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.

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Support Kinship

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

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WHO WE ARE...
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Across the globe and over the year there are several Kinship gatherings that go beyond our local and regional meetings. Any of you can attend any gathering but we wanted to take time here to describe some of our more regular ones so you can have a sense of what is available to you.

**Rehoboth Beach Mini-Kampmeeting**

Originated by Yolanda in US Region 2, this gathering pivots around a beach house in a traditional Delaware seacoast town known for its revival meetings at the turn of the 20th century. Now running Thursday night through Sunday morning, this mini-Kampmeeting includes Friday night vespers, Sabbath School worship, Sabbath lunch at the beach house, "open mike" vespers, and Saturday night dinner at a local restaurant. We have had ocean baptisms, kite flying, strolling conversations on the boardwalk, and shopping sprees at the local outlets. For more information you can contact Yolanda at Region2@sdakinship.org or check it out on the website at http://sdakinship.org/en/rehobothminikm/rehobothminikm2012.html.

**Women and Children First**

Begun in 2001 as a way to encourage women to attend Kampmeeting, in 2012 this gathering will expand to be a Friday-to-Tuesday event. Designed as an opportunity for Kinship women to have some social time to get to know each other, activities have included Sabbath morning worship, boat cruises of lakes and ocean inlets, a trip to Catalina Island, space shuttle launch viewing, tours of air and space centers, dinner together, poolside time, board games, and medieval joust dinners. This year our director is planning an historic boat trip down the Potomac. For more information you can contact Karen at women@sdakinship.org or access our website at http://sdakinship.org/en/wcf/wcf2012.html.

**Men before Kampmeeting**

2012 is the first year there will be activities for the men before Kampmeeting begins. Marshall Grimes has agreed to organize some activities. For more information, you can contact him at menb4kampmeeting@sdakinship.org.
Kampmeeting

The initiation of this community. Kampmeeting began at a California desert conference center as a conversation between gay Adventists and some Adventist clergy. For many years the focal session of Kampmeeting was the stories members told about their experiences. Now in its 33rd year, Kampmeeting includes spiritual speakers, workshops, stories, Sabbath song services, a talent show, Friends and Family meetings, and photography. For more information you can contact Marcos at kampmeeting@sdakinship.org, or check our website at http://sdakinship.org/en/usa-kampmeeting.html.

European Kinship Meeting (EKM)

In 2002, Reino and Ingemar invited Kinship members who lived in Europe to their house in Sweden for a weekend. Now in its thirteenth year, EKM has become so popular and important to the people who attend, that it has just added an extra day. EKM has also been held in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Scotland, and England. It typically includes speakers from the Adventist clergy, very interesting locations, excursions, and business meetings to plan upcoming events and activities. For more information you can contact Ruud at KinshipEurope@sdakinship.org or Frieder at frieder.schmid@online.de, or check our website at http://sdakinship.org/en/events.html and look for the link to European Kinship Meeting. (See pg. 5)

Kinship Australia Kampmeeting

Held in various lovely locations “down under,” this weekend meeting focuses on giving Kinship members a chance to get to know each other and hear a speaker who is usually connected to Australian Adventist clergy. Held in late September or early October, the gathering also gives participants time to enjoy the beauties of early spring. For more information, please feel free to contact Dave Coltheart at kinshipaustralia_news@sdakinship.org Later in the year you can also access details on the Kinship website under “Events” at http://sdakinship.org/en/events.html.

The Book and the Beach

Held September 20-23 at a beach house with views of the Nags Head, North Carolina ocean, this four-day event focuses on conversations about issues or questions participants want to discuss regarding Christianity and homosexuality, or spirituality, or Biblical concepts or.... At the beginning of the weekend each person has a chance to write their question or issue on a piece of paper and put it into “the hat” for group consideration. Meals are leisurely and delicious. Friday is typically a field trip day. The Book and the Beach 2012 is planning a dolphin watch. For more information you can contact Catherine at region1@sdakinship.org or check http://sdakinship.org/en/events.html in April.
Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting

Held Thursday to Sunday the second weekend in November, this gathering focuses on Bible study, play, adventures, community building, and food. Although this event was held at a lovely inn for the first six years, we are in the process of moving to a holiday house location so attendees can have a beautiful environment at more affordable rates. We have welcomed such guest speakers as Mitch Tyner and Larry Geraty. We have tromped through autumn woods, visited pottery and glass makers, wandered sculpture gardens, viewed local museums, learned drumming, experienced acupressure facelifts, created textile crafts, and gone on wagon rides. We have studied the Bible as literature and notions of sanctuary. For more information please feel welcome to contact Catherine at region1@sdakinship.org or visit our website in May at http://sdakinship.org/en/events.html and look for Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting under “Events.”

Kinship in Kenya

As our community builds there will be an increasing number of gatherings in different parts of the world. Rena is in the process of organizing a Kinship Africa meeting in Kenya. If you are interested in attending, you can contact Rena at [kinshipkenya@sdakinship.org]. As she confirms details we will include them in the Connection and on our website.

We at Kinship and at the Connection are very interested in letting our Kinship community know about events our coordinators and leaders in different countries are developing. Please feel free to let us know at connection@sdakinship.org.

European Kinship Meeting and EKM-Holiday in Germany

Join us for the European Kinship Meeting (EKM) 2012 in southern Germany from August 3 to September 3. We are gathering in the Odenwald nature reserve that is part of a low mountain range in Hesse. Seminarhotel Odenwald is in Hassenroth and close to the historic village of Hochst. The hotel is a cozy, gay-friendly facility that offers the perfect location and amenities for our five days of fellowship, spiritual renewal, and leisure.

The costs of € 273 per person for a single bed room and € 233 per person for a double bed room covers food and lodging from our 6:30 PM supper on Thursday night through our breakfast on Monday. Daily rates are € 71 for a single and € 61 for a double room.

Johann Gerhardt D.Min, professor emeritus of Friedensau Adventist University, will be our special guest speaker. He is a renowned theologian, teacher, and author. His topic for the weekend is “Courageous Faith—Believing without Fear.”

Our traditional Sunday excursion includes the possibilities of a boat trip on the Main River in Frankfurt or some other interesting sightseeing destination like Worms or Speyer, cities along the Rhine River with rich histories (i.e. Luther, Reformation, Jewry).

Our post-EKM holiday location is a romantic horse farm in the “middle of nowhere section of the Odenwald. Our friendly hosts have converted and modernized farm buildings into holiday homes. Each cottage includes two bedrooms with two beds each, a fully furnished living room, modern kitchen with all the necessary appliances, bathroom with shower, and sunny patios.

Cost for the entire week is only € 130 per person plus what we spend on food and excursions.

For more information you can contact Ruud at kinshipeurope@sdakinship.org.

Region 1 Agenda

* April 24 – 27
Rehoboth Beach Mini-Kampmeeting with Region 2. (Contact us for carpooling options.)
* May 5
Backyard cookout and games at David and Vern’s home. 3-9 PM.
* June 23
Kinship at the Southern New England Conference Campmeeting. We will be sharing lunch at 12:30 PM at the Atlantic Union College cafeteria.
* July 13 – 22
Region One joins the three Kampmeeting focused festivities.
* September 20 – 23
Region One joins Region 2 at Book and the Beach. (Contact us for carpooling options).
* October 13
Sabbath in NYC. We will be gathering at the Forum for worship and then off to lunch and other adventures.
* November 8-11
Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting.
* December 22
The Boston Gay Men's Chorus holiday concert and dinner at Betty's Wok and Noodle
The integration of sexuality and spirituality is a challenge for many straight Christians in our culture—doubly so for gay Christians who have been taught to hate their sexuality at its very core. The key to integrating sexuality and spirituality is to remember that they are ultimately about the same thing since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18).

On the issue of gay sexuality, remember that Paul advocated marriage on the basis that faithful, committed, sexual expression is better than involvement in sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 7:1-9). Since it is folly for a gay person to marry a straight person, the question thus arises, “What corresponding prophylactic is there to prevent gay people from falling into sexual immorality?” The answer is that committed whole relationships are always better than fragmented faithless ones.

The relationship between David and Jonathan is instructive. Saul clearly implies there is something more than mere friendship between them (1 Samuel 20:30, 31). Of Jonathan, David says, “Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women” (2 Samuel 1:26), and David knew many women. Whether or not there was a sexual relationship between them is beside the point. The story affirms the possibility and sanctity of deep same-sex love.

Consider the story of the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). Roman centurions were not allowed to marry until they had retired from the army. However, they would often take a younger servant as a lover in the interim. The centurion in this story uses a pet title for a servant, the Greek word for which is pais, and speaks of him as “dear” to him. There is no doubt that readers in the original context would have understood the centurion’s use of such language as implying a same-sex relationship. However, there is no record of Jesus first clarifying the nature of their domestic situation. Instead he heals the servant and informs his listeners that the centurion will be in the kingdom ahead of many of the other subjects.

Some argue against same-sex relationships by reminding us that God made Adam and Eve rather than Adam and Steve. Some elements of the original creation are determinative of ideals for the present time. Thus Jesus argues for the permanence of marriage (Matthew 19:1-9). Other elements are particular to the Garden of Eden, such as the first couple’s state of nakedness (Genesis 2:25). A description may simply fit what is true for a majority of people, not what must be for all. The point is that we are now well and truly outside of the garden. Sin must be distinguished from its effects. Thus grey hair may only exist because of sin, but it is not a sin to have it, nor are we required to vanquish it. We do not relentlessly attempt to resuscitate corpses simply because there was no death in Eden. The question is not so much what human sexuality was in the garden, but what it now is, and what are the most responsible ways of expressing sexuality in the world we actually live in.

The account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is sometimes used as an argument against same-sex relationships. However, attempted homosexual rape in Genesis 19 no more constitutes an argument against loving same-sex relationships, than actual heterosexual rape in Judges 19 constitutes an argument against loving opposite-sex relationships. Unless we value one sex above the other, rape against either sex is equally wrong. Ezekiel 16:49, 50 specifically identifies the sins of Sodom as its arrogance and lack of concern for the poor. Jude 7 mentions Sodom and Gomorrah lusting after “strange” flesh, or more precisely “different” (heteros) flesh. In other words, the transgression here is in relation to the inhabitants’ pursuit of angels, not their pursuit of homosexuality. It is the crossing of the species barrier that is the issue here.

The prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 19:13 are part of the Holiness Code, which does not apply to Christians in its totality. Seventh-day Adventists observe the prohibitions in Leviticus 11 against eating unclean animals, but not the accompanying rules concerning periods of uncleanness after touching their corpses. Uriah Smith argued that Adventists didn’t eat the pig because it was unhealthy, not because it was banned in Leviticus. Ellen White sometimes had oysters on her shopping list. Few Christians today refuse to sow two kinds of seeds in the same field or to wear clothing woven of two kinds of material (Leviticus 19:19), nor do they consider the
fruit of a tree off bounds for three years (Leviticus 19:23). It is sometimes argued that the sexual prohibitions of the Code apply, even if other prohibitions do not. However, there does not appear to be strong Christian advocacy of a prohibition of sex during the menstrual period, let alone for seven days afterwards (Leviticus 18:19; 20:18; cf. Leviticus 15:19-24).

Differentiation from heathen worship is a strong theme underlying Leviticus 18:20 (see Leviticus 18:1-4, 21, 24-29; 20:1-4; 22-24). Male and female prostitution alike were very much part of ancient fertility rites. The people of Judah are said to have been engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out in the time of Reho-boam, but it is male prostitution that is in focus here rather loving relationships (1 Kings 14:24).

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 don’t simply prohibit a man sleeping with another man. They prohibit one man sleeping with another man in the manner of a woman. Equal relationships are not in view. The texts may thus justify Lot’s stance in offering his daughters in the place of his guests, rather than himself. The unity of the Israelite brotherhood would thus appear to be particularly in view. In a patriarchal system, to treat a woman as a woman is one thing. For a man to let himself be treated as a woman under any circumstances is quite another thing. The perspective of male and female as equal in Galatians 3:29 must be taken into account in understanding the implications of these texts for today.

Certain homosexual behaviour is in focus in Romans 1:24-27. However, the purpose of Paul’s argument in Romans 1:3 is to conclude the whole world under sin, so that the whole world might open to the offer of grace. It is therefore a mistake to pick any one feature of its sad description of human sinfulness as a basis for excluding one group of humanity rather than others. Paul’s description is specifically in the context of idolatrous worship (Romans 1:21-

23). The people here described forsaken relationships with women, suggesting they are “straight” in orientation to begin with, and in so doing act “against nature” (vs. 27). This expression is sometimes understood to be referring to something contrary to original creation design. However, it is more likely a reference to the specific nature of the individuals involved. Compare how “against nature” in Romans 11:24 refers to the specific nature of cultivated versus wild olive trees, rather than to the design of any olive tree in the Garden of Eden per se. Those condemned in Romans 1:27 burn with lust for other men. It is all too often ignored that in fact it is wrong to burn with lust for anyone, male or female. Lust, and not love, is clearly the motive of these individuals.

1 Corinthians 6:9 excludes malakoi and arsenokoitai from the Kingdom of God, respectively translated as “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind” in the KJV. 2 Timothy 1:10 likewise speaks against arsenokoitai, this time translated in the KJV as “them that defile themselves with mankind.” These two Greek words are notoriously difficult to translate. Malakoi comes from the root from which the word “malleable” is derived and has the basic meaning of “softness.” It more likely refers to those who live in pampered luxury rather than to homosexuality. Arsenokoitai probably does denote people practising some form of homosexual activity. However, it is a masculine first declension noun, and such nouns are overwhelmingly used to refer to people’s profession or religious identity. It is therefore overwhelmingly likely that male prostitution is especially in view, especially of a religious nature. Jerome in the fourth century AD undisputedly translated aresenokoitai into Latin as a reference to male prostitutes (masculorum concubitores), and he was much nearer to Paul’s time than we are.

In summary, the Scripture highly values true love, including same-sex love. It does condemn homosexual behavior that involves rape, domination, prostitution, and inflamed lust. It nowhere condemns loving monogamous same-sex relationships.
As most of you know, we have a new leadership team in Australia and we would like to introduce ourselves in this issue.

**Brian Smith**

Brian trained as a radiographer at Waikato Hospital, New Zealand; and then, wanting to see a bit of the world, worked for three years at White Memorial Hospital in California. He recalls that the whole experience was “great fun and great folk to work with.” In a change of career, Brian then spent four years at Avondale College and completed the theology course before working in the Greater Sydney Conference. During some of that time he looked after two churches and assisted in several mission projects. He then attended Loma Linda University and completed the Master of Public Health degree (MPH) and the Health Sciences degree at the same time. On his return to Australia, he headed up Health Education at Warburton Sanitarium for a few years.

Brian writes: “My greatest desire is that as many gay folk as possible have eternal life. If what we do enhances that possibility, then the Lord will surely bless our efforts.”

**John Wallace**

I am an emergency doctor at the Sydney Adventist Hospital. I came out earlier this year, after 34 years of marriage to my wife. Like lots of other men who grew up in the 60s and 70s, I had denied my real self and remained fully closeted all those years. The 12 months before I came out were the darkest days of my life. I lived constantly in fear of the likely consequences of becoming a whole and more honest person.

The breakup of a marriage is never pleasant. We are experiencing the grief, denial, and anger encountered by so many. The other foci of my fears did not materialize. I was outed at my work fairly quickly but have had no negative experiences there. My colleagues are very supportive and we are actually closer than before. I have gained friends rather than losing them. I had already removed my membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of their official anti-gay position during the last year, and I have been attending a Baptist church recommended by a friend where the pastoral team is accepting. Interestingly, I have since found that the pastors at my former Adventist church are quite happy to have me there, too. I don’t go there, however, as that is where my wife has her support.

My adult children are supportive, as is my extended family. No one has been rejecting, and all have remained close. I hope my publicly being out and being well-known in my workplace and local area will enable others to be their real selves, too, and not be afraid.

**Nick Radonic** (L) and **Les Whitehead** (R)

Nick and Les have been partners for 15 happy years. They live in the country town of Gembrook (outside of Melbourne) with their two pooches, Ginger and Lucky. Both Nick and Les have three children. Nick has two grandchildren. Les has seven grandchildren.

Nick was baptized and joined the Adventist Church in 1962. After many years as senior elder and music director, he came out and was subsequently disfellowshipped in 1993. He then attended MCC Melbourne, which is where he met Les, who had also been disfellowshipped from a Pentecostal church when he came out. Together they lead the music ministry at MCC Melbourne. In the last three years Nick has returned to the Adventist Church (Serbian/ Croatian
congregation) in Springvale, Melbourne. Here he enjoys leading the music, arranging the flowers, and sharing teaching in Sabbath School. Nick and Les want to be an integral part of a vibrant SDA Kinship group in Melbourne which can grow, meet together, and attract others who are in need of the kind of support that Kinship can provide.

Keith Paulusse

I always knew that I was attracted to men. I was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk). Early in life I told my parents that I did not want to date girls but wanted to have them as friends. At a Christian school I was appalled at the behaviour of Christian boys who talked in demeaning ways about women and who treated women as sex objects. I was an athletic, well-muscled boy. My parents raised me to stand up for myself, be assertive, and to never let circumstances control me. When I was a teenager, and Christians denigrated and stigmatised gays and vegetarians, I demolished their attitudes with ethical intellectual Biblical rationales. I would then say, “Tell your friends you’ve been floored by a fairy.”

My family and I have always been involved with social justice issues. I joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church because I was impressed with the Biblical emphasis on truth, the Three Angels Messages, and the everlasting gospel of love, acceptance, and inclusion of all people. Soon after my baptism I thought I had made a mistake. I was confronted with bigotry, pharisaism, and judgment out of all proportions. Back then I was startled that the church was against equal pay for equal work by women.

I graduated as a young clinical psychologist just as the AIDS crisis hit the world. I was shocked by the attitude of many Christians who said that AIDS was God’s punishment upon gay men! I was appalled and angry at the same time. My Dutch theological heritage said that God created me that way. The Dutch Reformed Church and the Dutch Government had decriminalised same-sex attraction in 1811! I chose to remain in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to save the GLTB people from taking their own lives.

In 2007 and 2008 two young men, aged 20 and 22 and from a Seventh-day Adventist country church, took their own lives. In the last 10 years, 18 young people in the Victorian Conference have taken their own lives. It is my aim to work with the many well-educated and Biblically-literate Seventh-day Adventist young people who have the mind and heart of Christ to formulate a correct Biblical understanding for today’s culture.

I was one of the founding members of the Victorian AIDS Council and also one of the people who worked on the first safe-sex campaigns. We introduced the needle exchange programs into Australia. I talked about AIDS on TV.

The first gay man to die in Victoria was a Seventh-day Adventist, and his father was a Seventh-day Adventist minister. During the two years 1984-1986, 17 Seventh-day Adventist Victorian gay men died in the first three years of the AIDS epidemic. It was at this time when I was disfellowshipped from the Geelong Seventh-day Adventist Church on the assumed grounds that I was living an impure life because I was mixing with all those homosexuals. To the pastor’s credit, however, he later came to me and apologised. Someone else from that time recently apologised to me after the Week of Prayer for having deliberately spread malicious gossip about my sexuality. For the last 8 years I have been a member of Gateway Adventist Centre in Melbourne, and I can only say that they are truly practicing the love of Christ. There are 11 gay men and women attending this church. In addition, I founded a church consisting of refugees from Sudan that started with an English class.

David Coltheart

I was born in New Zealand, the son of an Adventist evangelist. My family moved to Sydney when I was nine, and we lived in several places in Australia over the next four years. Then my father accepted an appointment as an evangelist in London and I spent the next ten years in England where I attended Stanborough Adventist High School and Newbold College. After a year in West Africa as a student missionary, I graduated from Newbold with a degree in theology. After the death of my father, I returned to Australia with my mother and started work in Sydney. I worked in evangelism with a senior pastor and met his daughter, whom I saw as the answer to my problem. We married a year later.

I worked in Sydney pastoring churches for five years before moving to Lismore, then Tamworth, Port Macquarie and Gosford. During the seven years working in the North NSW Conference I pastored churches as well serving as the conference and then later the union evangelist. Three sons were born during that time. We shifted to Mt Isa, then to...
Darwin before returning to the South Queensland Conference. After a stint in Papua New Guinea where I was Ministerial Secretary of the PNG Union Mission, we returned to Queensland to do evangelistic work. There I became involved in *Archaeological Diggings* magazine, eventually becoming the editor and managing the self-supporting ministry. We shifted to Newcastle in 1996 where again I was the evangelist, although with increasing magazine responsibilities. I resigned from the ministry in 2001 to take up full-time work with the magazine.

After years of internal conflict, I finally admitted to myself that I was gay. But the real turning point came five years later when I saw “Brokeback Mountain” and realised that I could no longer continue living a lie. I came out to my family and church in October 2006, resigned my church membership, lost my job, turned my back on the family home, and started life anew. Through a remarkable series of providential events, I came to Queensland. I was unemployed for seven months, but I found employment on the Sunshine Coast as a technical writer for a private company specialising in training occupational health and safety practices, as well as writing teaching materials for operating heavy earth-moving and mining equipment. I am now the Client Relationship Manager for the company.

About the same time, I found an accepting church where I take an active part each Sabbath. I developed a wonderful circle of friends and work colleagues and discovered that my family still loved me and accepted me just the way I am.

Soon after shifting to Buderim, I met John, who lived in Brisbane. We dated for 12 months before John found a job and moved to the Sunshine Coast also. We bought a small house not far from where we both work and have found true happiness and peace. We celebrated our commitment together in a small ceremony for family and friends on 11 November 2011. You may have read about it in a recent issue of the *Connection*.

**Wendi Timms**

Wendi Timms focuses on connections with the women of Kinship and with the broader Kinship community. She lives with Marge, her partner of 12 years in Newtown, New South Wales, with their two Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Piper and Phoenix; and she works at the University of NSW. Born in Melbourne, Wendi grew up in Cooranbong, New South Wales, and attended church schools and Avondale College for a short period and nearby Newcastle University, where she completed a science degree.

She came out in the mid-1990s, looking to SDA Kinship International and MCC Sydney for support as she negotiated spiritual and orientation issues. Although no longer a Seventh-day Adventist church member, Wendi strives to live “for the greater good,” meditates, hikes in the mountains whenever possible, is active in community networks, and keeps young with her seven (very loved) nephews and nieces. You can catch Wendi for a chat, hot chocolate, and veggie burger around Newtown anytime!

Wendi writes: “This poem reminds me to slow down, to be in the moment and to care for people around me.”

Caretake this moment.
Immerse yourself in its particulars.
Respond to this person, this challenge, this deed.
As concerns the art of living, the material is your own life.
No great thing is created suddenly.
There must be time.
Give your best and always be kind.

~ Epictetus ~

**Ben Reuter**

Ben Reuter grew up with his parents and sister in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia. His father is a retired chiropractor. His mother was the receptionist. The family business was upstairs from the family home. Ben attended a Seventh-day Adventist high school, Prescott College, and the University of South Australia. He currently writes from New South Wales where he works as a computer programmer at Avondale College.

In his spare time he enjoys bike riding, bushwalking, reading, movies, friends, good food, and travel. His foot injury has put some of these on hold, hopefully only temporarily! Ben is an “ideas” person who likes to understand how things fit into the big picture. He also enjoys the mysteries of Christianity and the company of atheists who help to keep Christians honest.

Truth does not become more true by virtue of the fact that the entire world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it.

—Maimonides
**Feel Happier in 11 Steps: Find Your Happy Place**

1. **Believe in Yourself**
   Finding true happiness requires taking a good hard look at yourself. The goal is to identify any off-the-wall beliefs about your self-worth and adjust them. When you’re at ease with yourself and open to others, friendships seem to blossom naturally. Just acknowledging secret self-doubts may help you develop enough humor and compassion toward yourself to reach out to others, who, underneath, are probably just like you: sometimes unsure and shy.

2. **Hang Out with Happy Friends**
   Having someone in your immediate social circle who is upbeat ups your chances of happiness by 15%. Why? It seems happy people have the power to spread their feel-good vibes far and wide the same way a ripple spreads through a pond. Not only do immediate friends matter, but friends of friends, too. So make plans to have lunch with a friend or go for a walk together. It could have far-reaching benefits for your mental health.

3. **Make Time for Play**
   Swap your endless to-do list for some spontaneous playtime. It packs big benefits for your health, mood, mind, job, and even your relationships. When you’re floating free, happy, and totally absorbed, you are taking a mini vacation from deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, dreams, and even your relationships. When you’re floating free, happy, and totally absorbed, you are taking a mini vacation from deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule. Anything counts, deadlines, bills, and your crazy-busy schedule.

4. **Squash Negativity**
   Is your inner voice quick to snap out things like, "How could you forget that, you idiot?"
   Sometimes the noise inside our own heads is our biggest stressor. When negative thoughts crop up, imagine a stop sign in your head, and tell yourself, "Stop!" To turn things around, trade in put-downs for positive thoughts and affirmations. For example, when you feel tired during a workout, think, "I am strong" or when you start work on a difficult task, think, "I can accomplish anything." Empower yourself to think positive.

5. **Connect with Others**
   Make every effort to talk —really talk—to people you care about. If they’re far away, stay in touch through email, phone calls, video chat, and, when you can, face-to-face visits; you’ll all benefit by connecting. Get physical, too; hugs stimulate oxytocin, the "cuddle hormone," spreading a feel-good boost. Lovemaking does, too, in steady relationships (those couples report the highest happiness levels). Plus, connecting with others may keep you healthier by providing a coping mechanism for stress.

6. **Keep a Gratitude Journal**
   Simply writing down what you are thankful for makes you healthier, happier, and more optimistic. Feeling thankful comes, in part, from counting your blessings each day. If you’re not sure how to journal, start by answering: What three things am I thankful for? You might find that journaling gives you a better, happier outlook for each day because you’re looking for moments to include in your journal each night.

7. **Lend a Helping Hand**
   Volunteering at a nearby school or retirement residence, running to the pharmacy for a sick friend, or lending emotional support to a loved one can give your happiness quotient a big boost. How? Giving back and bonding with others inspires gratitude for what life has given you, and can help you define your purpose in life. The secret to being happy may be realizing that true happiness isn’t about being high on life all the time, but slowing down enough to share your natural gifts with others.

8. **Enjoy the Great Outdoors**
   Spending time with awesome Mother Nature makes you feel alert, en- thusiastic, energetic, and simply happy. Is it the fresh air, the sunshine, the greenery? No one knows for sure. But something about being al fresco appears to help people get even bigger benefits from their workouts and they’re also more likely to stick to their outdoor sports be it walking, bicycling, kayaking, or an outdoor fitness class.

9. **Turn On Some Tunes**
   If you want to feel happy, less stressed and more energetic, flip on your stereo. Whether you love Bach, Lady Gaga, or The Beatles, music that makes you feel good increases your heart and breathing rates and makes your brain release dopamine, a lovely feel-good neurotransmitter. Plus, no matter whether you enjoy listening to your favorite music alone or with friends, it will more than likely give you the mood boost you’re looking for.

10. **Meditate or Pray**
    For some, being spiritual means going to church. For others, it means finding a quiet place to meditate and think about life. No matter how you do it or what you call it, meditation and prayer can help slow breathing and brain activity, and reduce heart rate and blood pressure. Plus, when you do pray or...
It’s been just over three years since we first realized that the best way to respond to our deep disappointment about Prop 8 (the same-sex marriage ban in California) passing was to make a film that focused on the stories of gay and lesbian Adventists in an effort to change hearts and minds in the pews through the power of story.

Origins

I have a distinct memory of walking around our neighborhood park in San Francisco with Lily asleep in a Moby wrap on my front—she was just a few weeks old. Stephen and I had debriefed with the others who had started Adventists Against Prop 8, and he kept saying that the only way people change their stereotypes and perceptions is from knowing people, from our stories. I remember stopping at an intersection and saying, “You know, we could make this film. We are looking for a new film project, and this is something we’re passionate about.” It took a while to let that idea sink in—mainly we wondered if two straight filmmakers could make this film—but, in some ways it wasn’t a choice; it was an awareness of stepping into where we felt most called. And, especially with a child now, we felt like we owed it to her to help make the world the place that we wished it was. It has not been easy, and I’ve personally come close to a breakdown at times as the nature of this sort of work if very day-by-day. At one point we were down to $2 to our name (this was while filming in Atlanta), and we realized we couldn’t even pay our baggage fees to get home! Needless to say, we talked about putting the film on a back burner and finding other work; but within days, a check for $20,000 came into the San Francisco Film Society earmarked for our film, and we breathed again. The entire project has been a series of stories like that, much like the missionary stories I remember hearing in Sabbath School (the irony of that isn’t lost on us!). Whenever we feel like we’ve reached the end of the road, another miracle happens, and now we’re embarking on the final chapter of this process—screenings and outreach.

I am so, so happy to say that the film is very close to being fully done. The final piece right now is finishing a color grade, and we should be finishing that in early March. The Kinship community has been so incredibly helpful and encouraging throughout this entire project, and we feel like we’re better people, better parents, and certainly better Christians because of the beautiful and generous love we’ve been shown and have been given the opportunity to share with this project.

Preview screenings

Speaking of miracles, the way in which the film has been received so far feels like a huge answer to prayer. Even though we’re still finalizing the film, we’ve had five private screenings: two here in the Bay Area, one in Columbus, one in Chattanooga, and one in the Loma Linda area (all but one of these screenings were for the benefit of people featured in the film or their families or church communities). The response has been beyond what we have hoped and prayed for, and it’s incredibly satisfying to see these stories that we’ve been transformed by start to work in the hearts of others. We continue to hear that the film’s tone and story approach is the best way to move this conversation forward in a positive way regardless of theological differences. A recently retired major official from the General Conference (who has a heart of love but never would be considered a liberal) saw the film in Loma Linda, and his email to me the next day captured exactly what we hope will be the film’s legacy: “Congratulations on an outstanding evening and film. This film is going to do much to move people in the church towards more compassion and understanding.”

It’s been affirming to realize that the pure, char-
acter-driven story approach is absolutely the right one. People don’t change from their heads; they change from their hearts. I like to tell audiences before screenings a bit about the journey of the film and us as filmmakers over the past three years; and I admit that the film started off being an issue film, something that was an in-kind response to the incredibly cruel and decidedly “un-Christian” treatment we witnessed in the battle around Prop 8 here in California. But along the way we were gentled—and I think it was a God thing. It certainly was the result of choosing to focus in depth on the stories that are in the film, because the people featured have so much love and grace (and longing) that we couldn’t make an angry film if we were true to our film subjects. A long-time friend of ours from college who saw the film in Loma Linda had a great way of describing the film’s tone. He quoted Hosea 11:4 when God is describing how He’s led Israel, “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.” He felt the film did that for the church, nudging viewers along with strings of love and kindness. Wow. That must be one of the most beautiful ways to describe how we feel the tone of the film fits with the overall goals. I can only hope and pray the film continues to be received that way.

Demand to come to the most recent screening in Loma Linda was huge. I kept moving the screening to larger theaters to accommodate demand and finally had to cap it at 220, and I was incredibly nervous that people might get turned away. While I’d like to think that word is spreading about the quality of the film, I really think this huge interest shows that people are eager, very eager, to have this conversation in a new way and through a new lens. The old way has only resulted in hurt and battered souls, and people really want a new narrative, especially given the prominence of marriage equality movements in so many states right now. It feels like the right film at the right time.

We just need five percent

Last year I heard a brain function expert explain how the Arab Spring was possible. She said that it only takes five percent of a population to have a consciousness shift for the entire population to feel the results. And Stephen, a long-time worshipper in the house of Apple, likes to point out that a company that used to be ridiculed because it only had five percent of the marketplace is poised to be the wealthiest company on the planet. How many of us use (or wish we were using) Apple products today? Clearly five percent can be a powerful if small percentage. Five percent can change the way the world works.

When I think about what is possible in the church with this film, I think about the five percent. What if five percent of churches were welcoming congregations? What if five percent of us agreed to take an LGBT person out to lunch and listen to their story without interrupting? What if five percent of us said, “I don’t know what to do about the theology yet, but I’m going to love this person in front of me and let them love me”? There’s power when we share our stories—and that’s equally true for LGBT allies and advocates—we have to “come out” as supporters, too!

More screenings to come this year

As we put the finishing touches on the film, we’re also submitting to film festivals and planning more private screenings to let key thought leaders in the church see the film early. As soon as we know when our official premiere will be, we will first let all of you know and hope you can be there; and then we’ll begin planning a wide-ranging tour with screenings all around Adventist population centers. We’re talking about a screening at Kinship Kampmeeting in Virginia as well, and I’m so looking forward to my fourth Kampmeeting—this time with the film actually done!

I’ve already heard from many of you who are interested in setting up screenings in your area, and I’d love to hear from more of you. The screenings and discussions we’ve had have left us very eager to have more. We can’t wait to share and discuss the film with you, and then let you in turn share it and discuss it. That’s how the five percent will happen in the Adventist church.

Trailer

Many of you must be passing the link to the new film trailer around. It’s been great watching the number of views climb the past month. If you have not seen it already, please check it out: http://vimeo.com/33423405.

Thanks for all that you’ve done to help make this film a reality. I keep that Margaret Mead quote about a small group of committed people changing the world printed out above my desk, and it’s this community that has come together to make this film happen that I think of. Thank you for the privilege of sharing these stories and re-starting this conversation through a new lens.

Seventh-Gay Adventists: A film about faith on the margins
—daneen@daneenakers.com
In recent elections one would have thought that homosexuality and abortion were the new litmus tests of Christianity. Where did this come from? They never were the criteria of proper membership for the first 2000 years but reflect very recent culture wars instead—and largely from people who think of themselves as “traditionalists!” The fundamentals were already resolved in the early Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed. Note that none of the core beliefs are about morality at all. The Creeds are more mystical, cosmological, and about aligning our lives inside of a huge sacred story. When you lose the mystical level, you always become moralistic as a cheap substitute.

Jesus is clearly much more concerned about issues of pride, injustice, hypocrisy, blindness, and what I have often called “The Three Ps” of power, prestige, and possessions, which are probably 95% of Jesus’ written teaching. We conveniently ignore this 95% to concentrate on a morality that usually has to do with human embodiment. That’s where people get righteous, judgmental, and upset, for some reason. The body seems to be where we carry our sense of shame and inferiority, and early-stage religion has never gotten much beyond these “pelvic” issues. As Jesus put it, “You ignore the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and good faith... and instead you strain out gnats and swallow camels” (Matthew 23:23-24). We worry about what people are doing in bed much more than making sure everybody has a bed to begin with. There certainly is a need for a life-giving sexual morality, but one could question whether Christian nations have found it yet.

Christianity will regain its moral authority when it starts emphasizing social sin in equal measure with individual (read “body-based”) sin and weaves them both into a seamless garment of love and truth.

Adapted from The Spiral of Violence: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil (CD/MP3)

We are all a little weird and life’s a little weird, and when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them in mutual weirdness and call it love. —Dr. Seuss.

When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” And they went on to another village.


This week I want to share some thoughts on the above passage that I believe are becoming more and more relevant to us as followers of Jesus in our current cultural climate. There are a few points I’d like to focus on as a foundation for this week’s eSight. James and John viewed the Samaritans as sinners or outsiders. The Samaritans were in a state of rejecting Jesus in this story and thereby provoked James’ and John’s response. James and John had an Old Testament story of God reigning down fire on the Samaritans as justification for their feelings toward the Samaritans and also as a basis for how they, too, should treat them. (See 2 Kings 1, where God rains down fire on the Samaritans through Elijah.) Here’s the kicker though. They were Biblical in assessing the Samaritans as objects of God’s wrath; but, even while being Biblical, they were dead wrong about how God felt toward Samaritans. Jesus rebukes them and says, “You don’t know what spirit you are of.” Their spirit toward the Samaritans didn’t reflect God’s attitude toward them at all. James’ and John’s attitude toward and treatment of the Samaritans were more like that of the Accuser than it was God’s. They had an Old Testament story that they used to decide how they thought God felt toward the Samaritans, but God Incarnate was standing right in front of them revealing that He felt very differently than they assumed He did. God had not come to this world to destroy people’s lives but to save them. As His followers they were not to seek to consign people’s lives to destruction, but rather through humble servant love seek to...
save people’s lives as well.
But how does this all apply to us today? Here is my point, but I want to warn you ahead of time to, regardless of whether you agree with me or not, please just first hear me out. In love, please first listen before you judge what I’m saying.

Today when it comes to gays and lesbians, are we mimicking more the spirit of James and John or that of Jesus? Yes, we too have an Old Testament example of God raining fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 18, 19; see also Ezekiel 16) that we use as a basis for assuming how God feels toward the LGBT community. We too have an Old Testament justification and basis for our feelings toward and treatment of a group of people we have judged as sinners and outsiders. But are we making the same mistake as James and John today? In deciding how we relate to homosexuals, are we too giving greater weight to an Old Testament story than we are giving to the life, work, and ministry of Jesus?

This week, I’m not debating what is or what is not sin. I’m not debating why Sodom was destroyed or not. These topics at this stage are irrelevant. Regardless of how we define sin, the greater question is what is the example Jesus set before us in relating to others regardless of how we morally evaluate them, whoever they may be? The Pharisees possessed a holiness that repelled sinners. Those judged as “sinners” or “outsiders” in Christ’s day steered clear of the Pharisees for fear of being judged. Jesus had a kind of holiness that attracted sinners, the outsiders, the marginalized.

We have to let the following question confront us. Today, are those we have judged as being “sinners” and “outsiders” being drawn to us because of our radical, self-sacrificial, other-centered, humble, servant love? Or are they to a large degree (praise God for the few exceptions) steering clear of us, too? May we collapse our defenses and allow the Spirit to impress on us the conviction that we, in our treatment of those who may be of a different orientation, we have unintentionally but very clearly nonetheless, imbied more the spirit of the Pharisees, more the spirit of James and John, more the spirit of the Accuser, than we have the spirit of Jesus and thus God. As followers of Jesus, we are not to seek to consign people’s lives to destruction, but rather through humble servant love seek to save people’s lives instead.

What am I trying to say this week? In short, stop using Sodom and Gomorrah as a justification for our treatment of gays and lesbians. Just stop. We don’t know what spirit we are of when we do this. It brought about rebuke for James and John, and it places us in a position to be rebuked by Jesus and the Father, too.

Life and people are complicated. Compassion should be given freely and not earned. We have no right to judge anyone, but to pass judgment before we have even stopped to hear their story is demonically ugly. Everyone has a story; and, before we condemn, we must stop and listen. And
lastly, you don’t have to legitimize somebody’s lifestyle to love that person, to be brother or sister to that person, and to stand up for that person.

As a follower of Jesus, to those of you who belong to the LGBT community who receive our emails regularly, I’m so sorry for where I have not been Jesus to you.

This week, I choose to look at those around me, regardless of gender, race, or even orientation, ask myself how Jesus would reach out to them, and then ask myself, “Do I want to follow Jesus?” Who’s with me?

Keep living in love, and keep building the Kingdom.