

CREW

**citizens for responsibility
and ethics in washington**

December 11, 2006

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Acting Inspector General
Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1900

VIA MAIL AND FAX: 703-604-8567

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”), a non-profit government watchdog organization, on behalf of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (“MRFF”), respectfully requests that the Office of the Inspector General commence an immediate investigation into the circumstances surrounding the creation of a videotape promoting the Christian Embassy. The video includes interviews with several members of the Army and the Air Force, appearing in uniform in the Pentagon, praising the Christian Embassy. A copy of the video is enclosed for your review; it can also be found on the organization’s website, www.christianembassy.com.

The Christian Embassy is a self-described “non-political, multi-denominational ministry that has been caring for, encouraging and equipping our country’s leaders and decision-makers for nearly 30 years.” See www.christianembassy.com. The organization’s stated purpose is “to care for, serve, encourage and equip leaders at the White House, at the Pentagon, in foreign embassies and on Capitol Hill,” by helping “people in these communities reflect on and integrate their values with their work life to develop personally, professionally and spiritually.” *Id.* The video’s narrator states, “there are over 25,000 Department of Defense leaders working in the rings and corridors of the Pentagon. Through Bible studies, discipleship, prayer breakfasts and outreach events, Christian Embassy is mustering these men and women into an intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.”

According to the organization’s website, the Christian Embassy offers Pentagon employees morning prayer breakfast meetings each Wednesday from 0700 to 0750 in the Executive Dining Room (Room 3B1062), small group meetings where active and retired military leaders and Pentagon staffers “share and sharpen one another in their quest to bridge the gap between faith and work” and Bible studies.

The video depicts numerous scenes of groups of unidentified, uniformed military personnel, as well as interviews with a number of named, uniformed officials (in order of appearance): Army Brigadier General Vince Brooks, Air Force Major General Pete Sutton, Army Lieutenant Colonel Lucious Morton, Army Brigadier General Bob Caslen, Air Force Major General Jack Catton, Air Force Colonel Cynthia Islin and Pentagon Chaplain (Colonel) Ralph Benson.

In the interviews, each of the officers discusses the benefits of the Christian Embassy. For example, Army Brigadier General Vince Brooks explains that the Christian Embassy has helped him “realize we have a need for the lord in our lives.” Army Brigadier General Bob Caslen, discussing the meetings of Generals and Admirals for Flag Officer Fellowship states, “I see a brother and the lord in these Flag Fellowship groups and I immediately feel like I am being held accountable because we’re the aroma of Jesus Christ.” Colonel Ralph Benson states, “Christian Embassy is a blessing to the Washington area, it is a blessing to our campus, it’s a blessing to our country . . . being able to share the message of Jesus Christ in a very, very important time in our world as we’re in a worldwide war on terrorism. What more do we need than Christian people leading us in values?”

Service men and women shown in uniform at the Pentagon enthusiastically promoting a private, sectarian religious organization appears to violate a number of Department of Defense Directives, Joint Ethics Regulations, Army Regulations and Air Force Instructions as detailed below.

Failure to Abide by Community Relations Policy

The Department of Defense Community Relations Policy states that official community relations support must be confined to those activities that are of common public interest and of benefit to a broadly representational community. Department of Defense Directive 5410.18, paragraph 4.2.3.. Paragraph 4.2.3.5. authorizes official participation in events sponsored by “organizations with a narrow membership base or interest, such as . . . religious or sectarian organizations . . . when it is clear that the support primarily benefits the community at large, rather than the sponsoring organization.” Examples of such authorized official support include the use of a “church for a public concert, speech or display when the activity is not part of a religious service.”

Paragraph 4.2.9. of the Directive states:

Community relations activities shall not support, or appear to support, any event that provides a selective benefit to any individual, group, or organization, including any religious or sectarian organization, ideological movement, political campaign or organization, or commercial enterprise . . . when DoD support is provided to one non-Federal entity, the DoD Component commands or organizations providing such support must be able and willing to provide similar support to comparable events sponsored by similar non-Federal entities.

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Army Regulation 360-1, paragraphs 3-2.b.(2)(b) basically mirrors the DoD Directive, providing:

Public affairs support may be provided to events sponsored by organizations with a narrow membership base or interest (for example, civilian enterprises, religious or sectarian movements and organizations, ideological movements, and political organizations and campaigns) when it is clear that the support primarily benefits the community at large and/or the Army as opposed to benefiting the sponsoring organization.

In the chapter entitled “Community Relations,” Air Force Instruction 35-101, paragraph 8.6. states that to ensure every planned event complies with public law and DoD policy, at least one condition must be met in the categories “Program, Sponsor, Support, and Site.”

Under the “program” criteria, paragraph 8.6.1.2.1. “disapproved” events include those that are “[i]ntended, or which appear to endorse, selectively benefit, or favor, any private individual, special interest group, business, religious, ideological movement, commercial venture, political candidate, or organization.” Pursuant to paragraph 8.6.2.1.7., only if a religious group’s programs are “of community-wide interest, nonsectarian, and broadly promoted,” will the sponsor be approved.

Because the Christian Embassy’s video – which includes repeated references to Jesus Christ as the lord – clearly endorses a particular private organization (the Christian Embassy) as well as a particular religion (Christianity), according to DoD directives, Army regulations and Air Force instructions, neither Army nor Air Force personnel should have appeared in the video.

Improperly Appearing in Uniform

DoD Directive 1334.1., section 3.1.3. prohibits DoD employees from wearing their uniforms:

Except when authorized by competent Service authority, when participating in activities such as public speeches, interviews, picket lines, marches, rallies or any public demonstration . . . which may imply Service sanction of the cause for which the demonstration or activity is conducted.

AR 670-1, paragraph 1-10.j.(2) states that wearing Army uniforms is prohibited “[w]hen participating in public speeches, interviews, picket lines, marches, rallies, or public demonstrations, except as authorized by competent authority.”

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Air Force Instruction (“AFI”) 36-2903, table 1.3 provides that wearing Air Force uniforms is prohibited when “participating in public speeches, interviews, picket lines, marches or rallies, or in any public demonstration when the Air Force sanction of the cause for which the activity is conducted may be implied.”

Because all of the Army and Air Force officials appearing in the Christian Embassy video were filmed in uniform, all are in violation of DoD Directive 1134.1, Army regulations and Air Force instructions.

Failure to Include Disclaimer

Department of Defense 5500.7-R, Joint Ethics Regulation (“JER”) section 3-307a. states:

A DoD employee who uses or permits the use of his military grade or who includes or permits the inclusion of his title or position as one of several biographical details given to identify himself in connection with teaching, speaking or writing . . . shall make a disclaimer if the subject . . . deals in significant part with any ongoing or announced policy, program or operation of the employee’s Agency . . . and the DoD employee has not been authorized by appropriate Agency authority to present that material as the Agency’s position.

Further, the JER states that the disclaimer “shall expressly state that the views presented are those of the speaker . . . and do not necessarily represent the views of DoD or its Components.”

In addition, Army Regulation (“AR”) 360-1, paragraph 6-8, subparagraph d. provides “Any individual who uses a title or other identification connected with DoD in an unofficial writing or speech will include with such material the disclaimer at (2) above.” Subparagraph 2 states:

The following disclaimer must be used: ‘The views expressed in this article (book) are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.’

Although the Air Force does not appear to have an instruction specifically requiring the use of a disclaimer, AFI35-101, section 6.53., “Payment and Honoraria for Writing,” refers to DoD 5500.7-R, JER.

All of the officials in the Christian Embassy video were identified by their positions with the Department of Defense, yet the video failed to include any disclaimers indicating that the views expressed were not those of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government as

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required by DoD 5500.7-R, JER or AR 360-1. Accordingly, all of these officials violated Department of Defense regulations.

Questions for Consideration

CREW, on behalf of MRFF, respectfully requests that, as part of its investigation into this matter, the Office of Inspector General consider the following questions:

- 1) Who gave permission for the Christian Embassy to film its promotional videotape at the Pentagon?
- 2) Did the person or persons who approved the filming follow proper procedures and take into account the relevant DoD Directives?
- 3) Did the Christian Embassy fully explain to the DoD Office of the Secretary, Office of Public Affairs or the offices of Public Affairs for the Army and Air Force the promotional and sectarian nature of the video?
- 4) Did each of the service members depicted in the video seek approval from his or her appropriate supervisors, legal advisors, public affairs officials, or other military personnel before agreeing to be interviewed on camera?
- 5) Did each of the service members depicted in the video seek approval from his or her appropriate supervisors, legal advisors, public affairs officials, or other military personnel, before appearing in uniform on camera?
- 6) If permission was sought to appear in the video, did each of the service members interviewed therein reveal the sectarian nature of the Christian Embassy to his or her appropriate supervisors, legal advisors, public affairs officials, or other military personnel?
- 7) Why does the video not include a disclaimer indicating that the service men and women appearing therein are not expressing the views of DoD or any of its components?
- 8) Has DoD allowed other sectarian religious organizations to use Pentagon facilities and uniformed personnel in videos? Similarly, have other organizations, religious or otherwise, been denied permission to utilize Pentagon facilities and uniformed personnel in videos?
- 9) If, in fact, the Christian Embassy, is holding weekly Bible studies in the Pentagon or on other military property, have other religious groups been afforded the same opportunity to

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hold meetings at comparable places and times? Similarly, are there any groups that have requested the opportunity to hold meetings and been refused?

- 10) Has the Pentagon, the Army or the Air Force improperly given its support to a private, sectarian organization by allowing the video to be filmed at the Pentagon and by allowing service men and women to appear in the video in uniform, identified by position and rank?

Not only does the appearance of military personnel in the Christian Embassy video likely violate numerous DoD directives, Army regulations and Air Force instructions, it may also violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits the government from preferring one religion over another. High level Army and Air Force officials appearing in uniform, in the Pentagon, touting the Christian Embassy implies a government endorsement of the organization and its sectarian religious mission. As a result, CREW on behalf of MRFF, requests that the Office of Inspector General commence an immediate investigation not only into the circumstances leading to the Pentagon's participation in the creation of the Christian Embassy video, but also into whether that participation was appropriate in light of the Constitution, federal laws and military regulations.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Melanie Sloan
Executive Director

Encl.