

Chairman of 'ex-gays' ousted for gay-bar visit

By Julia Duin
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A nationally known leader of the "ex-gay" movement has been removed from the board chairmanship of a Christian ministry to homosexuals after he was spotted lingering with patrons in a Dupont Circle bar and then was caught lying to his superiors about the incident.

John Paulk, chairman of the board of Exodus International, a Seattle-based ministry, first told Exodus leaders he entered Mr. P's, a popular bar for homosexual patrons in the Dupont Circle area of the District, on the evening of Sept. 19 merely to use the restroom.

He then lingered there for nearly an hour chatting with patrons until he was spotted by staff from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a pro-homosexual lobby.

One of them summoned HRC communications director Wayne Besen, who lives in the neighborhood. Mr. Besen arrived at the bar with a camera and began photographing Mr. Paulk.

"I recognized him right away," said Mr. Besen, whose organization opposes ex-homosexual ministries of any type. "He was holding up a drink and having a 'gay' old time. I thought it was pretty reckless for him to go to a bar that was within a few miles of every national gay organization in Washington."

Mr. Besen was ejected from the bar for taking photos and Mr. Paulk headed out the front door. After Mr. Besen started berating him outside the bar, the ex-gay leader fled.

Mr. Paulk, who is also employed by the Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family, is nationally known after he and his wife, Ann — an ex-lesbian — appeared on the cover of Newsweek two years ago.

Word of Mr. Paulk's sighting hit the Internet and homosexual media within 24 hours, prompting the Exodus board to ask Mr. Paulk what he was doing at the bar.

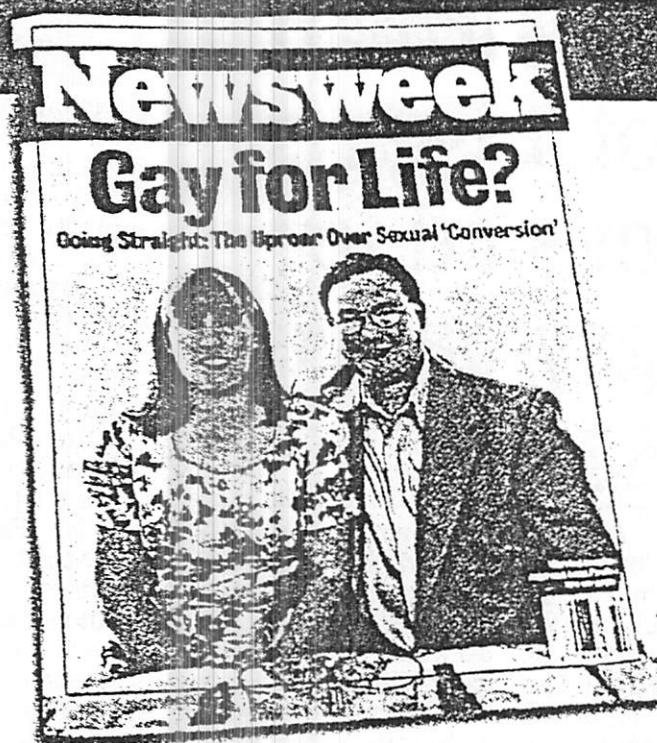
Mr. Paulk first said he stumbled onto the bar merely to use the restroom, then changed his story to admit he knew it was a homosexual establishment.

"My intentions were innocent, but my actions were unwise," Mr. Paulk said in a statement. "The situation constituted a lapse in judgment, not a lapse in heterosexuality."

Far Right

Maybe not quite so "ex" after all

It sounded like a tabloid headline: "Ex-Gay Man Found in D.C. Gay Bar." But on September 19 John Paulk, Christian-right poster boy and perhaps the world's most famous "ex-gay," was spotted and caught on camera in Mr. P's, Washington's oldest gay tavern. Paulk, chair of Exodus International, a group that seeks to convert gays and lesbians to heterosexuality, appeared with his wife, Anne, an ex-lesbian, on a 1998 *Newsweek* cover about going straight. But a Human Rights Campaign staffer sighted Paulk in the bar and called Wayne Besen, an HRC spokesman, who arrived with a camera. Paulk told the



Atlanta gay newspaper *Southern Voice* he was just using the rest room, though Besen and others said he spent 40 minutes at Mr. P's. "It's a tremendous blow to the credibility of the ex-gay ministries," Besen said. "But our community will be here for (Paulk) when he decides to start living openly and with dignity."

'Ex-gay' activist criticized for visiting homosexual bar

"My intentions were innocent, but my actions were unwise."

John Paulk, head of Exodus International North America

By Eric Gorski
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—John Paulk, who gained national attention for saying he abandoned homosexuality for Christianity, is facing criticism from both gay activists and his colleagues after he was spotted at a gay bar in Washington, D.C.

The head of Exodus International North America, an evangelical Christian ministry spearheading a movement that advocates gays can change, said the group's board of directors is considering whether Paulk should continue as chairman of the board, a volunteer post.

Paulk works for Focus on the Family, the Colorado Springs-based radio and media ministry headed by James Dobson.

Gay activists portray Paulk's Sept. 19 visit to Mr. P's bar in the city's DuPont Circle neighborhood as proof that he's still gay, but Paulk said that's not true.

Paulk said he was only looking for a bathroom and didn't know it was a gay bar initially. He said he stayed because he hadn't been in a gay bar for 15 years and was curious to see whether things had changed, a decision he now calls a mistake.

"The thing I'm most concerned about is my reputation for the past 13 or 14 years will be damaged, and I have committed no sexual improprieties of

any kind," Paulk said in an interview. "My intentions were innocent, but my actions were unwise."

The visit probably would have gone unnoticed had an activist for the Washington, D.C.-based gay and lesbian political group Human Rights Campaign not been in the bar and recognized Paulk. The activist called a colleague who confronted Paulk and snapped his picture.



Paulk

Paulk, 37, is probably the most recognizable face in a controversial Christian movement that portrays homosexuality as a lifestyle that can be left. Now a husband and a father, he was pictured in 1998 with his wife, a former lesbian, on the cover of Newsweek.

Paulk worked for Exodus International affiliates in the San Francisco area and Portland, Ore., before taking a job in 1998 at Focus on the Family.

Paulk said he was in Washington for a "pro-family" meeting about gay issues. He ate dinner at an Italian restaurant, got lost and wandered into Mr. P's to use the bathroom, he said. He said he soon figured out it was a gay bar. Paulk said he stayed and struck up a conversation with a man who, like him, was wearing a wedding band.

Wayne Basen, the HRC spokesman who confronted Paulk at the bar, said that story isn't believable. He said there are many other places nearby, including hotels and a coffee shop, where Paulk could have found a restroom.

"He's been a one-man industry for anti-gay propaganda," Besen said. "We urge him to come out of the closet and help people instead of hurting people as he is now in this double life."

Paulk said the gay community was trying to blow the incident out of proportion to undermine his work.

A Focus on the Family spokeswoman said Sept. 25 that Paulk is on vacation for the next week and a half. The ministry said Paulk remains in charge of its homosexual issues department but has declined to say whether Paulk faces discipline because of the controversy.

Tom Minnery, vice president of public policy for Focus on the Family,

said Paulk used "extraordinarily bad judgment."

Bob Davies, president of Exodus International North America, said his organization's board did not find any reason to immediately remove Paulk from his chairmanship but would make a final decision within two weeks. He also criticized Paulk.

"People are already suspect of our claims," Davies said. "If you're not careful, you can do damage to our credibility by engaging in behavior that opens up public speculation."

About a dozen Exodus affiliates have been shut down because their leaders have returned to homosexuality, according to news reports.