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**FAITH UNDER FIRE**

## Chaplain who prayed 'in Jesus' name' to fight Says he wants to return to Navy and worship according to conscience

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A U.S. Navy chaplain who got into trouble with his commanders for praying "in Jesus' name," yesterday was formally separated from the military service where he'd built a 16-year career and was evicted from military housing. Now he says the fight is just beginning.

"I'm going to continue my lawsuit against the Navy as a civilian, but will fight to be reinstated," Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt told WND. "I will continue to fight for all chaplains' rights to pray according to their conscience, but will do so outside of the Navy instead of inside."

He said he was removed from Navy housing, so has moved into student housing at Regent University where he's halfway through a four-year program to get his Ph.D in theology, and is willing to accept speaking engagements while his battle moves forward.



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

*(Story continues below)*

Klingenschmitt said the battle was worth it, and he would do it all over again. "We did change national policy. We rescinded the policy that I was punished for," he said.

Klingenschmitt's removal from the military came just a day after the District of Columbia Court

of Appeals concluded that Klingenschmitt hadn't met "the stringent standards required for an injunction pending appeal," so the administrative stay was being dissolved.

That stay had been obtained by a law firm representing him in his civil rights action against the Navy. He earlier had been scheduled to be removed from the Navy in January, but a lawsuit filed by [the Rutherford Institute](#) alleges he was within his rights to pray as he did.

"The Constitution is clear about the fact that the government is prohibited from establishing a religion," said John W. Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute. "Furthermore, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees that all citizens have a fundamental right to freely exercise their religious beliefs, and that includes military service people."

Klingenschmitt's orders revealed the Navy set a deadline of yesterday for him to be discharged and that his "honorable discharge certificate signed by the Secretary of the Navy [is] being retained ... and will be mailed to member's home subsequent to separation."

Klingenschmitt had written – without results – to Navy Secretary Donald Winter, asking him to personally get involved.

"I appeal to you directly, as a man of honor, to stand personally responsible before God, for firing this one Navy chaplain because he prayed and preached openly according to his faith, and publicly exposed many well-documented reprisals and harassments by men who hate religious freedom," the chaplain wrote.

"Or, you could do the right thing, and call a meeting, and hold these men accountable for publicly misrepresenting your views. Considering how 68 other chaplains are also suing the Navy, perhaps a little house-cleaning (or at least a mild tongue-lashing) could help stop their cancer of religious harassment from spreading any further throughout our beloved Navy," he said.

The civil rights complaint stems from a 1998 memo issued by the Navy Chief of Chaplains that discouraged them from invoking the name of Jesus in their prayers. "This instruction was later embodied in an instruction from the secretary of the Navy, which provided that religious elements for a command function, absent extraordinary circumstances, should be non-sectarian in nature," the lawsuit said.

"Chaplain Klingenschmitt resisted these directives on the basis of a federal statute providing that chaplains may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member," the firm said.

However, Klingenschmitt says that because he objected to the ban on the name of Jesus, the Department of the Navy gave him adverse fitness reports, reprimands and then brought him

up on a court martial – in violation of his constitutional rights.

And that, the Rutherford Institute charges, is an attempt by the Navy to assemble a "civic religion."

"There's a unitarian system of religion that's aimed at Christians," Whitehead 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."

In Klingenschmitt's disputed appearance, he prayed during an event held by 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.

While Klingenschmitt's punishment stems from his refusal to make all his prayers "non-sectarian," his battle already has been successful in that Congress has instructed that the policy be rescinded, and other chaplains will have the freedom Klingenschmitt sought.

"My sacrifice purchased their freedom. My conscience is clear, the fight was worth it, and I'd do it all again," he said.

Klingenschmitt, [as WND has reported](#), got into trouble after he appeared and delivered a public prayer "in Jesus' name" at that White House rally last winter with Judge Moore.

The Navy convicted him of failing to follow a lawful order because his superior didn't want him praying "in Jesus' name" and court-martialed him for that. But when Congress got word of his \$3,000 fine for his prayer, members ordered the Navy to remove the limitation and allow chaplains to pray as their "conscience dictates."

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