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FAITH UNDER FIRE

Navy surrenders: Chaplain eating

Hunger strike comes to end with OK to pray in uniform in name of Jesus

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The Navy chaplain who has gone without food for 18 days in protest of the Navy's policy encouraging "inclusive" prayers at public events says he has received permission to wear his uniform and pray in Jesus' name outside the White House tomorrow and will end his hunger strike by taking communion there.

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt had said he would not eat until President Bush signed an executive order allowing chaplains to pray in public according to their individual faith traditions. Later, he said if the Navy would allow him to wear his uniform in public and

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pray in Jesus' name he would end his fast. Klingenschmitt told WND this evening he has received a letter from his commanding officer giving him permission to do so.

A previous letter from his commanding officer at Naval Station Norfolk said the chaplain could not wear his uniform for

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

media appearances, which is standard Navy policy when a service member is expressing his own opinion. Klingenschmitt believed that letter was meant to prevent him from praying publicly in Jesus' name while wearing his uniform.

A 1998 Navy advisory to chaplains suggested that military clergy pray in an "inclusive" manner at "command settings" – secular events or ceremonies. It is that policy that Klingenschmitt objects to, pointing out that 74 members of Congress have asked President Bush to guarantee chaplains the right to pray as they wish.

At 11 a.m. tomorrow near the White House, Klingenschmitt says, he will lead a worship service while wearing his Navy uniform. After praying in Jesus' name, the chaplain says he will serve communion and then begin eating again.

Earlier this week, a Navy spokesman said Klingenschmitt's claim that he was not allowed to pray in Jesus' name in public was erroneous.

Lt. William Marks pointed out that the federal law allowing military chaplains to pray "according to the manners and form" of their own churches, in Title X of the U.S. Code, is under the heading of "Divine Services," which restricts that freedom to the voluntary religious events, he asserts.

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"When you go to a command-hosted ceremony, that is not a 'divine service,'" Marks told WND. "That is a secular service." And that is the type of service addressed by the 1998 advisory.

Klingenschmitt says with comments such as Marks', the Navy is "trying to split hairs between public worship and private worship."

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