

Christian School Defends Decision to Fire Pregnant Teacher

A former teacher is suing Heritage Christian Academy for unlawfully firing her, but Liberty Institute says its client had every right to terminate Cathy Samford, who became pregnant out of wedlock.

The Rockwell, Texas, school let go Samford, who served in a ministerial position as a teacher and volleyball coach, because she admittedly engaged in inappropriate behavior when she had sex outside of marriage. This act violated the specific terms of her written employment contract and the school's written policies, including being a Christian role model.

"As the U.S Supreme Court has recognized, the First Amendment grants schools like HCA religious freedom to make decisions on whom to hire and fire based upon religious reasons," said Jeff Mateer, Liberty Institute general counsel. "The U.S. Supreme Court's 9-0 decision from earlier this year in *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC* makes clear that the First Amendment bars a school teacher's wrongful termination action based upon an alleged violation of employment discrimination laws asserted against a Christian school. Our Constitution protects Christian schools and other religious organizations like HCA from interference with their religious beliefs and practices."

Samford does not think it was right for the school to fire her because she got pregnant, and says their actions do not exemplify Christian values. "We all have different views and interpretations," she told CBN News. "It's not necessarily the Christian thing to do to throw somebody aside because of

those.”

But when Samford and all other employees were hired they agreed to a specific code of conduct, which included the following commitment: “The teacher will manifest, by precept and example, the highest Christian virtue and personal decorum, serving as a Christian role model both in and out of school to pupils; and as an example to parents and fellow faculty members in judgment, dignity respect and Christian living.”

HCA Headmaster Ron Taylor said the school had to let Samford go in order to be a good example to its students.

“We love Cathy and her children,” he stated. “We continue to pray for them. We want God’s very best for them. Unfortunately, her conduct left us with no alternative but to terminate her from her position.

“While we understand that in today’s world this situation in many workplaces would go totally unnoticed, that is not the case here at HCA. We take seriously our responsibility to instill Christian values in our students, and we cannot do that if we are not modeling that as their mentors.”