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Judge: Navy Right to Punish Chaplain for 'Exclusive' Message, Prayer

A Navy judge has ruled that Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt should not have quoted from the Gospels when he preached a funeral message at a Navy chapel 18 months ago -- and that his protest of the punishment was "without merit."

The judge, Anita K. Baker, endorsed a decision reached earlier by Rear Adm. F.R. Ruehe, who ruled that the chaplain's commander was right to reprimand Klingenschmitt in March 2005 for preaching a 2004 message that was "exclusive" -- meaning it excluded people of other faiths.

Klingenschmitt told CitizenLink he preached the message in a chapel, with voluntary attendance, which mentioned salvation and Jesus Christ at the funeral of a believer. His main text was Romans 8.

"I quoted the Bible in the chapel, and I quoted it in a memorial service," Klingenschmitt said. "I also quoted John 3:36 -- 'If anyone has the Son, he has eternal life. If anyone does not have the Son, he does not have eternal life, because God's wrath remains upon him.'"

Klingenschmitt said his commanding officer, Capt. James R. Carr, took umbrage at both the message and the fact he prayed "in Jesus Name" -- and took measures to punish him.

The judge wrote that because Klingenschmitt had not submitted "any document that establishes he was required by his church to preach, on that occasion, the particular message he did."

The judge further wrote: "Presumably, if his bishop requires him to preach all the Gospels, and he's not required to deliver that particular message on that particular occasion, he was free to choose to deliver a message at the memorial service that, while being true to his own

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beliefs, could also have commanded the assent of the vast majority of his audience. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Klingenschmitt chose to deliver a message he knew to be, by his own description, 'exclusive.' "

Chaplain Klingenschmitt, who mounted a hunger strike for 18 days at one point to protest the Navy's actions, faces a possible fine of up to two years' pay -- and possible discharge from duty.

He is calling on Congress to investigate the Navy's reversal of what he calls "its historic policy" allowing chaplains to pray and preach unimpeded by political correctness.

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