

Christian Nurse Fired for Wearing Cross Necklace Vindicated in Court

An employment tribunal in the United Kingdom ruled Wednesday that the NHS Trust harassed and directly discriminated against a Christian nurse for wearing a cross necklace at work.

Represented by attorneys with the Christian Legal Centre, a legal ministry of the watchdog group Christian Concern, Mary Onuoha, was told by the tribunal that she had been victimized by Croydon Health Services NHS Trust.

As CBN News reported, Onuoha sued her former employer in October, alleging she was intimidated and forced out of her job because she wore a cross necklace.

'Treated Like a Criminal'

Onuoha, 61, had been a member of the hospital's staff for 18 years. She said she wore the cross for 40 years to represent her deep Christian faith.

Six years ago, Onuoha said she was told by her managers to remove the cross or face disciplinary action. She was told it was a health and safety risk and "must not be visible." Yet other clinical staff members at the hospital were permitted to wear jewelry, saris, turbans, and hijabs without being asked to remove them.

Only the cross and its owner were subject to being penalized, she claimed.

The issue escalated in August 2018 when her bosses at the hospital ordered her to remove the cross, saying it was a breach of the Trust's Dress Code and Uniform Policy and, therefore, a health risk to her and to patients.

After her refusal to comply, she was investigated, suspended from clinical duties and demoted to working as a receptionist.

Until her resignation in August 2020, Onuoha was constantly moved from one administrative role to the next, which she found deeply humiliating. She was also put under pressure and ordered not to tell anyone about what was happening to her. As she was unable to explain to any colleagues why this was happening, it took a lasting emotional toll on her.

“This has always been an attack on my faith,” Onuoha said. “My cross has been with me for 40 years. It is part of me, and my faith, and it has never caused anyone any harm. All I have ever wanted is to be a nurse and to be true to my faith.”

“I am a strong woman, but I have been treated like a criminal,” she continued. “I love my job, but I am not prepared to compromise my faith for it, and neither should other Christian NHS staff in this country.”

Humiliating, Hostile and Threatening Environment

In Wednesday’s ruling, the tribunal agreed with Onuoha, ruling the NHS Trust breached Onuoha’s human rights and created a “humiliating, hostile and threatening environment” for her.

Answering the Trust’s infection risk argument made during a hearing in October, the tribunal judge and two other members ruled, “Applying common sense, it is clear to us that the infection risk posed by a necklace of the sorts the Claimant used to wear when worn by a responsible clinician such as the Claimant, who complied with handwashing protocol, was very low.”

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