

Gay Activists in The Churches: Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International, Inc

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A conservative estimate of the proportion of homosexuals in the population at large is 5 percent; some researchers place it as high as 10 percent.¹ It is my informed estimate that the proportion of persons with strong homosexual inclinations among teenagers growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist church and other similar religious groups is higher than that in society at large. One reason for this is that macho males frequently do not find religion attractive, and therefore leave, while the more sensitive males feel much more at home in church than, for example, at school since they are attracted to spiritual things, music, and the kindness they find there before their sexual orientations are disclosed.

Because gays tend to cluster in the arts and the helping professions, they are found today in large numbers among church pastors and musicians, as well as among the teachers and medical personnel of the many Adventist schools, colleges and hospitals. This clustering within the church's institutions occurs in spite of the inevitably high dropout rate among gay Adventists that takes place as they grow older and find the church environment inhospitable. I have no reason to think that this pattern was any different in the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s.

Earlier Decades: Adventism as an Oppressive Environment

During these decades the Adventist church was almost entirely oblivious of its gay children—the categories "Adventist" and "homosexual" were regarded as mutually exclusive. Sermons and church publications praised the nuclear family as God's ideal for human beings while largely ignoring the needs of the substantial number of single Adventists and portraying the increasing visibility of homosexuals in society as an indication of moral decay and a sure sign that the end of human history was at hand. When, occasionally, a homosexual was discovered in pulpit or pew - perhaps following an arrest resulting from police entrapment— he² was usually disfellowshipped as rapidly as possible, being regarded as a pariah who had brought disrepute upon the church rather than as a brother who was desperately in need of compassion and support since he had probably lost family job, and reputation in one fell swoop.

At the first national "Kampmeeting" organized by SDA Kinship in 1980, gay and lesbian Adventists recounted their personal experiences growing up as gay Adventists ["Growing Up Gay Adventist," 1982]. One after another told of the isolation they had felt because almost all had been convinced he or she was the ONLY gay Adventist in the world; of years of unavailing struggle and unanswered prayer for a miracle that would make them heterosexual; of overwhelming guilt and self-rejection. Since they had been taught that it was impossible to be both Christian and gay but had found themselves irretrievably gay, they had despaired because they assumed that they were eternally lost. Some told how deep depression had led to suicide attempts. Almost everyone had found no one within

¹ It is impossible to gather accurate data concerning the number of homosexuals in a given population because of their ability to hide their identity and the costs imposed by society on those who disclose it. Consequently, the best estimate available is an educated guess.

² The lesbians were seldom discovered.

the church to whom they could turn for help; those who had sought counselling there had met platitudes like "go away and pray about it" or bad advice such as "it's only a phase: get married and everything will turn out all right." But the stories of those who had married were especially poignant, with guilt and defeat within the marriage relationship and sorrow over ultimate estrangement from children. About half had clung to the church grimly or nervously, and were often very active there while keeping their sexual orientation secret; the other half had dropped out, feeling rejected by both God and their church community. However, their presence at this Kampmeeting signaled that at least significant emotional ties to Adventism remained.

These autobiographies vividly illustrated that being raised as an Adventist had significantly exacerbated the trauma of growing up gay both for the persons concerned and also for their families, who frequently rejected their children or found themselves alienated from them and had to live with a belief that they were eternally lost. Gay Adventists during these years had many potential grievances - potential interests which could form the basis for organizing. But self-rejection prevented them from recognizing them, and it was not possible for them to mobilize until the gay liberation movement gave them a shared identity and their isolation had been replaced by networks linking them to one another.

The Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship

During the first half of the 1970s, following the birth of the gay liberation movement, several gay Adventists individually placed advertisements in the leading gay paper, *The Advocate*, hoping to make contact with others who shared their double minority status. Most of these were overwhelmed by the large but scattered response they received. However, one of these attempts, in 1976, led to the forming of an organization in Southern California, which was ambitiously named "Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International." This gradually expanded around the country and then the world as more advertisements were placed and as word spread; one of the officers heroically drove drop-off cars to all corners of the nation following up rumors of gay Adventists. Two of the early prominent leaders of Kinship were disfellowshipped by their congregations merely for having their names listed on Kinship letterhead or in newsletters. Both, however, kept attending Adventist churches, where they continued to keep their eyes open for gay Adventists. In order to make donations to it tax deductible, Kinship incorporated as an non-profit corporation in California in April 1981.

Kinship's Goals

The initial goals of Kinship were to provide mutual support for one another and to reach out to find other gay Adventists in need of such help. These goals remain of prime importance. Initially they were linked to a question that was accorded highest priority: could a person be both Christian and gay? Many of the early meetings were devoted to weighing what the Bible had to say about homosexuality. Much of the material written by scholars of other Christian denominations proved to be encouraging (McNeill, 1976; Scanzoni and Mollenkott, 1978; Horner, 1978; Barnett, 1979; Borhek, 1979; Boswell, 1980), and mutual support allowed Kinship members to examine their own experience and to realize that they were indeed both gay and Christian no matter how incongruous this seemed in the light of what they had been taught in church and parochial school. Nevertheless, because of Adventist sectarianism the issue was not decided for many Kinship members until leading Adventist biblical scholars and pastors affirmed their gay Christian experience at the first and second national Kampmeetings in 1980 and 1981.

This affirmation resulted in the setting of two additional key goals. The first of these grew immediately from the joy and assurance that replaced the guilt and isolation that had previously dominated their lives: a determination to help the Adventist church be more understanding of its gay children and more loving towards them. The purpose of this goal was to shield future gay Adventists from the additional trauma imposed by church membership that the first generation of Kinship members had endured. The second goal was to think through collectively the ethics of being gay Christians. Here Kinship members saw themselves to a large extent as blazing a new trail, for neither the official Adventist church nor the gay world at large was addressing the issue.

Kinship has not adopted goals that would have church leaders agree to ordain openly gay clergy or perform gay marriage ceremonies: it recognizes the conservatism of Seventh-day Adventism, and chooses to focus on goals that are seen as both possible and of prime importance to its members. The overall aim is steady progress rather than rapid transformation; this policy was designed to minimize the danger of backlash and regression.

Kinship's Strategies

Kinship's leadership has proved to be able, imaginative, and committed, and it has garnered strong participation and extensive financial support from its membership. These resources have allowed it to develop strategies to pursue all of its goals. The goal of providing mutual support has been furthered by holding regular chapter and regional meetings—both religious and social—in all areas where members are clustered, sponsoring a pen-friend network, and publishing the *Kinship Connection*, which has evolved into a high quality monthly paper. Strategies aimed at educating the church have included the development of a package of introductory and educational materials and the mailing of these to many hundreds of pastors, educators, counselors, administrators, and college students. The package contains, among other items, a booklet discussing homosexuality and the Christian and introducing Kinship, another dealing with what the Bible says and does not say about homosexuality, an article containing a selection of the personal stories of growing up gay and Adventist (as told at the first Kampmeeting), and an annotated bibliography. Kinship has also provided speakers for many college classes and for informal meetings of small groups of clergy. Meanwhile, growing numbers of Kinship members have found the courage to reveal themselves to their pastors and congregations and have, by their very presence as well as by answering questions, begun to break down prejudice. Because the church refused to give publicity to Kinship, the goal of reaching other gay Adventists was pursued through extensive advertising in gay, lesbian, and women's publications across the nation and by participating, with prominent banners, in gay parades. The mailing of information packages has also served this goal.

Perhaps the most important strategy has been the annual Kampmeeting, which has been held for a week in August each year since 1980 (Benton, 1982). These occasions have created strong bonds among members from all parts of the United States, Canada and Australia. Six to eight pastors and religion professors have been invited each year to help minister to Kinship members. Because almost no Adventist pastors and scholars have considered gay issues seriously, these "clergy" have been chosen not because of any stance taken on such matters but on the basis of reputations as open-minded and compassionate. Their exposure to Kinship members for a week at a time has transformed them into supporters of Kinship and ambassadors for it. Kinship members are now welcome at their churches. Time after time these groups of clergy have insisted at week's end that they feel sure that they have gained more than the Kinship members from the experience. Their comments have included: "I have been saying to myself all week, 'take off your shoes, you are on holy ground.' I have never seen people minister

to one another, care for one another, as you do." "THIS is the church - Kinship is real Christianity." "I beg you to endure some more, to stay in the church - the church needs you; the church can learn to love again from you; it can grow by responding to the challenge you present." "I have been going through a difficult time, and had begun to doubt my ministry. I have found it here again with you. You have ministered to me, and I thank God for you." Several of the clergy have said that their earlier reading and experience in counselling gays had given them a head understanding and sympathy towards gay Christians, but that now they understood in their hearts. The ministry of these people to Kinship members has also been enormously important: to find that some Adventist clergy care about gay Adventists, to hear them affirm the Christian experience of the members, to have them raise pointed questions and then participate in the finding of answers - all have had a vital impact on the organization.

In its collective search for an ethic for gay Christians, Kinship has placed high priority on supporting stable, monogamous relationships, and has introduced a "celebration of commitment" ceremony, which allows members to express and support commitment symbolically. Realizing that it serves as "church" for about half its members and as the most important aspect of the church for the other half, it has accepted responsibility for feeding and challenging them spiritually and has integrated the supporting clergy in this task. Recognizing the pain that Adventist families with gay members face frequently, Kinship has also invited its members to bring family members to Kampmeeting. Those who have come have found considerable relief and joy there.

As the AIDS crisis deepened, Kinship addressed it in three ways. First, it set up support networks not only for Adventists with AIDS but also for their families. (The stigma of AIDS is so great within Adventism that none of the four mothers I know whose sons have died as a result of the disease told their pastors or a single member of their churches what they were going through.) This includes the provision of monthly financial support for members who had lost jobs and homes as a result of AIDS. Secondly, Kinship tried to persuade the large Adventist hospital system, which was at the forefront during the polio epidemic, to become significantly involved with the care of AIDS patients and in AIDS-related research. Thirdly, Kinship mailed a letter to every Adventist pastor in America urging that their churches become involved with the crisis and offering information.

Kinship's Impact

The impact of Kinship's strategies on its members and selected pastors and teachers is thus very clear. But what of its efforts to reach other gay Adventists and to influence the attitudes and behavior of the official church? Kinship's membership has risen steadily, and now stands at over 1,100, most of whom are in the United States with clusters in Canada and Australia and scattered members in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Forty percent of the members are now women, and they have established unusually good relations with the men: for example, in 1984 Kinship chose to use inclusive language in prayers and hymns. But a membership of 1,100 is barely scratching the surface when the potential number in a church of 5 million members is considered: even the conservative 5 percent estimate would suggest that 250,000 Adventists are homosexual. Kinship's relatively small membership seems to be a function of three factors. First, ineffective publicity: the Adventist press has almost totally ignored Kinship, and it is likely that many Adventists struggling alone with a homosexual orientation do not read the gay press. Secondly, fear of discovery in a church notorious for its widespread gossip networks: many potential members on Adventist campuses refrain from joining because they are afraid to receive mail; many of the members, including most of the church employees, attempt to protect themselves by using - pseudonyms; and Kinship knows that some of those most outspoken against gays within the church

hierarchy are themselves closeted homosexuals trying to protect themselves. And thirdly, negative and misleading counter publicity released by church authorities and passed readily along communications networks: counselors at Adventist colleges have claimed that Kinship "endorses the gay lifestyle" (which undoubtedly conjures up images of promiscuity and alcohol in the minds of hearers), while initiatives by the student press on various campuses to present more balanced reports have sometimes been severely censored.

The Adventist Church and its Homosexual Members

There are two main elements to the story of the relationship between the Adventist leadership and its homosexual members: the saga of Quest/Homosexuals Anonymous, the program it funded to "heal homosexuals," and its increasingly rigid attitude towards Kinship.

The raising of the issue of gay Adventists prompted church leaders in 1980 to fund a program, the Quest Learning Center, founded by Colin Cook, an ex-minister who was a self-described "recovered" homosexual. This program proclaimed "deliverance from homosexuality," and brought homosexuals together in Reading, Pennsylvania, for a year or more of counselling and involvement in a mutual support group called "Homosexuals Anonymous" (HA). HA spread rapidly, speaking at 60 chapters around North America in 1986. The Quest/HA program received extensive official publicity within the Adventist church, where it was presented as *the* answer to homosexuality. Kinship regarded this as false advertising, for it was likely to condemn most participants to more years of fruitless struggle and increased guilt. It saw this misrepresentation as probably inadvertent, resulting from church leaders hearing what they wanted to hear rather than weighing facts objectively. Thus Kinship initially regarded the program as a positive, if mistaken, effort by church leaders—as a first attempt to respond to the needs of homosexual Adventists. However, church leaders never conducted a study of the impact of the program on counselees nor did they even require a written report before extending funding. They ignored Kinship's informed questions and listened only to the glowing reports of director Cook and to the orchestrated testimonies from counselees of healing claimed by faith rather than achieved in experience.

As part of my ongoing sociological study of the Adventist church, I carried out a series of interviews with 14 Quest participants in the Fall of 1986. These showed that the Adventists uprooting themselves to move to Reading to join Quest were usually fragile, very conservative church members with high levels of guilt and self-rejection because of their homosexuality. Even if they had heard about Kinship, they were so frozen in their guilt that they could not bring themselves to make contact with it: Quest, the church-endorsed program for "recovery," was their only hope. But Quest turned out to be a nightmare experience for them—one they did not describe in their testimonies before church leaders. Suddenly they found that they were no longer the only homosexual Adventists in the world— isolation was replaced by community, a community under stress because its members were trying to change their orientations and yet often felt attracted to one another. The immediate result was turmoil and confusion and— considerable sexual contact with one another. This confusion was greatly heightened when Cook, the director of the program, made repeated sexual advances to them. (This had been the experience of 13 of the 14 interviewees and, according to them, of many of their fellow counselees throughout the history of Quest; the only exception was an older man in his 50s.) None of the interviewees reported that his sexual orientation had changed, nor did any of them know anyone who had changed. Indeed, 11 of the 14 had come to accept their homosexuality: some positively, because of relationships they had formed at Quest or after leaving; others had become more confused and guilt-ridden and, defeated, pulled out of a program that showed little concern for such failures.

I decided that I could not allow such sexual exploitation to continue. Consequently, in October 1986 I wrote a letter to the world president of the Adventist church, telling him of what I had unexpectedly found at Quest. Cook admitted my findings were correct, and was removed within a week; shortly afterwards a decision was made to close the Quest counselling program, but to keep the support services for the mutual support HA chapters intact. While church officials made no attempt to justify Cook's actions, they continued to defend his methods and to assert that there were many counselees who had found "freedom from homosexuality" who I purposefully omitted from my sample. (When criticizing my sample they have failed to state that when Quest reneged on promises to assist me draw first a random and then a quota sample, I then had to rely on a snowball sample. I went to great pains to find five counselees who, it was reported to me, were spoken of by program staff as successes - but their accounts had proved in fact to be no different from the others.) However, the HA staff continued to refuse to provide me with the claimed successes so that I could check out their assertions.

The church press initially made no mention of the closing of Quest or the removal of its director. Consequently, the impressions of the program as *the* solution to the problem of homosexuality created by past glowing reports remained uncorrected. However, eleven months after the situation was disclosed the Adventist journal for clergy, *Ministry*, which is also distributed free to 300,000 clergy of other denominations, published an interview with Cook which, while indicating that there had been - improprieties, reaffirmed his approach and set out to rehabilitate him [Spangler/Cook, 1987]. In the wake of this affirmation, Cook reappeared as the lead speaker at the HA training seminar and at its annual conference. He also announced that he had formed Quest II, had resumed counselling, and that he was writing an autobiographical book on the healing of homosexuality.

Most gay Adventists would have nothing to do with Quest/HA: the participants it has drawn from the church were so few compared to the membership of Kinship that no matter how the only official - program for homosexual Adventists is judged, it was clearly an inadequate response to their problems. The token quality of the program is shown by the fact that elsewhere in the church old practices, such as the bad counsel given to students needing help with homosexual problems at Adventist high schools and colleges, continued the denominational role in financing and publicizing the Quest program had helped make church members more conscious of the existence of homosexual Adventists. Consequently, church leaders had received considerable criticism from conservative Adventists, who would have preferred to deny the existence of such members, even before Quest's problems were discovered. Their sense that they were thus under scrutiny made them the more eager to proclaim that their program was successful in changing sexual orientations and more careful to avoid appearing as if they were accepting homosexuals.

Pressures from conservative members, pastors and administrators also exacerbated the relationship of the official church with SDA Kinship. Church leaders were nervous during the first contacts concerning how these might be perceived by vocal members: they sought assurances that the participation of the clergy in the initial kampmeeting would not be used as an opportunity to claim in the press, once they had agreed to Kinship's request, that the General Conference had accepted homosexuality. When, after the kampmeeting, the clergy brought a number of recommendations to the church hierarchy, the latter explicitly rejected suggestions that two of the clergy be appointed as chaplains to Kinship and that "the church recognize Kinship as a vehicle by which other young Seventh-day Adventists, discovering that they have a homosexual orientation, may find the help they seek" because they felt it imperative not to be seen as recognizing Kinship. When the expected criticism concerning the participation of clergy in a gay Kampmeeting materialized, the hierarchy became the more defensive because this coincided with two serious attacks on traditional Adventist theological positions. Consequently, a key committee voted

that the church's response to homosexuality should be to offer "healing," that it could not condone practicing homosexuals, and that they could not negotiate with organized groups who call themselves SDA gays and lesbians nor even engage in "diplomatic relations" with them, for this would be interpreted by church members as "recognition and endorsement of a deviant philosophy and lifestyle;" indeed "counsel will be sought as to what appropriate action can be taken to prevent such groups from using the name of the church" [Minutes, North American Division Committee of the General Conference of SDAs, 4/9/1981].

When Neal Wilson, the president of the General Conference, discovered that Kinship had approached a second group of clergy privately to arrange their participation in another kampmeeting, he initially responded by issuing a letter to regional and school presidents throughout North America that attempted to prohibit this [4/23/1981]. Although he later responded to a personal appeal to allow those who wished to minister to Adventist homosexuals to do so and ultimately intervened personally with a local president to enable one pastor to attend, he kept his reversal off the record.

However, as Kinship distributed its educational materials more and more widely, this stirred up increasing demands that General Conference leaders respond by "doing something." One response was the launching of a study of homosexuality by the Biblical Research Institute, the research arm of the General Conference. However, the first draft of the initial overview paper, which was written by an ethicist in the religion department of one of the church's universities, received a chilly reception from the totally heterosexual committee when it concluded that while homosexuality was not the ideal, the church should encourage homosexuals to form and maintain monogamous relationships since their orientations could not usually be changed (Larson, 1984).³

A second response of church leaders to constituent demands that they react To Kinship's educational outreach was an editorial in the official church paper, *The Adventist Review*, which was explicitly spurred by one of Kinship's mailings [April 26, 1984]. As the first official published recognition of the existence of SDA Kinship, this represented progress regardless of content. In fact, the editorial made some endeavor to present a balanced approach. It rued the fact that the personal experiences of homosexual Adventists show "the almost total absence of people - ministry and laity alike - who seem capable of treating homosexuals with compassion"; it took note that "capable scholars" had put forward "alternative interpretations to many of the biblical passages that for years have been used to condemn homosexual behavior," before asserting - in advance of any serious Adventist study of the matter - that "the overwhelming weight of evidence still condemns such practices." It then swept aside the preponderance of scientific opinion that a homosexual orientation is either biologically determined or acquired very early in life with an assertion that "history shows that today's scientific fact may become tomorrow's error." While it admitted that "to ask that a person with a homosexual orientation either change—which may or may not be possible (which was in itself a considerable admission) - or remain celibate may be asking a lot," it concluded that "the offender, instead of seeking justification for unacceptable behavior, must reach out for divine power to conquer the problem."

The attitude of church leaders towards Kinship hardened further from 1985 onwards. They took the initiative at the quinquennial conference of the world church to revise previously vague language in the

³ The only known "homosexual" ever included on an official committee formed to discuss the problems of gay Adventists was Colin Cook, the "ex-gay" director of the Quest Learning Center - he could be relied on to affirm that "deliverance from homosexuality" was God's solution.

Church Manual, the document that governs the operations of the church, to classify "homosexual and lesbian practices" with adultery, sexual abuses of spouses and children, incest and bestiality as "obvious perversions of God's original plan" and as "grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline." This was followed by a request to Kinship that it cease using the denominational name for itself, a request which Kinship first parried and then, when church officials persisted, rejected.

In December 1987, the General Conference filed a suit against SDA Kinship International, Inc. for "breach of trademark." The suit, which did not mention that Kinship members are homosexuals and Adventists, claims that by using "Seventh-day Adventist" or its acronym as part of its name, Kinship is likely to cause confusion and so attract funds which donors think are going to the church and to harm the church's business activities. However, the accompanying press release, entitled "Church Moves Against Support Group for Homosexuals," made the extent of rejection of Adventist homosexuals and of Kinship's ministry abundantly clear.

It was mentioned above that church leaders had first talked about trying to stop Kinship from using the denominational name as early as April 1981, as controversy swirled concerning the official participation of clergy in the first Kampmeeting the previous August. They had taken the initial steps to register the name of the Church a year earlier, and had accomplished this by November 1981 even though two schismatic groups had also been using the name for several decades. However, an official copy of Kinship's incorporation papers was not requested until June 1986, an action that was spurred directly by a Kinship mailing to every student at Andrews University. Church officials were also incensed to find that banners bearing the name Seventh-day Adventist had appeared in "gay pride" parades in Los Angeles and New York that same month. From that point onwards the rhetoric of church leaders became increasingly shrill. For example, Duncan Eva, former Vice-president of the General Conference and Special Assistant to the President and now chair of the Quest board, in a letter to church and school officials throughout North America depicted Kinship as presenting a theological challenge to traditional Adventism: "Perhaps there is no greater challenge to our faith and our preaching of the gospel of the grace of God than the challenge which homosexuality and those who teach it as an acceptable alternative Christian lifestyle presents to our church today. Does the gospel we proclaim have power change or does it not?" Nevertheless, another 18 months passed before the suit was actually filed, during which time the acrimony of church leaders towards Kinship was heightened as a result of their anger and chagrin over the uncovering of the Quest scandal. The setting of their position, revealed in their decision to rehabilitate Cook, which in turn so provoked Kinship members that they had picketed church headquarters in Washington, D.C. in October 1987, seems to have precipitated the suit's filing. They had chosen to reaffirm Cook's approach to homosexuals and to reject and disassociate themselves from the approach of Kinship and from gay and lesbian Adventists in general.

This Goliath versus David suit was very poorly timed from the church's point of view, for it happened to coincide with the belated discovery of the Quest scandal by the media and the filing of a suit against the church by abused Quest counselees. Although the latter suit was independent of Kinship, all these issues were drawn together by the press and resulted in negative publicity for the church [*Los Angeles Times*, Dec.6, 1987; *Student Movement*, Feb. 3, 1988; *Reading Eagle*, Feb.14, 1988]. This publicity greatly helped to get Kinship's message out.

The greatest impediments to progress towards treating gay Adventists with understanding and compassion are the fears of rocking the boat held by persons in leadership positions and a misplaced confidence that they somehow have the answers and that their policies are for the best when in fact they are very poorly informed and their attitudes reflect societal prejudices. These problems were well

illustrated for me during a two-week visit paid to Andrews University in rural Michigan, which is also the home of the Adventist seminary, during the first half of October 1984. This visit occurred almost exactly one year after the president of the university had been arrested for making a homosexual advance to a vice officer, an event that had led to his abrupt removal and which was followed by the exposure of several gay students at the university who were subsequently expelled. When he heard that an officer of Kinship⁴ would be on campus, the official who had dealt with the gay students the previous year expressed a desire to meet with me. During a two-hour meeting I surprised him with my estimate that there were perhaps 200 to 250 students with homosexual orientations at this university of 2,800 students. He recognized the significance of the issue to the church if I was correct that gays tend to cluster among teachers, medical personnel, clergy, and musicians. When he complained that gay students were known to frequent bars, a milieu that is abhorrent to the church, I pointed out that - members of any minority group have a compelling urge to cling together, especially when they feel persecuted in their environment, but that gay students on Adventist campuses frequently fear even being seen together because of the danger of witch hunts. Thus, a result of the policy of Adventist college administrations towards gay students is to drive them to gay bars for company! Similarly, the counselling at the university, which discourages the formation of stable gay relationships while deriding the "gay lifestyle" for its stereotypical promiscuity, in fact encourages double lives and promiscuity because of the unrealistic emphasis it places on getting married and trusting God to change your orientation. The official told me he had learned a great deal from our conversation and that most of what I said made sense to him. However, when I offered to meet with the dormitory deans and counselling staff to discuss these matters with them, the offer was nervously refused.

Meanwhile, I had been invited by a professor whom I had interviewed for my research to speak about my experiences as a gay person at two meetings of his Human Sexuality class. The classes were obviously appreciated by most of the students there, but two told their parents of the subject matter and the latter, offended by it, complained to the university administration. Consequently, the chair of the behavioral sciences department was summoned to appear before the Deans' Council; the teacher was told to distribute materials that dealt conservatively with homosexuality to the class immediately; his textbook, which contained line drawings of human genitalia and of masturbation and sexual intercourse, was withdrawn from the book store lest students not in the class pore over them; and the new president of the university, who was absent at the annual council of the church, was kept informed of these developments while the whole university administration waited anxiously lest once again the issue of homosexuality at the university was raised at that council. That is, the barrier between church or - university administrators and the conservative members of the Adventist constituency is paper thin, and administrators feel under pressure to initiate actions on sensitive issues in order to avoid possible complaints.⁵

Meanwhile, when I approached the reference librarians at the two main collections at the university to ask them what materials they might have of relevance to my ongoing research on a general sociology of Adventism, the first items mentioned, with awe and glee, by both of them were their holdings of materials from Kinship! (Neither of them was aware of my connection to the organization.) And in the

⁴ I held the position of Liaison to the Church for 18 years, beginning in 1980.

⁵ When asked to estimate the number of homosexual students on campus, the undergraduates in the human sexuality class settled on 200, a much more realistic estimate than that of the university administration, which thought it got rid of most gays when it expelled half-a-dozen of them.

dormitories, isolated gay students were finding one another as a result of speaking to me after word of my sexuality classes spread like wildfire among the student body.

Kinship is saddened by the inability of its conservative church to focus effectively on the needs of its gay children. It feels sad, too, that the Adventist hospital system, which is one of the largest such systems in the U.S., has not yet made any special efforts to respond to the AIDS crisis. Meanwhile, however, it rejoices in evidence of progress at the grassroots. The second generation of Kinship leaders have not been disfellowshipped by their congregations, even though they have become much more prominent in the church than were their predecessors. Homosexuality is being discussed more openly within local church networks, and Kinship members who make themselves known are frequently being accepted there. The information packets distributed by Kinship drew a surprising number of favorable responses, while clergy who have participated in Kampmeetings have become firm friends. Most important, however, are the bonds and relationships that have been formed among gay Adventists, the new self-image that has emerged among them, and the certainty that they can be, and are, gay Christians.

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