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## Fired over love

*Charlotte area organist loses job for marrying his long-term partner*

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If you had not heard of Steav Bates-Congdon prior to January, you surely have at least seen his name in the past month. Bates-Congdon has received a lot of attention in the news, both local and national, for being fired from his job.

Bates-Congdon was fired from St. Gabriel Catholic Church in Charlotte for marrying his partner of 23 years Bill Bates-Congdon. The two were married in October following New York's June decision to legalize gay marriage. Between the time of the marriage and his firing, Bates-Congdon was never notified by the church of their direct opposition to his marriage nor the ramifications he would face for his decision to marry.

After exchanging emails with Laurianne Flemming, a former student of Bates-Congdon, I met up with him for coffee and was surprised when he walked in with a dog at his side. Bates-Congdon suffers from young onset

Parkinson's disease and for years has been raising chocolate labs as service animals to help him. As we introduced ourselves to one another, Bates-Congdon received a call on his cell phone. He apologized and answered the phone. It was Bill.

Bill, Bates-Congdon's partner, was on his lunch break and was calling to check in. While I only heard one side of the conversation, I didn't need to hear what Bill said to know what was going on. It was one of those conversations I have everyday with my own partner. A few "I love yous" and some talk about needs around the house, idle chat about the other's day and the two were off the phone again.

see *Organist* on 14

25<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary  
1986-2011