

# Willow Creek cuts ties with ex-gay Exodus International

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(RNS) Willow Creek Community Church, a trend-setting megachurch in suburban Chicago, has quietly ended its partnership with Exodus International, an "ex-gay" organization.

Willow Creek decided to sever ties with the Florida-based ministry in 2009, Christianity Today reported, but the decision only became public in June.

Church officials described the move as a shift in approach rather than a change in belief. Susan DeLay, a spokeswoman for Willow Creek, said the church continues to welcome those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

"Willow Creek has a whole host of ministries for people dealing with these issues, and we would never intend for them to feel sidelined," she told Christianity Today.

Alan Chambers, president of Exodus, sees the move as a "disappointing trend" within some Christian circles.

"There are Christians who believe like one another who aren't willing to stand with one another, simply because they're afraid of the backlash people will direct their way if they are seen with somebody who might not be politically correct," he told CT.

Willow Creek's decision comes at a time when the president of TOMS, the shoe distributor, apologized for participating in an event with Focus on the Family, a Colorado-based ministry that opposes homosexuality.

Last year, Exodus pulled its sponsorship of the "Day of Truth," which encouraged students to express their disapproval of homosexuality... In the wake of gay youth suicides and bullying last year, Chambers said churches should still believe the Bible opposes homosexuality but need to approach the issue "in a much more conversational, relational, service sort of way."