"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the Adventist Church

I’m writing this on September 20, 2011, the first day of a new policy allowing openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual people to serve in the United States military. The old policy, generally known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” (DADT) became law on December 21, 1993, and expired at midnight last night.

DADT was seen by most as progress for gays since the repeal of the old policy makes it now illegal for military personnel to discriminate against or harass closeted homosexual service members—a not unusual practice before DADT. The old policy prohibited openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from serving in the military. Gay persons wanting to serve were required to keep that part of themselves hidden. During the nearly 18 years DADT was in force, more than 13,000 service members were discharged from military service under its provisions.

What does all this have to do with you and me, leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist church? Like the United States military, we also know that gays and lesbians exist in our ranks. We have no specific regulations called “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (indeed there are very few official church policies at all regarding homosexuals), but Adventist practice ranges all the way from pre-DADT harassment to post-DADT acceptance.
Sharing God’s Grace with All

How does Adventist policy toward gays affect our ability to evangelize them?

By Rudy Torres

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19a, NIV).

“Then, I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6, RSV).

We Adventists are not effectively sharing the good news with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) sisters and brothers. We are not telling them in compelling ways that God loves them unconditionally. This is a tragic admission, because, until we find a way to do so, we are not being obedient to the gospel commission of making disciples of every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

Like the Jewish community in Christ’s day, we are ineffective with marginalized people because we are judgmental.

What Will I Say?

How the Adventist “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has affected a gay Adventist

By Robert L. Ramsay

These days I pray that new acquaintances will not ask which religious denomination I grew up in. I don’t want them to know that I was once a keen supporter of the Seventh-day Adventist church. I don’t want them to know that I used to serve my Lord as enthusiastic ingatherer, Junior division pianist, Sabbath school superintendent, junior Sabbath school teacher, adult Sabbath school teacher, church organist, vespers leader and CHIP (Coronary Health Improvement Project) facilitator.

I don’t like revealing my association with “The Caring Church” because folk may ask if I’m still a member. Then what will I say? Will I lie and say yes, or will I tell the truth? And if I tell the truth, how much will I reveal? Will I explain why I was disfellowshipped? Will I explain why I would never again choose to be a member of a church that treats some of its long-time faithful so dishonestly?

I could tell them how I grew up in “The Caring Church,” how
my mother rocked me in her arms while singing "Jesus Loves Me." I could tell of the wonderful years at camp meeting, when I shadowed my hero, our local pastor, as he went about his duties. I could tell how enthusiastic I was when the fall ingathering campaign rolled around, how I loved to hold that little box with the electric candle and tramp through the snow from door to door asking for funds to help the less fortunate.

Catherine Taylor is a child and family therapist in Southern Virginia where she lives with her partner, aunt, uncle and two dogs. She has been active in the Seventh-day Adventist church since age 6 when she became a student at Bakersfield Junior Academy. As an adult she has held significant offices in various churches as well as serving several local conferences as executive committee member, camp meeting speaker, women’s ministries coordinator, and consultant on family issues. Since being “outed” to her church as a lesbian, her professional expertise and leadership skills have benefited SDA Kinship, where she serves as editor of the member newsletter, Connection, and in numerous other significant leadership responsibilities. katgurian@aol.com

"...See All the People!"
How Adventist “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Impacted a Lesbian Adventist

By Catherine Taylor

When I was a little girl, I worked to make my hands accurately follow the rhyme: “Here’s the church, and here’s the steeple. Open the door and see all the people.” I delighted in the fact that my own small hands could look both like a solid church with a steeple and then, amazingly, like a very small congregation.

When asked to write this article, my mind threw up an image of a monolithic church with a steeple. The sides of this church displayed quotes from the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual. One of the quotes I picture on that monolith reads, “Adultery, sexual abuse of spouses, incest, sexual abuse of children, homosexual practices and lesbian practices are among the obvious perversions of God’s original plan” (page 170).

Another quote reads, “Among the grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline are the following: ...Such violations as fornication, promiscuity, incest, homosexual practices, sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults and other sexual perversions, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the spouse who has remained faithful to the marriage vow in a divorce for adultery or sexual perversion” (page 185).

Both quotes puzzle me because in their list that condemns those who use power to abuse the vulnerable, they also include a condemnation of mutually consented, lovingly committed relationships between equals. No matter the logic, these views are often what people oriented to or involved in same-sex relationships face in their congregations.
A Texan by birth who joined the Adventist church at age 18, **Sharlett Reinke** majored in social work at Southwestern and Union Colleges. Domestically she raised sons with her husband on a North Dakota farm. Professionally a social worker, she served in mental health, hospital, community, and nursing home settings. Moving to Nebraska for her eldest son to attend Union College, she was employed there for 14 years in the science and math division as a secretary and project manager for the honors program. Loving a gay son has led Sharlett into a rich ministry of encouragement to other parents of gays.

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**Who Are We?**

*How Adventist “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Affects Parents of Gays*

*By Sharlett Reinke*

On a sunny summer Sabbath, my favorite kind of day, my husband and I were worshiping at the Adventist church closest to our home. Friends from out of town were there as well. The pastor was one our contemporaries from college and was presenting a series on the Ten Commandments. The subject at hand was adultery and he was hitting hard on divorce.

I looked across the aisle at a young man who had recently divorced. My heart hurt for him as I knew the pastor’s comments were going to make his journey harder and cause him pain.

Then, without warning, the pastor switched subjects and began a tirade on “the terrible sin of homosexuality.” My husband and I sat in stunned silence as he continued. Around us sat friends who know our son is gay. I managed to keep a calm exterior until I reached the car. My heart was breaking at the awful and untrue things that had been said about homosexuals, whom I know to be nothing like the pastor’s descriptions. Through my tears I asked, “What am I doing in a church like this?” Even now I still wonder when I see how my church continues to treat our gay sons and daughters.

That day I knew I was going to speak to the pastor. I also knew I was going to need time for God to help me deal with my anger and to give me His spirit and words.

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**Questions and Answers**

*By Arlene Taylor*

**Q:** I am unable to even have a conversation with people who “do it” differently from straights. For my part, I wish they would all just disappear. I feel really ill when I think about it; yet I can’t seem to stop thinking about it!

**Q:** I have heard that you can tell whether an individual is gay or straight by the length of his or her ring finger. Is that true?

**Q:** My daughter insists she’s gay. She must be lying because her father and I are straight, so how could she be gay? I’ve told her to just use her willpower to be straight; but when I
The mission of **Who Cares?**

*A Newsletter for Caring Pastors and Educators*,

is to increase awareness among Adventist leaders of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex people in our congregations and classrooms, with the goal of increasing our understanding of what makes these people special and how we might become more effective in sharing the love of God with them.

With an estimated 5% of our church members and students likely to experience symptoms of one of these classifications, yet with very little understanding and much false information being believed about them, there is an urgent need for us to become better informed and much more purposeful about ministering to them in ways that do not drive them away but rather tenderly love these special people as Jesus would.

The first issue of **Who Cares?** was published in January 2011. Past issues are available at [http://www.whocaresnewsletter.org](http://www.whocaresnewsletter.org). Your comments and questions will be welcomed at editor@whocaresnewsletter.org.

Designed to highlight a conversation among Adventist pastors and educators about how to deal more constructively and compassionately with our gay and lesbian constituents, **Who Cares?** is a quarterly e-mail publication edited by Claude E. Steen, III, editor@whocaresnewsletter.org.

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