



## **T-shirts now in religious liberty battle's spotlight**

Art Toalston

February 15, 2018

And now it's T-shirts.

Blaine Adamson, owner of Hands On Originals apparel company, has become another figure in the battle over religious liberty for refusing to print T-shirts for a gay pride festival because of his Christian beliefs.

For Blaine Adamson, "the darkest hour was right after everything hit the media" over his company's refusal to print T-shirts for a gay pride festival. "And I went home, and my wife and I basically told the Lord, 'Whatever the cost, we're willing to serve. We're willing to stand.'"

In 2014, Adamson's small business in Lexington, Ky., was charged by the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission with violating the city's fairness ordinance for refusing to print T-shirts in 2012 ordered by Lexington's Gay and Lesbian Services Organization.

Both the Fayette Circuit Court and the Kentucky Court of Appeals subsequently ruled in favor of Hands On Originals before an appeal was filed with the Kentucky Supreme Court in January.

The case, which is still in the briefing stages with the state's high court, has drawn more than a dozen friend-of-the-court briefs for Hands On Originals, including a Feb. 7 filing by Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin.

Also filing friend-of-the-court briefings Feb. 7 were the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Adamson is being represented by Alliance Defending Freedom, a key legal organization advocating for the right of people to freely live out their faith.

Bevin's amicus brief argues that "Kentucky is, and always has been, a land of freedom of conscience, where citizens can live without fear that the government will prescribe what beliefs and speech are orthodox and require conformity therewith."

The drafters of Kentucky's constitution specifically rejected any limitation of freedom of conscience, Bevin's brief argues, and that requiring Hands On to print T-shirts promoting homosexuality violates the freedom-of-conscience guarantees enshrined in the commonwealth's constitution.

Steve Pitt, Bevin's general counsel, said, "For over two centuries, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has protected its citizens' right to act according to their conscience," the Kentucky Today news website of the state Baptist convention reported.

"This important case, which has attracted national attention, tests whether Kentucky's history of safeguarding freedom of conscience will continue or be curtailed," Pitt said. "Requiring Hands On's owners to engage in speech with which they disagree is a violation of their freedom of conscience, and we are hopeful that the Kentucky Supreme Court will reaffirm this bedrock of Kentucky's constitutional charter."

The U.S. Supreme Court has a case in front of it involving a baker who refused to make a cake for the wedding of a gay couple in Colorado. A ruling is expected before the court's term ends in late June or early July; the case is *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. Numerous other religious liberty cases across the country involve other bakers and wedding photographers and florists.

Adamson, in a 2017 video posted by ADF at YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tod9HQis65o>), recounted:

"Hands On Originals is a promotional printing company. We'll work with anybody, regardless of who they are or what belief system they have. It's just all based on the message. And if the message is something that conflicts with my conscience, it's just not something I can print.

"Five years ago, we were approached by a customer who asked us to print a message that conflicted with my conscience, so we respectfully declined the order, and I had another print shop who would print the same job at the same price. But they ended up going to our local government and they filed a lawsuit against us to try to get us, in the future, to print shirts that had a message that would conflict with my faith.

"For me, the darkest hour was right after everything hit the media. And I went home, and my wife and I basically told the Lord, 'Whatever the cost, we're willing to serve. We're willing to stand.'"

Adamson said ADF made contact with him "and they just basically said, 'Look, we'll take care of everything.'

"Since then, it has been a legal battle for our company. We've had to deal with customer backlash, media, the mayor coming out against us. I've definitely wrestled with the idea that we could lose our business. ... because if the government forces me to print messages that go against my conscience, then I've gotta leave the industry."

In a commentary posted at the Daily Signal, a website of the conservative Heritage Foundation, Adamson wrote last September, "For all the years that I've been running my business, Hands on

Originals, I've happily served and employed people of all backgrounds, of all walks of life.... I have gay customers and employ gay people. For example, we have printed materials for a local band called Mother Jane whose lead singer is a lesbian. That was never a problem for us because ... we'll work with everyone, but we can't print all messages."

While Adamson's small business has printed orders for such organizations as The Gospel Coalition, he wrote in the Daily Signal that he has declined other orders such as "a simple black shirt with white text that read, 'Homosexuality is a sin.' ... I don't think that's how Jesus would have handled the issue; Jesus would have balanced grace and truth."

"All we are asking for is that the government not force us to promote messages against our convictions. Everyone should have that freedom.," Adamson wrote.

Also submitting friend-of-the-court briefs for Hands On Originals, according to the Alliance Defending Freedom, are 10 states, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, American Center for Law and Justice, Tyndale House Publishers, Cato Institute, Jews for Religious Liberty and CatholicVote.org.

The case is Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission v. Hands On Originals, case number 2017-SC-000278.