

Pentagon Facilitating Christian Evangelism

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The Defense Department (DOD) allegedly provided two fundamentalist Christian organizations exclusive access to several military bases around the country. This access became official sanction for these groups to proselytize amid the ranks, despite the fact that such activities were in violation of federal law.

The evangelical Christian groups have posted detailed instruction guides on their web site that advises their members about tactics to use to win over soldiers, or “pre-Christians,” to evangelical Christianity when visiting military installations around the country.

Spokespeople for the DOD and for the fundamentalist Christian organizations identified in this report did not return numerous calls or reply to several emails seeking comment.

According to a week-long investigation by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a government watchdog organization, the evidence it has uncovered proves the Pentagon has been engaged in a pattern of widespread evangelizing in violation of Clause 3, Article VI of the Constitution, which forbids a religion test for any position in the federal government, and the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which says Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion. Furthermore, individuals representing a specific denomination may only offer spiritual guidance to soldiers and are prohibited from using the “machinery of the state” to proselytize or try to convert members of the military.

But that is not the intent of Military Ministry, a fundamentalist Christian organization, according to documents posted on the group’s web site [[1](#)].

The group says its members are responsible for “working with Chaplains and Military personnel to bring lost soldiers closer to Christ, build them in their faith and send them out into the world as Government paid missionaries” - a clear-cut violation of federal law.

Military Ministry boasts that it has successfully “targeted” basic training installations, or “gateways” and has converted soldiers to Christianity.

“Young recruits are under great pressure as they enter the military at their initial training gateways,” the group has said, according to an archive on its web site. “The demands of drill instructors push recruits and new cadets to the edge. This is why they are most open to the ‘good news.’ We target specific locations, like Lackland AFB [Air Force base] and Fort Jackson, where large numbers of military members transition early in their career. These sites are excellent locations to pursue our strategic goals.”

Military Ministry is a subsidiary of Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelical missionary organization. In August, several high-level Pentagon officials were admonished for participating, while in uniform and on active duty, in a promotional video sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ’s Christian Embassy group.

The inspector general issued a 47-page report that said former Pentagon Chaplain Col. Ralph G. Benson knowingly misled the DOD when he requested permission from Pentagon officials to film a

video inside the Pentagon claiming he was interested in gathering information about the DOD's "own ministry." In fact, the report says, Benson was determined to use the video to "attract new supporters" to the Christian Embassy, an evangelical organization that evangelizes members of the military and politicians in Washington, DC via daily Bible studies and outreach events. The group holds prayer breakfasts on Wednesdays in the Pentagon's executive dining room, according to the organization's web site. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, founded the Christian Embassy 30 years ago.

Another fundamentalist group, Military Missions Network, says its mission is to build "an expanding global network of kingdom minded movements of evangelism and discipleship reaching the world through the military of the world."

On its web site, the group has posted a 40-page instruction manual for winning over so-called "pre-Christians" to evangelical Christianity.

"As you begin to launch a movement on a base, ship or post, it is evangelism that will make the difference between a maintenance ministry and a thriving movement- like you see in the Book of Acts," the group says in the "Unstoppable Evangelism" section of its manual. "Military men, women and their families are barraged daily with messages from a secular world view. To counter this, we must use every appropriate means to communicate a Christian world view."

The instruction manual also says that soldiers are more vulnerable in stressful situations and that Military Missions Network members can tap into that vulnerability to proselytize and perhaps convince soldiers to embrace Christianity.

"Of course, you should recognize as well that some environments and situations (i.e. basic training, stressful TDYs, threats of violence) create a very receptive audience," the manual says.

Additionally, the manual suggests evangelizers become familiar with what makes their "targets tick."

"We need to ask as a team 'Who is it exactly that we are trying to reach?' Cadets, enlisted, officers, singles, marrieds, senior NCOs [non-commissioned officers], senior officers, retirees? Army, Navy, Air Force? Internationals? No doubt, other categories for our audiences exist. Take the time to define them. Once you know the target, you'll be able to begin to design your approach to reach them. Become as Paul was 'all things to all' (1 Corinthians 9:22). As you define your target more clearly, take the time to get to know a few of them! Mark Mittelberg says: 'Find out what makes them tick. What are their questions? What interests them? What do they wrestle with? Get to know their background. Learn their language-find out what words and concepts connect with them and which ones make their eyes glaze over. Then speak to them in their own language.'"

Military Missions Network and Military Ministry count current and former high-level personnel from all four branches of the military as board members and use their relationships with base commanders to gain access to soldiers, according to documents from both groups.

Mikey Weinstein, the founder and president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, said the new evidence that has surfaced proves proselytizing among military bases is not an isolated issue, which some of his critics have charged.

"Today is a tragically dark day of infamy for the Constitutional religious liberties of the guardians of the American Dream: the United States armed forces," Weinstein said in an interview. "Today, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation is publicly releasing incontrovertible and comprehensive evidence of a profoundly unconstitutional and previously undetected alliance between

fundamentalist Christian churches, parachurch organizations and the most intricate machinery of the American military. We are resolute and determined to present this compelling volume of evidence before the Judge in our current Federal litigation in Kansas City. It is our fervent hope that its shocking impact will formidably buttress the likelihood of a favorable legal victory to stem the engulfing tide of the Department of Defense's pernicious pattern and practice of Constitutional rape of the religious freedoms of our honorable and noble sailors, soldiers, marines, airmen and veterans."

Since Weinstein started his foundation more than two years ago, he has been contacted by more than 6,000 soldiers from all over the world who said they were being pressured to embrace some form of fundamental Christianity.

Last month, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation filed a lawsuit in federal court against Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and US Army major Freddy Welborn, on behalf of an Army soldier stationed in Iraq. The complaint filed in US District Court in Kansas City on behalf of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation for Jeremy Hall, an Army specialist currently on active duty in Combat Operations Base Speicher, Iraq, alleges Hall's First Amendment rights were violated when Welborn threatened to retaliate against Hall and block his reenlistment in the Army because of Hall's atheist beliefs.

P.S.

* From t r u t h o u t | Report

http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/100807J.shtml

* Jason Leopold is senior editor and reporter for Truthout. He received a Project Censored award in 2007 for his story on Halliburton's work in Iran.

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.militaryministry.us/inde...>