



**BOISE RESCUE
MISSION**
MINISTRIES

Boise Rescue Mission Ministries

Lighthouse Rescue Mission
City Light Women and Children's Home
River of Life Rescue Mission

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FEDERAL COURT CLEARS BOISE RESCUE MISSION OF ALL DISCRIMINATION CLAIMS

Court dismisses lawsuit in its entirety

In a September 10, 2009 ruling, Federal District Judge Edward Lodge dismissed a housing discrimination lawsuit filed by the Intermountain Fair Housing Council ("IHFC") and two individuals against the Boise Rescue Mission.

The lawsuit was filed in 2008 following the dismissal of similar allegations by HUD and the Idaho Human Rights Commission. The lawsuit alleged that the Boise Rescue Mission engaged in religious and gender discrimination in violation of the Fair Housing Act ("FHA"). The Rescue Mission responded that it does not engage in unlawful discrimination and that its voluntary religious services are perfectly lawful. Yesterday, the court ruled in favor of the Rescue Mission and dismissed the lawsuit in its entirety.

"The ruling is not a surprise" stated Rev. Bill Roscoe, Executive Director of the Boise Rescue Mission, "the Rescue Mission's services are available to people of any religious faith or no faith. This lawsuit was a repeat of the same baseless complaints that were investigated and dismissed by HUD and the Idaho Human Rights Commission. We are pleased that the federal court has made it unmistakably clear that our programs are lawful and non-discriminatory."

In dismissing the lawsuit, the Court found that:

- "The Rescue Mission does not limit occupancy of the shelter and residence in the Discipleship Program to persons of the same religion or give preferences to such persons." (Page 26)

- “The RFRA [Religious Freedom Restoration Act] bars application of the FHA [Fair Housing Act] to prohibit the Rescue Mission’s alleged religious activities in the operation of the homeless shelter and Discipleship Program.” (Page 29)
- The Rescue Mission’s homeless shelter is not subject to the Fair Housing Act. (Page 33)
- There was no evidence of gender discrimination by the Rescue Mission. (Page 32-33)

“We don’t think this lawsuit was about discrimination” stated Roscoe. “If we give the plaintiffs’ complaints any credence, we suspect that they are upset that the Rescue Mission does more than provide food, shelter and clothing to the homeless. Most homeless people are desperately low in spirit, so we offer voluntary spiritual guidance to guests who desire to learn about Christianity. For a person whose life is falling apart, it helps them greatly to know that God loves them and offers salvation, hope and help in their predicament.”

The Rescue Mission will continue to provide hot meals, safe nights of shelter and other emergency services to anyone in need without regard to gender, family status or religious affiliation. The Rescue Mission will also continue to provide hot meals, clothing and other assistance to homeless to choose who stay at Interfaith Sanctuary’s homeless shelter. The Interfaith Sanctuary is our companion in the fight against homelessness.

The Rescue Mission provides over 29,000 hot meals and over 8,000 safe nights of shelter to people in need each month. All of the Rescue Mission’s efforts are funded through private contributions from thousands of people, churches, and businesses. The Rescue Mission does not receive government support. We invite you to visit any of our facilities to see first-hand the services that the Rescue Mission provides to the homeless, and the compassion and love with which our staff and volunteers provide them. Simply drop by.

For more information, please contact:

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QUESTIONS

1. Who were the individual plaintiffs? What were they upset about?

The two individual plaintiffs illustrate how ridiculous the lawsuit is.

The first plaintiff, Richard Chinn, was an occasional guest (a few days at a time) in our emergency shelter services program. In Mr. Chinn's HUD complaint, IHFC provided a declaration from Mr. Chinn stating that the Rescue Mission forced guests to attend religious services. However, when HUD investigator's interviewed Mr. Chinn to confirm his allegations, he stated that declaration was wrong and that he never saw anyone coerced to attend religious services at the Rescue Mission. HUD dismissed Mr. Chinn's complaint (and all the other complaints). Despite recanting his earlier accusations, Mr. Chinn again made the same allegations. The court dismissed his claims because the homeless shelter is not regulated by the Fair Housing Act and because the Rescue Mission has the fundamental right to offer religious services to guests. To this day, we really have no idea what Mr. Chinn is upset about.

The second plaintiff, Janene Cowles, participated in our New Life Discipleship Program, which is a one-year in-residence program to help people defeat chemical dependency or alcoholism through intensive religious study that builds a new life, in Christ, that is free from the addictions and destructive habits of their old life. This program not part of our emergency shelter services program (where Mr. Chinn was a guest). Ms. Cowles applied to enter to program as an alternative to prison while she was incarcerated for a multiple felony drug offenses. As part of the application process, the Rescue Mission informed Ms. Cowles of the rigorous religious nature of the program. Ms. Cowles specifically confirmed her desire for the program's religious education. After a few months in the program, she changed her mind and determined that the religious requirements were not suitable to her. This is fine, as the program is entirely voluntary. We discharged her from the program and she returned to the custody of the justice system. We wrote a letter to her judge to make it clear that her discharge was not for bad conduct, but to allowed her to participate in a program without religious requirements. Ms. Cowles later filed discrimination complaints with HUD and the Idaho Human Rights Commission. Both agencies dismissed her complaints as baseless. The federal court has now dismissed her claims because basic principles of religious freedom grant the Rescue Mission the fundamental right to offer faith-based recovery programs to people in need.

2. Why did the Intermountain Fair Housing Council file this lawsuit?

We have asked ourselves the same question. Why does the IHFC object to the Rescue Mission offering voluntary religious services to our emergency shelter guests who desire spiritual guidance? Why does the IHFC object to us providing a faith-based recovery program for those who want to be free of chemical dependency or alcoholism? We think the IFHC distains religion and targets religious organizations with baseless complaints and lawsuits for exercising one of the most basic of human rights – the right to freely exercise religion. IFHC desires to prevent religious organizations from exercising their religious freedom. This is shameful conduct from an organization that advertises itself as promoting civil rights.