

Counseling meant to return Haggard to Bible conforming life

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Disgraced minister Rev. Ted Haggard's intensive counseling was geared toward returning him to a life "that conforms with the teachings of the Bible and the example of Jesus," a pastor at his former church said.

"Beyond that, it's fruitless to speculate," associate New Life Church Pastor Rob Brendle said regarding claims that Haggard is "completely heterosexual" after counseling. "That (his sexual identity) is something that likely only Ted knows for sure."

Rev. Tim Ralph of Larkspur, one of four ministers who oversaw Haggard's three weeks of intensive counseling, told The Denver Post that Haggard is convinced he's heterosexual and his behavior wasn't a constant thing. Ralph said their investigation found Haggard was only involved with a former male prostitute, Mike Jones, who came forward with sexual allegation.

"Give me a break," Jones told The Gazette of Colorado Springs Wednesday, adding that Haggard performed oral sex on him over the three years they saw each other.

"Until he's honest with himself, he'll never be happy," Jones said.

Haggard resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals last year after allegations of sexual misconduct surfaced. He was also forced out from the 14,000 New Life Church that he founded years ago in his basement after Jones alleged Haggard paid him for sex and sometimes used methamphetamine when they were together. Haggard, who is married, has publicly admitted to "sexual immorality."

Haggard's comments have rekindled debate over the controversial premise that people can overcome same-sex attractions through "reparative therapy." It's a concept espoused by many religious conservatives, and disputed by many mental health experts.

"After three weeks of counseling, you suddenly become completely heterosexual after a three year homosexual relationship? That's not the way things work in real life," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Washington-based National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which in the 1970s worked to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

Bill Maier, psychologist-in residence at Focus on the Family, which believes people can overcome homosexuality, said more men report having had a gay relationship than those who identify themselves as gay.

"Desire and behavior are pretty complicated issues," he said.

Haggard told church members in an e-mail Sunday that his family planned to leave Colorado Springs and that he and his wife planned to pursue master's degrees in psychology.

Brendle told Denver station KUSA-TV that Haggard signed an agreement with the church to relocate from Colorado Springs and not speak publicly about the scandal. The agreement includes a financial settlement, and a stipulation that neither the church nor Haggard would disclose the amount.

"We recognize that his contributions to our church are immeasurable, as our founder and as our senior pastor for 22 years. At the same time, we recognize that his indiscretions are inexcusable," Brendle said.