



## ONEGEORGEFOX MISDIRECTED LOVE

**“I SAID ‘GOODBYE’ TO GOD.”** Those are usually the last words said when a LGBT person talks about their faith experience. Having been rejected by the church or temple or other faith house that had sheltered, shaped and supported them, LGBT folk often come to the conclusion that, for the sake of their own well-being they have to close the door to any faith and that’s the end.

For Paul Southwick, though, saying “Goodbye to God,” is just an early chapter in an ongoing story about faith and redemption. Southwick is one of the co-founders of OneGeorgeFox, an alumni organization dedicated to creating dialogue and a healthy regard for spirituality and sexuality at their alma mater, George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

Southwick came to George Fox as a young man already struggling with his feelings of attraction to other men, but knowing he needed to hide his feelings on the evangelical Christian campus. In 2004, he went to Washington D.C. on a fellowship with the Family Research Council, a right-wing policy think tank. When the fellowship ended, Southwick had his first sexual encounter with a man, and fell apart.

“I was hospitalized for two nights for panic attacks,” Southwick said. Mentors at Fox encouraged him to go into “reparative therapy” to try to change his sexual orientation, encouraging him to watch straight porn as part of the process of becoming a healthy, heterosexual Christian man.

Southwick says, “Everyone was very loving toward me, but the love was misdirected and ultimately very damaging.” Southwick spent his last two years of school at Fox in reparative therapy in what he calls “a dark time” then went to study law at the University of Michigan where he found himself able to talk about his feelings and ultimately come out to himself and others in a safe environment.

But Southwick had doubts, “It wasn’t just about being gay,” he said. “It was about the Bible and the question of evil. Ultimately, I said ‘goodbye’ to God, but it was very hard. I mean, I prayed an hour every day and I believed I had a close personal relationship with God. Nothing can replace that.” But that was not the end of his journey.

Southwick says that he felt a need to let the administration at George Fox know that their policies, which officially prohibit sexual relationships outside of marriage while defining marriage as taking place between a man and a woman (thereby cutting off full relationship for LGBT people) can drive their students to despair.

He and other alumni have begun working with George Fox administrators to try to create a safe, healthy environment for LGBT students. Southwick says, “We hope for an open dialogue. We want sexuality and faith to be discussed openly.” Southwick would like to see Fox take a stand against reparative therapy and ultimately support same gender marriage, but admits that goal is probably a long way off.

About his own faith, Southwick is still in transition. He says, “I’ve had some great experiences in churches, even evangelical churches since this work with OneGeorgeFox started. I’ve been at churches that felt really familiar, that felt like home, but it’s like a home where it’s good to visit but you’re not sure you want to stay.” For now, Southwick says he is pro-Christian and pro-Gay and he hopes his alma mater can one day say the same.



Photo by Keene Studio

Regular contributor Rev. Jennifer Yocum is pastor of the Forest Grove United Church of Christ, where she says, *No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey you are welcome here.* Reach her at [www.fgucc.org](http://www.fgucc.org)