

# Fasting Chaplain Declares Victory

## *Navy Denies That He Couldn't Pray In Jesus's Name*

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A Navy chaplain who had been on an 18-day hunger strike resumed eating Saturday and reported for duty yesterday at the base chapel in Norfolk, saying he had finally wrung from the Navy the right to pray publicly in the name of Jesus.

But a spokesman for the Navy maintained that the chaplain, Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt, had been tilting at windmills all along. The Navy has no regulation against praying to Jesus and "has always encouraged every chaplain to pray according to his own individual faith during worship services," said the spokesman, Lt. William Marks.

Between those two accounts lies the story of an aggrieved clergyman who believed his military career was about to end because of his insistence on preaching a fire-and-brimstone kind of evangelical Christianity - and who managed to enlist more than 70 members of Congress and a who's who of conservative Christian leaders to pressure the White House on his behalf.

According to Klingenschmitt, his troubles began a few years ago when he preached about hell at a sailor's funeral, protested the Navy's failure to meet a Jewish sailor's request for kosher meals and led a group of Navy personnel who refused to attend a church service led by a gay minister during Fleet Week.

His commander aboard the cruiser USS Anzio recommended



BY JOSHUA ROBERTS - GETTY IMAGES

**Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt prays on the final day of his hunger strike in front of the White House, breaking his fast with a Communion wafer.**

that the Navy not retain him when his three-year contract expired Dec. 31. Klingenschmitt, 37, fought back with formal complaints accusing both the commander and the Navy's chief of chaplains of violating a federal law that says military chaplains "may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church" to which they belong.

As the end-of-year termination date drew closer, Klingenschmitt launched the hunger strike in front of the White House. He hoped to wear his dress uniform and to pray publicly to Jesus. But a superior officer warned him that regulations forbid the wearing of a uniform during political protests.

On Dec. 22, two days after he stopped eating, the Navy notified Klingenschmitt that he could stay on "indefinitely" in the chaplain corps. But Klingenschmitt vowed that he would not eat "until the president gives me back my

uniform and let's me pray in the name of Jesus."

Sixteen days later -- and 14 pounds lighter -- Klingenschmitt declared victory after the commanding officer of the Norfolk Naval Station, where he is now assigned, said in writing that he could wear his uniform if he was conducting a "bona fide worship service" in front of the White House. His first bite was a Communion wafer.

Marks, the Navy spokesman, said "nothing has changed" in Navy policy. He said chaplains are free to pray as they wish in any military chapel or worship service. But in other settings that are essentially secular in nature, such as a retirement or memorial ceremony attended by personnel of many faiths, "we ask -- ask -- that they be inclusive" and offer nonsectarian prayers, he said.

"If a chaplain can't do that, he doesn't have to. We won't force him to," Marks said.

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