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# British court rules on Christian foster parents

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Mar. 8, 2011

**LONDON** -- A British court has effectively disqualified a couple from becoming foster parents because of their Christian views on premarital and homosexual intercourse.

Owen and Eunice Johns of Derby, England, were told by judges sitting in the High Court in London that gay equality laws must "take precedence" over the rights of Christians to act in line with their faith.

The couple, who have fostered 15 children, had sought a judicial review of a 2009 decision by the Derby City Council to defer their application to be approved as short-term, respite, foster caregivers because of their views on sexual morality.

The judges were asked to consider the abstract question of whether public authorities should consider applicants' views on sexual ethics when deciding to approve them as foster parents.

The judges stated that Christian beliefs on sexual ethics may be "inimical" to children and implicitly upheld a submission by the publicly funded Equality and Human Rights Commission that children risked being "infected" by Christian moral beliefs.

If children are placed with parents who have traditional Christian views, "there may well be a conflict with the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked-after children," the judges said.

They added that "the equality provisions concerning sexual orientation should take precedence" over Christian beliefs.

The hearing took place in November, but the judgment was passed down Feb. 28.

After the ruling was issued, the Johnses said in a statement: "We wanted to offer a loving home to a child in need. But because of this ruling we are unsure how we can continue the application process. We have been excluded because we have moral opinions based on our faith, and a vulnerable child has probably now missed the chance of finding a safe and caring home.

"We do not believe that our ordinary Christian moral views are infectious, contrary to what the Equality and Human Rights Commission believes," they said. "Being a Christian is not a crime and should not stop us from raising children. Today, it looks as though a child has missed out on a home."

The couple were supported in their action by the Christian Legal Centre, an organization founded to defend the rights of Christians from discrimination and harassment. Neither the couple nor the center has indicated it would appeal.

In a Feb. 28 statement, Andrea Minichiello Williams, the lawyer who heads the center, said: "The Johns are a mild-mannered, ordinary Christian couple, yet they may never be able to foster children again. They were willing to love a child regardless of sexual orientation, but not willing to tell a young child that practicing

homosexuality was a positive thing.

"If Christian morals are harmful to children and unacceptable to the state, then how many years do we have before natural children start being taken away from Christians?" she said.

"There is a great imbalance in the law at the moment, resulting in ordinary people suffering," Williams added. "We cannot have a society where you are excluded just because you don't agree with the sexual ethics of the homosexual lobby. Britain is now leading Europe in intolerance against religious belief."

Since 2007, almost all of the 13 Catholic adoption agencies in Britain have been forced to either sever ties with their dioceses or close down because of gay equality laws compelling them to assess same-sex couples as potential adopters and foster caregivers.

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