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FAITH UNDER FIRE

WorldNetDaily

State bans 'Jesus' from troopers' prayers

'This edict is unacceptable and unconstitutional'

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Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine is being called on the carpet by a national religious freedom advocacy organization after his administration implemented a new state policy forbidding state police chaplains from using "Jesus Christ" in public prayers, and half a dozen chaplains resigned in protest.

"This edict is unacceptable and unconstitutional and must be reversed immediately," said Bishop Council Nedd, chief of [the group called In God We Trust USA](#). "Governor Kaine must immediately rescind this decision and beg the state police chaplains who have resigned in protest to return to duty."

Gordon Klingenschmitt, a former Navy chaplain who's been through a similar situation, also condemned the action.

"It's happening all over again! I cannot believe we live in a society where government officials literally dictate the content of a chaplain's prayers and dare to punish or exclude chaplains who pray 'in Jesus name,'" said [Klingenschmitt](#), who was fired from the military last year for praying "in Jesus name."

He later won a victory in Congress providing that right to other military chaplains and has a case pending to be reinstated.

(Story continues below)

"Kaine should be held responsible, since he campaigned as a Christian to get our votes. Now let's see him govern like a Christian," Klingenschmitt said.

According to Nedd, the ban was issued by state police Col. W. Steven Flaherty to chaplains just weeks ago. The dispute became public through the work of Charles W. Carrico Sr., a member of Virginia's House of Delegates who is a former trooper and will head up a Virginia effort to oppose the policy.

"In God We Trust will assist Delegate Carrico and oppose this policy with every means at our disposal," said Nedd. "Our supporters in Virginia are absolutely furious that the Commonwealth's government would rather its state troopers go without chaplains than risk someone being offended by a Christian chaplain invoking the name of Jesus Christ," Nedd said.

The group's report said there had been no complaints about any of the prayers by chaplains; it was simply a ban adopted "to prevent any possible future lawsuits."

The action, however, violates their First Amendment rights and prevents the chaplains "from serving effectively," said House Majority Leader H. Morgan Griffith. "These men had little choice but to resign."

Flaherty reported he was acting on an appeals court ruling dealing with prayers at the Fredericksburg city council, and his rule allowed only "nondenominational" prayers at public events.

He said those who object could opt out.

"This is not a forced situation," a spokeswoman for the state law enforcement agency said. "We wouldn't put them in that position."

Klingenschmitt battled the military over the same dispute.

He called those who resigned heroes, "because they refused to deny Jesus when ordered to by the Kaine administration."

The appeals court opinion the state cited was decided in a written ruling from former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who said discriminating against anyone who prays "in Jesus name" among officials rotating responsibilities to open city meetings is fair and reasonable.

Her reasoning left Klingenschmitt wondering how that conclusion had been reached.

That dispute focused on Rev. Hashmel Turner, a resident of Fredericksburg, Va., and a member of the town council, who was a part of a rotation of council members who prayed at the council meetings. He ended his prayers "in Jesus name."

That phrase, however, offended a listener, who prompted the involvement of several activist groups that threatened a lawsuit if the elected Christian council member continued to be allowed to pray "in Jesus name."

The city then adopted a non-sectarian prayer requirement, imposing a ban on any reference to "Jesus."

O'Connor wrote: "The restriction that prayers be nonsectarian in nature is designed to make the prayers accessible to people who come from a variety of backgrounds, not to exclude or disparage a particular faith."

"Ironically, she admitted Turner was excluded from participating solely because of the Christian content of his prayer," Klingenschmitt noted.

"The Fredericksburg government violated everybody's rights by establishing a nonsectarian religion, and requiring all prayers conform, or face punishment of exclusion," he said.

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