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Director of Diversity: (to be determined)
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Director of Diversity: (to be determined)
Director of Youth Interests: Ronoldo Appleton
Director of Communications: Ashish David
Director of Women’s Interests: Karen Wetherell
Director of Church Relations: Terry Rice
Secretary: Ruben López
Treasurer: Brian Durham
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COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Finance Committee: Sherri Babcock
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Communications Committee: Ashish David
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Int’l Growth and Development Committee: Floyd Pönitz
Diversity Committee: (to be determined)
Nominating Committee: (to be determined)

REGIONAL COORDINATORS, USA

Region 1 (ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, PA, NJ): David Thaxton, Catherine Taylor, region1@sdakinship.org
Region 2 (MD, VA, WV, NC, DE, DC): Yolanda Elliott, region2@sdakinship.org
Region 3 (TN, AL, MS, GA, SC, FL): (available)
Region 4 (MN, IA, MO, WI, MI, IL, IN, OH, KY): Claire Sommers, region4@sdakinship.org
Region 5 (AR, KS, LA, OK, TX): Floyd Pönitz, region5@sdakinship.org
Region 6 (ND, SD, NE, WY, UT, CO, NM): (available)
Region 7 (AK, WA, OR, ID, MT): Stephanie Spencer, region7@sdakinship.org
Region 8 (NV, HI, CA zip 93600+): Obed Vazquez-Ortiz, region8@sdakinship.org
Region 9 (AZ, CA zip 93599-): Ruben López, region9@sdakinship.org

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATORS

Argentina: Omar Aliani, kinshipargentina@sdakinship.org
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The Netherlands: Ruud Kieboom, kinshipnederland@sdakinship.org

Support Kinship

Seven-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 Seven-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.)

South Africa: Pierre Matthee & Johann Lubbe, kinshipsouthafrica@sdakinship.org
Uganda: Joseph Brown, opendoor@webmail.or.ca
Venezuela: Carlos Pajuelo, kinshipvenezuela@sdakinship.org

Other Coordinators

Transgender/Intersex: Twid Widmer, intersex@sdakinship.org / transgender@sdakinship.org
Older Adults: Ren Reynolds, olderadult@sdakinship.org
European Young Adults Under 30: Itamar Ahsman, kinshipeurope_imru@sdakinship.org
Webmaster: Linda Wright, webadmin@sdakinship.org

Chaplain

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

Who We Are...

Seven-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.

Seven-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.

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Seven-day Adventist Kinship
PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
or visit Kinship’s website at: www.sdakinship.org.
The Perks of Leadership

Elvys Pereira

Regina Mills, Lady Gaga, Steve Jobs, Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus Christ, Ellen White—are all part of a long list of people I consider remarkable leaders. You could say I’m insane to cite some of them; but, hey, I have my reasons.

I want to be a person with voice. This thirst helps me make my words bold. I used to sit on the bench watching what popular people did. Then I decided it was my turn to be a leader. I don’t want to take over the world. I do want to be the kind of leader that inspires others and makes them happy. I want to make others feel worthy, useful, real, perhaps even more alive. I don’t expect love, glory, or fame. I just want to make a difference.

Regina Mills (Lana Parrilla), is a fictional character from ABC’s Once Upon a Time series. Despite being The Evil Queen, she inspires her followers to fight for what they believe, to be strong, and to never back down. Lady Gaga, the worldwide famous pop star, is a simple woman who decided to inspire people to be genuine. Steve Job’s after-death legacy is still inspiring young and old around the globe to pursue excellence and creativity. Most of you can write your own thoughts about the legacies of Jesus and Ellen White.


Let me know what you think.
That’s it, my dearies. See you next month.
elvyspereira@aol.com or fb.com/imelvys

A String Too Short to Save

By Rom Wilder

We had our 50-year reunion a couple of years ago. (Aww, come on... don’t stop reading just because I’m 70!)

It was interesting to me how the “leaders” of our youth weren’t still leading. Don’t get me wrong; they weren’t failures. It’s just that different people were leading the reunions and communications.

Maybe we all need to look in the mirror before we label ourselves as leaders or followers. What happens in high school (academy) is often temporary!

The Perks of Leadership

Elvys Pereira

It was 1972. I had just accidentally realized I was a lesbian (another story). I knew I was the only gay Seventh-day Adventist on earth. The reason I had never heard of SDA Kinship International is because it hadn’t heard of itself yet. Our first Kampmeeting, birthed in those desert cabins, was eight years away. I had no idea how I was going to integrate my internal components, much less be organized enough to get myself graduated from University of California Los Angeles and begin something called real life. Despite my angst, on a sunny, southern California spring afternoon I let myself get pulled away from the books to this event called Christopher Street West. Feather boas, Troy Perry, women in black leather, moms with children, banners, balloons, local co-ops. In the memory of my mind’s eye mostly what I see are the colors, mostly what I feel is exuberance, and mostly what I hear are so many, many voices. It’s the voices that come down to me through the years: laughter, singing, chanting, and calling out to friends. I was not alone. All those voices touched my soul, reached in, and stretched it out like an expanding canvas. They let me begin to believe that my journey would be possible. In those voices there was a gift and a strength. All (oy, can it be so many?) these years later, it is still your voices that buoy me. I want them in these pages. Your voices have power. For two issues we are focusing on the voices of Kinship leaders/servants: those people who spend hundreds of hours creating a community that holds part of our lives. I am so grateful for your voices and your skills. I am grateful for Rom writing about her 50th reunion and for Eliel who has not yet graduated. Elvys, thank you for your voice across two languages and continents. He would so like to hear from our readers. Talk (or tweet) back to him! I am grateful for Daneen and Stephen who take our voices and share them like a cinematic rainbow banner across the world. Some of you were not even born when my first Christopher Street Day Parade marched itself down Hollywood Boulevard, yet your voices are part of its echoes. What a gift! What an amazing gift you are. Take good care of yourselves, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine
From April 6 to 7 the leadership team from Kinship met in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, for its annual spring meeting. We would like to share with you their thoughts and plans.

Kinship’s Leadership Team

Yolanda Elliott – President

I believe that a president should be someone who advocates for the needs of the members and works to make sure that their needs are met to the best of their ability. I don’t always feel presidential, but it was important for me to step up when I did. I wanted to give back to Kinship for all it has given me. In Kinship I have been affirmed just the way I am; it is my family of choice.

One of my most important goals has been to make Kinship a place where all of our members feel included and welcomed and valued. There are enough marginalized and disenfranchised folks who don’t feel they can attend church anymore. I want them to know that Kinship is a community where they’ll be encouraged to be themselves and to participate just the way they are. I’ve always wanted to help further the mission of Kinship and to make this a safe space for others to be nurtured as I was.

When folks reach out to me by phone or email, I try to spend some time talking and letting them know that Kinship is here for them. They share when they need to and I like to listen and encourage when I can. One of the committees I’m on as president is the Member Services Committee where we work to make Kinship known via the website and also work towards finding and working with local coordinators around the world. In region 2, we offer a monthly vespers and fellowship together. People like being able to meet up face to face. We also host a mini-Kampmeeting every spring. We have done that for about 12 years, and people in this area really look forward to having that time away. As president, I write a monthly column for the eNews where I share issues that affect our community and that are important to us. Most of all, I hope that members can feel how much I care about them. I think that’s what family is all about.

Outside of Kinship, I am constantly monitored by five elderly ladies (I run an assisted living facility). My sister and my girlfriend also keep me in line! Since the summer I’ve put up birdfeeders around the yard. We now have all sorts of birds close to the house, and it turns out the deer like birdseed, too; I love watching them.

Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.
–Will Rogers
D ave Ferguson – Interim Director of Church Relations

I have a growing desire to help LGBT Adventists live in a changed environment in Adventism. I started from the simple desire to help. I have become an advocate and activist. While I have never chosen those titles, they have been given to me by others who have viewed my work; and I now embrace them. God chose to bless me with the ability to organize and administer, so I need to respond.

I was first a regional coordinator and found ways to create events and interpersonal communication. Then, as Church Relations Director, I worked with Kinship leadership to develop and establish the Advisory Council of denominational employees who could provide direction on how to work within the system to begin creating change. First, this group created a DVD of stories, then they developed and presented a workshop on homosexuality that became a book. And then members of the Council created the amazing film, *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. With their support, Adventist campuses across the U.S. are developing student leaders and faculty who are changing the way LGBT students are viewed.

I consider myself a team player. I love working with others to accomplish goals. It is rewarding for all of us.

I have seen church leaders who were afraid for their jobs become bold in standing for the right. I have seen church members move to be allies. I have seen students bravely tell their stories of pain and attempts at suicide to help make a difference in the lives of others.

I work as an investment consultant to my clients. I work in the community and in my congregation as a social justice consultant. I sing with six choral groups. And I love spending time with my husband, son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren.

B rian Smith – Kinship Australia Leadership Team

Probably I took on the position because I hoped opportunities would arise where I can be of help. Kinship members in Australia are very widely scattered. Floyd recognized I was one of the older members from the “early days.” Perhaps he hopes I can show some wisdom.

I tried organizing a concert trip around a past Christmas. I sent out a notification but I think it was not soon enough. I am in the learning process here. I am looking forward to seeing what the younger members of our leadership team will suggest.

I have learned in my own life how important it is for LGBTI Adventists to have a personal growth in knowledge and in the understanding of Jesus and the true Gospel.

My personal belief is that because of what many LGBTIs have suffered over the years, there is a huge need today for hearing the good news.

K eisha McKenzie – Director of Resources and Development

Kinship, like many non-profits, is an all-volunteer effort. That means that nothing happens without people offering their time, funds, and presence, or linking this community with people they know who have these three things. When I joined Kinship I had a great experience in an active region, and since then I’ve wanted to make sure that other people can have at least the quality of support I did. Supporting Kinship in developing its resources—volunteers, fiscal donors, and broad membership engagement—is probably the best way I can help at this time.

I have three concerns for this year. One is to build direct connections with the people who have supported Kinship financially over the last few years. When I think about all the causes or organizations I have ever given to, I have the fondest feelings about those who’ve reached out to me to learn about why I care and want to help. Our donors have given so much, and it’s important for us to build strong relationships with them. The second concern is creating stronger systems behind the scenes for managing, tracking, and evaluating our donor relationships. I’ve been working with our Office Manager and Web Administrator on this and we’re making progress. The third area is to keep the communication lines open with new and emerging regions in South America and Africa. I’ve talked most with the Argentinean coordinator so far and am looking forward to helping him move forward.

Being in this role has allowed me to learn about how critical volunteers are to an organization like this. Most of the other organizations I’ve been a part of, including the church, trained me to look to official authority and offices as the reason that something would happen or not. But learning about development means learning that every player is important. Every donor, every member.

Outside of Kinship I support a local school district with an informal science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning program. It’s really exciting to see 7th and 8th graders take to science as if it’s their native language—and it truly is. Science surrounds us; we just need to build a common language for perceiving it and for understanding and discussing how the pieces fit together and how we can use our knowledge to make more meaningful and purposeful decisions in our lives, groups, and societies.

I also do some independent contracting as a technical communicator; I write on a variety of topics; read; and do art. For the last few months, I’ve created a new piece every month. I’m working on one for my mother now. 😊
Floyd Pönitz – Coordinator of International Growth and Development, Database Guru, Membership Services

Coming out and accepting that you may be something other than 100% heterosexual can be a scary and confusing experience... or at least it was for me. My involvement with Kinship is my attempt to make it a bit easier for those who are now dealing with this and coming to terms with their feelings and attractions. I enjoy working with people and sharing our experiences, so for me it is a pleasure to be on the Member Services Team and at the same time work with social media tools helping people to connect with each other. Back when the internet was just starting, I had a vision of making it easier for Kinship members to be in touch with each other. The feeling of being alone, isolated, or just the only one struggling is not a healthy one. We are a worldwide community, and being able to connect folks from all around the world by removing barriers has always been one of my passions and goals. This also ties in to my European roots and love for languages, in that I’m interested in making sure that all cultures around the world are able to be involved with SDA Kinship so they don’t have to reinvent the system. Working together we can accomplish great things.

One of my goals as the International Growth and Development Coordinator is to find local pockets of members and to identify a local leader in that area and then to nurture that group to grow and become more active as well as self-sustainable.

As the Kinship database manager, my goal is to continue to work on updating our database. I feel it is very important that we have the most current contact info for each of our members. An organization can only be successful if it has current info to be able to keep in touch with its members. I try to be as accessible as possible so members can reach me via many methods (email, phone, or Facebook). I’m always there if you want to talk, ask questions, or just say hello!

I consider it a great privilege to be entrusted with these tasks and to have made so many great friends within the Kinship community. The blessings I receive far outweigh the time I invest each day to work on Kinship activities.

Outside of Kinship, I enjoy spending time with Jeff, my partner of 10 years. Traveling and languages are two of my passions. German is my native language; and so German music, literature, and history are all favorites. I love the sunshine and warm days, so living in Texas is perfect for me, especially if I can do things outdoors. I find humans fascinating and love listening to what makes others tick and what their passions are. Professionally, I’m a massage therapist and so the human body and how it works fascinates me. The interconnectivity of our body’s organs and systems and our ability to recover and heal is amazing. I think that our body is an example of what a well-functioning community can do if we work together for a common goal. That is my hope for the SDA Kinship community... to work together to accomplish some great things to make it a better space for those coming after us.
Ruud Kieboom – Coordinator for Kinship Europe

I grew into this position after Reino Korhonen and I organized a meeting at his place in Sweden. We both wanted Kinship people from Europe to get together. After this initial tryout meeting we began our yearly European Kinship Meetings. When I was asked to be European coordinator, it was more or less a confirmation of the status quo.

Aside from getting people together, my main goal has always been to help LGBTI people accept theirorientation and come to peace with that acceptance. Through the meetings, I want to reach church officials by inviting them as speakers for the meetings or just as guests or participants. I want to support those in Europe who try to reach out to fellow believers and the church, in order to create understanding and acceptance.

Most of my goals have been reached by our local, regional, and European Kinship Meetings and by official and unofficial conversations with church leaders. I have shared my story with them. I have listened to their thoughts and their doubts about LGBTI issues. I have had wonderful experiences. I had an advantage because I knew people and was friends with church leaders before I began my work with Kinship.

I seldom speak of blessings or miracles. It’s not my way of believing. But if would I call them blessings, they have come in abundance. Very often my path seemed already prepared and I only needed to facilitate meetings. Having been active in my church before my coming out, I encountered much understanding and sympathy, even from people that didn’t agree at first with my choice (to be out). In time their position shifted while I gently continued my mission and found ways to be of help to the church to create acceptance. Sometimes it has been easier to convince clergy than to convince the LGBTIs in the church!

In my personal life, I have been told I am obsessed with the Eurovision Song Contest. I am a very social person. I am a family man who always keeps in contact with my relatives. I love to sing in my gay men’s double quartet which gives me peace and rest when I am stressed or depressed. I have much sympathy for people whose very existence makes them vulnerable.

Joc – Palm Springs Chapter Leader

I have a heart for Kinship. I have been a member since 1984, and this community was there for me during the lowest point of my life. I found a home away from home. I want to help others who may be experiencing a similar path. God would have come to save one soul. All it takes is one person to save, to change the world. And that salvation may be your own.

My goal is to reach out to the gay Seventh-day Adventist who has been marginalized. I want to educate and assist others seeking information or counseling. I want to help others find a balanced life of social interaction among peers. I want to share resources in my community.

I’m presently working with a Kinship member through counseling and social outreach. The process is slow. Many individuals seem to be wary and guarded with their personal self. I need to make more gestures to them on a consistent basis but respect their space. I want to have monthly meetings and get others involved in my community. I also want to contact political leaders in our community in order to have dialogue with them pertaining to our needs as well as support. The road is long but the journey is worthwhile.

The greatest blessing for me is seeing a child of God accept himself or herself and have an inner peace knowing God loves them as they are.

I recently joined the Palm Springs Gay Men’s Chorus. That has, unfortunately, taken a lot of my time. But it’s all been worth it. I’ve expanded my social circle as well as garnered new resources.

You are invited to our 8th Annual Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting!

Held at a rambling, comfortable Victorian home in Ludlow, Vermont, we are near one of Vermont's most scenic ski mountains. We will have access to a wide range of historic and artistic activities.

This year we have the opportunity to have our Sabbath worship in an Adventist heritage church.

There will be the usual morning Prayer, Praise, Promise, and Pajamas worship; Sharing Circle; and unexpected surprises.

Our focus is "Building Sanctuary."

For more information, please feel welcome to contact Catherine at Region1@sdakinship.org or 413 325-3648.

We look forward to seeing you!
The Kinship Board of Directors and the Nominating Committee hereby present this proposed slate of candidates for the 2013 elections to the Board of Directors. In compliance with the Bylaws, these candidates meet the Bylaws’ criteria for the position as described therein and shown below. Also in compliance with the Bylaws, the Board has designated the period of May 1 to May 20 for Kinship members to propose names to be added to the slate. Proposed candidates may be added to the slate with their express permission and if they meet all criteria outlined in the Bylaws. All Officers (President and Vice-president) must be Regular Members at least twenty-five years of age, must have been members for at least one year, and must possess a college degree, certificate, or its equivalent as determined by the Board. All Program Directors (Director of Church Relations and Director of Women’s Interests) must be Regular Members at least twenty-one years of age, must have been members for at least one year, and must possess a college degree, certificate, or its equivalent as determined by the Board.

If you wish to add a name to the slate, including your own, please contact nominations@sdakinship.org by May 20. This year’s election will again be held electronically, and we are looking forward to having all Kinship members participate in this important process!

You are Invited to our Fifth Annual Book and the Beach Mini - Kampmeeting!
September 19-22, 2013
Nags Head, North Carolina

Come join us for:
Wide-ranging Book-related Discussions on Spiritual Topics, Morning Worship Full of Singing Our Now-annual Dolphin Watch, Lighthouse Visits Delicious Meals, Family Reunions and New Friends Gorgeous Ocean Views
President – Yolanda Elliott
The President shall: Serve as Chief Executive Officer of the corporation; Represent the corporation in dealing with other corporations and businesses, including the signing of contracts; Sit in an ex officio capacity, without vote, on all committees except the Nominating Committee; Coordinate and chair membership meetings, Board meetings, and Executive Committee meetings, when present; Maintain communication with the Board between meetings; Report regularly to the membership.

Vice-president – Naveen Jonathan
The Vice President shall: Assist the President in her or his duties; Perform the functions of the President in the event of her/his absence, unavailability, or inability to perform the duties of the office; Coordinate and chair the Member Services Committee; Perform other duties as designated by the President.

Director of Church Relations – David Ferguson
The Director of Church Relations shall be a current member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and shall preferably have been employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Director of Church Relations shall: Act as the chief liaison between Kinship and the Seventh-day Adventist church; Monitor or facilitate monitoring the affairs of the Seventh-day Adventist church and report regularly to the President and/or the Board and/or the organization’s newsletter; Assist the Director of Kampmeeting with the identification and procurement of clergy for Kampmeeting participation, and assist with their education and preparation; Maintain a list of, and keep in contact with, clergy who have attended Kampmeeting and with other clergy and denominational employees who are supportive of Kinship; Act as a conduit for communication with the Seventh-day Adventist Church; Serve on the Kampmeeting Committee; Chair the Advisory Council and facilitate communication between the Board and the Council.

Co-directors of Women’s Interests – Debbie Hawthorn-Toop & Betty O’Leary
The Director of Women’s Interests shall: Serve as an advocate for women’s issues and concerns within the organization; Assist in the facilitation of networking and encourage and support participation among women members; Organize, facilitate, or delegate activities to implement the above; Advise and assist the Director of Communications in regard to outreach to women.

Our handicap-accessible beach house has a third-floor balcony from which you can view the ocean waves and passing ships. Cost for room, food, programs, and dolphin watch is $150.00 per person. For more information, you can contact Catherine at Region1@sdakinship.com or at 413 325-3648

We're looking forward to seeing you!!
You don’t have to be intentional to cause damage. That’s something I’ve learned in the past few years as I have journeyed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and witnessed so many attempts by pastors and theologians to explain and defend the church’s current position on homosexuality.

Just sitting in the pews as an LGBT person can be one of the most uncomfortable situations of our lives, as we’re spoken about in a theoretical and theological fashion, but seldom are we actually asked or allowed to share our perspective. You see, we are people of faith too, but the church has a de facto “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach (at best), even in most of its educational institutions; so we often linger in the shadows, in silence, hearing the most outrageous assumptions said about us by learned and well-meaning people who want to “minister” to us.

This past weekend was one of the worst examples of this “talk about” instead of “talk with” spaces, and it happened in Portland, Oregon, at a “Gays in the Family” conference sponsored by the North Pacific Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The “Gays in the Family” conference headlined pastors, a therapist and five ex-gay* and/or now-celibate (all older) presenters hand-picked by the North Pacific Union College to represent the official stance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As in most denominations, Seventh-day Adventists are beginning to realize that we have LGBT** people in our homes, in our churches, in our schools. Our administration is beginning to realize that we can no longer talk about homosexuality in a theoretical fashion; we need to humanize the subject in order to connect with the community. The realization is there, which I appreciate, but the execution is failing.

To open the weekend, Cheri Corder, the director of family ministries for the Oregon Conference, said, “Not every voice will be heard this weekend.” In other words, only handpicked voices that present and justify the Adventist status quo are being promoted.

She was absolutely right. The weekend wasn’t a dialogue; it was a presentation. All five of the ex-gay/now-celibate speakers had traumatic childhood experiences to which they attribute the cause of their “same-sex attractions,” most of them having been sexually abused or even raped. One speaker stated that he had had up to three partners a day for over 20 years. Lives of drug use, prostitution, and promiscuity were presented as the norm for LGBT people.

There was little diversity: All were in their 50s or 60s, all had had incredibly sad and traumatic childhoods, almost all had lived very broken and destructive lives when they were accepting their gay identities, and all now live the “ideal lifestyle” as a “person redeemed from the homosexual lifestyle.”

But none of these labels fits my life or the lives of the hundreds of LGBT people I’ve met. It’s like having a conference on women’s ordination (another current hot topic in our church) and having only Caucasian men as speakers, or only selecting (the few) women who agree with not ordaining women. Why weren’t there voices of same-sex, healthy, monogamous Christian individuals like those portrayed in Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film about Faith on the Margins? How are we supposed to have a dialogue when only a select few are chosen to promote a very biased presentation?

But one of the most disturbing parts of the whole weekend was the presentation by the licensed therapist, Dr. Lucille Ball (and no, she doesn’t joke about her name). Her talk was one I was looking forward
to, because it was titled, “The Myths About Homosexuality.” Sadly, it just perpetuated the worst myths out there, and from a “scientific” perspective, which made it all the more damaging. The premise of her presentation was that homosexuality comes after a traumatic experience in childhood, most likely sexual abuse. Dr. Ball said, “We are not born gay,” alleging that there is a “negative environmental factor which leads the person to think, ‘I am gay.’” She added: The bad news about that is that when we have that attitude that “I am born this way, and there is nothing I can do about it,” it becomes so fatalistic: “I might as well give in to it. I might as well live the gay lifestyle, because there is nothing I can do about it.” And you know what’s something I discovered? It’s that gay activists actually use that to get money from people, to fight for the gay agenda.

Dr. Ball continued her hour-long presentation with a string of statements that are shocking to anyone who has read any real research on homosexuality. She insisted that “67 percent of gay men were sexually abused,” and that once gay people are able to cope with whatever traumatic experience they encountered in childhood, they would be “healed” of their homosexuality. I couldn’t believe my ears. It was as if I had stepped back to the 1950s, when such propaganda was used to institutionalize LGBT people.

During the Q-and-A portion of the event, my question was selected and directed to Dr. Ball. I had asked, “What do you say to the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the rest of the legitimate scientific community, which believes that same-sex relationships can be healthy, and that attempting to change someone’s sexual orientation is in fact damaging?”

She responded, “[The professional organizations] receive much pressure to conform to the gay rights activists. I’d tell them that I take the Bible above any man-made organization.” Setting aside the outrageous conspiracy theory of the “gay agenda,” I was speechless that a licensed physician was outwardly stating that she had picked which facts from the scientific community to agree with based on her own personal religious views. How are you ministering to LGBT people when you’re calling them sick and using misleading “science” to back it up?

I have seen how damaging that narrative has been in my life, my family members’ lives, and the lives of other LGBT people. Just this past year I’ve had friends attempt suicide, kicked out of their homes, disfellowshipped from their churches, and been made second-class citizens at our schools and churches, all due to the overwhelming narrative that we have received from our churches. But none of these friends I’m referring to were abused. None have been living as sex addicts or doing drugs. None come from traumatic childhoods. Some of them even come from highly supportive homes. This narrative of “we need to heal the homosexuals” is toxic, has been proven to be damaging and does not contain an ounce of love. It’s spiritual and psychological malpractice.

This spiritual and psychological malpractice does real damage. I recently read a moving letter from an older brother to his younger gay brother, who attempted suicide just this last fall, overwhelmed by what the church said about him. In the letter the older brother pleads, “Please do not ever give up on your Jesus. You may have brothers who turn against you, friends who cause you to bleed tears, and churches that can’t legally bar their doors but yet still bar their hearts against you. Please do not let these people dictate the character of your Jesus.”

My generation is not tolerating this idea that LGBT people are sick, broken, and second-class citizens. The image of the “gay lifestyle” that is preached at our schools and from our pulpits doesn’t bear any resemblance to the real lives of LGBT people. What this does is create negative stereotypes that force our young people to be damaged, not from their sexuality but from the responses received from their Christian brothers and sisters.

When the Christian community approaches the LGBT community with an “accepting yet redeeming” model (what a pastor advocated at the conference) instead of an “accepting and affirming” model, we render the Holy Spirit useless. We actually don’t have to have theological unity about whether or not committed same-sex relationships are biblical in order to lean into unconditional love. But we have to begin listening to all the voices that need to be heard instead of hand-selecting a few that fit neatly into our current worldview. We have to see each other as equals at the foot of the cross.

In the comments section of a blog post on “change ministries,” the mom of a young lesbian woman talked about what really needs to change. Her revelation? That she was the one who needed to change: There is no need for “change ministries.” God says that with even the smallest faith, we can say to a mountain to move...and it will move if it is inside God’s will. If God really wanted gay people to change, a prayer made in faith...should be all that it takes. I have found that my crying and praying in earnest for God to change my daughter led me to realize that it was me that God wanted to change. I am the one who needed to learn to love more. I was the one who needed to change. I also think I have an obligation to not attempt to change LGBTQ people but to love them and let them know that God loves them and wants them for his own.

We need to change our approach. If this is what is going to be offered as a “conversation,” then it’s no wonder that LGBT youth that come from rejecting families are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide than those who come from accepting homes. A church like the Seventh-day Adventist Church is very much a home. It’s a very close-knit community, and it is incredibly damaging to kids to grow up thinking that they are entirely unwanted unless they twist them-
selves into some sort of heterosexual lifestyle or can imagine, at 17 or 18, living alone for their entire lives. Isn’t that what we’re promoting? “We love and accept you as long as we visibly see you trying to change.” This isn’t the love I read about in the Bible. This love comes with all types of conditions, requirements, and deadlines. We are loving LGBT people straight to hell. There are thousands of LGBT Adventists who live Christ-centered, healthy, monogamous lives. We’re here, and we sit right next to you in the pews. And we’d love to tell you our story. If you’d only open your eyes and listen to our stories, you would see the damage you are causing to people like me, however unintentionally.

*In Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gay vs. Christian Debate, author Justin Lee makes an interesting discovery on ex-gay ministries: “In ex-gay circles, I learned, the word ‘gay’ didn’t mean ‘attracted to the same sex.’ At ex-gay conferences, I often ran into ex-gay leaders who publicly testified that they were ‘no longer gay’ even while privately confessing that they still had same-sex attractions.” I believe this change of definition shows the focus of conservative Christian communities. It has nothing to do with the sexuality and everything to do with “gay sex.”

** I’m using “LGBT,” but this conference hardly ever used that language. They didn’t even acknowledge bisexual or transgender individuals at all. The only actually gay and lesbian people allowed to speak were described as “people redeemed from the homosexual lifestyle.”

The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.

- Albert Einstein

How I Became an Adventist Ally

By Daneen Akers

I remember the day I first felt righteous indignation spark deep within my soul about how gays and lesbians were treated in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the denomination my family has been a part of (often in leadership roles) for five generations.

My husband and I were attending a small, progressive church in San Francisco that wasn’t officially Adventist but met on Saturday mornings at 11 AM (the traditional worship hour for Adventists) and was cared for by a couple who are both former Adventist pastors. Word was getting out that if you were an Adventist on the margins in the Bay Area, you were welcome. We had found the Adventist churches in the city to be deeply conservative, and this spiritual community grew and challenged us in all the right ways.

Two women, Linda and Jacquie, who were long-time partners and lifelong Adventists started coming to our little church community once in a while. They also were active volunteers in one of the biggest churches in the area with a host of positions. Between them, they ran the church website and newsletter, coordinated the children’s programming, played the piano and organ for services, and directed the choir (and that’s just what I can remember).

They were the type of people who are the life and backbone of a church—church ladies, in the best sense. And one or both had been part of this church for more than 16 years—and so had several other LGBT Adventists in the area.

In the fall of 2004, a fundamentalist and zealous young heterosexual couple came to town, convinced that God was calling them to purify the church. To them, that meant ousting every LGBT person who had anything to do with the life and leadership of the church. Things got ugly pretty quickly, and gradually Linda and Jacquie were stripped of their positions, starting with the children’s Sabbath school program. Somehow, Linda and Jacquie kept going to church most Sabbaths, participating where they could and willing to forgive far more than I think I ever could. And then Prop 8 came to town.

I’m sure readers here remember this incredibly divisive piece of 2008 legislation that eventually banned same-sex marriage in California. It stirred up a lot of angst, fear, stereotypes, and hype; and conservative churches were ground zero for the spread of propaganda. Well, the pastor of this big church had preached a sermon that a well-known, ultra-right-wing Adventist pastor had also preached (and shared with other pastors in order to maximize the exposure) titled, “Gay Marriage: A State of Disgrace.”

It was a sermon full of the lowest and most debase arguments that circulated in the run-up to the 2008 election. He talked about gays being “blinded by lust” and that their relationships were “shameful” and “disgraceful” and that “they can get the victory over temptation” if they wanted to. Most bizarrely, he added that twin brothers or triplets might try to get married, and that the repeal of Prop 22 in CA (a court-overturned earlier ban on same-sex marriage) coincided with a week of intense storms, fires,
and lighting strikes in California, suggesting that it wasn’t just coincidence—God was letting us know how angry He was about our perverted culture.

The two women sat through this dehumanizing sermon, wondering what had become of their church. The next week, they lodged a complaint with the pastor, who in turn interrogated them about their relationship. They hadn’t ever hidden their status, but he was a newer pastor, and apparently he hadn’t quite realized they were a couple.

This led to a series of meetings and inquiries that resulted in Jacquie and Linda being stripped of everything but the right to sit in a pew (and tithe!).

They couldn’t participate in the life of the church in any way, and they were specifically instructed that they couldn’t do anything from the platform facing the congregation. In a bit of a loophole, Linda could continue to direct the bell choir because they didn’t have anyone else who could do that. But she had to keep her back to the congregation. Not surprisingly, they stopped attending. To this day, only a few people from that church they were a part of for over 16 years have even called to ask how they are doing.

It’s been more than four and a half years since I first heard that story, and it still makes me shake with anger to type it.

I’m tempted to ask if readers here can imagine what it would feel like to be told they could direct the choir but only with their back turned to the congregation; however, I now know that far too many people actually do know what this overt marginalization feels like. I’ve now heard story upon story from LGBT Adventists on the receiving end of “Love the sinner, but hate the sin”—like the young mother who was told, when it was discovered that she was a lesbian, that she could drop off her almost-two-year-old child for Sabbath school but couldn’t be around the other children herself.

Or the lesbian who was told she could only play her trumpet from the pew and not the platform, as the board wanted to make it clear that they didn’t condone her “lifestyle.”

Or the college student who was outed by unsigned pamphlets slipped under every dorm room door the night before he was running for a student association office.

Or the young woman whose father, a pastor, kicked her out of their home when she came out a few months ago.

Or the many stories I couldn’t hear because far too many gay young people of faith have committed suicide, convinced that the rejection they felt from the church over their sexuality was from God.

Over and over again, I’ve heard stories that seem like the absolute antithesis of Jesus’ directive in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Seeing this huge injustice done in the name of Christianity—in my church—really got my attention back in the late summer and fall of 2008. My husband and I worked with several other social justice-minded Adventists to start an online petition called, “Adventists Against Prop 8.” Our hope was that we could tap into the historically strong respect for the separation of church and state that has been a big part of Adventism since Adventists feel like a misunderstood religious minority themselves. Keeping a 24-hour Friday sundown to Saturday sundown Sabbath makes Adventists more similar to Jews than other Christians in many ways, and this leaves Adventists a pretty unknown group in the wider culture.

Many laws that protect freedom of religion are thanks to Adventists fighting for these rights. We felt that even if California Adventists weren’t sure what they thought of same-gender marriage from a scriptural or doctrinal perspective, they of all people would get that the state shouldn’t be writing a religiously-motivated definition of marriage into the constitution that would deny their fellow Californians crucial rights and the dignity of a family that was equal in the eyes of the law. It actually worked quite well to raise the consciousness of this issue within the Adventist church, and many high-profile Adventist thought leaders signed on.

When Prop 8 passed in November of 2008, we were deeply disappointed. This was something directly im-
pacting the lives and families of people we knew and worshipped with. And the arguments we’d grown up hearing about the scriptural wrongness of same-gender relationships weren’t holding up for us in the lived experience of Sabbaths spent with our gay and lesbian friends and their families.

If I looked at the fruits of their life, I knew God was working in their lives the same as in mine. They were teaching me more about love, gentleness, compassion, and patience than those who were condemning them. I realized that the assumptions I’d always had might need adjusting in the light of day and real people.

After all, the same Edenic model and Pauline texts that had historically been levied against women were being reexamined as the Adventist church gradually started to catch up with other denominations and consider ordaining women. I visited the South a lot to see family, and I was reminded on every visit that it wasn’t that long ago that most Christians used the Bible in a passionate defense of segregation and slavery before that.

Adventists have a belief in something they term “Present Truth.” It’s the idea that God isn’t done speaking and revealing divine truth. So Adventists actually have more of a model than other conservative denominations in changing course when given new evidence and new paradigms.

That’s what happened to me.

But beyond theological debates, which I realize are far from over as really good, earnest Adventists from a variety of perspectives start to actually engage in this important conversation, I wanted to engage in my denomination to prompt some serious reflection on how we treat each other when we have a disagreement. Surely the status quo of rejection, marginalization, not to mention the staggeringly high number of LGBT Christian youth who attempt suicide, was telling us a change was needed. Something was deeply broken.

Oh, and, not insignificantly, I was eight months pregnant with our daughter in November of 2008 when Prop 8 passed, and my husband and I were wondering if she was going to grow up to be a sixth-generation Adventist. Could we raise her in a church that marginalized our good friends, relegating them to roles that kept their backs turned to the congregation? The answer was no, so the next step was wondering if we could help spark a consciousness shift.

The vast majority of Adventists we knew weren’t homophobic, even if they were theological traditionalists.

But they didn’t realize how people on the margins were being treated because it just wasn’t talked about, and certainly not in an authentic way. I knew my church could do better if they knew the harm being done in their name to our LGBT members.

So we set out to tell stories, stories like the ones that had first opened our eyes and hearts.

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**Kinship Older Adults**

**Love Lives after 50: More and Less**

Over 8,000 people over 50 filled out a survey asking them about romantic behaviors they may or may not engage in.

**Here are some of the highlights of the study:**

"Do you kiss or hug your partner in public?"

Among the happiest couples, 73% indulge in public displays of affection at least a couple of times a month. Not-so-happy couples are much less likely to do this.

"Do you hold hands, at least sometimes?"

Over three/fourths of couples do hold hands, but younger couples are more likely to do so. Only 50% of couples who have been together at least 10 years hold hands.

"Do you say ‘I love you’ to your partner?"

Among the happiest couples, 85% say this at least once a week. More than 90% of men tell their partners
regularly, while only 58% of women do the same.

“Do you feel your partner loves you more now than when you first were married or started living together?”
40% say yes; 44% say about the same; and 16% say less.

“Do you exchange passionate kisses with your partner?”
74% of the happiest couples exchange passionate kisses at least once a week.

“Does your partner fulfill your needs?”
Slightly over half of the sample said “no.” About ¼ of the men say they aren’t having enough sex; About ¼ of women say they don’t have the lifestyle they had hoped for. About 15-20% of the sample want more affection.

“Do you have date nights?”
Among the happiest couples, 88% plan time alone together.

“How frequently do you make love?”
Almost 1/3 of the couples have sex several times a week; 28% have sex a couple times a month; 8% have sex once a month. 33% of the respondents say they rarely or never have sex. Among couples who report that they are extremely happy, ¼ rarely or never have sex. Clearly sexual activity is not required for couples to have a very happy life together. As one sex therapist has said, “Sex should be considered a hobby, not a necessity.”

The researchers concluded that engaging in romantic behaviors, such as holding hands, public expressions of affection, date nights, and saying “I love you” can help to bring a bit of magic back into a relationship that might otherwise be a bit ho-hum. Positive aging is all about that.

If you would like to fill out the survey, go to aarp.org/normalbarsurvey

When I first open my eyes
upon the morning meadows
and look out
upon the beautiful world,
I thank God I am alive.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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MEETING WITH KINSHIP FRIENDS IN GERMANY AND CZECH


And holiday week from September 2 to 9