



# Safe Places

January 2014

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### Stories of the Heart

*Dan (Bohdan) Pajonk*

Dear Colleagues,

January 2014

We hope you had good holidays: a blend of contemplation, delicious food, family, friends, music, and starlit evenings. We also hope this new year will bring you opportunities that feed your soul, adventures that lighten your heart, support from those you love, and a chance to build your dreams.

This month we have two devotionals. The first is from Kent Hansen's weekly blog about grace. . Kent is a Seventh-day Adventist business and employment attorney in Southern California. He works with organizational clients, including Loma Linda University, in higher education and healthcare. He has authored two books and numerous magazine articles on spiritual renewal and prayer. The second is by Luca Marulli, Professor of Theology at *Le Campus Adventiste du Salève* in Collonges. He is spending 2014 finishing up his doctoral dissertation.

We are sharing three research projects with you. The first describes how same-sex marriage affects the psychological well being of those who are allowed to have access to its benefits, responsibilities, and privileges. The second is a study from The Netherlands that investigates the ways that being raised by same-sex female parents affects core principles of democratic citizenship. The third study takes a look at early-age adoptions to develop predictors of what qualities point to a successful outcome. The components investigated included sexual orientation of the adoptive parents. You will notice that each report includes a link that will allow you to access the entire paper.

We are gradually enlarging our list of resources. This month we began to divide them into these sections: Books, Pamphlets, Short Videos, and Websites. If you have suggestions for resources we might include, please feel welcome to contact us.

In *Stories from the Heart* we introduce you to Dan Pajonk, a multi-generational Seventh-day Adventist from the Czech Republic.

You are welcome to share this newsletter with anyone who might find it helpful. You are welcome to send us names and email address of those who might like to receive it. As always, if you do not want to receive this newsletter again, let us know. You can contact us at [SafePlaces@BuildingSafePlaces.org](mailto:SafePlaces@BuildingSafePlaces.org).

We wish you many blessings,

*Catherine Taylor*

and the Safe Places Team: Frieder Schmid, Ingrid Schmid, Floyd Poenitz, Elodie Souil, and Ruud Kieboom



### Grace and Refuge



*By Kent Hansen*

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41-42).

Jesus is a realist. He is reduced to a warm fuzzy blur by all of the heart-tugging appeals, tear-jerking stories, and sonorous organ chords that short-cut past the mind to the heart. But in the light of his own testimony, He is a clear-eyed realist.

He approaches Jerusalem for the last time, knowing that he is going to be rejected and crucified there. He wastes no time on anger at his fate. He seeks no refuge, devises no evasive strategy.

When the religious start serving themselves instead of God, they will soon start sacrificing those with the temerity to point out the difference. Jesus has no illusions that it will be different for Him. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing” (Luke 13:34).

Being a realist does not make him a cynic. Jesus’ heart breaks with unrequited love. True love desires the best for the beloved. Jesus wants nothing less than the children to come home and be at peace with their Father, but they are settling for so much less. They will kill Him in an attempt to erase the reminder that their best isn’t good enough.

Jesus weeps for them, but He doesn’t stop loving them. That’s the saving grace of it all—when we are at our worst, He loves us still (Rom 5:8)! He doesn’t reject us or curse us in bitterness. Knowing every thing about us, He still intercedes for us with the Father (Hebrews 7:25).

Mavericks, rebels, rogues, wanderers, rugged individualists—think of the images we prize. How is that working out for us? After 2,000 years are we any better at “recogniz[ing] the things that make for peace”?

### Where is the Ink?



By Luca Marulli

I believe that rethinking our positions is a healthy process. We need to know each other as human beings, not just holders of particular theological stances. We need to experience each other's joy and pains, faith and hopes, families and bonds. We need to become reconciled to one another and to God. This article is about the reconciliation of the "body" to the "heart."

John Harvey Kellogg and William K. Kellogg of Battle Creek were men of keen intellect. The charisma and medical genius of Dr. John H. Kellogg led to the organization of a health institute, the largest health-care centre of its kind in the world. People like Amelia Earhart, George Bernard Shaw, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford became great admirers of Dr. Kellogg.

William K. Kellogg had an outstanding sense of business. When he was in his forties he became the "King of Corn Flakes," building a world-wide cereal industry and amassing one of the greatest fortunes of the 20th century. As a philanthropist, his William Kellogg Foundation appropriated \$50 million for 1500 projects.

A sad misunderstanding led to a separation between the brothers. For a large part of their lives they were not on speaking terms. On June 22, 1948, more than six months after the death of John, William Kellogg received a letter that had been written by John some time before his death.

Here are a few excerpts from John's letter.

*It was the greatest possible misfortune that circumstances arose which led you and me in different channels and separated our interests. I am sure you were right, as regards the food business. Your better-balanced judgment had doubtless saved you from a vast number of mistakes of the sort I have made, and allowed you to achieve magnificent successes for which generations to come will owe you gratitude. I am making desperate efforts to get all my affairs into such shape as to preserve as much as possible what good they may represent and to mend as many as possible of the errors I have made. I earnestly desire to make amends for any wrong or injustice of any sort I have done to you and will be glad if you will give me a very definite and frank expression of anything I have said or done which you feel should be justly designated unbrotherly or otherwise open to criticism.*

Had this magnanimous letter been delivered to William Kellogg at the time it was written, reconciliation could have taken place. Sadly, members of John Harvey's household, who were supposed to deliver the letter, thought it better not to do so. John Harvey never received a reply to his letter. He died thinking that his brother was unwilling to forgive. William Kellogg lived

the rest of his life regretting the fact that he had not been able to write the reply his heart would have dictated.

All of this pain because someone did not deliver a letter of reconciliation.

In 2 Corinthians 3:3 the Apostle Paul makes a beautiful statement, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

Each one of us is a reconciliation letter from God. This letter has been written with no ordinary ink. The ink is actually the Spirit of the Living God.

So our question is, “Where is this ink?”

“In every period of this earth’s history, God has had His men [and women] of opportunity, to whom He has said, ‘Ye are My witnesses.’ In every age there have been devout men...who spoke to the people the words of God.... These were [and are] ministers of righteousness. They were not infallible; they were weak, erring men; but the Lord wrought through them as they gave themselves to His service.

“Since His ascension, Christ...has carried forward His work in the world by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men, and ministers to their needs.... In Christ's stead they are to beseech men and women to be reconciled to God.” —*Gospel Workers*, p. 14.

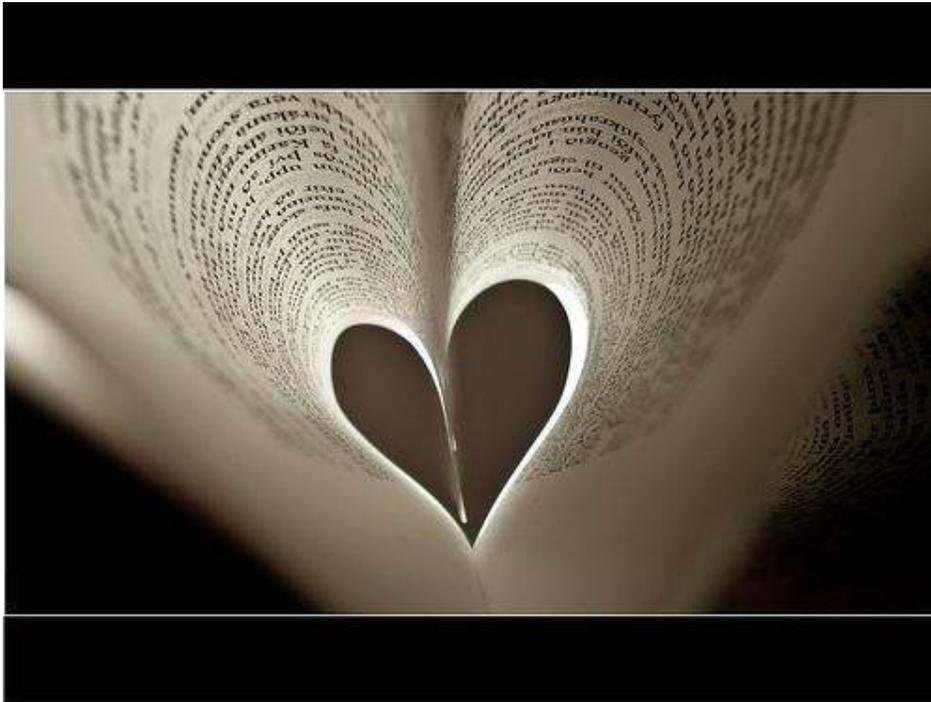
One of the greatest privileges we have, as Christians, is to live the opportunity to be reconciled with God and to help people to get reconciled to themselves and to God. The Gospel is the good news of reconciliation; it is the hope and possibility of change.

*The possibility of transformation and of reconciliation is the essence of the Gospel.* I’m not talking about the transformation of sexual orientation or sexual identity. I’m talking about a transformed life that realizes or discovers or recovers the feeling that our life makes sense; that we belong; that we are loved creatures of God with a goal, a purpose, and a future.

We all need to hear this message again, this good news. We all need to experience change and reconciliation in order to be co-workers with God, in order to minister to the needs of men and women with whom we share our everyday life.

Here are three steps that have helped me prepare for an encounter with God that opens me to change and reconciliation.

1. There should be earnest searching of heart.
2. There should be united, persevering prayer, and through faith a claiming of the promises of God.
3. There should be a deep humiliation of soul. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.



Now, there is something very interesting about those three steps; they are the same that the apostle Paul requires from those who approach the Lord's table to celebrate the Lord's Supper, the supper of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

1. 1 Cor. 11:28: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."
2. 1 Cor. 11: 7-18: "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it."
3. 1 Cor. 11:32: "When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."

Examine yourself, not the other!

Research shows that 75% of interviewed men and women are not satisfied with their own image reflected by a large and tall mirror, a mirror able to show the entire body. We don't like how other people see us. We pay a lot of attention to how we are groomed. We try to hide our age and to look good in the eyes of others. We usually don't like to be confronted with our own image reflected back by the mirror of God. We prefer to think that we can apply some makeup to our spiritual life. We want no one to see our fears.

Examine yourself. Take time to be confronted by that mirror, and let's see if, maybe, it will show that there is some idolatry, rudeness, envy, jealousy, violence, lack of forgiveness, or bitterness in us.

Take heart! We are not alone in our "earnest searching of heart." God stands beside us, not to judge us, but to provide forgiveness and a renewed heart.

Jesus has promised that the Holy Spirit will already start His work in us by helping us to examine ourselves: “I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:7-8).

Every member of the body needs to overcome hypocrisy in the earnest searching of heart, and this work belongs to the Spirit of God.

A tourist was visiting Rome. Talking to his guide, he said, “I now understand why you are so proud of your city. I’m very impressed by the number and the beauty of the churches and cathedrals. People here must love God very much.” The guide cynically replied: “They maybe love God, but for sure they hate each other.”

Before we become united we need to kneel and pray. Do I still have a problem with someone? Do I still feel bitterness? How do I forgive? It is impossible to pray and work with people I have not forgiven. In this way, the “body” can’t be reconciled.

1. I need to accept my anger and my desire for revenge: Eph. 4: 26-27 (The Message version): “Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.”
2. I have to decide that I will not take my revenge, because “God’s righteousness doesn’t grow from human anger” (James 1:20, The Message version). Rom. 12:19, 21 (New Life version): “Christian brothers, never pay back someone for the bad he has done to you. Let the anger of God take care of the other person. The Holy Writings say, ‘I will pay back to them what they should get,’ says the Lord. Do not let sin have power over you. Let good have power over sin!”
3. I need to stop pretending that I’ve already forgiven years ago. A man was complaining with his wife: “Why do you always recall to me that specific fault? I thought you forgave and forgot years ago.” “Oh, I forgave and forgot many years ago,” the wife replied, “but I want you to remember that I forgot and forgave.”
4. I need to believe that my pain can be transformed by God into an opportunity of personal growth. Rom. 5:3-5: “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us; they help us learn to endure. Endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. This expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”

Examine yourself, be reconciled and promote unity.

That’s not all. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God instead of making up God’s agenda. We need to let Him work His plans, not ours.

“...All the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet and said to him... ‘Pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do’” (Jer. 42:1-3). What a noble intent! “Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the Lord our God” (Jer. 42:6).



The truth is that those people already had a plan in their mind. They already had an answer to their prayer. They had already decided what God was supposed to do. As we continue our reading, we discover their true spiritual condition.

“When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the LORD their God—everything the LORD had sent him to tell them—[the chiefs of the people] and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, ‘You are lying! The LORD our God has not sent you to say [what you have said]’” (Jer. 43:2).

I now ask myself, and you: Are we ready to claim God’s promises and yet be ready to accept his will? Are we humble enough to realize that our will and plans might not be God’s will and plans? Are we ready to follow Jesus and trust Him, or do we want to stay as we are, and then pray saying, “I hope that God will bless anyway”? What good is it to kneel before God if I am not ready to change my mind? How could I ask God for guidance if I am not ready to follow His will?

There is an old story about a huge ship plowing through the seas in the dark of night with its signal light blinking. The captain of the ship sees another light in the distance and he blinks out an emergency message that says, “Emergency! Collision inevitable! Change your course ten degrees to the south!” The light in the distance blinks back the answer, “Emergency! Collision inevitable! Change your course ten degrees to the north!” The captain gets a bit hot under the collar and he sends back the same message, adding, “I am a captain!” To which the light in the distance replies, “Emergency! Collision inevitable! Change your course. I am a third-class seaman!” By now the captain is furious. He sends back what he believes will be the conclusive argument, “Change *your* course. I am a battleship.” And the answer comes back from the blinking light in the distance, “Change *your* course, I am a lighthouse.”

We have the right to complain and to be puzzled. However, we should never ~~let~~ allow our spiritual pride to tell the Lord what to do.

Again, I want to make sure that you know I’m not talking about sexual identity or orientation. I’m talking about our role and place in the church, amidst the people of God.

“The spirit of God will be poured out upon the church just as soon as the vessels are prepared to receive it.” E. G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 330.

1. Earnest searching of heart.
2. Unity and united, persevering prayer.
3. Humbleness under the mighty hand of God.

“You show that you are a letter from Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:3).

May the Lord bless you and give us all the awareness that we all are His words of reconciliation and that His Spirit is already in us.



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## Points to Ponder

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Words of cheer and encouragement spoken when the soul is sick and the pulse of courage is low—these are regarded by the Saviour as if spoken to Himself. As hearts are cheered, the heavenly angels look on in pleased recognition. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 159.

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Luke 6:38.

## Same-Sex Legal Marriage and Psychological Well-Being: Findings from the California Health Interview Survey



By Richard G. Wight, Allen J. LeBlanc, and M.V. Lee Badgett

December 2012

Psychological distress is lower among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals who are legally married to a person of the same sex, compared with those not in legally recognized unions. The study, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, also has implications for understanding mental health disparities based on sexual orientation: There were no statistically significant differences in psychological distress between heterosexuals, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons in any type of legally recognized same-sex relationship.

A large body of research has shown that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people generally experience higher distress levels than heterosexuals due to social exclusion, stigma, and other stressors. Research also shows that, on average, married heterosexuals experience better mental health outcomes than their unmarried counterparts. Since most lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are denied the opportunity to legally marry a same-sex partner, they are potentially denied the positive emotional benefits of the institution of marriage and they appear to be dually disadvantaged in terms of their psychological well-being.

The study was based on data from the 2009 California Health Interview Survey, the nation's largest population-based state health survey. Respondents between the ages of 18 and 70 were asked about their sexual orientation and same-sex relationship status. The study also included measures of psychological distress and multiple socio-demographic controls.

Click here for the full study:

<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2012.301113>

## Civic Competence of Dutch Children in Female Same-Sex Parent Families: A Comparison with Children of Opposite-Sex Parents



By Henny Bos, Nanette Gartrell, Jaap Roeleveld, Guuske Ledoux

September 2013

Pre-teen Dutch children raised by female same-sex parents scored higher on core principles of democratic citizenship than their peers in heterosexual-parent families. In a Dutch national survey of civic competence, those reared in female-parent households scored significantly higher than children in heterosexual-parent households on attitudes concerning acting democratically, dealing with conflicts, and dealing with differences. In the study, children between the ages of 11 to 13 years old were asked a series of questions about accepting and contributing to a democratic society, taking shared responsibility, handling minor conflicts or conflicts of interest, and handling social, cultural, religious, and outward differences.

The study is drawn from children with female same-sex parents from a national sample. The number of children with male same-sex parents in this sample was too small to be included in the analyses. Overall, the findings from this study suggest that growing up in a non-traditional family may be associated with a greater appreciation of diversity and the development of good citizenship.

Click here for the full study:

<http://yas.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/09/09/0044118X13502366.full.pdf+html>

*\*Article published in Youth & Society journal.*

*This item requires a subscription to Youth & Society.*

### Predictors of Psychological Adjustment in Early Placed Adopted Children With Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents



By Abbie E. Goldberg, JuliAnna Z. Smith

July 2013

Family type is not a predictor of a child's psychological adjustment among early placed adopted children with lesbian, gay, or heterosexual parents. An estimated 16,000 same-sex couples are raising more than 22,000 adopted children in the U.S., and these findings indicate that these children will likely fare no differently, as a result of their family type, than those being raised by heterosexual parents. This study examines aspects of the pre- and post-adoptive contexts in relation to child adjustment in 120 two-parent adoptive families (i.e., 40 female same-sex, 35 male same-sex, and 45 different-sex couples who adopted their children). All 120 couples were adopting their first child, and in all cases it was a single child under the age of 1.5 years.

**Key findings** include:

- Child age at placement—or the duration of time in the pre-adoptive context—did not emerge as a significant predictor of child adjustment (likely because all children in the sample were placed under 18 months).
- Parents' level of preparation for the adoption was related to both externalizing and internalizing symptoms, such that parents who were less prepared reported more symptoms in their children.
- Parents' depressive symptoms were also related to externalizing and internalizing symptoms in adopted children, such that more depressed parents reported more symptoms in their children. Depressive symptoms may compromise parents' emotional availability and ability to parent effectively, which can contribute to child adjustment problems.
- Parents who reported more relationship conflict during the early transition phase reported that their children had more internalizing behaviors 2 years later.
- Family type (i.e., parent sexual orientation) was unrelated to children's adjustment.

Click here to view full report:

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Goldberg-and-Smith-2013-JFP1.pdf>

Click here for press release:

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/press-releases/9-july-2013/>

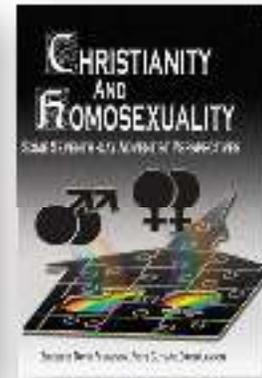
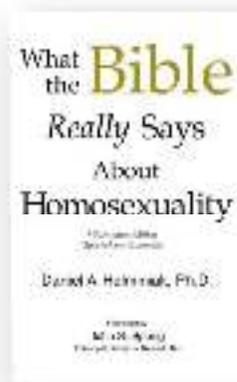
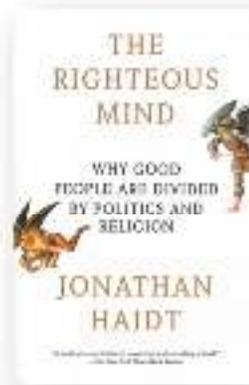
*\*Originally published in the Journal of Family Psychology.*

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## Resources

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### Books



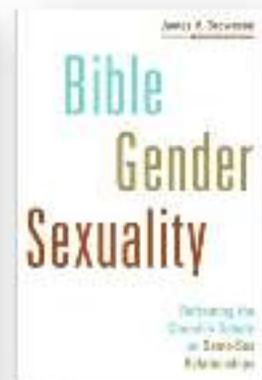
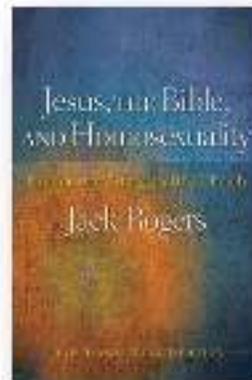
*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*  
by Jonathan Haidt

*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*  
by Daniel A. Helminiak

*Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives,*  
edited by Fritz Guy, David Larsen, and David Ferguson  
More information at <http://buildingsafeplaces.org/index.php/resources/christianity-and-homosexuality-some-seventh-day-adventist-perspectives.html>.  
[Sdagayperspectives.com](http://Sdagayperspectives.com)

*Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*  
by Jack Rogers

*Bible, Gender, Sexuality*  
by James Brownson

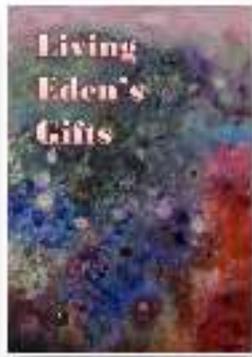


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## Recources

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### Pamphlets



#### *Living Eden's Gifts*

A Bible study that addresses Old and New Testament texts often used to condemn same-sex relationships. You can order a copy or copies of this study in pamphlet form by writing to [info@BuildingSafePlaces.org](mailto:info@BuildingSafePlaces.org). You can find it online at <http://buildingsafeplaces.org/index.php/resources/living-eden-s-gifts.html>

#### *Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*

<http://buildingsafeplaces.org/index.php/resources/homosexuality-can-we-talk-about-it/homosexuality-can-we-talk-about-it-english.html>

### Short Videos

*Teaching Empathy* - <http://www.wimp.com/homeroomteacher/>

*It Gets Better* - <http://www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org/>

The *It Gets Better Project* is an internet-based project founded in the United States. Its goal is to prevent suicide among LGBTIQ youth by having gay adults convey the message through social media videos that these teens' lives will improve. The project has grown rapidly: over 200 videos were uploaded in the first week, and the project's YouTube channel reached the 650-video limit in the next week. The project is now organized on its own website, the *It Gets Better Project* (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>) and includes more than 30,000 entries, with more than 40 million views, from people of all sexual orientations, including many celebrities. A book of essays from the project, *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*, was released in March 2011. The link above is the one made by and for Seventh-day Adventists.



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## Recources

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### Websites

**Someone to Talk To** - <http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net>

This ministry is for friends and families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex Seventh-day Adventists. Its goal is to:

- provide a listening ear for parents who desperately need a “safe” person with whom to talk;
- help parents work through their initial emotions of shock, anger, shame, grief, and pain;
- enable parents to get past focusing on their own suffering so they can begin to understand their children’s situations and the confusion and rejection they have experienced much of their lives;
- encourage parents to demonstrate God’s unconditional love to their children; and
- provide information and resources in the hope that they will help our church to move beyond ignorance and prejudice and to reach out with true compassion and understanding to those who so often have not been treated the way Jesus modeled.

**The Trevor Project** - <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

*The Trevor Project* is an American non-profit organization that offers an around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for LGBTQ youth. The project “is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community, and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive, and positive environment for everyone.” Though the crisis line is not available outside the United States, the digital community and information about the advocacy/educational programs is.



**American Association of Suicidology Warning Signs of Suicide**

<http://www.suicidology.org/web/guest/stats-and-tools/warning-signs>.

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

A free, 24-hour hotline available in the United States to anyone in suicidal crisis or distress. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Learn more at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.

**American Association of Suicidology Risk Factors for Suicide and Fact Sheets**

<http://www.suicidology.org/web/guest/stats-and-tools/fact-sheets>.



### Dan (Bohdan) Pajonk

I am a third-generation Adventist, born in Bruntal, Silesia, in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. I had a happy childhood and was baptized in the United States during a 2008 literature evangelism campaign. These days I don't go to church because the people in my congregations do not accept my homosexuality. I don't want to live a lie; I want to be honest with myself and with my God.

I realized I was gay when I was 13 or 14 years old and decided to hide it. For the sake of my parents, friends, and people in the church, I tried to become heterosexual. I prayed and cried for this change almost every day. I did not change. One day I had enough of hiding my true self, moved away from my home, and began to live in Prague where I could be true to myself.

In Prague I went to a meeting for the young people of the church. I felt weird; it seemed to me that I did not belong there any more. I still consider myself a Seventh-day Adventist. I was raised in the church and it is a large part of who I am. It is difficult for me not to feel like an Adventist! These days I feel okay being both gay and Adventist. I don't care what people think of my sexual orientation; it is their problem, and I let them deal with it for themselves.

Once my father spoke to me about a text he found in the Bible about men having left their natural behavior with women and having sex with men. He explained to me that they were not homosexuals so what is said there doesn't apply to homosexuals like me. It is not right to refer to those texts to condemn gay and lesbian people. Being a homosexual not by choice but by nature is a natural way to live, and to act accordingly has nothing to do with that passage in the Bible. On the contrary! I *was* living an unnatural life when I tried to live according to expectations of the church and not be who I am. If I would act like a heterosexual I would be like those the text is talking about; I would be living a life not according to my natural state.

A friend of mine told me about a group called "Homosexual Adventists in Germany." I looked for them on the internet and started a conversation with the webmaster of the site, Roy Raetzer. He brought me into contact with Mike Lewis who was organizing a Kinship meeting in England. Mike invited me to come to the meeting and offered a scholarship so I was able to attend. There I met a lot of very nice and kind people that were like me! I had a great time and was able to attend the next meetings in France and in The Netherlands. I now consider my Kinship friends part of my *family*. I feel happy to be around with them. Unfortunately I haven't been able to come to the last two meetings. Maybe next year...

I know of some other gay Seventh-day Adventist people in Czech Republic. I spoke with them about Kinship and invited them to come to the meetings. They haven't yet decided to attend, and I am not someone who can pressure others. I would love to see more people from Czech Republic coming to Kinship meetings. Maybe one day, when we have a meeting in Prague, they will come, meet us, and experience what I have experienced when I am with Kinship.

Since the end of communism, the environment for Czech gays and lesbians has improved drastically. We are no longer put into prison if we want to live in a relationship. We cannot always be openly affectionate in public, but I think that is not only a Czech problem. It takes

time for society to change. I find it is helpful that lots of celebrities have come out openly. Their openness makes our life more acceptable for the people in my country.

I have looked for a partner ever since I came out. Finally, this year, I met someone with whom I would like to share my life. Surprisingly, it was on a dating site. Often these sites are filled with people who just want sex, not a real and loving relationship. The first time Lukas and I talked, we chatted from the middle of the night until five in the morning. We couldn't stop; we wanted to know more about each other. I felt really good, just talking to him. I was very nervous the night we met in person. I was working at the desk of a party that, as it turned out, he was also attending. When Lukas arrived I just couldn't work anymore and had to ask my colleague to take over.

We have a lot in common. This October I moved to his place where he is taking care of his grandmother. Already, I cannot imagine a life without him. He is a blessing for me, an answer to my prayers. Life is wonderful now. We share so much fun and love. We have to hug at least once every half hour; sometimes people get annoyed by us. ☺ I want our affection to stay like this for a very long time.

I ask the Seventh-day Adventist church to not deny the problems and anguish gay and lesbian people experience. I understand that many pastors in Czech Republic know about Kinship; they just don't want to talk about the issue of same-sex relationships. They hide behind the rules of the church, even when they think differently in private. Their behavior is unfair and hurtful. I understand that these pastors are partly afraid and partly want to be loyal to the church. However, people like me are suffering and often think that God doesn't love us anymore. We don't know where to go; the church doesn't reach out a hand to us. Finally, we have no other choice but to live a lie or to leave the church. It is a shame that nobody dares to speak up on behalf of lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists.

When I was 19, I talked about my homosexuality with the Czech conference youth leader who was leading a three-year program called *Pay It Forward*. This program was designed to teach pastoral and social work to young people. When I told the youth director I was gay, his response was that I should pray to change. This was not helpful so I started a discussion about homosexuality on the *Pay it Forward* website. I used a pseudonym. The youth pastor refused to support even the discussion. He said, "The opinion of the church is clear in this matter; we do not need to talk about it." I was so disappointed in him! He chose to not respond to the needs of young people he had been directed to serve. I say to the church, *Be honest! Talk openly about the existence of Kinship, even if you don't agree with Kinship's mission. Show sympathy. At least give young people an opportunity to find support.*

