



## **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 17, 2011

### CONTACTS:

Ninia Baehr, ACLU of Montana LGBT Advocacy Coordinator  
(406) 579-8884, [niniab@aclumontana.org](mailto:niniab@aclumontana.org)

Rev. Roxanne Klingensmith, Deacon, St. James Episcopal Church, Bozeman  
(406) 580-4748, mobile

Rev. Eric Thorson, Pastor, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Billings  
(406) 248-6427

## **Montana Clergy Support Fairness for Same-Sex Couples** Sixty-six clergy sign onto statement supporting domestic partnership case

BOZEMAN, MT — From Miles City to Columbia Falls, Great Falls to Red Lodge, pastors, chaplains, rabbis and priests across Montana are taking a stand for fairness and love by signing a public statement supporting six committed, same-sex couples suing the state of Montana for domestic partnership recognition.

"Very simply put, they are children of God," said Rev. Roxanne Klingensmith, deacon of Bozeman's St. James Episcopal Church and archdeacon of the Episcopal Diocese of Montana. "Sexual orientation is not a choice. It is how they were created. God loves them and Jesus Christ has instructed us to love one another."

The statement supporting domestic partnerships:

"Because of our commitment to justice and compassion, we the undersigned stand in defense of basic human rights for our brothers and sisters who are in committed relationships with their same-sex partners. We are pastors and priests, chaplains and rabbis who live out our vocations throughout Montana. Although we may hold various theological and ethical understandings of sexual orientation, we are unified in our affirmation that all Montanans deserve equal rights and protections under the law. Therefore, it is our conviction that the present lawsuit being brought forward by Donaldson and Guggenheim on behalf of six same-sex couples will serve to deepen and broaden equitable treatment for all Montanans."

Six committed, same-sex couples in 2010 sued the state of Montana with the help of the ACLU in the case *Donaldson and Guggenheim v. State of Montana*. A district court judge dismissed the case this spring, but the ACLU will appeal that ruling to the Montana Supreme Court. These plaintiffs share the joys and responsibilities of living together, owning homes together and raising families together. The case is about these couples' rights to privacy, dignity, due process and the pursuit of life's basic necessities. We are committed to working toward a solution that fulfills these rights outlined in Montana's Constitution.

"Clergy are an integral part of our campaign to build a just Montana that treats all couples fairly and makes it possible for them to care for one another and for their families," said Ninia Baehr, LGBT Advocacy Coordinator for the ACLU of Montana. "They lead their congregations through good times and bad, and have a deep and personal understanding of the pain of couples whose relationships cannot be legally recognized. They know that lack of domestic partnership recognition has very real and very negative consequences for families."

“Two of the plaintiffs in the case, Denise Boettcher and Kellie Gibson, are valued members of my congregation,” said Eric Thorson, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Billings. “I support their case because I know how much they love each other and their children and how much domestic partnership recognition would help them. Beyond that, I am committed to working toward a society where all God’s children are treated with dignity and respect and have equal protection under the law.”

All 66 clergy members’ names will be publicized Sunday in an advertisement in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle in commemoration of the Montana Pride weekend celebration of the state’s gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and allies.

The full list of clergy signing the statement of support and more information about the “Fair is Fair” campaign and *Donaldson and Guggenheim v. State of Montana* are available at [www.aclumontana.org](http://www.aclumontana.org)

###