

Exodus: 'Praying away the gay' doesn't work

"It takes a lot of courage—and honesty—to admit you were wrong," and Exodus International has done just that, said **Marlo Thomas** in *Huffington Post.com*. For 37 years, the controversial Christian ministry was the driving force of the "ex-gay" movement, which maintains that gay men and lesbians can change their sexual orientation through prayer and psychotherapy. But last week, Exodus's president, Alan Chambers, "joined the ever-increasing chorus of voices in our nation calling for kindness, tolerance, and decency," and announced his organization's closure. Apologizing for the "pain and hurt" Exodus had caused, Chambers said he no longer believed that "reparative therapy changes sexual orientation, and in fact does great harm to many people." The idea of conversion therapy was always absurd, said **Susan Milligan** in *USNews.com*. "If one could choose one's sexual orientation, why make a choice that will make you the target of discrimination, violence, hatred, and even murder?"

This apology is too little, too late, said **Gabriel Arana** in *Prospect.org*. Exodus played a central role in peddling the idea to thousands of vulnerable kids and parents that you could "pray away the gay." When I went to a reparative therapist

affiliated with a similar organization, I was "devastated" that my orientation didn't change, and "I stopped believing in God." The therapy left me with nothing but a deep guilt and self-loathing that lasted for years. Exodus's closure won't bring back those teens who killed themselves because its "therapy" made them feel like disappointments to their families and God. Chambers has their blood on his hands.

As a gay Christian, I see Chambers's change of heart as "a sign of God's grace," said **Andrew Sullivan** in *Dish.AndrewSullivan.com*. He has taken full responsibility for his mistakes, apologizing to former gay clients that "I callously celebrated the end of relationships that broke your heart," and admitting that gay couples he knew "were every bit as capable of being amazing parents" as straight people. Even more importantly, Chambers said that he'd come to see that he and other evangelicals were "imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical." That's nothing less than "an unconditional surrender in the culture war"—and yet another sign that this society's long-standing bigotry toward gay men and women is crumbling with astonishing speed.