

Christian B&B Owners Seek to Go Over Supreme Court's Head in Human Rights Court

Two Christian guesthouse owners who have been accused of discriminating against same-sex couples by offering double rooms to married people only are appealing directly to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

Jeff and Sue Green from Powys in Wales believe they have no prospect of success in the British court system to allow them to conduct their business in line with their Christian conscience because of a recent Supreme Court ruling against Christian bed-and-breakfast owners.

The U.K. Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) challenged the Greens over their policy to provide double rooms to married couples only, having viewed the website for the guesthouse in Llandrindod Wells in Mid Wales. In its letter to the Greens, the EHRC claimed it had received a complaint about the guesthouse and warned them it was unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation.

The Greens have changed their policy to offer only single beds in all rooms, and the EHRC has now dropped the case.

However, the couple is seeking a hearing at the European Court because of the serious, long-term implications for Christians in the public sphere and because Jeff Green believes "recent U.K. equality legislation seems to be being used to undermine Christian faith and values."

Lawyers for the Greens will present arguments to the Strasbourg court that Christians should have protection in law to reflect their ethical beliefs in the running of a guest house, which is also their home.

Jeff Green, who is mayor of Llandrindod Wells, explains, "We believe that the rights outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights are an illusion in the U.K., so we have to go to Europe because we don't have a fighting chance in the U.K. courts."

Sue Green adds, "We have no recollection of ever refusing accommodation to same-sex couples, and the EHRC gives no evidence of a complaint in its letter. We have asked the EHRC to identify their evidence and source of complaint. It would be a matter of deep concern if a public authority is simply scanning websites with the intention of confronting Christian businesses which want to conduct their activities in line with their beliefs."

The Christian Legal Centre (CLC) is representing the Greens and is applying directly to the European Court on the basis that it cannot argue their case with any prospect of success in a British court.

British courts are bound by the Supreme Court decision in November, *Bull v. Preedy*, which dismissed the right of a Christian guesthouse owner to refuse to honor a homosexual couple's booking of a double room.

"This case is about people's freedom to live in line with their Christian faith and conscience in the public space," says Andrea Williams, CEO of the CLC. "It is disappointing that our courts do not recognize this, and this is why we are taking the case to Europe, where we hope to secure justice. It is ironic that the court in Strasbourg seems to understand the nature of Christian faith better than our own courts."

"Debate over sexual morality has been allowed to become a battlefield, and we are concerned about the attempt to clamp down and even exclude Christian beliefs on the issue from public life," she adds.

"In this case, no evidence has been presented to show that

anyone has been denied a service from the Greens,” Williams says. “It is disturbing that the couple have been forced to change their business model, have been targeted, and now face oppression from the state to deny how they live out their faith.

She concludes, “At the Christian Legal Centre, we have many cases in which Christians have lost jobs, faced discipline or been denied services. When will the state champion their cause?”