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TESTING THE FAITH

Tulsa welcomes back Jesus

Exclusive: Gordon Klingenschmitt cheers council that dumped 20-year-old prayer policy

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By Gordon James Klingenschmitt

Members of the City Council of Tulsa, Okla., [voted 7-2 to restore religious liberty](#), lifting a 20-year ban that had prohibited praying "in Jesus' name" before council meetings.

When a liberal chaplain who had controlled the rotating schedule for visiting pastors began enforcing the "no Jesus" prayer policy, it blew up in the Tulsa World newspaper. The Rev. Danny Lynchard admitted, "The phrase 'in Jesus' name' made it a non-inclusive prayer," [so religious leaders who did not comply were removed from the rotation](#).

Never one to shy from controversy, I sounded the alarm by granting my own newspaper interview and vowed to mobilize Tulsa-area pastors to stand up for Jesus and take back their government, even if I had to fly to Oklahoma myself.

At least one Tulsa pastor, Mark Rollins, took up my challenge and appeared personally before the City Council to read the newspaper's exposure of anti-Jesus discrimination. "I'm upset about this," Rollins told the councilmembers, "you can't tell people to stop praying to Jesus. I know dozens of pastors in this town, and they won't stand for this."

(Column continues below)

Rollins then invited me to Tulsa and I stayed in his home. Together we prayed and watched the

next council meeting on a local cable television network. Fireworks ensued.

The City Council took 45 minutes to debate the issue, and opened the floor to 10 citizens, including eight liberals who came together, pleading to keep the 20-year-old ban in place.

The Oklahoma Conference for Community and Justice, or OCCJ, held a monopoly for decades, admitting they helped write the original policy that mandated "non-sectarian" prayers. OCCJ Executive Director Nancy Day argued, "When asked to give a prayer in a public setting, you cannot assume everyone is of your faith. ... By praying to or through Jesus, that excludes folks in the room who are not Christian."

Apparently, she sees no irony in her own exclusion of praying Christians.

But Councilor John Eagleton countered with a brilliant legal defense of freedom, including case-law precedent, concluding, "I firmly believe that sanitized prayers to a generic deity don't really serve a spiritual purpose, at least not for me."

Public outcry from Christian citizens apparently won the day when the council voted 7-2 to restore liberty, writing a new policy that permits praying "in Jesus' name," a model policy that could be copied by other public bodies:

"The prayer leader may use the specific name of their god within the prayer, so long as it is not used in a manner to proselytize or advance, or to disparage any faith or belief or the particular tenets or beliefs of individual faiths," the new policy reads.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1991 *Lee v. Weisman* that governments cannot suggest "non-sectarian" prayer content, nor exclude expression of more sectarian beliefs.

Unfortunately, the Colorado State Legislature has much to learn from Tulsa, since its long-standing ban of "sectarian" prayers apparently only restricts Christians, but allows Hindus.

When Hindu Priest Rajan Zed recently prayed on the floor of the Colorado Senate, he sprinkled water from the Ganges River around the podium, and chanted the "om" syllable, that, according to his belief system, contains the universe.

Colorado Sen. David Schultheis told WND he was shocked by the appearance of the Hindu, since rules ban faith-specific references, such as the words "in Jesus' name."

"I think the most troubling thing [is] we have this appearance, and yet the bulk of our population is Christian or say they are Christian, and we are not allowed to mention 'Jesus' in any prayer," he said.

I have e-mailed Sen. Schultheis directly requesting he sponsor me to pray "in Jesus' name" on the floor of the Colorado Senate.

When I wrote about my experience watching Zed pray a Hindu prayer in the U.S. Senate, and myself being excluded by Sens. Reid and Clinton, I received hateful telephone calls and hateful e-mails from Hindu activists, some calling Jesus the son of the Devil.

So much for their "religious tolerance" of all faiths. When I advocate for their freedom, they demand I be excluded. It's strange how quickly the "ecumenical" crowd transforms into an "exclusive" club, likely refusing access to Jesus himself and anybody who claims His Name.

Thank God the city of Tulsa has elected officials with common sense.

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Gordon James Klingenschmitt is a former Navy chaplain who sacrificed his career to help change national policy, restoring the rights of military chaplains to publicly pray "in Jesus' name" – even in uniform. "Chaps" travels to speak at churches and can be invited via e-mail. He encourages readers to sign the petition to reinstate Chaplain Danny Harvey, the hospital chaplain fired for praying in Jesus' name.