

## NOTEWORTHY



### Marriage in 2004

By Gary Chartier

*In 2004, the Bush administration intends to invest significantly in programs designed to highlight its commitment to supporting “traditional” marriage. Intimate relationships in our society are under threat from a variety of sources, especially our workplaces, which place increasing demands on all of us. It is important, therefore, to know that our intimate partnerships matter to public officials.*

*It would be unfortunate, however, if, because of a focus on conventional different-sex marriages, both nontraditional different-sex relationships and same-sex relationships of various kinds received insufficient attention and support—or even proved to be objects of orchestrated campaigns of public hostility. Our intimate bonds are already too vulnerable, subject to too many threats and pressures.*

*The legal recognition of same-sex marriage, in particular, has proven to be a lightning rod. Politicians eager for a hot-button social issue they can use to distract voters from pressing economic and foreign policy concerns have zeroed in on same-sex marriage, claiming dubiously that it poses a profound threat to different-sex marriage.*

*It is ironic that conservative politicians, who profess to value personal virtue and communal stability, have so reflexively opposed the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. In fact, I believe, there is good*

*reason for people on both the right and the left of the political spectrum to believe that committed same-sex relationships deserve legal acknowledgment. In this essay, excerpted from a longer article, I attempt to show why.*

*The article originally appeared in print in 2001. Fortunately and unfortunately, it is, if anything, more relevant today.*

We afford legal recognition for various sorts of marriages—civil, ecclesial, common law—for a variety of reasons. We want to provide orderly means of disposing of property in case of divorce. We want to encourage the stability of families in order to foster the healthy development of children. We want to regularize the intergenerational transmission of property. Marriage serves important civic functions.

Marriage also serves to signify the community’s endorsement of a particular kind of relationship: in contemporary America heterosexual and dyadic. It does so directly as a symbol, but also through the conferral of various legal privileges. Proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage rightly see the unavailability of marriage to same-sex couples as a sign that their relationships are communally disfavored. Proponents argue for same-sex marriage as a sign of inclusion in the cultural mainstream for same-sex couples. Opponents argue

against it to preserve the moral integrity of the community, to discourage those who might be inclined to enter same-sex relationships from doing so, and to avoid encouraging those already involved in such relationships to persist in them.

If the social functions of marriage were only utilitarian and symbolic, those unconvinced by my moral arguments might be warranted in continuing to oppose legal recognition for same-sex marriage. There is however a third publicly important function of marriage: the cultivation of virtue. It is precisely because of their concern that the state promote public virtue that many people oppose same-sex marriage. However to say that marriage is a school for virtue means that marriage offers the partners distinctive opportunities to develop morally, to foster in each other moral growth and to learn and practice a responsibility that extends beyond their relationship and into the wider public world. Taking seriously the capacity of marriage to further the development of virtue thus means making marriage available to same-sex couples.

While marriage may embody as clearly as any social institution the transition from status to contract as the basis for social interactions, it nonetheless remains a status relationship. We are not at liberty to define



the terms of the marriage contract however we wish. To marry is to accept—and putatively to endorse—a range of pre-existing societal expectations. Those expectations include permanence and exclusivity.

Permanence and exclusivity both serve the ends of love. But that does not make them consistently easy. Societal expectations help us to take them seriously. Permanence

other than oneself, acknowledging the independent reality and worth of her or his perspectives and needs. Fidelity to another means being prepared at least sometimes to disregard one's own advantage. Commitment and love require learning that one is not at the center of the universe. To learn this contraction of the self in faithful and marital love is to acquire a habit one can and likely will carry into the

can serve as especially important alternatives to more traditional communities in an era when previously common patterns of authority and connections have lost considerable appeal.... Their own shared life can exert a ripple effect on the varied communities they touch. Civil society depends on an array of intertwined communities. Marriages are among the most important of these commu-

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and exclusivity offer great gifts to marriage partners: security, self-confidence, freedom from alienating isolation. Active societal encouragement of marriage thus means active encouragement of the provisions of these gifts. A society that cares about its members will wish them to enjoy the liberating and empowering experience of marital love. It will also recognize that persons thus liberated and empowered will be more fulfilled, more capable, and so better equipped to contribute in a variety of ways to the lives of others outside their families.

Taken seriously, habits of constancy, trust, honesty, fairness, and compassion will be evident outside the doors of people's homes. A relationship that affects a person as profoundly as marriage is likely to have ramifications that extend well beyond the domestic, not only because those who know themselves loved may be better neighbors and citizens, but because those who learn to love faithfully in marriage will find it more difficult to be untrustworthy and undependable persons in general.

Loving another person means attending to that person as truly

wider world. A moral relationship with a partner fosters moral relationship with other members of one's community.

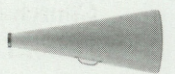
Marriage provides each partner a sense of dignity and value. Empowered and inspired by the awareness of her or his own worth, a person can contribute more effectively to public life. And the unconditional care and love of another can be, as J. Philip Wogaman puts it, "deeply humanizing." It can thus offer a kind of grace that can equip a person to play a meaningful role in the life of her or his community. The intimate community of a couple is a good in its own right. Fostering mutual giving of marriage partners to each other not only empowers them for public service but also furthers their own well being.

Marriage also contributes to the maintenance of civil society. Stable couples contribute to stable social networks. They are more likely to set down roots in local communities and to invest time and energy in making those communities thrive. Similarly, they are more likely to help anchor small communities of friends, which

nities. Strong marital relationships contribute to the growth and flourishing of healthy communities. And this is true whether the marriages unite same-sex or opposite sex couples.

The public recognition of a marriage through legal acknowledgement and celebratory ritual serves to strengthen a couple's ties with each other. Publicly married couples are clearly identified in the minds of friends, family members and the general public as couples. Who they are is different because they are married. At the same time, it also reminds them that their love for each other appropriately issues in a public vocation, a responsibility to contribute to the polis out of the largesse that love confers on them.

By contrast, as long as lesbians and gays are marginalized, their unions will suffer from pressures to which the marriages and dating relationships of straight couples are never subjected. Being legally and publicly married will increase the opportunity for lesbians and gays to give to their





various communities. By fostering the stability of lesbian and gay couples and integrating them more fully into the public world, same sex marriage will make our communities stronger. Marriages foster virtue in partners and enable them to grow morally, to contribute to each other's humanization, to foster the development of their society. Marriage is not morally neutral; it is morally crucial.

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## The International Adventist Grapevine

When Pastor Ruimar DePaiva, his wife, Margareth DePaiva, and their eleven-year old son, Larrison, were killed in Palau in December, the international Adventist grapevine began buzzing.

The sensational story of an intruder murdering a missionary family sent shock waves around the world because the family involved had touched the lives of people in at least three different divisions of the Church. The missionaries were originally from Brazil, had attended Andrews University in Michigan, and the father of the murdered pastor is the new field president for Sudan in the Middle East Union.

As chronicled by John P. Rutledge, legal counsel to Koror state government in Palau, another wave of e-mail messages went around the world after the family's funeral with an incredible story of forgiveness. At the Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan, Pastor Dwight Nelson read the story.

From there it went many directions, including to the people of the Middle East Union. By the time it arrived in e-mail boxes in the United States, the story seemed to have circled the globe, proving that there is nothing like a story of forgiveness to bring people together, and nothing like the Adventist grapevine to share it.

Rutledge told of a long, remarkable ceremony. After four hours of speeches and remarks, Ruimar's mom took the microphone. During the week she spent in Palau, she met with the man—Justin Hirosi—who had murdered her son, daughter-in-law, and only grandson. She prayed with him. And she let him know that she had already forgiven him. He cried.

"Then, having just learned that Justin's mother was at the service, she asked Ms. Hirosi to join her. Ruimar's mom hugged her so warmly that the casual observer might have believed the two were long-lost friends. Together, they stepped to the microphone and Ms. DePalva announced that they are 'both mothers grieving for lost sons.' You could have heard a pin drop. Absolute silence. And then the tears started.

"Ms. DePaiva went on. She implored the Palauan community to remove any shroud of blame that might otherwise cover Justin's family. She declared that the DePaivas do not blame Justin's family for the tragedy (and that no one else should either). 'We raise our children; we educate them,' Ms. DePaiva said (paraphrasing, of course). 'We teach them right from wrong. That is all we as mothers can do.'

"Next, the high chief of the island where the tragedy occurred came to the microphone. He announced that, 'If we follow Palauan tradition to its fullest extent, Melissa (the lone sur-

vivor of the tragedy) is now a daughter to Ms. Hirosi. And Ms. DePaiva is a mother to Justin.' He expressed shame, regret and sorrow on behalf of Justin's family, his clan and his entire tribe; after which, Justin's uncle the most senior male member of the family, stepped forward.

"The High Chief explained that Justin's family and clan, though of meager means, had sold many of their belongings and now desired to deliver \$10,000 in cash to Melissa for her college education. Frankly, I've never seen anything like it. And I've never been as emotionally moved. I wailed like a baby," Rutledge wrote.

"I've always lived my life by the doctrine 'Forgive, but don't forget.' Those days are done. I'm now a proud member of the DePaiva clan, and we do things a little differently. Love and forgiveness, that's what it's about."

## Drive for Regional Conference Continues in Pacific Union

Although the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee turned down a proposal to create a regional conference within its geographic borders in November, a group of twelve black churches has formed a federation and continues to work for the creation of such a conference.

At a membership meeting in December, the Regional Fellowship elected seven officers. The group chose as its director Anthony Pascal, pastor of the Sixteenth Street Church in San Bernardino, California, and held another meeting in January to begin development of an operations manual.

Calling their organization a federation of churches totally supportive of the Church and its structure, the



group plans to go to the North American Division to request status as a conference attached to the division, according to Charlie Jo Morgan, the spokeswoman for the group at the Pacific Union Executive Committee meeting.

After the proposal for the regional conference was presented to the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee in November, Major C. White, retired Pacific Union secretary, responded with a list of reasons not to create such a conference. Forty-five minutes of questions and answers between the committee and the presenters followed these presentations.

According to the report of the session in the *Pacific Union Recorder*, "After the presenters left the room, the committee discussed the issue for about an hour and then voted by secret ballot. Eight-nine percent voted against the proposal."

The Union Committee also voted a statement on regional ministry giving four reasons for its denial of the proposal:

1. We are stronger as we address multicultural issues together. We are convinced that a multicultural expression of God's gift to the Church is the best way to achieve our mission to bring the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people; and

2. The work of the Church would suffer loss if deprived of the best each group brings to the organization as a whole; and

3. Characteristically, Regional Conferences were formed where there were primarily two cultural groups, whereas the Pacific Union is multiculturally diverse; and

4. The North American Division policy B 07 10 requires a favorable response of the Union Executive Committee to the proposal to organize a new conference.

## Adventism in Africa

In 2003, the division infrastructure of church work in Africa was reorganized.

### East-Central Africa Division

Churches – 8,082

Membership – 2,012,030

Population – 242,881,000

Unions – 8

Conferences – 41

Health Care Institutions – 159

Higher Education Institutions

Adventist University at Lukanga, Democratic Republic of Congo

Adventist University of Central Africa, Rwanda

Maxwell Adventist Academy, Kenya

University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

### Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division

Churches – 5,638

Membership – 1,569,033

Population – 135,849,000

Unions – 9

Conferences – 37

Health Care Institutions – 65

Higher Education Institutions

Adventist University, Zurcher, Madagascar

Solusi University, Zimbabwe

### Western Africa Division

Churches – 2,567

Membership – 640,851

Population – 281,230,000

Unions – 5

Conferences – 37

Health Care Institutions – 51

Higher Education Institutions

Adventist University, Cosendai, Cameroon

Babcock University, Nigeria

Valley View University, Ghana

### Trans-Mediterranean Territories

In addition, the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and the Western Sahara are part of the Trans-Mediterranean Territories in the Euro-African Division. Afghanistan, Tunisia, and Turkey are also part of this "Attached Field."

Churches – 5

Membership – 176

Population – 237,025,000

Source: 2003 SDA Yearbook