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Gay Marriage Legalized: Wedding Plans Now In Full Bloom



DAVID B. CARUSO and VERENA DOBNIK : 06/25/11 10:43 PM ET :



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NEW YORK — As the news flashed around the globe that New York state had legalized gay marriage, New York fashion designer Malcolm Harris didn't waste any time. He dashed off a Twitter message to his boyfriend of nine years: "Will you marry me?"

A city away, in Boston, Bernadette Smith decided to immediately relocate her business planning gay weddings to New York City.

In Brooklyn, pastors Ann Kansfield and Jennifer Aull received their first two requests to wed gay couples at their church in the borough's Greenpoint section. They scheduled one for Labor Day weekend.

Even as supporters of gay marriage celebrated victory in New York on Saturday, preparations were being made to make gay weddings a reality in the state.

Couples who had talked about going out-of-state to wed changed their plans. Reception venues got their first calls. Churches that accept gay unions said they were looking forward to hosting ceremonies.

After a lifetime of waiting, there was a sense of urgency.

The law signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo late Friday night doesn't take effect for 30 days, but Harris – who got a "yes" to his Twitter proposal – said he and fiancée K. Tyson Perez planned to get a marriage license right away, wed on paper, and then have a blowout reception in six months.

"I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with him," Harris said.

"This is going to be as traditional as it gets. We're going to do it at the Four Seasons, a place that is like gay church to me," he added about the atmospheric restaurant where he planned to hold the event.

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The law passed amid opposition from the largest and most influential religious groups in the state, but in New York City, at least, there were still an ample number of churches that have already said they would happily officiate a gay marriage ceremony.

The Rev. Stephen H. Phelps, senior minister at the Riverside Church, in Manhattan, said he was looking forward to replacing the commitment ceremonies that have been done there for years with something state-sanctioned.

"I think it is an occasion for members of our society who have been burned by narrow-minded religion to see that it doesn't have to be that way," he said.

At a gay pride celebration in Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park, the Rev. Joseph Tolton of the Rehoboth Temple Christ Conscious Church, a Pentecostal congregation that is predominantly gay, said he couldn't wait to start.

"I'm going to be very busy on Saturdays," he said.

Congregants Yvonne Lindesay, 55, and her partner Elaine Livingston, 62, said they're planning to get married after living together for two years, after watching the results of New York's critical Senate vote on television Friday night.

"I cried. Our phone was ringing off the hook – from straight people too," Lindesay said.

Smith, who founded a gay wedding planning business in Massachusetts after it legalized gay marriage, said she had been hoping to relocate to New York for some time, and had already begun laying the groundwork to establish a New York office for her company, 14 Stories, in anticipation of the vote.

The move is partly a matter of survival, she said. Over seven years, her client list has been dominated by people traveling to Massachusetts from elsewhere to wed – a type of tourism that may now shift to the Big Apple.

"I was supposed to have a gay wedding today with a gay couple from New York," she said. "They were a no-show. Of course, for a good reason."

She said New York has quite a set of parties to look forward to.

"The weddings are incredible," she said. "I think maybe because there is a lot of pent up

anticipation ... It's really about appreciating and savoring the legality of it. Because some couples have literally been waiting for years and years. To be around that energy, where they are not taking a thing for granted ... there's usually not a dry eye in the room."

At the Greenpoint Reformed Church, Aull said she and co-pastor Kansfield, who got married themselves in Massachusetts years ago, have presided over same-sex unions before. But she expects there will be something different, more joyous, about being able to do it legally at home.

"There is always a little bit of a bittersweet aspect when you are doing a marriage, and there is a sense that it is not recognized by anyone," she said.

Associated Press reporter Julie Walker contributed to this report.

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