



Safe Places

February 2014

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We hope you are doing well. We hear that Europe is having a mild winter while the United States is experiencing drought on one coast and a series of severe storms throughout other parts of the country. Wherever you are we hope you have been safe and nurtured.

A Canadian, interested in how Jesus dealt with marginalized populations in Judaism, wrote this month's **devotional**. Andrew Dykstra is an active member of Immanuel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Toronto where he finds special enjoyment participating in Sabbath School. He is employed as a project manager at a small, family-owned printing company. It was at another such company that Andrew was first exposed to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by one of his fellow employees. Andrew enjoys watching a wide variety of films, but with a special interest in documentaries on cultural and social issues. Andrew is an avid reader of books and articles on spiritual subjects. He alone in his family became an Adventist as a result of his extensive study and reading. Even before becoming an Adventist, he had already read *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* and *The Great Controversy* by Ellen White.

We included the response of the Dutch Union of Seventh-day Adventists to the anti-homosexual legislation recently enacted in Uganda and Nigeria, in the devotional section because their statement is based on how they believe Jesus would want His church to act.

Our **research** section includes three very different topics. The first study looks at the challenges lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth encounter when they need to or try to access mentoring programs. The second is part of a 78-person longitudinal study of children (now teens) being raised by lesbian parents. The third study takes a look at suicide attempts of transgender and gender non-conforming adults.

As you can tell, our **resource** section keeps expanding. This month we've added two books and an offer to our readers by the producers of *Seventh-Gay Adventists*.

There are two contributions to **Stories from the Heart**. David Colheart writes training manuals on workplace health and safety. He and John live in Buderim, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast where they enjoy bush walking, swimming, and gardening. They attend a local Seventh-day Adventist Church where David is actively involved in outreach as well as operating the church public address and computer systems.

Lisa Jean Verona is pursuing graduate studies in Italy after graduating from the Adventist College in Villa Aurora in 2006. She is married to Emanuele Fresa. Lisa says her primary interests are theology and people. She has worked as an Adventist pastor between educational pursuits.

As always you are welcome to share this newsletter with anyone you think would enjoy and benefit from reading it. If you know of anyone who would like to be added to the mailing list, we can be reached at SafePlaces@buildingsafeplaces.org. If you have comments, critiques, questions, concerns, or a desire to chat with us, you are most welcome to write. If you would like to be taken off our mailing list, you can reach us at the same address.

We wish you many blessings,

Catherine Taylor and the Safe Places Team:

Ruud Kieboom, Floyd Poenitz, Frieder Schmid, Ingrid Schmid, and Elodie Souil

But only those to whom it has been given

Based on Matthew 19



By Andrew Dykstra

Jesus loved healing people. Upon His return to Judea, large crowds followed Him. Sick and suffering mortals stretched to glimpse the Savior, yearning to be made whole. In this midst of this gathering of hope, whispers announced the arrival of Pharisees.

Those church leaders resented Jesus and His power to touch the lives of common people. Though their enemy had no official theological training, some could remember how profoundly He spoke in the temple, even as a 12-year-old boy. Why did He not study with one of their own? Despite the culture of the day, Jesus had chosen to bypass authorized leaders and authorities to immerse Himself, with love, into the lives of those who flocked to Him. His disciples were men who, in their youth, had been deemed unsuitable for rabbinic training and were sent home to practice the trades of their fathers. Frustrated by the adulation of the crowd for Jesus and hoping to defuse His influence, the Pharisees made a plan to discredit the Teacher.

Omitting traditional courteous greetings, the church leaders asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” Jesus listened carefully to the trick question. The laws given through Moses had made a provision for divorce, often used by men as a legal loophole. Too frequently, women were divorced because they could not bear children, or—more specifically—sons. Wives were left destitute, because few respectable men wanted another man’s castoff. The Pharisees expected Jesus to “show respect” for the Mosaic divorce law, because any Jew who belittled the laws of Moses was shunned and expelled from the Jewish community. Jesus would have none of it.

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

Jesus then countered their question with another. “Have you forgotten that the Creator made ‘male and female,’ and that in another passage it is written that ‘this is the reason a man leaves his parents so that he and his wife can be one flesh?’” While “one flesh” was an expression of the marriage bond, it clearly encompassed sexual bonding, too. Many young men leave home, focused less on responsibilities than sexual fulfillment. Jesus challenged the Pharisees: “If you were so eager to leave home for the sake of your wives, why do you now seem in such a big hurry to leave them? You were once so attracted to them. God was willing to put His blessing on your union. What happened?”

Jesus reminded the Pharisees about Eden. I wonder if He was also thinking about the poem, *Song of Solomon*, a further celebration of the ideals to which Jesus referred. I have no doubt

that when the erotic *Song of Song* was read in the temple, many an imagination took flight. Along with subtle descriptions of sexuality, these chapters have joyfully explicit passages about rounded, full breasts.

In his reply, Jesus favored one passage of Scripture over another. He was clear that the later passage allowing divorce was a necessary concession, but it was a step down from the ideal expressed in Genesis 1 and 2. Regrettably, it also abandoned the romantic eroticism of *Song of Solomon*. Jesus was about to raise the bar higher than the Mosaic Law. “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” Then and only then, when the “one flesh” had ruptured—then and only then, divorce was but confirmation of the rupture that had already taken place.

Silenced, the Pharisees returned to Jerusalem, but the lessons weren’t over for the disciples. “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry!” From my perspective, the disciples thought what Jesus said seemed just too demanding! I think Jesus understood that his disciples were, at that moment, just as hardhearted as the Pharisees. They had suffered a blow to their sense of male entitlement. No wonder women were among Jesus’ most fervent followers!

Now that he had their attention, Jesus continued His lesson. “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way (from birth). Others were made that way by men (through violence). Others have renounced marriage ‘because of the kingdom of Heaven’ (in devotion). The one who can accept this should accept this.”



Taken in a completely unexpected direction, the disciples of Jesus were baffled. To whom had this teaching already been given and by whom understood? In an ultimate sense, it referred to Jesus himself. Jesus identified fully with the third group. While he understood their desire and longing, he was not to share in it. For the sake of Heaven, Jesus voluntarily became a “eunuch.” Even though it was given to the first Adam to find fulfillment in another human, to Jesus it was as if God declared, “I am sufficient for you.” The Second Adam was not to receive the gift received in joy by the first Adam. Jesus fulfilled his need for intimacy by devoting whole nights in conversation with His Father.

Paul was also a eunuch by devotion. Even though his advice ran contrary to the Edenic ideal, Paul recommended that if people could receive it, they, like him, should remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). Paul devoted his life to preaching to the Gentiles and focused on community-based relationships, never seeking and never finding the kind of sexual/relational fulfillment I believe was desired by the disciples.

The second group of “eunuchs” portrayed by Jesus include those who had been castrated, often after defeat in battle. They are “eunuchs” through violence, through no choice of their own. These men may marry but will never sire children.

The group of “eunuchs” portrayed by Jesus as “born that way” were, once again, “eunuchs” through no choice of their own. I would like us to consider that this group included people who, today, are understood to be gay or lesbian. Eunuchs in the first century were generically people who did not marry or reproduce. Homosexuals, when they were noted at all, were perceived as men who had little to no interest in women, did not reproduce, and so were included in the rubric of eunuchs. Lesbian and gay people, contrary to many societal expectations, do not feel towards the opposite sex the same attraction, as did the disciples and most others. They do not choose their orientation and for this reason I submit they are included in the first group of “eunuchs.”

It is interesting that both of the first two groups are “eunuchs” involuntarily. Only the third group was “eunuchs” voluntarily. From the tone of His talk I hear that Jesus meant for His listeners, then and now, to accept and have empathy for all three groups in this class of people. This lesson was another remedy Jesus had for hard hearts. Eunuchs were not contained within the Eden ideal, yet they did not receive one word of condemnation from Jesus.

If the disciples felt the divorce rule was demanding, this further progression of thought was not making it any easier for them. From the days of Moses, eunuchs were excluded from the worship life of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:1). Only later did Isaiah encourage eunuchs to believe they would one day be included as fully integrated worshippers (Isaiah 56:4). Eunuchs were excluded from “polite” society because they were unable to reproduce; they were believed to be, somehow, not whole, vibrant men. In the culture of Israel, any man who did not have children was regarded as somehow less than a man, and a woman without children was believed to be cursed by God. Even if a eunuch wanted to marry, he was only permitted to marry a proselyte.

Did Jesus change the original Edenic ideal? No. What He did was acknowledge that many aspects of life were transformed after Eden. Jesus, in that talk and throughout His ministry, emphasized that His kingdom called for compassionate hearts to respond to all of who have been affected by the many changes since the beginning of time. Jesus’ tone when speaking of eunuchs seems quite neutral. While the devotion of the third group (eunuchs for the Kingdom) is accepted and blessed, it is not set forth as the Eden ideal as Jesus has given it expression. Eden is encompassed in Genesis 1 and 2 plus the playful eroticism of *Song of Solomon*. None of these eunuch groups represented the Eden ideal, yet Jesus offered no condemnation

of them. Rather, He challenges us to overcome our prejudices about them. Let this melt your hard hearts. Let these people who do not participate in your dream and who, because of it, are marginalized in Israel, help you to learn compassion. From the beginning of the Christian movement, barriers against eunuchs began to fall. Philip baptized a eunuch who longed to follow Jesus.

As Jews, the disciples of Jesus must have wondered what distinguished homosexual “eunuchs” from the homosexual acts reviled in Leviticus 18:22. How could these men possibly receive acceptance? Were they not an abomination? No. There are two different words translated “abomination.” The “forbidden food” type of abomination was different from the “man lying with a man” type of abomination. The latter type of abomination was most often used for things connected to idolatry and not to homosexuality generically. Writing about Leviticus, even the conservative, not gay-positive writer Robert Gagnon, writes, “I do not doubt that the circles out of which Leviticus 18:22 was produced had in view homosexual cult prostitution, at least partly. Homosexual cult prostitution appears to have been the primary form in which homosexual intercourse was practiced in Israel.” ★

Jesus pointed his disciples to “eunuchs” as part of a conversation that had focused, at least partially, on the results of a culture of male privilege. It was an antidote to oppression, of women and of other marginalized people. It was a call to understand that they should be included in the community of spiritual Israel. Philip understood the lesson as he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. If we think hermeneutically about the lesson Jesus shared in Matthew 19, what do we learn about how to respond to the lesbian and gay people who are in our lives and our communities?

★ *Quote from Robert A. J. Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, page 130)*



Points to Consider

We know we have passed from death into life because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. —1 John 3: 15

Love is patient, love is kind.... Love keeps no record of wrongs. —From 1 Corinthians 13

When the Lord’s people are filled with meekness and tenderness for one another, they will realize that His banner over them is love and that His fruit will be sweet to their taste. Heaven will begin on earth. They will make a heaven below in which to prepare for heaven above. —Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 287

Response of the Dutch SDA Union to Ugandan Anti-Homosexual Bill



The Ugandan Parliament passed the so-called Anti-Homosexual Bill on the 20th of December, 2013. The Nigerian president signed a similar bill on the 13th of January, 2014. These bills promote the hatred and discrimination of LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, & Intersex) individuals, and misleadingly associate being LGBTI with paedophilia and sexually transmitted diseases.

The Netherlands Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church distances itself from these bills. We, as a church, stand for accepting love and following the character of Jesus Christ. We strongly believe that all people are called to love one another. This includes loving LGBTIs—not excluding them or judging their relationships.

Christians don't all agree regarding LGBTIs, but we are one in the faith that mankind was created in the image of God, and each person is valuable in His eyes. People should, therefore, create each other with decency—respectfully, peacefully, and lovingly. Violence or discrimination in any form is unacceptable.

The delegates of all the Adventist churches in the Netherlands took a strong stand with regards to LGBTIs in 2012. With a large majority, they decided the following:

Following the example of the “Safe Church” initiative, the delegates, gathered together in committee, charge the Executive Board in the coming administrative period to consider the problems of and concerning people with a non-heterosexual nature, so that they can feel safe in the church.

The Netherlands Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church also signed the International Day against Homophobia declaration in 2011. The Executive Committee took a unanimous stand against violence towards and discrimination of LGBTIs.

We do not all have the same views on homosexuality, but we are one in the belief that all human beings are created in God's image and precious in His eyes. Therefore people should treat each other with dignity—respectfully, peacefully, and affectionately—and violence against homosexuals, in any form, is completely unacceptable.

To each violation of human rights we say, That is wrong. Today we emphasize this in particular concerning the violation of the human rights of homosexuals. This includes all forms of physical, psychological, and verbal violence against homosexuals, as well as inciting these expressions of violence. He who uses violence against fellow human beings, made in the image of God, ignores Christ's appeal to love God and thy neighbour. Also in our own communities of faith the human dignity of homosexuals has sometimes been damaged by uncharitable and unsympathetic behaviour.

We dedicate ourselves to defend in every way the dignity of all people. We call on worshippers in our congregations to refrain from promoting any form of violence against

homosexuals. Churches desire, after the example of Christ, to be places of encounter. They desire to be a safe haven for all, including homosexuals.

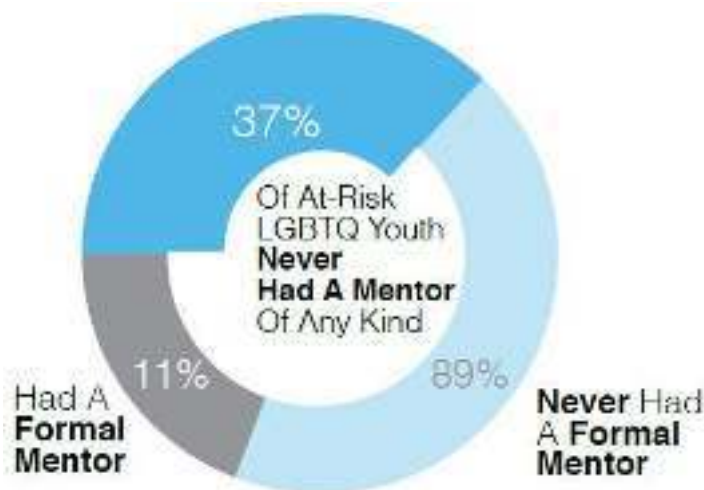
We call on everyone, whatever their place in society, to offer an environment in which homosexuals feel safe and in that way contribute to a safer social climate in our society.

We will endeavour, in our international ecclesiastical contacts and in our contacts with representatives of other faiths, to oppose homophobia, hatred, and violence against homosexuals.



Recent Research

LGBTQ Youth Face Unique Barriers to Accessing Youth Mentoring Programs



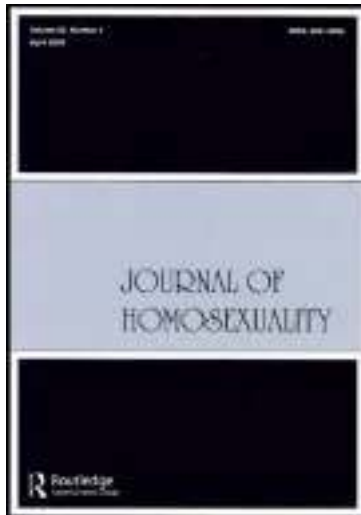
By Christy Mallory, Brad Sears, Amira Hasenbush, Alexandra Susman —January 2014

Over three million LGBTQ youth in the United States could benefit from access to youth mentoring programs. Research shows that LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the juvenile justice system, which may be due, in part, to selective enforcement of criminal laws against them. They also experience higher rates of family rejection, school harassment and bullying, homelessness, and a host of other factors related to their identity that put them at increased risk of involvement with the system. Youth mentoring organizations are designed to address the challenges at-risk youth face in their daily lives, but there is evidence showing that some organizations are unwelcoming of LGBTQ youth, and discriminate against them when they try to seek services.

For the full report, you can access the following site:

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Access-to-Youth-Mentoring-Programs.pdf>

Adolescents with Lesbian Mothers Describe Their Own Lives



By Nanette Gartrell, Henny Bos H, Heidi Peyser, Amalia Deck, MSN, Carla Rodas
—November 2012

Teens with lesbian mothers are academically successful and happy with their lives. The 17-year-olds participating in the longest-running study of lesbian families had high school GPAs in the A- to B+ range, and nearly all planned to attend four-year colleges. These adolescents had strong family bonds, and they were nearly unanimous in describing their mothers as good role models. They also reported having numerous close friends—generally with same-age peers who were predominantly heterosexual. Most of the teens felt comfortable bringing friends home, informing friends about their mothers' lesbianism and confiding in their mothers.

The teenagers were asked a series of questions about their everyday life experiences including academics, extracurricular activities, aspirations, friendships, family interactions, role models, health problems, and well-being. Notably, almost all of the 78 adolescents described their mothers as good role models. Prior studies on the same group of teenagers found that they demonstrated more competencies and fewer behavioral problems than an age-matched normative sample of American youth; although some adolescents with lesbian mothers had experienced homophobic stigmatization, family closeness helped counteract its negative effects.

The 78 adolescents in the current report were drawn from families that are participating in the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS), the longest-running and largest prospective investigation of lesbian mothers and their children in the United States. Initiated by Dr. Gartrell in 1986, the NLLFS examines the social, psychological, and emotional development of the children as well as the dynamics of planned lesbian families.

The current study appears in the current issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* and can be found at: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/nllfs-adolescents-with-lesbian-mothers-2012.pdf>

Suicide Attempts among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Adults



By Ann P. Haas, Philip L. Rodgers, Jody L. Herman

—January 2014

New analysis of responses to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) shows that transgender respondents who experienced rejection by family and friends, discrimination, victimization, or violence have a higher risk of attempting suicide. 78 percent of survey respondents who suffered physical or sexual violence at school reported suicide attempts, as did 65 percent of respondents who experienced violence at work.

The study suggests that several minority stressors—negative experiences related to anti-transgender bias—may contribute to elevated prevalence of suicide attempts among transgender people, such as experiences of harassment, family rejection, housing instability, and discrimination in health care. Over half of those who experienced harassment or bullying in schools reported lifetime suicide attempts, as did 57 percent of those who reported that their family chose not to speak to or spend time with them. High prevalence of suicide attempts was also found among those who had ever experienced homelessness (69%) and those who reported a doctor or healthcare provider refused to treat them (60%).

The study utilized data collected through the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), which was conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. 6,456 transgender and gender non-conforming people in the United States reported on their experiences of discrimination and abuse at work, at home, in school, and in the public sphere, amassing the largest transgender survey sample to date.

The full study can be found at:

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/suicide-attempts-among-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-adults/>



Feature Film



Free copies for Seventh-day Adventist pastors and teachers

Our hope and prayer making *Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins* has always been to spark authentic dialogue with (and not just “at” or “about”) LGBTI members of the Adventist church (and beyond). The listening spaces that have opened up at screenings and home viewings have been profound. People have realized that it’s not about a theological debate; it’s about listening, really listening, to the stories and perspectives of those most marginalized and least allowed to share their experiences in our pulpits and publications. Because of the importance of these conversations, we are offering the film for free to any Adventist pastor or teacher who requests a copy. The digital copy is entirely free, and the DVD version will only cost the shipping fees while supplies last. If you’d like to watch this film for yourself or share it with a Sabbath school class, home discussion group or class, please contact Daneen Akers at daneen@daneenakers.com.

Here are a few of the endorsements the film has garnered:

“The movie, which simply tells stories rather than taking an advocacy stance, is powerful. It can, I believe, do much to make Adventists more compassionate.”

—Dr. William Johnsson, retired editor, *The Adventist Review*

“Whatever one’s position regarding homosexuals and the church may be, this film is worth seeing because it candidly probes issues with real human faces and stories.”

—Dr. Roy Gane, author and Andrews seminary professor

“No matter one’s views going into the film, one comes out better understanding the human responsibility, let alone the church’s responsibility, in dealing with its LGBT children and members. I defy anyone to see this film dry-eyed. It will change you. You’ll leave with Christ’s words ringing in your ears, ‘I tell you the truth, whatsoever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.’”

—Dr. Lawrence T. Geraty, president emeritus, La Sierra University

“This film is—hands down—the best bridge-building film in this genre that I’ve seen.”

—Andrew Marin, author of *Love Is an Orientation*

“A must-see documentary film about the crossroads between faith and sexual identity. Thank you for being gracious and generous and for putting a spotlight on grace.”

—Pastor Ray Dabrowski, communication director for the General Conference
from 1994 to 2010

“The film is superb, a poignant and profound experience beyond any I’ve seen on the subject.”

—Chris Blake, author and professor of English at Union College

“If you are processing how a ‘follower of Jesus’ should respond to someone whom society has labelled as LGBT, you owe it to yourself to add this documentary to the list of resources you are considering. I was unexpectedly blown away.... I cannot recommend this film highly enough.”

—Herb Montgomery, author of *Finding the Father* and director of Renewed Heart Ministries

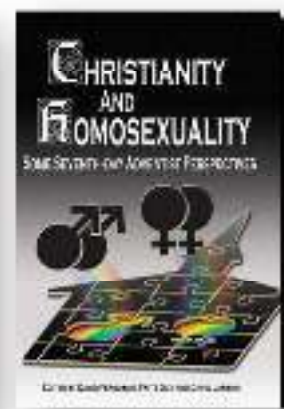
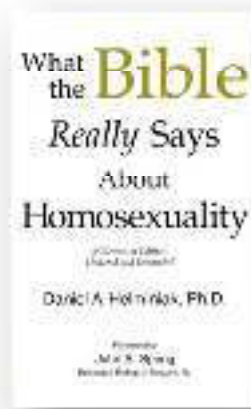
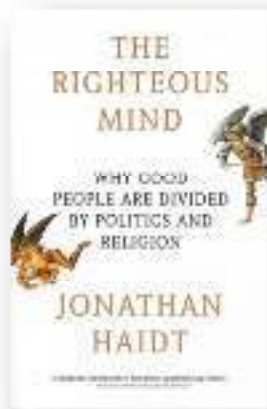
The digital and DVD versions include English closed captioning and subtitles in English, French, and Portuguese, as well as a great deal of special features (such as an intro and Q&A and over 30 minutes of additional footage).

To learn more about the film, please visit <http://www.sgamovie.com>.

Thanks for being part of this conversation,
Stephen Eyer & Daneen Akers,
Co-producers/directors



Books



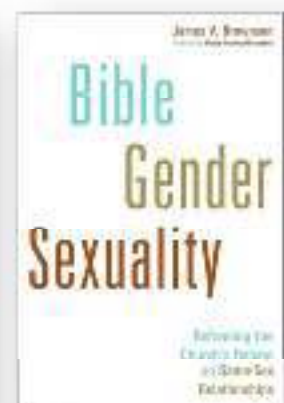
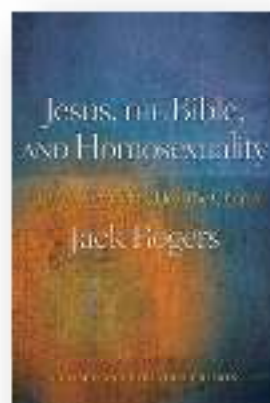
The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion
by Jonathan Haidt

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

Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality
by Jack Rogers

Bible, Gender, Sexuality
by James Brownson



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. 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. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_among_LGBT_youth_-_cite_note-Savage_sfgate_1010-29 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.

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>.



Adventist Young Adults Meet in Italy – Lisa Jean Verona



By Lisa Jean Verona

From October 31 to November 3 the Italian AMiCUS (Adventist young adults) Association held its annual meeting at the Villa Aurora in Florence. The theme of the meeting was “Right & Wrong—Human Rights and the Power of Change.”

On the last day of our gathering a representative of the evangelical network, “Faith and Homosexuality,” explained the definitions of *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, and *transgender*. They also talked about the nature of sexuality, psychological and psychiatric studies on homosexuality, homophobia in Italy and in the world, and churches’ positions on the topic. Attendees were very interested in the presentation. There were respectful questions from both conservative and progressive viewpoints.

At the end of the meeting I had the opportunity to distribute a leaflet, in Italian, about SDA Kinship and the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. I sold the books *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*; *Homosexuality, Marriage*; and *The Church—Biblical, Counseling, and Liberty Issues*.

I invited Ingrid, an old friend of mine, to meet me at Villa Aurora. She is a former Seventh-day Adventist from Florence. She founded Lei disse si (She Said Yes - www.leidissesi.net), writes a blog for *La Repubblica*, one of the most important newspapers in Italy, and worked on the Italian version of *It Gets Better* (<http://www.lecosecambiano.org/>). Ingrid and her partner were married in a same-sex ceremony on June 21, 2013. They were both welcomed to the AMiCUS meeting. Ingrid wasn’t at Villa Aurora to present her work and her writings. The gift of her visit is that she had the opportunity to meet her former spiritual community after 15 years.

This reunion touched Ingrid so deeply that she wrote about it on her blog. “It had been years since I entered the temple and the magnificent spiritual park that was the guardian of the games of my childhood and of my youthful secrets and passions. In fact, it had been 15 years since I left the church to explore the world and for my own personal growth. I believe it was also because I knew that, as a young lesbian, the rules of our community would not support me. Over these years I have built a new family, piece by piece, on a foundation of mutual esteem and respect. I have been escaping from any place or any person for whom my very existence could be a source of shame. Being at an Adventist-based conference on LGBT rights and being able to introduce Lorenza as my wife, made me feel for the first time in an Adventist context that there was no need to escape; there was nothing here that would make me feel out of place. For the first time I have a memory of me passionate and in love, without fear. It’s hard to explain how deeply grateful I feel for what happened, for what most of us experienced that day. I had a sense of *healing*—healing because we were able to meet our brothers and sisters. I felt *joy*—joy because we could *embrace* our brothers and sisters. I felt deep *emotion*—emotion because we *looked* in their eyes and we *loved* them, and they loved us.”

After all the meetings, the lectures, and the debates, we left the conference allowing ourselves the right to imagine. Imagine a church that is supportive of the issues that should characterize our being here, on earth, a loving church in anticipation of His great kingdom.



David (left) and John

Thoughts on Love and Marriage

By David Coltheart

This month, my partner John and I are traveling from our home in Australia to Queenstown, New Zealand, where we will be married on Valentine's Day, 14 February. John, who is not usually the romantic one, chose the date, which follows my birthday by a few days. I was born in New Zealand; but at the age of 9, I left with my parents to live in Australia. Although now an Australian citizen, the flight across the Tasman Sea will be an emotional journey back to my homeland.

The flights from Brisbane to Auckland, and then to Queenstown, will take four or five hours; but that is nothing compared to the journey of many years that has brought us to this point. Both John and I lived for decades in denial about our real selves, despite all the evidence to the contrary. We grew up in the era when homosexuality was simultaneously a mental illness and a crime. On top of that, I was convinced that being gay was a sin and believed the people who told me to resist temptation.

I tried to do that for many years, constantly shrugging off the nagging thought that there was something intrinsic in my nature that could not be changed. Constrained by family commitments, church expectations and the rules of society, I struggled to preserve the façade of a straight marriage and a family of three sons.

Even after looking in the mirror, scaring myself with the words: "David, you're gay," I could not conceive of being out, open or—impossible thought—falling in love with another man! And same-sex marriage was an oxymoron beyond comprehension.

But with the passage of years, my attitudes have changed, along with the people around us. What we thought unthinkable has rapidly become inevitable. John and I met and became friends, then moved in together. Our commitment ceremony took place four years later in front of family and friends. Six months ago, we began wearing matching rings as symbols of our love. When New Zealand legalized same-sex marriages in August 2013, we decided to take the greatest step in our journey.

Marriage for us is the ultimate commitment, and the most tangible symbol of loyalty, faithfulness, and love available to us. Even though only four of us will stand in the registry office—John and I, and two witnesses from Australia who have kindly offered to come over with us—there are many reasons why this will be the most significant day of our lives. While marriage will afford us legal and social status, beyond that there is a spiritual dimension, a union of hearts and lives that is the human equivalent to the union between God and His people.

We have already taken on the responsibility of being good husbands to each other. We know the need for nurture and mutual encouragement, the value of a healthy relationship and the importance of daily communication. We acknowledge the shared duties of home life and the responsibilities of daily care for each other. We recognize the need to sacrifice our individual interests for the greater good of our relationship. We share the same values and long-term

goals. We complement each other as best friends, and now look forward to completing each other's life in marriage.

Marriage is a human expression of the unity between the Three Persons of the Godhead and is at least as important as the other Christian symbols: baptism, footwashing, and the Lord's Supper. For this reason, marriage is just as significant for committed same-sex couples as it is to loving heterosexual couples—no one should be denied. The unity of two lives forming one shared existence is God's ideal for human beings. "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18).

When we recognize that suitable helper, then life is complete with the formation of a perfect trinity—the two of us, and God.

