

Gay or nay?

Key presenters of opposing conferences offer Christian counterpoint on being gay and going straight

by Timothy Krause

One man tried to be gay before going straight. The other tried to be straight before accepting himself as a gay man. Both are Christians, and each man's faith changed his life. Now they're in Portland to share their experiences and their philosophies at competing conferences June 21.

Mike Haley, 40, lives in Colorado Springs, Colo., with a wife and two sons. He serves as youth and gender analyst for Focus on the Family, a national fundamentalist religious organization that promotes prevention and treatment of homosexuality through means such as reparative therapy. An ex-gay man himself, Haley became the new poster child and host of the organization's anti-gay conferences called Love Won Out when prominent spokesman John Paulk announced his resignation last April. He also serves as chairman of the Exodus International board.

Brett Webb-Mitchell spent nearly four decades living the heterosexual American dream but remaining unfulfilled within. Ever so slowly, this former husband and father of two made his way out of the closet to embrace his true feelings. Now an openly gay man, Brett-Mitchell lives with his partner in Pittsboro, N.C., and serves as assistant professor of Christian nurture at Duke University. He's authored a new book titled *Christly Gestures: Learning to Be Members of the Body of Christ* and will offer the keynote address for the queer-positive multid denominational Love Welcomes All conference.

Just Out recently spoke with each man about the issues that would be addressed at the conferences as well as their personal experiences.

Timothy Krause: Many sexual minorities and evangelical leaders believe they can positively reconcile their faith with their sexuality, that the two can live in harmony.

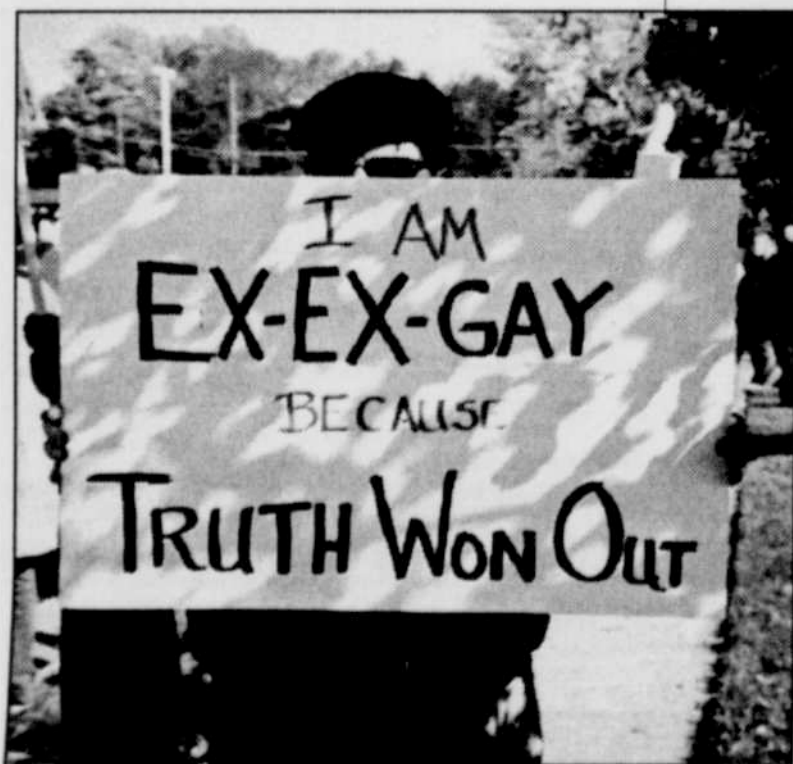
Mike Haley: We would want people to be able to articulate why they believe that. Where are you getting that information? Have you really studied Scripture?

One of our conference speakers was a pastor at a Metropolitan Community Church. When he really got down and studied Scripture, he would get backed into corners that he couldn't get out of. He finally had to be honest with himself about what the reality is regarding what Scripture truly does say when you look at it from the very core, from Genesis to Revelation, and not just picking and choosing and taking stuff out of context.

There's ceremonial law and moral



The queer-friendly Broadway Baptist Church rallies at a Love Welcomes All event in Kansas City, Mo.



Protesters demonstrate outside a Love Won Out conference in Washington, D.C.

law. Ceremonial law were things that were in the Old Testament that, when Christ came, followers of Christ are no longer bound by. But moral law has never changed. And the issue of homosexuality—that God has designed sex to be between a man and a woman solely in marriage—is part of the moral component that has not changed and never will change.

Brett Webb-Mitchell: Scripture says many things. It's kind of like a mine, with various rich veins of all kinds of minerals flowing in there. If we go into Scriptures, we can find anything we want. The issue gets to be this: How are you using Scripture?