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WORLDNETDAILY EXCLUSIVE

HUNGER FOR JUSTICE, DAY 15

Chaplain 'starves himself' over Navy no-Jesus zone

Episcopal priest continues fast in protest of policy banning prayers in Lord's name

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By Ron Strom
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The chaplain who has gone without food for two weeks in protest of the Navy's policy against praying in Jesus' name says Americans are giving the [White House switchboard](#) a workout each time he appears in the media, as supporters urge President Bush to sign an executive order allowing military clergy to pray according to their own faith traditions.

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt says he will not eat until the president takes action to allow him and other chaplains the freedom to pray and preach without diluting God to a one-size-fits all deity.

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reported, Klingenschmitt participated in a protest outside the White House two weeks ago, asking Bush to intervene. That was the same day he began his hunger strike.

Klingenschmitt, an Air Force Academy graduate who transferred to the Navy

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

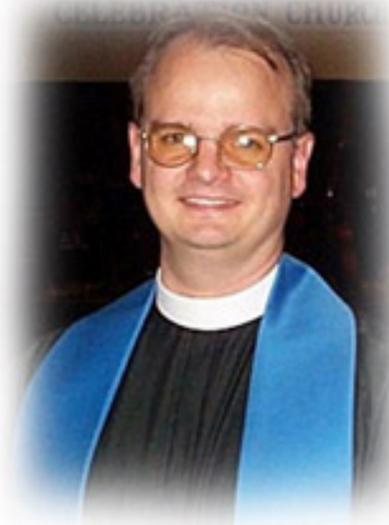
three years ago to be a chaplain, says since his case made national news the Navy has renewed his contract, but still says he cannot pray in Jesus' name in public while in uniform. While the chaplain says he welcomes the contract extension, he will continue his fast until he is allowed to wear his official uniform – which, he points out, bears a cross – while praying a Christian prayer in public.

"If I pray in Jesus' name in public, I have to wear civilian clothes," Klingenschmitt told WND in explaining the contract's stipulation.

Since 1998, the Navy has had a pluralism policy governing the behavior of chaplains, a policy Klingenschmitt ran into headlong when he first attended chaplain school in 2002.

"They taught mandatory lectures there to all chaplains, that you cannot pray to your God, you have to pray to the civic god," Klingenschmitt explained. "The Muslim chaplain can't pray to Allah, a Jewish chaplain can't pray to Adonai, a Roman Catholic can't pray in the name of the Trinity, and I couldn't pray in Jesus' name in public.

"They only let us do that in private. If it's in public, they tell us to just pray to God and say, 'Amen.'"



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Klingenschmitt, an Episcopal priest, says he challenged the policy at the time, saying that Title X of the U.S. Code allows him to pray "according to the manners and form" of his own church. "And that's been the law since 1860," he said.

The chaplain says he believes the 1998 Navy policy illegally overrides U.S. Code.

"They called me an immature chaplain because I claimed the right to pray in Jesus' name," Klingenschmitt added.

The "immature" label followed Klingenschmitt to his first chaplain post on a Navy ship. Two years later, his commanding officer, Capt. James M. Carr, wrote to the Navy board, saying Klingenschmitt emphasized his own "faith system" when praying and preaching.

The chaplain says the same officer punished him in July 2004 for a sermon he preached at an optional chapel service.

"In the sermon, I said, 'Jesus is the way to heaven,'" Klingenschmitt noted. He says he was told the next day: "You can't say that if unbelievers are in the audience because you're offending people, and that's not Navy pluralism."

In March, Klingenschmitt says, Carr asked the Navy board "to end my career. So I filed a complaint."

Said Klingenschmitt: "It went into the hands of a Navy judge. My career was on the line. They were going to end it after 14 years – out on the street with no retirement."

Just before his fast began, Klingenschmitt says, "The Navy stripped me of my uniform for all public appearances" that might include praying in Jesus' name.

"That's when I had enough; that's when I declared my

fast," he said.

[Klingenschmitt's website](#) covers the developments of his case.

The three-year contract extension means the chaplain is still in the Navy and is not in imminent danger of losing his job.

But the civilian-clothes mandate is too restrictive, Klingenschmitt claims.

"That's not good enough for me," he said. "I'm continuing my fast, and I'm asking the president to sign an executive order allowing chaplains to pray according to their consciences."

Klingenschmitt says a White House staff member told him on a conference call that Bush was "thinking" about the executive order and was personally aware of the issue.

"Every time I go on a radio show I give out the [White House phone number](#)," said Klingenschmitt. "There are unconfirmed rumors that we've overwhelmed the White House switchboard at least seven or eight times."

Currently based at Naval Station Norfolk, Klingenschmitt says he has not set a limit on his hunger strike and will take it one day at a time.

"I won't eat again until the president of the United States gives me back my uniform and lets me pray publicly in Jesus' name," he said.

Klingenschmitt noted 65 Naval chaplains filed suit challenging the plurality policy in 1999.

In October, 75 members of Congress, led by Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., wrote to the president urging him to sign an executive order that would reverse the Navy's policy.

"If you are a Christian, people know your faith, that Jesus Christ is your savior," Jones, a Catholic, told the Denver Post. "That is part of your tradition, part of your faith. Why in the world should you have to deny your faith?"

The American Center for Law and Justice sponsored an [online petition drive](#) that urges Bush to restore the right of Christian chaplains to pray "according to their faith." Klingenschmitt says 173,000 people have signed the petition.

If you'd like to sound off on this issue, please take part in the [WorldNetDaily poll](#).

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