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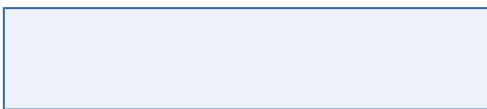
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Clergy: Prayer policy wrong

Ministers protest State Police decision on prayer

By **Chelyen Davis**

Date published: **10/2/2008**



RICHMOND

--A group of Virginia ministers yesterday condemned Gov. Tim Kaine for a recent state police requirement that police chaplains deliver non-denominational prayers at public events.

State Police Superintendent Col. Steve Flaherty had issued a directive to state police chaplains that they are to use non-denominational prayers at events, such as trooper graduations, after a federal court unanimously ruled in a Fredericksburg case against using sectarian prayers to open government meetings.

That is, in effect, a ban on using the name "Jesus Christ" in public prayers at such government functions. Six state police chaplains quit as chaplains--a volunteer position--after Flaherty's directive.

The ministers and the Family Foundation of Virginia held a news conference yesterday to assail Flaherty's directive and Kaine for backing it.

"The recent decision by Superintendent Flaherty and its subsequent endorsement by Gov. Kaine is an act of anti-Christian hysteria based on a flawed decision by a three-judge panel of the Fourth Circuit Court that has yet to be upheld and is, in fact, in conflict with other circuit court decisions from around the country," said Victoria Cobb, Family Foundation president. "The policy clearly violates the First Amendment-protected rights of free speech and religious freedom."

Cobb and the ministers said that barring the state police chaplains from using the name Jesus Christ is, in effect, a violation of those chaplains' rights because their religion calls upon them to pray to Jesus Christ.

"In our belief, it's not even a complete prayer" without appealing to Jesus Christ, said Rev. Rob Schenck, of the National Clergy Council.

Former Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt, who said he was discharged from the Navy for praying to Jesus Christ, sent Kaine a letter signed by 86 ministers, asking him to revise the policy for state police chaplains.

Klingenschmitt told Kaine that the policy amounts to religious discrimination and "anti-Christian persecution."

Kaine's response letter was similar to one he sent to House Majority Leader Del. Morgan Griffith, R-



Former Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt (center) speaks during a news conference in Richmond yesterday against the decision involving state police chaplains.
Bob Brown/Richmond Times-Dispatch

Salem, last week, when Griffith and another Republican delegate first raised the issue.

Kaine said a non-denominational prayer is "not watered-down by any means--Jesus suggested we pray to the Father. It just ensures that most if not all people attending a state sponsored-event are made to feel included and welcome."

Klingenschmitt said Kaine is too afraid of offending minority faiths to protect Christians' rights.

He is organizing a rally on Nov. 1 at the state Capitol in response to the issue.

Klingenschmitt also said under other court rulings cited in the Fredericksburg case ruling, the state doesn't have to ban denomination-specific prayers; it could allow a rotating prayer policy among different religions, or appoint chaplains to pray as they choose.

In the suit against the Fredericksburg City Council, a federal judge ruled in favor of the council and a three-judge federal appeals court upheld it.

Hashmel Turner, the Fredericksburg councilman and minister whose prayers to Jesus Christ sparked the court case, attended yesterday's press conference.

He said he has given up leading prayers before council meetings because of the court's ruling.

"We as Christians, we are persecuted and oppressed," Turner said. "We have to support these chaplains that are being persecuted."

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Date published: 10/2/2008

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Gov. Tim Kaine..... (posted by [goldie484](#) , Oct. 2, 2008 9:07 am)

is a [*#@!].

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Tamer..... (posted by [Justice1](#) , Oct. 2, 2008 8:51 am)

You are plainly, obviously, and forever, just a ridiculous idiot.....Oh my, you just did it, wow, you have just proved to every Christian that they are wrong. Wow, it has taken the secular world centuries of trying, but now, behold, the great Tamerlane has done it, heed now my friend, you are the all-knowing. Thank you for opening my eyes.

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Do you follow the Nicene Creed? (posted by [Tamerlane](#) , Oct. 2, 2008 7:20 am)

All Christians are supposed to. Constantine killed anyone who did not. Is says that all elements of the Trinity are of one substance, co-equal, co-created, co-existent, co-you-name-it. This was concocted to avoid the obvious logical conclusion that without it, the religion is polytheistic. Who came first: JC or God? Well it's just a miracle, and if you cite otherwise by insisting on elevating one of the godheads over the other tow, then you are a polytheist.

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