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*The mission of Ptownwest is to reconnect,
promote and create gay community*

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Supreme Court Rules in Favor of LGBTQ Rights in Landmark Decision

The Supreme Court just issued a landmark decision penned by Neil Gorsuch, a conservative justice appointed by President Donald J. Trump, deciding that “An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII.”

“Today, we must decide whether an employer can fire someone simply for being homosexual or transgender. The answer is clear. An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Sex plays a necessary and undisguisable role in the decision, exactly what Title VII forbids,” the decision reads. “An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII.”

“Those who adopted the Civil Rights Act might not have anticipated their work would lead to this particular result. Likely, they weren’t thinking about many of the Act’s consequences that have become apparent over the years,



including its prohibition against discrimination on the basis of motherhood or its ban on the sexual harassment of male employees.”

“But the limits of the drafters’ imagination supply no reason to ignore the law’s demands,” Gorsuch continued. “When the express terms of a statute give us one answer and extratextual considerations suggest another, it’s no contest. Only the written word is the law, and all persons are entitled to its benefit.”

Gorsuch was joined by Justices Elena Kagan, Sonia Sotomayor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, and Chief Justice John Roberts.

Last year, the Supreme Court heard arguments in three cases concerning LGBTQ rights and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans job discrimination “because of sex.” Two of the cases involved gay people (*Altitude Express, Inc. v. Zarda* and *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*) and one was brought by a transgender person (*R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC & Aimee Stephens*), arguing that Title VII already bans job discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs and for LGBTQ and civil rights groups argued that the provision in Title VII in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination “because of sex” necessarily applies as well to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation necessarily involve discrimination because of sex, mainly because a worker is getting treated differently for things that would be acceptable for someone of different sex.

Moreover, the plaintiffs argued, the Supreme Court has long included discrimination based on sex stereotypes under the definition of “because of sex.” LGBTQ people defy sex stereotypes like “men and women marry people of the opposite sex” and “people assigned male or female at birth identify as men and women,” meaning anti-LGBTQ discrimination is discrimination because of sex stereotypes.

James Esseks, director of the ACLU’s LGBTQ & HIV Project, said, “This is a huge victory for LGBTQ equality. Over 50 years ago, Black and Brown trans women, drag queens, and butch lesbians fought back against police brutality and discrimination that too many LGBTQ people still face. The Supreme Court’s clarification that it’s unlawful to fire people because they’re LGBTQ is the result of decades of advocates fighting for our rights. The court has caught up to the majority of our country, which already knows that discriminating against LGBTQ people is both unfair and against the law.

“Our work is not done. There are still alarming gaps in federal civil rights laws that leave people – particularly Black and Brown LGBTQ people – open to discrimination in businesses open to the public and taxpayer-funded programs. Congress

must affirm today’s decision and update our laws to ensure comprehensive and explicit protections for LGBTQ people and all people who face discrimination.”

Gerald Bostock had been employed as a social worker for the Clayton County juvenile court and Donald Zarda as a skydiving instructor for the New York-based Altitude Express without a record of the complaint until after they were outed through inadvertent circumstances.

Bostock was fired in 2013 after he was listed in a newspaper article as a player in the gay softball league. Zarda was fired in 2010 after he answered a female student’s concern about skydiving in tandem by reassuring her that he was “100 percent gay.”

Bostock and Zarda sued their former employers under Title VII in federal district courts. Zarda died in a base-jumping accident in 2014, but his mother is continuing to pursue his claim, which the federal appeals court in New York cleared for trial. Bostock’s suit was dismissed by the district court and that decision was affirmed by the federal appeals court in Atlanta.

Aimee Stephens had worked for the Detroit-area funeral home for six years before telling her boss in 2013 that she is a woman. She complained to the EEOC, which sued on her behalf in federal district court. The federal appeals court in Chicago cleared the case for trial.

The ALCU represented Aimee Stephens and Don Zarda, as well as Donna Stephens, Aimee’s wife, and Bill Moore and Melissa Zarda, Don’s former partner and sister, who moved these cases forward after they died.

The Trump administration argued in the cases that Title VII doesn’t address LGBTQ people at all, and that Congress in 1964 did not want the bill to include LGBTQ people. If an employer fires all LGBTQ people, no matter their sex, then the employer isn’t discriminating because of sex.

According to the Trump administration, it should be up to Congress to pass LGBTQ discrimination protections. **Donald Trump opposes** the Equality Act, which would ban discrimination against LGBTQ people.

The cases were the first to be argued before the Court since Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s appointment

in 2018 to succeed Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, who wrote and provided critical votes in three closely divided landmark gay-rights decisions, including the 2015 marriage equality ruling, [Obergefell v. Hodges](#).

“My wife Aimee was my soulmate,” Donna Stephens said in an emailed statement. “We were married for 20 years. For the last seven years of Aimee’s life, she rose as a leader who fought against discrimination against transgender people, starting when she was fired for coming out as a woman, despite her recent promotion at the time. I am grateful for this victory to honor the legacy of Aimee, and to ensure people are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Stephen died last month without seeing the conclusion of her case.

“The story of our nation is one of a relentless march toward greater justice and greater equality for all people,” former Vice President and presumptive Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said. “Fifty years ago this month, the first Pride march took place in New York City as a protest – as a call for liberation. Today, by affirming that sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination are prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court has confirmed the simple but profoundly American idea that every human being should be treated with respect and dignity. That everyone should be able to live openly, proudly, as their true selves without fear.”

Reading Community Leaders Condemn Anti-LGBT Hate Incident

Nearly seventy community leaders and organizations have issued the following joint statement:

We are deeply offended and saddened by the most recent incident of intimidation targeting our community: divisive fliers left at the LGBT Center of Reading on Friday May 29 by Patriot Front, a well-known white supremacist hate group. We stand together to say that cowardly acts of antagonism cannot divide us and will not be

tolerated. We are strengthened by our diversity and we welcome all who are committed to building our community. June is PRIDE month, and we want to be clear that all people are welcome here and that the undersigned organizations, religious and secular, believe love is love and stand firmly against all expressions of hate.

Recently, we have learned of several incidents of hate infecting our community - online and in person. We stand against all such acts, regardless of who is being targeted, and we pledge to call out hate wherever we see it. We also call on the Pennsylvania legislature to strengthen PA’s hate crimes laws so that all Pennsylvanians are protected.

We are continuously reminded that racism, discrimination, and bias persist in dangerous and even lethal ways in this country. Bias unchecked by action festers; silence is complicity. We must be vigilant against hate in whatever form it takes.

We know that often such acts are not isolated incidents. If you have experienced or witnessed an act of hate or bias, we urge you to report it to local law enforcement, the Reading Human Relations Commission, and the Anti-Defamation League. By reporting incidents of hate and bias, we ensure that we can track what is happening and empower ourselves and our neighbors to take action to combat discrimination, racism, oppression and bigotry.

The undersigned hope you will be part of the effort to defeat hate

<https://www.bctv.org/2020/06/03/nearly-70-reading-community-leaders-condemn-anti-lgbt-hate-incident/>

Editorial: Stop Judging, and Welcome LGBT Catholics ‘in good faith’

When asked about homosexuality in 2013, Pope Francis famously said, “Who am I to judge them if they’re seeking the Lord in good faith?” While that comment may have become a sound bite supporting things the pontiff may or may not have intended, it still stands as an expression of openness from a church that, like the broader culture, has persecuted, not welcomed, its LGBT brothers and sisters.

Sadly, there is still too much judging going on in our church.

Things are particularly distressing in Detroit, where under the guise of implementing Archbishop Allen Vigneron's recent pastoral note on what he calls "same-sex attraction," two recent announcements have attempted to banish groups of LGBT Catholics and their families from church facilities.

In a letter to archdiocesan priests in early March, Auxiliary Bishop Gerard Battersby instructed clergy "to refrain from offering Mass anywhere in the Archdiocese of Detroit for Dignity Detroit, lest we confuse the faithful by seeming to endorse an alternative and contradictory path to sanctity."

For more than 50 years, Dignity has advocated for respect and justice for LGBT Catholics, with the belief that they should "experience dignity through the integration of their spirituality with their sexuality, and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the Church and Society."

The Detroit Archdiocese instead supports the apostolates of Courage and EnCourage, which use a 12-step model to support LGBT people in battling what the groups obviously see as an illness or disorder.

Now the Detroit Archdiocese is expelling Fortunate Families, a group for families, friends and allies that seeks "to uphold and safeguard the dignity of LGBTQ+ daughters and sons of God," according to the Fortunate Families mission statement.

A letter from Battersby to the pastor of the Detroit parish that hosts the local chapter of the national organization said Fortunate Families could no longer be welcomed at any archdiocesan facility.

In addition, LGBT employees of Catholic schools, parishes and other institutions continue to face discrimination, harassment and loss of employment. Sadly, the tipping point for such treatment often comes after making a lifetime commitment to one's partner.

According to Francis DeBernardo, director of New Ways Ministry, a Catholic LGBT advocacy group, some parishioners or parents take it upon themselves to police LGBT employees, combing through marriage records and then reporting the person's marital status. School administrators may feel their hands are tied once a diocese or archdiocese gets involved, he said.

To preserve their employment, some LGBT employees remain in the closet – even at

otherwise progressive Catholic universities or schools that may even offer groups for LGBT students or gay-straight alliances.

Stop the judging.



Stop judging ministries that have been sincerely serving Catholic folks for decades. Stop judging LGBT Catholics trying to find their place in the church so they can tend to their spiritual lives. Stop judging families, friends and allies who support one another and their LGBT brothers and sisters. Stop judging employees by their marital partners instead of by their job performance.

The second half of Francis' comment often gets lost: "if they're seeking the Lord in good faith."

Let's leave the examination of conscience to individuals and their spiritual advisers – and "in good faith" welcome LGBT folks as the people of God they are.

Quarantined With Family, Russia's LGBT Youth Face New Struggles

For Sasha, a queer, non-binary person from Moscow, the clashes at home first started around age 13 or 14.

"It was basically made clear to me that I'll never be accepted in my own family if I 'keep having homosexual tendencies,'" Sasha, now 18, told The Moscow Times.

For years they coped with the tension and rows by staying with friends or changing how they presented themselves around their parents. But since the start of a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus in Moscow two months ago, they have been forced to stay at home 24/7,

existing in a constant state of anxiety and helplessness.

“Every time I walk through the door to the apartment it brings back painful memories ... I have to suppress myself at home, change the way I walk, talk, my mannerisms,” Sasha said.

Out of options, they launched an online fundraiser last month to raise enough money to move out.

Russia’s LGBT youth are increasingly seeking help for abuse, mental illness and even homelessness as schools have closed and the pandemic has forced them indoors with unaccepting families, said Svetlana Zakharova of the Russian LGBT Network, one of the country’s largest LGBT organizations.

“Right now, people are being locked in quite small places ... and a child, a minor, can’t do what he or she would do in normal circumstances [to cope],” Zakharova said. “There are many situations where [LGBT] people are locked together with aggressors or with people who don’t know about their sexual orientation or gender identity.”



According to the NGO’s data, the number of calls to its hotline since March has increased by 72.9% compared with the first three months of 2020 and by 35.4% compared to the same period in 2019. Requests for help from its online psychologist chat – a popular service among younger people – have increased by 96.3% compared to the first three months of 2020 and are up 174% from the same period in 2019.

“Before [the coronavirus], the chat was working five to six hours a day, and now it’s working 24 hours a day because of the huge number of requests,” Zakharova said. “Many requests for legal and psychological help are coming from minors.”

Musician and queer activist Slava Rusova said that quarantine has intensified problems that already existed for many young queer people.

“I think that quarantine has exacerbated two main problems. First of all, it’s domestic violence. There are already serious struggles with it in our country. Living in an apartment with abusive parents 24/7 is real torture,” she said.

“The second problem is communication: high-quality, accepting communication that queer teens can get only in a circle of close friends. Lack of a safe environment is a huge problem at any time, but now especially.”

While polling has indicated a gradual shift toward tolerance of LGBT people among Russians in recent years, homophobic attitudes, violence and government policies remain prevalent amid Russia’s pivot to “traditional values” under President Vladimir Putin.

Next month, Russians are set to vote on a set of constitutional amendments, one of which would add language defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman to Russia’s basic law. Another would allow Putin – who recently vowed gay marriage won’t be legal in Russia as long as he is president – to extend his presidency through 2036.

According to Zakharova, a law passed in 2013 that prohibits the display of “homosexual propaganda toward minors” has discouraged teachers, counselors and community members from directly helping LGBT youth stuck in abusive households.

“It creates this atmosphere of fear where psychologists don’t know if they can provide psychological support and teachers don’t know how to behave if they have an LGBT student,” she said.

Even if their home environment isn’t directly abusive, young people still face challenges expressing their identity around family. Anastasia, 18, identifies as lesbian but hasn’t come out to her parents.

“Since I became self-aware, my main concern has been avoiding the LGBT subject. And it still is,” she said. “My biggest problem is my own silence when I hear ‘What about a future husband?’ I understand that I can’t speak about the way it is, and it eats away at me. Being in an atmosphere of sexism and silence about homosexuality, I don’t fully accept myself.”

The St. Petersburg-based Vykhod (Coming Out) LGBT group classifies psychological pressure such as ignoring a person’s coming out, deliberate misgendering and disparaging comments about someone’s personal life as a form of domestic violence due to the toll it can take on mental health.

“I learned that [my parents’] love was conditional, or rather they loved a perfect version of me... that just doesn’t exist in real life,” Sasha said. “This disorganized attachment system really broke me and gave me bipolar disorder, depression, chronic derealization, emotional numbness, trust issues and fear of emotional intimacy.”

In addition to psychological harm, LGBT youth are at increased risk of homelessness, either because they leave home of their own accord or are thrown out

“In all of Russia there is only one shelter for LGBT people and it’s in Moscow,” Zakharova said. “Homelessness is a huge problem but for many reasons including this [‘gay propaganda’] legislation, there are no organizations that work specifically with homeless LGBT people or homeless LGBT minors.”

With coronavirus lockdowns slowly lifting in many regions of the country, there may be light at the end of the tunnel for young LGBT people who have been self-isolating with family.

“In a way it will improve, because children will be able learn strategies [for coping], like just leaving their home if there’s a question of violence,” Zakharova said. “But in general, this violence exists and it’s almost invisible in Russian society.”

For Sasha, waiting for a return to normal isn’t an option.

“I have big hopes for the future,” they said. “I want to be a writer, I want to try making music, I want to have freedom in expressing myself and eventually move to a more progressive country, but I can’t do any of this if I don’t move out.”

Some names have been changed to protect individuals’ privacy.

Biden Launches LGBTQ Voting Initiative as Trump Totally Ignores Pride Month

Published on June 8, 2020 at 01:21 PM

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden’s campaign is launching Out for Biden, an LGBTQ voting initiative for Pride month, while President Donald Trump ignores the LGBTQ community and refuses to honor the historic events that propelled equality forward this month. Biden has an 8000 word policy plan on LGBTQ equality. He also issued a statement marking LGBTQ Pride

Month on June 1. Trump has never issued a proclamation honoring LGBTQ Pride month, although last year he posted a tweet, managing to turn the month’s focus to himself.

“It is critical that, in this moment, as we speak out against racial injustice, discrimination, and harassment, we don’t forget to do everything we can to empower people,” U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), the nation’s first openly lesbian Senator, said in a statement about the Biden campaign’s program, as CBS News reports. Baldwin is one of 32 LGBTQ politicians and allies spearheading the Out for Biden initiative.

Illegal to be You: Gay History Beyond Stonewall

This website is based on an exhibition that opened at the National Museum of American History in June 2019. Objects pictured here may differ from those currently on view at the museum.

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/illegal-to-be-you>

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/illegal-to-be-you/how-far-will-you-go>

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/illegal-to-be-you/where-can-you-be-safe>

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/illegal-to-be-you/what-do-you-do>

