

Open Letter from the Former Ex-gay Leaders Alliance (FELA)

Conversion Therapy, also known as “reparative therapy”, “ex-gay therapy,” or “sexual orientation change efforts” (SOCE), professes to help lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people to change or overcome their sexual orientation or gender identity. The majority of those who practice this “therapy” often do so with little or no formal psychological training, operating instead from a strict religious perspective, believing homosexuality to be a “sin.”

At one time, we were not only deeply involved in these “ex-gay” programs, we were the founders, the leaders, and the promoters. Together we represent more than half a century of experience, so few people are more knowledgeable about the ineffectiveness and harm of conversion therapy. We know first-hand the terrible emotional and spiritual damage it can cause, especially for LGBT youth. We once believed that there was something morally wrong and psychologically “broken” about being LGBT. We know better now. We once believed that sexual orientation or gender identity were somehow chosen or could be changed. We know better now. We once thought it was impossible to embrace our sexual orientation or sexual identity as an intrinsic, healthy part of who we are and who we were created to be. We know better now. Looking back, we were just believing (and sometimes teaching) what we had been taught—that our identity needed mending. We grew up being told that being LGBT was disordered, sick, mentally ill, sinful, and displeasing to God. We grew up being told that loving, same-sex relationships were shallow, lust-driven, deceived, disordered, and impossible.

We grew up with the repetitive message that LGBT people were not enough — not straight enough, not Christian enough, not manly or womanly enough, not faithful enough, not praying enough. Never, ever enough. “Toxic” probably sums it up best. That message is poison to the soul. Especially a child’s soul. It can take a lifetime to get rid of that old programming and replace it with healthy, non-toxic views of yourself. Recovery from conversion therapy is difficult at best. Some remain forever scarred, emotionally and spiritually. Conversion therapy reinforces internalized homophobia, anxiety, guilt and depression. It leads to self-loathing and emotional and psychological harm when change doesn’t happen. Regrettably, too many will choose suicide as a result of their sense of failure. In light of this, we now stand united in our conviction that conversion therapy is not “therapy,” but is instead both ineffective and harmful. We align ourselves with every major mainstream professional medical and mental health organization in denouncing attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity. We admonish parents to love and accept your LGBT children as they are. We beseech the church to accept, embrace, and affirm LGBT persons with full equality and inclusion.

As former “ex-gay” leaders, having witnessed the incredible harm done to those who attempted to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, we join together in calling for a ban on conversion therapy. It is our firm belief that it is much more productive to support, counsel, and mentor LGBT individuals to embrace who they are in order to live happy, well-adjusted lives. We fully support the aim of #BornPerfect to bring an end to conversion therapy.

Members of Former Ex-Gay Leaders Alliance

- Alan Manning Chambers
- Anthony Bishop
- Bill Prickett
Founder, Executive Director (1986-1988), Coming Back
- Bradford Allen Reubendale
Lay Leader Volunteer (2005-2007)
Church Network Coordinator (2007), Exodus International Headquarters
- Catherine Chapman
Project Coordinator (2000-2003)
Women’s Ministry Director (2005-2007), Portland Fellowship
- Darlene Bogle
Founder, Director, Counselor (1985-1992), Paraklete Ministries
- David Foreman
- David Matheson
- Don Brown
- Jeff Coe
- Jeremy Marks
Founder (1988 – 2000), Courage UK
Exodus Europe (1988 – 1989)
- Jim Marjoram
Worship leader and group leader (1997-2012), Living Waters (Australia, New Zealand)
- John J Smid
Executive Director (1987-2008), Love In Action
Exodus International Board of Directors (1990-1995, 2002-2008)
- John Paulk
- Kim Brett
Former Associate, Exodus International – Australia
Former Leader, Living Waters and Liberty Inc Australia
- McKrae Game
Founder & Executive Director (1999-2013), Truth Ministry; name changed to Hope for Wholeness (2013-2017) as President

- Michael Bussee
EXIT (1974-1979)
Co-founder (1976-1979), Exodus International
- Paul Martin
- Randy Thomas
Executive Vice President (2002-2013), Exodus International
Director (1997-2002), Living Hope Ministries
- Roy A. Blankenship
- Tim Rymel
Outreach Director (1991-1996), Love in Action
- Wendy VanderWal Gritter
Exodus Regional Representative – Canada (2003-2007)
- Wenn Lawson
Director (1990-1992), Exodus Melbourne, Australia
- Yvette Cantu Schneider
Executive Director (2001-2005), Living in Victory Ministry
Director of Women's Ministry (2008-2011), Exodus International