

Midnight vows: Same-sex couples ring in new lives as law takes effect

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What is the status of same-sex marriage in the United States and do you consider this a civil rights issue?

(CNN) -- They've been a couple for two years and are eager to raise two children together. But it wasn't until Thursday that Holli Bartelt and Amy Petrich were allowed to legally wed.

They wasted no time.

They made plans to tie the knot one minute after a law permitting gay marriage went into effect in their home state of Minnesota.

At 12 a.m. Thursday, Minnesota and Rhode Island officially became the latest among 13 states -- plus the District of Columbia -- to allow same-sex marriage. Both states passed applicable laws in May.

Seven more states allow civil unions between same-sex couples, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), but six of those have laws against gay marriage.

Marriage is defined by law as a "relationship between a man and a woman" in 29 states.

Only New Mexico has no laws pertaining to same-sex marriage or civil unions on the books, NCSL says.

The slow but steady rise in the number of states allowing same-sex couples to wed is a sign that the United States is gradually marching toward the acceptance of these unions.

According to a May Gallup Poll, 53% of Americans now think same-sex unions should be legal. In 1996, that number was 27%.

In June, the Supreme Court gave proponents of same-sex marriage two major victories. It [struck down parts of the Defense of Marriage Act](#) that denied the same benefits provided to heterosexual spouses to legally married same-sex couples, and [allowed same-sex marriages to resume in California](#).

Going to the chapel

Bartelt and Petrich exchanged vows at 12:01 a.m. at the wedding chapel in the Mall of America in Bloomington, a particularly romantic spot for the two.

They recently got engaged in a photo booth there, a statement from the mall said.

They strode to the altar together decked out in white. Petrich wore a pant suit, Bartelt a long gown.

Bartelt's two children, ages 9 and 10, joined them, wearing blue and orange colors, which stand for marriage equality.

The were pronounced "wife and wife."

They were among the first same sex couples to marry in the state -- but they had competition.

[California court denies bid to halt same-sex marriages in state](#)

Midnight matrimony

Right at midnight, Mayor R.T. Rybak of Minneapolis presided over the unions of 42 same-sex couples at city hall, [CNN affiliate KARE](#) reported.

The couples were scheduled to be at the altar early, so Rybak could move the ceremony along in time for the first wedding vows to be over right when the clock struck 12.

The mayor studied up on the couples beforehand to keep things personal during the mass wedding.

"I never want to have a day where it feels like a conveyor belt of love," Rybak told [CNN affiliate WCCO](#).

In St. Paul, Reid Bordson and Paul Nolle joined the wave of midnight matrimony.

They have been a committed couple for 13 years and waited a long time for this moment. But for someone else, the wait may have felt even longer.

Bordson and Nolle are raising a 2-year-old daughter together.

"For her to know that we're able to be married like other families is a really big deal," Bordson told KARE, choking back tears.

Nolle reached for his hand.

Island wedding

In Rhode Island, the first marriages were planned for Thursday morning.

The sponsor of the state's same-sex marriage law, Sen. Donna Nesselbush, plans to be at Pawtucket City Hall to greet them, she told [CNN affiliate WPRI](#).

"As the only openly gay senator and as the prime sponsor of the bill in the Senate, (Thursday) is a day that I wish to remember both professionally and personally," she said.

She wants the day to be about love and commitment.