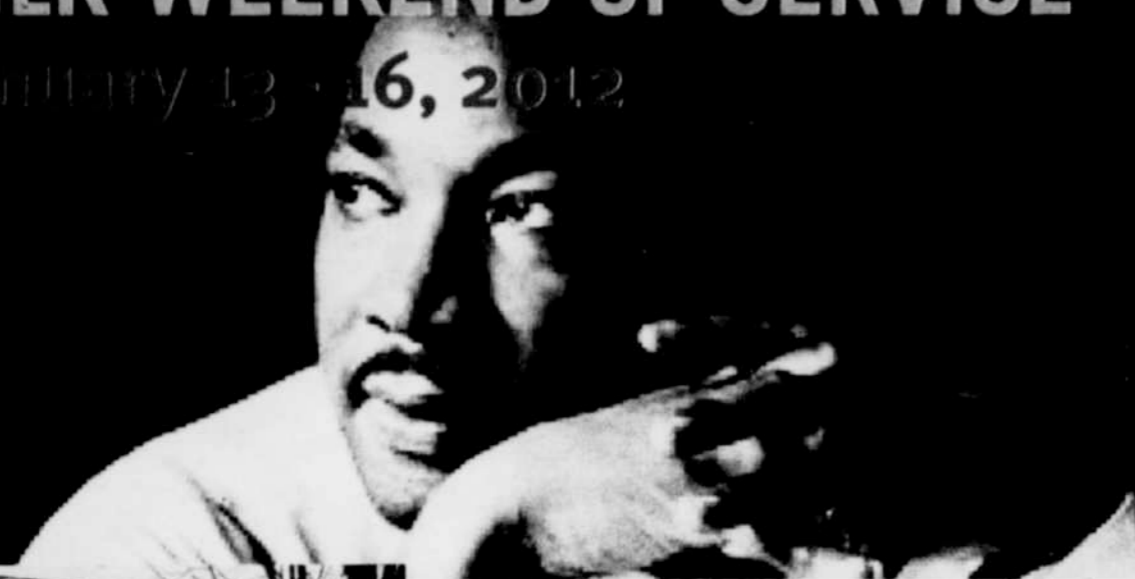


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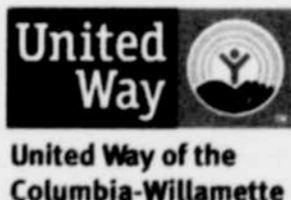
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THE YEAR IN faith

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BY RYAN J. PRADO

If faith as it pertains to the LGBTQ community weren't already a big enough debate before **Mars Hill** arrived in Portland's Sunnyside neighborhood, it became *the* debate for local equality activists heading out of summer. When it was announced in early September that the evangelical megachurch would be moving into Southeast Portland, the news was met with swift criticism by hardcore LGBTQ rights activists across the city. Before the congregation had even moved in, or its pastor Reverend Tim Smith offered an opportunity to address the skeptical denizens of its new community, Mars Hill was public enemy No. 1.

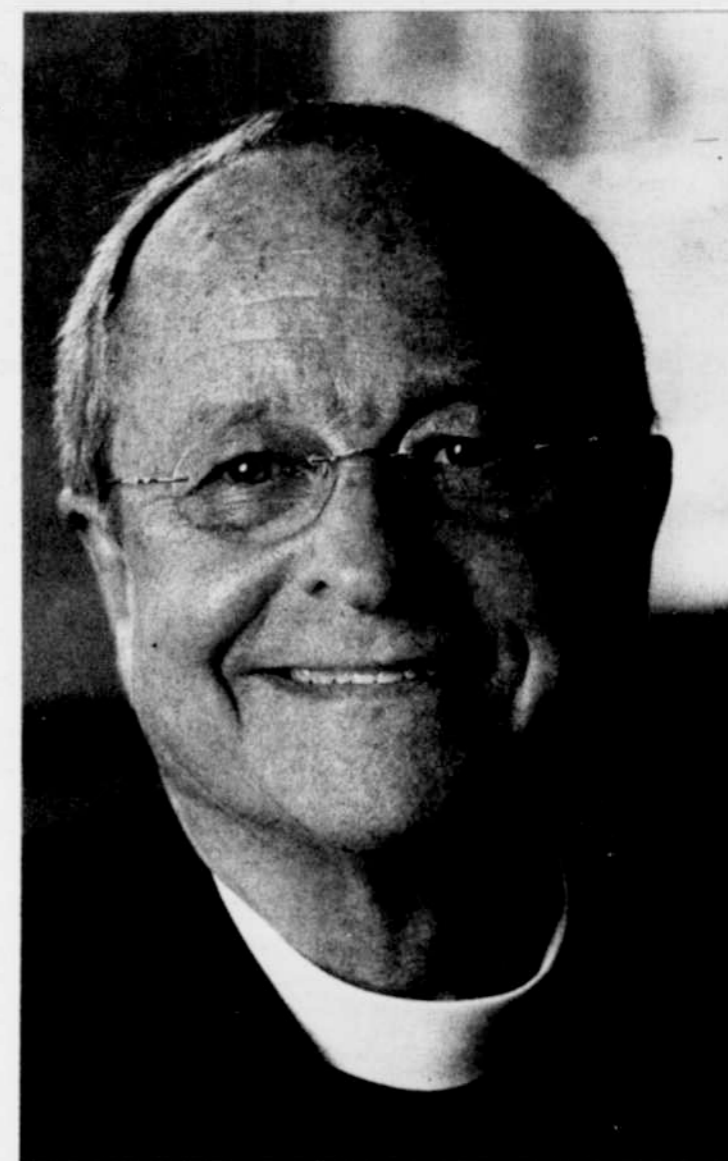
As reported by *Just Out's* Aaron Spencer in mid-September, the controversial aspects of Mars Hill's sermons were not unfounded, and polarizing even among conservative Christians. Its Seattle pastor, Mark Driscoll, has been criticized for comments he made about male pastors behaving too effeminately. The church also believes homosexuality is a sin, though so do several churches in Portland, even some in the Sunnyside neighborhood, where the Mars Hill branch is located. Mars Hill also raised eyebrows with a video posted on its website about the new Portland church, which shows images of rainbow flags and a strip club while Smith says, "[Portland] values sexual freedom as an end in itself with a thriving sex industry that goes back for more than a century."

Smith told Spencer his priority is not to fight homosexuality. He says his goal is to help people learn about Jesus.

"[Homosexuality] is not something that comes up in every sermon," he said.

The ensuing dissent expressed by equality activists was buffered by an extension of educational efforts, led by Portland's Q

Center soon after. Q executive director Barbara McCullough-Jones explained that the invitation to understand one another's positions with regard to the community at large was of major importance, though a sizable number of activists disagreed with Q's decision.



Bishop Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop, paid a visit to Portland in June.

"Maybe we're not going to change [Mars Hill's] mind because of the way they interpret the doctrine they follow," McCullough-Jones told *Just Out* in October. "That's the basis of who they are. But, if we as people who live in the same community can find some common ground, won't that lead us to more peaceful coexistence? In my view, the answer is yes."

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