



Safe Places

June 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

June 2013

We are part of an international team of Seventh-day Adventists who hold meetings called *Building Safe Places – for Everyone*. These meetings are for pastors, teachers, administrators and therapists and focus on ways to develop care and support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex Adventists who are part of our communities, schools or congregations.

One of the components of this work is a 12 month series of training "newsletters". Each mailing will include: *Visions of God and the Church*, *Recent Research*, and *Voices of the Heart*.

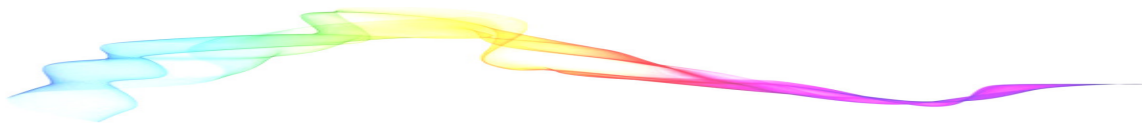
Visions of God and the Church will, generally, be an article by an Adventist pastor or theologian. This month's article is by Reinder Bruinsma. *Recent Research* will focus on issues such as brain chemistry, demographics, attitudes of Seventh-day Adventist toward homosexuality, etc. This month there are two articles. One study has assessed how many members of the population are lesbian or gay. The second article is from research about changing Adventist attitudes toward this issue. *Voices of the Heart* will be stories of the experiences of lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists. This month will be the story of Ruud Kieboom, a Seventh-day Adventist from the Netherlands. We will occasionally also share articles that discuss the ways the Seventh-day Adventist Church has dealt with a growing understanding of Biblical truths. The training packets will be in English.

In March of 2014 we will hold another series of *Building Safe Places – For Everyone* discussions; two day meetings that give us opportunities to have face-to-face conversations about these issues.

You are always welcome to give us feedback on these materials, ask questions, or share some of your thoughts or experiences. Feel free to share them with people you think might benefit from the information. If you would like to be taken off the list for these mailings, please feel free to let us know.

You can reach us now at Katgurian@aol.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.



The *Building Safe Places – For Everyone* Team:
Ruud Kieboom, Floyd Poenitz, Elodie Souil, Frieder Schmidt, Ingrid Schmidt
and Catherine Taylor

Diversity and the Seventh-day Adventist Church



By Reinder Bruinsma

Pastor Reinder Bruinsma, born in The Netherlands, has served in various offices in his long career in the church. From his poor and humble upbringing in a windmill in his native Holland, Reinder Bruinsma went on to become a writer, author, school principal, church pastor, and experienced church commentator and leader who is open to being challenged by those of other faiths and points of view. He is the author of almost twenty books, some of which have been translated into a number of languages. Some of his latest publications are *Faith: Step by Step* (Stanborough Press, 2006); *Keyword of the Christian Faith* (Review and Herald, 2008); and *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church* (Review and Herald, 2010). Pastor Bruinsma was president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in The Netherlands before retiring. He also served seven years as communication director and then executive secretary of the Trans-European Division, headquartered in St. Albans, England.

In order to understand some of the issues facing our church around concepts of diversity, I believe it is important for us to take a look at the difference between modern and postmodern thinking. The era we term modern rejected medieval myths, renewed an interest in the classics, embraced humanism, developed a new approach to the arts, and promoted trust in reason. The scientific method espoused experiment and exploration. The role of theology and church weakened as the emphasis on reason grew. The motto became, “I believe what I can understand.” Charles Darwin (1809–1992) wrote that science rather than religion explains our origins. Gradually secularism gained ground. There was an emphasis on harmony and structure. With the thoughts of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Nietzsche there began to be more focus on feeling, interpretation, lack of absolute truth and morality, and emphasis on hermeneutics. We began to think in terms of chance or contingencies instead of absolute truths. Diversity rather than harmony or unity became increasingly important. Believers began to ask questions not posed before: Why Christianity? Why this particular denomination? How much must I accept to belong to a church?

The appeal of non-denominational churches increased. Postmodern thinkers began to have changing views of ecumenism. We began to consider the possibilities that all traditions have value; and our goals began to focus on dialogue, understanding, and respect.

Diversity: A Christian Value

There is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 proclaims, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!” Exodus 20 instructs, “Do not worship any other gods besides Me!” Ephesians 4:5 reiterates, “There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” God is unity. And yet, God is also a trinity—One Essence in three “Persons”—community, communication, relationships. The Bible shows us repeatedly that it takes a multiplicity of metaphors to talk about God.

The Biblical view of mortals is holistic: We are unity. We have a body and a spirit that makes us a soul. We have individuality. Yet, we are diversity: male, female, intersex. We exist in a family, community, and relationships. We have a variety of occupations: farmer, prophet,

teacher, and healer. The Bible is a book of diversity; yet, there is unity in the Scriptures. There is great diversity among the authors and their styles of writing. There is diversity in sources and discrepancies in the reporting of specific events.

In the Old Testament there is both unity and diversity in the origin stories of Genesis 1, 2, and 10. In the stories of Israel and other nations there was no intention that other nations should cease to exist. God's intention was that these different nations should worship the one God. The covenant emphasizes kinship, but there is always a place for the stranger. Jesus' genealogy indicates non-Israelite women. In the New Testament Jesus associated with men and women of all walks of life. He had compassionate dealings with Jews and non-Jews: Samaritans, the Syrophenician woman, and Romans, for examples. He dealt with various categories of Jews. His followers interacted with a diverse group of people: Philip and the eunuch from Africa, Peter and the Roman centurion, Paul as apostle to the Gentiles. Christians were from everywhere and made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Some members of the new church thought that everyone should be the same; but the focus of Paul on diversity prevailed: we are one body with One Head, yet we differ from each other and are needed and interdependent. We have different gifts and talents but One Spirit. It is not what we are but in Whom we are.

Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

We have changed from being white and rural to mixed race and cosmopolitan. We began in the United States, expanded to Europe, and became world-wide. In many countries we have gone from monocultural to multicultural. We have shifted from being a denomination predominately from lower social classes to one containing a wide spread of social strata. We look at issues such as the role of the church community, the extended family (social control), and the place of church in the totality of life. Different times and parts of the church have had a variety of views on divorce, condoms and other contraceptives, polygamy, sex before marriage, cohabitation, and homosexuality. Schools of thought around these discussions include liberal, progressive, moral influence, evangelical, center conservative, extreme conservative, and ultra-extreme conservative (outside regular Adventism).

How do we decide what is more or less important? Do we use some sort of doctrinal triage? What are the landmarks of our faith? I propose a model of concentric circles. There are Christian fundamentals (what makes you a Christian). Then there would be Adventist core doctrines (defines an Adventist). Then Adventist secondary doctrines (fair degree of unanimity) and finally Adventist traditions. The postmodern person will make personal judgment.

Key issues at the present time are: how to read the Bible, hermeneutics, creation, women's ordination, and sexual orientation. As the church struggles with how to address issues of diversity I have many reasons for optimism. We share many basic convictions: a high view of the Bible; basic Christian doctrines such as God, Christ, and salvation; a general Protestant orientation; Sabbath; the second coming; a great controversy theme; belief in a Heavenly sanctuary; an understanding of the nature of humanity; and an emphasis on stewardship, especially health.

How Will We Deal With Polarity and Diversity: Looking Forward

Will we maintain unity through forced uniformity or through unity in diversity? Some positive signs are: the "grand story" still works much of the time; we still utilize Ellen White; we have a strong organizational structure from the local church to the General Conference; there is frequent travel between various parts of the church; we are able to organize large multicultural

meetings; we have strong publications such as *Adventist World*, mission stories, and the Hope Channel; and we have many common goals. However, we need to look at how modern and postmodern thinkers will communicate and understand each other. We need to address theological polarization, and we need to develop ways to integrate thoughts and cultures between different communities inside the church. Will we accept and welcome diversity or will we fight diversity?

We need to create a general climate of tolerance. We need to figure out ways to engage in a positive dialogue and demonstrate willingness to learn from each other as we discuss our theological issues. We need to improve our ways of addressing the Bible and Ellen White. We need to overcome fundamentalist thinking. There are three main issues facing the church in the next five years: creationism, the ordination of women, and homosexuality. There is a movement within the church to tighten the language of Fundamental Belief #6, which has to do with our understanding of a six-day creation. If we do not take a balanced view, we run the risks of strengthening an anti-science reputation, losing intellectuals in our denomination, creating crises in our colleges and universities around their freedom to develop their curriculum, and placing the Geoscience Research Institute in an impossible situation. As the scientists from that institute have noted, there are geological patterns that can point to slow evolutionary development, and geological patterns that can point to a creation/flood story development. Since no human was there at the beginning, the decision about what to choose is an act of faith. We need to address how we will protect our understanding of the origins and sacredness of the Sabbath.

The situation around the ordination of women has become extremely messy. In Atlanta the constituents voted to ordain all deacons, including women deacons. Whether some parts of the world will do so, remains to be seen. They also made a decision to form committees to study the issues involved with ordaining women to the ministry. By 2015, no matter what is decided by the General Conference Session, the ordination of women will go forward. There are divisions and conferences that will not be able to wait any longer for the process to go forward.

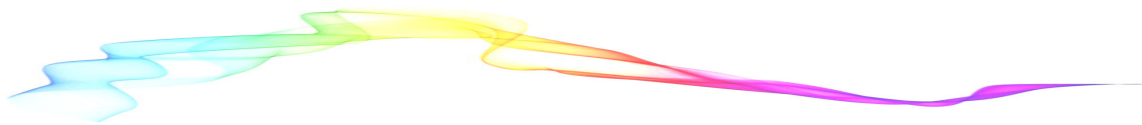
The third primary issue facing the church at this time is homosexuality. In the next five years we will need to carefully consider the theological concerns (both pro and con). We will need to train our pastors to work with their gay and lesbian congregants in thoughtful, honest, supportive, and compassionate ways. We need to address legal challenges. And we need to address public relations challenges, such as the public reaction to a Seventh-day Adventist woman who was running for parliament and decried because of the church's reputation for homophobia, the refusal of the church to allow Carrol Grady and her organization that supports families of gay and lesbian people to have a booth at the General Conference Session, and the refusal of the Toronto Vegetarian Association to allow the Seventh-day Adventist Church to have a booth at their health fair because of the church's homophobic policies.

The church could address these issues by applying pressure that would affect the careers of people, curtail educational institutions, demand some sort of "total commitment" document to be signed by employees as a sign of loyalty to present policies, censure books and publications, and guard against external influences. But how well could this possibly work?

As we head into these discussions, I am convicted that we need to protect the identity of the Adventist movement by recognizing our non-negotiable core of basic Christian beliefs and key Adventist convictions. I believe we need to remain intentional about unity and, at the same time, be intentional about creating a space for diversity.

I suggest that the church recognize the value of a postmodern climate, stimulate dialogue and study, educate our members about various issues, reflect positive attitudes towards diversity in our publications, give educational institutions freedom, and accept some ruggedness at the edges. I think it is important that our church accepts some differences between the administrative divisions on the issue of women in ministry, letting some issues be determined at lower levels for positions regarding certain geographical territories. While doing this I suggest that the church let local congregations have their own unique “flavor.”

As we go into these times of change, we need to keep a spiritual mind, be willing to listen, distinguish between principle and culture, develop the tolerance for others that we want for ourselves (including when they hold opinions that disagree with ours), look for what binds us together, and strengthen our patience and our understanding that change takes time. Perhaps we may even need to be prepared to change our own minds about some things.



How many people are gay?

Williams Institute Study Estimates Gay Population in the United States at 9 Million

Drawing on information from four recent national and two state-level population-based surveys, the analyses suggest that there are more than 8 million adults in the US who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, comprising 3.5% of the adult population. In total, the study suggests that approximately 9 million Americans – roughly the population of New Jersey – identify as LGBT.

Among adults who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, bisexuals comprise a slight majority (1.8% compared to 1.7% who identify as lesbian or gay); women are substantially more likely than men to identify as bisexual; estimates of those who report any lifetime same-sex sexual behavior and any same-sex sexual attraction are substantially higher than estimates of those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. There are also nearly 700,000 transgender individuals in the US. An estimated 19 million Americans (8.2%) report that they have engaged in same-sex sexual behavior and nearly 25.6 million Americans (11%) acknowledge at least some same-sex sexual attraction.

Full report: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf>

Survey Explores Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Adventists



By Carol J. Grady

Attitudes among Americans regarding various issues related to homosexuality are changing. What do Seventh-day Adventists in the pews really think about this topic? Do most Adventists side with the official church statement¹ that condemns “homosexual practices and relationships” as sinful, while affirming the “dignity of every human being,” including gays and lesbians? How many have found their understanding of homosexuality changing as new information is made known?

Up until about 40 years ago, Adventist opposition to homosexuality was no different from that of most other Christians, indeed from American society in general. However, as continuing scientific research has brought a growing understanding of homosexuality, the consensus of experts shifted and it is no longer included in the list of mental disorders by professional organizations.² Today, polls show that a majority (53%) of the American public favors gay marriage.³ Currently, 12 states, the District of Columbia, and two Indian tribes legally recognize gay marriage, and it is possible that in June 2013 the Supreme Court could overturn the Defense of Marriage Act.

Churches, too, began to wrestle with this “new light,” particularly the more liberal churches, while conservative denominations stepped up their opposition. Today, the following denominations welcome and affirm gays and lesbians, and some perform same-sex unions/marriages and/or ordain gay and lesbian clergy: United Church of Christ, Alliance of Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran (ELCA), Metropolitan Community Church, most “Old Catholic” communities, Presbyterian Church (USA), and some Quaker communities, as well as three of the four branches of Judaism in the United States.⁴ And although the Roman Catholic Church officially condemns homosexual behavior, a recent poll showed that 82% of American Catholics are not opposed to gay marriage.⁵ In a 2003 study at a large public university in Texas, in which Seventh-day Adventists were included among a group labeled “conservative Protestants” this group had significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than “moderate Protestants” and even more negative than “liberal Protestants.”⁶

But no published study has previously been conducted to look specifically at attitudes among individual Adventist members. Have attitudes in the pew changed, along with societal attitudes at large? I was interested in finding answers to these questions by doing a survey to find out more about the attitudes of Adventists across the country toward homosexuality, so I enlisted the help and sponsorship of Dr. Aubyn Fulton, professor of psychology at Pacific Union College. Dr. Fulton and I designed the survey itself, while I was responsible for recruiting participants and Dr. Fulton did the statistical analysis of the results. These results were presented formally at the Western Psychological Association Convention in April; what follows here is an informal summary and discussion of what we found.

Our Sample

We decided to identify a representative sample of Adventist churches in the United States, and then ask each pastor to help us invite their church members to complete our survey. The Adventist church is organized into geographically based unions; we divided these Unions into North (Lake and Mid-America), East (Atlantic and Columbia), South (Southern and Southwestern), and West (Pacific and North Pacific). Then we determined what percentage of the total United States denominational membership each of these unions comprised, and on that basis randomly selected a proportional number of churches from each region: five from the North, eight from the East, 12 from the South, and 13 from the West, for a total of 38 churches. We sent letters to the pastors of each of the 38 randomly selected churches explaining our project and asking them to either provide us with an email list of their members, or to forward our invitation to take the survey to their members themselves. Twelve of the 38 pastors (31.5%) agreed (two each from the north and east, three from the south, and five from the west, ranging in size from 22 to 765 members). Ten pastors chose to forward our survey invitation to their members themselves, while two small churches where few members had computers filled out paper surveys and mailed them to us. In one church the pastor moved shortly after agreeing to participate, so the church secretary announced the survey in the church bulletin and we estimated that half the membership had seen it. We estimate that 919 people were invited to take our survey. We received 441 completed surveys, for a total response rate of 48%.

The General Conference Department of Archives and Statistics does not presently collect information on age, ethnicity, or gender; but using information from a 2008 Pew Forum Survey that included Seventh-day Adventists, we can compare our demographics with theirs.

AGE 18-29 39-49 50-64 65 and older

Pew Poll 20% 44% 21% 15%

Our Survey 22% 46% 22.7% 9.3%

ETHNICITY White Black Hispanic Asian

Pew Poll 43% 21% 27% 5%

Our Survey 57.8% 27.9% 7.5% 5.2%

GENDER Female Male

Pew Poll 60% 40%

Our Survey 57.1% 42.9%

Our age and gender demographics are fairly consistent with those of the Pew Poll, but ethnically, white members are considerably over-represented, while Hispanic members are under-represented. We contacted a number of ethnic churches, but only one fairly large black church agreed to participate.

In addition, 428 respondents identified as *heterosexual* (97.1%), six as *homosexual* (1.4%), and seven as *bisexual* (1.6%). A Gallup Poll published in October of 2012 reported that 3.4% of the United States population identifies as LGB.⁵ Our 3% total is close to that.

We asked participants to indicate the length of time they or their family had been Adventists. 25% were *first-generation*, 23% were *second-generation*, and 52% represented *three or more generations* of Adventists.

Participants were also asked to identify their perspective on the Adventist faith; are they *conservative* or *very conservative* (31%), *moderate* (44%), or *liberal* or *very liberal* (25%)? This is a fairly balanced spread.

Finally, participants were questioned about personal contact with LGBs; 65% said they were closely or casually acquainted with a lesbian, and 72% were closely or casually acquainted with a gay man.

Although caution should be used in interpreting the results of this survey, it does provide the best picture we have at this time of how American Adventists understand and view homosexuality. It can serve as a baseline for other studies in the future.

Survey Findings

Let's begin by looking at the number of those who agreed/strongly agreed or disagreed/strongly disagreed with the following statements in the survey; later we can discuss the differences between the various demographic groups

First are two statements about beliefs regarding the nature of homosexuality which were close to evenly split.

- **I understand homosexuality to be a result of factors that are beyond voluntary control.** Another way of saying this might be that homosexuality is not something people choose. 45% agreed; 55% disagreed.
- **I believe that with the proper motivation and interventions, people who identify as homosexuals can be changed to heterosexuals.** A total of 55% agreed that orientation can be changed and 45% disagreed.

The next three questions about acceptance by the church show a majority with attitudes of acceptance.

- **I would welcome a gay or lesbian person who came to my church.** On this question there was near consensus, with 94% agreeing to this statement.
- **If a gay or lesbian couple who lived together romantically attended evangelistic meetings in my church and asked to be baptized, I would insist that they quit living together before they were allowed to be baptized.** Only 48% would insist on such a couple separating before being baptized, while 52% would not impose this restriction.
- **I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to be members in good standing in Adventist churches.** 53% agreed to membership for gays and lesbians, while 47% did not.

Three statements about participation in church life follow. Attitudes here were less accepting, with the exception of musical participation.

- **I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to serve as Sabbath school leaders or teachers in Adventist churches.** More than a fourth (29%) agreed; 71% disagreed.
- **I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to serve as deacons or elders in Adventist churches.** More than one in four (28%) also agreed on this, and 72% disagreed.
- **I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to share their musical talents in Adventist churches.** Maybe it's their reputation for musical abilities, but 80% were happy to have gays/lesbians provide music for worship services, and only 20% did not want them to do even that.

Next are statements referring to the church's relation to societal issues.

- **I believe that Adventists should politically oppose the legalization of gay marriage.** Only 56% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 44% disagreed. Perhaps this reflects the strong role religious liberty directors have played in some areas by urging members to vote against gay marriage because of their belief that it is sinful, in spite of the traditional Adventist belief in liberty of conscience.
- **I believe that gay men and lesbians do not have the same rights to equal employment and housing opportunities as straight Americans do.** Over three-quarters (77%) believe that LGBs should have equal housing and employment rights, even if they believe the behavior is sinful; only 23% are not in favor of granting those rights.

The following statement concerns religious belief about homosexuality.

- **I believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin.** This is another question which elicited high consensus, with 86% agreeing the Bible calls homosexuality a sin, and only 14% disagreeing. It should be noted that this question states homosexuality itself, not just homosexual actions, is condemned by the Bible. Perhaps this reflects a common fuzziness in understanding of the various terms used in discussing this issue.

Respondents also completed the six items on the "Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men" scale by Herek (2002). This well-validated and often-used measure is scored on a 4-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), with high scores indicating negative attitudes. The average score on the ATGL for our sample was very close to 3, meaning that our average participant agreed with negative attitudes about homosexuality.

Interestingly, many of the demographic variables tracked in our survey were significantly related to the various attitudes and beliefs regarding homosexuality that we asked about. A multiple regression analysis showed that six variables together explained a highly significant 36.7% of the variance in the overall attitudes towards homosexuals as represented by the ATGL score (adjusted $R^2 = .367$, $F(5,518) = 49.02$, $p < .001$). In order of the strength of the relationship, liberal respondents, those more acquainted with gay men, younger respondents, white respondents, women and those who live in the northeast reported more positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. For the most part, the same variables, sometimes in different orders, predicted more positive attitudes toward homosexuals participating in various ways in the life of the church, and adherence to beliefs that are generally seen as being positive about homosexuals (that sexual orientation is not a choice, that it cannot be easily changed, and that it is not a sin). Fewer of our demographic variables related to attitudes about welcoming homosexuals to church, or the belief that homosexuals have the same rights as heterosexuals, because the majority of our respondents indicated agreement with these positions regardless of their demographic status.

Conclusions

We should first recognize the survey's limitation in being representative. Only about a third of the pastors agreed to participate, and a little less than half of the members of these churches completed the survey. It is certainly possible that those who did participate tended to be more liberal than those who declined. There could also be a bias toward the more technically savvy respondents, since the survey was conducted by computer. We also neglected to include a question about educational level, so this element is missing from our analysis. Nevertheless, this does represent one of the most complete samples to date of American Adventists to be asked about their attitudes toward homosexuality.

The survey results indicate that we should be careful not to make sweeping statements about what Adventists believe because there is a wide range of attitudes toward, and understanding of, homosexuality among American Adventists. This makes me think of my own journey. I am a fourth-generation Adventist; my parents worked in Adventist hospitals in Maryland and California. I attended Adventist schools and spent my growing-up years in Takoma Park, Maryland, then our world church headquarters. I never questioned what I was taught about our church – basically that we were the only Christians who really had the whole “Truth.” In college I fell in love with a theology student and married him, determined to be the best pastor’s wife ever. After ten years in Southeastern California Conference and five in the then Hawaiian Mission, we and our three boys became missionaries in the Far Eastern Division and lived in Singapore for 15 years before returning to work at the General Conference. It was while there, 23 years ago, that we discovered our youngest son is gay and began a long period of learning about and trying to understand this strange and unexpected place where we found ourselves. Our eyes were opened to a world of pain and heartache we had never known. Slowly, our love for these “outcasts” grew, and our ignorance and prejudices were overcome. I believe it is the same for many of our church members today. Keeping up with growing knowledge about homosexuality, as well as having a family member or close friend who is LGB, fosters understanding and empathy. As more and more gay and lesbian church members “come out of the closet” at ever younger ages, it seems that nearly everybody has someone in their family with a different sexual orientation. As research continues to bring more information to light, and as there is more discussion in many Christian churches and other world religions about how we treat others who are different, I have come to believe that this “new light” is a present truth that the Holy Spirit is bringing to us.

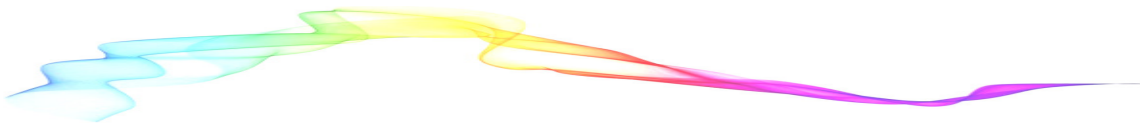
The survey also shows that, despite a pretty general belief (86%) that homosexuality is condemned in the Bible, there is a more nuanced attitude toward homosexuals themselves. Although only a quarter of respondents self-identified as liberal/very liberal, 94% affirmed that they would welcome an LGB person to their church; more than half (53%) said we should allow them to be church members, and (52%) would have no problem with baptizing a gay or lesbian couple who are living together. More than a quarter would even be willing for LGB people to serve as Sabbath School leaders or teachers, elders, and deacons. This indicates that more and more church members are coming to believe we must treat LGB people like everyone else, as members of our family and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Close to half of respondents (45%) report that they understand homosexuality is not a choice, and that sexual orientation cannot be changed. This indicates that the American Adventist Church is moving closer to accepting that homosexuality is not a sinful choice and that it is not something that can be healed or changed.

Finally, as I recall how difficult it was for anyone to even talk about this issue back when we first learned our son is gay, it is easy to conjecture that if a study such as this had been conducted twenty or even ten years ago, the result would probably have shown considerably more negative attitudes than this one. Two of the variables in this study that are high predictors of positive attitudes – close acquaintance with an LGB person, and being a young person – indicate that as we look to the future we are likely to see even more positive attitudes in the church toward our differently oriented brothers and sisters.

1. <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat46.html>
2. <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/discrimination.aspx>
3. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159089/religion-major-factor-americans-opposed-sex-marriage.aspx>
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT-affirming_Christian_denominations;
<http://forward.com/articles/165958/-of-jewish-groups-have-gay-friendly-policy/>
5. <http://www.newsmax.com/US/Quinnipiac-Catholics-gay-marriage/2012/12/05/id/466540>
6. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1387580?uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101752378427>

Carrol Grady is the wife of a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister and has had a ministry for families of gays and lesbians since 1996. More information about her ministry is available at www.someone-to-talk-to.net.



Growing into Love



By Ruud Kieboom

I never realized I was different when I was a young boy, because I didn't know how others felt about certain things. But at the same time that was the reason why I kept certain feelings to myself and didn't dare to share them with others. Did I – unknowingly – feel what was considered right and what wrong? I remember in primary school that there was this teacher whom I thought was very beautiful. I remember vividly his gestures and the way he talked, but I certainly did not realize at that time that it could have anything to do with being gay. It just was that way. I liked to look at guys that I considered beautiful.

When playing games as a child with neighbor friends we explored each other's sexuality. And when they had enough of it I was the one that wanted to go on and wanted to play the game again. I had no guilt. I was in a process of learning about myself and how I related to others. In many ways, I think, I was a normal child, though my object and expectations were different. But, like other little boys, it really didn't play such a big role in my life then.

When I was a young teenager, my sister began to date the man who later became her husband. Before they married he slept in my bedroom when he came to visit us. I couldn't resist exploring his body with my hands to find out what an adult male body was like! His body was interesting to me. Around that time I was – what we call today – “abused” by a guy in the dressing room in the public swimming pool across the street from where I lived. It was my first

sexual experience with a man. I remember asking him (for the first time in my life) if I was gay. He was in his early twenties, I guess. I was not afraid or hurt, neither did I experience his act as sexual abuse (though now I think differently). The idea whether this was wrong or not still had not occurred to me then. And over the next couple of years he “abused” me several times in the swimming pool. But though it didn’t hurt me directly when it happened, I must confess that for years afterwards I was always nervous whenever I entered a swimming pool. It took a lot of years to get over that feeling. Now it doesn’t come to my mind anymore. It is something of the past.

When I was in secondary school I would stay away from girls who were interested in me. By then I realized I would not be able to give them what they had a right to if we were to get seriously related. Looking back on this period, I must have known I was gay by the time I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I had read about broken marriages of gay/straight couples and was convinced never to do harm a girl that way. It would not be fair – I thought – to date a girl if I was not able to keep up a “healthy” relationship with her.

I grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church. When my aunt and her family came back from Australia in 1971 I got into contact with Seventh-day Adventists through them. My cousin told me this church had Bible studies. And so it happened that I was baptized in 1978. Soon after my baptism I left home to work in a kibbutz in Israel at the age of 24. For the first time in my life I was on my own, dealing with both my religion and my sexuality. When I came back to The Netherlands I began to wonder if it was permissible to be gay. I had read about this issue in the church materials but don't really remember anything specific that really bothered me then.

In Dutch society at that time homosexuality was talked about in good and bad ways. It became important to me to find out God’s opinion about my orientation. I had some one-night stands, or better say “one-hour stands,” but no relationships. I never stayed with anyone. I never had intercourse because I was afraid of getting a disease. If anyone wanted more then I was comfortable with I would back up. After every encounter I felt depressed; and the older I got, the more it touched me. I felt dirty and sinful. I was deep in the closet, not out to anyone, and certainly was afraid to show up with a guy all of a sudden. Hardly anyone told me it was okay.

Despite this difficult thing in my life, I wasn’t an unhappy young man, though I did feel lonely at times, not able to express my feelings when I fell in love with a man. When I was 32 years old, I suddenly realized I had fallen in love with my best friend from church. I helped him through an agonizing period in his life when he got divorced from his first wife. We were spending lots of time together talking and praying. At that time we were training for a march event. During our training we talked a lot. For my friend it was a relief to have somebody to open his heart and soul to and I – though I didn’t realize it right away – was too eager to listen and help if I could. There were more things bothering him, so one night during the march he cried on my shoulder. When his heart was relieved he then asked me why I never had a girlfriend. So the next night was my turn to cry on his shoulder and to tell him why. I told him my story and for the first time there was someone I was not afraid of to speak out to. This was one of the most important moments of my life and the beginning of my coming-out process. I found it helpful to be able to talk about the things of which I was ashamed. I could tell him everything. He had no direct answers or solutions, but he listened! He tried to help me to accept myself as a whole person. His embrace was strange but beautiful. I was not used to embracing men; my parents were from a generation that did not hug very much.

It was important to me that my friend was an Adventist, because I wanted to have an opinion from someone who was religious and who believed somewhat the same as I did. To be accepted and self-acceptance were the most important things that happened to me. He helped me to read the Bible in a new and more modern context. From him I learned to look differently at some Bible verses. Times and visions have changed since the completion of the Bible.

Till this day I have a special friend in him. I think not many people could have kept such a friendship, especially not because it was a burden to my friend, knowing I was in love with him. Sometimes I would call him in the middle of the night and he would say, "Come on over" and we would talk and I could stay the night with him. Yes, he later confessed to me, he had thought about giving up our friendship because I was taking too much of his energy. Today I still wonder how he managed to stay with me till the day I freed myself from loving him. A faithful friend like him is hardly found, I realize all too well!

When the pain was over I started to talk, wanted to talk, with family and friends, people who were important to me, also in the church. My mother was sad when she learned of my orientation. Not that she rejected me or homosexuals in general, but because she envisioned another future for me and thought I would be lonely, having no wife and children of my own. My father was wonderful! He just said it was okay to be gay and even advised me not to tell the other members of our family. *"They never told you about their orientation, so why should you? They will learn soon enough when you show up with your boyfriend."* And he was right! When I introduced him everybody welcomed him in the family. *"Ah, I knew it! I knew it!"* one of my sisters said. Was I lucky?

In the church the people that matter to me didn't reject me either and accepted me as they did before. My second pastor even organized a special Sabbath meeting on the theme "Homosexuality" with a special edition of the church's magazine. One of the items was an interview with me. I got many positive responses to that. Everybody in church knows I am gay and have a partner. Though he is not a Seventh-day Adventist he is always welcomed when he comes to church with me. The only one that disappointed me was my pastor who served at the time of my coming out. He didn't have a clue about homosexuality at all. And I think many pastors in our church don't have an idea what it is to have another orientation than the one the church proclaims the "right" one. His question was *"Do you want to be a woman?"* He said he was going to think and read about it but he never came back with anything. He wanted to find "a theological solution," but he never came with one. Now and again he asked me how I was doing, but always with other people around, so I could never speak out about myself. He is retired now and I don't blame him for it anymore. But pastors of today should know better, but many just don't care to learn more about homosexuality other than what the church teaches or they are afraid to say what they really think. There were and maybe still are people in my church that have difficulties in accepting homosexuality as a way of living. Nevertheless they love me for the person I am and appreciate the work I have done for about 27 years in our local congregation. The fact that I am a homosexual is not really an issue anymore.

Soon after my coming out I joined a group called *Kringen* (Circles). This group meets at people's homes. It was my first exciting experience of being with a whole group of gay people! Every meeting we invited a speaker and new members could tell their story. And in 2000 I finally contacted Kinship.

On my first date with Kees (my present partner), my best friend (!) drove me to his place in the city of Leiden where he had to be that night as well. I had him drop me off and told him to pick me up in two hours in case this did not work. When he came back after two hours I realized the time had flown by. On Valentine's Day 1994, seven years after we met, Kees and I bought a house and started living together. We had our relationship ratified by a lawyer by a life contract to make sure that if anything happened to one of us the other would be able to keep everything. In 1998 we were able to get "married" (registered partnership) which was witnessed by many family members and friends, also from the church. And my best friend was one of the official "witnesses."

In the end of the 1980s a girlfriend from church moved to the United States and sent me a leaflet about Kinship that she found on a church pew. I put the leaflet in a safe place (too safe, because I never found it again), because the States were just too far away for me then. I couldn't imagine what Kinship could do for me in Holland. When we got connected to the internet in our home I tried to find out more about Kinship and found the website. Through *KinNet*, the online discussion board of Kinship, I came into contact with a member in Sweden. So in July 2002 "Kinship Europe" met for the first time under a huge, ancient tree in his place in central southern Sweden. Kinship's president and people from Britain, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and The Netherlands were present. The next two years I organized meetings in my town Den Haag where I found a convenient holiday resort to gather. I put a notice on *KinNet* and 25 participants attended from The Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, Norway, South Africa, United States, Sweden, and Belgium. In 2004 we even had attendees from as far as Australia and Brazil!

My spirituality has gone from somewhat conservative to liberal. Nowadays I am open about my orientation. When people ask me, I just say "I am gay." I have a wonderful partner in Kees. I feel free and secure with him. Kees has helped me to get my religion in a place that is very comfortable for me. I have learned a lot from him about not being a Scribe or a Pharisee anymore. I do not keep the Sabbath in quite the same way as I did before. I used to be very strict with food and drinks and things like that. He helped me to be free from being rigid. The church taught me rules to find a certain freedom. But Kees taught me to find the freedom in the rules. I think self-acceptance is the first thing to strive for, but everyone has his/her own way to reach that. I had to accept myself before I could tell others who I am. The second thing is to have someone to talk to. These are the two things that freed me. If we have someone to talk to, we accept ourselves more easily. Once a friend – looking at us – told us "I see peace when I look at you. When you two are together you radiate a feeling of peace and rest." I think this has to do with self-acceptance. I would like everyone to have this peace of being yourself

