

# Navy chaplain charged with violating code

BY KATE WILTROUT  
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NORFOLK — A Navy chaplain who fasted for 18 days in front of the White House over the right to invoke Jesus' name outside of religious services has been charged with two violations of the military's code of conduct.

A Navy spokeswoman said Friday that Lt. Gordon J. Klingenschmitt was charged with willfully disobeying a superior commissioned officer and failing to obey a regulation or order. The charges stem from Klingenschmitt's March appearance — in uniform — at a televised political news conference.

Klingenschmitt said he thought he had written permission to wear his uniform to the event, at which he offered a prayer in Jesus' name. A conflicting verbal

order not to wear the uniform was unlawful, he said.

He described the charges as "an act of religious harassment" and a violation of the Whistleblower Protection Act.

Klingenschmitt said he has been told to choose between a letter of reprimand or a court-martial and he hasn't made up his mind how he will proceed. He said he has until Wednesday to respond.

He also said he intends to file countercharges against his commanding officer.

The Navy spokeswoman said the charges have nothing to do with Klingenschmitt's "other issues."

"This is just basically his conduct as a naval officer," she said.

Klingenschmitt, an evangelical Episcopal who works in a chapel at Norfolk Naval Station, began his hunger

strike in front of the White House in December.

Military chaplains are encouraged to pray according to their faith during worship services but are expected to offer nondenominational prayers at events where sailors of various backgrounds are present.

In January, according to The Washington Post, the commanding officer of Norfolk Naval Station said in writing that Klingenschmitt

could wear his uniform if he was conducting a "bona fide worship service."

The chaplain contends that offering opening and closing prayers during the March news conference qualified as a "bona fide religious observance," meaning he was within his rights to wear his uniform.

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