

Legal Defence Fund News

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Important new cases

Since The Christian Institute launched its Legal Defence Fund in December 2006 over 50 cases have been investigated by Institute staff.

We have decided to appoint a full-time lawyer with experience in litigation to work on religious liberty cases.

The Institute is currently involved in two cases that are particularly noteworthy. The first involves a local authority that is disciplining a Christian

registrar for opting out of registering civil partnerships.

The second involves the internet search engine, Google, which refused to place an advert about abortion from The Christian Institute because the Institute's website is "religious".

You can read about all these developments, plus more, inside.

[Read more inside](#)

We want to build on past success

SUCCESS: Roberts Case

Christian pensioners, Joe and Helen Roberts, were interrogated by police in 2005 because they had complained to their local council about public money funding 'gay rights' projects.

With the Institute's support the couple lodged formal complaints, but the police and council refused to accept they had acted wrongly.

After launching legal action, the couple eventually won an apology and damages from Lancashire Police and Wyre Borough Council. The police and the council also changed their procedures to avoid making the same mistake again.

The Roberts case was the first to be financed by the Institute's Legal Defence Fund.



SUCCESS: Northern Ireland Judicial Review

A High Court judge deleted badly worded 'harassment' provisions from a set of homosexual discrimination laws in Northern Ireland in a case financed by the Institute's Legal Defence Fund.

The Institute believed the harassment provisions threatened free speech and were introduced after a faulty consultation process. The judge agreed.

The court action also established a number of legal facts which will help Christians defend their religious liberty from the laws, known commonly as the 'Sexual Orientation Regulations'.

The Regulations outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods and services on the grounds of sexual orientation.



Litigation lawyer joins Institute staff

The Institute has appointed a litigation lawyer to our full-time staff to manage cases for our Legal Defence Fund.

Sam Webster has seven years of litigation experience. He is a committed Christian and has worked at a large national law firm.

He is a solicitor-advocate, which means he is a solicitor who is also qualified to represent clients as an advocate in the higher courts in England and Wales.

Since our Legal Defence Fund was launched, Institute staff

have investigated over 50 cases where there was a potential threat to a Christian's religious liberty.

Cases have involved Christians being disciplined at work because of their beliefs, evangelists being stopped from speaking about the gospel in public, and Christian organisations having funding cut because of their ethical values.

By God's grace we hope the appointment of Sam Webster will be a great asset to the Institute and to the cause of religious liberty in the UK.



Litigation lawyer, Sam Webster, joins our staff



'Homophobic' for displaying John 3:16 sign

A public body told a Christian employee that she had been unwise because she was seen holding up signs in public with the text of John 3:16 and other Bible verses. She held the signs as a Christian witness during a 'gay rights' march in her local town. Despite the fact that she was acting lawfully as a private individual outside of work time, she received an official letter implying she was homophobic. The Institute funded legal advice and the case was resolved to her satisfaction using her employer's internal appeals procedure.



Social worker succeeds in gay adoption opt out

A Christian social worker involved in adoption refused to place children with homosexual couples because of her professional judgment and her religious beliefs.

The social worker's employer threatened to force her to act against her conscience. She contacted The Christian Institute for help and our Legal Defence Fund financed legal advice for her.

After she followed the advice the local authority backed down and allowed her to opt out of placing children with homosexual couples.



Street preacher put in police van for reading Bible

A Christian street preacher in Manchester was silenced, taken into the back of a police van, questioned and detained for over an hour following a complaint of 'homophobia'. Miguel Hayworth had been publicly reading from the Bible, from Romans 1:17-32, when a member of the public complained. The officers later released Mr Hayworth and he was permitted to continue preaching. The Institute and Mr Hayworth will be meeting with Greater Manchester Police to discuss the religious liberty implications.

Registrar disciplined over civil partnerships

Registrar and Christian, Lillian Ladele, has asked an employment tribunal to determine whether Islington Council can compel her to perform civil partnerships against her conscience.

The law requires a local authority to register civil partnerships, but there is no legal obligation on it to compel all its registrars to provide this service. Many local authorities have allowed individual registrars to be exempted from undertaking civil partnership duties as a matter of personal conscience.

Miss Ladele has worked in the Registration Service for 15 years. In 2004, over a year before the Civil Partnership Act came into force, she alerted Islington Council to the conflict the new law could cause with her religious beliefs, if she was required to form same sex unions. For the past 2½ years she has not undertaken civil partnership duties, and the local authority has been able to provide its full range of civil partnership services. She has been honest and consistent throughout, giving Islington



Christian registrar, Lillian Ladele

Council every opportunity to affirm its commitment to accommodating religious beliefs; the Council says that accommodating her religious beliefs conflicts with its own equality policies.

The Christian Institute's Legal Defence Fund is backing Miss Ladele's case which will be heard by an employment tribunal in London soon.

Google faces court for refusing Institute's anti-abortion advert



The Christian Institute is suing the internet giant, Google, because it will not allow adverts for websites which combine "abortion and religious-related content".

The well-known search engine blocked a pro-life ad for The Christian Institute's website, christian.org.uk, because it is a "religious" website. Yet Google is happy to accept abortion ads from non-religious groups.

Lawyers for The Christian Institute say Google is treating

the Institute less favourably than other customers simply because of its religious beliefs. The Equality Act 2006 makes it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of religion in the provision of goods and services. Legal papers have been filed in the County Court.

A statement released by Google UK's media office said Google only allows ads for websites that are "factual" on abortion.

The Legal Defence Fund

The Christian Institute set up its Legal Defence Fund to cover the costs of legal action and the associated campaign work in cases of national importance for religious liberty.

We want to use the Legal Defence Fund to protect Christian religious freedom and restrain those who are unlawfully harassing and discriminating against Christian believers.

We also want to use the fund to intervene in strategic court cases where precedents could be set which may affect Christian religious liberty.

Law on tract distribution

Have you been told you need a licence from the council to hand out Christian tracts in public places like a town centre? You don't. If an official tries to stop you, he may be acting unlawfully. The Institute has produced a free guide which sets out your rights. Download it from our website (christian.org.uk) or telephone us on 0191 281 5664.

Law on public evangelism



Has a council official or a police officer stopped you from street preaching

or another form of public evangelism? They could be acting unlawfully. Laws on free speech and religious liberty are there to protect you.

The Open Air Mission obtained legal advice on public evangelism. With permission from OAM and its lawyer, the Institute has published the advice in a simple, handy format. Free copies can be obtained from our website (christian.org.uk) or by telephoning our office on 0191 281 5664.

Religious liberty in the workplace

The Christian Institute has teamed up with employment lawyer and Christian, Mark Jones, to produce a handy guide to religious liberty in the workplace.

Mark is head of employment law at Ormerods solicitors in London, where his advice is much sought-after by many 'household name' corporations.

He has assisted many Christian individuals who have suffered workplace discrimination because of their faith and advises a number of Christian organisations.

Already one of the Institute's most popular publications, this extremely practical booklet addresses many key issues faced by Christian employees:

- Can I send Christmas cards to my colleagues?
- Should I be allowed time off because of church services/Christmas/Easter?
- Can I wear a cross?



- I am being asked to wear an immodest uniform – can I refuse?
- Can I share my faith in the workplace?
- Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?
- I am worried I might be accused of being homophobic.
- Can I object if my employer has asked me to undertake duties that are contrary to my Christian conscience?
- My employer has asked me to provide a good or service for a client that is contrary to my Christian conscience.
- How should I convey my concerns?

Institute hosts legal conference

In February The Christian Institute hosted a conference for lawyers and church leaders on "Religious freedom and the law".

Leading lawyers and professionals working in the religious liberty sphere spoke to delegates about various areas of legislation including employment law, discrimination law, charity law and criminal law.

Guest speaker Jeff Ventrella, from American religious liberty group the Alliance Defense Fund, spoke passionately about what it means to be a Christian lawyer. It's more than having a fish symbol on your business

card and a few tracts in your office reception, he said.

Other speakers included solicitors Tom Ellis and Paul Conrathe. Mr Ellis acted for the Roberts in their litigation against Lancashire Police and Wyre Borough Council. Mr Conrathe has defended the free speech of religious broadcasters and street preachers.

The conference, financed by the Institute's Legal Defence Fund, helped inform lawyers and church leaders. It also proved to be a key networking opportunity which will benefit the Institute's religious liberty work.