



The Adventist Church AND ITS LGBT MEMBERS

BY RONALD LAWSON

How has Adventism responded to social issues over time? We have exhibited two different patterns and one unique case. In one pattern, early sectarian Adventism did not care how a category of people was regarded by other groups, but focused on using all available resources to get its message out; concurrently, it reduced hindrances to conversion that were common in the practices of other churches. This response was urged strongly by Ellen White. Consequently, it used women as well as men as pastors, evangelists, and administrators. When it evangelized African Americans along the Mississippi River it created mixed-race congregations, even though this provoked anger among other whites: all

were welcome. And in Africa it did not follow the example of other mission churches by insisting that polygamous male converts send their additional wives away, but instead accepted whole polygamous families, only insisting that the men not add any additional wives after their baptism. However, as Adventism became less sectarian over time, and therefore more concerned with its reputation in society and especially among the more conservative churches that became its reference group, Adventists segregated their churches, stopped appointing women to the ministry, and changed their policy on polygamy to match those of the other churches, in spite of the damage such changes caused.

In the second pattern, Adventists accepted the judgment of most of society and the other churches of morally unacceptable behavior, as a sign that the end was near, but as otherwise not their issue; they assumed that Adventists did not get pregnant outside of marriage, divorce their spouses, or abuse their wives or children. When this assumption proved incorrect, they regarded the members concerned as a blotch on the church's reputation that must be removed immediately, and disfellowshipped them.

Homosexuals also fell into the second category: just as an unmarried pregnant member was seen as shaming the church, when a gay or lesbian was discovered among its members—and in those days discovery was usually the result of the publication in the press of the names of those arrested following a police raid on a gay meeting place—this was seen as embarrassing, and that person was purged immediately.

Religious and Civil Contexts

Condemnation of homosexuality by Christian churches long fostered discrimination against homosexuals in many countries. This was reflected both in law, where criminal penalties were often harsh, extending to capital punishment in some parts, and in public opinion, where it was invoked to justify ridicule, physical violence, eviction from housing, and loss of employment. However, growing concern for justice and civil rights in the United States during the 1960s, beginning with discrimination against blacks and women, was extended at length to homosexuals. The new current fostered the emergence of the gay liberation movement in 1969. This quickly garnered support from key organizations; the American Bar Association issued a call for the decriminalization of homosexual behavior between consenting adults in 1973,

and the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders in the same year. The more liberal denominations also responded; the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian-Universalist Churches, emphasizing that God loved all his children, voted to ordain openly gay and lesbian pastors. Most of the mainline churches began to debate such issues, and some of their congregations declared that they welcomed gay members.

However, conservative religious groups quickly mounted several political crusades that tapped deep reservoirs of hatred and prejudice within society. For example, when, in 1977, Anita Bryant successfully took the lead in the campaign to reverse a civil rights ordinance that had helped protect homosexuals against discrimination in employment and housing in Dade County, Florida, her campaign spawned bumper stickers that urged people to “Kill a gay for Christ.”

In recent years, the situation has changed dramatically; same-sex marriage and the right of LGBT couples to adopt children are the law now in many countries in the developed world. Several US states, beginning with Massachusetts in 2004, legalized same-sex marriage, and the US Supreme Court extended it to the whole nation in 2015. The previous “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in the military was overthrown, making it OK to be openly gay, lesbian, or transgender. Gay and lesbian clergy and bishops are now common in several of the Mainline Protestant denominations. However, the religious right, made up of fundamentalists, Mormons, and many Catholics and Evangelicals, is striving to undermine same-sex marriage, and their congregations rarely welcome people known to be homosexual.

Where does the Adventist Church fit into this evolving picture?

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The Emergence of Gay Issues

The Adventist Church largely ignored the topic of homosexuality until the early 1970s. The Adventists’ prophet, Ellen White, never referred to it directly in her vast published works or correspondence. Consequently, when I was a teen in the 1950s and at university in the 1960s, wrestling with my realization that I was different from most people in terms of the gender I was attracted to, it was never mentioned in church services or publications. But I sensed, correctly, that I could not go to a pastor for help, or even to my parents.

Church leaders generally assumed that there were no homosexual Adventists. This assumption was false. However, most homosexual members were deeply closeted, living desperate lives. Their discomfort caused many to exit the church, and those who were discovered often faced rejection by their families and church, expulsion from church schools if they were students, loss of their jobs if they were church employed, and exposure to guilt, shame, and humiliation. Vernon Hendershot, who was president of the Adventist Seminary when it was located at the General Conference complex in Washington, DC, disappeared suddenly after being arrested during a police raid on a gay meeting place in 1952. Such experiences were repeated throughout the global Adventist Church. For example, a student at Avondale College, in Australia, in the 1970s, who confessed to being homosexual between his final examinations and graduation, was not allowed to graduate and finally received his degree in the mail a year later. Our church was concerned with protecting its purity and reputation rather than loving and supporting such members.

Although most “sins” committed by church employees could be forgiven, this was not true of sexual sin. Of these sins, homosexuality was considered the worst. In 1983, when Grady Smoot, the president of Andrews University,

was arrested after propositioning an undercover vice officer while in Washington for Annual Council at the General Conference [GC], it was reported to me that several dispirited church leaders had exclaimed, “If only it had been with a woman!” Although the number of church members whose homosexuality was discovered so dramatically was relatively small, the proportion of gay and lesbian members who grew up in the church was no doubt about average, and many others also joined as adults.

Many Adventist pastors, evangelists, and publications interpreted the emergence of the gay liberation movement in 1969 as a sign of the end of the world. Although counselors and pastors regularly advised homosexuals to pray for deliverance, and to date a woman and marry her in expectation that God would answer their prayers, two books on sex published during the 1970s recognized that change in orientation was unlikely and urged that divine strength be enlisted to resist temptations. Even though I was heavily involved in church during my university years as choir director, organist, and Youth Sabbath School Superintendent and teacher, I spent those years in agony as I wrestled with my problem, dated women I liked but was not attracted to, and had fleeting sex with strangers that caused overwhelming guilt. I felt incredibly alone, for I did not have a single gay friend. Fortunately, I did not marry; I think it would have been a sin for me to have done so.

In 1973, two years after moving to New York from Australia, I took stock of my turbulent life. I had been praying that God would change my attractions for fifteen years, but there had been no answer. I asked God and myself why so, and realized suddenly that I must have been praying for something that God did not want to give me, for surely the absence of an answer indicated that he was happy with the way he had made me. Wow!

After that, I gradually became willing to look for a gay man I wanted to date. But I so much wanted him to be an Adventist! In 1977, I was one of at least three Adventists who independently placed ads in the national gay paper that invited gay Adventists to write to us. I received between 40 and 50 replies—all from far away. But these ads helped to create networks among some gay Adventists, and this resulted in the formation of a support organization ambitiously named Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. By following networks and placing advertisements in gay and lesbian publications, Kinship expanded rapidly around North America. It became global soon after the creation of the internet.

As time passed, church leaders felt pressure to respond to the needs of homosexual Adventists. In 1976, a series of articles in *Insight* proclaiming that victory over homosexuality through faith was possible drew a large pile of letters from young people seeking help. The author was Colin Cook, a former pastor who had been fired when he was found to be gay. Distraught, he had sought spiritual healing for his unwelcome drives and had eventually married. He held himself up as proof of what he advocated, and responded to the interest by distributing ten hours of tapes under the title “Homosexuality and the Power to Change.” In another contribution to *Insight*, in 1980, he estimated that there were between ten and twenty thousand homosexuals within the Adventist Church in the United States alone, and chastised the church for failing to foster ministries to help these members.

The First Kinship Kampmeeting

The membership and leadership of SDA Kinship was initially concentrated in Southern California. However, towards the end of 1979 its members decided to sponsor a national “Kampmeeting” the next summer, and invited me to a meeting in Los Angeles to help plan it. I found a group of gay men who were much like me; they were uncertain whether God accepted them, their guilt and self-hatred had made it difficult to form a relationship with another man even after marriages had failed, and this had

resulted in promiscuity and loneliness. The church had no answers for us, for no Adventist biblical scholar had researched our issue, and its rejection of us was based on proofreading a few isolated “clobber texts” that had not been examined in historical context. Since we were closeted and anyone discovered was disfellowshipped, the church leaders knew almost nothing about our lives, or how important our faith was to us.

I suggested that we invite the best Adventist scholars we could find, and leading pastors also, to minister to us at the Kampmeeting. I got the job of recruiting them, even though I knew no suitable candidates at that time. I recruited the heads of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Theology departments in the Seminary, the pastor of Sligo Church, and the only woman pastor in the church at that time. I asked each of the Seminary professors to tell us whether God would accept gays and lesbians as Christians; all said that would be something new for them to explore, but they were eager to do so. Each initially thought that he could slip away to the Kampmeeting without seeking

permission, but, when the Seminary professors discovered that three of them were coming, they realized that they would need permission. Jim Cox, the chair of the New Testament department, contacted



On January 10, 1976, Kinship was founded at a meeting in Palm Desert, California, as a result of an ad placed by two gay Adventist men. Within four months, Kinship had 75 members, a temporary chairperson, and four committees

Neal Wilson, president of the GC, who responded sympathetically. (It turned out that he had a gay brother and at least one other gay person in his extended family.) He sent Duncan Eva, his special assistant, to meet with Jim and me at La Guardia Airport in New York City. The church leadership had at last taken a step towards addressing our situation.

During the negotiations, Eva said to me: “You have approached us; it is the responsibility of the church to reach out to you.” However, he insisted on two conditions: Kinship could not use the participation of clergy as an opportunity to claim in the press that the GC had accepted homosexuality; and Colin Cook, whose claim to be able to help homosexuals change their sexual orientations was attracting favorable attention among church leaders, should be added to the five invited. In return, the GC

would pay the fares of all six. The scholars were expected to submit a written report afterwards.

About forty gay and lesbian Adventists attended the Kampmeeting in Arizona. The most emotional experience there was telling, and listening to, personal narratives, which were dubbed “the horror stories.” One person after another told of the isolation each had felt because almost all had been convinced that he or she was the only gay Adventist in the world; of years of unavailing struggle and unanswered prayer for a miracle that would make them heterosexual; of overwhelming guilt and self-rejection; of consequent difficulty in establishing relationships; of promiscuous patterns and more guilt; of rejection by their families and estrangement from their congregations. Since they had been taught that it was impossible to be both Christian and gay, but had found themselves irretrievably gay, they had despaired because they assumed that they were eternally lost: some had been told that homosexuality was the unpardonable sin. Many told of being bullied, some of being attacked. Some told how deep depression had led to suicide attempts. Almost everyone had found no one within the church to whom they could turn for help; those who had sought counseling there had met platitudes, such as, “It’s only a phase. Pray about it, date a girl, and get married—everything will turn out all right.” But the stories of those who had married were especially poignant, with guilt and defeat within their marriage relationships and sorrow over ultimate estrangement from their children.

The biblical scholars concluded, as a result of their study in advance of the Kampmeeting, that the Bible was silent about persons with a homosexual orientation and that the little it said there was directed to heterosexuals involved in pagan fertility rites or having same-sex fun on the side. They were deeply moved by the personal

stories they heard. They argued that homosexuals, like heterosexuals, were called to faithfulness within a committed relationship and to chastity outside of such a relationship. The biblical proscriptions were also the same for homosexuals as for heterosexuals: sexual exploitation, promiscuity, rape, and temple prostitution. Wilson may not have anticipated such an accepting response.

These scholars also drew up recommendations for the church leadership. However, these were forgotten when the attention of the church focused on the aftermath of the firing of Dr. Desmond Ford after his trial, held at Glacier View, CO, the week following the Kampmeeting, and were buried when a letter campaign, orchestrated by a right-wing publication, queried whether the participation of GC-sponsored clergy in a homosexual “kampmeeting” indicated that the denomination had “accepted homosexuality.” At its Spring Council in 1981, the church leaders explicitly rejected Kinship:

The problem of homosexuality in the church was discussed, emphasizing the need to help those who are enslaved by this perversion to find deliverance . . . It is not possible for the church to condone practicing homosexuals . . . The efforts of the church must be focused on individuals, rather than groups, who desire help and deliverance . . . We cannot negotiate with organized groups who refer to themselves as SDA gays and lesbians, and we cannot establish “diplomatic relations” with corporations which in the minds of most people, would be considered as recognition and official endorsement of a deviant philosophy and lifestyle. Counsel will be sought as to what appropriate action can be taken to prevent such groups from using the name of the church.

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Estrangement

A series of mailings that Kinship sent to college administrators, teachers, students, and pastors caused heartburn among many Adventists. The *Adventist Review* explained that Kinship was not associated with the church in an editorial titled “The Church and the Homosexual.” Church administrators also set out to add a statement on homosexuality to the *Church Manual*. The new statement, which was voted at the 1985 General Conference Session, for the first time labeled these “practices” as unacceptable and a basis for discipline.

In a further effort to distance the church from Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, the GC demanded in 1985 that Kinship remove the name of the church from its name. We refused, for it was seeing that name when we marched in gay pride parades that brought Adventists on the sidewalks running to us for information. Our Adventist roots and identity were central to the reasons for our existence and ministry. But the church leaders interpreted our use of the denominational name as “dragging it in the mud.” We waited nervously for the other shoe to drop, for the GC had registered “Seventh-day Adventist” as a trade name with the US Patent and Trademark Office in 1981.

Colin Cook and the Quest Learning Center

Church leaders were much more comfortable with the approach of Colin Cook, a self-described “recovered homosexual,” who had founded the Quest Learning Center in late 1980. His program, which proclaimed “deliverance from homosexuality,” brought homosexuals together in Reading, Pennsylvania, for counseling and involvement in a support group called Homosexuals Anonymous [HA]. Within a few months, the General Conference and Columbia Union opted to fund Quest and provided more than half of its budget. The Adventist Church thus became the first denomination to fund a “change ministry” for homosexuals.

Church periodicals provided the Quest-HA program with extensive publicity within Adventism, presenting it as the answer to homosexuality. Adventist pastors and counselors in Adventist schools began to recommend that anyone who came to them with a homosexual issue contact Quest. *Ministry*, the church’s publication for ministers, featured a long interview with Cook in an issue distributed free to thousands of clergy from other

denominations. As Quest grew, it attracted a great deal of attention from both the press and TV and radio talk shows and drew endorsements from conservative clergy of other denominations. Adventist leaders basked in the favorable publicity.

The Adventist Church never conducted a study of the impact of the program on counselees, nor did it even require a written report before extending funding. It ignored Kinship’s informed questions and listened only to the glowing reports of Cook and to orchestrated testimonies from counselees who were still in the midst of their time at Quest. It failed to understand that the reported healings were claimed by faith rather than achieved in experience. Church leaders eagerly extended funding when Cook and his wife appeared hand-in-hand before the Annual Council of the church leaders: Cook became their representative “ex-gay.”

The denominational role in financing and publicizing the Quest program helped make church members more conscious of homosexual Adventists. Three articles published by *Spectrum* in the spring of 1982 had a similar effect. These reported in detail on the 1980 Kampmeeting, recounted ten of the personal stories shared there, and, in order to provide “balanced” coverage, provided Cook with an opportunity to describe the Quest program. The arrest of the president of Andrews University in 1983 and of an associate pastor of the Takoma Park Church near the GC headquarters the following year, both on vice charges, brought further awareness. The sense of church leaders that they were under scrutiny made them more eager to proclaim the success of their program in changing sexual orientations and more careful to avoid appearing as if they were accepting of homosexuals.

When Cook conducted a weekend seminar at a NYC church in 1984 I attended it, and found his claims of healing unbelievable. I decided it was necessary to interview a sample of people who had been through his program as part of the study of global Adventism that I was preparing to launch. I interviewed fourteen Quest participants in 1985 and 1986. I found that they were fragile, very conservative church members, with high levels of guilt and self-rejection: Quest, the church-endorsed program for “recovery,” was their only hope.

But Quest turned out to be a nightmare experience for them—one that they did not describe in their testimonies

before church leaders. Suddenly, they had found that they were no longer the only homosexual Adventists in the world: isolation was replaced by community, a community under stress because its members were trying to change their orientation and yet were often sexually attracted to one another. The immediate result was confusion, turmoil, and considerable sexual contact. Their confusion was greatly increased when they discovered that a regular feature of counseling sessions was massage from Cook with both counselor and counselee naked, sexual arousal, and repeated sexual advances. None of the interviewees reported that his sexual orientation had changed, nor did any of them know anyone who had changed. Indeed, eleven of the fourteen had come to accept their homosexuality.

I had thought Quest's claims and testimonies of "healing from homosexuality" hard to believe, so I was not surprised to discover that the testimonies I had heard were not real. However, I was taken aback by the evidence that Cook had sexually used and abused almost every counselee. Realizing that I had a moral obligation to report such abuse, I wrote to GC President Wilson in October 1986, telling him what I had found. To try to ensure that he would not ignore my letter,

I sent copies to twenty-nine other church leaders and academics. Cook admitted that my findings were correct and was removed within a week. Church leaders decided shortly afterwards to close the Quest counseling program, but to continue support for Homosexuals Anonymous chapters.

The Adventist press initially ignored the closing of Quest and the removal of its director, so that the widespread image of the program as *the* solution to the problem of homosexuality remained uncorrected. Eventually, I asked the editor of the *Adventist Review* about

this omission, and he responded with a "newsbreak" announcing merely that Quest had been closed because of the resignation of Colin Cook as its director. Ironically, the same issue included a full-page advertisement urging Adventists to subscribe to the *Review* with the heading, "It's my church. I want an honest picture of what's going on." In September 1987, eleven months after the situation was disclosed, *Ministry* published another long interview with Cook which, although indicating that there had been

improprieties, strongly endorsed Cook's methods as the answer to homosexuality and announced (in a photo caption apparently left in by mistake) that he would "soon resume leading seminars for recovery by homosexuals." By December, Cook had recovered enough confidence to announce, in a report addressed to Wilson and copied to forty others, that he had launched Quest II and was working with his first two counselees.

In 1989, an article by Cook appeared in the Evangelical publication *Christianity Today*, trumpeting how he had "found freedom" from homosexuality. Cook was beginning to find new sources of support among Evangelicals and, ultimately, the religious right, which, because of its frequent attacks on homosexuals, sorely needed a

"solution" to showcase. In 1993, Cook moved to Denver, where he founded a new ministry, FaithQuest. This grew and became prominent thanks to close alliances with organizations such as James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Cook also reappeared once again on national television on the *Phil Donohue Show*. He spoke frequently at Adventist churches in Denver and spoke at a series of meetings at PUC. These opportunities in Adventist circles emerged because of the failure of the church to inform Adventists of his fall. Consequently, young Adventists troubled by their homosexual desires continued to contact him for help.

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My interest in Cook and his ministries was rekindled when two of his new counselees brought their new painful stories to my attention. They had discovered that the would-be healer was still a sexual predator, and had learned about my earlier role in unmasking him via the Adventist grapevine. Consequently, I set out to research Cook's activities in Denver, and confirmed their stories about him. In an endeavor to prevent further abuse, I provided the results of my research to the religion reporter at the *Denver Post*, who then carried out a full investigation of her own, and published a front-page story. This then forced the religious right to back off. FaithQuest and Cook largely disappeared from view while the furor subsided. The Adventist Church announced that it was not connected to Cook's seminars and counseling activities. Meanwhile, Cook was greatly hampered because his wife, who had separated from him earlier, then divorced him. Shortly afterward, he happened to ask a female researcher, whom he did not realize was a friend of mine, for help in finding a replacement. He explained that he needed a wife to give his program legitimacy.

General Conference vs. SDA Kinship

In December 1987, the General Conference filed a suit against Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. in the US District Court for the Central District of California for "breach of trademark." Because the suit had to be shaped to address commercial law, it did not even mention that Kinship members are homosexual and Adventist: its case had to be shaped in terms of unfair commercial competition. Its brief consequently made the absurd claims that by using the name Seventh-day Adventist or its acronym as part of its name, competition from Kinship's newsletter was undermining the church's publishing empire and that Adventists were likely to contribute heavily to Kinship, mistaking it for the church's official tithe/offering conduit. However, the accompanying press release, titled "Church Moves Against Homosexual Support Group," made it clear that the GC was rejecting Adventist homosexuals and the ministry of Kinship. In addition to seeking to compel Kinship to change its name, the suit also demanded "exemplary, punitive, and treble" monetary damages.

This Goliath-versus-David suit was poorly timed from the church's point of view, for it coincided with the

media's belated discovery of the Quest scandal and the filing of a suit against the church by abused counselees. Although the latter suit was independent of Kinship, the press drew all these issues together, which resulted in considerable negative publicity for the church.

In filing this suit against an organization with fewer than one thousand members, church leaders expected an easy pushover. The GC hired two major law firms to present its case, at an admitted cost of more than \$200,000. However, it failed to take the strength of the gay movement into account: the case was accepted by National Gay Rights Advocates, which arranged for Fullbright and Jaworski, a major legal firm, to defend Kinship on a *pro bono* basis. Depositions were taken in the fall of 1990, and the case was argued in the federal court in Los Angeles in February 1991. I was one of those deposed and one of two Kinship leaders called to give evidence in court. The legal proceedings were traumatic for us: it was hard not to feel estranged from the church that was attacking us. Since the lawyer who deposed me, Douglas Welebir, was an Adventist, I suggested we begin with prayer. He ignored the suggestion. However, in its verdict, which was announced in October, the court rejected the suit, thus allowing Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International Inc. to keep its full name.

In her opinion, Judge Mariana Pfaelzer pointed out that the term Seventh-day Adventist has a dual meaning, applying to the church structure, but also to adherents of the religion. She found that the Seventh-day Adventist religion pre-dated the Seventh-day Adventist Church; that the uncontested use of the name by schismatic groups such as the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement indicated that it does more than suggest membership in the mother church; and that, as used by Kinship, the name merely describes that organization in terms of what it is, an international organization of Seventh-day Adventists. Consequently, she found that "as used by SDA Kinship, the terms 'Seventh-day Adventist,' and its acronym 'SDA' are generic, and are not entitled to trademark protection." Left with no good grounds on which to appeal the decision, and advised to avoid the risk of a more devastating loss in a higher court, the GC chose not to appeal this result.

The fact that a group of gays and lesbians could continue to identify themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, and that nothing could be done about this, continued

to irritate church leaders. After the verdict, Kinship approached the GC, suggesting that enmities be forgotten and communication begin concerning such common problems as HIV/AIDS. However, the GC spurned Kinship's overtures. The church press also persisted in referring to "Kinship International" rather than "Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International."

Church Statements and Political Involvement

The 1985 GC Session amended the *Church Manual*, for the first time, to refer to homosexuality: "Adultery, homosexuality and lesbianism are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan." In 1987, the Annual Council voted "A Statement of Concern on Sexual Behavior": "adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behavior . . . Sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan." It was extremely hurtful to LGBT Adventists to find themselves listed in such company.

In the years that followed, the GC issued several statements focusing on gay-related issues. In 1994, when President Robert Folkenberg learned that Mitchell Tyner, a GC staff member, had been invited to minister at a Kampmeeting, he issued this statement:

HOMOSEXUAL GATHERINGS – SPEAKING INVITATIONS. In view of the fact that homosexual behavior is clearly contrary to biblical teachings, Church beliefs, . . . and in order to avoid the appearance of giving the sanction of the Church to such behavior, it was VOTED, to request all General Conference personnel to decline invitations to speak to gatherings of homosexuals.

This response indicated that church administrators had not caught up with the interpretations of the so-called "clobber texts" by biblical scholars. Because Tyner saw the need to support and minister, he participated in the Kampmeeting for the whole week.

In 1996, the GC Administrative Committee voted "An Affirmation of Marriage," which reminded homosexual Adventists that their only acceptable option was celibacy.

In 1999, as gay issues came increasingly to the fore in political debate and court cases, the Annual Council voted a new "Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality" that was more sweeping and negative than the one added to the *Church Manual* in 1985. This was revised in 2012:

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation . . . Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden; . . . For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships. . . . we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

As the new millennium dawned, Adventism became directly involved in the raging political debates. In February 2000, the president of the Pacific Union and his Religious Liberty specialist published articles in the union paper urging Californian members to support Proposition 22, which was designed to insure that California need not recognize same-sex marriages when and if they became legal in other states. Alan Reinach, the Religious Liberty director, added, "We need not sit on the sidelines on this issue, assuring ourselves that Adventists avoid political issues. . . . We can assist in efforts to educate our neighbors, and to get the word out, as well as urging our own church members to vote." Reinach became much more frequent and virulent in his statements than his counterparts at the GC. In May 2000, as Vermont was in the process of adopting legislation that recognized civil unions between same-sex couples, officials of the Atlantic Union and the North New England Conference raised their voices in opposition to it. Similarly, when courts in Canada began to move towards recognizing same-sex marriages, the Religious Liberty director there declared that "Adventists have a responsibility to make their voices heard on this issue."

In April 2003, Reinach opposed legislation in California



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that would have required organizations supplying goods and services to the state to provide the same benefits to domestic partners as to married couples because it did not exempt Christian organizations. He launched a petition against the bill and requested that churches make announcements urging that members sign it. Adventists were allied with Mormons, Protestant Fundamentalists, many Pentecostals, conservative Catholics, and other elements of the religious right in their stance. Their opposition failed.

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court had shocked such Adventist officials when, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, it overturned a Texas sodomy statute on the grounds that it did not treat homosexual and heterosexual persons equally. When Canada added disparagement of “sexual orientation” to its list of hate crimes, the *Adventist News Network* reported that pastors there were afraid that their preaching against homosexuality could result in them falling afoul of the law.

After the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court legalized same-sex marriage there in 2004, Reinach attacked the ruling and suggested that Adventists support legislation designed to override that decision. Adventists committed to the long-held position of separation between

church and state saw such statements as a remarkable change in the church’s position.

Meanwhile, a number of cities had begun to perform same-sex marriages, attracting a great deal of attention from the media. These developments, together with the growing number of nations considering the legalization of same-sex unions, led the GC Administrative Committee in March 2004 to issue a “Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions – A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage.” This restated the church’s narrow position on homosexuality.

The official positions announced by church leaders became narrower and more polarizing over time. Although they often declared that all people, including homosexuals, are children of God and that abuse, scorn, and derision aimed at them were unacceptable, the dominant tone was an insistence that gay and lesbian Adventists lead celibate lives.

In 2008, when the Mormon Church secretly funded the campaign supporting Proposition 8, which temporarily ended same-sex marriage in California, Reinach, the Religious Liberty director in the Pacific Union, was outspoken in his support of it. However, a

web-based group organized by religion teachers at Loma Linda and La Sierra universities put forward a petition opposing the measure. This created a stir, for it was new and unexpected. Reinach scrambled to launch an opposing petition. The GC, under President Jan Paulson, chose to stay out of the issue.

In 2010, Ted Wilson, the son of Neal Wilson, became president of the GC. Knowing that he would garner little support from the developed world, he had used his travel in the developing world during the previous year to attract support there by voicing opposition to the ordination of women and to accepting homosexual members. Once elected, it became clear that his opposition was to sexually active homosexuals, including any living in committed relationships.

In 2012 the GC Executive Committee voted a statement on same-sex unions:

The institutions of marriage and family are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart . . . Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word . . . God's Word that transcends time and culture does not permit a homosexual lifestyle.

In 2015, the Adventist Seminary approved this statement: "All persons, including practicing homosexuals, should be made to feel welcome to attend our churches, while non-practicing gay persons should be welcomed into membership and church office." Soon afterwards, the North American Division [NAD,] at its annual meeting, voted a statement that made the same distinction that any LGBT Adventist could be a member and hold any church office including that of elder, provided that he/she was not sexually active: "those with same-sex orientation, who conform to biblical teachings about sexual behavior, may fully participate in the life of the Adventist Church." The statement also insisted that "Seventh-day Adventist

Church employees are not to officiate, perform, or have an active, participatory role in same-sex wedding ceremonies." These rules were especially likely to impact Adventists living in committed relationships, while those remaining closeted and having promiscuous sex with passing strangers were much less likely to attract attention. The position adopted was likely, then, to encourage the kind of behavior foreign to biblical principles.

In 2017, the GC finally issued a rather confusing "Statement on Transgenderism." This recognized a "contemporary trend . . . to reject the biblical gender binary (male and female) and replace it with a growing spectrum of gender types." However, it warned that

the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices . . . God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. . . . As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. . . . [However] because the Bible regards humans as wholistic entities and does not differentiate between biological sex and gender identity, the Church strongly cautions transgender people against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone such a procedure.

The Adventist Church's attitude towards its LGBT members should be understood as part of a larger trend toward fundamentalism in society that it is in tune with. It is part of the larger picture of societal polarization in many countries, including the US. Religion itself is seen increasingly as allied with the political right; in the US, Evangelicals are perhaps the most fervent segment of President Donald Trump's base. Moreover, hope for change based on the far more accepting attitudes of younger generations is diluted by the fact that these same generations are far less likely to be attracted to organized religion. Many churches in the NAD have no millennials attending, leaving conservative members of older generations in total control.

In March 2014, GC President Ted Wilson sponsored a “summit,” *In God’s Image: Scripture, Sexuality and Society*, in Capetown, South Africa. This was the first conference on this topic ever called by the official church. A presentation by speakers from “Coming Out” Ministries, who endorse the official church position that the only acceptable homosexual is a celibate homosexual (see below), was highlighted; they were also the only LGBT people invited to attend. Wilson showed that sexual orientation was for him a very negative issue. However, although some of the presentations were very negative towards LGBT people, Wilson could not control all the speakers. This conference brought the issue to the forefront; it was a significant moment for the Adventist Church.

Adventist Ministries to Homosexuals

In 1995, Pacific Press published *My Son, Beloved Stranger*, which recounted the story of a mother’s distress on realizing that her son was gay and the events that followed. The mother, Carrol Grady, was well known in the church, for she was married to a pastor and both had worked at the GC for years. Although she initially published under a pseudonym, the book resulted in invitations for her to speak at Adventist meetings and to publish articles in church-related magazines. Her experience with her son had led her to realize that Adventist parents of gay or lesbian children had nowhere to turn for support. She started a newsletter, *Someone to Talk To . . .*, in 1996, and a support group by the same name for families and friends of Adventist gays and lesbians in 1999; she launched a



website in 2000. When Grady decided to retire from her post after twenty years at the helm, she passed the baton to a pastor and wife who were parents of a transgender daughter.



A variety of “change ministries” promoting celibacy for gay Adventists emerged around the end of the millennium. The most prominent has been “Coming Out” Ministries (COM), formed in 2010 by three men with LGBT pasts. A fourth person, a woman, joined them sometime later. Their approach is to share their personal stories with those “struggling with sexuality, identity, or brokenness,” and to present Jesus “as the source of hope, healing, and lasting victory.” They state that they reject “reparative therapy,” but they do hold up the possibility of becoming heterosexual and marrying—which has been achieved by one of the four speakers; however, their main thrust is towards celibacy.

COM conducts meetings in Adventist churches and academies, where its speakers tell their own stories, which feature wild promiscuity and involvement in drugs and alcohol. These personal histories are portrayed as typical of all LGBT people. In a presentation in Asheville, NC, in 2018, I found them out of touch with the diversity of LGBT people and the behavioral trends among them over time, and therefore both false and offensive. In the two academies near Asheville, attendance by students was made compulsory; the LGBT students were so distressed by the experience that some were reported to have become suicidal.

COM was embraced by the Ted Wilson GC administration, for its message is in tune with his. They

[COM] state that they reject “reparative therapy,” but they do hold up the possibility of becoming heterosexual and marrying—which has been achieved by one of the four speakers; however, their main thrust is towards celibacy.

were the only “LGBT” people featured at the GC-sponsored 2014 global conference on homosexuality in South Africa, which was attended by 350 delegates from all divisions of the world church. It has also been embraced by other conservative Adventist-related organizations such as the television network, 3ABN. “Journey Interrupted,” a documentary released in 2016 that also tells their stories, received the imprimatur of the GC when it was shown at Fall Council in September 2016. It has since been shown widely, such as at the GYC convention in December 2016, the NAD Ministerial Convention in January 2017, the Adventist Seminary in March 2017, and in several other countries.

The stories of the three older men featured in this group reflect the experience of some gay men, several decades ago: they were closeted, promiscuous, self-hating, and involved with alcohol and illegal drugs. I had a real problem with their presentation of this as the typical gay experience in an era where many LGBT couples, especially Christian couples, now form monogamous, committed relationships, and marry legally. However, the ill-informed church leaders evidently want to believe that their biographies are still a truthful depiction of the lives of LGBT Adventists.

COM has lost two of its speakers recently. I was told that one of the founders resigned because he failed to maintain a celibate record; the woman also resigned for “personal reasons.” Consequently, the COM website now offers only two speakers, and the organization has lost credibility. They found that marrying their beliefs to last-generation perfectionism was not sustainable.

I was given the information about a COM founder having had a sexual “fall” in an interview. Since I was not sure to what extent this had been publicized, I thought hard before deciding to mention it. I decided that if one of the COM founders can no longer say he has been celibate, that is relevant for people to know. It is obvious to me that for such a gay person, even a senior, trying desperately to be celibate is asking a lot of oneself, and that proclaiming one’s celibacy as an example to lure others to that path must increase the pressure. So I feel for him. But I, and lots of others, were oppressed by hearing their testimony and their judgment on our lives. I know from my own history that asking God again and again to help us to change orientation or be celibate, and then

failing again and again, and hating ourselves as a result, is a truly miserable experience. When I found love it was an enormous blessing—I understood God better as a result, for God is love. My years of unsuccessful prayer to be changed, from age 18-34—a total of 16 years!—were torture. Instead of trying to set up untold numbers of similar trajectories among Adventist youth, the church should let us show them how to create loving, committed relationships and to use those as examples of similar relationships with Jesus. The COM message, which it proclaims with GC backing, that being celibate is the only way an LGBT person can please God, is abusive.

During these decades, SDA Kinship grew more rapidly than previously, both in North America and internationally. Its total membership in January 2020 stood at 3,311 in 79 countries; 2,033 (61.4%) of these were in North America. Kinship supports committed relationships among its members, and its meetings and activities provide opportunities for gay and lesbian Adventists to meet one another and pursue such relationships. It also nurtures, without judging, all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed persons who approach it. Most members are Adventist or of Adventist background, with most of its non-Adventist members being partners of Adventists. Kinship’s spiritual message, which has often brought encouragement and healing to homosexuals who felt estranged from God and rejected by their church, is that God loves and accepts them the way they are. Its worship services at Kampmeeting are moving experiences, for not only are the sermons addressed directly to their needs, but they are the only services where many of its members feel welcomed.

The Adventist Press

The official church periodicals were largely silent about homosexuality until the 1990s, apart from the earlier articles in the youth magazine, *Insight*, by Colin Cook, and those in *Ministry*, publicizing and then attempting to rehabilitate him. However, some magazines that were addressed to particular audiences became more willing to publish articles that addressed homosexuality and related issues. While a few broadened the issues addressed, all stayed within the official behavioral guidelines of the church.

In 1992, *Insight* published a major article, “Redeeming

“Could I go to your church? Would they be like you?”
She reported that she replied: “No, Jed, my church
isn’t ready for you yet.”

Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality,” authored by Christopher Blake, its editor. Blake admitted that the church should have issued a public apology following the collapse of the Quest Learning Center and that it had not moved ahead with any other approach to help gay and lesbian church members. In many respects, the article represented an advance in understanding, especially in its sections titled “Nobody Chooses to Be Homosexual,” “‘Gay Bashing’ Is Never Acceptable, Especially for Christians,” “Many Fears about Homosexuality Are Irrational,” “Homosexuals Are Not by Nature Necessarily Promiscuous or Child Molesters,” “Changing One’s Homosexual Orientation Is Difficult and Rare,” and “Homosexuals Can Be Genuine, Model Christians.” However, the article defined such model Christians as those who “battle against their orientation all their lives” because “homosexual activity is sinful” and cannot be condoned.

Insight published several more articles dealing with homosexuality in subsequent years, but these were much less adventurous and were careful not to contravene the official church position.

An article by a mother of a gay son writing under a pseudonym appeared in *Women of Spirit* in 2000. She told of traveling to meet her son’s partner for the first time and of finding herself eating with three gay guys and a lesbian, who unexpectedly asked her about her faith and church. Warming to her responses, one commented that he knew little about Christianity, but would like to learn more. He then asked, “Could I go to your church? Would they be like you?” She reported that she replied: “No, Jed, my church isn’t ready for you yet.”

In November 1996, *Ministry*, the periodical addressed to Adventist clergy, published an issue that addressed the question “What do homosexuals need from a pastor?” All articles stayed within the officially recommended

behavioral guidelines for homosexuals. The lead article stated that it was essential to recognize the difference between orientation and behavior and urged that pastors and churches “be both prophetically clear and genuinely compassionate”; that is, it held that sexual orientation was probably fixed, but LGBT Adventists should choose to be celibate.

As the issue of same-sex marriage became politically prominent in the United States, the tone of some articles in church publications became much more strident. In October 2003, for example, Roy Adams, published an editorial in the *Adventist Review*, the “official church paper.” Titled “Marriage under Siege,” it referred to “the concerted push for full acceptance by a well-heeled, well-financed homosexual lobby, the media falling all over itself to push the agenda.” After listing the overturning of the Texas anti-sodomy law and the acceptance of same-sex marriage by the Netherlands and Belgium and its advance through the courts in Canada and Massachusetts, it posed the question, “What is to be our stance as a Church?” Declaring that “the spiritual crisis of the last days” was here, that we were seeing “a brazen, deliberate, concerted attack on the three foundational pillars of the book of Genesis: Creation, Sabbath, and . . . marriage,” Adams asserted that in spite of the historic embrace of the separation of church and state by Adventists, “Silence is not an option. The stakes are too high . . . This is the time for faith communities to speak out.”

In 2004, an issue of *Liberty* set a similar tone. This was surprising, given that the publication’s historic purpose was to promote religious freedom and, in the United States, the separation of church and state.

In contrast, the progressive Adventist independent periodicals, *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*, together with their websites, played very different and significant roles. During the 1980s, *Spectrum* informed its readers about

the emergence of the gay civil rights movement within Adventism and the response of the church. It covered SDA Kinship's first Kampmeeting in detail, the approach of the church-funded "change ministry" and its collapse amid scandal, the impact of HIV/AIDS on gay Adventists in North America, and the failure of the suit brought by the GC against Kinship. In 2008, it completed an ambitious and important project: the publication of the book *Christianity and Homosexuality:*

Some Seventh-day Adventist

Perspectives. This told stories of LGBT Adventists and of their parents, discussed biomedical, ethical, and social science perspectives, including a history of the evolution of Adventist responses to its LGBT members, and presented discussions by Adventist biblical and theological scholars that were very different from the official church understanding. In the new century, both *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* and their websites broadened their coverage considerably, opening the door to an understanding of the lives and problems of LGBT Adventists, including those who are transgender and intersexed. Both became supportive of treating them as brothers and sisters. They also covered the findings of major

studies detailing how Adventist families have responded to their LGBT children, and significant theological pieces helping people to understand the real meaning of the few biblical texts usually invoked against them. They have also challenged Adventists to treat LGBT Adventists as Christ would. *Spectrum* has published a total of forty-seven LGBT-related articles, twenty-three since 2000, and its website over eighty, all in the latter period; *Adventist Today* has published twenty-nine articles in just the last four years.

Adventist Schools and Colleges

Teenage LGBT students are often bullied at school. As I have prepared to write about Adventist education, I have found myself wondering about the extent to which the amount and kind of bullying in Adventist schools differs from that in secular schools. Even though I was 6-foot-plus tall by the time I was 13, I was bullied at my secular school and called names like faggot even before I was anywhere near dealing with that issue personally; the bullies sensed

that I was different and not inclined to fight back physically, and acted accordingly. I have wondered whether there is more or less of such bullying at Adventist schools, and whether the possibility of seeing LGBT or potentially-LGBT students as sinners as well as different would change the dynamics. I posed questions concerning this topic on gay-friendly Adventist-related sites on Facebook, seeking data, and received a bunch of replies. A number of these suggested that many of the LGBT persons responding had experienced less bullying at Adventist schools—perhaps because the students all knew one another as a result of the small size of those schools. Some reported more trouble from administrators/teachers: for example, some who refused to write positive references for

PUC was the first college to have a gay support group among students, in the late 1980s. . . .

There are currently LGBT-related organizations on seven NAD campuses, where they seem to be of great importance to the members. Three of these have official recognition, and the others function without harassment.

students who appeared as if they might be LGBT. When respondents could report on the situation of current students, their comments suggested that it had changed more recently; many public schools now recognize and support their LGBT students, and there are gay-straight alliances and other support for them there. However, this is not true in Adventist academies; evidence was put forward suggesting that the sin issue has become more important there in recent years: "When I was (a teacher and counselor) at small Adventist schools, the kids who came out as LGBT were picked on mercilessly."

By the mid-1990s, Adventist colleges had moved away from witch hunts focused on suspected gay students to policies of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” In part, this was because they had become more accustomed to the presence of known gay students within their student bodies. Another ingredient was their increasing need to maximize tuition income. Students found in compromising situations, however, are still likely to face discipline, although expulsion is now rare.

PUC was the first college to have a gay support group among students, in the late 1980s. This garnered help from the pastor of the campus church and several faculty. Walla Walla, what was then CUC, and La Sierra followed during the 1990s. All depended on the presence of students with the courage to act. The visibility and indeed the very existence of each group rose and fell as active students graduated and newcomers became involved.

During the 1980s and 1990s, students who were openly LGBT on campuses faced a lot of negative responses from other students. However, as homosexual issues became politically prominent in the new century, and as courts made decisions recognizing same-sex marriage, other students became more supportive, and many saw these issues as the major human rights issues of this time. The result was the emergence of a new kind of organization, gay-straight alliances, on some Adventist NAD campuses.

There are currently LGBT-related organizations on seven NAD campuses, where they seem to be of great importance to the members. Three of these have official recognition, and the others function without harassment. Members from each campus meet annually, usually at Kinship’s Kampmeeting. In very recent years, the climate for LGBT students has improved greatly on most campuses, with support from faculty and often tacit support from administrators. However, a few administrators have tried to block the formation of groups on the remaining campuses, ostensibly to be in support of the denomination. The dynamics at La Sierra University [LSU] have been representative of those at several campuses.

LGBT students at LSU created support groups starting in the early 1990s. Since their early iterations were not officially recognized, they were not permitted to meet on campus: instead, they met in the homes of supportive faculty members off-campus. They were also

hampered by not having access to the usual means used by other student clubs to publicize their activities. Since they depended on the presence of student leaders who had the courage to be open about their orientation, their existence was intermittent. While La Sierra was part of Loma Linda University in the 1970s and 1980s, it ignored the possibility that it had LGBT students. There was a lot of bullying, hate, and harassment of the LGBT students, especially in the men’s dormitories, but the college would not be accountable for mistreatment. The administration made a fuss in the later 1980s when the student paper published an ad from Kinship, making its phone number available to LGBT students needing help.

Once LSU separated from LLU, it became more open under the Guy and Geraty administrations, although this was always cautious and only really visible at an unofficial level. Nevertheless, many students continued to make homophobic remarks in classes, and the LSU chaplain was hostile to homosexuals. A new VP for Student Life, appointed in 1995, rewrote the Student Handbook in a much more LGBT-friendly fashion, but this was undone after 2000 on the initiative of the new Provost, Ella Simmonds. Meanwhile, however, the faculty had become more supportive; in 1995, over a hundred of them agreed to place their names on a list of faculty who were safe for LGBT students to talk with. At this time, a member of the Counseling department was important in publicizing a new unofficial LGBT support group among potential members. The Psychology department later took over and expanded this role. However, the Board of Trustees was seen as conservative, and some administrators also. The Student Life administration was unwilling to ask the Board to approve an LGBT support group, which was necessary to make it a legal student club.

In the early years of the new century, the attitude of the LSU student body began to change noticeably, because of both a new chaplain and societal changes. The LGBT students began to feel that they had many allies on campus, although some continued to be adamantly opposed to them. In 2011, LGBT students organized again, as Prism, and when they began the process of applying for formal recognition the student government voted in favor of this unanimously. However, the Student Life administration again refused to forward their application to the Board, thus again forcing the LGBT

support group to function unofficially. However, the group later gained the equivalent of official standing under the umbrella of the Psychology department. This made it organizationally more stable. Meanwhile, the presence of several LGBT faculty members and administrators has become more widely known, though not officially acknowledged, on campus.

The Adventist LGBT college students in the NAD came to regard the denial of their right to organize on their campuses as a discrimination problem that needed to be addressed. They also wanted to work together on problems faced by a significant number of Adventist LGBT students, such as rejection by their families when they came out to them or were discovered by them. In an attempt to address these issues more effectively, Rebbe Kern from LSU and Eliel Cruz from Andrews University founded the Inter-Collegiate GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) Coalition of LGBT groups (IAGC) at Adventist Colleges in 2011–12. Kinship worked with them, and it really took off. It began to train potential LGBT leaders on all the Adventist campuses, and several college administrations began to hold conversations with their campus LGBT group. The IAGC regarded the NAD statement issued in 2015, which stated that celibate homosexuals could be church members and hold any church office, as affirming their identity and giving the colleges permission to work with them. They used that interpretation to extend their contact with college/university administrations.

Meanwhile, at the two largest universities, Loma Linda [LLU] and Andrews [AU], both of which happen to be GC institutions, recent changes have been especially dramatic. These universities have been addressing such issues at a level far beyond the rest of the church, and, as such, have become social labs, working through things in advance of the denomination, and setting precedents en route.

Andrews University

In October 2009, Nicholas Miller, a Seminary professor, responding to the publication of *Christianity and Homosexuality* and its chapters by Adventist biblical scholars addressing the scriptural passages usually used to “bash” LGBT people, organized a “scholarly conference” on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church. Its focus was tightly theological. Those working with students at

Andrews University found its contents irrelevant to their LGBT students. In fact, the practical issues of how to respond to Adventist LGBT children were never addressed in those years.

In 2013–14, Jonathan Dorum, an AU freshman, described his feelings about being a gay student at AU:

I think one of the hardest times is when you’re just sitting in vespers or church and everything is fine . . . until the speaker says something negative about homosexuality and how wrong and sinful it is. Suddenly the people around you and the congregation echo their amens and you’ve never felt so small before. And then in the dorm and on campus people proudly proclaim their homophobic slurs/comments and your friends laugh along. You feel like no matter how good, how friendly, how Christ-like you try to be, no one will like you if they knew the real you. And then you truly feel alone.

The Capetown “summit” in 2014 had brought with it a call for continued conversation on the topic of LGBT Adventists. Spurred by this, AU14One, the unofficial Gay-Straight Alliance at Andrews University formed in 2013, proposed that its members tell their personal stories to other interested members of the student body, and the university administration agreed to sponsor “a conversation with LGBT students” on Sabbath afternoon, April 19, 2014. President Niels-Erik Andreasen explained that it was “important that we seek to offer compassion and support for all members of our community.” The session was opened by then-Provost Andrea Luxton and moderated by two faculty members. The university advertised the event as “a supportive environment where Andrews University LGBT students can honestly and safely share their stories.” The event was attended by over six hundred people. It garnered a lot of enthusiasm both on campus, where the student newspaper devoted an entire issue to it, and from LGBT alumni who had not had voices when they were students there. However, the university received pushback from conference presidents such as Jay Gallimore of Michigan.

A year later, the unofficial group wanted to raise money for a homeless shelter in Chicago for LGBT teens. (There

are high numbers of such teens because many are thrown out of their homes when they come out to their parents. Some of the LGBT students at AU have themselves had such an experience.) However, the AU administration became nervous and refused the request because the group was working with an LGBT organization in Chicago that used drag shows to raise money. It explained that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not support intimate LGBT relationships. Consequently, “Andrews University’s policies do not permit the raising of funds to support the work of agencies that advocate behaviors contrary to Adventist beliefs.” However, Eliel Cruz, the campus LGBT leader, who had excellent connections to the press, fought back by gaining press publicity for AU’s refusal to help the homeless. For example, the American edition of the respected British newspaper, *The Guardian*, published an article headlined, “Christian charities preach helping the less fortunate, unless you’re gay.” AU14One turned to crowdfunding to finance its project, collecting \$17,000, while the university was shamed in the press.

AU responded by establishing an LGBT Student Life Practice and Policies Taskforce, to address the difficult problem of how to operationalize the official position of the church on homosexuality, marriage, and same-sex unions in a way that provided compassionate care for LGBT students and prevented harassment of them. The concern for homeless LGBT youth resulted in a study by AU faculty that is examining the phenomenon of Adventist families who throw their LGBT children out after they have come out or been discovered by their parents.

In September 2016, Campus Pride, a national non-profit organization endeavoring to create safer college campuses for LGBT students, added AU to its Shame List, which calls out the “shameful acts of religion-based prejudice.” A key reason for this was the university’s refusal to allow an official LGBT group on campus. (The

unofficial group, like that earlier at La Sierra University, was not permitted to meet on campus or advertise to find others who may need help.) Ironically, this announcement came just in advance of the release of its *Framework for Relating to Sexual Orientation Differences on the Campus of Andrews University* by the Taskforce. While insisting that students refrain “from romantic behaviors between individuals of the same sex,” it recommended creating a safe, caring, and informed environment for LGBT students, and an

official campus organization designed to minister to their needs. In arriving at this recommendation, it took notice of the findings of a large study by faculty members that “a significant number of Adventist young adults who identify as LGBT have experienced a great deal of suffering and rejection from family members and faith communities.” Consequently, the university’s goal was to “engage these students spiritually and support them emotionally as they navigate their sexuality and/or gender identity.” The recommendation was approved

The Adventist LGBT college students in the NAD came to regard the denial of their right to organize on their campuses as a discrimination problem that needed to be addressed.

by the Board of Trustees in October 2017. The plan offered students confidentiality, so that they were not outing themselves in joining the organization. Meetings are run by two faculty members, and look rather like a counseling office. The formation of this organization did not remove the need for the unofficial gay-straight alliance; the two organizations cooperate so that their meetings do not clash. Meanwhile, the university is still working on how to respond to questions raised by transgender students.

Andrews University follows the GC in distinguishing between sexual orientation and sexual activity. However, since it is aware that this has not been recognized in key legal decisions, this may be a reason why its official statements do not indicate that it does not discriminate on the basis of orientation. Staff members who administer in the area of student life expressed frustration with the extent to which discussions in this area emphasize religious rights while neglecting biblical themes like hospitality,

neighborliness, Christian forbearance, and access. One summed up the current situation: “In practice, LGBT students on Adventist campuses are still often excluded and made to feel unwelcome. There is a long way to go before the institutional culture is successfully changed. Meanwhile, many LGBT students think of themselves as no longer Adventists before they graduate—because they do not see a place for themselves within their church.”

Loma Linda University

Loma Linda University, the site of the Adventist Medical School and other related programs, long had a reputation of being inhospitable to gay and lesbian students. This was especially so during the long administration of President Lyn Behrens. In September 2000, she told a local newspaper during an interview that faculty were fired and students expelled if caught or suspected of breaking the university rules banning homosexual conduct. Student records were marked that the dismissal was because of immorality, and they were not given supporting letters or help in finding other schools. In an August 2002 article in the *Adventist Review*, the LLU vice president for diversity, Leslie Pollard, reported being asked about the university’s position on sexual orientation after making a presentation on health care and diversity at a national conference. His answer had been “Loma Linda has one standard applicable to both hetero- and homosexual persons: celibacy before marriage; monogamy within marriage.” Since same-sex marriage was still illegal, he was in effect saying that only celibate homosexuals were acceptable. In response to another question, he added that Loma Linda did not knowingly hire practicing homosexuals or extend benefits to their partners.

During this time, university policies, reflected in the

rules listed in the student and faculty handbooks, omitted mention of sexual orientation or gender identity from the lists of categories of people who were protected from discrimination, abuse, or other mistreatment. Similarly, in the section that covered principles of conduct concerning the relationships students develop with their patients, the clause that proscribed “refusal to treat any patient for reason of . . .” also omitted those categories.

However, under the administration of the current president, Richard Hart, and especially over the last six years, Loma Linda University has become a much more welcoming environment for LGBT Adventists. This has been a complex process, in which several clusters of factors each played important parts.

The dramatic changes in American attitudes towards LGBT people over the last twenty years influenced court and legislative decisions and the questions raised at re-accreditation visits. Recognizing that its community included LGBT people, for it did not grill potential faculty members or students concerning their sexual orientations, LLU chose not to be out of step with the law or the communities it serves, and came to realize that following the example of Jesus meant caring for such marginalized groups also.

The personal commitment of several key administrators evolved over time, becoming very different from that of earlier administrations. Knowledge of the angst of LGBT friends, family members, and students, and a certainty that they too were children of God, led such administrators to become strongly committed to making LLU a truly welcoming campus. For example, a close friend of President Hart, dating back to academy and college, transitioned from man to woman in the 1990s. Without Hart’s commitment and zeal, the changes would probably not have been made at this time.

Staff members who administer in the area of student life expressed frustration with the extent to which discussions in this area emphasize religious rights while neglecting biblical themes like hospitality, neighborliness, Christian forbearance, and access.

LLU was proud because both its faculty and students were drawn from many countries and were racially and culturally diverse. Its commitment to diversity broadened over time to include sexual orientation and gender identity also.

A growing commitment to follow where scientific research they trusted took them had prepared LLU administrators to think of gender identity and sexual orientation as scientific rather than doctrinal issues; scientific research, especially Kerby Oberg's studies of fetal development, helped both administrators and students understand the complexity of sexual differentiation, and that sexual orientation is not a choice.

In recent years, the rules listed in the LLU Student Handbook have gradually become more protective and friendly towards LGBT people. Treatment stigmatizing or degrading a student because of sexual orientation was forbidden in the Student Mistreatment section by 2011. In 2013, the medical school moved ahead of the rest of the university in the policies distributed in the orientation package to incoming students by its Office of Student Affairs: "Any form of discrimination or harassment based on personal characteristics of race, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity will not be tolerated." This was the first mention in any LLU policy of gender identity. In 2014, the Student Handbook broadened the scope of Title IX: "Loma Linda University maintains a strict policy prohibiting discrimination and harassment based on personal characteristics of . . . sexual orientation, gender identity, . . ." However, the policies prohibiting same-sex sexual contact remained in force. The 2015 Handbook, which was published shortly after the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the nation was announced, removed the reference to homosexual sexual relations as being contrary to the ideals of the university and subject to disciplinary action. Sexual relations between same-sex couples had finally been accepted on campus within a marriage. The 2019 Handbook removed the statement that sexual relations within a committed heterosexual marriage were God's ideal.

During the years 2016–17, the process of changing LLU's attitudes towards LGBT people sped up. In May 2016, President Hart asked Dr. Jana Boyd, the newly hired director of the Employee and Student Assistance

Program, to be involved in working towards making the university a safe and affirming environment for LGBT students and faculty/staff. She created a resource site for LGBT information and materials, which involved meeting with LGBT persons on campus in order to ask them what resources were needed. She also began working with them towards creating an officially recognized LGBT support group.

Next, Hart invited a current transgender student, a former gay student, and a faculty member who is the mother of two gay children to tell their stories at meetings of the University Leadership Council, whose membership included most of the primary administrators and leaders. In September 2016, he made understanding LGBT people the theme of a Leadership Retreat.

In December 2016, the university had agreed to sponsor a Humanities Sabbath afternoon panel discussion on "Religion and the LGBT Community." After the meeting ended, some LGBT students and others gathered near the front, meeting and conversing with one another. This led to the formation of an unofficial LGBT club on campus. In mid-2017, Jana Boyd created an official LGBT support group, where students could discuss personal and campus issues. This was the first officially recognized LGBT group on any Adventist campus. In 2020, the LGBT club also gained official status.

Since LLU is a medical and health-related university, some of the research and teaching done there was immediately relevant to LGBT issues. For example, the research of Kerby Oberg on fetal development allowed him to speak with authority in a course about human development that discussed the developmental basis of intersexed persons, who have both male and female sexual organs, and also about the way sexual organs and brains develop and can get out of sync—a situation that can result in biological sex being discordant with a person's gender. Oberg showed that these variations could be biological, rather than theological, and therefore not a choice. LGBT students spoke enthusiastically about Oberg's classes, for the data presented had helped them understand and accept their sexual orientations.

In December 2016, Oberg addressed the NAD Symposium on Transgender People at Santa Barbara. After that, President Hart arranged for him to make presentations at LLU to the President's Leadership Council

and to a committee of the university's Board of Trustees in January 2017. In these presentations, Oberg provided evidence that gender identity could have a biological basis and as such would not be a choice, making it a medical rather than a theological issue. Hart also arranged for a transgender student to tell her story to the LLU Diversity Council, and for Oberg to speak after her, explaining the biological basis of reproduction. This had the effect of placing her story in scientific context.

President Hart devoted the issue of his letter to the campus, *Notes from the President*, distributed on February 2, 2017, to relating to LGBT people. This passage was highlighted:

It is critical that we understand, treat and support everyone we encounter, regardless of their hereditary, cultivated, assigned or self-assumed sexual identity. That is what we do as health professionals. It is what our code of conduct expects of us.

He continued:

My own interactions suggest that most LGBT individuals are not trying to stand out, or fly a flag—they are longing to be accepted as part of the human race and community they find themselves in . . . Christ Himself spent his time on earth reaching out to individuals who were marginalized during his day. . . . While the Bible doesn't give us a specific story about Jesus relating to an LGBT person, individuals under this umbrella would certainly fit into His lexicon of those deserving His compassion and care. The question of causation asked of Him about the blind man—"Who sinned, this man or his parents?"—seems very pertinent here. Christ's answer—"Neither, but to glorify God"—acknowledges his acceptance regardless of causation. . . . It seems to me that this is not a time for judgment, but rather a time for acceptance, a time for offering emotional support during a difficult journey.

There has subsequently been a remarkable shift in Loma Linda University's treatment of LGBT persons:

the meetings of the student LGBT groups are advertised on monitors throughout the campus; transsexual students have received gender-changing surgery and transitioned while training at the university; the university now has openly LGBT faculty members and is open to hiring same-sex couples. While this shift may have been initiated by the need to face accrediting agencies and to be in accordance with new California laws, key decision makers became personally invested in totally ending discrimination. As a result of this focus, they have withstood opposition and criticism from GC President Ted Wilson.

The staff who provide help to students at the other Adventist colleges and universities in the NAD are aware of the dramatic developments towards LGBT acceptance on the Loma Linda campus. Some have told me that they see Loma Linda as better positioned to move in directions that the GC might object to, and hope that it can create a wake that will also propel other campuses in a similar direction. Since they realize that the new state-sponsored regulations helped push Loma Linda towards dramatic changes, they realize that the time may come when similar regulations will pressure their colleges to be more caring towards their gay students. They see an irony in that pattern, where actions by government or courts prod Adventist institutions to be more Christian in their actions.

Congregations and Pastors

Given the negativity of the Adventist Church's official statements, the diversity of voices within it, and the bitter debates within society about civil rights for homosexuals, to what extent have Adventist congregations and pastors in the United States and Canada become caring and welcoming toward homosexuals? To what extent do Adventist churches support their LGBT children and members and offer them unconditional love? On the other hand, to what extent do they judge and reject them? How frequently do churches assume that they have no LGBT people and practice "don't ask/don't tell," offering no support or affirmation until perhaps one of their youth "comes out" by bringing a same-sex sweetheart to church?

We saw earlier that what matters most to the GC and the NAD is not whether a person's sexual orientation is homosexual, but whether or not he/she is believed to be sexually active. Celibate homosexuals are supposedly

eligible to be members and hold any office in their local church. This means that a same-sex couple in a committed relationship, who may now be legally married, is by definition not eligible. A 2017 incident illustrates some possible dynamics. A married lesbian couple had been attending a Californian church: one was a long-term Adventist, the other new to Adventism. When the latter's experience in that church and with her spouse led her to request baptism, the pastor and officers were supportive, but the senior pastor was nervous about performing the baptism himself. A retired ordained pastor agreed to do so. However, word of the happening was leaked to a right-wing publication in Oregon, which made a fuss about it. This led various church authorities, including GC President Ted Wilson, to apply considerable pressure to the conference, demanding that it discipline both the senior pastor for permitting the baptism to take place and the retired pastor for having performed an "illegal baptism," and that the baptism be annulled. The conference initially asked the retired pastor if she would be willing to relinquish her ministerial credential in order to allow it to demonstrate that it had taken strong action and upheld a strong position. However, ultimately it took the position that membership is a local matter, and no move was made at the church to annul the baptism. The senior pastor was reprimanded for going against church policy, but no efforts were made either to remove him or rescind his ordination. The retired pastor feels that considering the amount of pressure that came from the GC president, both the NAD president and union and conference officials handled the matter with "the softest touch possible." Both the lesbian who was baptized and her partner endured very distressing events, but both remain Adventists.

In fact, there are considerable differences from one congregation to another. This was well illustrated by two interviews I completed back-to-back in Los Angeles. One of the questions on the interview schedule for pastors asked, "How many gay members do you have?" When I asked this of the pastor of a large Hispanic church, his first response was "none," which he quickly changed to "maybe one." He then told me of a member who had been disfellowshipped because of his homosexuality, but had later been re-baptized because he claimed to have been "cured." However, the members shunned him when

he attended church because they did not believe his claim. The pastor explained that he did not speak to him either, because this would have offended the congregation's lay leaders. My next interview was with the pastor of a predominantly white church only a few miles away. He told me that his youth leader, who was highly admired, was widely known to be gay and that he and his partner often sang duets in services.

Most North American Adventist churches follow an unwritten, unstable version of "don't ask, don't tell." This means that it is acceptable if an LGBT member is single and discreet. It may be acceptable for a couple, especially a lesbian couple, to attend together as "friends": some lesbian couples have been able to live together, and even follow one another from one city to another as they change church-related jobs, without raising overt suspicion. However, if a member is open about a same-sex relationship, severe problems frequently emerge. Consequently, the most stable same-sex relationships—married couples—are likely to attract trouble. Some pastors and members want their congregations to be safe places for LGBT Adventists to worship, free of harassment from the pulpit or from members. However, because the church hierarchy has embraced an antagonistic position and some members may voice negative opinions, many are loath to risk conflict. Consequently, only a handful of congregations are known to be accepting of acknowledged same-sex couples. Sadly, such accepting situations can also be fragile and uncertain, for a loving pastor can be replaced by a crusader, new antagonistic members may set out to "cleanse" the church, or the conference can suddenly intervene, and in each case a previously loving community may then become a poisonous environment.

One example of such a dramatic change occurred at San Francisco Central Church, where several LGBT members had found a spiritual home and also support in a ministry to reach out to members of the broader gay community. That ministry folded in 2004 when one leader died and his partner then moved away. This allowed two ultraconservative newcomers to the church to change the accepting dynamic, kill the outreach program, and intimidate the remaining LGBT members. Another example occurred at the North Oshawa Church in Ontario, Canada, which had supported and integrated a gay couple. Later, however, the conference intervened

and, in a vicious process, a new pastor was appointed and new, compliant lay leaders elected. Both the gay couple and the former leaders were made to feel so unwelcome that they formed a new, independent, congregation.

An LGBT Adventist can also be left without a spiritual home if he or she needs to move to another area. In the late 1980s, a Kinship member was nominated to be head elder of his church in suburban Philadelphia. Surprised by this development, he felt it necessary to inform his pastor that he was gay, and was assured that his sexual orientation would not disqualify him; when he added that his roommate was his partner, the pastor remained steadfast. Some years later, the gay elder moved to the opposite side of the metropolitan area, and began to attend a nearby church. However, when he gave the pastor there the same information, he was abruptly disfellowshipped. He was so hurt by the experience that he switched to an accepting church of another denomination.

When I moved to Asheville, NC, in 2015, I was told by the pastor of the church I attended that I was welcome to attend services but that I should not attempt to move my membership to the church for I would then be rejected. While I had been asked to play the organ and to lead song services for about three months after I started attending the church, once my sexuality became known via the grapevine, I was never again asked to do anything. It was apparently assumed that I was sexually active: I was never asked about that. While attending there I endured a virulently anti-gay sermon preached by a lay member and a presentation by “Coming Out” Ministries, Ted Wilson’s favorite ex-gay group, whose depiction of “the gay lifestyle” was false and offensive to me.

Many Adventist pastors do not know how to minister to gay members. I have heard numerous complaints about derisive statements about homosexuals from the pulpit, and even insensitive jokes at their expense, from pastors who are apparently oblivious to the fact that there may be closeted LGBT persons sitting in the pews. Some pastors have also betrayed those who have confided in them.

The typical Adventist congregation creates opportunities for its heterosexual youth to bond, and there is excitement when one shows romantic interest in another. However, LGBT youth have no such opportunities, and if one brings a boy- or girlfriend he/she has met elsewhere, they are immediately suspect. So they are obliged to go to

gay bars or to search online for a partner. This makes it much more difficult to create an “Adventist home.”

The evidence suggests that Adventist congregations and pastors usually offer their LGBT members conditional, rather than unconditional, love. Because of this, the best way for a gay or lesbian member to survive there is to remain closeted—but this prevents strong bonds from developing because such members must try to hide who they really are. This forces them to turn instead to the gay community for genuine, caring friendships. The closet is an uncomfortable space in which to be confined. LGBT Adventists of older generations often put down deep roots in their churches when they were young because they found love there while they struggled secretly with their sexual orientation. Once they came out to themselves they realized that the love they had felt might be conditional, but they often remained active in their churches because of both the strength of their faith in the Lord and the fact that Adventism had become such an important part of their identities. Given the negative situations that they often endured, it is amazing how many remained committed to their congregations. However, this is much less common among the current generation of youth; because of the availability of information on the internet and of support groups in public schools, they tend to “come out” at a much earlier age, and to realize that their churches are so unwelcoming that they frequently look for a loving environment elsewhere. Is this the result that Adventist churches and denominational leaders desire?

The possibility of a church voting to become an “affirming congregation,” which has become important in several mainline denominations, has only recently emerged within Adventism. A website dedicated to encouraging Adventist congregations to craft welcoming statements, with examples of what various churches have voted, was created in 2018, largely through the efforts of Chris Blake, professor emeritus at Union College. The goal of the site, AdventistChurchWelcomingStatements.org, is to give site visitors “biblical inspiration for creating a welcoming statement, a list of actual welcoming statements, and tips for creating a welcoming statement for your church.” It notes that,

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has officially published many encouraging statements



The website adventistchurchwelcomingstatements.org provides instructions on how to craft a welcoming statement, along with listing churches with similar welcomes.

welcoming *all* people . . . In practice, however, Adventist churches at times have been exclusive and repellent. We have closed doors to people who didn't behave like us or think like us or look like us. We have cared more about being right than about being kind. We have confused acceptance with agreement. We have been too motivated by fear. We have turned away thirsty seekers of the free water of life . . . Now is the time to be more intentional concerning the openness and warmth of our local church climates. As important as a mission or vision, a welcoming statement gives the church a face.

The site lists twenty-seven Adventist churches and their welcoming statements: twenty-four from the US, three from Australia. Here are two examples:

The Charlottesville Seventh-day Adventist Church welcomes you and people of every race, appearance, belief system, sexual orientation, nation, gender, economic level, age, and ability.

(Florida Hospital Church) We are . . . single, married, divorced, female, male, straight, LGBTQ, poor, rich, old, young. At FHC, we welcome any member of the community to join us in worship. We don't care if you're a practicing Christian or got lost in traffic and

wound up here by mistake. We want to offer you grace and peace as you begin or continue your faith journey.

I found this statement the most striking:

La Sierra University Church is a church "between," bridging generations and communities . . . We are also seeking reconciliation with those we have left out. Though we have said, "You are welcome here," we realize that many in the LGBT community, in particular, do not feel included. We confess that we have fallen short. Aspiring to follow Christ's command to love one another, we resolve to work for change in our church community to be fully welcoming and affirming for all LGBT people. As we work to make concrete changes and open new conversations, please hear us when we say, "ALL are welcome here."

I decided to explore how LSUC came to embrace this statement. Pastor Chris Oberg, the first, and so far only, woman lead pastor at an Adventist university church, had come to understand and care about the struggle of LGBT Adventists. Consequently, when the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists* (see below) was released in 2012, she insisted that it be shown in the church sanctuary, not another space, and she was there to introduce it. The church was jammed, with over 1,500 present for the showing. Pastor Oberg then spent the next six years fostering dialogue, preaching on compassion, inclusion, and welcome, and many in-depth church-board conversations, until ultimately the collective consciousness of the congregation was raised, and it was ready to be really accepting and welcoming. As is true in many churches, the community included several LGBT people, including students, and many allies. These included a gay couple, Gabriel and Chase Uribe, both





The filmmakers, Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers, with David and Colin from the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*.

graduates of LSU, who became committed to participating in the process. In 2018, when the LSUC Board formed a Welcoming Statement Taskforce to suggest the next steps in making the church truly welcoming, Gabriel was one of those appointed to it. While crafting the statement, it became clear that equally important to marginalized people is a safe space to gather and be at home, for a statement can only do so much. Along the way, many were surprised to hear a simple request for a Sabbath School class for LGBT people where they could grow their devotion to God and study Scripture, not foster some other agenda. Consequently, the Task Force chose to begin not with a welcoming statement but with something more tangible, an explicitly welcoming Sabbath School class catering to the needs of LGBT people. It felt that this would help demonstrate that the sentiment expressed in the statement was real and not mere words. The class was voted by the board in September 2018 and launched the following month, with Gabriel and Chase as the teachers; it was named the Kinship Class. The committee then completed the welcoming statement, choosing to include the reconciling, confessing language quoted above. Although Gabriel had not thought an apology was necessary, the

committee decided that it was important because of the long history of damage by faith communities, including Adventists, to their LGBT siblings. At the beginning of 2019, the Task Force brought the statement to the board and then to a business session of the congregation. Both the class and the statement had been endorsed without a single dissenting vote.

When Gabriel and Chase married in 2017, they wanted their pastor to tie the knot. However, this was impossible because Adventist authorities have absolutely forbidden Adventist pastors to have any roles in performing same-sex weddings. However, to the surprise of the couple, every member of the LSUC pastoral staff attended their wedding in order to celebrate with them and show their love for them.

The contrast between the university churches at La Sierra and Loma Linda seems strange and unexpected. While LLU has become welcoming to LGBT people, the LLU Church, which is situated on its campus, makes no such statement; unlike La Sierra University Church, it has lagged behind the university. This is so even though its senior pastor, Randy Roberts, is also a vice-president of the university and in that capacity has approved the changes made by the university. When asked about this, an associate pastor told me that there has not been a negative comment about homosexuals in a sermon for several decades, and explained that it is difficult for LLUC to address this issue because of the diversity of views within the congregation: it is a “big-tent” congregation. This means that LGBT members can participate in services but should not expect overt statements of support; that is, the church is still in a “don’t ask/don’t tell” mode. It is therefore not a surprise that most of the LGBT students who attend church services do so at one of two overtly accepting congregations, one of which is independent from the denomination and conference. It surprised me that most of the LLU administrators interviewed were not aware of this disparity between the official positions of the university and the church that bears its name until I asked them the reasons for it.

Films

When the LGBT members of the San Francisco Central Church were made unwelcome, they withdrew and ultimately formed a new independent congregation.

They were joined in this by some heterosexual allies. Two of these, Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer, a married couple, were filmmakers. Their experience persuaded them that they should make a film to help heterosexual Adventists understand and appreciate their LGBT brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. The result was the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*, completed in 2012, which told the stories of three gay and lesbian couples. This has now been viewed by thousands of Adventists in several countries. A second film, *Enough Room at the Table*, was completed in 2016. More recently they released a series of short films focusing on the stories of individual LGBT Adventists. These films have been important in helping many Adventists to become supportive.

Ted Wilson, the conservative president of the GC, saw the “danger” of the impact of these films on Adventist opinions. He responded by embracing “Coming Out” Ministries as the officially approved face of LGBT Adventists.

Guiding Families

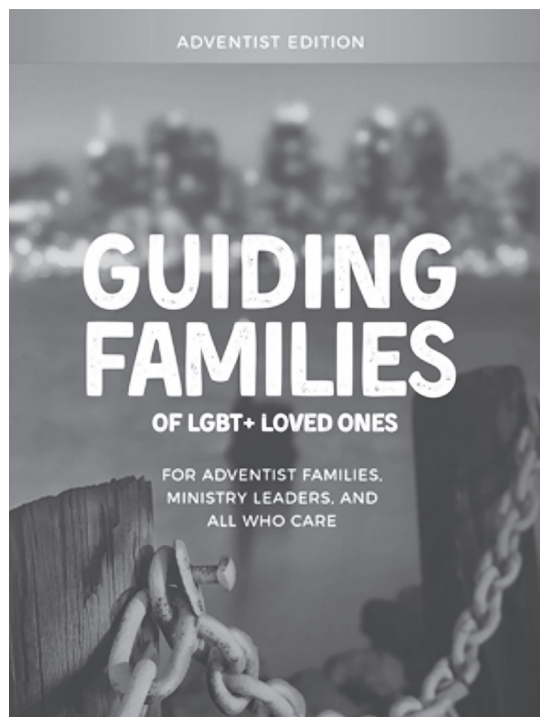
After the Adventist NAD issued a statement in 2015 emphasizing sexual behavior rather than orientation, it became increasingly aware of the practical issues concerning responding to LGBT Adventist children that were posed increasingly by parents, churches, conferences, youth and family ministries, schools and colleges, Pathfinder leaders, and summer camp directors. Rapidly increasing numbers of Adventist teens were coming out as LGBT, parents and church and program leaders were asking urgent questions, but the Adventist Church seemed to have no good answers. Several Adventist-related books focusing on the theology of sexual orientation had been published in recent years, but there was nothing addressing the issues that were being raised. The accounts that the division leaders

were receiving of parents rejecting their LGBT children because they believed this is what the church required, of LGBT students being bullied in academics and colleges, of churches which did not know how to respond to their LGBT youth, and of suicides among them, led the NAD officers to decide to prepare material for the families of LGBT loved ones. Realizing that the NAD Director of Family Ministries was not a suitable candidate to do this because he believed that sexual orientation was a personal choice, the officers gave the responsibility to Kyoshin Ahn, the NAD Undersecretary (now Secretary).

Ahn appointed an ad hoc NAD Commission on Human Sexuality, which worked with him on the project. Those chosen did not include anyone from SDA Kinship because church leaders continue to view it negatively, but one of the seven members chosen was a transgender woman. The Commission considered several options, and chose to use an existing book, *Guiding Families*, written by Bill Henson, a conservative Evangelical with considerable experience working with LGBT people. Henson agreed to let them modify his text to fit Adventist culture. There was some worry about crossing the GC leadership: “we don’t want to be demonized by them.” There was some outcry from Adventist fundamentalists such as Fulcrum7, who

wanted a more doctrinal approach, and from “Coming Out” Ministries, who had been the face of the church in these matters under the Ted Wilson administration, and who resented losing that position in this project. However, all proceeded smoothly thanks, I was told, to strong support from Dan Jackson, the NAD president.

The largest change in the original Henson manuscript was the decision to employ just-released data from a study of LGBT Adventists, by social science professors at Andrews University led by David



Kyoshin Ahn appointed an ad hoc NAD Commission on Human Sexuality, which eventually led to the *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones* resource.

The accounts that the division leaders were receiving of parents rejecting their LGBT children because they believed this is what the church required, of LGBT students being bullied in academies and colleges, of churches which did not know how to respond to their LGBT youth, and of suicides among them, led the NAD officers to decide to prepare material for the families of LGBT loved ones.

Sedlacek and Curt Vanderwaal, in a Q&A segment. This showed that Adventist LGBT youth are seriously at risk of suicide, especially if they face considerable bullying or are rejected by their families, both of which are common experiences. The data showed that 81% of them were afraid to tell their parents, and that they were much more likely to receive support from friends than from their families or churches. The book advises parents concerning how to respond to their gay children in order to retain close ties to them, how to express acceptance and avoid alienating language, how to welcome their partners and LGBT friends into their homes. It teaches that responding with love and acceptance is a necessary condition of being faithful to the Bible.

Guiding Families is thus a very different kind of Adventist publication. Unfortunately, it has not been publicized by the media that are controlled by the GC, such as the *Adventist Review*, *Ministry*, and the *Sabbath School Quarterly*; the NAD controls nothing like them. Nor has any report of the Andrews University data appeared in the *Review*. Changes in ministerial training are sorely needed, but this too is under the GC. At this point, 18,000 copies of the book have been distributed; 6,000 of these have gone to teachers in Adventist schools, but the NAD does not have the resources to train teachers to use the resource. I was told that the main purpose was to make copies available to those who sorely need them: but how best to inform those about the availability of the book? The suggestion that it is better not to distribute it among members who could be upset by its thrust highlights the

Adventist problem.

The approach adopted in *Guiding Families*, together with the dramatic changes towards LGBT students and faculty members by Adventist universities and colleges in North America, together amount to major changes in Adventist responses to its LGBT youth there.

LGBT Adventists Around the World

Adventism has grown rapidly in recent decades, especially in the developing world. This has resulted in a decline in the proportion of the membership located in the United States and Canada, which now stands at only 6% of the total. The membership in most other parts of the developed world—Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan—is quite small. Nevertheless, the Adventist Church is now a global church, with members in almost every country, and it is especially strong in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, parts of Asia, and the South Pacific Islands.

It was noted above that SDA Kinship has grown rapidly since 2001. In January 2020, 1,278 (38.6%) of its members were located in seventy-nine countries outside North America. Europe and Australia have their own Kampmeetings. Countries with active clusters of members include Australia, New Zealand, Germany, England, the Netherlands, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho.

The situation of gay and lesbian Adventists in much of the developing world is grim. There are undoubtedly thousands who live in total isolation because they have

never heard of Kinship or have no means of making contact with it. Many of those who have contacted Kinship have yet to meet another LGBT Adventist face-to-face. Moreover, they typically confront a church even more rejecting of homosexuals than in North America, and they often live in cultures that are hostile.

While traveling the world doing research on international Adventism, I asked pastors and administrators wherever I went how many homosexual members they had, and tried to find opportunities to meet and interview gay members personally. One in Lima, Peru, explained that he had left the church as a youth because he had realized that it had no room for him. Indeed, he was aware of many homosexuals who had been Adventists—all had exited the church, either because it had disfellowshipped them or because they had realized it was a hostile environment. One gay couple in Buenos Aires, Argentina, had grown up in one of the largest congregations there, but it had disfellowshipped them after discovering their homosexuality. Still being Adventists at heart and wishing to worship God in an Adventist setting, they began to attend the headquarters church as visitors, not members. However, they were soon told explicitly that they were not welcome at its services.

When I conducted interviews in Africa, I was almost always told that there were no homosexuals there. However, an LGBT group in Uganda led by a former Adventist pastor contacted Kinship over a decade ago. It had over a hundred members, twelve of whom actually joined Kinship. About twenty of the group were Adventists and the rest came from other communions, including about ten who were Muslims; all shared the experience of being cast out by their religious groups. Several had been expelled from their schools and homes when their sexuality was discovered. All of them also faced a situation where homosexuality is illegal and can result in long prison sentences. That is, they face harassment and ostracism from both church and state. The group was formed when the former Adventist pastor gathered them together into a nonsectarian worshiping community. The pastor, who was disfellowshipped after discovery of his homosexuality in 2002, spoke to me with excitement about finding Kinship on the Internet. A young woman assisted him, leading the lesbians in separate activities. The pastor told me that he felt that God had called him to minister



SDA Kinship Colombia posted this photo of an event on their Facebook page.

to homosexuals, especially Adventist homosexuals, in Uganda. He said that many gay Adventists continued to be hidden in the church, living miserable closeted lives. However, once discovered, or even suspected, they were disfellowshipped—often secretly. He mentioned that some gay Adventists had committed suicide after being discovered. When I asked another gay former pastor, who had fled to the US after he was discovered and fired, about the impact of growing up as gay and lesbian Adventists in Uganda, he replied, “It is the most difficult thing you could ever think of—they tell you that you are already condemned, going to hell. No one tells you that God loves you.” LGBT lives there became even more difficult after legislation was enacted criminalizing same-sex intimacy with lengthy prison terms and calling for the death penalty for repeat offenders.

This law was enacted at the instigation of the association of clergy in Kampala at a time when the president of the Uganda Adventist Union was its leader. On December 17, 2012, the Ugandan daily newspaper, *New Vision*, published an article reporting that the

<https://www.facebook.com/sdakinshipcolombia/photos/a.215020679135181/353282735308974>

president of the Adventist East-Central Africa Division, Dr. Blaisious Ruguri, a Ugandan, had delivered a speech at an Adventist church in Uganda in which he had declared that Adventists “fully” supported the government’s “Anti-Homosexuality Bill.” The article quotes Ruguri as saying:

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

Kinship has lost contact with the Ugandan group since that time, and is uncertain and deeply concerned about the fate of its members.

In other parts of Africa, Kinship’s membership in Kenya has grown considerably, and its leaders have worked with groups of pastors during camp meetings there during the past two years. The groups in Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and South Africa are also active.

Adventism has become very prominent in the island state of Jamaica in the Caribbean. Approximately 10% of its population is Adventist, and several Adventists have occupied prominent positions in government. In the last decade, they have risen to the highest positions. In 2009, Patrick Allen, an Adventist pastor who was then president of the Adventist Church in Jamaica, was installed as Governor-General, the head-of-state, a position he continues to occupy. In March 2016, Andrew Holness, another Adventist, and his Jamaica Labour Party, won an election and he began his second term as prime minister, a position he still holds.

It is embarrassing that Jamaica is widely described by rights organizations as among the most dangerous places in the world to be a homosexual, with the authorities often turning a blind eye to assaults and murders of gays, lesbians, and their allies. In 2004, Human Rights Watch issued a scathing report, “Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence, and Jamaica’s HIV/AIDS Epidemic.” In 2012, it reported that “attacks on homosexual people or people perceived

as being homosexual or transgender appear to remain commonplace.” Severe anti-LGBT laws help to sustain the antagonistic atmosphere.

The Adventists now holding the top positions, and the Adventist Church itself, support the anti-LGBT laws. In a November 2011 interview with *The Gleaner*, Andrew Holness, then in his first term as prime minister, rejected calls from Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron that he repeal Jamaica’s “anti-buggery” laws, which criminalize same-sex intimacy with jail times of up to ten years. In November 2012, Sir Patrick Allen complained in an address: “There is mounting pressure on states such as Jamaica to recognize specific rights for lesbians and gays, with even threat of withholding financial assistance from those who do not.” In August 2013, the Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists published an article, “Same-Sex Marriage is Not a Human Rights Issue,” on its website. This stated that the Adventist Church in Jamaica has “been very strident in its opposition of any softening or repealing of the buggery law.”

In the first decade of this century, a Jamaican member of the Metro New York Adventist Forum, who had been living in the US on a student visa while completing his education, appealed to be granted permanent residence on the ground that he, as a gay man, would be in serious personal danger if obliged to return to Jamaica. The American authorities agreed with his assessment of the situation in Jamaica, and granted his request.

AIDS

The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was first diagnosed in 1981, although it was known initially as Gay-Related Immuno-deficiency Disorder (GRID) because it was first found among gay men in America. At the first Adventist conference that focused on the disease, sponsored in 1990 by the *Adventist Review* and Sligo Church in suburban Washington DC, Fritz Guy challenged Adventists: “It would seem that responding to AIDS would be a natural for Adventism, because we claim that healing and caring are part of our mission, and because a sexually transmitted disease is immediately relevant to our understanding of the wholeness of man.”

In fact, however, church leaders were slow to recognize that AIDS impinged on Adventism. Since it was seen as

When he saw his first AIDS patient in January 1983, he realized he was strongly prejudiced against homosexuals and drug users.

However, as he interacted with his patients and learned their stories, he realized that if Jesus were in his place He would reach out to such patients, and he accepted this as his calling.

a gay disease, many Adventists saw it as God's judgment on willful sinners and a sign that the end of the world was imminent. That is, they were repelled, and frozen in inaction, because of their own homophobia. While the disease raged and gay Adventists died, the GC broadened the Adventist definition of adultery to include homosexual behavior as a legitimate ground for divorce, and it sued SDA Kinship in an attempt to force it to change its name. When *Message*, the missionary magazine addressed to African Americans, published a cluster of articles dealing with AIDS, it omitted any reference to homosexuality and drug abuse, fearing that this could be interpreted as approval of such lifestyles.

Neither did the hospitals in Adventism's large hospital system in the United States go out of their way to treat people with AIDS (PWAs). Indeed, Loma Linda University Medical Center became the object of special criticism following reports of neglect and demeaning behavior toward PWAs. The reasons given to explain this pattern included fear of infection, moral disgust with the patients, and the risk of financial problems attendant on providing care for patients who often lacked medical insurance, yet often required long stays in hospitals.

This pattern was very different from the role played by Adventist hospitals during the polio epidemic of the 1950s, when they had stood at the forefront. Indeed, their work among children who had contracted the disease had so impressed the members of a prominent Ohio family that they had donated a 400-bed hospital, the Charles F. Kettering Memorial Hospital in suburban Dayton, to the church. Adventists had viewed the children as innocents, but they saw those infected with AIDS differently.

Adventism's major response to the AIDS epidemic was to affirm its stance against "sexual immorality." The epidemic never became a focus during the hype about Adventism being "the Caring Church." There was no systematic education of clergy or church members in North America, and little coverage of it in Adventist schools, in spite of studies showing that students there were engaging in at-risk behavior. Neither did the church raise its voice in advocacy on behalf of PWAs. Most Adventist PWAs slipped away from their congregations without putting them to the test, and their families were shamed into silence. I interviewed several mothers of PWAs during the 1980s and 1990s, and not one of them had told her pastor, her Sabbath School class members, or her church friends about the cloud that hung over her family.

A few church members became prominent AIDS activists. One was Eunice Diaz, who became active in 1981, almost as soon as the disease was identified, while working with the Los Angeles County Health Department. Later, while employed by the Adventist White Memorial Medical Center, which is located in the major barrio in Los Angeles, she tried to bring people together around AIDS. However, the hospital administration demanded that she drop the issue because the visibility she brought the hospital created a "negative image." As a result, she resigned her position in 1988 and became a health care consultant for government and private agencies. Within months after she left the Adventist hospital, President George H. W. Bush appointed her to the National Commission on AIDS, which was commissioned to advise the president and Congress on all matters pertaining to HIV and AIDS.

When church periodicals trumpeted this news, Diaz responded sadly: “With the minimal response of our church, I don’t go around waving a flag saying I’m a Seventh-day Adventist.” She explained, “The church has turned its back on the AIDS issue because it cannot come to grips with the issue of homosexuality. The leadership of the church is afraid of becoming identified with something it finds embarrassing.”

Another prominent Adventist activist was Harvey Elder, a physician and specialist in infectious diseases at the Veterans Hospital in Loma Linda, California. When he saw his first AIDS patient in January 1983, he realized he was strongly prejudiced against homosexuals and drug users. However, as he interacted with his patients and learned their stories, he realized that if Jesus were in his place he would reach out to such patients, and He accepted this as his calling. By the mid-1980s, he could see that a frightful epidemic was spreading, and, after meeting with Eunice Diaz, the two set out to prod the Adventist Church to become involved. Both were appointed to the GC AIDS Committee when it was created in 1987, and served on it for a decade. However, they became frustrated when its meetings did not result in actions. Dr. Elder responded by launching a lonely crusade aimed at persuading Adventists to embrace the disease and PWAs.

The AIDS Committee failed in its attempt to put AIDS on the program of the GC Session in 1995. However, its members were given twenty minutes to address the Annual Council of church leaders in 1996. Since many pastors interested in the disease found that speaking about it led people to suspect that either they or their children were gay, the committee’s speakers urged the GC to acknowledge that AIDS was a major crisis. They also asked that the church advise heterosexual couples in areas with high rates of infection to be tested before marriage and to use condoms if one of them was found to be HIV-positive. They also urged that the Adventist seminaries teach about AIDS, if only because the students needed



Eunice Diaz was appointed by G. W. Bush to the National Commission on AIDS.

to be prepared to preach suitable sermons at the funerals of PWAs. In spite of considerable opposition to the use of condoms under any circumstance, all of the items were approved. However, the committee members were deeply disappointed when there was little attempt to implement the voted measures.

It is still true that the church in North America has never really made AIDS its concern. According to the committee, “We don’t have any idea of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the North American church. There is still so much shame and stigma that family members do not speak and those at risk do not attend church.” Although Adventist hospitals now treat PWAs as they do those with any other disease, Dr. Elder told me that he was “not aware of any SDA hospital that has made AIDS a priority.” When the GC Health department sponsored a conference on AIDS at Andrews University just before the GC Session in June 2005, only two of the one hundred attendees were from North America. A survey of the churches here, in an attempt to discover levels of interest in the topic, found that AIDS was not seen as a major problem when compared to other medical problems. Only about 20% of respondents expressed some interest, the majority from black congregations.

An AIDS epidemic broke out in Africa shortly after the disease was identified in the United States. It was also transmitted by sexual contact, but this time it was primarily heterosexual. When I interviewed Bekele Heye, president of what was then the Eastern African Division of the Adventist Church, where AIDS was rampant, in 1990, he told me that “AIDS is not an Adventist issue!” This was because he associated it with sexual promiscuity, and since the church forbade that, he was not interested in the disease. The lack of interest no doubt contributed to the fact that I had found Adventist hospitals in his division cavalier about the risk of spreading the contagion through the use of untested blood supplies and through reusing needles when I visited in 1988–89. Heye also ignored the

facts that thousands of new members were pouring into the church there and he could not speak to their sexual habits before their baptism. Indeed, I also stumbled on considerable evidence of sexual promiscuity among church members and pastors during my three research-related visits to Africa. Heye's attitude was therefore totally unrealistic.

As late as 1996, in an article titled "AIDS and the Church in Africa," Saleem Farag, former long-term head of the Health department in the Eastern African Division, and Joel Musvosvi, ministerial secretary of the division, made no mention that Adventists had AIDS or that the disease had affected the church. Neither was there acknowledgment that African Adventists were often highly promiscuous. Instead, the authors referred to US data and urged emphasis on morality and evangelistic opportunities among PWAs.

The GC AIDS Committee had chosen to focus its efforts on education to prevent the spread of the disease in the developing world, and thus on promoting "moral behavior" there. This focus allowed church leaders once again to avoid dealing with homosexuals, for AIDS in these regions was found primarily among heterosexuals. However, with the evidence that an epidemic was galloping through Africa, it started to dawn on church leaders that AIDS was just another disease rather than God's judgment on homosexuality. Nevertheless, the church took a long time to recognize that the infection rate among Adventists in Africa was high. In fact, GC President Robert Folkenberg did not realize that the church was infected until Dr. Elder warned him that a significant number of pastors there had the disease and Folkenberg himself saw firsthand during a subsequent visit to Africa that pastors and midlevel church administrators were dying. Dr. Alan Handysides, head of the Department of Health at the GC, gained the attention of administrators when he pointed out that the cost of medical care for one church employee with AIDS equaled the salaries of four or five pastors. It was not until the new century that church leaders in Africa acknowledged that multiple sex partners, incest, and rape are major problems within the church there. Independent studies show that the average number of sex partners that African Adventists have is only slightly lower than for people in the general population. Adventists' discouragement of the use of

condoms, primarily because of Saleem Farag's views while health director in the Eastern African Division and support he received from the GC, made the situation even more dangerous. Africans tend to see things in black-and-white terms, and ultraconservatives among them coined slogans such as "conduct not condoms." This view started to change only after the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) embraced the issue and introduced a new pro-condom slogan, "Protection for People with an Unregenerate Heart." Early in the new century, GC President Jan Paulsen endorsed the use of condoms at an AIDS Conference in Africa.

When I visited South Africa and Zimbabwe in 1999, I found churches in Swaziland that had only women and children members because their husbands were away working in the mines. Pastors there told me that the men returned once a year to see their wives and "give them AIDS," which many had contracted as a result of active sexual lives while away. In Zimbabwe, I saw the results of a confidential survey among unmarried members of the largest Adventist congregation in Bulawayo, where more than 80% of the males and 75% of the females admitted to being sexually active. I was dismayed to learn that the promise of confidentiality for respondents who admitted to having had a homosexual experience had been broken.

Dr. Handysides became head of the GC Health department in 1998. By the following year, he realized that AIDS was an enormous problem for the church because of the large number of members in Africa, where the epidemic was worst. He pushed successfully to have an AIDS office established in Africa and headquartered in Johannesburg. That office worked to persuade Adventist universities in Africa to teach a course on AIDS in their ministerial training programs as both a warning and a call to minister to PWAs, to make every Adventist church an AIDS support center where PWAs can sew and bake goods for sale, and to help reduce the transmission of AIDS from mother to child through testing and treating. However, the shoestring budget of the office severely hampered the director's efforts.

Dr. Elder's crusade took him to Africa many times after 1989, where he endeavored to raise the consciousness of the church about the epidemic. When he felt that too little was being said to the church youth there, he designed an AIDS course which was taught in four of the African Adventist

universities. “I fervently hope that [the course] changes the attitude about the infected, and helps the students realize what are dangerous behaviors,” he told me. “When it comes to protection, being an Adventist does not work nearly as well as a condom!” Dr. Handysides concurred; he explained that HIV/AIDS challenges some beliefs that Adventists have about their purity, such as the assumption that they will not be infected by such an epidemic.

An Adventist AIDS conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 2003, represented a turning point, at least in acknowledging that Adventism had been slow to respond to the epidemic, that many Adventists were infected, and that those who had contracted the disease frequently faced stigmatization in their churches. Pardon Mwansa, then president of the division, bravely acknowledged that a member of his family was infected with AIDS. He insisted that Adventists acknowledge the disease as their problem. Elder had insisted that the conference schedule a separate meeting for union presidents and health educators, and Adventist PWAs. As a result of his urging, presidents who attended the meeting confessed to the PWAs that they had sinned against them by lying to them about God and about them to their members.

The Adventist Church learned to respond to heterosexual Africans who transmitted AIDS through multiple partnering as it came to realize the extent to which Adventists were infected. However, it continued to do next to nothing about the disease in the United States because it started there as a gay disease—and it continues

to reject both gay Adventists who put themselves at risk of contracting AIDS and those who live in committed relationships as equally promiscuous because the sex of both groups is not within heterosexual marriage.

Conclusion

To what extent does its one-time slogan, “The Caring Church,” describe Adventism? As measured here, the official Adventist Church fails the test because it has proven itself more concerned with rules and image than with the needs of its people.

Despite the failure of the “change” program it supported, and the sexual exploitation of young, fragile counselees by its director, church leaders helped restore him to a place where he could resume his activities, and they have continued to insist that only homosexuals who struggle to change their orientation or to be celibate will be accepted. The prejudice of these leaders led them to sue SDA Kinship in order to distance themselves from LGBT Adventists, and it prevented them from seeing the relevance of the AIDS epidemic to Adventism, especially in places that initially considered it a “gay disease.” It also continues to withhold support for civil rights for LGBT groups. Indeed, it has endorsed attempts by the religious right to take away recent gains.

However, if we focus on the broader church, beginning with members, congregations, and educators rather than the institutionalized hierarchy, then there are some reasons for hope. The scholars and pastors who participated in Kinship Kampmeetings had their awareness of the situation of LGBT Adventists transformed, and consequently often

became allies. Over the past twenty years many of these have served on an advisory council, where they work with Kinship towards making our church more truly caring. In recent years, church members, congregations, and other church-related entities have become more aware of the presence of LGBT people in the church, its families, and colleges. This has been largely the result of the efforts of SDA Kinship and some truly remarkably caring individual church members, and the publications of *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*, which have encouraged a new openness among readers.

<https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2019/seventh-day-adventist-kinship-international-celebrates-40th-annual-kampmeeting>



In July 2019, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International celebrated its 40th annual Kampmeeting in Portland, Oregon. Similar to, yet different from, traditional Adventist camp meetings, this is a time when LGBTQ+ Adventists, their families, and supportive allies come together to worship, socialize, and tell their stories.

The main message of the Adventist Church and the GC to its LGBT members continues to be far too often that Adventists “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” This attitude, in fact, judges the faith and lives of the people whose sin is “hated,” and may best be translated as “we will truly love you only when and if you meet our standards.”

There has been a remarkable change in the tone of the stories that newcomers tell about growing up gay in the Adventist Church since the first Kinship Kampmeetings forty years ago. Their early designation as “horror stories” is rarely apt today in North America or much of the rest of the developed world, even though the stories often still reflect pain, confusion, isolation, and rejection. A number of factors have made a remarkable impact: the very existence of SDA Kinship International; the fact that LGBT Adventists currently find Kinship more easily and at a younger age; the ready availability of information on the web; and changing attitudes in society and church, especially among many Adventist parents. This is not yet the case in the developing world, where both church and society still typically reject gays and lesbians and where “horror stories” continue to abound.

SDA Kinship International continues to make an extraordinary contribution in the name of the church, often to the latter’s chagrin. Kinship is reaching out with increasing effectiveness to young Adventists who have questions about their sexuality; no longer does it need to send mailings to Adventist campuses, because most young homosexuals find it easily on the web and most American college campuses now have a Gay-Straight Alliance or an LGBT support group. It nurtures LGBT Adventists spiritually, encourages them to think through the ethics of being a gay Christian, and fosters stable relationships among them.

As outlined in this paper, LGBT Adventists have reasons for hope because of recent changes in the attitudes towards them displayed by key Adventist universities in the developed world, such as Loma Linda and Andrews universities; because of a new awareness at

the NAD illustrated by its publication of *Guiding Families*; the emergence of a few “welcoming congregations” in the US and Australia; and the support shown them by increasing numbers of progressive Adventists, as illustrated by the many thoughtful and aware articles published by *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. Nevertheless, the main message of the Adventist Church and the GC to its LGBT members continues to be far too often that Adventists “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” This attitude, in fact, judges the faith and lives of the people whose sin is “hated,” and may best be translated as “we will truly love you only when and if you meet our standards.” It thus offers conditional rather than unconditional love. This is neither welcoming nor caring.

Consequently, a profound distaste for LGBT persons, and a fear of them, continues to exist among large numbers of Adventists. The question asked in the title of an article about an intersexed person that was uploaded to the *Spectrum* website in January 2020—“Is There a Place for Bob and Others Like Her in the Adventist Church?”—remains truly pertinent. It suggests that perhaps the best way for Adventists who wish that their church would care for its LGBT members and children is to work towards helping the churches where they worship to become truly welcoming congregations.



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