

Navy Chaplain Discharged After Court-related Delay

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WASHINGTON - A military chaplain who publicly protested a Navy policy that urged "nonsectarian" prayers was discharged Thursday (March 1).

Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt signed the final documents after an appeals court determined that his suit against the Navy did not demonstrate the "stringent standards required" to prevent the court from halting his discharge.

Klingenschmitt received orders stating he was to be dismissed by Jan. 31, but the appeals court postponed the discharge until it had reviewed his case. The Navy said Klingenschmitt was discharged after his request to renew his chaplain appointment with a different denomination was denied.

"The decision to disapprove his request was based upon a review of his credentials," said Lt. Tommy Crosby, a spokesman for the Navy. He said that review included "his military record and performance."

Klingenschmitt, who was a lieutenant, had argued against a Navy policy that urged chaplains to lead "nonsectarian" prayers outside traditional worship services.

The chaplain argued his faith compelled him to pray "in Jesus' name" at all times, including at a protest outside the White House. A military jury determined last September that Klingenschmitt disobeyed orders by making that protest.

Late last year, Congress passed a bill that dropped the policy the chaplain opposed. Klingenschmitt said he was satisfied that the policy was dropped, despite the loss of his 16-year career.

"Other chaplains are free again to pray in Jesus' name," he said. "I would do it all over again and I praise God that my sacrifice purchased their freedom."

Klingenschmitt said he was discharged "honorably," but Navy officials would not confirm that, citing privacy law. The chaplain is now pursuing a theology degree at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va., and plans to travel to speak about his experience.

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