

## Christian couple lose foster ruling over views on homosexuality

A Christian couple morally opposed to homosexuality because of their faith lost a landmark High Court battle today over the right to become foster carers.



Owen and Eunice Johns Photo: DAVID BURGESS

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Eunice and Owen Johns, aged 62 and 65, from Oakwood, Derby, went to court after a social worker expressed concerns when they said they could not tell a child a "homosexual lifestyle" was acceptable.

The Pentecostal Christian couple had applied to Derby City Council to be respite carers but withdrew their application, believing they would never be approved because of the social worker's attitude to their religious beliefs.

Today they asked judges to rule that their faith should not be a bar to them becoming carers, and the law should protect their Christian values.

But Lord Justice Munby and Mr Justice Beatson ruled that laws protecting people from discrimination because of their sexual orientation "should take precedence" over the right not to be discriminated against on religious grounds.

Outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London, where the decision was given, Mrs Johns stood alongside her husband as she said: "We are extremely distressed at what the judges have ruled today.

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[Analysis: parents banned for smoking and obesity despite need](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8352522/Fostering-analysis-calls-for-restrictions-to-be-eased-after-parents-turned-away-for-smoking-and-obesity.html)

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[Commentary: would-be parents must be non-judgmental](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8352539/Fostering-row-commentary-would-be-parents-must-be-non-judgmental.html)

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"All we wanted was to offer a loving home to a child in need. We have a good track record as foster parents.

"But because we are Christians, with mainstream Christian views on sexual ethics, we are apparently unsuitable as foster parents.

"We are unsure how we can continue the application process following the court's ruling today.

"We have been excluded because we have moral opinions based on our faith and we feel sidelined because we are Christians with normal, mainstream, Christian views on sexual ethics.

"The judges have suggested that our views might harm children.

"We have been told by the Equality and Human Rights Commission that our moral views may 'infect' a child.

"We do not believe that this is so. We are prepared to love and accept any child. All we were not willing to do was to tell a small child that the practice of homosexuality was a good thing.

"Worst of all, a vulnerable child has now likely missed the chance of finding a safe and caring home at a time when there are so few people willing to foster or adopt.

"We feel excluded and that there is no place for us in society.

"We have not received justice. We believe that an independent inquiry is needed to look into this."

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, the lesbian, gay and bisexual charity, said: 'We're delighted that the High Court's landmark decision has favoured 21st-century decency above 19th-century prejudice.

"In any fostering case the interests of the 60,000 children in care should override the bias of any prospective parent."

"Thankfully, Mr and Mrs Johns's out-dated views aren't just out of step with the majority of people in modern Britain, but those of many Christians too. If you wish to be involved in the delivery of a public service, you should be prepared to provide it fairly to anyone."

The Christian Legal Centre reacted to today's ruling with dismay and warned "fostering by Christians is now in

doubt".

The organisation said the judges had effectively ruled "homosexual 'rights' trump freedom of conscience in the UK".

The judges had stated that "biblical Christian beliefs may be 'inimical' to children, and implicitly upheld an Equalities and Human Rights Commission (ECHR) submission that children risk being 'infected' by Christian moral beliefs".

The CLC said the judgment summary "sends out the clear message that orthodox Christian ethical beliefs are potentially harmful to children and that Christian parents with mainstream Christian views are not suitable to be considered as potential foster parents".

Andrea Minichiello Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern and the CLC, said: "The judges have claimed that there was no discrimination against the Johns as Christians because they were being excluded from fostering due to their sexual ethics and not their Christian beliefs.

"This claim that their moral beliefs on sex have nothing to do with their Christian faith is a clear falsehood made in order to justify their ruling.

"How can judges get away with this?"

"What has happened to the Johns is part of a wider trend seen in recent years.

"The law has been increasingly interpreted by judges in a way which favours homosexual rights over freedom of conscience.

"Britain is now leading Europe in intolerance to religious belief."