

“U.S. Marine for Christ” prompts suit at Colo. academy

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Professors at the U.S. Air Force Academy have filed suit in a bid to stop a school prayer luncheon headlined by a motivational speaker who calls himself a "U.S. Marine for Christ."

Five faculty members joined the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, which has spent years fighting proselytizing at the academy, in filing suit Monday (Jan. 31).

The scheduled speaker for the annual National Prayer Luncheon on Feb. 10 is Lt. Clebe McClary, a decorated disabled Vietnam veteran from South Carolina.

"By making a fundamentalist Christian the keynote speaker at this event, the government has promoted, elevated, endorsed and favored Christianity over all other religions," they argued.

Academy spokesman Lt. Col. John Bryan said McClary was invited after former Secretary of State Colin Powell could not attend. The event is voluntary and paid for with a chaplains' offering fund and a \$7 admission. As of Tuesday, 178 attendees from the 10,000 on base are expected.

"He's not here to pass out Bibles and to have a sermon," Bryan said

of McClary. "Does he have personal Christian beliefs? Yes, he does. ... We're committed to protecting somebody's right to practice any religion they choose, or no religion, provided those practices don't violate policy or law or impede mission accomplishment."

The Rev. Welton Gaddy, president of the Washington-based Interfaith Alliance, had warned the academy's superintendent that "inviting Lt. McClary appears to be a step backward in creating a climate of religious respect."