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TESTING THE FAITH

Navy dismisses chaplain who prayed 'in Jesus' name'

'We are homeless, jobless,
and we are in God's hands'

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By Bob Unruh

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A U.S. Navy chaplain who prayed "in Jesus' name" as his conscience dictated is being ejected from the military service "in retaliation" for his victorious battle to change Navy policy that required religious rites be "non-sectarian."

"This fight cost me everything. My career is over, my family is now homeless, we've lost a million dollar pension, but Congress agreed with me and rescinded the Navy policy, so chaplains are free again to pray in Jesus' name," Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt told WND. "My sacrifice purchased their freedom. My conscience is clear, the fight was worth it, and I'd do it all again."



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

Klingenschmitt, as WND has reported, has fought an extended battle with the Navy over its restrictions on religious expression by its chaplains. He appeared and delivered a public prayer "in Jesus' name" at a White House rally last winter and was court-martialed for that. The Navy convicted him of failing to follow a lawful order because his superior didn't want him praying "in Jesus' name."

He's also launched a legal battle that he said he hopes eventually will result in his reinstatement, alleging the Navy assembled a "civic religion" by ordering its chaplains to pray in a certain way.

(Story continues below)

"There's a Unitarian system of religion that's aimed at Christians," John Whitehead, founder of the [The Rutherford Institute](#), told WND. "It boils down to that. We're seeing it all across the country, with council prayers, kids wanting to mention Jesus. What's going on here is it's generally a move in our government and military to set up a civic religion."

"I think the Supreme Court's going to have to look at the idea of can the government in any of its forms tell people how to pray, set up a basic religion and say you can only do it this way," he said.

Klingenschmitt told WND he'd been delivered a formal letter of reprimand for his appearance at a White House function in March 2006 at which he wore his uniform and prayed "in Jesus' name." For that he was convicted at a special court-martial of violating a lawful order from his commanding officer not to do that.

His appearance was with former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice and WND columnist [Judge Roy Moore](#), who was removed from his office when he refused to follow a federal court order he considered unlawful: to remove a Ten Commandments monument from public property.

Klingenschmitt's \$3,000 fine was suspended and because of the issues, Congress got involved and ordered the Navy to rescind that particular policy, and allow chaplains to pray as their "conscience dictates."

In a Congressional report on the situation, members of a conference committee noted, "The House bill contained a provision ... to prescribe that military chaplains shall have the prerogative to pray according to the dictates of their conscience, except as must be limited by military necessity, with any such limitation being imposed in the least restrictive manner feasible." That position was adopted with orders that the "Secretary of the Navy rescind Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1730.7C dated February 21, 2006, titled 'Religious Ministry within the Department of the Navy'" and replace it with a policy allowing such freedoms.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also then promised Congress that no chaplain would be punished under the now-cancelled policy, but the Navy's plans to get rid of Klingenschmitt moved forward anyway.

A federal judge in Klingenschmitt's lawsuit also concluded that his termination from the service and the damage that would result would not be "irreparable," so he would not step in at this point, and Klingenschmitt was delivered a Navy letter this week ordering him to move out of his home in conjunction with his removal from the service.

"Access onto all military installations within Navy Region Mid-Atlantic for Lieutenant Gordon J. Klingenschmitt, CHC, USNR, will terminate on January 31, 2007," said the letter from S.W. Wong, who is with the Judge Advocate General's Corp.

While he's battling for reinstatement, Klingenschmitt said, he'll be accepting speaking invitations and can be contacted through his website, and working with supporters Alan Keyes and Rick Scarborough who have assembled an online petition that calls on new Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to honor Rumsfeld's promise that no chaplain would be punished under the old policy.

"U.S. Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt is being unjustly punished for praying in Jesus' name, for quoting Scripture passages in a military chapel, for voicing evangelical messages about Christ while in uniform," the petition says.

"Chaplain Klingenschmitt courageously stood for what is right, and his stand was completely vindicated by Congress. I am calling on you to immediately exonerate him and allow him to continue his outstanding service as a Navy chaplain. Mr. Secretary, you must act! And fast! Otherwise Chaplain Klingenschmitt will be kicked out of the service by Jan. 31, ending an award-winning 15.5-year career. He will lose his pension, health care benefits and be evicted from military housing – and our sailors will lose this faithful vicar of Christ."

"I think the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, should keep the promise of his predecessor," the chaplain told WND. "We are homeless, jobless and we are in God's hands."

"My separation is in direct retaliation for my victory on Capitol Hill. This is how the Navy treats whistleblowers," he added.

In the lawsuit filed by the Rutherford Institute, the authors noted that courts in the District of Columbia already have concluded: "What we have here is the government's attempt to override the Constitution and the laws of the land by a directive that clearly interferes with military chaplains' free exercise and free speech rights, as well as those of their congregants."

The case developed when "one Navy Captain decided that he did not like the content of the Chaplain's religious speech during an optionally attended sermon in the chapel," the lawsuit said. Then a Navy investigation showed Klingenschmitt had prayed "in Jesus' name" and had even prayed in public in uniform. For that, the court-martial was held, "ignoring Naval Uniform Regulations that permit chaplains to wear the uniform during public worship."

The lawsuit notes that the Navy is using the chaplain's resignation from one "ecclesiastical endorsement" and acceptance of another from a different church group as its reason for terminating him. However, the lawsuit notes that the Navy's own regulations state that a chaplain "shall" be recertified on request.

In apparent conflict, a letter from J.C. Harvey Jr., a vice-admiral, ordering Klingenschmitt's removal from the Navy, opined that "presentation of a new ecclesiastical endorsement from a qualified Religious Organization does not automatically mandate recertification."

The district court judge also found, in ruling against the chaplain, that in the military "public worship" is different from "worshipping in public," so that the Navy's punishment could move forward.

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[Bob Unruh](#) is a news editor for [WorldNetDaily.com](#).