

# Florist reaches settlement with homosexual couple after wedding flap

OLYMPIA, Wash. (BP) – Barronelle Stutzman's defense of her religious liberty is over. The florist and owner of Arlene's Flowers reached a settlement with the homosexual couple who sued her because she would not design floral arrangements for their 2013 wedding.

Stutzman agreed to pay Rob Ingersoll and Curt Freed \$5,000, according to a release from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). "At age 77, it's time to retire and give my business to someone else," Stutzman wrote in a letter. "I've never had to compromise my conscience, or go against my faith."

Rather than violate her deeply-held religious beliefs when longtime customer Ingersoll sought her services for his wedding, Stutzman recommended other area florists.

Initially, the Washington state attorney general sued Stutzman. Ingersoll and Freed eventually joined the suit when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) became involved. The case has been argued and appealed for more than eight years and had recently been appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The settlement also includes Stutzman dropping of her appeal to the nation's highest court.

"ADF is proud to have represented Barronelle – and many of us have formed deep friendships with her," said Kristen Waggoner, ADF general counsel.

"She laid the groundwork that makes it possible for the Supreme Court to take a case like *303 Creative* and definitively protect the rights of creative professionals like Lorie Smith [and] Jack Phillips of Masterpiece Cakeshop – who

has now been sued for the third time – and many like them who have been victimized by officials demanding compliance with government orthodoxy.

“The Supreme Court needs to affirm the right of *all* Americans to speak and live consistent with their conscience,” she said.

*“From the beginning, I have asked no more than the freedom to act in accordance with my religious beliefs and personal convictions. I have treated those who persecuted me with respect, and with the assurance that I want for them the same freedom that I ask for myself.”*

*Barronelle Stutzman*

The ACLU says Ingersoll and Freed plan to donate the settlement money to the PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and to match it with personal funds.

“This is a case that Southern Baptists have been watching and praying over for years,” said Brent Leatherwood, interim president of Southern Baptists’ Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville. “While we welcome the fact a conclusion has been reached, meaning this difficult season has come to an end for Barronelle Stutzman, it does not excuse the offensive ways state and secular actors have targeted her with litigation.

“Thankfully, these attempts have not prevailed, and Barronelle’s conscience rights remain intact,” he said.

Stutzman wrote in her letter, “From the beginning, I have asked no more than the freedom to act in accordance with my religious beliefs and personal convictions. I have treated those who persecuted me with respect, and with the assurance that I want for them the same freedom that I ask for myself.”

She said she hopes her case will draw attention to the danger “this growing intolerance poses for all of us.”