

Claim by Jehovah's Witness dismissed

Last Updated: Wednesday, July 22, 2015, 07:46

A JEHOVAH'S Witness who claimed she was shunned by other members of her congregation is not entitled to bring an action for slander, the High Court ruled yesterday.

Ruth Moram, Killarney, Co Kerry, claimed she was "disfellowshipped" from the Killarney congregation after she was accused of slandering her husband by implying he was an adulterer. Her husband denied the accusation, the court heard. Ms Moram had brought proceedings against three members of the congregation, claiming she in turn was slandered in a letter written by one of them to her in December 2009.

Mr Justice John Hedigan yesterday ruled Ms Moram had shown no cause of action in her claims against Killarney Jehovah's Witness elders Peter Van Benthem, and Andrew Beeston, or against Jehovah's Witness Martyn Bell, Furies, who wrote the letter in 2009. The judge also awarded costs against Ms Moram who said she would go to jail rather than pay them and would also appeal the decision to the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr Justice Hedigan said the case dated back to June 2004 when Ms Moram claimed Mr Van Benthem and Mr Beeston called to her home and accused her of slander without, she claimed, telling her at that stage what the alleged slander was. Later that month, at a meeting of the Killarney congregation, Mr Bell gave evidence of the alleged slander of her husband and as a result Ms Moram was "disfellowshipped", she said. This meant fellow members were not to associate with her until she repented.

She appealed that decision internally in August 2004 during which evidence was given that Ms Moram had told a fellow Jehovah's Witness that a woman, referred to only by initials, had spent weekends away with Ms Moram's husband, Mr Justice Hedigan said.

Ms Moram claimed, as a result of that, she was accused of slander in that she implied her husband was an adulterer, the judge said. In a separate meeting, her husband denied the allegation, the judge added.

Following these hearings, Ms Moram was disfellowshipped. She then wrote a letter of complaint to the branch office in Wicklow and included photographs of her husband on a weekend break in Galway with the other woman, the judge said.

The branch sent a letter to the appeal committee which changed its decision and told Ms Moram the committee "forgave" her. She refused to accept this on grounds she had not slandered anyone but the accusation had not been withdrawn, the judge said. In February 2010, she formally left the Jehovah's Witnesses after elders refused to allow her to speak at a meeting, he said. Since then, she claimed, all her Jehovah's Witness friends had been forbidden to speak to her and she had been brought into public hatred, contempt and ridicule.

Mr Justice Hedigan said yesterday the proceedings would have had to be issued within three years of the 2004 events but were only issued in 2011. As there was no publication of the letter and no special damage was claimed, Ms Moram had shown no cause of action against the three and her claim must be dismissed.