

Latest News of Significant Individual Cases

The following are summaries of the story so far in some of the significant recently-resolved or still unresolved cases involving Christians responding to a wide range of legal, police or disciplinary action against them. Seeking a remedy by means of litigation can be a lengthy process – sometimes taking several years for a closure to be reached. All cases mentioned are being handled by the Christian Legal Centre.

Doctor’s foundational Bible belief ruled “incompatible with human dignity”

An experienced Christian doctor who was forced out of his job working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) after refusing to use transgender pronouns has lost his Employment Tribunal case. The tribunal ruled that his belief in the Biblical view of what it is to be male and female was “incompatible with human dignity”.

The judgment will have serious ramifications for Christian professionals and indeed all medical professionals, as the judgment dictates the language that professionals must use in the workplace. The judgment is also contrary to scientific reality and is likely to undermine freedom of speech in the workplace.

Sacked for refusing to use transgender pronouns

In July 2019, Dr David Mackereth, 56, a doctor for 26 years in the NHS, challenged the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at Birmingham Employment Tribunal after he was sacked from his job for refusing to identify clients by their chosen gender instead of their biological sex.

Counsel representing Dr Mackereth, Christian Legal Centre’s Michael Phillips, argued that the DWP discriminated against Dr Mackereth because of his Christian beliefs, including: “His belief in the truth of the Bible, and in particular, the truth of Genesis 1:27: ‘So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.’ It follows that every person is created by God as either male or female. A person cannot change their sex/gender at will. Any attempt at, or pretence of, doing so, is pointless, self-destructive, and sinful.”

The DWP’s case against Dr Mackereth, however, claimed that his belief in Genesis 1:27 was not a belief protected by the Equality Act 2010 and was a “mere opinion”.

Foundational Christian beliefs not “worthy of respect”

In the judgment Judge Perry puts “transgender rights” ahead of Christian freedoms and in effect forces Christians to use compelled speech in order to not offend those who believe in gender-fluidity.

The judge found that Dr Mackereth “holds to the principles of the Great Reformation of the 16th Century including a commitment to the supremacy of the Bible as the infallible, inerrant word of God as his final authority in all matters of faith and practice”. That includes his belief in the truth of Genesis 1:27, and the logical consequence: scepticism about transgenderism and refusal to use transgender pronouns.

The judge ruled that “belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals” (para 197). He continued that, “in so far as those beliefs form part of his wider faith, his wider faith also does not satisfy the requirement of being worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others” (para 232).

In the Bible, Genesis 1:27 establishes the foundational doctrine that human beings are made, male and

female, in the image of God and therefore of great value and dignity. The teaching is foundational to Judeo-Christian thought and was highly influential in political history as concepts of tolerance and human rights were first developed.

The ruling will have profound ramifications, excluding foundational Christian beliefs from the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination law. The ruling puts a belief in the Bible on a par with the racist and neo-Nazi ideologies which have been held to be “not worthy of respect in democratic society” in earlier judicial decisions.

“Would you call a six-foot bearded man, madam?”

At proceedings in July, giving evidence, Dr Mackereth had said that he was asked in a conversation with his line manager: “If you have a man six-foot-tall with a beard who says he wants to be addressed as ‘she’ and ‘Mrs’, would you do that?” Dr Mackereth, who now works as an NHS emergency doctor in Shropshire, said that in good conscience he could not do this and said that his contract was subsequently terminated over his refusal.

He told the tribunal he was suspended the following month after being “interrogated” by his boss, James Owen, for refusing to “call any six-foot-tall bearded man ‘madam’ on his whim”. The medic claims he was told he was “overwhelmingly likely” to lose his job unless he agreed. Dr Mackereth left his role on 25 June 2018, after an email exchange with Mr Owen in which he was instructed to follow the “process as discussed in your training”.

The email read: “If however, you do not want to do this, we will respect your decision and your right to leave your contract.” Dr Mackereth replied: “I am a Christian and in good conscience cannot do what the DWP is requiring of me.”

“Freedom of speech has died in this country”

Dr Mackereth gave evidence that he did not resign his position and was the victim of direct discrimination and harassment.

He argued that he was dismissed, *“not because of any realistic concerns over the rights and sensitivities of transgender individuals, but because of my refusal to make an abstract ideological pledge”*.

Responding to the judge’s ruling, Dr Mackereth said: *“I am not alone in being deeply concerned by this outcome. Staff in the NHS, even those who do not share my Christian convictions, are also disturbed as they see their own freedom of thought and speech being undermined by the judges’ ruling.*

No doctor, or researcher, or philosopher, can demonstrate or prove that a person can change sex. Without intellectual and moral integrity, medicine cannot function and my 30 years as a doctor are now considered irrelevant compared to the risk that someone else might be offended.

I believe that I have to appeal in order to fight for the freedom of Christians – and any other NHS member of staff – to speak the truth. If they cannot, then freedom of speech has died in this country, with serious ramifications for the practice of medicine in the UK.”

Compelled speech for first time in English law

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

“This is an astonishing judgment and one that if upheld will have seismic consequences not just for the NHS and for Christians, but anyone in the work place who is prepared to believe and say that we are created male and female.

It is deeply disturbing that this is the first time in the history of English law that a judge has ruled that free citizens must engage in compelled speech. Here Judge Perry has ruled that Christianity is not protected by the Equality Act or the ECHR, unless it is a version of Christianity which recognises transgenderism and rejects a belief in Genesis 1:27.

The teaching of Genesis 1:27 is repeated throughout the Bible, including by Jesus Christ himself. It is fundamental to establishing the dignity of every human person but is, in a bizarre ironic twist, being branded as incompatible with that dignity.

No protection is given to beliefs 'incompatible with human dignity' and 'not worthy of respect in a democratic society'. In the past this definition has only applied to the most extreme beliefs, such as those of Holocaust deniers, neo-Nazis, and similar. It is quite shocking for the judge to put the belief in the Bible in the same category now.

This is one of the most concerning rulings we have ever seen at the Christian Legal Centre and we are determined to continue to fight for justice in this case, not just for Dr Mackereth and Bible-believing Christians, but for everyone who believes that we are born male and female.

People who suffer from gender dysphoria must be treated lovingly, but not telling the truth to these vulnerable people is unloving. Men cannot become women nor can women become men."

Actress sues theatre and agency after being sacked for citing Bible on Facebook four years ago

A Christian West End actress who was removed from a lead role in a musical for a four-year-old Facebook post that cited the Bible, is set to take a theatre and her agency to court for breach of contract and for anti-Christian discrimination.

The case, supported by the Christian Legal Centre, raises the question of whether Bible-believing Christians have the freedom to hold and express mainstream Biblical views in public, without fear of losing their livelihoods. It also raises the issue of whether, as a society, we are allowed to hold and express opinions and interpretations of art, literature and drama in ways that are contrary to LGBT ideology.

Given lead role in *The Color Purple*

On 14 March 2019, Miss Seyi Omooba, 25, from East London, had been given a lead role as Celie in Leicester Curve and Birmingham Hippodrome's co-production of the award-winning musical *The Color Purple*, based on Alice Walker's classic American novel. The casting was announced the same day that Miss Omooba went with her father, Pastor Ade Omooba, an eminent international Christian campaigner and Christian Concern's co-founder, to Buckingham Palace to receive his MBE.

Miss Omooba had developed her raw talent from a young age, singing gospel in church and studying performing arts at Anglia Ruskin University. She had already built up a portfolio of performances, among them parts in *Hadestown* at the National Theatre, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Spring Awakening*, and had played the role of Nettie in the Cadogan Hall production of *The Color Purple*.

In a review of her full debut in the West End musical, *Ragtime*, Miss Omooba was described as: "jaw-droppingly good, and her ferocious gospel vocals... pin you to your seat. This is her professional debut, and she's someone to watch." In the production of *A Color Purple* at Cadogan Hall, Miss Omooba's depiction of the character of Nettie was described as capturing the "very heart of her character".

Facebook post from 2014

After the cast was announced, however, on 15 March, Miss Omooba was tagged on Twitter by another West End performer, Aaron Lee Lambert, who is not known to her. With a screenshot of a Facebook post that Miss Omooba had posted four-and-a-half-years ago on 18 September 2014, Mr Lambert wrote:

"@seyiomooba Do you still stand by this post? Or are you happy to remain a hypocrite? Seeing as you've now been announced to be playing an LGBTQ character, I think you owe your LGBTQ peers an explanation. Immediately."

In September 2014, Miss Omooba was a 20-year-old student whose acting career had not even started. She regularly posts about her faith online without any issue, and in this post had written on her personal Facebook page, in the context of the government introducing same-sex marriage legislation, that:

"Some Christians have completely misconceived the issue of Homosexuality, they have begun to twist the word of God. It is clearly evident in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 what the Bible says on this matter. I do not believe you can be born gay, and I do not believe homosexual practice is right, though the law of this land has made it legal doesn't mean it is right. I do believe that everyone sins and falls into temptation but it's by the asking of forgiveness, repentance and the grace of God that we overcome and live how God ordained us to. Which is that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24. God loves everyone, just because He doesn't agree with your decisions doesn't mean He doesn't love you. Christians we need to step up and love but also tell the truth of God's word. I am tired of lukewarm Christianity, be inspired to stand up for what you believe and the truth #our God is three in one #God (Father) #Jesus Christ (Son) #Holy Spirit."

Miss Omooba received the tweet from Mr Lambert while supporting a grieving friend, and despite being deeply shocked and intimidated, refused to be drawn into an online discussion on the issue.

Called the "n" word for citing the Bible

Calls for Miss Omooba to be removed from the cast followed, however, as well as online abuse which included her being called the "n" word.

Miss Omooba, who visibly prays before each show and wears a "Not Ashamed" of the gospel wristband, had accepted the lead role over Celie after originally auditioning for the character of Nettie, and disagrees with the interpretation that Celie is a lesbian character.

The character of Celie in *The Color Purple* has intrigued readers and critics since it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 after its publication the previous year. Set in the Deep South of the US, its main character, Celie, leads a life of immense struggle at the hands of men, until she briefly finds comfort and friendship with another woman. It was made into a Hollywood film in 1985 and starred Whoopi Goldberg, who described the film and the character of Celie as:

"Not really about feminism, or lesbianism, despite the fact that Celie finds out about love and tenderness from another woman... It has nothing to do with lesbianism. It has to do with, her eyes are opened, now she understands."

Steven Spielberg, who directed the film, was pressed in 2011 on whether today he would make the "kiss" scene in the film more explicit, but he said: "I wouldn't, no. That kiss is consistent with the tonality, from beginning to end, of *The Color Purple* that I adapted."

On 15 March, Miss Omooba received a call from her agency, Global Artists, telling her that pressure was mounting for her to be removed from the show because of her views. She was told that only through retracting the comments and publicly apologising would she be able to continue under their management, which she refused to do.

Fake news article led to contract termination

Leicester Curve Theatre and the Birmingham Hippodrome then released a statement on 21 March which led to Miss Omooba's contract being terminated. The theatres claimed in their statement that: "The play and production are seeking to promote freedom and independence and to challenge views, including the view that homosexuality is a sin."

That same day, Miss Omooba was now told by her agency "not to make public comment at this point", without informing and consulting them, which Miss Omooba agreed to do. However, on the 24 March, a blogger based in Nigeria published a fake news article on the story which included a fake quote from Ms Omooba made "through her publicist", saying that homosexuality is an aberration and that she stood by her Facebook post from 2014. The blogger wrote clearly that the article was "clearly satirical and should not to be taken seriously".

Nonetheless, this article was enough for the agency to send Miss Omooba a brief email telling her that she would now be released from their services, and the news appeared in the media within hours – before Miss Omooba had the opportunity to explain that the article had nothing to do with her, which she was only able to do the following day. Even though Miss Omooba chased the agency for a response, it was not until 18 April that they responded saying their decision was final as their confidence in her had been "irretrievably eroded". This was despite Miss Omooba being entitled to two months' notice.

Told to abandon entire upbringing

Since then Miss Omooba has tried to find work in the theatre profession but appears to have been blacklisted. One agency she approached for roles even told her that: "Homophobia is illegal. It is not a matter of faith." and added that the agency would help her once she came "to her senses on this matter" and when she had "got away from the ideologies of your entire upbringing".

The theatre has attempted to avert Miss Omooba's lawsuit by offering to pay her the full wages she would have received for playing in the performance. However, Miss Omooba has rejected that offer, and will ask the Employment Tribunal for a formal and public ruling that the theatre has acted unlawfully and discriminated against her because of her Christian beliefs.

Told to choose between her beliefs or career

Miss Omooba said: "When I received the email that I was going to be dropped from the cast, I was heartbroken. The theatre has offered me a financial settlement, but I am not in this for the money. For me it's not about the money or my face – it was about telling and expressing Celie's story, as I interpret it as a performer, because that is what I love to do.

For me, Celie is a complex character. I do not think it is possible to clearly define that she is a 'Christian' or a 'lesbian'. Celie has to grow up so fast, but in her mind she is just a child trying to navigate through and overcome the many trials and tribulations that life throws at her.

The people who know me, know that I have no hatred as a result of my faith; only love. Yet the theatre and the agency gave me the choice of either losing my career or renouncing my faith. I could not do this, not even to save the career that means so much to me.

I want our society to be more open to both sides of the debate and to accept that many Christians do not believe homosexual practice is right. Even though there are differences in belief, we need to be more loving to each other, we need to understand each other's struggles – that is what my post in September 2014 was all about. No one should be treated as I have been because of expressing these beliefs."

Blacklisted for expressing what the Bible says

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *“What happened to Seyi Omooba was cruel and has damaged the career of a highly talented young artist for a Facebook post she had made four years ago.*

Here you have a young Christian woman, with what critics have described as having a ‘ferocious’ talent, being sacked and blacklisted for expressing what the Bible says about homosexual practice, the need for forgiveness and God’s love for all humanity. This is another in a string of cases involving Christians being hounded out of their careers because they love Jesus.

The presence of a homosexuality theme in the play is a very poor excuse for discriminating against a Christian actress. If we were talking about a lesbian actress playing a Christian character, nobody would dare to suggest that her sexual lifestyle would make her unsuitable, and that you could fire her without breaking the law.

This story sends a chilling message to Christians, not only in the theatre profession but across our society, that if you express and hold mainstream Biblical views, you will be punished and will lose your career if you do not immediately renounce your beliefs.

This cannot go unchallenged and we are determined to fight for justice in this case.

Met Police offers damages to Nigerian street preacher after wrongful arrest

A Christian street preacher has been offered £2,500 in exemplary damages from the Metropolitan Police in relation to his false arrest, imprisonment and unlawful detention.

In February, a video showing the aggressive arrest of Pastor Oluwole Ilesanmi (64) was watched by millions around the world, prompting outrage. Officers were shown forcibly handcuffing the preacher, claiming that he was breaching the peace and had made “Islamophobic comments”.

A petition was quickly launched calling on the Home Secretary to investigate the guidance and training given to police officers nationwide on the freedom to preach in public.

Marking the resolution of his case, Pastor Oluwole will deliver the petition, now with over 38,000 signatures, this Tuesday (30 July) at 10.30am at the Home Office to the new Home Secretary Priti Patel, as well as to London City Hall. The Christian Legal Centre, which has assisted Pastor Oluwole throughout the case, has written to chief constables across the country, asking them to uphold the freedom of street preachers to speak freely about Jesus Christ in public. This letter will be delivered on Tuesday to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick.

“Exceptional humiliation and degradation”

On 23 February 2019, Pastor Oluwole was preaching outside Southgate Underground station. A member of the public, Mrs Ambrosine Shitrit, saw a tall, hooded man squaring up to a street preacher. Thinking that the preacher was about to be assaulted, she pulled over and started filming with her phone.

Two police officers shortly arrived in response to a 999 call, claiming that the preacher had been “Islamophobic”. The hooded man, who had identified himself as a Muslim, left the immediate vicinity and the police began asking the preacher to leave the area for supposedly “breaching the peace”.

The video, which shortly afterwards went viral online, shows Pastor Oluwole explaining his freedom to continue preaching to the officers, who arrest him, forcibly handcuffing him and snatching his Bible. Pastor Oluwole was then driven five miles away from the scene, beyond the area he could use his Oyster card, and left with no means to pay for his ticket home. Police initially denied that this had happened, later changing their story after evidence backed the pastor's claim.

Motivated by the desire not to see other street preachers treated the way he was, Pastor Oluwole authorised the Christian Legal Centre to write a pre-action letter to the Metropolitan Police. In response, the police force has agreed the sum of £2,500 in damages, including general damages for false imprisonment in the sum of £500, plus £1,000 for the exceptional humiliation and degradation and £1,000 for the mental trauma caused to Pastor Oluwole.

Petition to be delivered

Following the initial incident, questions were asked by MPs, peers and London Assembly members concerning Pastor Oluwole's treatment. A Christian Concern petition was also launched, supporting Pastor Oluwole and calling for the Home Secretary to urgently investigate the training given to police officers nationwide to ensure that they protect the freedom to preach in public.

The Christian Legal Centre will also deliver a letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, which is being sent to every chief constable in the country that calls for many of the misconceptions about street preaching freedoms to be addressed through specialist training.

The letter explains:

'Many street preachers have found themselves in trouble. This has included being arrested, and prosecuted, despite the law recognising their rights to both manifest and express their religious beliefs. None of the clients we have assisted has been convicted; accordingly, that might suggest the criminal justice system is working appropriately; however, the problem is that many officers simply do not understand the interplay between the public order legislation and the right to freedom of speech.'

Christians and freedom of speech must be protected

Pastor Oluwole said: *"I am glad that the police have recognised that it was not right to arrest me for preaching from the Bible. It was traumatic being arrested and left many miles from my home. But God was always with me and even though I was left in a place I did not know, I was determined to get back to Southgate and start preaching the gospel again.*

When I came to the UK it was a free Christian country, but now preachers like me are being arrested for speaking the truth. Christians and freedom of speech must be protected, especially by the government and police. I hope this recognition of fault can lead to more Christians being protected and the police gaining greater insight into what it means to lawfully proclaim the Word of God on our streets.

I am amazed and so grateful for the support I have received from people across the world and the Christian Legal Centre."

Critiquing ideas is often motivated by love and not hate

Andrea Williams, Chief Executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *"Street preaching has a long and honoured history in the UK. In many ways it is symbolic of the kind of freedoms we have treasured in this nation.*

However, despite laws that theoretically support the freedom to preach in public, in practice, police officers are quick to silence preachers at the first suggestion that a member of the public is offended. Freedom of speech means that each one of us needs to be able to critique all religions and ideas without immediately

being labelled and silenced as offensive. Critiquing ideas is often motivated by love for others and not hate. The result of this also chills free speech through self-censorship.

While the extent of the public outrage at Pastor Oluwole's arrest was unique, what he faced from the police and members of the public was not. We are constantly supporting street preachers who are being silenced and penalised on our streets by the police, and their poor treatment and the injustice they face is too quickly forgotten.

So whilst we are pleased that the police have agreed to pay compensation for what has happened to Pastor Oluwole, we now need to see tangible action from the government, the police and the Mayor of London, offering assurances that Christian street preachers are free to preach the gospel within the law without fear of prosecution."

Victory for Felix Ngole in watershed ruling for Christians and freedom of speech

In a landmark judgment in the case of Felix Ngole, the Court of Appeal has upheld the rights of Christians to freely express their faith and overturned a High Court decision. The crucial outcome represents a major development of the law which results in Christians now having the legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers.

This is the first Court of Appeal judgment regarding freedom of expression of Biblical views which sets limits on the rights of professional regulators to limit free speech on social media; the judgment will be an authoritative statement of the law which is likely to be relied upon in hundreds of current and future cases.

A major development in the law

Felix Ngole was expelled in 2016 from his course at the University of Sheffield where he was studying to become a social worker after quoting Bible verses on Facebook that were deemed critical of homosexuality. In 2015, he had entered into a discussion on Facebook over the imprisonment of Kim Davies, the Kentucky marriage registrar who was jailed for refusing to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples. In a robust online debate, views were exchanged on same-sex marriage, many openly discursive of the Christian faith. Devout Christian, Ngole, quoted Bible verses affirming the traditional Christian opposition to same-sex-marriage and of the sinful nature of homosexual activity.

Some months later, Felix Ngole was anonymously reported to the University of Sheffield; and subsequently was disciplined in a Fitness to Practice hearing. He was informed that he had brought the profession into disrepute and was dismissed from the course, losing his career.

It was the university that lacked insight

The university refused any compromise, arguing that Felix Ngole "lacked insight" into the effect of his posts. The expression of his Christian views was found to be unacceptable by the university; and, in effect, he was required to stay silent on pain of losing his career. Felix Ngole felt he could not surrender his faith.

The University of Sheffield held that he was not permitted to express the Christian viewpoint on same-sex marriage or homosexual activity in any public forum, even including a church. He could never express his viewpoint in a work situation even if directly asked.

The Court of Appeal held rather that it was the University that was lacking insight and not Felix Ngole; further the Court of Appeal lavished praise on Christian Concern's Pastor Ade Omooba for his good sense in seeking "caution" and compromise.

Felix had never acted in a discriminatory fashion

The Court of Appeal condemned the position of the University whereby people would live in fear if private expressions of views were overheard; and could be reported by anonymous complainants. The Court of Appeal held that: "The mere expression of religious views about sin does not necessarily connote discrimination." It was also recognised that Felix Ngole had never been shown to have acted in a discriminatory fashion.

Felix Ngole was represented by the leading religious rights barrister, Paul Diamond, who argued against the misuse of professional disciplinary processes to silence speech you disagree with. This case will have significant implications not just for Christian free speech, but in relation to all free speech. For example, comments made by people on social media (often many years ago) have been arbitrarily used to penalise viewpoints that people dislike or disagree with, with a silencing effect on free speech.

"My personal loss is gain for future Christians"

Felix Ngole said:

"This is great news, not only for me and my family, but for everyone who cares about freedom of speech, especially for those working in or studying for caring professions. As Christians we are called to serve others and to care for everyone, yet publicly and privately we must also be free to express our beliefs and what the Bible says without fear of losing our livelihoods.

I am thankful to the judges for recognising that I did not discriminate against anyone and that it was not I who was entrenched, lacking insight or disproportionate in my approach to the issue, but the University of Sheffield.

I have suffered tremendously as a result of how I was treated by the University of Sheffield and I feel that four years of my life have been taken away from me. Despite all this, I feel overwhelming joy that what I have lost will be so much gain to Christians today and in the future as a result of this important ruling for freedom. I would also like to thank the Christian Legal Centre and Paul Diamond for supporting me."

A message of freedom

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: *"This is a watershed case for Christians and a resounding victory for freedom of speech. We are delighted that the Court of Appeal has seen the importance of this case and made a ruling that accords with common sense. It is shocking that the University sought to censor discussion of the Bible in this way, and we hope this sends out a message of freedom across all universities and professions that Christians and others should be allowed to express their views without fear of censorship or discipline.*

Felix Ngole is a hero, and he and his courageous family have taken a stand for freedom in this case so that we and future generations of Christians do not have to. His case has always been one of the most disturbing and important cases the Christian Legal Centre has faced and if the judges had not made this ruling, the ramifications for Christian professionals across society would have been significant.

Due to Felix's sacrifice, Christians and others now know that it is their legal right to express Biblical views on social media or elsewhere without fear for their professional careers. This is a major development of the law and must be upheld and respected in current and future Christian freedom cases.

Despite this victory, this is not the end of Felix's fight for justice. He must now go back to a University of Sheffield panel who will judge, in light of this outcome, his fitness to practice as a social worker. Full justice must be served and the university held to account so that this kind and compassionate man can finally work in a job that reflects his education and his ability, professionally and as a person. Our communities and the most vulnerable in our society need more Christian professionals like Felix, not fewer."

Christian school worker sacked for sharing concerns about sex education

A Christian school worker is to challenge a Gloucestershire school academy's decision to dismiss her for gross misconduct. She was dismissed after she shared with friends two Facebook posts that raised concerns about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at another school in the same village – her own child's Church of England primary school.

Two schools

Kristie Higgs, aged 43, a mother of two children, has been working at the academy – Farmor's School in Fairford, Gloucestershire – for the past six years as a pastoral assistant with an exemplary record. Yet, after one anonymous person saw two of Kristie's personal Facebook posts, which shared concerns about sex education lessons at her own child's primary school, she was reported to the academy headteacher with a claim that her posts were "homophobic and prejudiced to the LGBT community". Even though the posts were only visible to her friends, Mrs Higgs was subsequently sacked.

Mrs Higgs was told at a hearing that, for holding and sharing her views, she "may exert influence over vulnerable pupils who may end up in isolation" and was therefore deemed no longer suitable to work with children.

Two Facebook posts

With reference to her child's primary school, Kristie Higgs, using her personal Facebook account under her maiden name, had shared two posts. The first began with her writing in capital letters: "Please read this they are brainwashing our children!" "Please sign this petition, they have already started to brainwash our innocent wonderfully created children and it's happening in our local primary school now." The rest of the post, written by another mother, highlighted that a government consultation on proposals to make RSE mandatory for children as young as four was coming to a close, and urged its readers to sign a nationwide petition calling on the government to uphold the rights of parents to have children educated in line with their religious beliefs.

The petition, subsequently signed by over 115,000 people, was debated in parliament, ironically under a government protocol for freedom of speech and for fostering closer links between public concerns and parliament in an open democracy. This mother wrote conveying that she felt that some aspects of the proposed RSE syllabus, especially children's books with transgender themes, were not right for pupils at her own child's Church of England primary school, and she wanted other parents to be able to make informed decisions. Mrs Higgs shared this in her post.

In the second post, Mrs Higgs shared an article from Judybeth.com on the rise of transgender ideology in children's books in American schools and added her own comment: "This is happening in our primary schools now".

These posts, sharing with friends her concern for her child's primary school, were reported to the academy where Mrs Higgs was working. The person who reported it remains anonymous.

Investigation and dismissal

After an investigation, the academy concluded that Mrs Higgs would be dismissed for: "illegal discrimination", "serious inappropriate use of social media", and "online comments that could bring the school into disrepute and damage the reputation of the school". However, the conclusions by the academy were unfounded.

In the conclusion to Mrs Higgs' hearing, the academy admitted in writing that: "*Regarding bringing the*

school into disrepute... we agree that there is no direct evidence that as a matter of fact that the reputation of the school has been damaged to date."

Furthermore, despite the clearly religious context, with one of the Facebook posts specifically mentioning Mrs Higgs' views on Christian teaching and that "freedom of belief would be destroyed", the academy claimed: "We concluded that no action was taken because of your religion. The disciplinary occurred for reasons other than your religion."

The academy added: "*As an inclusive employer, Farmor's school recognises and protects the statutory rights of its staff. Such rights however are not absolute and we are concerned that you did not demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the school's requirement to respect and tolerate the views of others and to role model such behaviour.*"

When Mrs Higgs asked whom she had discriminated against, she was told by the academy: "*you had not directly discriminated against one person, rather it was about the words you had used that could be perceived as discrimination*".

Legal action

Mrs Higgs, a member of Fairford Christian Fellowship, has been supported by her pastor, Gregory Husband, in this case and has turned to the Christian Legal Centre for help. She is now taking legal action against the academy for unfair dismissal and discrimination.

Mrs Higgs said: "*I have been punished for sharing concerns about Relationships and Sex Education. I hold these views because of my Christian beliefs, beliefs and views which are shared by hundreds of thousands of parents across the UK. My number one concern has always been the effect that learning about sex and gender in school will have on children at such a young age.*

As soon as the investigation into the posts began, I was repeatedly told: 'this is nothing to do with your religion'. That was clearly a legal tactic and of course it has everything to do with my religion. I am determined to fight this case and to stand for Christians and all parents across the country who are being silenced for sharing and holding these views."

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said: "*This case is about the freedom to hold Christian views about what it means to be human. Many Christians have faced pressure for expressing these views in the workplace before, but in this case, Kristie has been dismissed for sharing her views among friends on Facebook.*

What Kristie shared on Facebook simply reflects the genuine and justified concerns of a parent about the sexual ideology currently being imposed on her own children and thousands of children across the UK. Kristie has not only lost her job, but her whole career is now tarnished with the accusation that for holding these views she is now a danger to vulnerable children. This is despite an exemplary record at the school and in her work with youth in the wider community. If Kristie does not win this case, due to one complaint, she will never be able to work with children again.

Kristie is a kind, loving and courageous woman, and we will stand side by side with her as she fights for justice."

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