Stories of Love & Hope

Adventist Young Adults Meet in Italy

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

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit 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 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

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

RESOURCES
www.someone-to-talk-to.net
www.buildingsafeplaces.org
www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org
www.sgamovie.com
www.facebook.com/sdakinship
… and more.
From the Editor

My Dutch colleagues have informed me that romantic February celebrations are a construct of the United States-based Hallmark greeting card company and are not widely celebrated in other parts of the world. The same couple sharing this piece of cultural data “just happened” to get married on February 14 a couple decades ago. Happy Anniversary, Ruud and Kees! No matter what our cultural bias, February can be a complicated month. A large portion of the population of the Northern Hemisphere are either immersed in skiing or sick of the cold...or just plain sick. It’s been a bad flu season. My rather vivid imagination pictures those of you “down under” reveling in summer holidays with family and friends, not curled up in front of a romantic fireplace. And then, David and John are getting married on February 14 so I know there are exceptions to my imaginary rules. Congratulations! We hope you have a lovely wedding.

Most of you know that St. Valentine (Valentinus, in Latin) is a widely recognized third-century Roman saint commemorated on February 14 and associated since the High Middle Ages with a tradition of courtly love. Rumor has it that he was arrested and imprisoned upon being caught marrying Christian couples and otherwise aiding Christians who were being persecuted by Claudius in Rome. Helping Christians at this time was considered a crime. Claudius took a liking to this prisoner—until Valentinus tried to convert the emperor—whereupon this priest was condemned to death. He was beaten with clubs and stones; when that failed to kill him, he was beheaded outside the Flaminian Gate. Given what our community goes through to have relationships, I imagine we can appreciate Valentinus. It still seems like an odd event to celebrate with chocolates.

As this issue has come together, its articles seem to embody the complicated nature of love for our Kinship community. We included a message from Michele O’Mara about the five languages of love. These are helpful whether your love is romantic or friendship-based. We are appreciative of the responses of our Kinship leadership and the Dutch Union of Seventh-day Adventists to the horrific anti-LGBTI laws enacted in Uganda and Nigeria and glad we can share them with you. We’re sharing some reactions to the Italian Adventist young adults’ conference last autumn. We slipped in a research study about sex for those over fifty. As part of our series to help us better understand the variations in our community, we’ve included an article and diagram about sex, internalized and externalized gender, and orientation. Denise Samen wrote about her transition looking for community. David Coltheart wrote an article about his journey as he heads for his legal wedding on Valentine’s Day. We hope you find these articles interesting and useful. More importantly, we hope that, whether you are single or in a relationship, you take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine
Yesterday I completely re-organized and alphabetized the contents of our pantry; detailed my partner’s car; washed, dried, ironed, and put away all of our laundry; and then cleaned the house, including all of the windows; changed the furnace filter; and loaded the salt in the water softener. Oh, and then I made dinner.

I should clarify. I didn’t really do these things; this is what I did in a dream my partner had last night. I loved listening to Teresa tell me all about this dream. You see, it all makes sense. Of course she would dream about me doing all of these chores around the house, and I would love listening to her share her dream with me, because these are our love languages. I feel loved and appreciated when I have quality time together, she feels loved and appreciated when I get things done around the house.

What is interesting about communicating love is that many couples simply do not speak the same language. There is a great book that helps you learn not only your own love language, but also your partner’s: Just Ask! 1,000 Questions to Grow Your Relationship, by Michele O’Mara.

Oops, that was just a shameless plug for my book. The love language book is by Gary Chapman, and it is called The Five Languages of Love.

Have you ever said to your partner, “If you loved me, you would ___.” If so, you are not alone. Couples often speak different love languages. In fact, I have come to view relationships as international affairs because of the significant cultural (as in the culture of our family of origin) differences that each partner brings to the relationship. It can be very frustrating to feel like you are constantly doing things or behaving in ways that would make you feel loved, only to receive negative feedback from your partner who is not able to decode your love language.

Love languages are styles of communicating our feelings of love. Love languages help illustrate how love is actually a verb. Love is something that we do. Our love languages represent the vehicle we use to show our love. Chapman separates the language of love into five categories:

1. Hearing words that affirm
2. Quality time spent together
3. Receiving gifts and tokens of caring
4. Having things done for you
5. Physical touch and connection

Your primary love language becomes evident in two ways: you speak it more often than the other languages, and you feel most loved when it is spoken to you. The love languages you speak are the same whether you’re a romantic partner, friend, or parent. When you want to communicate caring to someone in your life, are you more inclined to call them and tell them you miss them (#1), call and ask to go get coffee or hang out (#2), send them a card (#3), invite them over to cook dinner for them (#4), or extend a big hug (#5)? How you are most comfortable expressing care and concern provides insight about your love language.

If your partner doesn’t speak to you in your “primary love language” you may feel as if something is missing or feel unloved, even if they are speaking in their own “primary language.” This can become problematic if your partner goes to great lengths to communicate her love for you, only to be met with your disapproval.

For example, if I fell in love with someone who spoke fluently in German but not a bit of English, we
would have to rely on something other than words to connect, while we each worked to learn one another’s language. The more fluent we are in all of the languages of love, the better. What’s most important, though, in our primary relationships, is that, one, we know the love language of our partner, and two, that we are able and willing to learn it and speak it.

Adventist Young Adults Meet in Italy

By Lisa Jean Verona

From October 31 to November 3 the Italian Amicus-AUDA Association (Amicus is the Adventist University Students Association, AUDA is the Italian name of the association) held its annual meeting at the Villa Aurora in Florence. The theme of the meeting was “Right & Wrong – Human Rights and the Power of Change.”

On the last day of our gathering a representative of the REFO Association (Evangelical Network “Faith and Homosexuality”) explained the definitions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. They also talked about the nature of sexuality, psychological and psychiatric studies on homosexuality, homophobia in Italy and in the world, and churches’ positions on the topic. Attendees were very interested in the presentation. There were respectful questions from both conservative and progressive viewpoints.

At the end of the meeting I had the opportunity to distribute a leaflet, in Italian, about SDA Kinship and the film Seventh-Gay Adventists. I sold the books Christianity and Homosexuality - Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives; Homosexuality, Marriage, and The Church - Biblical, Counseling, and Liberty issues.

I invited Ingrid, an old friend of mine, to meet me at Villa Aurora. She is a former Seventh-day Adventist from Florence. She founded Lei disse si (She Said Yes - www.leidissesi.net), writes a blog for La Repubblica, one of the most important newspapers in Italy, and worked on the Italian version of It Gets Better (http://www.lecosecambiano.org/). Ingrid and her partner were married in a same-sex ceremony on June 21, 2013. Ingrid wasn’t at Villa Aurora to present her work and her writings. The gift of her visit is that she had the opportunity to meet her former spiritual community after 15 years.

This reunion touched Ingrid so deeply that she wrote about it on her blog. “It had been years since I entered the temple and the magnificent spiritual park that was the guardian of the games of my childhood and of my youthful secrets and passions. In fact, it has been 15 years since I left the church to explore the world and for my own personal growth. I believe it was also because I knew that, as a young lesbian, the rules of our community would not support me. Over these years I have built a new family, piece by piece, on a foundation of mutual esteem and respect. I have been escaping from any place or any person for whom my very existence could be a source of shame. Being at an Adventist-based conference on LGBT rights and being able to introduce Lorenza as my wife, made me feel for the first time in an Adventist context that there was no need to escape; there was nothing here that would make me feel out of place. For the first time I have a memory of me passionate and in love, without fear.”

It’s hard to explain how deeply grateful I feel for what happened, for what most of us experienced that day. I had a sense of healing—healing because we were able to meet our brothers and sisters. I felt joy—joy because we could embrace our brothers and sisters. I felt deep emotion—emotion because we looked in their eyes and we loved them, and they loved us. After all the meetings, the lectures, and the debates, we left the conference allowing ourselves the right to imagine. Imagine a church that is supportive of the issues that should characterize our being here, on earth, a loving church in anticipation of His great kingdom.
The Importance of Staying Hopeful

One of the consequences of being hopeful is having a greater sense that life is meaningful. Other psychologists have found that hope is a strong predictor of other positive emotions. Hope and happiness tend to go hand in hand. Researcher Randolph Arnau and his colleagues looked at hope’s connection to depression. Surveying 500 college students, they found those who expressed higher hope at the beginning of the study had lower measures of depression and anxiety one and two months later. In another study more hopeful students also went on to greater academic success.

In the workplace, hope seems to have a positive relationship with productivity. Shane Lopez and colleagues analyzed 45 studies in which workers across a variety of industries were evaluated. They concluded that hope accounts for 14% of workplace productivity. “A hopeful person does one day a week more work than a less hopeful person in a seven-day workweek.”

Steven Stern, MD, at the University of Texas studied hope and mortality in a sample of older Mexican- and European-Americans. Of the nearly 800 people aged 64-79 studied between 1992 and 1996, 29% of those classified as hopeless had died by 1999, compared with 11% of the hopeful people. Hope may be a key component to sustaining life.

Dr. Jon Allen of the Menninger Clinic believes that much of our capacity to hope comes from our social relationships. With his patients, the hope they express seems to be an outgrowth of positive social support from others. Support for this idea also comes from studies of people who are more sociable or extraverted. They also tend to have more hope than others.

There are also steps one can take to increase hope. Getting a good laugh is one. In one study, people who watched a funny video expressed more hopefulness afterwards. Another step is to do something to realize one’s hopes, such as taking a course or quitting a dead-end job. Having a contingency plan in case Step One doesn’t work out is also a strategy for remaining hopeful. If one thing doesn’t work out, then plan B may work. Sometimes “re-goaling is necessary;” if one goal doesn’t work out, switch to another goal.

To learn more about nurturing hope in life, check out www.hopemonger.com, a site from Shane Lopez.


Region 7 News (Stephanie Spencer, regional coordinator)

In November eleven people gathered for Friday night vespers. For me this was a nice addition to our usual mostly secular gatherings. Joy and I made some very tasty lentil vegetable soup and vegetarian stew. Others brought bread and desserts.

We had our holiday gathering at the home of Sherry Lacey’s parents. As we arrived we were greeted by a colorful array of Christmas lights. Gordon had purchased the bulbs individually so they could make a rainbow. We all felt quite at home. Our meal was delicious: mushroom chow mein, salad, lasagna, cookies, and linder balls.

Because the theme of our gathering was “Around the World,” Sherry put flags from different countries on her tree. It was a small intimate gathering, but we had plenty of laughs and a comfortable environment. Sherry read the story, “If You are Missing Baby Jesus,” a true story, that always gets me a bit misty-eyed. The party ended with the Christmas gift exchange and a round of Christmas carols.

Here’s the link to the story if you would like to read it.
http://www.thefamilyinternational.org/christmas/article7a3f.html?sid=188&section=1
Moving to Philly
By Denise Samen

I left New York City on January 27, 2014. As I write this note to you early in the month, I am packing up a lifetime of living here and getting ready to move to Pennsylvania. My upcoming major transition began through gay community connections.

My good friend Susan knew this guy from back in the Gay Liberation Front days. Forty years later they reconnected. He’s now the editor of PA Gay News. He was instrumental in getting a group of organizations together to fund the building of The John C. Anderson Apts, an LGBT-friendly senior building.

Susan and I took a day trip to Philly to attend an informational meeting about the apartments. I enjoyed meeting everyone there! One of my contacts, Mark Segal, heard I was a military veteran, got excited, and now tells folks that I am the distinguished veteran of the building (guess he never met a WAC).

After two more visits to the building and tours of the apartments I was hooked! Finding that my rent would be the same as it was in New York City helped me finalize my decision to move. On my lease-signing day I met a great group of women whom I will enjoy getting to know better.

I found a moving company, got boxes, and began to pack. My aide and I filled two boxes a day. At moving day minus 12, I was exhausted, physically and mentally! I swear, my next move is to the grave. You never know how much stuff you collect until it’s time to move.

The weather in Philadelphia is about the same as NYC. I’ll be moving to Center City, in the “Gayborhood,” with the LGBT center being directly across the street from my new residence! I love Market Street and enjoy the small town feel there. I have a map of the city and the bus line and where the VA Hospital and Center is. And as soon as the weather gets warmer I look forward to going to the museums, like the Vietnam Memorial. Maybe I’ll even see the Liberty Bell and visit Betsy Ross’s place.

I thought I wanted to move to the mountains, but it seems to me like God is leading me here. I won’t question Him, even if Philly is at sea level.

Sex is so often made synonymous with youthful looks, sexy bodies, and enormous libidos. It doesn’t seem appropriate that parents and grandparents might also be “getting it on,” and no one wants to talk about it. This stereotype does older people no favors and may discourage many people who would like sexual intimacy. A 2008 study in the New England Journal of Medicine found that more than half of those over age 50 and a quarter of those 75 to 85 were still sexually active. Dr. Betsy Crane, Widener University Professor of Human Sexuality, thinks there should be more people exploring their sexuality than there are. “Sex is good for your health. It lowers blood pressure, elevates mood, boosts immunity, burns calories, and helps you sleep better. Men who have sex more often have a lower incidence of heart attacks.”

For couples who have let sex slip away, Dr. Crane recommends that physical intimacy may be rekindled by making time for romance, holding hands, kissing, and setting dates for sex. She recommends that instead of the youthful model of late-night sex, older couples arrange for siesta breaks, morning trysts, or other times of the day when energy is high. She also advocates the use of sex toys, erotic literature, and “outercourse (non-penetrative sex). Creative responses to physical limitations are also often necessary with older people, but pillows, new positions, and props can compensate. People without partners can also find ways to pleasure themselves.

Importantly, older people should realize that the hormone-powered drive that signaled the urge for sex in youth tapers off, and sex becomes more of a decision to engage in something ultimately more satisfying than a sudden demand. “But once you make a decision, it can be fun. And there’s a lot more fun to be had.”

From: Sex after 50 or 75? But of Course by Melissa Dribben, Philadelphia Inquirer, October 20, 2013, G1, G7

Make someone feel important today…
…it’s never too late to live happily ever after.
Embrace Your Dreams

By Jacinta Hin

It is not by chance that things happen in our lives. What we see today is the result of thoughts and actions that we put in motion a year, ten years, even twenty or more years ago. Many of us have been in the New Year swing of things for weeks already. Every day my head spins with ideas and my heart is full of resolutions: take a bolder stand in life, go after the unimaginable while being firmly grounded in the here and now, trust that broken pieces will eventually fall into place and that new pieces will manifest when I am ready. Life may be unpredictable, but it also finds a way to bring destiny to our doorsteps, provided we do our part to make things happen. The New Year has always been a special time for me to recommit to resolutions once made, to mull over new ways to establish the person I want to be, and connect with who I already am.

Not long ago, a wise friend told me that the purpose of life is not to learn but to remember who we are. Our work, he said, is to become aware of what is already here and has always been available. We simply need to connect. This is a helpful perspective. My dreams can come true, but I don’t need to chase after them. Instead, I have only to unravel the tangled strands of thought and behavior that prevent me from seeing those dreams. I must change habits that distract, as well as attitudes and beliefs that are keeping me small and may unconsciously be sabotaging my projects. How am I standing in my own way? This becomes the question rather than, What do I want?

Jacinta Hin was born in The Netherlands and has been living in Tokyo, Japan, since 1989. Her professional background is in human resources, career management, and coaching. She is passionate about helping people, herself included, discover new perspectives of possibility, move to embracing and working with their transitions, and designing and realizing changes aligned with who they truly are and what they truly want from their lives.


9th Annual Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting

November 6-9, 2014

At the base of Okemo Mountain in Ludlow, Vermont

More information on Kinship’s website http://www.sdakinship.org/index.php/coming-events/
**Biological sex**, shown on the top scale, includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, and fat distribution. These characteristics are objective in that they can be seen and measured (with appropriate technology). The scale consists not just of two categories (male and female) but is actually a continuum, with most people existing somewhere near one end or the other. The space more in the middle is occupied by intersex people (formerly called hermaphrodites), who have combinations of characteristics typical of males and those typical of females, such as both a testis and an ovary, or XY chromosomes (the usual male pattern) and a vagina; or they may have features that are not completely male or completely female, such as an organ that could be thought of as a small penis or a large clitoris, or an XXY chromosomal pattern.

**Gender identity** is how people think of themselves and identify in terms of sex (man, woman, boy, girl). Gender identity is a psychological quality; unlike biological sex, it can't be observed or measured (at least by current means), only reported by the individual. Like biological sex, it consists of more than two categories, and there's space in the middle for those who identify as a third gender, both (two-spirit), or neither. We lack language for this intermediate position because everyone in our culture is supposed to identify unequivocally with one of the two extreme categories. In fact, many people feel that they have masculine and feminine aspects of their psyches; and some people, fearing that they do, seek to purge themselves of one or the other by acting in exaggerated sex-stereotyped ways.

**Gender expression** is everything we do that communicates our sex/gender to others: clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, way of speaking, roles we take in interactions, etc. This communication may be purposeful or accidental. It could also be called social gender because it relates to interactions between people. Trappings of one gender or the other may be forced on us as children or by dress codes at school or work. Gender expression is a continuum, with feminine at one end and masculine at the other. In between are gender expressions that are androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) and those that combine elements of the two (sometimes called gender bending). Gender expression can vary for an individual from day to day or in different situations, but most people can identify a range on the scale where they feel the most comfortable. Some people are comfortable with a wider range of gender expression than others.

**Sexual orientation** indicates to whom we are erotically attracted. The ends of this scale are labeled “attracted to women” and “attracted to men,” rather than “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” to avoid confusion as we discuss the concepts of sex and gender. In the mid-range is bisexuality. There are also people who are asexual (attracted to neither men nor women). We tend to think of most people as falling into one of the two extreme categories (attracted to women or attracted to men), whether they are straight or gay, with only a small minority clustering around the bisexual middle. However, Kinsey's studies showed that most people are in fact not at one extreme of this continuum or the other, but occupy some position between.
people fall near one end of the scale or the other, but very few people are actually at the extreme ends, and there are people at every point along the continuum.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are resistant to change. Although we don’t yet have definitive answers to whether these are the result of biological influences, psychological ones, or both, we do know that they are established very early in life, possibly prenatally; and there are no methods that have been proven effective for changing either of these. Some factors that make up biological sex can be changed, with more or less difficulty. These changes are not limited to people who change their sex: many women undergo breast enlargement, which moves them toward the extreme female end of the scale, and men have penile enlargements to enhance their maleness, for example. Gender expression is quite flexible for some people and more rigid for others. Most people feel strongly about expressing themselves in a way that’s consistent with their inner gender identity and experience discomfort when they’re not allowed to do so.

The four scales are independent. Our cultural expectation is that men occupy the extreme left ends of all four scales (male, man, masculine, attracted to women) and women occupy the right ends. But a person with male anatomy could be attracted to men (gay man), or could have a gender identity of “woman” (transsexual), or could have a feminine gender expression on occasion (crossdresser). A person with female anatomy could identify as a woman, have a somewhat masculine gender expression, and be attracted to women (butch lesbian). It’s a mix-and-match world, and there are as many combinations as there are people who think about their gender.

This schema is not necessarily “reality,” but it’s probably closer than the two-box system. Reality is undoubtedly more complex. Each of the four scales could be broken out into separate scales. For instance, the sex scale could be expanded into separate scales for external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, hormone levels, chromosome patterns, and so forth. An individual would probably not fall on the same place on each of these. “Biological sex” is a summary of scores for several variables.

There are conditions that exist that don’t fit anywhere on a continuum. Some people have neither the XX (typical female) chromosomal pattern nor the XY pattern typical of males; but it is not clear that other patterns, such as just X, belong anywhere on the scale between XX and XY. Furthermore, the scales may not be entirely separate; if gender identity and sexual orientation are found to have a biological component, they may overlap with the biological sex scale.

Using the model presented here is something like using a spectrum of colors to view the world, instead of only black and white. It doesn’t fully account for all the complex shadings that exist, but it gives us a richer, more interesting picture. Why look at the world in black and white (marred by a few troublesome shades of gray) when there’s a whole rainbow out there?
I tried to do that for many years, constantly shrugging off the nagging thought that there was something intrinsic in my nature that could not be changed. Constrained by family commitments, church expectations, and the rules of society, I struggled to preserve the façade of a straight marriage and a family of three sons.

Even after looking in the mirror and scaring myself with the words, "David, you’re gay," I could not conceive of being out, open, or—impossible thought!—falling in love with another man! And same-sex marriage was an oxymoron beyond comprehension.

But, with the passage of years, my attitudes have changed, along with those of the people around us. What we thought unthinkable has rapidly become inevitable. John and I met and became friends, then moved in together. Our commitment ceremony took place four years later in front of family and friends. Six months ago, we began wearing matching rings as symbols of our love. When New Zealand legalized same-sex marriages in August 2013, we decided to take the greatest step in our journey.

Marriage for us is the ultimate commitment and the most tangible symbol of loyalty, faithfulness, and love available to us. Even though only four of us will stand in the registry office—John and I, and two witnesses from Australia who have kindly offered to come over with us—there are many reasons why this will be the most significant day of our lives. While marriage will afford us legal and social status, beyond that there is a spiritual dimension, a union of hearts and lives that is the human equivalent to the union between God and His people.

We have already taken on the responsibility of being good husbands to each other. We know the need for nurture and mutual encouragement, the value of a healthy relationship, and the importance of daily communication. We acknowledge the shared duties of home life and the responsibilities of daily care for each other. We recognize the need to sacrifice our individual interests for the greater good of our relationship. We share the same values and long-term goals. We complement each other as best friends, and we now look forward to completing each other’s life in marriage.

Marriage is a human expression of the unity between the Three Persons of the Godhead and is at least as important as the other Christian symbols: baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper. For this reason, marriage is just as significant for committed same-sex couples as it is to loving heterosexual couples—no one should be denied. The unity of two lives forming one shared existence is God’s ideal for human beings. "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18).

When we recognize that suitable helper, then life is complete with the formation of a perfect trinity—the two of us and God.

David Coltheart writes training manuals on workplace health and safety. He and John live in Buderim, on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast where they enjoy bushwalking, swimming, and gardening. They attend a local Seventh-day Adventist church where David is actively involved in outreach as well as operating the church PA and computer systems.

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SDA Kinship Kampmeeting 2014

July 15-20

The Lodge at Simpsonwood

A Conference and Retreat Center

Simpsonwood is located in Northeast Atlanta in the Peachtree Corners area of Norcross, GA at 4511 Jones Bridge Circle

For more information visit Kinship’s website at http://www.sdakinship.org/index.php/coming-events/
Response to Uganda

As most of you know, Uganda recently passed a new law allowing imprisonment of people based on their sexual orientation. Both Kinship and the Dutch Union responded to this state-mandated persecution. Their letters are below.

January 5, 2014

Ted Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Dear Elder Wilson,

On 20 December 2013 the Ugandan Parliament passed a modified version of the so-called Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which promotes hatred and discrimination against those who are, or are believed to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI).

When the Anti-Homosexuality Bill was first introduced by MP David Bahati in 2009, it prescribed the death penalty for so-called “aggravated homosexuality;” that is, if one party was HIV-positive or if a liaison involved a minor. By conflating homosexuality with disease transmission and pedophilia, this law directly undermines legitimate public health initiatives in Uganda. Now that the bill has passed, people in Uganda who are, or are believed to be, LGBTI are subject to 14 years in prison for a first “offense” or imprisonment for life.

As we wrote in December 2012, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International finds this law reprehensible. The legislation violates fundamental human rights, is a vehicle for discrimination, and is contrary to the character of Jesus Christ and the value system that our church promotes. We are each part of the diverse human family; and God calls us to love one another, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That includes loving our LGBTI neighbors, not scapegoating them, ostracizing them, or imprisoning them for consensual relationships.

Regardless of the church’s stance on human sexuality and gender roles, we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should never actively or passively promote the violation of basic human rights. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has an obligation to its Ugandan members to strongly, clearly state that it does not support this law or the abusive, violent rhetoric that puts thousands of Ugandans in jeopardy.

We are also disappointed that the leader of the Church in Uganda failed to disavow the revised law when it was reintroduced last session. In 2012, Pastor Blasious Ruguri, East-Central African Division President and vice president of the Seventh-day Adventist church, reportedly made the following statement against LGBTI Ugandans at a public meeting at the Mbarara Seventh-day Adventist Church, Southwestern Uganda Field:

"Our stand is ‘zero tolerance’ to this vice and to western influence on this crucial issue because God says no to it. We are together with the President and the Speaker and we fully support the Anti-Homo-

sexuality Bill. I call upon all religious ministers, all Ugandans, and all Africans to say no to Homosexuality. [sic] Let us stand for our sovereignty as Ugandans and as God-fearing people even [though] the heavens fall."

Ugandan politicians were present at this meeting.

Shortly after the Ugandan paper New Vision reported Ruguri’s comments, the General Conference claimed that New Vision misquoted Ruguri’s “intentions.” If that were true, his comments also misled The Daily Monitor, which quoted him making similar remarks.

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International calls upon the East-Central African Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to oppose this law and urge Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni to rescind this bill and affirm the human dignity, liberty, equality, and non-discrimination of all Ugandans. We appeal for similar statements in favor of human liberty from our church representatives in Nigeria, in Russia, and in India.

With Christian love,
Yolanda Elliott,
President, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International
The Ugandan Parliament passed the so-called Anti-Homosexual Bill on the 20th of December 2013. The Nigerian president signed a similar bill on the 13th of January 2014. These bills promote the hatred and discrimination of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) individuals, and misleadingly associate being LGBTI with pedophilia and sexually transmitted diseases. The Netherlands Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church distances itself from these bills. We, as a church, stand for accepting love and following the character of Jesus Christ. We strongly believe that all people are called to love one another. This includes loving LGBTIs, not excluding them or judging their relationships.

Christians don’t all agree regarding LGBTIs, but we are one in the faith that mankind was created in the image of God, and each person is valuable in his eyes. People should, therefore, treat each other with decency—respectfully, peacefully, and lovingly. Violence or discrimination in any form is unacceptable.

The delegates of all the Adventist churches in The Netherlands took a strong stand with regards to LGBTIs in 2012. With a large majority, they decided the following:

**Following the example of the “Safe Church” initiative, the delegates, gathered together in committee, charge the Executive Board in the coming administrative period to consider the problems of and concerning people with a non-heterosexual nature, so that they can feel safe in the church.**

The Netherlands Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church also signed the International Day against Homophobia Declaration in 2011. The Executive Committee took a unanimous stand against violence towards and discrimination of LGBTIs.

**To each violation of human rights we say that is wrong. Today we emphasize this in particular concerning the violation of the human rights of homosexuals. This includes all forms of physical, psychological, and verbal violence against homosexuals, as well as inciting these expressions of violence. He who uses violence against fellow human beings, made in the image of God, ignores Christ’s appeal to love God and [love] thy neighbor. Also in our own communities of faith the human dignity of homosexuals has sometimes been damaged by uncharitable and unsympathetic behaviour.**

**We dedicate ourselves to defend in every way the dignity of all people. We call on worshippers in our congregations to refrain from promoting any form of violence against homosexuals. Churches desire, after the example of Christ, to be places of encounter. They desire to be a safe haven for all, including homosexuals.**

**We call on everyone, whatever their place in society, to offer an environment in which homosexuals feel safe and in that way contribute to a safer social climate in our society.**

**We will endeavor, in our international ecclesiastical contacts and in our contacts with representatives of other faiths, to oppose homophobia, hatred, and violence against homosexuals.**

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**European Kinship Meeting**

This year’s European Kinship meeting (EKM2014) will be held in St Mark’s College, Saffron Walden, England. This is a beautiful old Hogwartsy complex with a reputation for wonderful food and comfortable small-dormitory accommodation in the heart of the southern English countryside. It is easily accessible from London Stansted airport.

**28 August – 1 September**

Our speaker for the weekend is the Reverend Cecilia Eggleston, and she will be developing a Biblically based theme of Prayer in a stimulating mix of presentations and activities. There will be a trip to a local site of interest as well as time for fun, fellowship, and worship.

For more information about EKM visit Kinship’s website at http://www.sdakinship.org/index.php/coming-events/
Over the weekend of 17-19 January 2014, SDA Kinship Australia held its most recent Kampmeeting in Melbourne, the food and fashion capital of the state of Victoria. Thirty-six participants came from as far as Brisbane and Sydney in the north and Perth in western Australia to attend the weekend conference held in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in the suburb of Richmond.

By David Coltheart

Friday night we sat in a circle, introduced ourselves, and shared our stories. Afterwards we spent some time getting to know each other in an informal way over refreshments. Sabbath morning began with spirited singing using contemporary songs selected by our MCC hosts. After praying for the group, former Seventh-day Adventist pastor, David Coltheart, explained why he still retained his faith and church connection. David said there were many factors influencing his spirituality, including his home upbringing, Adventist school education, and years as an evangelist. While others with similar backgrounds have left Adventism, David thinks he has stayed because of the unconditional love and acceptance offered by the members of a small Seventh-day Adventist church near where he now lives. The congregation reached out and accepted him, and later his partner John, as authentic Christians. Their church offered both fellowship and affirmation. David has been able to attend church each week and to take an active role in the worship services and teaching ministry.

Dr. Wendell Rosevear was the next speaker. Well-known around Australia as a spokesperson on gay health issues and for his quiet activism on behalf of the LGBTI community, he received the prestigious Order of Australia medal in 1998 for his work with HIV/AIDS patients. His numerous other awards recognize his work with drug addicts, prisoners, and rape victims and perpetrators. He believes that people can overcome their addictions, poor self-image, and destructive behaviours when they realize that they have true worth in their own eyes and when those around them value them as human beings.

After a delicious lunch, provided by the MCC members who served as our hosts, Dr. Ian Wilson spoke about the physiology of sex. He outlined the complex bio-chemical processes that produce a combination of interacting hormones to create the feelings and emotions associated with intimacy. Ian is an oral and maxillofacial surgeon at one of Australia’s leading regional hospitals and is also an accredited relationships counselor with an interest in addictions. He outlined how some people can be addicted to sex (usually along with other addictive behaviours and drug dependency problems) and explained some of the factors that cause this. He also pointed to various solutions for the very real problem.

Dr. John Wallace, an Emergency doctor at the Sydney Adventist Hospital, summarized the scientific evidence for the origins and existence of homosexuality. John pointed out that scientific authorities agree that homosexuality is neither a choice nor a
curable disorder. The scientific evidence points increasingly to a biological basis for same-sex attraction, especially the release of hormones by the mother during pregnancy. Although the environment inevitably plays some role in the development of the homosexual personality and manifestation, John explained that homosexuality is within the range of normal human—and animal—sexual expression.

Dr. Rosevear was the last speaker for the afternoon, and his presentation compared the characteristics of unhealthy and healthy relationships. Unhealthy relationships are based on need and tend to use the other person to buy favours. When relationships are manipulative, or based on power struggles, they can degenerate into co-dependency or even abuse. Healthy relationships, he pointed out, function on the basis of acceptance—acceptance of a person’s body, individuality, choices, needs, and time. Communication in a healthy relationship is honest and the result is total trust.

After a break, everyone enjoyed a delicious buffet dinner, followed by the screening of the movie Seventh-Gay Adventists. Some of the members from MCC Melbourne joined us for the evening and we enjoyed seeing and hearing the powerful stories in the movie. Some of us who have seen the movie multiple times now know exactly when to tear up and when to laugh. The movie was followed by a lively question-and-answer period.

On Sunday, some of us travelled up into the hills on the outskirts of Melbourne for the day. We enjoyed the hospitality of Les and Nick, two SDA Kinship members who entertained us with a splendid meal while we looked out over the fields and forests that surround their country home. During the afternoon we shared experiences that reminded us again that we are spiritually and emotionally bound together.

Bio line:
David Coltheart is the SDA Kinship Australia correspondent for the Connection

Front cover picture: Participants at the SDA Kinship Kampmeeting in Melbourne. (Photo credit: Ben Reuter)
Region 7 Holiday Gathering

November 2013

Impressions from Vermont mini-Kampmeeting

Go tell it on the mountain...

connection