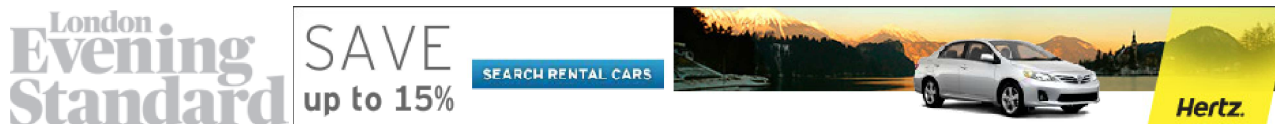




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# Jehovah's Witness sues for £150,000 after church 'snubbed him over fraud claims'



"Ostracised": Putney property developer Frank Otuo denies any wrongdoing (Picture: Facebook)

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DAVID CHURCHILL

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A former Jehovah's Witness is suing the UK branch of the religion and a London congregation leader for more than £150,000 after allegedly being ostracised following a business dispute.

Frank Otuo, 43, is suing the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Britain and an elder of its Wimbledon congregation, Jonathan Morley, for defamation, saying he has been "disfellowshipped" over allegations of fraud he says are untrue.

As a life-long worshipper Mr Otuo, a property developer from Putney, claims he has lost hundreds of friends from within the tight-knit religious community.

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A member of the Wimbledon congregation for 20 years, he also claims the move has violated his right to a family life because relatives who belong to the faith, including his ailing mother living abroad, are effectively barred from speaking to him.

According to papers lodged at the High Court, seen by the Standard, Mr Otuo claims to have suffered "near irreparable damage to his reputation, emotions, physical and psychological" and "extreme shunning by friends and family."

The papers add: "My three young children [aged seven to 14] are finding it extremely difficult to cope with the fact that their dad has been ostracised by the only community they have ever known since birth.

"This is in addition to the spiritual harm and mental distress caused to me as a direct consequence of the action.

"I have lost all my friends who were only Jehovah's Witnesses as they are not allowed to speak to me lest they face the same fate.

"The worship and faith was in essence everything my family and I lived for.

"It was our lives and everything else revolved around it. I am not allowed to have any spiritual association with my own wife and children [who still attend meetings]."

The business spat is said to have erupted in July 2012.

An unhappy creditor is said to have complained about Mr Otuo to congregation elders, who set up a committee and later booted out the father-of-three.

The court claim said Mr Otuo "vigorously denies the allegation of fraud and has consistently maintained his innocence".

A court hearing is set for October 30.

Mr Morley declined to comment.

A Watchtower spokesman said it would defend the action.

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