

Christian Ministries Have Right to Hire Using Faith-Based Principles, Judge Rules

On the heels of last month's jury verdict for a Christian professor punished by his employer for his conservative and Christian speech, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) team is pleased to report yet another victory for religious liberty.

A former employee sued her Christian employer, a national campus ministry, claiming that its religious criteria for employment constituted discrimination in violation of federal law.

This is an issue that Christian employers have been fighting for years as they've worked to preserve the liberty to hire and fire employees—especially ministerial employees—using faith-based principles.

If federal antidiscrimination laws were applied to the hiring and firing of ministerial employees (for example, pastors and religious teachers), then no church or ministry would be able to safeguard the integrity of its message.

In an opinion issued Thursday, a federal court dismissed the plaintiff's claims, reaffirming that the First Amendment protects a "ministerial exception" to federal antidiscrimination laws. The court explained:

"Moreover, allowing a ministerial employee to pursue employment claims against her supervisor would allow the state to become involved in the strictly ecclesiastic decision of who shall minister to the faithful and to impose upon a religious group an unwanted minister—the very concerns that underlie the ministerial exception

“The Free Exercise Clause provides the freedom for Christian employers to apply their faith, while the Establishment Clause bars the government from getting entangled in religious decision-making.”

It’s a matter of common sense that Christian employers should be able to use biblical principles when deciding who shares the gospel, but it’s also a matter of constitutional law.

At the ACLJ, we’re thankful for the victory and thankful for a Bill of Rights that still has legal power to protect our first freedom.

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