

Exodus International shuts down, president apologizes

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—[Exodus International](#), a group that bills itself as “the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality,” announced it’s shutting its doors.

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



Exodus president Alan Chambers.

(Photo courtesy Exodus International)

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 the ministry 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 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.”

Core beliefs have not changed

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

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](#) showed 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.

Three years ago, Exodus had more than 20 employees in its Orlando office. Today, it has nine. In July, it will have 3 employees before it completely shuts down.

Local ministries will continue

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 *Christianity Today* in 2007. The ministry faced some challenges in recent years, including a split with [Willow Creek Community Church](#) outside Chicago and other dissolved partnerships.

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.”