

Dr. Stephen Haines

Two Rivers Community Church
Englewood, OH 45322

Testimony

February 19, 2017

I am now 70 year old, and have been retired from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for one year. My wife and I served 30 years overseas in Costa Rica, Colombia, Ukraine, and Paraguay.

I have also served as a pastor and associate pastor both in the U. S. and overseas. I was ordained to the ministry in 1977 by Potomac Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia.

In more than 40 years of ministry I have performed numerous weddings. In every case I met with the couple in various meetings prior to the ceremony to ascertain their readiness for marriage and their suitability for marriage. In some circumstances I declined to perform the ceremony because of conscience. I could not reconcile my own faith commitment to the Lord with the perceived spiritual condition of the couple planning to marry. I declined to perform the ceremony for my own brother at his first marriage.

The faith commitments of both the pastor and his/her congregation should always be respected. To force someone, under threat of legal charges, to perform a ceremony that violates the pastor's personal convictions is to weaken and undermine his/her own standing within the church that the pastor serves. In the long run, using civil law to compel practices that violate the conscience of pastor or church will weaken one of the institutions that strengthen the moral resolve and ethical commitment of a society.

Church and/or pastoral sanction of a marriage is not a requirement in any state in the union. Furthermore, ready access to ordained clergy and related churches that do support gay marriage is available. Those members of the clergy and those churches that do not believe in gay marriage should not be forced to participate in solemnities that appear to give God's blessings to such unions.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in an appropriate democratic expression of opinion.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stephen M. Haines