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Coalition spotlights marriage

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profile media events that generated substantial media coverage for equal marriage rights.

On the morning of May 5 a gay male couple — under the direction of the Coalition and flanked by a mass of reporters — became the first same-sex duo to officially request a marriage license from Mecklenburg County.

As expected, Rev. Mick Hinson and his partner of 11 years Gene Hinson (who has legally taken the former's last name) were turned away by Register of Deeds Judith Gibson. She told the men that the denial is nothing personal just adherence to state law, which restricts the granting of marriage licenses to opposite-sex couples. She gave the Hinsons a copy of the statute.

"I take an oath and my staff takes an oath to uphold the law of North Carolina," she said.

Afterward Mick Hinson, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte, told reporters that the couple knew they would be turned away and the intent was to bring attention to the issue.

"There is not justice in the world regarding [same-sex] relationships — period," he explained. "A man and a woman who go in to apply for a marriage license and get married have all of these rights already established for them, simply by going through this ceremony."

A much-publicized federal study found that marriage immediately confers more than 1,100 rights and privileges to wedded couples. For the Hinsons, who are raising two children adopted by Gene, the entitlements related to child guardianship are of particular importance.

"Had I not gone to a lawyer and set up papers to where [Mick] had rights, he would have had no rights because he's not legally my spouse," Gene said.

Dr. Tara Moore and Vincent Magnarini received their marriage license while the Hinsons were being rejected. "I hate that they were denied," Moore told Q-Notes.

The Hinsons have no plans to pursue legal action against the county.

Coalition for Marriage Equality co-director Shane Windmeyer described the day as "splendid."

"For once in the Charlotte community we set the stage and had the opposition responding to our timeframe. That's why there was

only one protestor who showed up. We were delighted by the reaction of the media."

In an effort to keep the momentum going, three days later the Coalition sponsored a Rally & Family Festival for Marriage Equality in the parking lot of the Lesbian & Gay Community Center. The event drew approximately 200 adults and children who were treated to guest speakers and free carnival games and food.

The theme of the rally was "Defend, Don't Amend the Constitution."

"We have the federal Defense of Marriage Act and a North Carolina state law that limits marriage to opposite-sex couples," Windmeyer told Q-Notes.



Around 200 people turned out for the Rally & Family Festival for Marriage Equality.

"Constitutional amendments at either level are unnecessary and only serve to fuel hate and divide Americans."

The Federal Marriage Amendment to ban gay marriage was introduced in the U.S. Senate last fall and has garnered the support of President George W. Bush. On May 11 state Sen. James Forrester (R-Gaston), author of the 1996 anti-gay state measure, introduced a bill that would rewrite North Carolina's constitution to outlaw same-sex marriage. (See story on page one.)

Windmeyer believes the Coalition can build a broad participant base to fight these proposals.

"We have already seen that the marriage issue brings out people who may not be involved in any other type of LGBT activism. We plan on doing significant outreach to allied communities to get them involved as well. We need to start strategizing now," he added.

info: www.charlottemarriageequality.org



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