

'Ex-gay' group closes as its president apologizes

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [July 24, 2013](#) issue

Exodus International, a group that billed itself as “the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality,” announced June 19 that it was shutting its doors.

Exodus’s board unanimously agreed to close the ministry and begin a separate one, though details about a new ministry focused on gender and sexuality were still being worked out.

The announcement came just after Exodus president Alan Chambers released a statement apologizing to the gay community for many actions, including the organization’s promotion of efforts to change a person’s sexual orientation.

Exodus functioned as a support group for men and women who were struggling with their sexual orientation and early on embraced the idea that gays and lesbians could become straight through prayer and counseling.

But the belief in “reparative therapy was one of the things that led to the downfall of this organization,” Chambers said in an interview, noting that Exodus in recent years redirected its focus to helping men and women work through their sexual identity.

“I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents,” Chambers said in the apology. “I am sorry that there were times I didn’t stand up to people publicly ‘on my side’ who called you names like sodomite—or worse.”

Chambers, who is married, said his core beliefs about sexuality have not changed and admitted he still wrestles with his own same-sex attraction.

When he was hired in 2001, he said, he told the board, “Success looks like Exodus going out of business because the church is doing its job.” Three years ago, he said, Exodus had more than 20 employees in its Orlando office. Today, it has nine. In July,

it will have three employees before it completely shuts down.

Chambers had already disavowed reparative therapy at the annual Gay Christian Network conference in January 2012, and his apology “is the acknowledgment many of us have been waiting to hear for a long, long time,” said GCN executive director Justin Lee.

Chambers announced the closure of Exodus at the ministry’s 38th annual conference in Irvine, California. Local affiliated Exodus ministries, which are autonomous, will continue, but not under the name or umbrella of Exodus.

“Alan has been moving this way for awhile . . . but this apology is much more explicit and leaves no room for support for change therapies or demonizing gays,” said Warren Throckmorton, a psychology professor at Grove City College who has long observed the ex-gay movement.

John Paulk, who was spotted at a gay bar in Washington, D.C., in 2000 and left his role as chairman of Exodus, also recently apologized for the reparative therapy he once promoted. —RNS

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