

Courthouse Cafe Owners Face Eviction for Playing Christian Music

Carlo Magno and his wife have been serving hot cups of coffee and warm muffins to judges and attorneys at the court house in Rancho Cucamonga, California, for the past 11 years.

Cafe Justice is a popular gathering spot for plaintiffs, defendants and staffers looking for a respite from the stress of the day. The walls of the cafe are decorated with inspirational Christian messages, and their music playlist includes several contemporary Christian songs.

Last October, the cafe's religious music and inspirational decor triggered microaggressions among local atheists.

A complaint was filed with the San Bernardino County Department of Real Estate Services, the cafe's landlord. A few weeks later the Magnos were notified that their location was going to be put up for public bid status.

"We were encouraged to include in our proposal for bid that we would not play our religious music or have any religious decorations," Mr. Magno told me.

In January, the county notified the Christian business owners their bid had been denied. The cafe had a stellar record, was beloved by court personnel and had always paid the rent on time.

"We have not broken any laws—federal or state—nor did we breach anything in our contract," Magno said.

It appears they are being punished for believing in God and owning a business.

“Every day we open our cafe, our endeavor is to be able to not just serve the best products that we can, but also encourage people who might be going through a rough time,” he told me.

Mr. Magno has hired an attorney to fight back and a number of judges and lawyers have signed a petition urging the county landlord to reconsider its decision.

“We have initiated litigation against the County of San Bernardino Real Estate Service to reveal the unlawful handling of the bidding process along with the religious discrimination against a Christian-owned business,” he said.

County officials did not respond to my questions.

As it stands, the Magnos are about to be evicted from the courthouse. Should that happen, it would be a grave injustice for Cafe Justice.