Editor’s Perspective

Claude E. Steen III retired from more than 40 years of active pastoral ministry in June 2010. His work was mostly in the Southern and Columbia unions with 5 years in Ethiopia and a short stay in the Southwestern Union. With his wife Donna (Chalmers) their family consists of 2 married sons, 2 married daughters, a gay son, and 11 grandchildren. He lives happily with Donna in a restored 1827 farmhouse at the end of the road near Roxboro, NC. claudestoneis@gmail.com

A Year of Asking, "Who Cares?"

With this issue of Who Cares? we begin our second year of publication. As editor, I have had a year of learning much and of humble gratitude for all those who have been willing to write and those who have read our words. Thankful for the start we have made, I am more than ever convicted that we are beginning to fill a real need in the Adventist church—the need to provoke prayerful discussion among Adventist church pastors and educators about how we might more effectively minister to our gay and lesbian members, students, and attendees.

With the potential for a million or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people going and coming through the doors of our churches and schools worldwide, it is none too soon for us to think again about our attitudes toward these people, our understanding of their uniqueness, what it takes to meet their spiritual, emotional, and social needs, and what we really believe about how God would have us relate to them.

These people are not strangers to us. We know many of their names because they are our children, our church members, our students, and our visitors. They are among us because they identify themselves as Adventists or are thinking about becoming Adventists. But they harbor urgent questions about whether they can measure up to our expectations, whether we would accept them if we knew their big secret, and, most of all, what God thinks of them.
Daneen Akers is the co-producer/director of *Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins*, along with her husband, Stephen Eyer. They live and work with their three-year-old daughter, Lily, in San Francisco, CA. You can learn more about the film at [www.sgamovie.com](http://www.sgamovie.com) or email her at daneenakers@gmail.com.

Creating the Film Seventh-Gay Adventists  
An Interview with Daneen Akers

*By Daneen Akers*

Daneen Akers and her husband Stephen Eyer are putting the finishing touches on their new documentary film they've named *Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins*. Here are some questions about this film I recently asked Daneen, along with her answers. *Editor*

**Question:** What was the original motivation that prompted you and Stephen to begin this huge project?

**Question:** What experience do you two have in filmmaking?

**Question:** Why do you think a film on Adventist gays is needed today?

**Question:** When did you start and what have been your biggest challenges?

**Question:** Have contributions been your only source of funding? Will you be charging people to see the film? What costs are still looming ahead?

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Since 2002, Bryan Aalborg, D.Min., has served as senior pastor of the Foster Seventh-day Adventist Church, Asheville, North Carolina, known for its "come-as-you-are" congregational culture. Under his leadership, the church has also become known in Asheville for its Community Services ministry.

**To Bridge a Divide, Imitate Jesus**

*By Bryan Aalborg, D.Min.*

“In the sight of our law, the African slave-trader is a pirate and a felon; and in the sight of Heaven, an offender beyond the ordinary depth of human guilt.” (1) So stated Daniel Webster in a speech given in 1820 commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock.

John C. Calhoun, however, along with others in the South, presented an entirely opposite viewpoint. Regarding slavery in America, Calhoun observed, “Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually.” (2) Defenders of slavery noted that the Bible did not forbid it but guided a humane practice of slavery.
serving over 100 people weekly with basic necessities, networking with other churches to increase services to the needy, and providing extended instruction and mentoring to persons desiring to rise above poverty. Bryan’s doctoral dissertation from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, Texas) is titled Clarity and Compassion: Preaching to Achieve the Formation of a Local Church Policy which Affirms Grace and Transformation to Homosexuals.

In the 19th century, slavery divided a nation, leading to tragic loss of life for tens of thousands. Now it is unquestioned that slavery demeans humans created in the image of God.

Today homosexuality generates sharp contention. Scholar-author Robert Gagnon crystallizes the opposing viewpoints resident in the general Christian community.

“The church—local congregations and denominational bodies—divides because of fierce disagreements about the status of homosexual Christians, their relationships, and their qualifications for ministry.”

Will the currently divided Christian community come to embrace a unified view and practice regarding homosexuality? Time will reveal. Presently a unifying and healing approach will attempt to imitate the mind and attitude of Jesus.

George P. Babcock, Ed.D. has a resume considerably longer than this article, spanning 53 years of remarkable achievements in service to the Seventh-day Adventist education system. Not yet willing to write the final chapter, at 75 he is in his second year as principal of Hinsdale Adventist Academy in Illinois.

Highlights of Dr. Babcock’s career include four years as president of Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts; 12 years at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, first as dean of the School of Education and Psychology then as vice president for academic administration;

Confronting Bullying in Adventist Schools

By George Babcock, Ed.D.

Every year millions of young people are emotionally or physically injured as a result of bullying or cyberbullying. Many are left with lifelong scars. Some are hospitalized for depression. Others even commit suicide. Unfortunately, all of these things have happened in Seventh-day Adventist schools. It takes considerable courage to talk honestly about bullying—especially when it takes place in a church-operated school system where the curriculum and teaching is Christ-centered.

We must be careful not to be too judgmental because many youth who attend Adventist schools do not come from homes which could be classified as truly Christ-centered. In other words, some of the students, parents, and teachers may not be as dedicated to Jesus as they should be. As unbelievable as it seems in 2012, there are some Adventist church school principals and teachers who think that bullying couldn’t be a problem in their schools. Further, some think that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students do not exist in our God-appointed schools (shades of Ahmadinejad who said that there are no gays in Iran).

Research tells us that bullying is most common in grades 6 to 10, but it can happen at nearly any age and among both sexes. Among boys, physical bullying seems to be the typical method of attack. Pushing, tripping, and hitting are widespread and well-known examples of this type of behavior. Girls seem to prefer social or relational bullying. They use
eight years as president of Pakistan Adventist Seminary and College; and 12 years as General Conference Associate Director of Education in charge of 2,700 institutions scattered from the Pacific westward to the Mediterranean. Earlier positions included academy principal, local conference associate superintendent of education, and union conference associate director of education.

Peer pressure and manipulation to isolate and hurt other students’ feelings. They sometimes convince a group of students to ignore, shun, or avoid a particular student, which causes the attacked student to feel trapped in an invisible cage with no friends, no one to talk to, and no way to escape.

The most common form of bullying is verbal bullying. Students are teased, mocked, threatened, insulted, and taunted. These verbal attacks usually focus on things outside their target’s control, such as physical appearance, sexuality, race, family or parents’ income. The most rapidly growing form of bullying is what is called cyberbullying. Using cell phones, instant messages, social sites, chat rooms, and online videos, bullying may be intensified in ways that were not possible a few years ago.

Beth Anderson is a Mainer transplanted to the mountains of western North Carolina where, for the past 12 years, she has served with her academy principal husband as school counselor, sophomore English teacher, and librarian at Mount Pisgah Academy. She holds an MA in education (school counseling) from Western Carolina University and a BA in English from Atlantic Union College. This summer will complete 30 years of marriage to her husband, Rick, who, with their three young adult offspring, challenge Beth’s ability to deal with her family of New England team sports fanatics. She finds great joy in mentoring teen girls in their lives and Christian growth but also dreams of living in a log cabin on the three acres of Maine woods she owns. She lists hobbies of reading, yard work, music, walking, and visiting labyrinths.

God’s Children, Our Responsibility

By Beth Anderson

Jennifer, Samantha, Robert, Dave, James, and Neal are not in the Seventh-day Adventist Church any longer. They have moved on as many of our young adults in the church have. However, Jennifer, Samantha, Robert, Dave, James, and Neal are gay. How did that contribute to why they left the church? Or did it? Some have found other faith communities where they can worship God safely with others. Some have filled their lives with careers, family, children, and friends. As church members, what is our responsibility to our young people?

Anthony, on the other hand, came out to his friends and family within the last year. He still attends a Seventh-day Adventist church. He says,

I am still unflinchingly a Seventh-day Adventist, but less because I feel accepted by the church, both locally and otherwise, and more because I feel led by God to the place where He is most evident. Basically, I believe there is much work to be done in the acceptance of homosexual people as ‘people’ rather than as sinners in constant need of repentance. Because, the truth is, we are all sinners in constant need of repentance and renewal.

But there is definitely a stigma towards openly gay Adventists within the church. Let me be clear: this does not often stem from hatred, fear, or even confusion on the issue of
homosexuality. Most Adventists who have consulted me about my ‘struggles’—and there have been struggles—do not hate me, fear me, nor are they confused at all about their views on Christianity and homosexuality and where they do or do not intersect. However, I still feel judged every time I step into my local church…”

An Orientation Change for Christians?

A review of Andrew Marin's book Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community.

By Claude E. Steen, III

In the battle between conservative Christians and gays, conservative Christian Andrew Marin believes the only way to achieve victory is for Christians to change their orientation. His game-changing book, Love Is an Orientation, (2009, InterVarsity Press, 204 pages) is a must-read for anyone concerned about homosexuality or the bitter relationships between the two camps.

FREE BOOK OFFER TO OUR READERS

We at Who Cares? believe that Andrew Marin's book Love Is an Orientation is such an important departure from the many books arguing one side or the other about homosexuality that we're prepared to send a free copy to the first 100 of our readers that request it.

Andrew Marin is a conservative Christian who was horrified when three of his best friends “came out” to him within three months. But instead of abandoning or condemning those friends he decided to immerse himself in the gay community in order to understand and come close to these people he considered profoundly lost. He hasn't changed his allegiance to Bible truth, but he believes that God's Word teaches us better ways to reach across the great canyon that separates the gay community from conservative Christians. He is one of very few who is able to work closely with gays, conservative churches, and liberal churches; and he has a message for all of us that is Biblical and full of the love Jesus.

A fuller review of the book is in this issue of Who Cares? More reviews of Love Is an Orientation can be read at amazon.com.

You may also be interested in studying the website of the Marin Foundation, who recently concluded the largest, most comprehensive religious survey of GLBT people ever done. Results of the survey are expected to be published by the Marin Foundation soon. Check out www.themarinfoundation.org.

To get your free copy of Love Is an Orientation just email me at editor@whocaresnewsletter.org.
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. 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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A Year of Asking, "Who Cares?"

With this issue of Who Cares? we begin our second year of publication. As editor, I have had a year of learning much and of humble gratitude for all those who have been willing to write and those who have read our words. Thankful for the start we have made, I am more than ever convicited that we are beginning to fill a real need in the Adventist church—the need to provoke prayerful discussion among Adventist church pastors and educators about how we might more effectively minister to our gay and lesbian members, students, and attendees. With the potential for a million or more gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people going and coming through the doors of our churches and schools worldwide, it is none too soon for us to think again about our attitudes toward these people, our understanding of their uniqueness, what it takes to meet their spiritual, emotional, and social needs, and what we really believe about how God would have us relate to them.

These people are not strangers to us. We know many of their names because they are our children, our church members, our students, and our visitors. They are among us because they identify themselves as Adventists or are thinking about becoming Adventists. But they harbor urgent questions about whether they can measure up to our expectations, whether we would accept them if we knew their big secret, and, most of all, what God thinks of them. GLBTI members and students present a significant challenge to us as church and school leaders. Many of us are ignorant about current scientific understandings of homosexuality. Some of us don’t really know any gays personally so we are unfamiliar with their challenges and feelings. Even though our denomination has official position statements and policies on the subject, we are not all in total agreement as to what the Bible really teaches or on what basis we should accept gays into our fellowship or schools. Some of this disagreement is because of some of us haven’t really paid much attention to the issue, while others who have studied into it have developed serious questions about the validity or effectiveness of the current church position. Still others have implicit faith that our official position is exactly right.

Meanwhile, as we leaders try to find the right path, a gay member is wondering if she’d be welcomed at her local Adventist church and if she can safely bring her partner, who’s searching for spiritual enlightenment. A child in our school is being bullied by classmates who sense that he’s somehow different than they are. A gay member who married a fine Adventist woman in hopes of “curing” his same-sex attraction is realizing the marriage is about to come apart despite his best efforts. One of the most talented and promising students in the academy is seriously contemplating suicide because of his abhorrence and fear of the same-sex attractions he struggles with. The time for complacency about homosexuality is long past! Are you one who really does care and wants to help minister to this segment of God’s family?

Who Cares? does not advocate doctrinal change for the denomination or propose specific policy positions. But we do urge all pastors and teachers to become familiar with the issues surrounding homosexuality and Christianity, the scientific information available and, if possible, to become personally acquainted with some of the gays and lesbians near you. We know Jesus deeply loves these people; and, with His Spirit’s guidance, you can, too. In order to help raise your consciousness of issues and possible solutions, Who Cares? tries to bring you thoughtful articles from both sides of the traditional/progressive divide. And we do advocate for a basic attitude of loving acceptance of all God’s children as we believe Jesus did.

In this Issue

First, we feature an interview with Daneen Akers who has been working with her documentary filmmaker husband, Stephen Eyers, for the last couple of years to produce a new film called Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins. Bryan Aalborg’s recent D.Min. dissertation was titled Clarity and Compassion: Preaching to Achieve the Formation of a Local Church Policy which Affirms Grace and Transformation to Homosexuals. Bryan is senior pastor of the Foster Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asheville, North Carolina. His article, To Bridge a Divide, Imitate Jesus, supports the denominational position but pleads for the love and balance of Jesus. Dr. George Babcock’s 53 years of remarkable achievement in Adventist educational administration are reflected in his article, Confronting Bullying in Adventist Schools.

Not a problem, you say? Amazingly, at 75, Babcock is principal of Hinsdale Adventist Academy and knows well the subject he writes about! As an academy principal’s wife, Beth Anderson has lived most of her life on academy campuses. As school counselor at Mount Pisgah Academy in North Carolina she sees up close and personal the struggles of Adventist teens who realize their romantic and sexual attractions are different than most of their peers. Her article, God’s Children, Our Responsibility, will be worth your while.

And we have a gift for you! We’d like to send a free copy of Andrew Marin’s book, Love Is an Orientation, to the first 100 readers who request it. It’s a book that stands out from among the many polemics on homosexuality, and we think it will transform your thinking and your ministry. So read our review and email us your request.

We close this issue with another Q & A column, Answers from The Brain Doctor, by our resident “brain doctor,” Arlene Taylor, Ph.D. You may be amazed at the questions and enlightened by the answers.

Our Guiding Star

Whether pastors or educators, we each need a guiding star to keep us moving in the direction God has ordained for us. Though I can’t claim to have faithfully followed it, early in my ministry I chose as my compass the same words that Jesus quoted as His reason for coming to earth. These words still ring true as we consider a ministry to our gay brothers and sisters.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (Isaiah 61:1-3, NIV).

May God help us to learn how to translate these lofty ideals into practical ministries to all God’s children!

Claude E. Steen, III
Claude E. Steen III retired from more than 40 years of active pastoral ministry in June 2010. His work was mostly in the Southern and Columbia unions with 5 years in Ethiopia.

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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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Creating the Film Seventh-Gay Adventists

By Daneen Akers

Daneen Akers and her husband Stephen Eyer are putting the finishing touches on their new documentary film they’ve named Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins. Here are some questions about this film I recently asked Daneen, along with her answers. Editor.

Question: What was the original motivation that prompted you and Stephen to begin this huge project?

Answer: We really began this project in the fall of 2008, although we didn’t realize it at the time. We were part of the “Adventists Against Prop 8” initiative, a small but influential advocacy group in the church in California that asked Adventists to consider voting “no” on Proposition 8—the proposed California constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. Our opposition was based on the long-standing Adventist position on a strict separation between church and state.

We’d been going to church at a small, inclusive church that wasn’t officially Adventist, but it met on Sabbath and the pastors used to be Adventist pastors. Word got around the San Francisco Bay Area that it was a space where all were welcome, and a number of gay, lesbian, and even transgender Adventists began attending regularly because there aren’t other welcoming Adventist congregations in the Bay Area. For the first time we became really close friends with gay and lesbian Adventists, and we saw through new eyes the hurt, fear-based propaganda, and stereotyping that cut us off from Prop 8 (much of it, unfortunately, from religious groups). We couldn’t just sit by, I was also pregnant with our first-born, Lily, and I think imagining what kind of church we would want for her was a big part of our involvement.

When Prop 8 passed we were incredibly disappointed! I remember Stephen, who has worked in film for more than a decade, telling me, "What the church needs is a film with stories. That’s how hearts and minds are changed.” I agreed and wondered who could do it. After a few days of mulling that question over we realized that we could do it! That was three years ago almost exactly.

Question: What experience do you two have in film-making?

Answer: This is our second feature documentary. The first was about fibromyalgia, a chronic pain and fatigue condition that my mother has. We’d recently finished promoting that film and we knew we wanted to do another documentary, because we find the medium such a powerful way to share stories that aren’t typically heard.

Stephen has done a lot of film work over the years and was actually the first student to graduate from PUC’s Film and Television program (it was called Digital Media Technology then). Although I’ve also done a lot of writing and teaching, I really enjoyed working with Stephen on a common cause. Film is just a visual form of writing, I’ve learned!”

Question: Why do you think a film on Adventist gays is needed today?

Answer: A film like this is a chance to hear from people whose very existence is often ignored. Or, if it is acknowledged, the discussion happens entirely around abstract theological issues. We feel strongly that we need a new way to have this conversation, and we feel that these stories can provide a relational lens through which to have this conversation in an entirely new way. And, even if an Adventist happens to know someone who is gay, it’s not easy to find a way to ask them, over haystacks, about how they have reconciled their religious identity with their sexual orientation. That’s not exactly polite conversation material!

A film like this is a chance to hear from people whose very existence is often ignored. Or, if it is acknowledged, the discussion happens entirely around abstract theological issues. We feel strongly that we need a new way to have this conversation, and we feel that these stories can provide a relational lens through which to have this conversation in an entirely new way. And, even if an Adventist happens to know someone who is gay, it’s not easy to find a way to ask them, over haystacks, about how they have reconciled their religious identity with their sexual orientation. That’s not exactly polite conversation material!

So a film like this is an opportunity for us viewers to experience these incredible stories and spiritual journeys in a way that would be hard to do otherwise. There’s something pretty amazing when we just hear someone else’s story. And that doesn’t mean this isn’t still a complicated topic in the church and in families! But this film’s message is very hopeful that we can live together, worship together and be in intentional, loving relationships with each other while we keep talking.

Question: When did you start and what have been your biggest challenges?

Answer: We started the project early in 2009. The biggest challenge of any documentary is always funding, and its been huge for us to step out in faith, many times not knowing how we were going to pay expenses and keep moving forward. But it has all worked out, often at the last minute as an answer to prayer. It’s been incredible to see the huge community of people who have come together to make this film happen—some contributing significant funds, others a widow’s mite. A student set up a recurring donation of $20 a month and told us she was giving to the film instead of buying fancy coffee! People really have cared about making this happen.

The other big challenge is letting the film grow, shift and change over the process of production and editing. A documentary film requires incredible vision and energy to actually produce, but it also requires holding that vision with an open hand in order to see where your stories are taking you. We began making an issue film, but we’ve ended up making a film that’s entirely story-driven and character-based. That means that we have a great deal of footage that isn’t in the film. I keep saying we’ll have amazing special features on the DVD one day! Following our film subjects and their stories took us in a different direction that we’d originally imagined, but that direction is one of grace, gentleness and hope, and I think the film is a much more powerful vehicle to challenge stereotypes and engage all of our hearts with each other, no matter our theological positions, because we were willing to let the film’s vision evolve and expand.

Question: Have contributions been your only source of funding? Will you be charging people to see the film? What costs are still looming ahead?

Answer: The film has been almost entirely funded by contributions from individuals who believe in the film’s goals and want to see this conversation in the church happen in a new way. We did receive two small grants, but they were less than one percent of the budget. We’re still in the very beginning stages of releasing the film, and films come out quite slowly. Right now we’ve just been doing some private screenings, most of them for the benefit of someone featured in the film. So far we aren’t charging for admission but are accepting tax-deductible contributions to help cover the screening costs. We’re entering the final phase of the film, so our upcoming costs are primarily to cover screening costs and outreach materials.

Question: You have traveled around the US finding and interviewing many people for this film. What kinds of people did you interview? What impressions, feelings, convictions have come to you as a result of your travels and interviews?

Answer: Yes, we started this project with a three-month, 10,000 mile road trip just trying to get to know this community and the topic. Our daughter was nine months old when we started and a few days shy of her first birthday when we ended, so it’s a bit of a blur trying to remember just how all of that worked. It really was a great way to delve into the project.

We set up story booths around the country in Adventist population centers (near colleges, typically) and tried to spread the word that we wanted to hear from LGBT Adventists (current and former) and their families. We heard the most incredible stories, and that’s where some of the themes that we knew needed to come out in the film started to take shape. There were just some really common experiences that almost every gay Adventist had, like not consciously knowing that there were any gay Adventists while growing up. And every single person had wrestled deeply with scripture, theology and God’s will for his or her life. Almost every gay Adventist I’ve met knows the Bible better than I do! I knew we wanted that deep, spiritual walk to come out in the film. We also interviewed a wide range of pastors, theologians and other Adventist professors and thought leaders about the church and homosexuality, and we found ourselves blessed by each conversation, even by those we had expected to be uncomfortable with, based on past publications. I think that’s a big part of why the film “gelled” in tone. We were tempted at first to respond in kind to some extremely un-Christian treatment we’d witnessed towards gay Adventists. But in talking to even the most conservative voices in the church, we realized that, by and large, Adventists are trying to do their best to love people and do what they think scripture requires of them. It’s not easy, and while the policies can be harmful, most people really do want to be loving. They just don’t always know how! And the wide-spread ignorance and stereotypes that are often present in churches are mainly due to this being a taboo topic, which is another reason we wanted to make a film that would prompt thoughtful conversation.

Question: What is the target audience for this film?

Answer: We’ve always had a few audiences in mind for the film. The first audience, and the one we care most about, is those Adventists who are ready to discuss homosexuality in a new way. Change happens in a church from the pews up, and Adventism has a marvelous system where individual churches have a great deal of autonomy. So a local church really can decide that gays are welcome to worship on Sabbath mornings, and a really tangible change that is felt in the lives of many people can happen.
We are also planning to share the film with general audiences as well. All people experience a longing to belong and to be accepted. They get what it's like to struggle with your identity. And the spiritual identity piece of this film is fascinating to non-Adventists. When we tell people that it would be just as hard for our film subjects to stop being Adventists as it would for them to stop being gay, they find that a very interesting situation.

We also want to share the film in LGBT film festivals because so many people assume that being gay and being a person of faith is an "either/or" proposition. This film shows that it can be "both/and" in a very beautiful way. So far the non-Adventists who have seen the film love it because, usually, they'd known almost nothing about Adventism. We really tried to make sure the film showed why Adventism is such a powerful community of belonging. It's really almost like an ethnicity! I keep telling Stephen that the church should be giving us an evangelism grant! When else are a bunch of secular film-goers and LGBT activists going to be wanting to know more about Adventism?

It's still very early in the release process for us, but our plan is to continue to do select private screenings, then to screen a few film festivals, and then—assuming we find the funding—take the film all around North America for screenings and discussions. I'd love to do as many international screenings as we can, too. And then we'll make the film available on DVD and likely online somehow. Our intention has always been for the film to prompt thoughtful, sincere dialogue about how we treat our gay and lesbian church members. And in order to do that, we need people to see the film! I definitely think this will be a slow roll-out with a lot of screenings in living rooms on a Sabbath afternoon. I've had several students tell me that they aren't coming out to their parents until this film is ready for them to all watch together. And I do imagine a lot of family conversations that are going to start in earnest because of this film.

Question: What is the length of the finished film?
Answer: It's 100 minutes long, not counting all the DVD special features and deleted scenes I have planned.

Question: How can I be sure to not miss a showing that may occur near where I live?
Answer: Please sign up for our newsletter at www.sgamovie.com and follow our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/sgamovie. If you'd like to help plan a screening in your area I'd love to hear from you! Please write me at daneen@daneenakers.com.

Question: Is there still need for more money for this project? Are you still accepting donations and how may I donate?
Answer: Yes and yes! We are almost done with all of the post-production final touches, but we're entering the screening and outreach phase of the film. In some ways I'm glad I didn't realize three years ago how much energy and dedication this project was going to take, or I don't know if I could have imagined doing it! I am only now realizing that making a film is just half of the process. Getting it screened and discussed is the other half of the job, and screenings, travel and outreach all require time and funds too. You can find all of the information to make a tax-deductible donation at www.sgamovie.com/donate.

Question: Isn't there a danger that by focusing so much on homosexuality Adventists may become more comfortable with it and thus lower the moral standards of the church or its members? Wouldn't it have been better to have made a film advocating higher standards of holiness and Biblical morality rather than glorifying the lifestyles of church members who have fallen into this Biblically condemned way of life?
Answer: There's a great quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer I keep pinned above my desk that says, "Listening is the first thing we owe the oppressed." I think its quite fair to say that within conservative Christian communities like the Adventist church, gays and lesbians have not only been oppressed but very, very misunderstood. Before we decide how someone should live or whether or not their love is immoral or their families are inferior, let's simply listen to their stories. Jesus certainly modeled giving each and every person, especially those frequently dismissed by their cultures, His full attention and respect. That attention was healing! And I feel strongly that we simply need to start sharing stories. When we do that we can no longer sit in judgment. That doesn't mean everyone is going to agree, and it doesn't mean we're all going to suddenly share the same interpretation of Pauline texts. We don't yet agree on the role of women, so it's going to be much longer before we agree on this topic! But it does mean that we can start showing up in our homes and churches with genuine, Christ-like love for all our brothers and sisters.

Question: Having gone through this lengthy and challenging project, do you feel positive about what you have accomplished? Why?
Answer: We feel good about being the curators for some truly powerful stories that otherwise would not be heard. And even though it's just the very beginning stage of sharing this film, the feedback has been so affirming that it feels clear that God has led. The film could have been angry or bitter--there's certainly material to justify that tone! But that's not a space where change can happen. We started the film feeling quite bitter about some very un-Christian treatment of gay and lesbian Adventists we witnessed. Yet we're ending it feeling very positive because we've seen such amazing love and respect in the lives of our film subjects. They've found different paths, but they are all hopeful stories that can help us all lean into intentional, loving relationships with each other even though we haven't figured out a theological statement we can all sign off on.

Of course, this is almost the exact same case with the role of women in the church. And one of our goals with the film is that homosexuality can be much like women's ordination: we don't all agree and we interpret the Genesis stories and Pauline writings a bit differently at times, but we still agree to stay in fellowship with each other while we keep dialoging. Nobody is going to disfellowship me because I advocate for women's ordination. What I've seen while producing this film is actually a lot more hope than I expected. And that's a very good thing.

Daneen Aker's is the co-producer/director of Seventh-Gay Adventists: A film about faith on the margins, along with her husband, Stephen Eyer. They live and work with their three daughters, who are a great source of support and inspiration. You can watch the film at www.sgamovie.com and keep up with the latest news and updates on Facebook: www.facebook.com/sgamovie. If you'd like to help plan a screening in your area I'd love to hear from you! Please write me at daneen@daneenakers.com.
To Bridge a Divide, Imitate Jesus
By Bryan Aalborg, D.Min.

"In the sight of our law, the African slave-trader is a pirate and a felon; and in the sight of Heaven, an offender beyond the ordinary depth of human guilt." (1) So stated Daniel Webster in a speech given in 1820 commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock.

John C. Calhoun, however, along with others in the South, presented an entirely opposite viewpoint. Regarding slavery in America, Calhoun observed, "Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually." (2) Defenders of slavery noted that the Bible did not forbid it but guided a humane practice of slavery.

In the 19th century, slavery divided a nation, leading to tragic loss of life for tens of thousands. Now it is unquestioned that slavery demeans humans created in the image of God.

Today homosexuality generates sharp contention. Scholar-author Robert Gagnon crystalizes the opposing viewpoints resident in the general Christian community.

The church—local congregations and denominational bodies—divides because of fierce disagreements about the status of homosexual Christians, their relationships, and their qualifications for ministry. One side appeals to the explicit statements in Scripture regarding same-sex intercourse, the structures of God’s creation, principles of sexual holiness, two millennia of church tradition, the influence of environment on the development of homosexuality, the dearth of long-term and monogamous homosexual relationships, and the negative health effects of homosexual behavior. The other side points to genetic causation, the fruit of caring homosexual relationships, the antiquated worldview and obsesiveness of other parts of Scripture, and such Christian virtues as tolerance and inclusion.

Will the currently divided Christian community come to embrace a unified view and practice regarding homosexuality? Time will reveal. Presently a unifying and healing approach will attempt to imitate the mind and attitude of Jesus. Jesus came close to those whom the community regarded as sinful. To the paralytic carried by four friends, Jesus assured, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:5). (4) Because of her conversation with Jesus, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well hurriedly returned to town exclaiming, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:29). It is reasonable to assume that "what she ever did" was well-known in her community, exposing her as a target of scorn. These instances are only two among numerous others.

Jesus attempted to come close to those whom the community did not regard as sinful but who actually were. Days before His betrayal, trial, and condemnation, Matthew 23 records a severe and emotional monologue of Jesus directed to religious leadership, concluding with what was likely in broken voice: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). His cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," along with the imagery of the "hen gathering her chicks," is rich with significance from the Psalms (see Psalm 17:8; 57:1; 91:1-4). With compassion, Jesus took the initiative to come close to and make Himself available to the sinful of all stripes. Some embraced Him. Others did not.

At the same time Jesus manifested compassion toward the sinful He also spoke clearly about sin. Together with an assurance of "no condemnation," Jesus directed the adulterous woman to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). To the healed paralytic of 38 years Jesus instructed, "Sin no more lest a worst thing come upon you" (John 5:14). Jesus clearly stated His affirmation of the Old Testament’s moral code: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17, 18). Jesus never backpedaled on sin. Much of the heat generated by today’s conversation about homosexuality revolves around sin. Are same-sex acts sinful? Some voices claim the Levitical passages (18:22; 20:13) do not apply to today because the Old Testament prohibitions were stated in the context of condemning idolatry. (5) It is asserted that contemporary homosexual relationships in the context of mutuality, caring, and love are outside these Old Testament restrictions. Leviticus also, however, prohibits adultery in the same general context of idolatry (Leviticus 20:10). If one allows for homosexual acts disassociated from idolatry, then a consistent interpretation and application calls for the allowance of adultery disassociated from idolatry. Adultery today occurs with mutual consent, but it is still defined as sinful.

Or, it is claimed, the prohibitions of same-sex acts are contained in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) which has a time-bound application to the Hebrews of antiquity. (6) However, within the Holiness Code, moral absolutes such as adultery (Leviticus 20:10) and incest (Leviticus 18:6-18) are reaffirmed in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9; 5:1-7).

Some suggest that Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 6:9; 10 refer to homosexual prostitution or pederasty. (7) However, New Testament scholarship concludes that Paul’s comments refer to general male same-sex acts and do not refer exclusively to prostitution or pederasty. (8) Jesus did not say anything specific about homosexuality. He did not say anything about slavery either. We wish He would have. He did, however, endorse the Edenic model of marriage as God’s design for sexual experience (Matthew 19:3-9). Jesus’ lack of specific comment on homosexuality or slavery does not assume His endorsement or allowance of either. Regarding homosexuality, the Bible in both testaments presents a common view. Same-sex acts are sinful. It is unlikely that Jesus would contradict that perspective.

Having briefly noted the Bible’s comments on homosexuality specifically, let’s return to the approach of Jesus in ministry. Jesus continually extended Himself to outcasts regardless of their background or behaviors (Luke 15:2; 19:1-9). Christian communities should imitate Jesus’ model by doing the same. While not compromising what the Bible reveals regarding homosexual behaviors, individuals and the church as a whole are Christ-like when extending friendship, love, and support to those who find themselves in a homosexual experience. The church is to be the community in which all can experience friendship, love, and support regardless of one’s specific life issues.

Generally speaking, conservative Christians should follow Jesus’ lead in connecting with persons outside of their comfort zone (John 4:27). And, generally speaking, Christians who are not inclined to pay attention to the Bible’s specific comments regarding same-sex acts should imitate Jesus’ value of the Bible as a whole. Jesus clearly possessed a high regard for the sacred writings of His day, appealing to them again and again (see Matthew 19:4; 22:31; Luke 18:31; John 5:39). All are called to imitate Jesus. Reach out in friendship, extending value upon every person who resembles, in some manner, the Creator. Uphold God’s revealed design and perspective in relationships and life.


2. Scripture references are from the NKJV.


4. Scripture references are from the NKJV.


9. Since 2002, Bryan Aalborg, D.Min., has served as senior pastor of the Foster Seventh-day Adventist Church, Asheville, North Carolina, known for its "come-as-you-are" congré Designated 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.
Confronting Bullying in Adventist Schools

By George Babcock, Ed.D.

Every year millions of young people are emotionally or physically injured as a result of bullying or cyberbullying. Many are left with lifelong scars. Some are hospitalized for depression. Others even commit suicide. Unfortunately, all of these things have happened in Seventh-day Adventist schools. It takes considerable courage to talk honestly about bullying—especially when it takes place in a church-operated school system where the curriculum and teaching is Christ-centered.

We must be careful not to be too judgmental because many youth who attend Adventist schools do not come from homes which could be classified as truly Christ-centered. In other words, some of the students, parents, and teachers may not be as dedicated to Jesus as they should be. As unbelievable as it seems in 2012, there are some Adventist church school principals and teachers who think that bullying couldn't be a problem in their schools. Further, some think that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students do not exist in our God-appointed schools. (Shades of Ahmadinejad who said that there are no gays in Iran.)

Research tells us that bullying is most common in grades 6 to 10, but it can happen at nearly any age and among both sexes. Among boys, physical bullying seems to be the typical method of attack. Pushing, tripping, and hitting are widespread and well-known examples of this type of behavior. Girls seem to prefer social or relational bullying. They use peer pressure and manipulation to isolate and hurt other students’ feelings. They sometimes convince a group of students to ignore, shun, or avoid a particular student, which causes the attacked student to feel trapped in an invisible cage with no friends, no one to talk to, and no way to escape.

The most common form of bullying is verbal bullying. Students are teased, mocked, threatened, insulted, and taunted. These verbal attacks usually focus on things outside their target’s control, such as physical appearance, sexuality, race, family or parents’ income. The most rapidly growing form of bullying is what is called cyberbullying. Using cell phones, instant messages, social sites, chat rooms, and online videos, bullying may be intensified in ways that were not possible a few years ago.

As an educational administrator with 53 years of experience in Seventh-day Adventist schools, I have reason to believe that the bullying experienced in Adventist schools is somewhat less than what is experienced in public schools. At least, when talking with my public school administrator friends, it would seem that we have fewer bullying challenges. However, this is no reason to lessen our efforts to combat this growing scourge. Unlike the public schools, at an Adventist Christian school, we can openly seek help from the Lord to combat this very unchristian conduct.

At the college/university levels, the type of bullying engaged in by most youth in grades 6 to 10 is somewhat lessened, but GLBT bullying often escalates in the late high school years and at the collegiate level. However, we will make scant progress with GLBT bullying unless we tackle the entire bullying scope at every level.

I would like to quote from the Student Handbook at Hinsdale Adventist Academy:

"Bullying in any form will not be tolerated. This includes but is not limited to:

**PHYSICAL BULLYING** (hitting, punching, pinching, tripping, kicking, pushing, scratching, spitting, stealing or damaging property, throwing objects at someone, hiding/taking belongings, etc.)

**VERBAL BULLYING** (teasing/name calling, making offensive remarks, making discriminatory remarks, insulting, threatening, repeated teasing, intimidating someone, etc.)

**EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL BULLYING** (spreading rumors, excluding someone, ignoring, making fun, preventing people from befriending someone, etc.)

**CYBERSPACE BULLYING** (any form of bullying using cell phones, computers, Facebook, any other electronic equipment or social media, etc.)

All of the above items are especially offensive when connected with someone's gender, sexuality, race, religion, ethnic origin, or economic status."

Added to the above is the following anti-bullying statement:

Students are expected to act with consideration and respect for other students, staff, and their property. School personnel are responsible for creating a safe, civil, and respectful learning environment where students can gain the knowledge and the interpersonal skills they need to succeed. Bullying creates a climate of fear and hostility, disrupts the educational process, inhibits the ability to learn, adversely affects student participation in educational programs and activities, has a negative effect on a school’s social environment, and leads to antisocial behavior.

Bullying behaviors may focus on an actual or perceived characteristic such as race, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (GLBT), or other reasons related to a student’s distinguishing characteristic. Hinsdale Adventist Academy prohibits any and all forms of bullying by students and will not tolerate acts of retaliation for reporting of bullying.

School faculty and staff shall identify and stop bullying behavior and refer perpetrators for appropriate discipline.

To add emphasis to the above, each student must sign a document stating that they have read and understand our policy on bullying. Additionally, the academy has an anti-bullying week when we bring in specialists to speak in every classroom (grades K-12) each day that week on all aspects of the subject. Three additional chapel services (two in the first semester and one in the second semester) give emphasis to this topic. We especially highlight GLBT issues in grades 6 to 12.

Should any form of bullying appear after we have educated each student about this topic, the parents of the student doing the bullying are immediately called and the student is suspended from school. Students who engage in this conduct are dismissed from school. Fortunately, since I have been principal, we have not had to dismiss any student for this reason because both the...
parents and students know that bullying of any sort will not be tolerated.
In Adventist schools, the administration, faculty, and students need to read and talk about bullying and try to figure out where each one fits into this issue. How has bullying affected you? Have you been a bully, or a victim, or one of the many bystanders who allow bullying to exist? What can you do at your Adventist school to make bullying go away or at least be less common? I have found that honest opinions and real-life experiences can help guide students as we deal with this hurtful behavior.
George P. Babcock, Ed.D. has a resume considerably longer than this article, spanning 53 years of remarkable achievements in service to
Highlights of Dr. Babcock's career include four years as president of Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts; 12 years at Southern Advent
Much more than high-sounding titles, each of these life chapters have been marked by outstanding accomplishments, including leading rol
The recipient of many honors, Dr. Babcock has been married to his wife, Fern, for 54 years, with two adult children and three grandchildren

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, Claude E. Steen, III Editor
Dave Ferguson Subscriptions
Jacquie Hegarty Director of Communications
Linda Wright Layout & Design
God's Children, Our Responsibility

By Beth Anderson

Jennifer, Samantha, Robert, Dave, James, and Neal are not in the Seventh-day Adventist Church any longer. They have moved on as many of our young adults in the church have. However, Jennifer, Samantha, Robert, Dave, James, and Neal are gay. How did that contribute to why they left the church? Or did it? Some have found other faith communities where they can worship God safely with others. Some have filled their lives with careers, family, children, and friends. As church members, what is our responsibility to our young people?

Anthony, on the other hand, came out to his friends and family within the last year. He still attends a Seventh-day Adventist church. He says, I am still unflinchingly a Seventh-day Adventist, but less because I feel accepted by the church, both locally and otherwise, and more because I feel led by God to the place where He is most evident. Basically, I believe there is much work to be done in the acceptance of homosexual people as 'people' rather than as sinners in constant need of repentance. Because, the truth is, we are all sinners in constant need of repentance and renewal.

But there is definitely a stigma towards openly gay Adventists within the church. Let me be clear: this does not often stem from hatred, fear, or even confusion on the issue of homosexuality. Most Adventists who have consulted me about my 'struggles'—and there have been struggles—do not hate me, fear me, nor are they confused at all about their views on Christianity and homosexuality and where they do or do not intersect. However, I still feel judged every time I step into my local church, and I cannot help wonder whether that is because they know me so well there. I grew up there, so can they help but feel a little uncomfortable around someone each member may have suspected, but now knows, is definitely gay? I think many of them are simply attempting to figure out what it all means."

In over 25 years of being an educator, I have only had one student come out directly and question his sexual orientation while in academy. This may be because a lot of our students don't start to seriously answer those questions for themselves until they get a bit older. And that's fine. However, could it also be because we don't give them a safe environment in which to ask those questions? Students are intuitive. They know which staff are safe to talk to and which ones are not. One student, who came out three years after he graduated, told me that he was very scared to tell the staff at his former school. I'm not sure how many he talked to, but he was relieved that those staff members he confided in showed unconditional love for him. Whatever your beliefs about homosexuality, it is up to us to love our students and model true Christian love to them. It is not up to us to judge them, just to love them.

Are our policies at Adventist academies meeting the needs of our students and families? Adventist boarding schools have always received mixed reviews for their policies and discipline track records. As a counselor and educator, I feel we need to take a good look at the services we are providing for our students. Yes, the parents and church members are paying the bills. Yes, the parents and church members sit on our boards. They have a vested interest in how we run our programs. However, are some students falling between the cracks when it comes to their emotional needs? I believe the answer is yes.

Many of our Adventist academies do not address the issue of homosexuality in their handbooks; but, in my limited research, I came across two schools which directly did. One stated that students could be disciplined for "any type of sexual conduct, including sexual harassment and/or homosexuality."* The other stated that the following may result in suspension or withdrawal: "Involvement in sexual relationships with members of the same or opposite sex" and "advocating or professing a homosexual lifestyle or practices."

One administrator, whose school does not have a written statement in its handbook, stated, "As long as the church has an official stand, the school is responsible to uphold the church's position." He continued to say that most, if not all our schools, have LGBT students in attendance; but we cannot allow them to openly profess or promote their lifestyle on campus. He feels our schools and dormitories are not equipped to deal with this challenge, but he strongly believes that students need to be encouraged to talk with someone they trust and feel safe with.

Another English teacher I spoke with said that, although it had never come up as a discipline issue at any of the schools where she had worked, many students had poured their hearts out in journal entries and even talked with her. She felt her place was to listen.

We are expected to educate our students academically, spiritually, and religiously, and make sure they are disciplined and acting like proper Adventist young adults. Never mind that a lot of teens are sent to us with no discipline at home! The schools are expected to have all the answers and are criticized when our agenda is not the same. Back in the 1970s, families took for granted that their children would attend the local conference academies. Our academies were bursting at the seams. Many parents that send their children to Adventist academies in 2012 do so because they want them to be in a sheltered and safe environment, away from gangs, drugs, partying, and Sabbath-infringing activities.

I believe it is not enough to provide a safe haven from the outside world. We have the opportunity and responsibility to help our students use critical thinking skills, to step outside of their comfort zones, to be caring world citizens, and to have the opportunity to seek a relationship with God, their Creator.

Our students are children on the cusp of adulthood. We need to listen to them, hear their concerns, and help them come up with options. I have students who come from traditional Adventist homes, homes where there are drugs, single-parent homes, same-gender parent homes, homes with a deployed parent, and homes where there has been sickness and death. These kids need Jesus in their lives. Why would we want to turn them against Him? And we do turn them against Him when we are mindlessly judgmental.

At this point in time, I don't think our church institutions are ready for a whole lot of change. But I do think that we need to keep this a matter of prayer. When a student asks about being gay on a boarding school campus, I remind them of our policy of no public displays of affection. I tell them that the policy applies to everyone. This has often been enough of an answer; because, at that point, they are just beginning to think about the ramifications. Sometimes it may be enough, but I'm sure sometimes it is not. I urge students to be very careful who they trust with personal information because it is not always safe. It is important that we provide our children with a secure place to ask the tough questions and seek answers. We must teach our children to trust God and that His love for us is unconditional. He wants a relationship with each and every one of us. No child should feel left behind. I want to be one who encourages and leads students to the foot of the cross and stays there beside them.

*This is an example of failing to distinguish between a gay person experiencing same-sex attraction and indulging in homosexual activity. The Adventist position does not condemn those who are tempted but does forbid same-sex activity. Our schools should understand this difference and make it clear. Editor.

Beth Anderson is a Mainer transplanted to the mountains of western North Carolina where, for the past 12 years, she has served with her academy principal husband as school 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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A review of Andrew Marin's book Love Is an Orientation:
Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community.

By Claude E. Steen, III

In the battle between conservative Christians and gays, conservative Christian Andrew Marin believes the only way to achieve victory is for Christians to change their orientation. His game-changing book, Love Is an Orientation, (2009, InterVarsity Press, 204 pages) is a must-read for anyone concerned about homosexuality or the bitter relationships between the two camps.

Marin, who is founder and president of the Marin Foundation in Chicago, never intended to be involved in ministry to gays. In fact, as a young adult Christian he was offended and sickened by the very idea of same-gender sexual relations and was certain that gays were so offensive to God that only eternal destruction could await them.

Then, over a space of three months, three of his closest friends confided to him that they were gay. He was horrified and sickened by those revelations, feeling that he could never speak to those friends again. But his love for them soon led to a quite opposite response. He decided to immerse himself in the gay community in an effort to better understand his friends. He has since housed his wife Brenda and their children in the middle of Boys Town, the main gay suburb of Chicago.

Today his organization is lauded not only by gays, but by many conservative Christians as well as by many in the wider community. His basic premise is that if we are ever to be successful sharing the gospel with the gay community we will have to somehow tear down the wall of distrust and hatred that separates conservative Christians and gays. Amazingly, Marin uses the very same Biblical passages that most Christians use to condemn what they call the "gay lifestyle," to show, instead, how to elevate the conversation, cool the angry rhetoric, and build bridges to the gay community.

Besides pointing out the principles for reconciliation with gays, Marin makes some startling assertions. One is that, with a radically different approach, he finds gays hungry and thirsty for the gospel and the love of Jesus Christ. To test that assertion, the Marin Foundation has just completed the largest-ever research study on religion in the gay community. Results of that study are scheduled for publication early in 2012.

But are gays who Marin sees so eagerly responding to the gospel forsaking their homosexual ways? That question misses the main point, says Marin. It is not our job to either convict a person of their sin or to judge the quality of their response. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict and God the Father's work to judge. Our work is to connect people to Jesus Christ by becoming channels of His unconditional love to sinners. When we truly learn to do our part God is fully able to take care of His.

Marin contends that the focus of conservative Christians on the perceived sins of gays is a major component of the great wall that separates the two groups. We must stop judging them and trying to convict them of their sin and get on with the business of loving them unconditionally. Once gays have been captivated by the love of Jesus revealed through His followers, He will deal faithfully and effectively with the issues of their lives.

The subject of sexual orientation and whether God will deliver gays from same-sex attraction is a complex and murky topic of great disagreement. Rather than trying to find and defend definitive answers, writes Marin, Christians must get back to our assigned work of telling the Good News and demonstrating the unconditional love of God. Though we may feel insecure doing so, we must trust God to lead his true children, including converted gays, into His will for them, whatever that might mean.

Some will fault Marin for refusing to give definitive answers to many of the questions we frequently ask about homosexuality and the salvation of gays. Marin has done this purposefully as a part of elevating the conversation to what he considers more important questions. He includes some very practical examples of how to avoid directly answering closed-ended "yes-or-no" questions which foster conflict and argument, and instead follow the example of Jesus by countering with open-ended questions that lead to the bigger picture and a more productive discussion.

The book is replete with instructive stories from the lives of gays, especially as they are confronted with the love of Christ in His disciples. And Marin also presents important principles of effective Christian ministry to gays which seem to have practical application in other ministry settings.

Not all conservative Christians will agree with everything Marin says, and the book has some weaknesses. But the central message of the book, the rich experience and spiritual principles which support it, and the practical guidance it gives would be soul winners, far outweigh its minor flaws. This is a book which could dramatically change the nature of relationships between conservative Christians and the gay community. Don't try to continue the conversation without it.

FREE BOOK OFFER TO OUR READERS

We at Who Cares? believe that Andrew Marin's book Love Is an Orientation is such an important departure from the many books arguing one side or the other about homosexuality that we're prepared to send a free copy to the first 100 of our readers that request it.

Andrew Marin is a conservative Christian who was horrified when three of his best friends "came out" to him within three months. But instead of abandoning or condemning those friends he decided to immerse himself in the gay community in order to understand and come close to these people he considered profoundly lost. He hasn't changed his allegiance to Bible truth, but he believes that God's Word teaches us better ways to reach across the great canyon that separates the gay community from conservative Christians. He is one of very few who is able to work closely with gays, conservative churches, and liberal churches; and he has a message for all of us that is Biblical and full of the love Jesus.
A fuller review of the book is in this issue of Who Cares? More reviews of Love Is an Orientation can be read at amazon.com.

You may also be interested in studying the website of the Marin Foundation, who recently concluded the largest, most comprehensive religious survey of GLBT people ever done. Results of the survey are expected to be published by the Marin Foundation soon. Check out www.themarinfoundation.org.

To get your free copy of Love Is an Orientation just email me at editor@whocaresnewsletter.org.

Claude Steen
Editor

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