



Safe Places

September 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

September 2013

Where I live, this is the time of year when we put away our holiday suitcases, pull out the children's school backpacks and supplies, distribute, in various forms, a plethora of beach and mountain photos, take a deep sigh, and settle down to the "work" ahead of us. We hope you found some rest and time with those you love over the vacation season.

In this issue of *Safe Places* we focus on some ways lesbian and gay Adventists have interacted with our church.

In writing for **Visions of God and the Church**, Claude Steen describes his thoughts about and responses to being asked to baptize a lesbian living in long-term relationship with her Seventh-day Adventist partner. Claude is a retired pastor, living in an historic North Carolina home with his wife, Donna. They are parents of five married children, including a gay son, and grandparents of eleven. Their activities focus on family, horses, neighbors, travel, writing, and their local Adventist church.

Recent Research shares two studies:

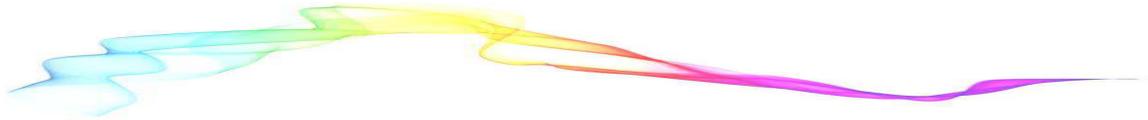
Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists: Strategies and Outcomes of Resisting Homosexuality is a study done by Rene Drumm, Ph.D. Rene is Dean of the School of Social Work at Southern Adventist University (SAU). She earned her Ph.D. degree from Texas Women's University, her M.A. in Social Work from Michigan State University, and her B.A. in Sociology from Andrews University. She has taught at Andrews University and Southwestern Adventist University. She is married to Stanley Stevenson, also on the Social Work faculty at Southern. They are the parents of twin daughters who are students at SAU. If you have questions about or would like to discuss her research, Rene can be reached at Rdrumm@southern.edu. For those of you who would like to do more reading, we have also included her references.

Because so many LGBTI Seventh-day Adventists have powerfully experienced a sense of isolation we have also included "The Lethality of Loneliness: We now know how it can ravage our body and brain", published in *The New Republic* by Judith Shulevitz.

Catherine Taylor writes about her experiences with various components and representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in **Stories from the Heart**. Catherine is a family therapist who specializes in grief, trauma, and the development of benevolent systems. She organizes and facilitates a variety of yearly retreats, conferences, and trainings, and edits two newsletters. At home in Virginia, Catherine is the primary caretaker for her 93-year-old aunt with Alzheimer's disease and enjoys biking, swimming, gardening, **SCRABBLE®**, teaching Bible classes, and practicing Taoist Tai Chi.

As always, you are welcome to share this newsletter with anyone who might find it interesting or helpful. If you would like to be taken off mailing list or if you would like to ask us questions, make comments, offer suggestions, or write for us, we can be reached at SafePlaces@BuildingSafePlaces.org.

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

Visions of God and the Church

Baptism on the Outer Banks



By Claude Steen

Seldom do I step into baptismal waters as a pastor without thinking about the work of John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth of Judea. I can see this rough but deeply spiritual man, strong in body and spirit, standing waist-deep in the muddy waters of the Jordan River, working long hours in the hot sun to accommodate the seemingly endless line of people waiting to wash their sins away. I can smell the sweating bodies and feel the wet hands anxiously grasping the preacher's in this unfamiliar experience of being gently pushed under the water.

Looking back over nearly a half century of pastoral ministry I have many memories of my own. Some are set amid light streaming through stained glass and enhanced by heartfelt singing and rich organ music. Others are more reminiscent of the Jordan, complete with muddy water and slippery footing. But every memory is tinged with a deep joy—joy on wet faces savoring spiritual

cleansing. And joy in the heart of the preacher at being able to help another of God's children move closer into His loving embrace.

Last September's baptism on the Outer Banks of North Carolina was another joyful occasion, so similar to many others yet unforgettably unique. On that narrow ribbon of land curving out into the Atlantic, with the pounding surf on one side and the placid waters of the sound on the other, it occurred during a weekend retreat called Book and the Beach. More than twenty people gathered from Florida, Massachusetts, California, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and New Mexico to make new friends, renew relationships, laugh and eat, revel in a dolphin watch, study the Bible, talk, and sing. The fact that most of the group was gay or lesbian, that most of the couples were same-gender, was evident, but seemed a non-issue in the comfortable give-and-take, the songs of worship, and the enjoyment of good food.

One of the couples attending was Carol and Gay, smiling grandmotherly women, obviously content in their warm relationship. Gay is an Adventist from several years back; Carol's faith tradition was Roman Catholic. As they worshiped and prayed together in their home, Carol became increasingly attracted to her partner's spiritual views and practices. And after studying the details of Adventist belief with Gay and starting to attend an Adventist church, Carol decided she wanted to be baptized by immersion and become an Adventist herself.

Would I be willing to baptize Carol, a woman in a lesbian relationship? That question revived another. Why had my wife, Donna, and I agreed to attend this weekend retreat with a group of openly gay and lesbian people? Would we be encouraging and approving what God had clearly said is detestable to Him? How could I, as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, under oath to preach "the whole counsel of God," participate in several days of worship and fellowship with people considered blatant sinners of the most extreme kind by the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians?

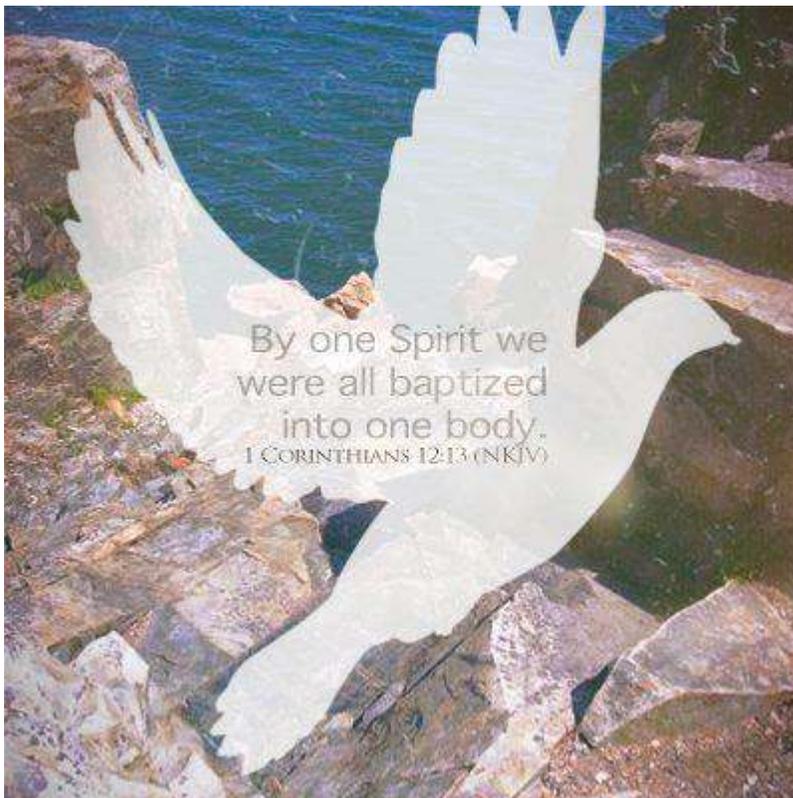
In all this questioning still another question came quickly to mind. "What would Jesus do?" He was notorious to the legalists of His day for mingling and eating with "sinners." But to those of us who recognize our sinful fallenness, He is the one bright hope in our sin-darkened lives. We rejoice in His willingness to spend time with us, to eat our food, forgive our sins, and show us His magnificent love!

And if I were to try to judge the people at this ocean-side retreat with their same-sex partners—something my Savior sternly warned me not to do! (Matthew 7:1-5)—how could I determine which is the worse disobedience: To choose to live in a loving, intimate covenant relationship with a same-gender person, when it has proven virtually impossible to sustain such a relationship with an opposite-sex person? Or to choose to remain single and alone in this fallen world, when God has clearly declared a life alone to be "not good" (Genesis 2:18)?

Is it my responsibility as a minister of the gospel to make such huge personal decisions for people whose experience is so totally foreign to mine, or to condemn them for their choice if it differs from mine? Or is it my sacred duty to seek to obey the one command that both Jesus and His apostles taught as the most important—to love my neighbor as myself and to do for her what I would want if I were in her place? (Matthew 22:34-39; 7:12) Could it be that my pastoral oath to declare the whole will of God (Acts 20:27) and to seek out the wounded and wandering sheep of

His pasture (Ezekiel 34) requires me, rather, to take them in my arms and both show and tell how much Jesus loves them and is preparing a place for them in His kingdom? And where repentance is needed in their lives, as it is in every life, could it be that by demonstrating to them the kindness of God they may be led into the repentance they need? (Romans 2:4)

So on that windy Sabbath at the beach, after a morning spent in worship and Bible study, we prepared to walk across the sand together to bury Carol's old life of loneliness and fear in the salty surf. A few years before I had baptized a strong, young surfing instructor along this very coast and it had been such an exhilarating experience! But now we realized that the waves were too rough for this old preacher and the grandmotherly baptismal candidate. What could we do?



Another baptism in this same vicinity came to mind. Just three months before I was privileged to baptize twelve-year-old Isabella, whose faith had brought miraculous healing from her Savior after many months of crippling pain, fruitless surgeries, and hospitalizations in the best medical facilities of the land. She and her parents lived only minutes away near the secluded spot on the sound side of the outer banks where she had been baptized so recently.

A quick phone call and we weekend "retreaters" were piling into cars and heading for a different baptismal venue. We found the bumpy dirt track that leads to the secluded spot. By now, stormy clouds hid the sun and the wind was whipping even the usually placid waters of the sound into little white caps. Younger hands helped us navigate the uncertain footing hidden beneath the dark water to find a place of appropriate depth. Songs of praise and devotion rose from the group at the edge of the water—a loving, makeshift family for Carol, gathered from far and near, to confirm with smiles and hugs that she had been reborn into the family of God. Tears of joy tinged

my voice as I invoked the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and lowered this newest member of God's vast family into the cleansing, muddy water.

Would John the Baptist have done the same? In my heart I knew he would have. And though we saw no dove descend from the stormy clouds nor heard any heavenly voice proclaiming Carol as God's beloved daughter, just for a moment I knew I heard the voices of an angel choir joining the singers on the shore.



Thinking Point

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.”

—Isaiah 58:9-10, New International Version (NIV)

That which distinguishes the people of God from worldlings is their sympathy for others, their tenderness, their meekness and lowliness of heart: they reveal they wear Christ's yoke and are recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, December 6, 1900

Recent Research I

Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists: Strategies and Outcomes of Resisting Homosexuality

(published in *Social Work and Christianity*)



By Rene D. Drumm

This article presents findings from a qualitative study of 37 gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists. Using in-depth interviewing, the research explored participants' accounts of the home environments and examined participants' journeys in trying to reconcile a lesbian or gay sexual orientation with an identity as Christian. Findings offer contextual information regarding the participants' experience growing up in Adventist families and Adventist churches whose religious beliefs prohibited homosexual behavior. Findings highlight various strategies participants used to resist homosexuality, including several change strategies that appear unique to Christian gay and lesbian persons that have not been previously examined in the literature, and the outcomes of those efforts. These findings suggest implications for social work practitioners, social work educators, and faith-based communities.

Many world religions point to the Bible story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as proof of God's disapproval of homosexuality (Ponse, 1978). Particularly among conservative Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish adherents, the practice of homosexuality is condemned (LeVay & Nonas, 1995). In spite of this, many homosexual persons have religious identities and commitments that they are reluctant to give up (Salais & Fisher, 1995). Studies suggest that "gays and lesbians belong to the various major faiths and denominations in about the same proportions as other Americans" (LeVay & Nonas, 1995, p. 106). Further, research indicates that among gays who were religiously affiliated, the religious attitudes of gay and non-gay members were not much different (O'Brian, 1991).

In studying religiously affiliated gays and lesbians, researchers note the pervasiveness of the influence of religious socialization on the individual. Religion frequently provides a world view with which all other competing forces must contend (Thumma, 1991). This world view may be so powerful that it produces measurable differences in attitudes among gay and lesbian persons. Wagner et al. (1994) noted a significant difference between a community sample of gay persons not associated with a religious institution and those affiliated with a particular religion concerning

religious beliefs and religious behavior. These findings may indicate important differences in the gay community between religiously affiliated and non-religiously affiliated gay and lesbians.

Internal Conflict and Seeking Change

The more serious homosexuals are about their religious experience, the more conflict they may have over their homosexuality (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Some researchers note an association between religiosity and homophobia (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Individuals reared in families whose religious beliefs define homosexual behavior as sinful may internalize these convictions (Wagner et al., 1994). Some may believe “If I am homosexual, I must not be a true Christian; if I am a Christian, I cannot be homosexual.”

As a result of the conviction that homosexual behavior is inherently non-Christian, religiously affiliated gays and lesbians often seek to change their sexual orientation (Friedman & Downey, 1994). The search for a change in sexual orientation, however, is often disappointing because such a change appears to be highly unlikely (Friedman & Downey, 1994). Coleman (1988, p. xv) states, “many of the psychoanalytic and behavioral approaches which were designed to purge homosexuality from the individual and create heterosexuality were found to be generally ineffective and ethically questionable.” Research concerning “change ministry” within the Adventist church found widespread sexual abuse of the counselees by the “reformed homosexual” center director (Lawson, 1987). While literature exists supporting the possibility of change in sexual orientation, it remains controversial. One reviewer of change therapy concludes that these studies “are consistently flawed by poor or nonexistent follow-up data, improper classification of subjects, and confusion of heterosexual competence with sexual orientation shift” (Haldeman, 1991, p. 155).

As social perceptions and attitudes have shifted regarding the merit and efficacy of changing sexual orientation, acceptance of one’s homosexuality has become the focus of social work practice and policy. Consequently, the literature has dwindled concerning efforts religiously affiliated gay and lesbian persons make to change their orientations. In addition, there is a significant lack of information about the everyday experience of many homosexual Christians in terms of integrating their religion and sexual orientation.

This paper addresses the experiences of gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists and reviews their journeys in reconciling a lesbian or gay sexual orientation with an identity as a particular kind of Christian. Seventh-day Adventists view homosexual behavior as sinful (Ministerial Association, 1988). Since this is a typical stance in conservative Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism (Orbach, 1975; Thumma, 1991), this research may have implications for persons of other religious faiths as well.

Methods

The naturalistic paradigm of scientific inquiry provided the structure for this qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The naturalistic paradigm holds that perceptual realities are “multiple, constructed, and holistic” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). In-depth interviewing provided the vehicle to gain a deeper understanding of lesbian and gay Adventists from the perspective of the participants.

Study Participants and Sample Selection

Thirty-seven individuals contributed information for the study. Of these, 28 were interviewed, and nine submitted autobiographies for analysis. There were 14 women and 23 men whose ages ranged from 23 to 56. While most were Caucasian, there was one Asian American, one African American, and one person of Hispanic descent. There was also some international diversity in the sample. One participant was a native of Australia and two participants were Canadian. All participants had graduated from high school. Seventeen participants had completed college, eight had continued on to a master's degree, two had graduated from medical school, and three had earned a doctoral degree.

This study used purposive sampling methods in accordance with the conventions of the naturalistic paradigm to magnify information and add understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To locate participants, I used the internet computer network developed by members of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, called KinNet. Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International is a support group for Seventh-day Adventist gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons.

I invited users of this group to reply to a general announcement explaining my project. Members could participate by agreeing to an in-depth interview or by submitting an autobiography. To be included in the study, the participants needed to meet two criteria: (1) identify themselves as homosexual and (2) be a current or former member of the Seventh-day Adventist church.



Data Collection and Analysis

I developed an interview guide based on the research questions from my doctoral dissertation. This guide was used as a starting point to direct the discussion and assist in getting similar information from all participants (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Autobiographies were also gathered from some participants. In this way, I was able to use multiple sources of data. Triangulation “improves the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305).

The interviews lasted an average of two to three hours with a maximum of six hours. Participants reviewed and signed an informed consent agreement prior to the interview. Interviewees had an option of being audiotaped or allowing me to take notes on a laptop computer to record the data.

The naturalistic paradigm calls for inductive data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data were initially processed using the computer program Ethnograph to assist in coding the emerging themes. As coding continued in the analysis process, I examined specific instances of the codes to clarify similarities and differences. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I generated both descriptive and explanatory categories. This process led to interpretive insights as I noted the emerging themes.

To assure accuracy in my interpretations, I used member checking as an analytical tool. Member checking consists of the participants reviewing the report for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of member checking is to provide a direct test of the findings and analysis with the participants themselves.

Findings and Discussion

All of the names used through this study are pseudonyms. I chose to use pseudonyms instead of case numbers so that ethnicity and gender would not be masked. In addition, pseudonyms aid the reader in identifying the participants as persons rather than objects used for scientific study.

Growing Up Adventist

For the majority of lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists in this study, understanding the influence of family and religion was fundamental to understanding how their conflicts formed between their sexual orientation and religious affiliation. Most participants grew up in Adventist homes and were firmly entrenched in the Adventist religion. One participant summarized his experience:

To answer the question of how I became an Adventist, I'd have to say that I don't know what else I could have been. I was born in an Adventist hospital (on the Sabbath, no less), to Seventh-day Adventist parents who had graduated from Seventh-day Adventist schools, sent there by their Seventh-day Adventist parents. I went only to Seventh-day Adventist churches and my parents socialized almost exclusively with Seventh-day Adventists. My aunts and uncles were Seventh-day Adventists. One set were missionary doctors; another uncle was an academy Bible teacher. My mother's father had been a missionary to Japan (Marvin).

Participants in this study overwhelmingly reported growing up experiences of typical Seventh-day Adventist families. The majority of participants described having family worship, following a vegetarian diet, keeping the Sabbath, and other traditions promoted by the church. Nearly all participants related that they had come from a close-knit family. "I come from a very loving and caring family. We are very close to this day. I call them all the time and assure them that I love them. They do the same" (Donald).

Seventh-day Adventist education was another important factor influencing these participants. All of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample attended a church-affiliated school for at least

some portion of their education. “The greatest influence on my development as an Adventist was probably the fact that I attended Seventh-day Adventist schools from first grade through a master’s degree” (Tom).

The combination of being raised in Adventist homes and attending Adventist schools produced a similar acceptance of Adventist teachings and traditions among the participants. Most participants accepted the Adventist religion and belief system in its entirety. “I went to boarding school for academy and an Adventist college a few hours away after I graduated. I had a good experience. My teachers were great. I really never questioned the Adventist beliefs having grown up in the environment” (Nathan).

Dealing with the Conflict of Religion and Sexual Orientation through Resisting Homosexuality

Having had similar family and educational backgrounds, participants in this study also experienced comparable journeys as they developed an understanding of their sexual orientations. Much has been written in the literature regarding stages and models of how people come to see themselves as gay or lesbian (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1988). Less is known about the specific strategies individuals use to try **not** to be gay or lesbian. Lesbian and gay Adventists offered some insights about how they resisted homosexuality. While some of the strategies reported here reflect themes from the literature, I will elaborate on the unique aspects of lesbian and gay Adventists’ journeys in resisting homosexuality.

As these participants began to understand their sexual orientation to be other than heterosexual, they engaged in a number of strategies to resist “becoming” gay or lesbian. Participants used change-seeking strategies that included: staying in denial, seeking professional help to change orientation, engaging in suicide attempts, praying, claiming Bible promises, using religious rituals, immersion in religion, and heterosexual marriage. Many participants used tools they had gleaned from church teachings to ward off homosexual urges. Of these eight strategies, five appeared unique to gay men and lesbians with strong religious identities. That is, the strategies of staying in denial, seeking professional help, and engaging in suicide attempts are common in the literature as ways that lesbians and gay men sometimes deal with their homosexuality. While research documents heterosexual marriage among gay and lesbian populations, it is generally not within the context of trying to change sexual orientation. Praying, claiming Bible promises, using religious rituals, and immersion in religion as strategies in changing sexual orientation are seldom mentioned.

Denial

Denial is a typical response in understanding oneself as gay or lesbian (Troiden, 1988). Participants in this sample, however, often connected the denial with religion or God. One participant remembered, “I couldn’t admit to myself that I was gay. It seemed to be such a sin. I just knew it had to be my fault, my choice made wrong somewhere I didn’t remember” (Marvin). A woman reported, “My first reaction [to realizing my homosexuality] was screaming inside, ‘No! God, No! I’d rather die.’”

Professional Help to Change Orientation

About one-third of this sample sought professional help to change their sexual orientations. The range of modalities included traditional talk therapy, aversion therapy, and residential treatment. In each case, these efforts failed. This supports existing literature which documents the difficulties that are typically encountered in changing orientations (Friedman & Downey, 1994).

In some cases, failure to change was only one problem associated with treatment attempts. One participant experienced sexual abuse while attending a church affiliated “change ministry” program. This ministry was operated by a “reformed homosexual” who was a former Seventh-day Adventist minister (Lawson, 1987). This participant committed himself to residential “treatment” and was sexually approached by the director from the first weekend at the center until he left over a year later. Subsequent interviews with former residents revealed wide-spread abuse among the counselees in this particular “change ministry” (Lawson, 1987).

Suicide Attempts

Research indicates that suicide among lesbian and gay adolescents is six times higher than the norm (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997). It is not surprising, therefore, that about one-fourth of the participants in this study also attempted suicide in response to their homosexuality. These attempts ranged from taking handfuls of pills (whatever they could readily find) to cutting their wrists and hospitalization.



Prayer

All of the participants in this sample used prayer as a means to resist homosexuality. This generally took the form of praying to God to take away homosexual desires. “I spent entire nights agonizing in prayer with God. Begging Him, ‘Please Lord! Please! Don’t let me be gay!’ I found myself praying, ‘Please Lord, let this cup pass from me, but your will be done’” (Joanne).

“I have prayed my entire life (since age 13) that the Lord would change me. I didn’t want to have these feelings. I didn’t want to go to hell. I didn’t want to be this way” (Mitch).

Claiming Bible Promises

Adventists believe that God, through the Bible, promises help in times of need. Participants were taught to “claim” these promises, that is, to dimension?? believe that God’s help will come to them if they ask, referring to certain Bible texts. “I resolutely decided I could overcome this, with God’s help. It was sin and all sin could be overcome through Christ. I began looking for Bible texts to admonish myself. I’d look for promises of overcoming and ask friends to pray for me” (Sue).

Use of Religious Rituals

The “laying on of hands” is a religious ritual where Adventist ministers and elders of the church pray for the person who needs “healing.” The laying on of hands is done in a group while touching the individual. One male informant recalled, “Soon after my first affair I was filled with guilt. So the next morning I said to him [my partner], ‘You can’t stay here. This is wrong.’ He left and I got into the religion thing again. People prayed for me with laying on of hands” (Alan).

Immersion in Religion

When trying to resist homosexuality, some lesbian and gay Adventists would immerse themselves in religious activities hoping that the homosexual tendencies would lessen.

“I did a lot of praying. I got involved with church activities like leading out in song service, youth activities, helped out with Pathfinders; and I led out in Sabbath School” (Nathan).

“After my sophomore year in college I decided to become a student missionary. If I had a year off to do nothing but concentrate on ministering to others, I could overcome this” (Sue).

Heterosexual Marriage

One way participants in this study tried to resist homosexuality was to pursue a heterosexual relationship and get married. Most individuals realized that they were gay or lesbian; however, they hoped that marriage would change their orientations. All of the participants in this study who married are now divorced. In general, participants held their former spouses in high regard and expressed much regret for the pain the marriage caused. One female participant remembered her heterosexual marriage:

I guess I allowed myself to fall in love with the idea that this guy loved and cared for me. When he asked me to marry him, I was 32 years old and figured this was God’s answer to my prayers. After all, we were taught that if we asked God to take away unnatural desires he would do so (Nan).

Other participants were less sure that the marriage would change them, but wanted to give it a try. On his wedding day, one participant recalled, “Standing in the church waiting to say, ‘I do,’ I was thinking, ‘I shouldn’t do this. Hans, you’re gay. But you can’t back out now. What will the church think of you?’ I wanted to be married. I wanted to be straight. I thought I could pretend” (Hans).

Outcomes of Resistance

While the lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists in this study had previously resisted acknowledging and accepting their homosexuality, at the time of interview, they recognized their sexual orientations as a part of them that would not change or go away. This section outlines three basic outcomes or decisions participants made to deal with their homosexuality and religion after abandoning resistance.

Leave the Church while Retaining Gay/Lesbian Identity

Approximately one-third of the participants in this study (12 out of 37) chose to leave the church after realizing that their resistance was not going to change their orientations. In this study, leaving the church refers to dropping church membership. In spite of dropping church membership, many of the participants still sustained, to some extent, Adventist traditions. For example, some remained vegetarian and observed the Sabbath, which are traditions of the Adventist religion.

There were three conditions under which lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample left the church. These conditions included: (1) no longer believing church doctrines; (2) believing church doctrines, but not being able to conform to them; or (3) feeling righteous indignation and leaving the church.

No Longer Believe Church Doctrine

The majority of participants who left the church did so simply because they no longer believed church doctrines. Nationally, the Adventist church experiences about a 50 percent drop-out rate as people change their religious beliefs (Willis, 1998). Being gay or lesbian may or may not itself have been the decisive factor in these participants’ decisions to leave the church. One woman shared, “I left because I no longer believed the doctrines nor the dogma of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, even in God. I believe that there is no one truth as Seventh-day Adventists claim” (Anna).

Believe Doctrine, Cannot Conform, Leave the Church

Another condition of leaving the church was that the participants believed the church doctrines, but realized that they could not conform to the expectations of the church (celibacy) and left. These participants believed that homosexual behavior was wrong, and therefore did not want to go to church because they knew they would not remain celibate.

I’m no longer in the church, but I’m a lot more comfortable with myself as a gay person. I don’t pretend to have the big answer [about homosexuality]. I would take the position that it

[homosexual behavior] isn't a sin if I was talking to my mom. But I'm not sure I'm convinced of that myself. It would be very hard to come back to the church. It would make a difference if the church turned its position around. I still hang on to certain Adventist traditions. I tithed to Kinship, and I'm still a vegetarian, don't drink or smoke. The big issue is the gay issue (Mark).

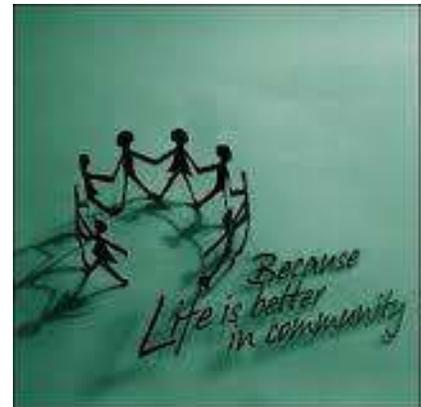
Believe Doctrines, Feel Righteous Indignation, Leave

A third condition for leaving the church was that participants felt wronged by the church and left. In general, these participants believed most of the Adventist doctrines, but did not attend church because of the church's stance on homosexuality. These participants felt that the church had rejected them and in return, they rejected the church. One participant said:

With respect to institutional Adventism, I want no part of it unless I am welcome. Until gay acceptance is written as part of a policy of acceptance, I want no part of institutional Adventism. I have a wonderful worship community that I am a part of. I will not simply idolize my past, nostalgia, or familiarity (George).

Retain Church Membership through Celibacy

Homosexuals who practice celibacy can hold church membership in good standing since the church's objection is focused on homosexual behavior rather than orientation. Two of the 25 who retained church membership did so by practicing celibacy. These individuals fully recognized and accepted their sexual orientation and believed it would not change. At the same time, they did not want to give up church membership and therefore made a commitment to celibacy. One participant said, "For myself, I have to be celibate because it [homosexuality] is a controversial issue. I might not keep that same reference forever, but for now I'm committed to living a celibate life (Jim).



Integrate Gay/Lesbian and Adventist Affiliation

About 60% of the lesbian and gay Adventist in this study (23 of 37) had fully integrated their sexual orientation with their Adventist church lifestyle and membership. The participants in this group were fairly open regarding their sexual orientation and their Seventh-day Adventist affiliation. In general, participants who integrated gay/lesbian orientation with church membership were either in a committed same-sex relationship or were looking for a life partner. The following interview excerpts illustrate the integration of homosexual orientation and Adventist affiliation.

Despite the church's official opinion, there are two things I've always been—always will be—a Seventh-day Adventist and a lesbian. God doesn't expect me to try to be something I'm not, or say I can't be something I believe in (Nan).

I am still a quite conservative Adventist. The Adventist lifestyle is something that works for me and something that I worked out with God on my knees after many hours of prayer and studying

and tearful contemplation. The same goes for my homosexuality. I have peace in my heart that God accepts me as I am. Being the omnipotent God that He is, He knew I was going to be gay long before I was a gleam in my Dad's eye. Now I see my homosexuality as a blessing. It took a long time to get there—34 years (Hans).

Conditions Leading to Integration

There were three conditions that appeared to facilitate the integration of lesbian/gay identity and church affiliation. These conditions were:

1. Having an accepting church congregation.
2. Having a job that would not be in jeopardy if sexual orientation became known.
3. Having an accepting family.

Having an Accepting Church congregation

The condition that appeared mandatory for a fully integrated identity was having an accepting local church congregation. Without an accepting church congregation, the participants' church membership was withdrawn. A female participant reflected:

My involvement with the church has been less than average in the last six years. It's not because I don't believe—I do—but I was limited because of how I thought the church may perceive me. But lately I've found a refuge in the church. When I go to prayer meeting, my partner comes with me. The pastor said that if the gay fellowship in his church increases, he would be more than happy. People in this church are warm and accepting, or at least not mean. So, I've started to go back to church more and try to teach my partner who is not an Adventist more (Carol).

Having a job that would not be in jeopardy if sexual orientation were known

Another important condition for integrating a lesbian or gay orientation with Adventist affiliation was for the participant to hold a job in which sexual orientation was not an issue. None of these participants were in a position where their employment would be jeopardized by coming out publicly. Most participants in this category were self-employed or worked for non-church related organizations. One participant reported, "I came out to my boss [an Adventist] and she said, 'I don't see it [your sexuality] as an issue.' Then she told the president of the company, and the president said the same thing" (Brandon).

Having an accepting family

Having an accepting family was another condition facilitating the integration of gay/lesbian identity and church affiliation. While the majority of families in this sample initially had difficulty accepting a gay or lesbian family member, over time they did accept the gay or lesbian member. Nathan shared, "Now I feel loved by my family. I understand that they had to have a 'coming out' period of about three years. Since my father is an Adventist pastor, it was important for me to be accepted by him before I could go back to church."

Conclusions

Lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists in this study shared a number of common pathways on their journeys in understanding their sexual orientation and their relationship to the Adventist religion. Most participants grew up in highly religious homes with loving, involved parents. This contrasts with other research on gay and lesbian families. Pattison and Pattison found that their “subjects reported that the primary cause of their homosexuality was unsatisfactory relations with their parents. Eight subjects stated that their fathers were distant, aloof, and uninvolved with them” (1980, p. 1558). Since this study only included 11 gay men, this difference could be because of small sample size, researcher assumptions, or biases.

Gay and lesbian Adventist used a variety of strategies to resist homosexuality. While the literature addressed denial (Troiden, 1988) and suicide (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997) as resisting strategies, it does not address the other strategies discussed by these participants. My sense from the data is that gay and lesbian Adventists may engage in strategies to resist homosexuality to a greater degree than other studies indicate. These data demonstrate an extensive use of resisting strategies by the participants. It was also interesting that many of the resisting strategies connected to religion: prayer, immersion in religion, use of religious rituals, claiming Bible promises. Participants relied on tools gleaned from their religious upbringing to try to overcome what they believed was sin.

Once participants came to believe that their sexual orientations would not change, they made choices about church membership in accordance with their beliefs about homosexuality and the church doctrines. Study of choices about church membership in relation to sexual orientation is lacking in the literature; however, a number of studies point to religion as important in the lives of some lesbian and gay persons (Davidson, 1970; Shallenberger, 1996; Thumma, 1991). While participants in this study clearly saw no “choice” in their sexual orientations, they were able to choose what to do about church membership under their given circumstances and did so with varying outcomes.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social work has a long history of faith-based involvement, research, and advocacy. It appears that addressing religiously affiliated gay and lesbian persons sometimes presents social workers with unique challenges. How do conservative social work practitioners and educators integrate their religious beliefs and convictions with their social work mandates of inclusion and advocacy? How do liberal social workers work respectfully with religiously conservative gay and lesbian clients who may be choosing to try to resist homosexuality or to integrate their sexual orientation with the beliefs and practices of their religious groups?

First, social workers should become educated about sexual orientation in general, its development, fluidity, and its multifaceted features. In checking the research on sexual orientation, particularly “change” in orientation, it is crucial to pay particular attention to research rigor, methodology, and how the conclusions flow from the data. Some research abstracts examined for this article that appeared to support orientation change, upon careful examination of the full article, supported instead, little to no change.

Secondly, social work practitioners who have religious convictions against engaging in same-sex relationships may hesitate to advocate for gay rights such as extending marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples. Social workers may want to consider the impact on lesbian and gay persons who have done what they could to be true to their religious convictions and come to believe they can never be heterosexual. While some of these individuals may choose celibacy as a way to resolve the conflict, others believe that finding a life partner more feasible. These people believe they are simply doing the best they can with what they feel they were given.

Third, social workers may not realize the importance of religion in the lives of their gay and lesbian clients because of the lack of information and dialog about religiously affiliated gay and lesbian persons. Social workers should not assume that gay and lesbian clients are void of spirituality because their religious convictions do not include heterosexual sex-within-marriage as the only appropriate sexual expression. Similarly, social workers should not assume they know what the goals of their religiously conservative gay and lesbian clients are or should be. Respect for client self-determination is complex, especially when workers and clients may have differences of values and goals, regardless of what direction that difference may run.

Finally, social worker clinicians must carefully consider the ethics of engaging in therapies designed to change sexual orientation, even with clients who request such therapy. Research indicates the lack of these therapies' efficacy while documenting some inadvertent harm that clients have suffered because of such therapies. The integrity of both the client's and social worker's values must be protected, not always an easy thing to accomplish.

In terms of social work education, educators should provide students with specific information about religiously affiliated gay and lesbian persons. Popular media presents a picture of the lesbian and gay community at large that is not necessarily in keeping with gays and lesbians who have strong religious convictions. Silence insinuates non-existence, which presents a biased view of homosexual persons.

Faith-based Communities

Too often, it is easy for religious adherents who see homosexual behavior as sinful to pass judgment on lesbian and gay persons as simply choosing to live an immoral lifestyle. Given the magnitude and range of strategies lesbian and gay Adventists use to avoid homosexuality, it appears unlikely that this is the case. It is important to recognize the reality of gay and lesbian Christians and to listen to their voices, often full of pain and confusion, as they seek to honor their religious beliefs.

How should the non-gay/lesbian church community respond to their gay and lesbian members? It may be important for church members of all religions to re-examine their attitudes towards gay and lesbian adherents. The issues, complex and deeply woven into the fabric of Christianity, are unlikely to change quickly or dramatically. In spite of this probability, we must begin meaningful dialogue that incorporates new knowledge and a deeper understanding of sexual orientation into our perceptions and subsequent actions.



Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists: Strategies and Outcomes of Resisting Homosexuality" published in *Social Work and Christianity*

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The Lethality of Loneliness: We now know how it can ravage our Body and Brain



By Judith Shulevitz

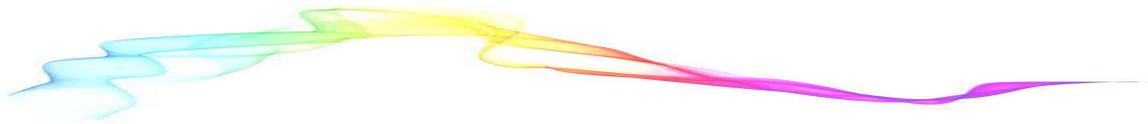
Sometime in the late 50s, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann sat down to write an essay about a subject that had been mostly overlooked by other psychoanalysts up to that point. Even Freud had only touched on it in passing. She was not sure, she wrote, “what inner forces” made her struggle with the problem of loneliness, though she had a notion. It might have been the young female catatonic patient who began to communicate only when Fromm-Reichmann asked her how lonely she was. “She raised her hand with her thumb lifted, the other four fingers bent toward her palm,” Fromm-Reichmann wrote. The thumb stood alone, “isolated from the four hidden fingers.” Fromm-Reichmann responded gently, “That lonely?” And at that, the woman’s “facial expression loosened up as though in great relief and gratitude, and her fingers opened.”

Fromm-Reichmann would later become world-famous as the dumpy little therapist mistaken for a housekeeper by a new patient, a severely disturbed schizophrenic girl named Joanne Greenberg. Fromm-Reichmann cured Greenberg, who had been deemed incurable. Greenberg left the hospital, went to college, became a writer, and immortalized her beloved analyst as “Dr. Fried” in the best-selling autobiographical novel *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (later also a movie and a pop song). Among analysts, Fromm-Reichmann, who had come to the United States from Germany to escape Hitler, was known for insisting that no patient was too sick to be healed through trust and intimacy. She figured that loneliness lay at the heart of nearly all mental illness and that the lonely person was just about the most terrifying spectacle in the world. She once chastised her fellow therapists for withdrawing from emotionally unreachable patients rather than risk being contaminated by them. The uncanny specter of loneliness “touches on our own possibility of loneliness,” she said. “We evade it and feel guilty.” Her 1959 essay, “On Loneliness,” is considered a



founding document in a fast-growing area of scientific research you might call loneliness studies. Over the past half-century, academic psychologists have largely abandoned psychoanalysis and made themselves over as biologists. And as they delve deeper into the workings of cells and nerves, they are confirming that loneliness is as monstrous as Fromm-Reichmann said it was. It has now been linked with a wide array of bodily ailments as well as the old mental ones.

The rest of this article can be found at: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113176/science-loneliness-how-isolation-can-kill-you#>



Recources

Someone to Talk To

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.

Living Eden's Gifts

A Bible study on texts often used to condemn same-sex relationships. You can access it online at <http://www.sdakinship.org/en/edensgifts.html>. If you would like a paper copy or copies for yourself or to share, you can order the booklet at EdensGifts@buildingsafeplaces.org.

Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives

can be ordered at www.sdagayperspectives.com.

Stories of the Heart

...See all the People



By Catherine Taylor

When I was a little girl, I worked to make my hands accurately follow the rhyme: *Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Open the door. See all the people!* I delighted in the fact that my very hands could look both like a solid church with a steeple and then, amazingly, like a very small congregation.

When Claude Steen once asked me to write an article about the Adventist church response to homosexuality, my mind threw up an image of a monolithic church with steeple. The sides of this church displayed quotes from the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. One of the quotes I pictured on that monolith reads, "Adultery, sexual abuse of spouses, incest, sexual abuse of children, homosexual practices and lesbian practices are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan" (pg 170). Another quote reads, "Among the grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline are the following: . . . Such violations as fornication, promiscuity, incest, homosexual practices, sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, and other sexual perversions, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the spouse who has remained faithful to the marriage vow in a divorce for adultery or sexual perversion" (pg 185). Both quotes puzzle me because in their list that condemns those who use power to abuse the vulnerable, they also include a condemnation of mutually consenting, lovingly committed relationships between equals. No matter the logic, these views are often what people oriented to or involved in same-sex relationships face in their congregations.

Adventist publications, including the *Church Manual* and *Adventist Review*, as well as the 2010 conference held at Andrews University, "Marriage, Homosexuality, and the Church," have systematically refused to acknowledge more than one opinion on the validity and value of same-sex relationships. As a result, many gay and lesbian members experience a sense of hopelessness, isolation, confusion, and anger at God as well as at the church. In some cases, individuals also experience extreme self-hatred and suicidal ideation.

As a young lesbian, I remember wondering how I could somehow cut asunder two integral parts of myself and choose one in which to live. I thought if I was going to go to hell, I might as well go there in a handbasket. As a psychotherapist, I have been weighted with sadness as I have seen the lengths to which Adventist gay and lesbian people will go to somehow fit in and be accepted

by the church. As a student of the Bible, I have been startled that people who profess to thoroughly investigate God's Word can take statements and teachings out of context in order to condemn members of their church family. As the editor of *Connection*, I have been profoundly moved by the stories I read, describing the move toward wholeness. I wonder at a people who can sing, *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true*, while sending their "brothers and sisters" to an abyss of anger or despair.

But then, as in the nursery rhyme, I open my mental hands and find that the church is not a monolith but a group of pastors, theologians, administrators, teachers, therapists, medical personnel, and congregants with a wide continuum of study, journey, contacts, opinions—and heart. Here are some of the voices who have been the face, thought, heart, and arm of the Adventist church for me in my journey to integrate myself as a Seventh-day Adventist lesbian Christian. While the initial request was for a response to a monolithic policy, I have come to find that the voices of the church are complicated, changing, and individualized.

The Books – In the early 1970s I first realized I was not going to end up in an opposite-sex marriage of two missionaries. I decided to check out what the Adventist Book Center carried that shed light on homosexual Adventists. I would casually wander into the store and surreptitiously scan the index of any book that looked like it might be useful. None were. The only one I remember was *God Invented Sex*. Its comments on same-sex relationships offered the opinion that God may have invented sex for heterosexuals, but not for gay and lesbian people. I remember the despair I felt, standing there in the aisles of the Adventist Book Center during camp meeting. I tried to decide to leave the church.

Pastor Philip – My agnostic first partner announced to me that my level of misery indicated I could not and should not live without my church; we had better find an Adventist one, talk to the pastor, and begin to get this confusion clarified. She looked one up in the phone book, drove me there, and, a few months later, made an appointment for us with the pastor. Philip was a newly minted minister with a three-church rural district. He very kindly and gently showed me what I have come to know as the clobber texts. He said he could not figure out a way God could bless same-sex relationships. At the same time, he never once, as far as I know, told anyone in the church or pointed a pulpit finger of God's wrath at me. Some mix of his response, my clarity that I would never be in an opposite-sex relationship, and my need to participate in my spiritual home led my choice to gradually build a compartmentalized life. For the next twenty-seven years I was a Sabbath school teacher, lay preacher, personal ministries coordinator, conference women's ministries director, camp meeting speaker, and consultant to conference and union administrators and personnel. I never introduced my partners for who they were. Even as I write, I can feel the exhaustion from that double life waft over me. Keeping this secret left me a less open and emotionally accessible person. I believe it had a large part in my past substance abuse. It affected the depth of emotional intimacy I had with Adventist friends. It affected my trust in the way God could lead my life. For fifteen years, the clobber texts seared my mind and soul, heating end-of-time fires I could not figure out how to escape.

Larry Geraty – I have no definitive idea why it took me a decade and a half to ask for help to study "those texts." In 1973 I had found Troy Perry's book, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*. I enjoyed the book; but, like many Adventists, I didn't want to get my theology from the Metropolitan Community Church, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, or any Christian

authors published by Zondervan. I wanted a certified Seventh-day Adventist theologian who would explain those texts through a lens I trusted. I would like to tell you that courage drove me to clarify the meaning of Leviticus, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. I think it was the exhaustion. I just needed to find out. I needed to know if I could live with hope. Murky despair is a difficult companion. I made an appointment to talk with Larry.

I remember his book-encompassed office. I remember his reading glasses, the kind you peer over to look at the person in front of you. I remember his kindly eyes. I remember watching him take down the books he used in our chat. I remember my sense of encountering revelation as Larry explained meanings of the context and words in Leviticus. I remember relief. I remember my “Oh, no” moment when Larry looked at me over his lenses and said, “Now Catherine, this means you need to live a Biblical life—one partner, one God.” This meant I had to make an emotional and contractual commitment. I remember my mental, “Oh, I just don’t think so” response when Larry said, “Catherine, you need to let other Adventists know that there are conservative, Bible-believing, Bible-following gay and lesbian Adventists, and that you are one of them.” I was selfish, self-protective, and still mistrusting that God would lead me. I did not want to give up being a camp meeting speaker or any of the rest of the ways I connected to the church. I remember my gratitude to Larry that only deepens, even now. He threw me a life preserver—and a responsibility.

Madeline Haldeman was a speaker at the very first Kinship Kampmeeting I attended. I don’t know much about her except that when she spoke about Jesus to our group of rather flowery LGBTI folk, she introduced us to a Jesus who loves us and plans to live with us—and our partners—in Heaven. I listened to her with open mouth and with remaining gratitude.

Hyveth Williams – To the faithful, sitting on wooden benches of a New England camp meeting, Hyveth thundered a call for Adventists to become Bereans. She challenged us to study and think more deeply. She called us to understand the difference between Biblical principles, policies, and practices. She pushed me on the next steps of my journey to the Bible study that became *Eden’s Gifts*.

Pastor Henry – Eleven years ago Henry came to our New England church district at the request of some of us in leadership roles. At the time, he described himself as a choleric, task-focused personality. At about the same time I ended an unhealthy relationship. A year later I began to date the woman I would eventually marry. In a rage, the woman from my former relationship began to write to every conference and union with whom I had worked in any capacity. She effectively helped me out of my church-related closet in a way that let Seventh-day Adventists in my part of the country know that yes, there are Bible-believing, observant lesbian Adventists. I don’t believe this is the way that Larry intended I should become an example, but it was effective. My camp meeting invitations ended. My consultations ended. Pastor Henry came to visit me at work to ask me if I was a lesbian. I told him I did not want to take part in what I described as a witch-hunt and would not be part of that conversation. Today I wish I had just said “yes.” The outcome would have been the same and I would have felt less like the Cowardly Lion. Thursday of the next week, I got a call from a church elder saying the board wanted me to appear at a meeting to discuss the action of church discipline that the congregational leaders would take toward me.

Pastor Mitch – I was not ready to lose my membership in the Adventist church. I called my friend Floyd and asked him to help me figure out my options. He said, “Call Mitch Henson.” I did. Mitch listened. I told him the situation and asked him if I could find membership asylum in his Adventist congregation. He said he thought it was possible. I said, “I want to be very clear with you that I am a lesbian in a relationship.” He said I had been clear the first time. When did I need my membership transfer? By next Tuesday. Friday night he called me back, told me he confirmed my faith and practices with a member of his church who knows me, and asked me if it would be okay if his congregation welcomed me as a member by profession of faith the next day during worship. I had found sanctuary.

The Millers Falls Church – At the Tuesday board meeting Pastor Henry began proceedings by explaining that they had called this meeting in the belief that I was acting in ways that called for church discipline. He laid out the process that they planned to take. I told them I had already become a member of another Seventh-day Adventist congregation and believed this process was now no longer necessary. Pastor Henry was outraged. He condemned any church leader that would interfere with his actions toward a member of his congregation. I told the leadership that I loved this congregation, even in such a difficult time. I told them that even though I had needed to move my membership to another place, I was committed to their well-being. I told them I planned to continue attending and sharing what gifts they would allow. Within two weeks the church called a business meeting and passed a motion that forbade me to come on church property, even as a guest.

Leona refused to be part of the vote. A seventy-six-year-old taciturn New Englander, she had shared a camp meeting tent with me over several years, infinite numbers of mosquitoes, one flood, and many conversations. Talking to her daughter about her reactions to the church, she said, “I don’t understand Catherine being a homosexual, but I know she loves God and I will just trust her to it.”

Marsha has been my friend and fellow Adventist for forty years. She is a pastor’s wife. Twelve years ago, when we finally began to discuss my orientation, Marsha went to the internet and studied everything she could find about being a lesbian Christian. She came back to me saying, “It sure looks to me like this is a biblical gray area.” She has become one of my staunchest advocates. My coming out to her has deepened our friendship and leaves me regretting the years I kept a wall of caution between us.

Cool Spring Fellowship of Seventh-day Adventists – Marsha, her husband, and a small group of local Adventists founded a rural church plant. They invited my partner Karen and me to be part of that group. They told anyone who didn’t want us in the congregation that perhaps those people should find another place to worship. When Karen and I got married eight years ago, they were celebrants in our wedding. All but one couple in the church plant attended.

The Millers Falls Church – The voice of the congregation changed. Pastor Henry left. Three years ago a representative called to say they welcomed me to come back and visit the church. Until that point I had respected the vote of the business meeting and not returned. A few weeks after the phone call, I returned for a visit and was welcomed with hugs and affection.

Pastor Henry – People change. At the July 2011 Kinship Kampmeeting, a new Kinship member phoned her beloved brother to tell him how much she was enjoying her experience. He asked her

if Catherine Taylor was attending. Startled, she asked him how on earth he knew me. His reply: "I am one of those bad pastors I told you about, and I was a bad pastor to her." I was surprised that this new member was my former pastor's sister. I was surprised he was supportive of her. It seemed to me, at that moment, that I had looked into a window of how God's grace is working in the church. It seemed to me like I had walked into a miracle. I don't have a tidy end to this part of the story; it's still in process.

The Bible – Adventists declare that the Bible is the originator of all church policies. My craving to learn more deeply the Bible's voice led me to more study. That study became a paper for a European meeting on the subject of homosexuality and the Adventist Church. Over the course of my research, I became increasingly clear that the Bible's voice on same-sex relationships is not the voice expressed in the church manual. My study, *Eden's Gifts*, is being used in a variety of ways. If you would like to read it, I would enjoy hearing your feedback.*

Ellen White – No discussion of Seventh-day Adventist policies or views on any topic would be complete without a study of Ellen White's contributions to the topic. The difficulty with our topic is that she said *nothing* about homosexuality. As I have read her writings and thought about how she affects the church and my life, I would like to leave you with this one quote. I believe this counsel, if incorporated into church policy, would change the lives of millions.

"'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 interpretation of 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*, pg. 123, 124.

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the door. See all the people. I have read the official Seventh-day Adventist policy on homosexuality. In others and myself I have experienced a broad range of reactions to that policy. I have experienced The One who is greater than any policy. I am seeing the way that Heaven is working in our individual congregations, unions, conferences, and institutions. In that work and in their open-hearted responses I find hope.

"The last message to this world is a message of God's love, a revelation of His love."
—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 415.

