

Home > Canada > Former members allege gay conversion therapy, excommunication at Third Day Worship Centre

Canada

# Former members allege gay conversion therapy, excommunication at Third Day Worship Centre

Several ex-members of the evangelical Third Day Worship Centre in Kingston have spoken to YGK News about alleged abuse during their time studying and worshipping at the church.

By **Stefan Strangman** - October 13, 2020 0

**KINGSTON**  
Light Snow

**-9.9** °C ↕ -8°  
↕ -10.3

78% 5.8km/h 90%

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|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU |
| -5° | -8° | 2°  | 3°  | 4°  |

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*Ben Rodgers during a mission trip with the Third Day Worship Centre. Rodgers notes that he doesn't think there should be room for compromise in this bill to help appease the Conservative naysayers. Photo supplied.*

Mayor Bryan Paterson, Third Day Worship Centre deny allegations from former members who say they experienced conversion therapy and toxic behaviour from senior church leadership.

Several ex-members of the evangelical [Third Day Worship Centre](#) in Kingston have spoken to YGK News about alleged abuse during their time studying and worshipping at the church.

36-year-old Ben Rodgers is a former church member who attended the church from 2004-2005. Rodgers says he was openly gay at 19 when he when he turned down an offer at St. Lawrence College, to study at the church. He says that at first his sexuality wasn't a problem, but after he became more involved, he faced pressure to distance himself from his interest in men.

"Once you started kind of getting in further with the church ... You're encouraged to pull away from gay friends." Says Rodgers.

*Photo of Rodgers on a church outing*

**"I was crying the whole time."**

"Your lifestyle, your identity is being labelled as sinful and something not to do."

Rodgers says he was staying with family who attended the church in 2005 when he was called to the church office to talk with senior leadership. "They had found some photos on a floppy disk in some of my old things. They asked me why I was lying to them... and laid hand on me to pray. I was crying the whole time."

He said he stayed for the remainder of the year before finally leaving because he wanted to fit in and their offers of study were still enticing.

"They offered me everything I wanted. I wanted to go to Bible College and they had a Bible college and they were telling me that basically going to music theatre school, I was literally just walking myself back into the enemy and back into my old lifestyle. And to do that would take me away from my walk with God."

## Former member alleges being excommunicated

Jennifer O'Rourke, another former church member, says she remembers Ben attending the church's program, and had seen members praying for Rodgers. "They wouldn't call it conversion therapy...[but] he had prayers of deliverance over him, deliverance from homosexuality."

O'Rourke says she was a member of Third Day's leadership until 2016, when she left on her own accord, but was then "excommunicated." She says while attending she was continually asked to prioritize church events over family functions, and contribute more and more of her time on service days. "If you start pursuing post secondary education, it's kinda frowned upon because you should be about the work of the Lord, because [in the view of Third Day] the rapture is coming soon." She said.

## Kingston Mayor "steps away" from church after controversy

Both the office of the Mayor of Kingston and Third Day Worship Centre declined requests for interview by YGK News. However, in statements to [Vice News on October 9th](#), Mayor Paterson and Third Day Worship Centre denied allegations made by Rodgers.

"I do not condone conversion therapy in any shape or form and I never participated in conversion therapy," said Paterson to Vice. "While I don't agree with all his recollections as it relates to my time at TDWC, I do believe that these conversations are important as we work towards building an inclusive and caring community."

This echoed a statement made to [Vice](#) by Third Day Worship pastor Francis Armstrong, who stated in an email to Vice that the church "have never offered or engaged in such conversion therapy."

Kingston Mayor Brian Paterson was youth pastor from with Third Day from 2005-2009, and had been involved with the church since 2000. Paterson was previously criticized for a 2014 video showing him discussing the "hypersexualization" of youth, and again for a perceived snub of the Kingston pride parade which he did not attend in 2017. Paterson is also prominently featured in a video on the Third Day Worship Centre [Facebook page](#) where he narrates footage from the church, including a rally to "defend the traditional definition of marriage" in the spring of 2005 in Ottawa.

*Portrait of Mayor Bryan Paterson. Photo from City of Kingston Website.*

Mayor Paterson [announced](#) he was stepping away from the church in September after [video compilations](#) were posted to social media showing Francis Armstrong making controversial statements about the LGBTQ2+ community.

*Mayor Paterson appearing to attend anti-LGBT rally with TDWC*

The video compilations, where Armstrong called homosexuality an 'abomination', have since been taken down from YouTube and Dailymotion. Videos of most of the sermons on the Third Day Worship webpage have also been scrubbed.

After their posting, Paterson posted an open statement on his blog where he stated that he did not "condone hate in any form," and would be distancing himself from the church.

## Video that depicts TDWC's celebrating 10 years, with Mayor Paterson at an Anti-LGBTQ marriage rally (TDWC Facebook Page)

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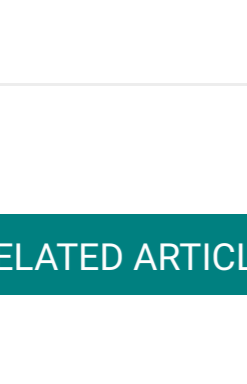
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Stefan is a documentary photographer and freelance Journalist focusing on humanitarian and social documentary, Indigenous issues and the outdoors

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