

Synagogue worker: I was fired for having sex before marriage

By [Jamie Schram](#) September 22, 2015 | 3:14pm



Alana Shultz

Photo: Patrick McMullan

A renowned Upper West Side synagogue fired a worker after learning she had had sex before marriage, a new lawsuit charges.

Alana Shultz — a longtime program director for Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest synagogue in the US — failed to “adhere to their religious morals” by getting married when she was already about five months pregnant, her suit says.

Before leaving on her honeymoon, Shultz, 36, confided to her supervisor, Barbara Reiss, that she was 19 weeks pregnant, according to the Manhattan federal court suit, which was filed Tuesday.

Reiss heartily congratulated her, Shultz’s suit says.

But by the time Shultz returned from her honeymoon July 21, she had become a pariah among the congregation, which was established in 1654, her suit says.

Shultz was hauled into Rabbi Meir Soloveichik's office, where he and Reiss gave her the cold shoulder, documents state.

The rabbi wouldn't even acknowledge her presence, the papers say.

"When Ms. Shultz entered Rabbi Soloveichik's office, he had his head turned to the side, looking away from her," the suit says.

Reiss then told Shultz that her position at the synagogue at 8 W. 70th St., which she had held since 2004, was being eliminated and that her last day would be Aug. 15, according to the lawsuit.

Shultz, who has a master's degree in Jewish studies, told her higher-ups it would be "extremely" difficult for her to get a new job because of her pregnancy, but her words were met with a cold silence, the suit claims.

Reiss then offered Shultz a severance package of six weeks of pay with no medical benefits in return for her assurance that she wouldn't take legal action against the congregation, the suit says.

The severance agreement also specified that Shultz would need to train her replacement — even though she had been told that her position was eliminated, according to the suit.

Shultz hired a lawyer, and the synagogue tried to rehire her in a "thinly-veiled attempt to mitigate defendant's exposure for their blatant discriminatory and unlawful conduct," the suit says.

Instead, she filed suit, demanding compensation for monetary damages and emotional distress.

"After working tirelessly at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue [Shearith Israel] for the last 11 years, I am beyond saddened they've forced me to file this lawsuit, which I hope will help other women avoid what they did to me during what should be a time for celebration and joy," Shultz said in a statement.

Congregation Shearith Israel did not return calls for comment.