Estelle decided to leverage a townhome they own on Cape Cod, make that their permanent residence, and celebrate their 25th anniversary by getting married in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The first step was to officially “come out” after all these years of quietly living together, and see if anyone would be willing to make the trip to Cape Cod. As Iris and Estelle made their phone calls, they were overwhelmed by the support they received from Adventist friends and family, colleagues, and professional associates. Iris’s sister baked Australian delicacies and shipped them frozen-express. Then she and her extended family flew to the United States to host two pre-wedding open houses. Greeting cards poured in from Australia and around North America. RSVPs piled in from Indiana, Australia, Michigan, Toronto, New York, Ohio, England, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Chicago, and more! This couple had hoped they could have a gathering of at least 25 guests. Four times that number turned into a congregation that spilled out of the little Kelley Chapel (circa 1873) and later filled the Old Yarmouth Inn (est. 1696) with celebration.

The service was written and led by the Reverend Professor June Boyce-Tillman, composer, author, and educator from the University of Winchester, England. The world premier performance of “Loving Love,” an original composition by Anthony Palmer, was performed for the musical meditation. The music for both the service and the reception was provided by the guests, many of whom have PhDs in music. The day was beautiful, the couple was radiant, and the guests were delightful!

The following day, Iris and Estelle led more than twenty of their guests on a ferry excursion to Nantucket. This included a local bus trip to Siasconset to see the beautiful homes and gardens, have lunch at a café, and then return to town for ice cream and sightseeing. It was a foggy day, which made the sights all the more charming. Everyone went home with happy memories, interesting things to talk about, and an expanded circle of friends.

(Iris attended Wisconsin Kampmeeting in 1993.)
Diversity Day in Walla Walla, Washington

Terry Rice

Diversity Day is a multi-cultural arts festival, usually held on Father’s Day weekend at Pioneer Park. This year, because of a threat that Fred Phelps’ Westboro, Kansas, church would picket our gathering, the city of Walla Walla and park security prepared LGBTI organizations for potential hate speech demonstrations. And SDA Kinship’s Walla Walla Valley Chapter attended to support all LGBTI Christians at the park.

Hymn
By June Boyce-Tillman
(Sung to the tune of Londonderry Air)

We shall go out with gratitude within us
For signposts, guides, and waymarks in our lives,
And friendships formed in laughter and in sadness;
For when we sense support our hearts revive.
May we in strength work with the needs of others,
Not let our fear destroy the Truth within;
May we see justice for a whole creation
And stay in tune with One who is our Origin.

We praise this Source of all that is created,
The model of our creativity;
May we be one with all that is life-giving,
Not lose our way in negativity.
For we would walk in happiness and sorrow
Yet keep in touch with wellsprings deep inside;
So shall we come to know abundant living
And share in God a love that is both deep and wide.

A Reading from the Service:
What greater thing is there for two human souls than
to feel that they are joined—to strengthen each other-to be at one with each other in silent
unspeakable memories.

—George Eliot

Special thanks to those who worked behind the scenes to get our booth looking great. Suzi Sullivan provided an awning that fit perfectly. Kinship leaders mailed us signs, literature, and a gay Christian flag. Our display included Connection issues and Eden’s Gifts. Movie-makers, Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers, gave us Seventh-Gay Adventist movie flyers to use for this occasion. Two other supporters, who could not risk being “outed,” worked behind the scenes to make our booth a reality. They printed copies of the Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It? Other Kinship attendees transported the materials, provided electrical extension cords, and helped create a brand new banner. Your Third Place, a Walla Walla University Church Sabbath school class that openly affirms LGBTI people, funded our 10’ x 3’ colored banner. This banner sign was created by local chapter attendees and produced by Image Smart Sign Company, located In downtown Walla Walla, at no labor cost.

Members of our group attended a required meeting to train us how to deal with the followers of Fred Phelps. Prayer was uplifted at the Pioneer Park gazebo the night before, asking that God’s peace would be reflected in our own characters the next day. The anticipated Diversity Day came with many looking around for demonstrators and picketers. They never showed up! Kinship booth participants encountered joy, tears, laughter, soul-searching, and admiration for what we were doing.

We showed a video that talked about the Bible and homosexuality. Tracy, Glenda, Elaina, Terry, and Anthony talked with visitors at our table, described Kinship’s work and mission and handed out Eden’s Gifts, a Bible study guide that addresses the clobber texts. We heard some tearful festival attendees say, “This ministry is long overdue.” We heard others comment that they were amazed that some Seventh-day Adventists were leading our local Christian community in a badly needed ministry.

Some visitors shared the hurts and struggles they have with their own parents. Free thinkers asked us how we decided to remain followers of Jesus in the face of rejection. A young lesbian Christian couple told us they found our pamphlets meaningful and useful. An intersex person shared their unique struggle. We were delighted with a group of former Seventh-day Adventists and the local chapter of PFLAG who asked to join us behind the SDA Kinship banner and gay Christian flag in the Tri-Cities parade in July.
Homosexuality and vs. Christianity has been a hot topic for many years, and those of us existing in this space know it can be an extremely volatile environment. Whenever the LGBT community has sought to end discrimination based on sexual orientation or gain equality, opposition always comes from the same quarter; right-wing, conservative Christians, leaders, denominations, and organizations. And they can be extremely vocal and opinionated. Over the last ten years I have communicated with literally thousands of people about the issue of homosexuality and Christianity. This has been through face-to-face meetings with individuals and church leaders and via personal emails, internet groups, forums, Facebook, and blogs, as well as posting comments after relevant news stories on media sites.

When I first began this kind of work it became quite obvious to me that little effective communication was going on. I’ve often referred to it being like a boxing match. The bell rings and both opponents come from their corners swinging punches. The object of the game is to knock the opponent out. The six passages in the Bible that refer to same-sex activities aren’t called the “clobber passages” for nothing.

Within the above contexts it’s easy to attack and give back what is being dished out by our “opponents.” The conversation reduces to nothing more than an emotional diatribe which basically reinforces each one’s perceptions of the other and opposing positions. Nothing shifts. Calling these kinds of engagements a discussion or debate is flattering ourselves.

Winning is not the goal; communicating effectively is. To speak intelligently, rationally, and graciously requires skill and patience.

Here are some of my observations and personal guidelines I’ve found helpful; some I learned the hard way.

We should always speak respectfully to each other even when we disagree or when people oppose us. If we want to be respected and listened to then we must also be willing to give respect and a listening ear.

Winning is not the goal; communicating effectively is. To speak intelligently, rationally, and graciously requires skill and patience.

We should always speak respectfully to each other even when we disagree or when people oppose us. If we want to be respected and listened to then we must also be willing to give respect and a listening ear.

An angry response to an angry comment gets another angry response and can keep you unhealthily engaged for hours or days. Proverbs 15:1 says “a soft answer turns away wrath.”

Sometimes people are speaking from ignorance, preconceived ideas, and misconceptions. My role is not to condemn them for their stupidity or ignorance but endeavor to inform and educate.

Watch out for your own and others’ triggers. We all have triggers. These may come up in the discussion or have initiated it. One trigger that sets people off can be that the person is gay himself but as he has not accepted it, he projects his hatred of what is within him on to others. Research has proven this many times. Another trigger can be sexual abuse, and that traumatic event understandably clouds a person’s perception and responses. Bitterness and resentment a person holds towards the church, Christians, or God for the pain, rejection, or injustice he has experienced can be a trigger. If we create a safe space and talk the person down instead of winding him up, then the source of his hurt or anger usually comes out.

When someone attacks you, don’t attack back. If you do, you are lowering yourself to their level.

Sometimes it’s helpful to not respond immediately after reading an email response; emotions are running high, and by responding in that state you risk the possibility of increasing volatility. Walk away. Put your mind on something else to diffuse the emotion. Sit on it for a few hours or a day. Sometimes it is best to walk away be-
cause the discussion has become toxic. If you continue to engage in it, it will poison you as well.

Some people have made their minds up already and have only one agenda—to convert you to their way of thinking. They are often unaware that you used to believe as they do but your personal experience or reading has changed that. If people have made up their minds already, then dialogue is not a valuable use of your time. Actually, it’s a useless exercise and does nothing more than feed the other person’s angst on the topic. Personally, I don’t bother investing time with these people. Best to spend time with those who are questioning as opposed to people who “know” they are right. We won’t change everyone’s mind on the subject of homosexuality, so don’t try and convert everyone.

Name-calling never enhances rational discussion. It reduces the quality of the dialogue. Resist the temptation of labeling everyone a homophobe who has a different opinion or belief than you.

Asking probing, insightful questions can be more helpful than telling people what the truth is. I learned that as a coach. Example: “If you feel that homosexuality is a choice, can you please tell me what the benefits are over being straight?”

Show your humanity by acknowledging when a comment hurt you. Saying, “When you said [whatever], it really hurt me,” is better than saying, “You arsehole, I hate it when people say things like that,” or “I am offended.” Sometimes people are so into the emotion and volatility of the discussion they are not conscious of how hurtful their remarks are. We are all human beings; and, as humans, we have feelings. Show the hurt and pain; suppress the anger.

Humor, used appropriately and wisely, can help reduce the angst in a heated discussion. Always remember, though, that “hehe” or “LOL” at the end of your comment in written communication is the way to let people know you are being funny. Humor doesn’t translate well in written form. People can’t hear the laugh in your voice or see the smile on your face. Without this, you upset people unnecessarily. Sarcasm never enhances a dialogue.

Talking people down and not winding them up is a skill; and, like all skills, can be learned, developed, and enhanced. Anyone can pour petrol on a fire; it takes skill to put the fire out.

It doesn’t hurt to remind yourself occasionally that there was possibly a time when you felt the same way as the person you are communicating with does.

Ask yourself the question, “While I was ignorant about the science around sexual orientation or the historical and cultural contexts of the oft quoted ‘anti-homosexual’ verses, how could people have best
Finally, if you are going to be involved in dialogues, you must be patient. Some of us forget how long it took us to find answers and resolution. It took me 28 years. No one jumps from being anti-gay to pro-gay in one conversation. I had email communication with one person for over six months. One church leader and I have been dialoguing for six years now. Most people would say if he hasn’t changed now, he never will. I refuse to believe that, as every time we meet I know I am building trust and respect and giving him one more thing to think about that wasn’t in his consciousness previously. The shifts are small but they are shifts none the less. Eventually, all that time and effort will pay off.

I guess all the 15 things above can be summarized in the golden rule. Always treat others the way you’d like to be treated yourself.

© Anthony Venn-Brown
Author of “A Life of Unlearning” and an ambassador for the LGBT Community Honoured to be voted one of the 25 Most Influential Gay & Lesbian Australians (2007 & 2009)
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You are Invited to Book and the Beach!

Local Wisdom Weekend
October 20-23, 2011

Are there questions or issues you have always wanted to have a chance to discuss at leisure? When you read Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives, Eden’s Gifts, or those clobber texts, were there revelations or confusions that crossed your mind? Would you like a calm place to think about how to deal with some difficult or complicated family members? Some time to play at the beach?

Book and the Beach is focused on creating a time and place for us to talk with each other. There will also be morning worships, time to sing, optional field trips to local places of interest, outlet shopping and comfortable chairs in which to listen and share your thoughts.

$ 125.00 per adult for the weekend
$ 40.00 per child (between the ages of 6 & 15)
Free for children under six

To register for this weekend you can access our website at http://sdakinship.org/en/the-beach-a-the-book.html. You can also fill out the registration form at the back and send it to SDA Kinship, PO Box 69, Tillamook, Oregon 97141-0069.

To get your room assignment or if you have questions please feel free to contact Catherine at Katgurian@aol.com.

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Kinship = 911

KC for Kinship Korea

No blood spattered on the wall. No smoke billowed from heat-shattered windows. No pulse faded. This was an emergency of emotional proportions.

Last May I received a 911 call in an email. It began, Yes I’m terrified to send this. One hundred and eight words later the missive ended, I’d be so grateful if you’d respond. A fair share of those 108 words were in “code,” but it is a code that I understand perfectly.

I responded: “I’m so sorry you felt afraid to send this email but I know where you are coming from. I worked for [...] so I understand. I will do everything in my power to safeguard your confidentiality. I’m convinced there are quite a few more who are firmly locked in the closet of fear and loneliness. I’m not sure how to find them.

I think there are many of us who are lonely and have a hard time connecting with people with whom we can dare to share. I have only one such friend in Korea right now.

A couple emails later my “caller” wrote, It’s so awesome that you’ve taken the time to care, such an important ingredient to life. I am so thankful that God isn’t religious.

After several phone conversations and additional emails, we finally met for the first time. I facilitated a lesson in “Seoul Subway Navigation;” a mega-system where some 13 train lines spider-web through hundreds of stations. While getting around is very efficient, it can be a daunting challenge to a person who has spent most of a lifetime above ground only.

Between parts one and two of the lesson we went out for a delicious dinner of Thai food. Our run-on conversation wandered through four hours of topics and was punctuated with several misty-eyed moments. I was very surprised to learn that the email that I had received had not been the first cry for help sent to Kinship. The first email had never gotten a response. Before the evening was over, I was heaped with pro-fuse thanks for taking the time to care.

I have been struggling here in Korea. I have felt like I haven’t been doing what I should for Kinship. After this experience I have learned my most important job.

When the “red phone” rings, answer it!