

The *Union Gospel Mission of Yakima* Case

Case Name: *Union Gospel Mission of Yakima v. Ferguson*

Case Status: On April 5, plaintiff filed a motion for preliminary injunction in the U.S. District Court Eastern District of Washington. The Court held a hearing on defendants' motion to dismiss and plaintiff's motion for a preliminary injunction on May 31, 2023.



Significance: Whether religious organizations have the right to hire employees that share their religious beliefs.

Background: Union Gospel Mission of Yakima is a private nonprofit religious organization that is located in Washington, and it has served the Yakima community for 85 years through its homeless shelter, addiction-recovery programs, outreach efforts, meal services, and medical and dental clinics. The Mission serves everybody equally, yet it must hire employees that are likeminded believers to ensure that the Mission advances its religious purpose. It can only hire employees that adhere to its Christian faith, including abstaining from any sexual conduct outside of biblical marriage between one man and one woman. A Washington law, however, requires religious organizations like Union Gospel Mission to violate its religious convictions by forcing it to hire people who do not agree with and live out the Mission's religious beliefs. Washington State officials view the Mission's commitment to biblical marriage and sexuality as an unlawful violation of the sexual orientation discrimination provision under the Washington Law Against Discrimination, which has stifled the Mission's ability to hire those who live out its Christian calling. The Constitution protects Yakima Union Gospel Mission's right to hire employees—for all positions—who adhere to and live out the Mission's religious beliefs. Alliance Defending Freedom filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Mission to protect its freedom to hire employees that are aligned with and live out its religious beliefs.

Key Points:

- The Mission wants everyone it interacts with to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but Washington state officials are forcing the Mission to hire those who disagree with its religious messages.
- By forcing the Mission to hire people that do not share the same beliefs, the state of Washington undermines the work the Mission does, threatens its existence, violates its free exercise of religion, and harms our society.
- The Washington Law has chilled the Mission's speech and religious exercise, causing irreparable harm every single day the Mission cannot express its beliefs and hire those who share the same beliefs.

Key Facts:

- The Mission's New Life Recovery Program is a yearlong program that helps people locate the root causes of their struggles, pointing them to long-term solutions based on a solid Biblical foundation.
- From July 1, 2021, through July 30, 2022, the Mission provided shelter to nearly 1000 people, gave out over 130,000 meals, and reached over 500 homeless individuals through its services.

The Bottom Line: Religious organizations should be free to hire employees that are aligned with and live out their religious beliefs.