

OPEN LETTER FROM SDA KINSHIP DACH TO THE LEADERS OF THE INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS (EUD) WITH THEIR UNIONS, CONFERENCES, INSTITUTIONS, AND OTHER RESPONSIBLE PARTIES IN GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

In January 2023, an Adventist pastor in Germany publicly came out as bisexual. His local church congregation and the leadership of his employing Conference in the North German Union supported him. They affirmed his „deviating from the norm“ identity and declared their solidarity with him. The same year various Adventist publications appeared in Germany with the aim of initiating an open discussion in our church on the topics of sexual orientation, gender identity and same-sex monogamous partnership.¹

There were numerous reactions from all circles of our church. Critical voices were heard, especially in Germany, Austria and from leaders of the EUD and the General Conference. They made it clear that the traditional doctrinal position of the Adventist Church on homosexuality² as first framed and published by the Executive Committee of the General Conference in October 1993³, should be adhered to unwaveringly. It is based on the conviction that the Bible contains unambiguous and conclusive instructions for same-sex oriented people. They are to be regarded as the timeless valid word of God. Same-sex love relationships are categorically rejected and condemned as grave sin. Alternative interpretations of the biblical texts are seen as bowing to the Zeitgeist, which is considered immoral. Allegedly the authority of the Bible is called into question and the doctrinal foundation of the Adventist Church gets fundamentally shaken.

Because this debate touches on central questions of our lives and our faith, we understand the strong resistance to positions which are considered unbiblical and immoral. However, this completely overshadows the main focus of the initiators for an open discussion on the topic of LGBTQ+: the affected queer people themselves! Sometimes the impression arose that the topic was being reduced to an end-time or liberal/conservative discourse and misinterpreted. At the same time, a disturbing lack of knowledge about the reality of queer people's lives and their challenges in everyday and community life became apparent. Queer believers – unless they (have to) keep themselves hidden for their own protection – feel inadequately appreciated or treated like foreigners in their own congregations. The official reactions of the church have torn up old wounds of inflicted rejection and condemnation.

This letter aims to encourage an open and direct conversation and makes concrete suggestions for improving the current difficult situation. In the EUD's statement on the book „queergedacht“, we felt encouraged by the following declaration of intent:

*As a church, we must **listen carefully** to those who identify as LGBTQ+ and promote **multidisciplinary research** to **better understand** the situation of those affected and create an **environment in our congregations where all people are welcome.**"⁴ (emphasis ours)*

We dare to hope that our initiative will support the leadership of the EUD – possibly the TED, too – as well as the regional and local leaders of our denomination to implement the necessary measures to ensure that Adventist churches in their territory are safe spaces for queer people.

After a long period of silence, many church members these days expect professional information and education on LGBTQ+ issues. More and more Adventists are realizing with great sadness the terrible suffering queer people among us have to endure – alone, silently, and unrecognized.

An ongoing learning process

After decades of controversy, experimentation and research, there is now a growing consensus in the fields of sexology, psychology, psychiatry, and medicine concerning same-sex orientation or gender identity. Old prejudices and stereotypes are increasingly being discarded – due to the mounting visibility of queer people in our society and by coming to terms with taboo issues in direct encounters with them. Personal circumstances of queer people have gradually improved, but much remains to be done.

In autocratic states and in societies where heterosexuality is seen as the “natural norm” and any deviation implicates strong ideological reservations, queer people are exposed to strong pressure, exclusion, persecution, and violence. In such milieus, the LGBTQ+ movement is often denigrated as the „decadence of the West“ and considered a threat to social order and morality. The fact that the core issues are human rights, and the protection of a vulnerable minority usually falls by the wayside in all these politically and ideologically motivated power struggles. Even in our congregations, queer people are by no means spared. The massive psychological strain on those affected is deeply deplorable.⁵

The social rethinking is reaching the mainline churches, and increasingly independent churches as well – with some delay and in waves. New insights and questions about the vital areas of sexuality and gender identity are fundamentally challenging for all of us. Old assumptions are proving to be incorrect or only partially correct. This creates uncertainty and fear. There are no quick and easy (serious!) answers. That is why a persistent, interdisciplinary, and reflective debate is also essential for our SDA Church.

A look to social media and discussions in SDA forums show how contemporary Adventists take opposing stances on questions of sexual identity. Some offer understanding and sympathy for queer people and are deeply affected when they learn about their unfortunate experiences. Others are fearful and feel extreme aversion or even hatred towards them.

In today's diverse lifestyles, it is important to find ethical positions based on the Christian-Adventist faith that unite fundamental religious values with the reality of queer people's lives in a healing and differentiated way. Everyone deserves equal opportunities for a fulfilling and healthy life. It is also a basic Adventist conviction that all of God's commandments and instructions are aimed at a happy and contented life in the here and now.⁶ This means that when religious demands harm people, they must be critically examined – and corrected if necessary.

The Adventist Church has its own history of tabooing and managing the topic of LGBTQ+. An organized and constructive discussion and learning process is the challenge of the hour. Silencing and concealing, simply looking away and suppressing the issue will only cause further damage.

The Ex-Gay Movement

Many Adventists today do not (or no longer) know that their church was one of the first Christian denominations to propagate and significantly co-finance a “conversion therapy facility” for homosexuals in the USA in the 1980s.⁷ Thereby it was actively involved in the so-called ex-gay movement, which campaigned to change same-sex orientation, particularly in evangelical church circles worldwide.⁸ For conservative churches, this movement initially to some degree was a progressive step: for the first time affected persons were recognized and taken seriously in their own ranks. Many hesitantly but expectantly ventured out of hiding. What the church offered gave them hope of “healing” and “change,” combined with the prospect of a “God-pleasing” partnership and domestic happiness. However, after around four decades, this movement, which originated in the USA and has since been adopted by many Christian churches, collapsed (2013).⁹ Countless participants who had come out of the closet and attended such programs with the best of intentions experienced the nightmare of their lives. Quite a few felt like spiritual failures when their sexual orientation could not be treated or prayed away as expected. The resulting concept of a severe God darkened their faith experience.¹⁰ Under the pressure of this burden, some saw suicide as the only way out.¹¹

The ex-gay-movement was wrong. Their offers did not deliver what they had promised. They only confirmed findings of contemporary research that homosexual orientation is as difficult to change as is a heterosexual one. Since it is not a disease, the fallacy of treating it away should long since have been clarified. From a psychotherapeutic point of view, such attempts only lead to further injuries and traumatic experiences. Treatments or programs aimed at changing sexual orientation are now being banned in more and more countries.

Unfortunately, this experiment of the ex-gay movement was never dealt with self-critically in our church. In many places, there is still a lack of knowledge and awareness of the problem. Recent EUD publications continue to speak vaguely and inconsiderate of change and healing in connection with sexual orientation, and (unverifiable) case studies are reported¹² on an official Seventh-day Adventist website¹³. A critical retrospective view and an unambiguous distancing from the unrealistic goals of the ex-gay movement are missing. Therefore and on behalf of the victims, we urgently ask our church for an appropriate reappraisal, a plain declaration, and a course correction. A word of regret and an apology from the official side would be appropriate, indeed we consider it overdue.

Recent developments (“Side-B”)

We have noticed that the “Side-B” position, which is becoming popular in the evangelical world, is also increasingly propagated in the Adventist Church. This position recognizes the reality of a permanent homosexual orientation, while still interpreting the biblical texts as prohibiting same-sex love relationships. Parallel to this new position, older and demonstrably problematic concepts are also still advocated in our churches.¹⁴ What is positive about this latest development is that today’s scientific consensus finds recognition: sexual orientation is generally anchored in a person’s personality (biologically and psychologically) and cannot be changed.¹⁵

Another positive development we see in our church is a certain awareness of the shortcomings towards its queer minority and a hesitant acknowledgement of the need for future improvements. It remains to be seen how sustainable these intentions are and can be put into lasting practice.

What causes us great concern about the “Side B” position is the propagation of celibacy as God’s way of action for same-sex oriented believers. This position is still very young in terms of church history and its attempts to harmonize the traditional interpretation of the Bible with today’s accepted facts about the immutability of same-sex orientation. As in the early days of the ex-gay movement, it is based solely on “successful” solitary examples. Today, serious believers choose a life of abstinence out of love for God and in the conviction that their desire for partnership is sinful.¹⁶ The problem here is once again that individual cases are generalized. We warn therefore against a repetition of the ex-gay disappointment with its devastating consequences in the long run.

We are convinced that we do not have the right to deny a responsible person the central basic need for emotional bonding and partnership and at the same time deny the sexual part of what is actually holistic love, which is just as important for queer people, their health, and their happiness in life as it is for heterosexuals. This approach focuses solely on the sexual aspect in a reductionist manner and leads to the degradation and condemnation of the same-sex love as a holistic act.¹⁷

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc.

SDA Kinship¹⁸ is an internationally active private Adventist support organization. It serves and assists queer (active and former) Adventists and their relatives. The organization was founded in 1978 by gay Adventists in the USA (as a non-profit organization) and has been growing ever since.¹⁹ The number of supportive non-queer members (“allies”) is also steadily increasing. SDA Kinship offers queer Adventists a safe space to meet, encourages them in their Christian-Adventist faith and provides regional services, counseling, or support in coping with specific challenges in their everyday lives. SDA Kinship was born out of the need of queer individuals who had failed in their attempts to change their sexual orientation or in their opposite-sex relationships. Many have hidden and disguised themselves in their congregations and families for years for fear of condemnation and rejection. Some fell ill physically or psychologically, or they suffered under constant stress to the point of total exhaustion. Those who wanted to end what they perceived a dishonest game of hide-and-seek and finally dared to come out faced harsh rejection and were ostracized by their families and in many congregations. As a result, many despaired of their church, their faith and God and walked a lonely path through life as a shadow of themselves. Many have left the church. Some have put an end to their lives. We hear more and more reports from victims and are ashamed of the suffering and lack of love that so many have experienced in our midst. This has to stop!

Most public statements by the church today do not lack a commitment to human respect and Christian compassion towards people of the rainbow spectrum. There are also more and more voices admitting that the loving treatment of queer people in our churches leaves something to be desired and that there is an urgent need for clarification. However, a friendly commitment to compassion alone is not enough. In many places it is common to look the other way indifferently. As a result, leaders in our church have lost much of their credibility and trust within the queer community. These words must now be followed by action.

In this context, the well-known formula is often quoted: “God loves the sinner but hates the sin.” According to this, queer people should be lovingly welcomed into the church, but their same-sex love is rejected as sin. This sentence does not do justice to the reality of queer people’s lives. It reduces a person to a certain sexual behavior. Anyone who talks about a “homosexual lifestyle” or same-sex attraction as a “temptation to sin” has not understood what is the nature of a sexual orientation and identity. Without realizing it, a central dimension of a person’s personality is being condemned as sinful. For queer people, this expression describes and misinterprets the natural need for commitment and partnership as something wrong (provided with the biblical terminology of „abomination“). Many of those affected experience this as a rejection not only of their feelings or behavior, but of their entire person. Behind this spiritual-sounding statement, they encounter a serious form of discrimination.

“It is wrong and a violation of the human right of the presumption of innocence to teach queer people that their being different is a sin. The idea that same-sex orientation is a consequence of sin and therefore, if it cannot be overcome, must not be lived, also places people inherently on the side of evil. And when it is said that, like Jesus, one rejects sin but wants to ‘love sinners’ – by this explicit attribution of the ‘other’ to evil, this insinuation now gets dressed in a ‘Christian’ garb. Many times the result is despair, as those affected for years fight in vain against their sinfulness – oftentimes also in their prayers.”²⁰

If a church requires its queer believers to renounce a true, loving and fulfilling partnership for the rest of their lives, it must be able to provide a theologically sound justification and explain in a plausible way what is so reprehensible about same-sex love from a Christian ethical perspective that it deserves exclusion from the church community and eternal death. The simple resort to “blind obedience” is not convincing. In the context of new psychological and biblical-historical questioning and findings, more and more Christians, even those with a conservative understanding of the Bible and faith, are coming to the conclusion that the traditional church teaching is not as simple and biblically clear as it seems at first glance. In view of the extent of injustice and suffering that this position has caused or indirectly been justified in its history, it is time to thoroughly “go over the books” again. And it is imperative that queer brothers and sisters are included in this discourse. We want them to be able to sit as dialogue partners at those tables where their lives are being negotiated.

Biblical texts

To this day, Old Testament stories and legal texts plus three verses from Pauline epistles are directly applied to same-sex loving people.²¹ This is highly problematic because it does not sufficiently clarify the differences and similarities between the era these texts originated and our modern world, particularly in the area of human sexuality and gender.

In the first chapter of Romans (Romans 1:18–32), Paul uses sexual aberrations as a particularly vivid example of the lostness of non-Jewish peoples and their need for redemption through Christ. His line of argument follows a widespread criticism of paganism at the time, which was very familiar to his Jewish audience. According to this, the decline of the non-Jewish nations began with their turning away from the Creator God and ended in sexual perversions. God gradually abandoned people to their self-imposed error.

However, the inner logic of this passage from Romans can only be applied to gay and lesbian people with a great deal of imagination and without any detectable understanding of the reality of their lives. For Paul, the calamity starts with the inexcusable contempt of the Creator God

(vv. 20–21a). This, he writes, leads to a self-inflicted shrouding of perception and understanding (vv. 21b–22). Subsequently, in arrogant self-deception, in place of the Creator creatures are worshipped as idols (vv. 23,25). Finally, this inherent rejection of God gets manifested in their behavior in shameful and bizarre ways (v. 24): in sexual perversion, women (v. 26) and men begin to dishonor their own bodies by their sexual practices. The lowest level of moral decline is reached when the men abandon their previously natural sexual relationship with their wives and become inflamed with unnatural same-sex desires (v. 27). At the end of this aberration, the corresponding reward awaits them (vv. 27,32).

Christians with same-sex orientation for a long time have been asking themselves urging questions about these texts: “When have we despised God as our Creator and refused to get to know him?” “When have we, with a darkened heart, exchanged the glory of the immortal God for idols and as a result reaped our same-sex attraction?” Never! We have always sincerely loved God and at some point in our younger years perceived our attraction to the same sex as an unchangeable part of our natural personality. We have never “exchanged” or “abandoned” anything in this regard.

Unlike Paul, interpreters of the “Side B” position today emphasize that the predisposition to same-sex orientation (desire) principally is not sinful, only resulting actions can be sin. However, Paul’s assessment of the people Paul has in mind in his letter to the Romans is different. Their same-sex desire is reprehensible because it is causally linked to their unbelief and crosses natural boundaries which previously were inherent. It is the obvious endpoint of a personal religious and moral degeneration. Paul obviously has people in mind who, according to our categories today, are heterosexuals who transgressed the inner barriers of their natural disposition in excessive lust, turning to same-sex desires and intercourse (perhaps he also had certain emperors in Rome in mind, whose unrestrained sex life was publicly known). At a closer look, the logic of this entire classification does not apply to people with a same-sex orientation at all.

For a long time, hardly anyone has taken in account the devastating effects the generalizing application of biblical texts with references to same-sex acts have had on queer people. As these texts without exception entail devastating condemnations, these have been intentionally or unwittingly incorporated into our assessment of these persons and transferred on them in an undifferentiated manner (“God hates fags,” “Death penalty for fags”).

Today at least, the biblical story of the city of Sodom and its sexualized violence is fortunately interpreted in a historically more nuanced way than in the past, even by most conservative theologians. However, the old term “sodomy” still reminds us that from the Middle Ages onwards, every same-sex impulse and act was directly associated with the depravity of this xenophobic city, grossly generalized. It had become a symbol of severest sexual perversion and the separation from God by a society doomed to destruction. Sodomy was therefore despised like the pest. It was considered a “transmittable” and “contagious” moral plague that could only be eradicated with fire from heaven. Thus the divine condemnation of the Canaanite Sodom and the death sentence in the Book Leviticus (20:13) were applied to all gay men. This resulted in a long and terrible history of persecution, the shadow of which extends to our own day.

An interpretation of the Bible that continues to make such a direct transfer always becomes – intentionally or unintentionally – a stirrup holder for queer hostility. The church then lacks the arguments and the persuasive power to stand up for the rights of queer people. The tendency to look away will remain strong – to pass by and remain silent when queer people are

discriminated against and marginalized, while they need a voice of support and helping hand in the spirit of the Gospel. In the same way, it will also not be possible to eradicate the idea that God deeply abhors the legitimate desires of same-sex oriented people, let alone their entire differentness. But: Is it really their longing for love as partners that generates the seeds of eternal death? Some queer Christians feel that they are a living symbol of the human brokenness that resulted from the fall of mankind. They have done everything they could to suppress their longing for partnership.²² And many have learned to hate themselves in the process. That is why to some degree this traditional interpretation is responsible when queer people in our congregations pretend, hide, or say goodbye to us.

Then and now

The Bible was written by people in a different time, in a different language and to recipients in a different cultural context. Our church agrees that this fact must be adequately taken into account when biblical texts are interpreted. It is always necessary to clarify what the original author meant and what his audience understood. Unfortunately, when it comes to understanding queer people, biblical texts are still very simply and directly applied to the present, without taking into account the results of historical research and without listening carefully to the accounts of queer people. The traditional interpretation does not sufficiently take in account the different living conditions and environments with regards to the concepts of sexuality and gender identity then and now.

„Some explicitly admit that a sexual orientation that differs from the majority is not a sin, but see sexual practice with a person of the same sex as a sin. In this they refer to the Bible. It is true that the Bible only speaks of same-sex sexual acts, nowhere of sexual orientation. Because in today's world we attribute such acts to homosexuality, we assume that Romans 1:26-27 or Genesis 18:22; 20:13 are talking about gays and lesbians. Despite our ignorance of conditions and thought patterns in an ancient world we nevertheless derive from there what in our times makes sense to us. However, in those days there were many other reasons why men engaged in sexual acts with other men: the set expression for a consensual relationship of dependence between mature men and adolescents; a ritual in orgiastic religious festivals; private revelry of an erotic nature; male dominance acted out sexually by ‚using‘ slaves; self-affirmation of male dominance by ‚using‘ as many other men as possible; humiliation of strangers and prisoners of war. These acts were not linked to a homosexual orientation, but were mostly conducted by heterosexual men. For the interpretation of Leviticus 18:22; 20:13, it is much more likely to think of such practices in the ancient context than of homosexuality in the modern sense, even if the texts do not provide any clues which specific social situation in each instance they refer to.”²³

In connection with these complex ethical challenges, sometimes the impression arises that the desire of church leaders for clear and simple biblical answers is so strong that statements on issues that were completely unknown to their authors are wrested from these ancient texts. However, since the LGBTQ+ issue is about the lives and wellbeing of people living today, great care must be taken when biblical texts are transferred and applied to our time.

It is safe to assume that the biopsychosocial concept of same-sex orientation as we know it was not in the minds of the biblical authors and their contemporary readership. Certainly, various forms of same-sex relationships were observable at all times since queer people have always existed. It is also conceivable that individuals with close contact to queer persons had suspected that their acquaintances felt a permanent attraction to the same sex. However, the deeply rooted natural same-sex predisposition was obviously unknown. For human beings in times

past an undifferentiated heteronormativity was the only given norm, which is understandable from our perspective. It was based on the obvious physical differences between men and women and an understanding of sexuality that considered biological reproduction to be the central issue. A more differentiated picture is available to us today, which allows a more nuanced view of the diversity in the area of sexual orientation or gender identity. We are obligated to take into account the gain of knowledge available to us today. A millennials-old understanding explains why all these Bible quotations are lacking the acknowledgement of the inner realities of queer people and why the plight of queer believers is nowhere addressed in the Bible. These insights have now set the course for today's interpretation of biblical texts with reference to same-sex acts.

The love between man and woman

In the biblical accounts of creation, Eve was created after Adam felt an unfulfilled longing for a partner (Genesis 2:20). God said: ***“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”*** (Genesis 2:18, NIV). Did the author of the creation narrative also have the queer minority in mind when he short and wonderfully profound described the partnership-based love between a man and woman created by God? If this is not certain, which right entitles us to derive universally valid rules for the “exception,” the queer part of humankind? And what right do we have to engage in exegetical endeavors to precisely define the holistic complementarity of man and woman as a norm for queer people? A norm they can never meet by nature? And for this reason, all they are left with is to be alone without a partner, which, according to the biblical text, is explicitly assessed by God himself as “not good” for humans? And because they can't escape their same-sex thoughts and desires, are they sinning in the worst possible way -- with no prospect of deliverance? In this way, the heterosexual majority is set as the norm for queer people. This places a heavy yoke on them which very few heterosexuals would be able to bear. This is a conclusion that demands a better justification!

Which convincing ethical reasons are there to condemn emotional affection between two queer people as a sin? Who is harmed when two mature individuals of the same sex love each other? To what extent are they threatening the marriage between a man and a woman? And what are the consequences for society and for themselves if they want to frame their relationship in the form of a lasting, faithful, and caring partnership in the Christian spirit - with a strong awareness of responsibility for each other? Especially when it is clear that an opposite-sex person cannot be a suitable and helpful partner for them, but a same-sex person can? If the latter fully satisfies their need for bonding and partnership? Conversely, what harm is caused if this desire is rejected as sin in the name of God and a relationship of this kind is categorically forbidden? We ask what is actually immoral: queer love or its prohibition? What understanding of marriage guides us? Is man made for marriage or marriage made for man?

Leading individuals in our church (e.g., GC) repeatedly compare same-sex love with addictions such as alcoholism and drug addiction, or with notorious lying and kleptomania. On the one hand, this means that a strong human desire alone, maybe even hereditary, does not justify morally questionable behavior (which is true). On the other hand, it emphasizes that God can empower us to overcome, that he is able to heal and deliver from addictions and sins (which is also true). However, this analogy is misleading in two ways. It distorts truths and facts by mixing fundamentally different categories and thereby hurts people: Firstly, it insultingly reduces the holistic potential of same-sex love to the level of a self-destructive addiction. However, queer people in their desire for partnership are no more sex addicts than heterosexuals

would be. Here we talk about mature and responsible people who can give each other security and safety, not about two bodies that are anatomically “coupled” correctly or incorrectly. Secondly, this comparison upholds the disproved concept of changing (“healing”) a sexual orientation by the exercise of true faith and unceasing prayer. Whoever holds on to this idea has failed to learn the lessons of the ex-gay movement (see above). While for many heterosexuals this addiction-analogy is somewhat strange at best, for queer people it has tragic and destructive consequences. It rips the soul out of their committed and genuine love, turning it into a monstrous and sinful bond.

The better way

For thousands of queer people, the meetings organized by SDA Kinship have become a safe space. Direct encounters and an honest and frank exchange on fundamental questions of faith and life, which queer believers are often left alone with in their congregations, are possible here. Many have gradually learned to discover and accept their true identity in this environment. With God’s help, emotional wounds can heal. New love for themselves, for God and fellow men can awaken and a new zest for life can blossom. Countless non-heteronormative people in our ranks testify that they have found healing and overall happiness as a result of affirming their orientation and identity, as well as in loving partnerships. Anyone who continues to argue that a same-sex love relationship would inevitably cause long-term or permanent damage and lead away from God is ignorant of the realities of the believers concerned.

SDA Kinship has done pioneering work for people from the rainbow spectrum in the Adventist Church worldwide. The experience of almost 50 years of ministry has given us the joy and strength to swim against the tide where necessary and the assurance that God blesses this ministry.

Our requests

We have seven requests directed to the EUD leadership and all those in positions of responsibility in the unions, conferences, and churches. If our wishes were granted, we are convinced that this would take us great steps forward all together.

We ask you ...

1. ... to continue and support in a constructive and positive spirit the discourse on LGBTQ+ issues that has emerged in the German-speaking countries (DACH). This means permitting and encouraging a respectful discussion and a process of fair and open discourse “bottom-up” instead of hindering it with discussions or statements that determine the result “top-down” in advance. Queer church members should always be included in this process. (An exemplary action was the LGBTQ+ Symposium in Kassel in November 2023, organized by the North- and South-German Unions. We are very grateful to the organizers!)
2. ... to reappraise self-critically in retrospective the period of failed reparation and conversion attempts in/by our church, to learn our lessons for the present and the future and to support the process of healing for the wounded.
3. ... to critically and interdisciplinarily examine the “Side B” position with regard to the longer-term consequences of the general celibacy requirement for same-sex loving Christians.
4. ... to conduct a Europe-wide study on the fate of queer children, young people, and adults

in EUD (and TED) congregations. How are these people doing, what specific needs do they have, especially when they realize at a young age that they are queer?

5. ... to develop positive and practicable Adventist-Christian life concepts from the knowledge gained, especially for queer children and young people in our churches. Role models in our ranks could help to communicate these authentically and in practice.
6. ... to support the awareness of discrimination against queer people in the church and in society and to take a clear stance against it.
7. ... to promote competent pastoral care for rainbow people at all levels of our Church.

SDA Kinship feels strongly in tune with the goals of its church when it is about bringing the love of God in Jesus Christ and the Advent hope to all people, especially the queer minority, in a credible and meaningful way. With this letter, we want to emphasize that we are available as constructive “sparring partners” for the leaders of our church at all levels of the church organization. We have always experienced personal and direct encounters as rewarding for everyone involved.

It is our dream that SDA Kinship as a private organization will one day become obsolete because Adventist churches in general have become a safe space for queer people. We would like the Adventist church to offer services tailored to the needs of this minority and to show them respect and appreciation. In so doing, the great potential of the rainbow community in our ranks could be fully utilized also for the mission of our church. It is our experience that this diversity is enriching for us all!

We look forward to hearing from you and are also available for direct encounters.

With best wishes and blessings,

Your SDA Kinship brothers and sisters and friends in the German-speaking area (DACH),

p.p. Ingrid und Frieder Schmid



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Please also consider the endnotes! 

ENDNOTES

¹ Publications in German language:

- „**Adventisten heute**“, September 2023, www.adventisten-heute.de
- „**queergedacht**“, Beiträge für eine offene Diskussion über gleichgeschlechtliche monogame Beziehungen» („queergedacht“, contributions for an open discussion about same-sex monogamous relationships“), Hrsg. Werner E. Lange, Dennis Meier und Reinder Bruinsma, STAB-Verlag, D-Adendorf, 2024 (English edition available autumn 2024, www.stab-verlag.com)
- „**LGBTQ+ in unserer Kirche**, Orientierungshilfe für Angehörige, Pastor:innen und alle, die das Thema bewegt“, Nord- und Süddeutscher Verband der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Deutschland, Neumünster, 2023. (Translation of „Guiding Families of LGBTQ+ Loved Ones, for Adventist Families, Ministry Leaders, and All Who Care“, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, USA, Commission on Human Sexuality, Lead Them Home, 2006-2020).
- **Vorträge vom Symposium „LGBTQ+ und Adventgemeinde“**, 17.–19. November 2023 in Kassel, (Presentations from the symposium „LGBTQ+ and the Adventist Church“, November 17–19, 2023 in Kassel), Advent-Verlag GmbH, Lüneburg, 2024.
- Various **sermons and sources**: <https://www.adventgemeinde-grindelberg.de/lgbtq-material>
A book published in the USA by an Adventist theologian was an important impetus for the book “queergedacht” and is considered a valuable contribution to the discussion because it contains theologically and psychologically detailed information and is written in a friendly and winning spirit:
- „The Bible & LGBTQ Adventists“, A Theological Conversation About Same-Sex Marriage, Gender, and Identity, Alicia Johnston, Affirmation Collective, 2022.

² The term **homosexuality** was coined in the second half of the 19th century when the phenomenon of sexual orientation was discovered. It describes the sexual and romantic attraction to people of the same sex. Until the middle of the 20th century and up to the time of the ex-gay movement and its offshoots, same-sex orientation was pathologized on the basis of depth psychological theories, i.e. understood as a pathological developmental disorder and unsuccessfully attempted to be changed. It was not until the 1950s and 60s that sexology, psychology and psychiatry increasingly came to the realization, based on solid empirical research, that same-sex orientation is neither pathological nor treatable, but should be understood as a natural personality trait. In the current theological debate, the term homosexuality is unfortunately often used indistinctly and read anachronistically, i.e. incorrectly back in time to biblical times, or it is assumed indiscriminately that the biblical authors were thinking of people with a homosexual orientation when they condemned same-sex acts. The word homosexuality also reduces the meaning of same-sex orientation to the purely sexual act or sexual aspect. This promotes the old but false idea that this is essentially about an exotic satisfaction of the sex drive. The holistic ability of queer people to love people of their own gender is overlooked. It would help to break down prejudices and stereotypes and bring more clarity and fairness to the discussion if the terms homosexuality or homosexual were only used in contexts where it is clear that the people involved are people with a same-sex orientation. This would prevent the Bible's harsh condemnations of certain same-sex acts from being applied indiscriminately to queer people. For example, anyone who speaks of “homosexual rape” in connection with the biblical Sodom story (Genesis 19) accepts that the base motives of Sodom's perpetrators are generalized without nuance and transferred to queer people. Historically speaking, the Christian churches have thus incurred great guilt towards a sexual minority.

³ <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/homosexuality/>

⁴ <https://news.eud.adventist.org/en/response-materials/response-materials/go/-/6267/>

⁵ “Knowing as a same-sex feeling person that they [...] do not have the same rights as heterosexual people is a discriminatory experience that leads to the feeling of not being welcome in the society in question and a reason for the development of feelings of loneliness (and increased suicidal tendencies, note R. Pfandl). Another exclusionary social signal is the fact that in the Catholic Church and in independent-church evangelical groups, people who deviate from cis-identity[*] and heterosexuality are often marginalized and pathologized.” Udo Rauchfleisch, “**Einsamkeit**. Die Herausforderung unserer Zeit.” (“**Loneliness**. The challenge of our time”). Patmos Verlag, Ostfildern, 2024, p. 43. [*Cis-identity refers to the gender identity of the majority of people who feel no discrepancy between their perceived gender and the gender assigned to them at birth. In contrast, people with a trans identity realize that their psychological gender does not match the gender they were assigned at birth].

- ⁶ Lev 18:5; Deut 5:16; 6:2; Ps 1:3; Prov 3:1–2; 6:23; Isa 48:17–18; Ezek 20:11; Rom 7:10; Mt 7:24–25.
- ⁷ The organization Quest Learning Center, founded by the Adventist pastor Colin Cook and supported both ideally and financially by the General Conference. See **“queergedacht”**, chapter 7, “The disappointed hope for healing”.
- ⁷ See: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex-Gay-Bewegung>
- ⁹ The umbrella organization “Exodus International”, which had been active in this area since 1976, was closed in 2013 and its director publicly apologized to all those affected for the distress and disappointment that such offers had caused. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exodus_International
- ¹⁰ “The relationship between people and God is closely linked to the formation of conscience. There is a close connection between the conscience, the superego and our concept of God. Helmut Jaschke and Erwin Ringel have drawn attention to the significance of an image of God that makes people ill and its effects on religious life in an impressive way. If a child is taught that God is primarily a constricting, controlling and punishing authority, this often leads to this God becoming an oppressive voice of conscience. Feelings of depression and bitter despair can arise as a result of a neurotic distortion of life, which can also influence religious life. Trust in God can be lost, one can experience oneself as God’s stepchild and even accuse him. On this basis, feelings of guilt can easily arise, which can (sometimes unconsciously) lead to a tendency towards self-punishment. It is obvious that such pathological religiosity can pave the way for suicidal development.” Thomas Haenel, **„Keine Angst vor der Couch! Warum Religion Psychotherapie verträgt“** (“Don’t be afraid of the couch! Why religion tolerates psychotherapy”). Kösel Verlag München, 2005, p. 76–77.
- ¹¹ Specialized studies on the topic: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13811118.2015.1004476>; [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(18\)30050-3/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(18)30050-3/abstract)
- ¹² When people report a change in their same-sex attraction, it is important to listen carefully to what they have experienced. It is necessary that individual experiences are not uncritically generalized and interpreted as a “change” in the sense of ex-gay philosophy. The Christian psychiatrist and therapist Martin Grabe writes: “In summary, it can be said that sexual orientation is generally anchored in a person’s personality and cannot be changed. There are certainly occasional cases of change, mostly in the direction of homosexuality. This is because, as has been said many times before, coming out is the breakdown of unconscious defenses and our society still provides many reasons to reject homosexuality. However, there are also rare changes towards heterosexuality if the previous sexual orientation was predominantly based on neurotic fears that could be dealt with in therapy. From a therapeutic point of view, it makes no sense to discuss a change in sexual orientation as a therapeutic goal. In the vast majority of cases, a change is not possible and where there is a strong desire for change, it usually has to do with destructive internalized rules and prohibitions. The latter should then be the subject of therapy.” Martin Grabe, **„Homosexualität und christlicher Glaube: ein Beziehungsdrama“** (“**Homosexuality and Christian faith: a relationship drama**”), Verlag der Francke-Buchhandlung GmbH, 2020, p. 32–33.
- ¹³ Website of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists: www.humansexuality.org
- ¹⁴ See e.g. **„Adventisten heute“**, February 2024, p. 36. Appropriate publications are recommended to the church community (e.g. Ed Shaw, **„Vertrautheit wagen! Gemeindebau hautnah. Und wie die Kirche sexuelle Vielfalt biblisch integrieren kann“**, Fontis-Verlag Basel, 2018. – Original English edition: “The Plausibility Problem“, 2015 by Ed Shaw, Published by arrangement with Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham).
- This **position**, known as **„Side-B“**, recognizes that homosexuality is generally a given and unchangeable personality trait. It advocates a celibate life for these people, which should be supported and sustained by a caring church culture.
 - This is opposed by the **„Side A“ position** (also represented by SDA Kinship), which emphasizes that same-sex love and partnership is just as valuable and important for same-sex oriented people as opposite-sex love and partnership is for heterosexual people. According to this view, both forms of partnership love are essentially so close that the basic ethical values given in the Bible for marriage between a man and a woman can and should also be applied to these unions - which are nowhere portrayed in the Bible. See the pastorally careful chapter 15 in **„queergedacht“** and in **„Adventisten heute“**, September 2023, pp. 10–13.
 - However, there are also Adventists who still hold the older **„Side-X“ position**. This was propagated by the ex-gay movement. For them, homosexuality is a symptom of a developmental disorder in children (usually due to a dysfunctional home and/or early experiences of abuse). According to this belief, there is a fundamental opportunity to „heal“ or „repair“ this through appropriate therapeutic measures and/or through God’s supernatural work (so called reparation- or conversion therapies). This depth-psychological approach has proven to be wrong in practice.

- At the very end of the categories is the Biblicalist „**Side-Y**“ position, which regards the very concepts of „homosexuality“, or „trans identity“ as ideological constructs of a society far removed from the Bible and God, because they do not appear anywhere in the Bible. The Bible is seen as a sufficient source of information and a comprehensive interpretative framework for all LGBTQ+ issues. According to this conviction, Christians should not refer to themselves as homosexuals in an „unbiblical“, „worldly“ way, but merely speak of a same-sex temptation to sin. Behind the LGBTQ+ movement, she sees a socio-political (or satanic) conspiracy agenda that wants to push back Christian values.
- ¹⁵ „There is a consensus among experts today that in most cases homosexuality is a personality trait that is deeply rooted in a person’s nature and can no more be changed than heterosexuality.“ Martin Grabe, „**Homosexualität und christlicher Glaube: ein Beziehungsdrama**“, (Homosexuality and Christian faith: a relationship drama), Verlag der Francke-Buchhandlung GmbH, 2020, pp. 24–25.
- „An important prerequisite for understanding homosexuality is the fact that a homosexual cannot be converted or with prayer turned into a heterosexual (as little as this is possible the other way round). Whoever feels homosexual cannot help his (or her) feelings.“ Haag and Elliger, (p. 176) say succinctly about homosexuality: „It is not a disease, not freely chosen, not a sin.“ Thomas Haenel, „**Keine Angst vor der Couch! Warum Religion Psychotherapie verträgt**“. („Don’t be afraid of the couch! Why religion tolerates psychotherapy“). Kösel Verlag München, 2005, p. 141–142; Herbert Haag and Katharina Elliger: „**Zur Liebe befreit - Sexualität in der Bibel und heute**“. („Liberated to love. Sexuality in the Bible and today“). Benziger, Zurich 1990.
- ¹⁶ An honest biographical report by a „Side-B“ representative that leaves no doubt as to the hardships of the celibate path: Wesley Hill, „**Identität: Christ – Orientierung: schwul – Lebensstil: enthaltsam**“. Brunnen Verlag GmbH, Gießen, 2021, (Original English edition: Washed and Waiting, Zondervan Corporation L.L.C an imprint of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc. 2010, 2016).
- ¹⁷ The current appreciation and support of single life is commendable in principle. However, this must not lead to a devaluation of partnership-based love, which remains essential for the happiness of most people. On the contrary, the Christian concept of marriage should continue to be strongly supported and recommended to all those who wish to enter into a loving partnership. Anyone who chooses a celibate life because they reject their desire for partnership as something sinful should receive good pastoral care. What the „Side B“ position demands must be tested in practice and evaluated on an ongoing basis. A second experiment with an outcome like that of the ex-gay movement must not be allowed in our church.
- ¹⁸ The term Kinship stands for a community of people that gives its members a sense of belonging, love, acceptance, security and safety.
- ¹⁹ More information on the history of SDA-Kinship can be found in the book „**queergedacht**“, Chapter 18 & 19.
- ²⁰ „**Wir und die ‚Andersen‘: Nachdenken über die Begegnung mit queeren Menschen**“, („We and the ‚others‘: Reflecting on encounters with queer people“), essay from Bernhard Oestreich, Mai 2024; PDF-edition for download: <https://www.adventgemeinde-grindelberg.de/lgbtq-material/>
- ²¹ Gen 19:1–13; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Jdg 19; Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–11; 1 Tim 1:8–11
- ²² For a moving and disturbing example of this inner struggle, see pages 10–11 of: https://www.salvationandservice.org/files/sunds_ausgaben/pdfs/sunds-69.pdf
- ²³ „**Wir und die ‚Anderen‘**“, B. Oesterreich.