



# Safe Places

August 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

August 2013

We hope you are doing well and that in your work, as well as in your life, you are finding gifts that offset the stressors.

This month Luca Marulli has shared with us one of his **Visions of God and the Church**. About himself, Luca writes:

*I teach New Testament and Biblical Interpretation at the Adventist University of France, Collonges-sous-Salève. My wife Irène is the manager of the massage department at the Seventh-day Adventist institution La Clinique La Lignière (Gland, Switzerland). Our daughter, Maya, is 6 years old and full of joy and life. I'm a member of SDA Kinship, and my wife and I support LGBTI civil rights and church integration.*

We are including a resource used by many Adventist families that might be helpful for people with whom you are working.

Our **Recent Research** section continues addressing some of the biological components of sexual orientation. This month will focus on brain structure: hypothalamus, cerebral asymmetry, and anterior commissure. We've included links for those of you would like to read in more depth.

Two parents of gay and lesbian children have shared some of their story and thoughts in **Stories of the Heart**.

*Carrol Grady, the wife of a retired minister and missionary, makes quilts and reads lots of books in Snohomish, Washington, while trying to remember the birthdays of 15 grand-children and five great-grandchildren. She is the author of My Son, Beloved Stranger and facilitates the website "Someone to Talk To." She also wrote a chapter for Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives. She has come to know several hundreds of parents and other family members of gay and lesbian people, and knows close to a thousand gay and lesbian people themselves, as well as a smaller number of transgender people. She believes God led her into her ministry, and her heart's desire is to see our church grow into a more loving and accepting place for her gay friends.*

*George Babcock was born into a non-Adventist family but, thanks to his grandmother, he attended a Seventh-day Adventist church school through third grade. Public school followed through grade 8 and then he attended Forest Lake Academy, where he met Fern, who later became his wife. George graduated (BA) from Columbia Union College and received both his MA and EdD degrees from Andrews University. He served the church as teacher, pastor, principal, educational superintendent, and director of education at the union and General Conference levels. He also served as university academic dean, college president, and educational consultant to the governments of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and for eight years represented private education on the Tennessee Education Council. George served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 54 years and was awarded the Medallion of Distinction (the highest award conferred jointly by the GC and world divisions to outstanding Adventist educators for meritorious service to the global church and role modeling of academic excellence and faith commitment). George and Fern have two grown children and three granddaughters.*

We continue to welcome your thoughts, comments, suggestions, requests, and critiques. Please feel most welcome to share this newsletter with whomever you think might benefit from reading it. If you would like to be taken off our mailing list, just let us know.

We wish you many blessings,

*Catherine Taylor*



*The Building Safe Places – For Everyone Team*

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

### Like a Mustard Seed



*By Luca Marulli*

A woman was at work when she received a phone call that her daughter was very sick with a fever. She left her work and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication. She got back to her car and found that she had locked her keys in the car.

She didn't know what to do, so she bowed her head and asked God to send her some help. Within five minutes an old rusty car pulled up with a dirty, greasy, bearded man who was wearing an old biker skull rag on his head. The woman thought, *This is what You sent to help me?* But she was desperate, so she was also very thankful.

The man got out of his car and asked her if he could help. She said, “Yes, my daughter is very sick. I stopped to get her some medication and I locked my keys in my car. I must get home to her. Please, can you please help me to unlock my car?”

He said, “Sure.” He walked over to the car, and in less than a minute the car was opened.

She hugged the man and through her tears she said, “Thank you so much! You are a very nice man.”

The man replied, “Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison today. I was in prison for car theft and have only been out for about an hour.”

The woman hugged the man again and with sobbing tears cried out loudly, “Oh, thank You, God! You even sent me a professional!”

Maybe for the first time, this man had been genuinely appreciated for something considered a blemish by the society at large. How often have we been tempted to desert the church, to avoid fellow committed Christians? How often have we felt out of place in a Seventh-day Adventist environment? On the other hand, how often have pious Christians felt uncomfortable because they are disturbed by the presence in their midst, in our midst, of people who are not as we wish they were?

Jesus said, “What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches” (Luke 16:18-19). We have already seen that when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, He’s not only describing the new order God will bring in the universe, but is also describing how this future reality is already at work in our

everyday life. In the same gospel of Luke, only one chapter later, we find this meaningful saying: “For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21).

When the parable starts with, “What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it?” Jesus is likely referring to something that is happening here and now. To what does He compare the kingdom? What is He trying to tell us about how we should facilitate and recognize God’s action in our midst?

A mustard seed is proverbially known for being very, very small. It measures about 1 mm. Jesus is then talking about something that is considered little, insignificant in people’s eyes. The mustard plant is an annual. It grows wild and comes in three varieties, of which the most common in Palestine, *sinapsis nigra*, is a plant that normally grows to four feet, although at times more. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), a contemporary of Jesus Christ, was an ancient author and natural philosopher of some importance. He wrote in *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History): “It [mustard] grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand when it has once been sown it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once.” We are dealing here with a plant that has a high speed of germination and spreads rapidly.

Now remember that our first concern is, *Where can a person who’s struggling with crisis find help and restoration?* The parable of the mustard seed, I believe, responds to this question. In this very short parable of a tiny seed, we find at least two anomalies. We cannot perceive them anymore because we live some 20 centuries after the parable was told. If we think as the original Palestinian hearers thought, we will discover some interesting things.

The first anomaly of the parable is found in verse 19: “It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden.” If we were Jewish people of the first century, we would find the word *garden* inappropriate and even shocking. Why? In the Torah there are laws that are called “The Rules of Different Kinds.” An instance of this law is Leviticus 19:19: “You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.” The purpose of the rules of diverse kinds was to bring order into the disorderly world. The creation of order in this world replicates the division between the sacred and the profane. The places where things could not be planted or mixed together were important for the maintenance of purity boundaries.

The mustard figures prominently in the rabbinic discussions of “diverse kinds.” Now, according to the teaching of the rabbis, in the Mishnah Kilayim 3.2, we read, “Not every kind of seed may be sown in a garden-bed, but any kind of vegetable may be sown therein. Mustard and small beans are deemed a kind of seed and large beans a kind of vegetables.” Consequently, *a mustard seed could not be planted in a garden*. Planting a mustard seed in a garden was believed to be the same as planting something profane into a pure reality. To emphasize his point, Jesus does not say a man planted a mustard seed in his garden. He says instead, “A man took and *threw the seed* into his own garden.” *Threw* is here clearly meaning that the man was performing an act that he didn’t want other people to see. He *threw* the seed, because the act of planting a mustard seed into a garden was not socially and religiously accepted.

The second anomaly in the parable is: “...and it grew and became a tree.” Why does Jesus describe the mustard plant as a tree, when botanically it is a shrub? Jesus was aware of the difference between a shrub and a tree. Again, in the Mishnah Kylaïm, we find this rabbinical

writing, “Where trees, vegetables, and shrubs are dealt with in distinct groups, *mustard is clearly classified with shrubs.*” Using the word *tree* is manifestly wrong. We have to realize that when Jesus tells a parable he often tries to shock the audience. How it is possible that somebody could be stupid or blasphemous enough to plant a seed of mustard in a garden? How can a shrub become a tree? There is more. The shrub not only became a tree, but Jesus says, “...and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” These apparently superfluous words are in fact a quotation of the Old Testament. And this quote gives the key to unlock the parable.

In Ezekiel 17:22-24, we find a prophecy against the people of Israel who despised the covenant with God. However, the Lord makes a promise comparing every man and nation to a tree:

*I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it.*

Jesus’ hearers were aware of this text. When Jesus talked about a little shrub like the mustard plant becoming a tree able to shelter birds, their minds were drawn to Ezekiel’s prophecy.

What, then, is the meaning of this parable? The parable begins with a metaphor of impurity. A little unwelcome seed is thrown into a well-kept and “socio-religiously correct” garden. I believe that Jesus here is talking about people who are facing crisis—people who are struggling with moral, physical, and/or spiritual sufferings—but also about people who are not considered a blessing by most pious church members or by the society itself. Those people, Jesus tells me, are like the little mustard seed: considered by many unwelcome, not fitting the picture, a contaminant more than an asset. But Jesus says *the little mustard seed has its place in the garden.*

Actually the garden is the place in which they need to stay, they need to be welcome, they need to have a chance to develop in order to become much more than you would expect.

What would you expect from a mustard seed? A shrub or a tree? Jesus reassures us, “If put in the right place, which is among you, this little shrub can become a beautiful and fruitful tree. Yes, in God’s economy, the mustard seed grows into a tree, as every person grows into an accomplished child of God.”

Some are struggling with addictions. They belong to the body! Some feel far away from what God has in mind for them. They belong to the body! Some believe their life is a mess. They belong to the body! Others simply feel unwelcome. They are part of the body! We all are like a mustard seed. The church is the garden. We all need to be invited to grow in the riches of its soil.

The strong message for those who consider themselves *believers* is that the church must become the place that most reflects the welcoming heart of Jesus. The church must become the place where strong and healthy relationships are built. The church must become the place where mustard seeds can be planted safely.

Several pastors I know have expressed shame about the degree of ignorance they display on the subject of homosexuality. An Italian pastor wrote, “How can we still tell homosexual people

that they must become heterosexual? How can we tell them that the church loves you and always will, but you can become a member only if you become heterosexual or if you live a life of celibacy?”

It seems to me that there are at least three forms of homosexual behavior:

1. Somebody can choose to have homosexual intercourse as a sexual practice that is simply lascivious and oriented toward going beyond all boundaries.
2. Somebody else could have homosexual intercourse in situations where there are no heterosexual options. This can happen in prisons or during war.

In both cases, knowing the Lord and/or changing the context can help people abandon those practices.

3. However, there is what I call “natural homosexuality.” We don’t know why, but some people are simply *created* homosexual.

I cannot ask them to become different. I cannot ask them to become celibate against their will. I know the Catholic Church asks its priests to become celibate. I also know few of them actually remain so. There may be miracles; but to ask every single homosexual to become celibate against their will is, I think, the heritage of a deviant Christianity imbued with sex phobia.

Look at Adam. As he was admiring the beautiful creation, he could not help feeling sad and lonely. Only in Eve could he find a deeper taste for life. “At last! Finally!” he must have exclaimed. From that moment forward, men and women have uttered, “At last! Finally! There you are!” when they succeed in conquering the heart of their loved one. Like Jacob, people have worked fourteen years to be able to say, “At last! Finally!” Others have taken life-threatening risks. Some have gone to jail. Some have endured torture. The power of being able to say, “At last! Finally!” transcends time and obstacles.

How can I, as a pastor, tell people who love with this kind of love, “We will accept you only if chaste”?

Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them” (Luke 11:46, NIV). I think we require of homosexuals the ability to repress their sexuality that we, as heterosexuals, don’t normally have nor want.

I want you to know that the “body” (church), or at least some of the members of this church, have come to understand that more needs to be done in order to become as welcoming as the welcoming heart of Jesus. Many confess the hypocrisy, and many strive for a more radical love.

There is a long way to go. The situation is not easy nor will it be. Given that, I want you to know that we need you to keep your mind and your heart going towards where the Spirit of God is leading us. I want you to know that it is important to keep loving God and His people and that it is important to seek reconciliation from both sides.

Each one of us, heterosexual or homosexual, is a mustard seed that has been planted in this garden. This is the place we need to be in order to grow and make the garden beautiful. Don't feel out of place, because nobody is out of place in God's garden.



## Thinking Points

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” —Matthew 7:1-3

“Jesus said, ‘Judge not that ye be not judged.’ That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of the Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them.”

—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, pp. 123, 124



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## Recources

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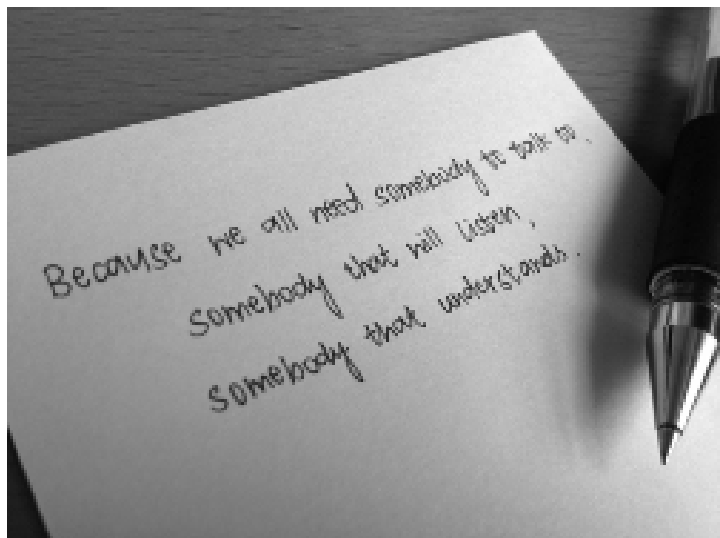
### Someone to Talk To

*Carrol Grady*

The purpose of this ministry for Adventist families and friends of gays and lesbians is:

- To provide a listening ear for parents who desperately need a "safe" person to talk to;
- To help parents work through their initial emotions of shock, anger, shame, grief, and pain;
- To 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;
- To encourage parents to demonstrate God's unconditional love to their children; and
- To 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.

You can reach us at [www.someone-to-talk-to.net](http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net).



### Brain Structure and Orientation

#### *Hypothalamus*

The hypothalamus is known to be involved in sex differences in reproductive behavior, mediating responses in menstrual cycles in women; and, specifically, the anterior hypothalamus of the brain helps regulate male-typical sexual behavior. Recently, the hypothalamus has been linked to gender identity and sexual orientation.

A seminal paper by Simon LeVay found that the interstitial nucleus of the hypothalamus INAH3 was found to be dimorphic according to sexual orientation not gender. These results were obtained from postmortem analysis of hypothalamic nuclei of known homosexual subjects compared to heterosexual patients.

The hypothalamus is also linked to sexual orientation through findings that show that activity of aromatase, an important enzyme converting androgens to estrogens, is high in the preoptic hypothalamic region of mammals during the pre- and neonatal periods. This activity is linked to sexual differentiation and may be a basis in structural and functional sexual differences playing a role in mediating the sexual orientation development due to prenatal hormonal exposure.

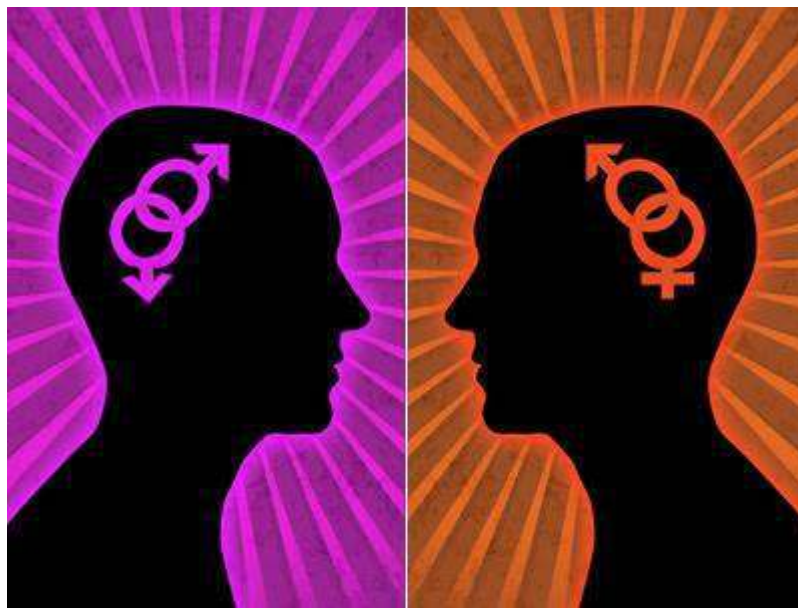
The suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) of the anterior hypothalamus has also been found to relate to sexual orientation, with homosexual men having twice as large of a vasopressin-containing subnucleus of the SCN as heterosexuals. This might be a neurological explanation for the finding that homosexual men arise and retire earlier each day than heterosexuals, as it is known that the SCN is involved in modulating human circadian rhythms. Analogously, in a rat model study, it was found that male rats treated with an aromatase inhibitor showed a partner preference for females when tested in the late dark phase but showed homosexual mating preferences when tested in the early dark phase, implicating the involvement of the SCN in sexual orientation in other species.

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2. LeVay S (August 1991). "A difference in hypothalamic structure between heterosexual and homosexual men." *Science* **253** (5023): 1034–7. doi:10.1126/science.1887219. PMID 1887219.

## *Cerebral Asymmetry*

The size of the brain's hemispheres is a sexually dimorphic trait in which men tend to show asymmetry in the volumes of their hemispheres while women show volumetric symmetry. A recent volumetric MRI study indicated that homosexuals showed sex-atypical symmetry: homosexual men showed hemispheric volumes to be symmetric similar to heterosexual women and homosexual women showed asymmetry in hemispheric volumes as heterosexual men do. These findings demonstrate a global neurological difference in brain structures showing sex-atypical characteristics associated with sexual orientation.

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## *Anterior Commissure*

The anterior commissure, a fiber tract that is larger in its midsagittal area in women than in men, was examined in 90 postmortem brains from homosexual men, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women. The midsagittal plane of the anterior commissure in homosexual men was 18% larger than in heterosexual women and 34% larger than in heterosexual men. This anatomical difference, which correlates with gender and sexual orientation, may, in part, underlie differences in cognitive function and cerebral lateralization among homosexual men, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women. Moreover, this finding of a difference in a structure not known to be related to reproductive functions supports the hypothesis that factors operating early in development differentiate sexually dimorphic structures and functions of the brain, including the anterior commissure and sexual orientation, in a global fashion.

Full text is available as a scanned copy of the original print version. Get a printable copy (PDF file) of the complete article at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC49673/pdf/pnas01089-0546.pdf> (958K).

*For those of you who would like more in depth reading on these and related research studies, we are including this list of resources.*

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### A Parent's Journey



*By Carol Grady*

I grew up within walking distance of Washington Missionary College, Washington Sanitarium and Hospital, the Adventist Seminary, the Review and Herald Publishing Association, and the General Conference, in Takoma Park, Maryland. My dad was director of the clinical lab at the San and my mom was one of the first married women to go back to school and take nursing. Just after my academy graduation, our family moved to California, where my parents worked at Paradise Valley Sanitarium and then Loma Linda Sanitarium and Hospital, while I went to La Sierra College, fell in love with, and married a theology student, Bob Grady. After ten years of evangelism and pastoral ministry in Southeastern California Conference and five years as a department director in Hawaiian Mission, we were called to a 15-year missionary stint in Southeast Asia Union and the Far Eastern Division. Our three boys all graduated from Far Eastern Academy and went on to Pacific Union College. From Singapore, Bob and I went to the General Conference, where Bob was Sabbath School director. This was in 1985.

Near the end of his freshman year, Paul, our youngest, called to tell us he was engaged to Angela, a girl he'd met while working at summer camp before school started. We had met her once and liked her, but were concerned about them finishing school before getting married. We didn't think a long engagement was a good idea. To slow things down a bit we suggested that Paul stay at home the next year and attend Columbia Union College, with Angela coming for a visit at Christmas break. Back at PUC for his third year, with Angela a year ahead of him, they planned to get married at Christmas of his senior year, when she, hopefully, would already have a job. And then, in the spring when they were getting ready to order wedding invitations, we were stunned to hear that the wedding was "postponed"—which we soon learned meant "cancelled." Angela's mother was heartbroken and called us, as much at a loss for answers as we were.

Bob departed on a six-week South American itinerary, and I was left to puzzle out Paul's unsatisfactory explanation that he and Angela had different philosophies of life. Suddenly, it seemed all sorts of things that had been buried deep in my subconscious came to the surface and began to point in the same direction. I remembered how four-year-old Paul loved to dress up in the Nativity costumes I had made for Sabbath school and in the outgrown sari his Indian friends had given him. How he was a very gentle boy who hated rough and tumble games. How he shared my love for music, poetry, and art. How he had always seemed to march to the beat of a different drummer. And there were so many other little signs that I, in my naiveté, had not picked up on. I had to find out, but how could I ask Paul when I might be wrong? At last, I decided to call the college church pastor. I knew Paul and Angela had gone to him for premarital counseling.

When I falteringly asked the pastor if I should talk to Paul about my question, a long silence ensued, and then he finally answered, "Yes, but be sure not to say anything that would make him turn to a lifestyle we wouldn't want." I felt like I had just heard news of Paul's death! I put the phone down and stumbled through the house, screaming and pounding my fist on the wall.

Although I knew next to nothing about homosexuality, I had somehow acquired this disgusting mental picture of men who were perverts and thought about sex all the time. But I knew that Paul wasn't like that. He had always been a deeply spiritual person. I knew I needed to learn more. I began to read everything I could find on the topic.

This was such an unmentionable subject in the church, and especially at the General Conference, that it seemed there was no one I could talk to. I felt as if I were in a closet of my own. I was desperate enough to visit the family ministries department with a story about a "friend" who had just learned her son was gay, and I asked if there was any material I could give "her." I was handed a little booklet by Colin Cook, a gay former Adventist minister who promised to help young men overcome their homosexual attractions. But soon after that a scandal erupted; Cook had been accused of sexually abusing young men who came to his live-in center for help.

I was fortunate to have pastors at our church who were sympathetic and supportive when I finally found the courage to talk to them. They both encouraged me to be loving and accepting to Paul; and, indeed, how could I be anything else to my dear son? What a blessing it was, just a few months later, when dear friends who also worked at the General Conference came to see us one evening. Unbeknown to us, they had a lesbian daughter who had met Paul and called to tell them we needed their help. It was such a relief to have someone to talk to who could understand what we were going through! They learned about a pastor in the area who had a gay brother; and they brought him over another evening to talk to us about the Bible texts that appear to condemn homosexuality and how recent theological study had shown problems with the traditional interpretations.

The AIDS epidemic was in full swing then. The first fear that had sprung to my mind was that Paul would be lost; the second fear was that he might get AIDS. When I heard that Sligo Church was holding an AIDS conference, I wanted desperately to go but feared someone might recognize me; so I sneaked in late and sat near the back. My heart was wrenched as I heard the stories of people who had been rejected by the church and its members.

Suddenly it seemed that I was seeing something new about homosexuality everywhere I looked. One evening, we accidentally tuned into a heart-breaking story about a lesbian woman who was hospitalized with a serious illness. Her family prevented her long-time lesbian partner from having any contact with her before she died. In my doctor's waiting room, I saw a *TIME* magazine with a provocative picture of a baby on the cover with the headline, *Is This Baby Gay?* The article talked about the latest research on homosexuality, indicating that a fetus' brain was wired for homosexuality before birth. I took the magazine home so Bob could read it. On a vacation weekend at the beach, we turned on the TV while we were eating lunch and were caught up in the hearings on the military's "Don't ask; don't tell" policy toward gay servicemen.

Eventually, I decided to write our story so that other parents would know that they weren't the only ones who were dealing with this situation; writing it was also therapeutic for me. At



the time, Paul was very supportive of my book. Pacific Press published *My Son, Beloved Stranger* in 1995, after I had agreed to camouflage the fact that Paul had become a Catholic. This was probably harder for Bob to accept than Paul's homosexuality. A couple of years after becoming a Catholic, he and his Catholic boyfriend decided that they should become celibate and, after living together for nine years, Paul went back east to work for a Catholic foundation. While there, he met a Carmelite priest who, with two novices, was building a new monastery. Paul decided he wanted to enter the monastery. The priest said he would help Paul overcome his homosexuality, but his method was to force Paul to completely submit to his will. It turned out to be a very dysfunctional situation; and, nine months later, Paul decided to leave. Since he had given the monastery everything he owned when he entered, we encouraged him to come home until he could get his feet back on the ground.

We found him sadly changed. He struggled to control anger. We learned the priest had tried to poison his mind against us. Where before he had always been open to talking about everything, including homosexuality and religion, there now seemed to be a high wall between us. He was determined to change his orientation, and spent the next four years in counseling with a reparative therapist and attending a support group. The therapist continued to brainwash him into believing that his homosexuality was all our fault, and for nearly a year he had little to do with us. All we could do was pray and be open to any overtures on his part.

Gradually, he began to warm up to us and we became close again, although certain topics were still off limits. After four years of trying to change his orientation, he finally said he still had "those feelings" but had learned to repress them. He was ready to start dating women. After every date, he would say, "There's just no spark there." I wanted to tell him there probably never would be a spark, but I didn't. Eventually, he met a devout Catholic girl who was a soul mate, sharing many of his interests and feelings. She was undaunted by his past, and of course he claimed to have learned how to repress his feelings. They were married a few months later. The priest who married them knew Paul's story and told Bob after the wedding, "Well, God can work a miracle." We promised Paul that we would support his decision and be there for both of them. They live near us and have produced three adorable little Catholic boys. We know so many marriages like this that haven't lasted, but we pray every day that theirs will.

It was several years after learning Paul was gay before I could bring myself to read books that discussed alternative theology, but before long I had a whole shelf full of such books. And they made sense, if one is willing to read the Bible as written by men inspired by God but only able to write in their own historical context. In fact, I discovered that reading the Bible that way helps a lot of things in it make more sense. But strangely, as my views became more liberal and accepting, Paul became more conservative and rigid. I wondered if he was seeking to forge an identity in opposition to his parents.

After my book was published, Kinship invited me to speak at their Kampmeeting; and several people there urged me to do something to reach out to their parents to help them through their anguish and fear. So I started a monthly newsletter, *Someone to Talk To*; and over the 12 years that I published it, I had somewhere near 700 parents or other family members who subscribed. In the meantime, I learned to know and love many Kinship members and other LGBTI people who found me through my website, [www.someone-to-talk-to.net](http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net). I began having a booth at various large church conferences every year for about ten years, until I was blacklisted by the General Conference because they believed my views were too liberal.

But through my opportunity to know so many families and LGBTI people, I became aware of a world of pain and sorrow that not many people recognize. Perhaps I can offer a few suggestions for pastors, teachers, and others who may need to respond to these outcasts when they need help.

1. Be quick to listen, slow to judge. The more you can repress your impulse to tell them what they should do, and the more you are willing just to listen and sympathize with their heart-breaking stories, the more good you can do.
2. Try very hard to put yourself in their shoes. They have probably spent confusing, desperate years trying to understand what is different about them and pleading with God to make them “like other people.” It has probably taken enormous courage for them to come and talk to you, and they are likely very fearful that you will condemn them. Please don’t give them a reason to believe this.
3. Remember, they are God’s beloved children; and I think He has a very special place in His heart for these dear ones of His who have suffered so much abuse in His name.
4. Do everything you can to reassure them of God’s love for them. They will often need many occasions of assurance before they can begin to believe that God really loves them.
5. A good pastor friend of mine tells me that in every sermon or lecture he gives, he makes it a point to, in some way, refer to homosexuals in a sympathetic, non-judgmental manner, and almost every time someone will come to him afterward to talk about their own or their child’s or friend’s issues with this. Parents, especially, need this gentle encouragement to talk about something they fear will brand them before other church members.
6. Be willing to firmly defend LGBTI people and their families from those in the church who would denigrate or condemn them.
7. Educate yourself on the scientific research about homosexuality and about different theological ways of understanding the Bible regarding this subject.

Most of all, pray that God will use you to bring love and acceptance to those who so often feel excluded from His love and grace.

## What's a Church Leader to Do When His Child Is Gay?



*By George Babcock*

Monday night I arrived back in Washington, DC, from Singapore. It had been a long and restless flight—especially since I got on that plane already exhausted from four weeks of non-stop meetings, speaking appointments, and college evaluation sessions. After a few hours of sleep, I hurried to my office in the Education Department of the General Conference. I really needed to get back to the GC that day because the other leaders were leaving for overseas appointments and an elected officer needed to be in the education office.

Before I had a chance to begin tackling the huge stack of mail awaiting me, my telephone rang. It was Elder Neal Wilson. “Come to my office immediately,” he ordered in the most authoritarian voice the General Conference president could muster.

“Yes, sir!” I replied and then almost ran to his office wondering what in the world I did to be summoned so emphatically.

Elder Wilson was alarmed because he had received a one-page tri-fold brochure from an organization called Seventh-day Adventist Kinship inviting people who were having challenges with their sexuality to call the listed hotline number. Identical brochures had been sent to all the students and faculty at Andrews University. Wilson wanted to know who and what was this Kinship organization and who had given out the address lists. Unfortunately, I couldn't answer his questions since I had never heard of Kinship and knew nothing of the brochure. He ordered me to find out all I could about Kinship and to report back to him ASAP, which I did.

My investigation was the beginning of a life-changing study that prepared me for what I would discover within five years regarding my eldest child, Sherri. In hindsight, I realize that God had sent me this assignment. I read every book on homosexuality I could find, authored by both conservative and liberal theologians, scientific authors, psychologists, social workers, ministers, and others.

Before being called to the General Conference, my family and I had spent eight years in Pakistan where I was president of our little college and seminary as well as the director of education for the Pakistan Union. My daughter, Sherri, was five years old when we left the United States and thirteen when we returned. During those years Sherri was becoming aware that she was different from other girls, but she never mentioned her concerns to us even though, as a family, we had very open communication. She excelled in mathematics and enjoyed working with tools. She was one of very few missionary girls on campus, although there were several boys whom she outperformed, especially in those areas which were thought

to be the “boy” things. As we look back on those years, my wife and I feel we should have at least noticed that. But we were blissfully ignorant. The thought that Sherri might be gay never crossed our heads. Even during her four years in academy we knew nothing, but those years were a living nightmare for Sherri.

Now, fast-forward five years after Elder Wilson gave me my Kinship assignment. By this time, Sherri had completed two years of college and had accepted a call to be a student missionary (teaching mathematics) on the island of Pohnpei in Micronesia. Sherri knew I was traveling in Asia and sent me an urgent message to come immediately to Pohnpei. When her message caught up with me, I was in Manila. I quickly discovered that one does not get to Pohnpei without considerable planning. At that point in time, there was only one flight per week from Manila to Pohnpei and that flight hopped from island to island across the South Pacific. I had no idea what was so urgent, but the thought of spending a week with my daughter in a tropical island paradise certainly had its appeal. Sherri would not tell me right away what was wrong and she kept me waiting for three or four days. The night she finally told me she was a lesbian, we were both in tears. Then I learned what had happened in Pakistan, and at the academy in the States, and at college. I put my arms around her and told her that no matter what happened she was still my beloved daughter. She was afraid that I would be fired from my position at the General Conference and even from all church work anywhere. We spent many hours holding each other and shedding tears.

In due course of time, word of Sherri’s orientation spread through the Adventist grapevine and various GC men took it upon themselves to give me advice on how I should treat this matter to uphold the good name of the denomination. The summation of the advice was to disown my daughter and cut all ties with her until she came to her senses. The lack of love and understanding, the critical attitude, and the lack of knowledge on this topic appalled me. I could not imagine that the God I serve would ever treat anyone as the brethren were telling me to treat Sherri. My initial response was to keep a very low profile, avoiding all discussions about the situation, to plunge ever more deeply into studying the topic, and to keep on loving my daughter. Further, my wife and I determined to show Sherri in tangible ways just how precious she was to us and to do so more than we ever had before.

My view of God has changed even though I always saw Him as forgiving and loving. Now I have a fuller grasp of the depth of His love for all His children. I know without a doubt that God would have sent Jesus to this sinful world to die for only my daughter. Furthermore, I became confident that He will take everything about her into consideration when it comes to the judgment; and that includes her background, her genetics, her experiences, and everything else about her. He understands all those things far better than I ever could.

As I listened to the brethren, I found the clichés that we glibly use such as “love the sinner but hate the sin” and “our thoughts and prayers are with your family” were of no help. I don’t mean to sound cynical; but help is not what we *say*, it is what we *do*. As I studied church history, I saw that the Jews before, during, and after Christ’s life on earth hated certain groups of people and used the scriptures to defend their attitudes and actions. The Christian church has continued to use scripture to show why they should support or allow slavery, racial discrimination, and a patriarchal system which holds women down, or to oppress any group that thinks or acts differently than the church decrees at that point in time. Today, homosexuals are the target. It seems to me that we have indeed made God into our own image when He hates the same people that we do.

I definitely believe that the union of one man and one woman was God's original plan for marriage at creation, and I am not challenging that; however, there are many things that are *not* like God originally planned and yet God tolerated them—things such as slavery, polygamy, death to adulterers, and divorce. The church has also changed positions over the years on black/white relations, divorce, jewelry, mixed marriages, and, in some places, polygamy. But, I am extremely distressed by how God's church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—treats people who think and act differently. *Desire of Ages*, p. 487, says that “there can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt...those who act contrary to our ideas.” Many things that the church has said have been very hurtful to homosexuals who are extremely fragile, spiritually. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible for humans to love the sinner and hate the sin. How can you hate one aspect of a person without it affecting how you treat that person?

My wife and I have been happily married for 56 very good years. Because Sherri is a lesbian, we have had the opportunity to meet dozens and even hundreds of gay Seventh-day Adventists and their parents. As a group they cry out for understanding, for love, and for acceptance. They have been rejected by their society, their schools, their churches, and their families; and very frequently they have rejected themselves since they have been told so many times that the world would be a better place if they did not exist. Through it all, my own relationship with God has grown and has been greatly enriched by having to deal with this topic and attempting to minister to homosexuals as God provides me the opportunity. I have met many gay people who have struggled to maintain a hold on God and their church and are beautiful compassionate Christians.

A very wise woman, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, wrote, “The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.” “Sometimes it is better to be kind than to be right. We do not need an intelligent mind that speaks, but a patient heart that listens.” This is good advice for us and our church.

For sure, Jesus is coming again soon. We have been told through the Spirit of Prophecy and Scriptures that the world will recognize that we have been with the Master because of how we love each other. “The last message to this world is a message of God's love, a revelation of His love.” *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415. Does the gay world see this love in our church?

