

Tuesday, January 3, 2006

NAVAL CHAPLAIN STRIPPED OF HIS UNIFORM ACCEPTS NEW CONTRACT WITH NAVY BUT CONTINUES HUNGER STRIKE

ANS NEWS STORY

By Jeremy Reynolds

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WASHINGTON D.C. (ANS) -- A Navy chaplain who faced termination of his 14- year career without retirement, partly because he prayed publicly "in Jesus' Name" has accepted a new three-year contract with the U.S. Navy.

In a news release, Chaplain Lieutenant Gordon James Klingenschmitt said that nine months after being told he was ineligible for a contract renewal without a "positive endorsement" from his commanding officer, he began a hunger strike in front of the White House on Dec. 20 and appeared on national television on Dec. 21.

In the news release, Klingenschmitt said that within 24 hours of his appearance on TV the Chief of Naval Chaplains renewed his contract.

Klingenschmitt said in the news release, "I accept the Navy's offer to let me finish my career, but I still can't wear my uniform in public. I won't end my fast until they give me back my uniform and let me pray in Jesus' Name."

Two weeks ago, Klingenschmitt said in the release, he was stripped of his uniform for all public appearances. That means, Klingenschmitt said, he is not allowed to talk about Jesus in public unless he is wearing civilian clothing.

WHAT HAPPENED?

In a speech, Klingenschmitt explained the circumstances leading up to his predicament. "The Chief of Navy Chaplains told me in writing that if I pray publicly 'in Jesus name,' that I'm denigrating other faiths. That same week he told the Washington Post, 'we never tell chaplains



Chaplain Klingenschmitt
(through www.persuade.tv)

how to pray' because we don't want to violate their First Amendment rights. His public statements and private statements contradict.”

A statement from the Navy Chief of Chaplains, Rear Adm. Louis V. Iasiello reported by the Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/24/AR2005122400774_2.html), read that “Chaplains can pray however they like in sectarian worship services, but that in public ceremonies where attendance is mandatory for sailors and officers of many faiths, they are encouraged to use inclusive wording. If a chaplain is uncomfortable with that, he should decline to give the benediction.”

Iasiello, the Post said, is a Catholic priest.

In the same article, the White House declined to comment specifically on Klingenschmitt's situation.

“The Administration values the contribution of military chaplains to America's troops and recognizes the importance of religious free exercise for military personnel,” the Post reported spokeswoman Alyssa J. McClenning said in a statement.

PRAYING TO WHO?

In the same speech, Klingenschmitt said in its mandatory lectures for all junior chaplains the Naval Chaplain School says Muslim chaplains are prohibited from praying publicly to Allah, Jewish chaplains are not allowed to pray in Hebrew to Adonai, Roman Catholic chaplains are forbidden from praying “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” and evangelicals can't pray “in Jesus name.”

Klingenschmitt added, “Everybody is taught to pray only to God and say ‘Amen.’ Senior chaplain evaluators with clipboards criticize our prayers.”

However, Klingenschmitt thought he had found a successful way to accommodate the military's rules. He said he asked his commanding officer's permission to take turns at leading the evening prayer times with the other faith leaders on board.

The result, he said, would allow “my Muslim sailor to pray to Allah, my Jewish sailor to pray in Hebrew to Adonai, my Roman Catholic sailor to pray ‘in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ and I'd just pray ‘in Jesus name’ every fourth night.

However, the situation didn't work out as Klingenschmitt envisioned. He said his superior told him, “No Chaps, I don't like that. You keep saying the prayer, but you pray Jewish prayers from now on.’ I obeyed him and prayed only from the Psalms for eight months.”

However, Klingenschmitt said in the speech, the Director of the Naval Chaplain school still told Klingenschmitt's commanding officer that Klingenschmitt was an “immature chaplain” because

he claimed a right to pray “in Jesus’ name.”

As a result, Klingenschmitt said, his commanding officer wrote to a Navy board saying “Chaplain Klingenschmitt over-emphasized his own faith system” (i.e. in his sermons and prayers).”

Klingenschmitt said in his speech that General George Washington prayed “in Jesus’ name.”

Klingenschmitt continued. “And since the American Revolution, chaplains have been allowed to pray according to their civilian bishop’s faith, not the government’s faith. Since 1860, U.S. Code Title 10 Section 6031 has mandated, ‘An officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member.’”

Klingenschmitt is a minister in the Evangelical Episcopal Church.

However, Klingenschmitt said, in 1998 the Navy established a new policy telling chaplains if they prayed “in Jesus name,” then we “ought to exclude ourselves from participation as the prayer-giver.”

As a result, Klingenschmitt said, 65 Navy Chaplains have been involved in a class-action lawsuit since 1999, but the Navy found “nothing wrong, so Navy JAG spends millions of taxpayer dollars defending religious discrimination.”

Klingenschmitt said, “As a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, I’m directly appealing to my Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush, to sign an Executive Order enforcing the law that’s been on the books since 1860. Now 160,000 Americans and 74 Congressmen have asked the President to sign an Executive Order, not to establish new law, but just to enforce the law on the books since 1860, but the President has yet to lift his pen.”

Klingenschmitt commented, “I find it ironic that Franklin Graham was allowed to pray ‘in Jesus’ name at the President’s first inaugural, but now admirals in the Pentagon who claim to represent the President are trying to take away my uniform for praying in Jesus’ name.’ Even Senator Clinton (D-NY) has written a letter of concern on my behalf.”

The Air Force recently adopted similar guidelines, Klingenschmitt said, and now requires all its chaplains to pray “non-sectarian” prayers. However, Klingenschmitt said, “this government-sanitized prayer policy violates the First Amendment, and the Supreme Court has already ruled that ‘non-sectarian’ prayers are unenforceable.”

EXECUTIVE ORDER

Klingenschmitt said anyone interested should call the White House at (202) 4561414 and ask the President to sign an Executive Order protecting the right of all military chaplains to pray according to their faith.

The sermon that got Klingenschmitt in trouble may be read in its entirety at www.persuade.tv/againstgoliath/AppendixHSermonThatGotChapsFired.pdf

To contact Klingenschmitt call (719) 360-5132 or e-mail him at chaplaingate@yahoo.com

For additional information go to www.persuade.tv

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