

Two-year 'recovery' for charismatic pastor: Haggard needs time for healing and wholeness

by [John Dart](#) in the [November 28, 2006](#) issue

In the aftermath of Ted Haggard's sexual immorality scandal, analysts may wonder how much the misdeeds harmed the evangelical-White House alliance or the National Association of Evangelicals, which the megachurch pastor led as president for three years.

Virtually unmentioned in coverage was that the Colorado Springs pastor, who allegedly paid a gay male escort, Michael Jones, 49, of Denver, for sex and drugs over three years, was a prominent figure in the charismatic-Pentecostal camp of Christianity.

Pentecostal and later-generation charismatic churches have been celebrating in this centennial year of the 1906 Azusa Street Mission their growth in religious maturity and broader acceptance among other Christians. But the Haggard scandal—perhaps the biggest since the sexual failings of Pentecostal televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart in the late 1980s—cannot but remind churches of the periodic indiscretions of some high-energy “Spirit-filled” pastors in the past.

Haggard, married and the father of five, needs a period of restitution, and arguably the movement will need time to recover as well. It was not surprising that charismatic leaders looked for help from Jack Hayford, former pastor of the 10,000-member Church on the Way in southern California. Known as a pastor to pastors, a national leader who has at times publicly decried spates of clergy divorces, Hayford agreed two years ago to become full-time president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, a Pentecostal denomination which had been hit hard by financial mismanagement.

Hayford was named to a counseling team for Haggard that included pastor Tommy Barnett of the First Assembly of God in Phoenix and Focus on the Family founder

James Dobson. However, Dobson withdrew November 7, saying he wanted to help but did not have “the time to devote to such a critical responsibility.”

In accepting Haggard’s resignation, the NAE executive committee, headed by the top official of the Presbyterian Church in America and the president of the Open Bible Churches, a Pentecostal denomination, issued a statement November 3 saying that “due to the seriousness of Rev. Haggard’s misconduct . . . we anticipate that an extended period of recovery will be appropriate” for his moral healing and restoration.

Hayford, who was asked to review the statement before it was posted on the NAE Web site, told the *Century* on November 4 that he fully affirmed the statement. He went further in an interview. “The only thing that I would add is that we should not presume that recovery too rapidly. It takes two years or longer for a person to be sufficiently stabilized in his marriage and his own sense of recovery,” said Hayford.

“One of the most common failures in the way churches handle people who have fallen is to say, ‘We forgive him. God forgives,’” he said. “The baseline for recovery is a couple of years, and this is not as punishment but to bring wholeness.”

Haggard, 50, the founding pastor of the 14,000-member New Life Church, who was termed one of the 25 most influential evangelicals by *Time* magazine last year, admitted to sexual immorality (after previous denials to reporters) in a statement read in Sunday services November 5. “I am a deceiver and a liar,” he said. “There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I’ve been warring against it all of my adult life.” His words reflected the imagery of “spiritual warfare” that many charismatic pastors use to characterize their prayers and exhortations versus demonic spirits.

Profiled in *Harper’s Magazine* last year, Haggard started his church in the mid-1980s by fighting what he termed evil forces. “He staked out gay bars, inviting men to come to his church; his whole congregation pitched itself into invisible battles with demonic forces, sometimes in front of public buildings,” according to writer Jeff Sharlett. Haggard said he was once attacked by a witch, and he gave the name “Control” to evil forces that he felt dominated U.S. cities.

Asked if he thought Haggard or some of his followers might revert to excuses such as “the devil made me do it,” Hayford said that though no Pentecostal or charismatic believers would discount the possibility of evil spirits at work, human moral failures

are recognized for what they are.

Haggard's exit from the NAE post will be a disappointment for conservative evangelicals as well as for some moderate and liberal Protestants. Unlike oldline Pentecostals such as Oral Roberts and Pat Robertson, Haggard represented a younger, fresher charismatic face under the broad evangelical umbrella.

He pleased fellow conservatives by opposing same-sex marriage and abortion and became part of religious right circles that endorsed Bush administration policies. In late 2003, Haggard accepted a summons from the White House to be on hand for the signing of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act by the president.

But Haggard was also appreciated by some socially moderate and liberal church leaders for being concerned with global warming and human rights violations. "These are not issues most people associate with evangelicals," said Jeffery L. Sheler, author of *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America*.

"The absence of his voice will be felt in the NAE's internal effort to broaden the evangelical agenda," said Sheler, who spoke to the NAE's executive board this fall after Haggard read his book. "In the short term, I think this will hurt the evangelical movement," said Sheler, a contributing editor to *U.S. News & World Report*.

Haggard's stances were not always predictable. Despite his support for a ban on gay marriages, Haggard did not speak publicly against Referendum 1 on the Colorado ballot, which sought to give same-sex couples some legal rights and benefits.

Also, he stood firm in refusing to cancel his church's invitation to a choir from the gay-oriented Metropolitan Community Church to join other choirs at an ecumenical Easter service, according to the *New York Times*, which quoted Nori Rost, executive director of Just Spirit, a group that monitors the religious right.

When the liberal All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, revealed last fall that the Internal Revenue Service was investigating the church for possibly violating its tax-exempt status with a 2004 antiwar sermon critical of President Bush, Haggard urged that the relatively liberal National Council of Churches do everything in its power to fight the government threat to pulpit freedom.

While his opposition to IRS actions reflected conservative evangelical efforts to allow more partisan political speech in churches than liberals would want, Haggard's

willingness to contact the NCC risked displeasing NAE conservatives.

A previous NAE president, Kevin Mannoia, a Free Methodist pastor, was forced to resign in 2001 after he had suggested that the NAE could have some limited relationships with the NCC. Financial support dwindled, and Leith Anderson, senior pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, was named interim president. NAE officials called upon Anderson again this month to take the interim post.

When the scandal hit the news, Haggard was described as one of several evangelical leaders who had the weekly ear of Bush aides. But that characterization, once useful politically to Republican strategists, was soon downplayed.

White House spokesperson Tony Fratto said November 3 to the Associated Press that Haggard took part in those weekly calls only “a couple” of times. Also, “there’ve been a lot of people who’ve come to the White House,” said Fratto, who expressed confidence that evangelical voters could distinguish between an individual’s problems and the GOP agenda.

“He’s no longer of any use,” observed whistle-blower evangelical David Kuo, whose recent book accused Bush aides of being dismissive of religious right leaders as “nuts” with crazy ideas, yet useful politically. Kuo, Beliefnet.com’s Washington editor, in his blog November 3 decried the White House’s lack of “compassion for a pastor’s fall.”