

For Immediate Release: Terry Pochert and Joe Connolly, Plaintiffs in Connolly et. al. v Roche React to Judge John Sedwick's ruling in favor of Marriage Equality in Arizona

Today's ruling by Judge John Sedwick has granted Arizona same-sex couples the same rights and privileges our opposite sex counterparts have enjoyed for years. We have longed for this day for years; for ourselves, for others who have gone before us and for those who will come after us. Opponents who blocked marriage equality through local, state and federal laws and through our court system learned today that legislators and the voting population cannot discriminate. The "will of the people" can never trounce on the rights of a minority.

The ruling today has no impact on churches. Churches and their Pastors have and always had the ability to choose who they will or will not marry as their Freedom of Religion. Today's ruling does not change that. We have always known that.



Terry Pochert, and Joe Connolly

Through our faith community, University Lutheran Church in Tempe, AZ we started this journey, Connolly et. al. v Roche. The lawsuit was a grass roots effort and with the love and care of our current and former members of our church community, the plaintiffs and lawyers came together to put their faith in action on this important social justice issue. Today this ruling legally recognizes family units and their lifelong commitments.

While today's ruling is about civil marriage, for us personally, this case has also been about our Freedom of Religion. In the past few years, many churches have allowed gays and lesbians to marry where civil law allows it. Christian organizations like the Center for Arizona Policy and Alliance Defending Freedom purport to fight for Christian values. These organizations fail to demonstrate Christ's words to "Love they neighbor". They have weaponized the Bible to make their point at the expense of Christ's words and works and human beings. They fought to restrict our religious freedom and the civil and religious freedoms of the LGBTQ community. The laws they passed and testimony they gave prevented us from full participation in the rite of marriage within our faith. No organization, no law, no legislature and no public referendum should ever prevent us from the full expression of our faith. We will use our freedom or religion to further defend our cause.

The ruling today hands the LGBTQ community a precious gift we have longed for. With this ruling, with this gift comes responsibility. We are now tasked with preserving the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of *our* marriages. Where that phrase was used as a weapon against us, we must uphold marriage because we fought for the right and have won.

As people of faith, it is our wish and hope that all couples will carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully take their own reflective journey toward marriage, civil or religious. We hope you will plan a wedding that represents your uniqueness and speaks to your families, friends and co-workers. Celebrate with a wedding that consummates your engagement. Enter into marriage with your eyes open, thoughts for the future and plan a celebration befitting of your love. In 2008, we anticipated a small window of opportunity to marry. While we married in a church, that church was empty. The Pastor, our witness and the church custodian were the only souls in attendance for us. We never had the chance to celebrate our marriage publicly with our family, friends, co-workers, church community and neighbors. Make no mistake, there is joy in our marriage experience and our lives together but there is also an emptiness we can never erase. It is for this reason we hope and pray all couples will plan, pray, enter into marriage lovingly, carefully, thoughtfully and sharing it. We are all blessed today by this ruling.

For more information: www.arizonaequality.org