



January 20, 2011

To:

Mr David French, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force  
Lt. Col. Shawn Mann, Office of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force  
Lt. Gen. Michael Gould, Superintendent, USAFA  
Chaplain (Colonel) Robert Bruno, USAFA Command Chaplain

The Academy is in danger of backsliding into command-supported proselytism with its upcoming prayer breakfast on February 10<sup>th</sup>. In promoting a prayer breakfast through command channels and inviting retired Lt. Clebe McClary, Academy leadership sponsors an evangelical Christian event that subverts the military mission. The Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers (MAAF) supports the efforts of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation in identifying these issues. Thousands of members of MAAF are hoping the Academy, Air Force leadership, and chaplains can come together to ensure this event is handled properly.

MAAF objects to all government prayer events due to their exclusive nature and special privilege to religion. This prayer event is being promoted through command channels, thus elevating the special privilege given to theistic views over nontheistic views. The invitation to Lt McClary creates a situation where government resources and mandate are provided to Christian evangelism. Worst of all, Lt McClary's message subverts the military mission for the purposes of Christian evangelism: "To [McClary], USMC will always mean a U.S. Marine for Christ." The Academy has created an unconstitutional entanglement of religion in this event, which uses command channels to promote Christianity to the detriment of the military mission.

MAAF strongly encourages the Academy to disseminate senior command disclaimers that clearly distance the Academy from Lt McClary's message and also state clearly to cadets, faculty, and staff that this is a Christian event not officially endorsed by Academy leadership. Events of a religious nature should be published only through the chaplain channels to interested parties, in this case, only to those who have asked to receive information from chaplains about Christian events. Additionally, disinviting Lt McClary will further ensure that military mission should not be co-opted for Christian evangelism. To truly resolve this issue, the Academy should cancel this and all future official government prayer events and instead provide for these activities only through private facilities and the appropriate chaplain channels.

The Academy and the Air Force have indicated they want to move away from the exclusive and problematic history of evangelism. Following MAAF's recommendations provides an opportunity to show there is no special privilege for evangelical Christianity and that nontheists have the same support as theists within the Academy.

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