

Bush and Congress Urged to Protect Religious Freedom in U.S. Military

By Chad Groening
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(AgapePress) - A Navy chaplain who went on an 18-day hunger strike for the right to pray in Jesus' name says new guidelines adopted by the U.S. Air Force might be expanded to cover America's other armed forces as well. However, he believes those regulations would end up restricting free speech and religious expression.

Lieutenant Gordon Klingenschmitt says the Air Force's new policy does nothing to free up chaplains and other Christian military personnel to pray according to their own religious traditions. Instead, the regulations require inclusive or nondenominational prayers at public events -- which, he points out, in effect prohibits praying in Jesus' name.

Klingenschmitt fears the Air Force regulations regarding prayer may eventually become policy throughout the U.S. military. "The Secretary of Defense has indicated that, when these guidelines are finalized, they will be implemented across all the Armed Services, telling Army, Navy, and Air Force chaplains that they are not allowed to pray in Jesus name," he notes.

Already, the Christian Naval officer points out, some believers in uniform have had to take legal action to fight what he believes amounts to religious persecution in the U.S. armed services. "Many chaplains are suing because they can't get promoted," he says. "They're passed over for promotions. Sixty-five chaplains in the Navy, and Congressman Jones has complaints from over 130 chaplains, including Army and Air Force chaplains who were all punished for their faith."

The new Air Force guidelines on public prayer are "basically the same as the old guidelines," Klingenschmitt contends. "They still require what they call nondenominational prayers, which is just a code for saying no Jesus -- you cannot pray in Jesus name. And if these Air Force guidelines are implemented in the Navy, I will definitely take legal action."

The best way to resolve the issue, the Navy chaplain asserts, would be for the federal legislature to get involved to enact a policy on prayer that safeguards the First Amendment rights of military personnel, or for President Bush to issue an executive order to that effect.

"We need congressional oversight," Klingenschmitt insists. "We still need the President to step in and protect free speech for military chaplains."

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