

Gay man says he was kicked off Baptist World Alliance commissions

by [Mark Wingfield](#)

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TJ Williams-Hauger (Facebook)

TJ Williams-Hauger, a gay man, says he was asked to resign from two Baptist World Alliance commissions. When he refused to resign, he said BWA executive director Elijah Brown removed him from the two volunteer roles.

Reporters obtained a copy of an email sent from Brown to Williams-Hauger on April 21 with the subject line: "Commission Invitation Rescinded." The body of the brief email states: "Following our phone conversation yesterday, this email confirms that the invitation from BWA for you to serve on Commissions is rescinded. Please know that I am praying for you."

The way Williams-Hauger sees it, the worldwide Baptist communion that once was deemed too "liberal" for the Southern Baptist Convention is now too conservative to allow volunteer participation by Christians in the LGBTQ community.

Williams-Hauger serves as associate minister for youth and young adults and community outreach at Lake Street Church in Evanston, Illinois, a congregation affiliated with the American Baptist Churches USA.

Since 2020, he has served on two BWA groups, the Interfaith Commission and the Racial Justice Commission.

This spring, he says, he was approached by Brown about his continued service on the commissions because of a resolution the BWA had adopted regarding a "biblical" view of sexual relations. An internet search produced no public record of any new resolution adopted by a BWA body about sexuality.

The US pastor spoke with BWA friends in Europe who serve on the commissions with him, and they did not know of any such resolution either, he said.

"He lied to me," Williams-Hauger said.

Williams-Hauger said Brown urged him to resign quietly rather than make a public fuss, which he has chosen to do. "If you don't keep this quiet, I'm going to be forced to find the other gay folks," Williams-Hauger said Brown told him.

The ABC minister said he refused to go quietly because his dismissal is indicative of a larger agenda.

“We have to be able to call a thing a thing, to name homophobia and racism and White supremacy for what it is,” he said, adding that his cousin Chad, who was gay, was murdered after years of abuse from Christians.

“I’m talking about this because it’s very connected to my ‘yes’ to serve,” Williams-Hauger said. “I’m walking in the shoes of the Chads of the world. There has been too much death.”

Williams-Hauger also sees his removal from BWA service as an indictment on all LGBTQ Christians: “When Elijah said I’m removing you from this commission, it was a way of saying my voice as an LGBTQ person is not impactful.”

If his removal wasn’t motivated by homophobia, it could have been because Williams-Hauger holds a more inclusive view of religious work than some other Baptists, he said.

“I have been one of those progressive voices who said it is important that we be in conversation with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and not for the purpose of evangelism. I wonder if there was some silent conversation around that, that ‘he’s not 100 percent about leading people to Jesus.’”

It’s not that he’s against evangelism, he said. “I believe in religious diplomacy in a world that is fractured, that it is important to listen to one another.”

Williams-Hauger was not a stranger to Brown, he said. They had previously worked together on an interfaith service at the United Nations.

And the fact that Williams-Hauger is gay was well-known to Brown, he said. “Our wedding story was told in *Out* magazine. We were the first gay couple to legally marry at Riverside Church in New York City.”

Williams-Hauger also is well known within the Black church, having worked with such luminaries as Jeremiah Wright, Al Sharpton, and Jesse Jackson—whom he calls “spiritual fathers.”

“All those folks within the African American community, I am out to. It was no secret.”

The BWA brings together Baptists from 128 countries and territories. In 2004, the SBC—once the largest religious body participating in BWA—[broke all ties](#) with the

alliance because the new SBC leaders found the BWA to be not conservative enough.

“We have noted, with sorrow in our hearts, a continual leftward drift in the BWA,” Paige Patterson said at SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis that year.

BWA leaders at the time vigorously disputed that claim.

Brown did not respond to initial requests to comment on Williams-Hauger’s allegations, but after the May 31 publication of this story, he replied with the following statement: “Though the BWA does have a standing practice to acknowledge that commission members serve as volunteers, we do not comment on the specifics of any current or previous commission member.” —Baptist News Global