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Latest: Isabel Vaughan-Spruce to Face Trial for Silent Prayer

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Silent prayer can never be a crime in the UK,"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce will stand trial in January for praying silently on a public street. Deputy Senior District Judge Tan Ikram ruled at Birmingham Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, November 25, that the 49-year-old Catholic charity volunteer must answer five criminal charges under Section 9 of the Public Order Act 2023, one for each time she is said to have stood and prayed quietly inside the 150-metre buffer zone outside the Robert Clinic in Kings Norton. The trial is set for January 25 to 29, 2027.

She said nothing. She held no sign. She blocked no one from entering the building, and she spoke to no one.

On five seperate days, according to the prosecution, she simply stood on a pavement in Kings Norton, folded her hands, closed her eyes, and prayed in her head. For that, the state says, she may now face a criminal conviction.

Vaughan-Spruce, from Malvern in Worcestershire, is a charity volunteer who has prayed outside abortion clinics for years. She is the first person to be prosecuted under the national buffer-zone law, which came into force in October 2024.

The law makes it a crime to influence, obstruct or cause distress to anyone seeking or providing abortion services within 150 metres of a clinic. The law was written to cover protests and vigils. Her case will test whether it also covers a woman standing alone, in silence.

The five charges cover five occasions spread across a six-month window beginning on June 13, 2025. Each charge stands on its own, so the court will hear evidence about each day separately: where she stood, how long she stayed, and whether anyone at the clinic even noticed her. Vaughan-Spruce pleaded not guilty in October, and her lawyers argued the whole prosecution was an abuse of process and should be thrown out before it ever reached a trial.

Judge Ikram rejected that argument at a hearing in October and refused to dismiss the case on Tuesday. The ruling means the prosecution goes ahead in full, with witnesses, cross-examination and a five-day trial in the new year. For Vaughan-Spruce, it also means more than a year of waiting since the first of the alleged incidents, with a criminal record hanging over her if the court finds against her.

Silent Prayer Can Never Be A Crime, Says Vaughan-Spruce

Outside the court, Vaughan-Spruce did not soften her words. "Silent prayer can never be a crime in the UK," she said.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

READ THE FULL STORY

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