

# PTOWNWEST

No Place Like Home



## P TOWNWEST

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

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The Hilton hotel in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico will host the destination wedding and reception of gay travel blogger Josh Rimer after Sheraton turns them away

The Hilton hotel in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico will host the destination wedding and reception of Josh Rimer, the gay travel blogger and winner of Mr. Gay Canada 2019, for free after the rival Sheraton Baganvillas Resort & Convention Center turned Rimer away because it doesn't "specialize" in same-sex marriages. Rimer has accepted the Hilton's offer to host his April 2020 wedding and has also accepted the offer of a free honeymoon cruise to Lisbon, Portugal from the travel company VACAYA.

Two days after Rimer published a video about [the Sheraton resort's initial refusal to host his same-sex wedding](#), the Hilton tagged Rimer in [an Instagram post](#), stating, "We'll gladly host your wedding ceremony and feast for FREE for you and your 45 guests at Hilton Puerto Vallarta!"

In response, Rimer wrote, "Amazing, what a kind offer!"



Josh Rimer

Soon after, [VACAYA confirmed](#) that Rimer had accepted the Hilton's offer and "decided to celebrate his honeymoon on [VACAYA's] Lisbon Pride Cruise in June 2020," adding, "We're thrilled to join Hilton Puerto Vallarta in celebrating the love between Josh and Heath because we believe that together we can shine a brighter light on the work we still have left to do to reach equality."

When Rimer first asked the Sheraton resort to host his wedding, [an employee declined via email](#), stating, "Our staff is not specialized to carry out an equal wedding," even though Rimer requested

no special accommodations except for an extra boutonniere for his fiancé, Heath.

"I don't know if she thinks we're going to show up in speedos with gogo dancers and we expect the officiant to be wearing leather chaps," Rimer joked in his video about the incident. "This is just a normal wedding. It just happens to be with two guys."

A spokesperson for Marriott later said they contacted Rimer directly to apologize for his experience and added, "Marriott has long been committed to providing an environment where all are welcome including our LGBTQ guests and their loved ones."

**LGBTQ Methodists were stuck loving a church that didn't love them back. Sound familiar?**

Before the United Methodist Church (UMC) announced a proposal to split the denomination over "fundamental differences" regarding theological beliefs on LGBTQ clergy and same-sex marriage, that Friday morning of January 3rd, I was on the phone with the Reverend Joel B. Guillemette.

Guillemette and I were finalizing plans for me to come out to preach and celebrate with the church its upcoming 15th anniversary as a Reconciling Congregation. In his letter inviting me he wrote the following:

"Given the proximity of this year's observance to the next UMC General Conference vote re: LGBTQ legislation in May 2020, it is important to us to invite a preacher who will encourage us during a tumultuous time in our relationship with our global connection and, to be honest, in our congregation's own internal connections." UMC Reconciling Congregations welcome people of all gender expressions and sexual orientations. Just minutes after our phone call ended, [my smartphone flashed the news](#). The church was going to split over LGBTQ issues. I let out a long sigh of despair.

LGBTQ inclusion in the policy and practices of UMC has been a long contentious and exhausting battle - both nationally and globally. The proposed schism to be voted on in May at General Conference in Minneapolis will divide the nation's third-largest denomination worldwide.

While the current UMC will allow LGBTQ marriages and clergy, the impending split will create a new "traditionalist Methodist" denomination, allowing outright discrimination and denunciation of LGBTQ people in the name of God.

"The best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person," the proposal, *Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation* stated.

Truth be told, the UMC has always been contradictory in its policies concerning LGBTQ worshippers. While it states that we have and are of the same sacred worth as heterosexuals and that it's committed to the ministry of all people regardless of gender identities and sexual orientations, the church views queer sexualities as sinful.

*The Book of Discipline* states that sexuality is "God's good gift to all persons" and that people are "fully human only when their sexuality is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church and society." However, this rule does not apply to LGBTQs.

Since the church's conservative and liberal wings merged in 1968 to become the UMC, it has implemented stricter positions against us. In 1972, for example, UMC delegates inserted in *The Book of Discipline* that as a church body, "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

In the hopes of avoiding a schism, the Council of Bishops in 2018 [recommended the One Church Plan](#) that would grant individual ministers and regional church bodies the decision to ordain LGBTQs as clergy and to perform LGBTQ weddings. It was hoped that such a decision on a church-by-church and regional basis would reflect the diversity as well as affirm the different churches and cultures throughout the global body of UMC.

The One Church Plan, however, was one of three proposed plans by the UMC's Commission on a Way Forward. The One Church Plan would have excised the offensive language targeted at LGBTQs from *The Book of Discipline* and replaced it with compassionate and up-to-date wording about human sexuality in support of its mission. It was voted down. The other plans were both exclusionary to LGBTQ parishioners.

Many UMC members will point a finger to its African churches as the sole reason for the new "traditionalist Methodist" denomination. However, the U.S. conservative wings - the Wesleyan Covenant Association and the Good News movement - had been preparing to leave before the traditionalists won by a narrow vote in 2019.

The schism in the UMC, sadly, mirrors today's ongoing battle among religious conservatives. A movement for some time now has been afoot in state legislatures across the country to disenfranchise LGBTQ Americans. These bills called "religious freedom" laws are a backlash to the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage, and the Supreme Court decision that legalized it nationwide.

As a nation, we're at crossroads on many issues. It's a shame when a church cannot bring us together.

**Apple, Verizon and other companies are pushing for permanent legal protections for LGBT Michiganders**

According to Bloomberg Law, Corporate leaders of Apple Inc., Verizon Communications, and Whirlpool Corp. are pushing for permanent legal protections for LGBT Michiganders that the state's legislature has rebuffed for decades.

The companies are part of a corporate and activist collaboration seeking to expand state anti-discrimination law to cover a person's gender identity and sexual orientation through a citizen referendum on the November 2020 ballot. They announced Jan. 7 that they are filing paperwork with the Michigan Secretary of State to begin the

process of collecting at least 340,047 valid signatures before May 27, 2020.

The state currently has in place tenuous protections for LGBT workers through a reinterpretation of state anti-discrimination law by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. The agency was the first state commission to unilaterally reinterpret the law in this way, sidestepping the Republican-controlled House and Senate.

If the group collects sufficient signatures, the Michigan legislature would have the ability to adopt the referendum before it goes to voters. However, adoption prior to any referendum is unlikely because the change is opposed by Speaker Lee Chatfield (R).



The push comes as the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to rule on a trio of cases dealing with whether Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects gay and transgender employees from discrimination. For more on this, read the full [Bloomberg Law](#) report.

In 2017 a 'Huffpost' report claimed that there was 379 companies urging the Supreme Court to support same-sex-marriage. The list included Silicon Valley heavyweights Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Xerox, Qualcomm and Oracle. The list has likely increased over time.

Apple's Tim Cook became CEO after Steve Jobs passing in 2011. In 2014 Cook came out to say that he was gay and told BloombergBusiness that he didn't consider himself an activist.

## Taylor Swift to be honored with prestigious Ally Award for her work fighting for LGBT Equality

In 2019 the singer broke from her long-held apolitical stance *with a campaign for the Equality Act*, a proposed law to protect LGBT+ people from discrimination in all 50 US states.

The petition - which attracted half a million signatures - was launched off the back of Swift's pro-LGBT+ track *'You Need to Calm Down'*. The music video for the track, which was co-executive produced by out singer Todrick Hall, was a celebration of queer culture - with cameos from Laverne Cox, the Queer Eye Fab Five, Billy Porter, RuPaul and Hayley Kiyoko - among many others. **Taylor Swift honoured with GLAAD Award.**

Ahead of the GLAAD Media Awards on April 16, it was announced that Swift will be honoured with the Vanguard Award - which is awarded to allies who have made an impact in promoting LGBT+ acceptance.



**Todrick Hall and Taylor Swift receive a 'Video For Good' award for onstage during the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards at Prudential Center on August 26, 2019 in Newark, New Jersey. (Dimitrios Kambouris/VMN19/Getty Images for MTV)**

Previous winners include Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Britney Spears, Demi Lovato, Patricia Arquette and Jennifer Lopez.

Sarah Kate Ellis of GLAAD: "From boldly standing up against anti-LGBTQ elected officials to shining attention on the urgent need to protect LGBTQ

people from discrimination through the Equality Act, Taylor Swift proudly uses her unique ability to influence pop culture to promote LGBTQ acceptance.

"In a time of political and cultural division, Taylor creates music that unites and calls on her massive fan following to speak up and call for change."

Janet Mock also to be honoured by GLAAD.

Pose and The Politician director Janet Mock will also be honoured with the Stephen F Kolzak award, given to an LGBT+ person who has made an outstanding contribution to tackling prejudice in media.

Ellis added: "Janet Mock is a trailblazing force for diverse and inclusive storytelling who has raised the bar for LGBTQ representation in Hollywood.

"She tells stories that need to be told, including those of transgender people and people of color, in revolutionary and eye-opening ways that inspire and enrich.

"Her passion for inclusive storytelling, combined with her undeniable talents in writing, directing, and producing, will continue to create a Hollywood where voices and stories that have been left out of the conversation are placed front and centre where they belong."

## New York's First LGBT-Friendly affordable elder housing, opens in Fort Greene

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), BFC Partners, SAGE, the New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC), and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) recently celebrated the opening of Stonewall House, New York State's first LGBT-friendly affordable elder housing, in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. It is the largest such development in the nation and is a fitting tribute to LGBT pioneers during this year - the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising.

Although New York's housing affordability crisis impacts households of all backgrounds and demographics, older LGBT people are statistically more likely to face housing discrimination and harassment. They are also less likely to have children or other family members to help provide for their needs as they age, exacerbating the crisis for the population.

*Stonewall House, the first project to be completed under the NextGen NYCHA initiative, is a 17-story building at 112 St. Edwards St. in Fort Greene. It provides 145 units of affordable housing for households who earn 50 percent or less of the area median income and include at least one person who is 62-years-of-age or older. The building has 54 studio and 91 one-bedroom apartments, and 25 percent of these homes will be occupied by formerly homeless households.*

*SAGE, the world's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT elder people, will operate the SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House, a 7,000 square-foot state community center located on the ground floor. The new center will open in early 2020.*

*"Stonewall House represents this City's unparalleled investments in affordable housing, and our staunch commitment to ensuring our senior residents are not priced out of their communities. Today we welcome home over 140 seniors who now have a safe and affordable home to call their own," said HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll. "I thank my team at HPD, our colleagues across the government, and our long roster of dedicated community partners for their help championing this project."*

*"NYCHA is excited to bring affordable housing to New York City seniors," said NYCHA Senior Vice President for Real Estate Development Jonathan Gouvea. "Our seniors deserve new, safe, clean affordable housing. This 100 percent affordable development is necessary and a great step forward for New York City."*

*"We want all New Yorkers to feel secure and welcome in our city, and this historic development builds on our commitment to support LGBTQ+ communities and their families," said First Lady Chirlane McCray. "Stonewall House will provide residents with a safe environment and support system where they will be treated with respect and compassion. We are grateful to our partners at SAGE for their continued work in building LGBT senior affordable housing across the city."*

*"Housing forms the bedrock of healthy communities, and everyone deserves a place to call home," said Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Raul Perea-Henze. "With the Stonewall House project, the de Blasio administration and our partners honor the trailblazing legacy of older LGBTQ New Yorkers with an empowering space where elders can live in community and with pride."*

*"Today is a true celebration for New York City. We are proud to partner with SAGE and the de Blasio administration and deliver this truly*

*transformative housing that is welcoming and supportive of LGBT elders and their families," said Donald Capoccia, principal and founder of BFC Partners. "We hope that this project blazes a path forward for stakeholders across the nation to step up to the plate and further help aging members of the LGBTQ community."*

*"It's no exaggeration to say that LGBT elders in New York City have been working for 50 years for a place they can truly call home - since they stood up and said "no more" back at Stonewall in 1969," said Michael Adams, CEO of SAGE. "Thankfully, they've now found that home at Stonewall House, and we at SAGE could not be more thrilled." Continued Adams, "The Mayor's ten-year housing plan encouraged developers of senior housing to partner with LGBT nonprofit service providers in order to provide inclusive affordable housing opportunities for LGBT elders, and we are proud that this is the first building to accomplish that mandate."*

*"Getting to live here is a dream come true," said Diedra Nottingham, a Stonewall House resident. "I am so excited to move into this building and be part of a community that is LGBT-friendly. I was born and bred in Brooklyn and coming back to the area is like coming home."*

*The building is a part of NYCHA's 100 percent Affordable Housing program, supporting Mayor de Blasio's Housing New York 2.0 plan. It will help NYCHA meet its goal to provide 10,000 new affordable units over the next decade.*

*Stonewall House received financing from HPD's Senior Affordable Rental Apartments (SARA) program, HDC, and Wells Fargo. Nixon Peabody advised BFC Partners on the development.*

*"Today we celebrate the addition of 145 units of affordable senior housing, along with an onsite senior center that will benefit both the residents and the larger community," said HDC President Eric Enderlin. "I would like to congratulate our partners on the completion of Stonewall House and extend my gratitude to everyone at SAGE for all they do to support our LGBTQ seniors."*

*"Providing seniors with an affordable and safe place to call home is part of our commitment to older New Yorkers to have the opportunity to age with dignity in a City that they love," said Grace Bonilla, Administrator for the NYC Human Resources Administration. "We are thrilled to celebrate the opening of this innovative and inclusive housing development and look forward to continued collaboration with our private partners and sister agencies to ensure that all New Yorkers can access similar opportunities."*

*"It was an honor working with BFC Partners, SAGE and the City of New York. I commend them for their leadership and collective commitment to the LGBTQ community, without which Stonewall House would not have been made possible," said Nixon Peabody partner Joe Lynch. "Stonewall House is not just a home and a safe haven for LGBTQ elderly in New York but a beacon of hope for all LGBTQ people across the country.*

### **Philippines Supreme Court Rules Against Marriage Equality "with family"**

*The Supreme Court of the Philippines has decided against hearing any further arguments or appeals on Falcis III vs. Civil Registrar-General, meaning that same-sex marriage will remain banned in the country.*

*This is the second time the petitioner, out gay lawyer Jesus Falcis had brought his argument to the court. His petition argued that the Family Code of the Philippines discriminated against his civil rights because the law "define[s] and limit[s] marriage as between man and woman."*

*The Family Code also "mentions homosexuality or lesbianism as grounds for annulment and legal separation," according to ABS-CBN News.*

*Falcis first filed his petition in 2015, hypothetically challenging the Family Code; there wasn't an incident or actual occurrence that caused the filing. This annoyed some of the justices on the court when they first heard Falcis' petition in June 2018. They even held the petitioners in contempt during the arguments.*

*This September, the Court ruled against Falcis' petition, saying his arguments suffered from a "lack of legal standing, failure to raise an actual justiciable issue and violation of the doctrine of hierarchy of courts." The author of the decision, Associate Justice Marvic Leonen, did note that "the Constitution does not define or restrict marriage on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression."*

*He also pointed out the history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the country, which gave some a glimmer of hope for a different ruling in the future.*

*When Falcis asked the court to consider the petition again, however, the Court "resolved to deny with finality" any further arguments in this case. That means Falcis cannot ask for any further decisions or changes to their ruling.*

*"No substantial arguments were presented to warrant the reversal of the questioned decision. No further pleadings or motions will be entertained," Court clerk Edgar O. Aricheta wrote.*

*Culture and politics in the Philippines are heavily influenced by religion. In 2016, then-Senatorial candidate and boxer Manny Pacquiao caused outrage when he compared gay couples to animals on Filipino television.*

*Former President Rodrigo Duterte has touted on several occasions that he was homosexual but was 'cured', 'renounced' it and 'became a man again'. Duterte has often called political opponents gay, such as in 2016 when he called the American ambassador to his country a "gay...son of a whore."*

*Home Deputy Speaker and Christian leader, Eddie Villanueva, praised the court's decision.*

*"The Family Code was crafted to mirror the historical, traditional and religious values of Filipinos on marriage....the Supreme Court decision is a welcome development to us. It reaffirms our belief that we are in the right path," he said.*

### **This Tweet About LGBTQ Mental Health Has Gone Viral & Inspired Thousands of Queer People**

*Alexander Leon – a writer employed at the Kaleidoscope Trust, an Australian LGBTQ organization – has gone viral this week with his tweet stating that queer people "don't grow up as ourselves, we grow up playing a version of ourselves that sacrifices authenticity to minimize humiliation & prejudice."*

*Leon added, "The massive task of our adult lives is to unpick which parts of ourselves are truly us & which parts we've created to protect us." He called this task "a gift in disguise" as it compels*

*queer people to undergo profound self-discovery that most cisgender and heterosexual people never achieve.*

*His tweet has since been shared on social media thousands of times. He has used the tweet's popularity to ask people to donate to the Australian Red Cross to help fight the raging Australian bushfires.*

*Here are Leon's tweets:*

Alexander Leon

@alexand\_erleon

· Jan 7, 2020

Queer people don't grow up as ourselves, we grow up playing a version of ourselves that sacrifices authenticity to minimise humiliation & prejudice. The massive task of our adult lives is to unpick which parts of ourselves are truly us & which parts we've created to protect us.

Alexander Leon

@alexand\_erleon

It's massive and existential and difficult. But I'm convinced that being confronted with the need for profound self-discovery so explicitly (and often early in life!) is a gift in disguise. We come out the other end wiser & truer to ourselves. Some cis/het people never get there.

11.7K

3:20 AM - Jan 7, 2020

Twitter Ads info and privacy

1,575 people are talking about this

Replying to @alexand\_erleon

All of this is to say - be kind to yourself. Discovering who you really are is an enormous task it doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen without some hiccups along the way. Be patient, be compassionate, be vulnerable and exist loudly. And most of all - be proud! 🇺🇸

Alexander Leon

@alexand\_erleon

This has blown up unexpectedly and I'm very humbled ♡ If this meant something to you & you are able I'd really appreciate any donations to help families affected by the Australian bushfires. I am Australian and seeing my country burn is heartbreaking. [https://twitter.com/alexand\\_erleon/status/1214536380501524481?s=19](https://twitter.com/alexand_erleon/status/1214536380501524481?s=19) ...

Alexander Leon

@alexand\_erleon

I have to leave Sydney tomorrow & I am so conflicted about leaving. My family home is <50km from fire affected areas. I am certain they will be safe but many families are not. Plz consider donating to the Red Cross if you are able. Even a RT helps ♡ <https://fundraise.redcross.org.au/drr>

Leon is right, as famous LGBTQ books like *The Best Little Boy in the World* and *The Velvet Rage* can attest. Queer people, especially those who live in conservative and anti-LGBTQ societies, are often emotionally abandoned by adult authority figures in their lives.

Because many LGBTQ people have to live in the closet for their own safety, they may avoid people, hobbies and expressing certain emotions just to avoid being perceived as queer. Over time, they deny the grief and anger they feel at being mistreated and begin to internalize and deny it, often using self-effacing humor and achievements as a cover.

Lee Kinsey – an out gay psychotherapist, sex therapist and couple's counselor in Texas – has told LGBTQ Nation that a majority of LGBTQ people's psychological difficulties stem from anti-queer stigma. Sadly, mental health remains out of reach for many queer people, especially those who are poorer and people of color.

However, Leon's tweets show there's a shared and growing recognition of the shared struggles between queer people, providing an illustration of how we might support one another as we work through our trauma to live as our authentic selves.

In response to his tweet going viral, Leon wrote:

My tweets went viral overnight & beyond it being extraordinarily humbling (& overwhelming), I am so emboldened by the response. I adapted the tweets from an essay I thought too personal/niche to attempt to get published. All I've ever wanted to do in any of my work is for queer people (& particularly QPOC) to feel seen, heard & understood. I can't open this app at the moment without ugly crying because y'all are showing me that in my own small way, I'm achieving what I set out to do. Thank you.

### A Gay Bar is Holding a 12-Hour Drag Event to Raise Funds for Australia's Deadly Bushfires

Two Brewers, a London gay bar, will host a 12-hour drag fundraiser on Sunday, Jan. 26 to raise money for the Australian bushfires that have already killed over a billion animals and 24 humans while destroying 2,000 homes and over 25 million acres of land.

The event will occur from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. on "Australia Day," an annual Australian holiday commemorating the arrival of British fleets to the island continent. The bar – which resides in Clapham, a southwestern suburb that has a large number of Australian expats – will host 17 drag and non-drag acts during the day.

The bar will raise funds by charging an 8 pounds (\$10.45 in U.S. dollars) entry fee and by allowing patrons to make donations at the bar. Two Brewers is also raising funds for the cause via the online crowdfunding platform Just Giving.

The funds will go to WIREs, the Australian Wildlife Rescue Organisation, and the firefighters of New South Wales, the southeastern region of Australia which has been particularly ravaged by the blaze.

Among the lineup for the 12-hour fundraiser are Australian-themed drag performers Shae G'Day

and Karla Bear as well better known local performers like Baga Chipz and Kelly Wilde.

"This event is looking extremely popular!" Two Brewers wrote on its Facebook event page.

Australia has a special place in the hearts of many LGBTQ people worldwide in part for the 1994 film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* in which three drag performers drive a bus deep into the Australian outback.

The island continent is also well regarded for its hosting of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, an annual event that began when a 1970 Australian protest of solidarity with the Stonewall rioters in New York City was disrupted by violent local police forces. The Mardi Gras now draws hundreds of thousands of people annually.



and Karla Bear as well better known local performers like Baga Chipz and Kelly Wilde.

## **Tmall Ad Depicting Same-Sex Couples Gets Positive Response in China**

*A new advert from the Chinese ecommerce website Tmall that includes two same-sex couples has won widespread praise and been hailed as a small but significant win by China's LGBT community.*

*Chinese LGBT advocates have welcomed the advert as a positive step for the community, but warned that it may take a while before LGBT representation becomes truly accepted.*

*"This is only a single case and not widespread, so it's hard to say that it represents progress," said Yang Yi, media officer at the China Rainbow Media Awards, a non-profit dedicated to promoting LGBT visibility in the media.*

*"In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to see LGBTQ+ representation in the Chinese media, regardless of whether that's film or the news media, so every instance is very important."*

*Mainstream representation of LGBT people in Chinese media is rare, and LGBT content and discussions are regularly censored online because the government deems them sensitive.*

*In the past, entire social media discussion forums, and scenes from films with explicit LGBT themes, have been pulled at the government's request, while LGBT advocacy NGOs have been forced out of existence.*

*Homosexuality in China was decriminalized in 1997, but LGBT people still struggle to assert their rights.*

*Many LGBT Chinese face discrimination and prejudice in their everyday lives, in the absence of anti-discrimination legislation for sexual minorities, while forced LGBT conversion therapy continues to be practiced.*

*However, in the past year there have been some minor advances in legal rights for LGBT people. A gay couple in Beijing were the first LGBT couple to become each other's legal guardians in August, and hundreds of thousands of LGBT supporters appealed to the government to authorize same-sex marriage during its recent public consultation on civil legislation.*

*Peng Yanzi, director of LGBT Rights Advocacy China, said that the advert suggested that mainstream Chinese companies were seeking to display a more LGBT-friendly image, in line with international companies' pro-LGBT ad campaigns designed to lure a younger, more progressive demographic.*

*"LGBT people are the top consumers in various sectors, and will opt to buy products from companies that show a positive attitude towards their community, which then makes the company more competitive," Peng said.*

*"I believe this shows the slight influence of the 'pink economy,' and that all kinds of companies should be paying lots of attention to the advert."*

*A 2017 report by strategic market research provider Euromonitor found that China had an estimated 70 million LGBT people and the pink economy was worth US\$300 billion a year.*

*The timing of the advert to coincide with the forthcoming Lunar New Year festival was doubly significant, according to Yang, even though the advert did not explicitly mention LGBT rights or show the characters displaying romantic feelings towards each other.*

*"Chinese New Year is the most important festival of the year for most Chinese people," Yang said. "It is a time of family reunions in which tradition and mainstream culture are intertwined. So adding LGBT content to the mainstream narrative is an attempt to affirm it."*

*However, a spokesman for the Beijing LGBT Center, surnamed Duan, said that it was a "one-time online marketing ploy," even if it made LGBT people in China more visible. "I feel more ambivalent about it," he said.*

*This was not the first time a mainstream advert for a Chinese company had featured LGBT themes, according to Yang.*

In 2014, the ecommerce site Dangdang released a poster before the November 11 Singles' Day shopping festival, showing two men walking hand in hand, with the caption: "I'm scared of dirty looks but I dare to love truthfully."

A spokesperson for Alibaba, which owns Tmall and the South China Morning Post, said: "Chinese New Year is a time for family reunion and inclusion, and the ad is a creative expression to celebrate such an occasion."



The Tmall advert includes two same-sex couples. (Picture: Handout)

### Lesbian Who Was Hospitalized after Conversion Therapy found dead

A woman who was featured in an article about the harms of conversion therapy was just found dead.

Alana Chen talked to the Denver Post in August about how a priest in high school put her through conversion therapy without telling her family and about how she was later hospitalized for self-harm: "I was feeling so much shame that I was comforted by the thought of hurting myself."

Chen, who was 24, was reported missing this past week after she told her family that she was going hiking but didn't return. Her car was found next to a reservoir in Chautauqua Park in Boulder, Colorado, and her body was found several hours later nearby by a search party.

The Boulder County Sheriff's Office said that her death is "not considered to be suspicious." The

coroner has completed an autopsy but not yet released the official cause of death.

Chen was raised Catholic and she came out to a priest at her church in 2009. The priest told her not to tell her parents and started counseling her.



(Alana Chen)

By the time she was in college, she started formal conversion therapy through Catholic Charities' Sacred Heart Counseling and her church. Chen said that she couldn't follow her dream of being a nun because of her sexual orientation.

"I felt a lot of shame and anxiety," [Chen told the Denver Post](#) as part of an article about people who would not have been [protected by Colorado's conversion therapy ban](#), either because they sought conversion therapy from their church or because they were adults at the time.

"I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop thinking about it. Was I going to hell? But I was still extremely faithful, and I felt like the church and the counseling was the thing that was saving me. The worse I got, the more I clung to it."

In 2016, her parents noticed scars on her arms that she had caused, which led to her checking in to a psychiatric hospital and dropping out of college.

"I think the church's counsel is what led me to be hospitalized," said Chen. "I've now basically completely lost my faith. I don't know what I

believe about God, but I think if there is a God, he doesn't need me talking to him anymore."

A spokesperson for the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver said that they "reject any practices that are manipulative, coercive, or pseudoscientific." But that didn't stop them from sponsoring a conference this year with a ministry for people who want to "overcome homosexuality."

Chen said that she participated in the *Denver Post* article because she wanted to educate people about the harms of conversion therapy and so that others who went through the same wouldn't feel alone.

A GoFundMe was set up [to support her parents](#) after her death.

### The Advocate & Out's Editors Both Resign Amid Financial Troubles

Their departures follow months of lawsuits, two rounds of layoffs, and a bevy of unpaid freelancers. What will happen to these two historic publications?

By [Daniel Villarreal](#) Thursday, December 12, 2019

Zach Stafford, editor of *The Advocate*, and Phillip Picardi, editor of *Outmagazine*, have both [announced their resignations](#) following financial troubles by their publications' parent company, Pride Media.

Pride Media's CEO Orlando Reece is stepping down as well, leaving an uncertain future for these longrunning LGBTQ

Their departures follow two [rounds of layoffs](#) among the publications' editorial and sales staff, severe pay and budget cuts that [left freelancers unpaid](#) for months, [a lawsuit](#) by the National Writers' Union to get those freelancers paid, a reduction in the number of print issues, [the sudden departure](#) of Pride Media's former CEO Nathan Coyle, several failed attempts to secure outside funding, and [a \\$10 million lawsuit](#) brought by Pride Media against the publication's former owners for allegedly hiding hundreds of thousands in debt during the publications' sale.

Reece and Stafford - the first black men ever to lead as Pride Media's CEO and The Advocate's editor, respectively - are expected to stay in their roles until January 2020. But Picardi wrote on his Twitter account yesterday, "Today marks my last day at @outmagazine, just one year after I started. This journey has been shorter and more complex than I hoped, but it has been an honor to helm this title, and a deeper honor to lead such an incredibly talented team of LGBTQ+ people."

In September 2018, when Adam Levin, one of the founders of Orevia Capital, [first acquired](#) Here Media's *Out*, *The Advocate*, *Pride*, *Plus*, *Out* and *Out Travel* magazine under the newly formed Pride Media brand, it quickly surfaced that Levin had [a substantial history of donating to rabidly anti-LGBTQ Republican politicians](#). After pledging to stop such donations, Levin said his support had entirely to do with the politicians' support for Israel.

Levin has not yet commented on this recent departure of high-level staff. It's unclear whether Orevia Capital/Pride Media might resort to a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing or a Chapter 7 liquidation filing to help ease the publications' financial strain, possibly leaving the publications available to a future buyer.

### Same-Sex Marriage Now Legal in Northern Ireland

Same-sex marriage is now legally recognised in Northern Ireland.

From Monday, same-sex couples will be able to register to marry, meaning the first ceremonies will take place in February.

For couples who are already married, their marriage will now be legally recognised in Northern Ireland.

However, those who are already in a civil partnership will not be able to convert it to a marriage at this stage.

The Northern Ireland Office is set to begin a consultation later this year about converting civil partnerships and the role of churches in same-sex marriages.

Heterosexual couples will also be able to enter into civil partnerships from today.

'Historic day'

When the Stormont assembly collapsed, marriage equality campaigners turned their focus to Westminster.

In July 2019, MPs backed amendments which required the government to change abortion laws and extend same-sex marriage to Northern Ireland if devolution was not restored by 21 October 2019.

An amendment was made to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 by the Labour MP Conor McGinn saying that the government had to legislate for same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

Speaking to BBC News NI, Mr McGinn said "everyone who values equality, love and respect can celebrate today".

"It's a good day for Northern Ireland, an important day for citizens' rights across these islands and an exciting day for same-sex couples who can now register to marry," he said.

Patrick Corrigan from Amnesty International said it was a "historic day for equality and human rights in Northern Ireland".

"For too long, LGBT+ people in Northern Ireland have been treated as second-class citizens. So, today is an incredible moment for same-sex couples who can finally marry and have their relationships recognised as equal," he said.

Same-sex marriages have been allowed in England, Scotland and Wales since 2014, but Stormont did not legalise them.

In November 2015, a vote on the issue in the devolved assembly resulted in a numerical majority in favour of same-sex marriage for the first time.

However, the DUP blocked a change in the law by using a veto known as the Petition of Concern.

Five years of campaigning

Because couples have to indicate their intention to marry 28 days before doing so, the first weddings are expected to be held in the week of Valentine's Day.

John O'Doherty from the Love Equality campaign said this was the "culmination of five years of campaigning for marriage equality and marks an enormous step forward for LGBT+ people".

"There remain a number of issues to be addressed before couples in Northern Ireland have the same rights as those in other jurisdictions," he added.

"However, we celebrate this remarkable achievement with the thousands of people who made their voices heard and demanded change in spite of the many barriers placed in their way."

A Londonderry couple have expressed their joy that their marriage is now legally recognised in their home city.

Danielle Doherty and Emma Bradley got married in County Donegal in 2019.

"It just shows you the change that's happened over the last few years, from it being a dream to reality," said Ms Doherty.

"We are not undermining the value of a civil partnership, but for us, we wanted a marriage.

"We would've loved to have gotten married in Derry, we love Derry, but it was never an option."



