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Ex-gay group Exodus International shuts down, president apologizes

Sarah Pulliam Bailey Religion News Service | Jun. 20, 2013

Exodus International, a group that bills itself as ?the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality,? announced June 19 that it?s shutting its doors.

Exodus?s board unanimously agreed to close the ministry and begin a separate one, though details about the new ministry were unavailable at the time of the organization?s press release [1].

The announcement came just after Exodus president Alan Chambers released a statement [2] apologizing to the gay community for many actions, including the organization?s promotion of efforts to change a person?s sexual orientation.

?I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents,? Chambers said. ?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.?

The announcement comes at a critical point for gay rights, as the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to issue two potentially decisive rulings on gay marriage and public opinion shifts rapidly in favor of gay rights and even gay marriage.

A recent Gallup Poll [3] showed that 59 percent of Americans now view gay or lesbian relations as ?morally acceptable,? a 19-point swing since 2001 and the biggest change seen on any social issue, including divorce, extramarital affairs and other issues.

Chambers disavowed reparative therapy at the annual Gay Christian Network conference in January 2012. ?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.

?Exodus has been a lighting rod for Christian discussion about homosexuality over the years and with today?s events will probably continue to be for awhile.?

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 [4] for the reparative therapy he once promoted.

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

Exodus began in 1976 by a gay man, Frank Worthen. ?Perhaps nothing has brought Exodus into the mainstream of evangelicalism more than its embrace by James Dobson?s Focus on the Family,? wrote [5] Christianity Today in 2007. The ministry has faced some challenges in recent years, including a split [6] with Willow Creek

Community Church outside Chicago and dissolved partnerships [7].

In his apology, Chambers acknowledged stories of people who went to Exodus for help only to experience more trauma.

?I have heard stories of shame, sexual misconduct, and false hope,? he said. ?In every case that has been brought to my attention, there has been swift action resulting in the removal of these leaders and/or their organizations. But rarely was there an apology or a public acknowledgement by me.?

On Thursday, journalist Lisa Ling?s program ?God & Gays,? which features Chambers among others, will air on The Oprah Network. ?The organization needs to shut down. Shut down!? a man in the trailer [8] tells Chambers.

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