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Jury rules for Cincinnati Catholic school teacher fired after artificial insemination

Brian Roewe | Jun. 4, 2013 NCR Today

A jury ruled Monday that the Cincinnati archdiocese violated anti-discrimination laws [1] in its decision to fire a Catholic school teacher who became pregnant through artificial insemination.

The jury awarded Christa Dias more than $170,000, including $51,000 in back pay, $20,000 in compensatory damages and $100,000 for punitive damages, according to multiple news reports.

A former computer teacher at St. Lawrence and Holy Family schools, Dias, 34, was fired in October 2010 after she requested maternity leave, which surprised school officials given she was single.

The archdiocese said her dismissal was not because she was pregnant, but because she violated her contract, which required her to "comply with and act consistently" with church teaching. Having a child out of wedlock and artificial insemination both go against the teachings of the church.

From the Associated Press [2]:

> "Dias, who is not Catholic, testified she didn't know artificial insemination violated church doctrine or her employment pact. She said she thought the contract clause about abiding by church teachings meant she should be a Christian and follow the Bible.
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> "The case, viewed as a barometer on the degree to which religious organizations can regulate employees' lives, is the second lawsuit filed in the last two years against the archdiocese over the firing of an unmarried pregnant teacher."

The archdiocese's attorney had argued that the firing was appropriate, since it viewed Dias as a ministerial employee and previous court rulings have held religious groups can make personnel decisions without government interference. But the jury ruled her role was not ministerial.

"For the archdiocese, this case has always been about an employee violating a legally enforceable contract that she signed," Dan Andriacco, the archdiocese's communications director, told the *Catholic Telegraph* [3], the archdiocesan newspaper.

"We also believe that we have a First Amendment right to give Catholic school parents what they expect ? an environment that reflects Catholic moral teaching. Our schools are Catholic schools and the work that our school employees do is an extension of that ministry," he said.

Andriacco added that it is unclear whether the archdiocese will appeal the case.

Dias also brought charges against the two schools, but the jury did not find either liable.

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