

Navy Chaplain: 'Best Thing for Church Is Persecution'

Navy Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Wes Modder never expected counseling service members on what the Bible says would put him in the fight of his life.

But that's what happened after a group of those he counseled complained a few months ago about what he had to say on subjects like homosexuality and other sexual matters.

Worsening matters, Modder's direct commander sided with his accusers and decided to take legal action against the chaplain.

"It was shocking. You feel a lot of emotion," Modder told CBN News in a recent interview. "You feel natural feelings like betrayal."

His opponents at Joint Base Charleston in South Carolina didn't just want the Assemblies of God pastor corrected. They were after his job, which would have meant the loss of his military pension as well.

"They wanted to kick me out, remove me from a promotion list," Modder recalled. "Having a family with four children, not knowing what I'm going into, sacrificing 19 years of honorable military service—all of it was on the line, everything."

Then recently his attorney, Michael Berry with the Liberty Institute, got surprising news from the Navy: Modder was cleared of all the charges.

"When we found out that the Navy, that this two-star admiral had completely exonerated Chaplain Modder, I was blown away," Berry told CBN News. "It was not what I was expecting. I was preparing myself for a dogfight."

Berry said he was elated and could hardly wait to tell Modder the good news. The chaplain and his family were overjoyed. But he admits he's still hurting.

"There's a huge sense of victory and relief, but the emotional capital is overwhelming," Modder said.

Still, he suggested as more and more Christians face similar battles over their beliefs, they have to fight because the cause is crucial.

"I think it's paramount," he said. "I think the best thing for the Church is persecution. And I know that sounds counterintuitive, but we need to stand for religious liberty."

"It's not really about bakers. It's not really about florists. It's about validating something that is national," he explained.

Berry said he's distressed by the un-American nature of this Christian persecution.

"It could be people of any other faiths, too, but unfortunately right now the majority of attacks are coming against Christians in this country," Berry said. "That's not what our country is about."

As a combat veteran, Berry's particularly frustrated military commanders are thrust into the middle of these battles.

"When a commanding officer has to worry about whether or not somebody in his unit is going to be offended because a chaplain is praying or because a chaplain dares to speak from their religious worldview to another service member, that commanding officer now, his attention and his focus is taken away from the external threat and he has to worry about things he should never have to worry about," he said.

Modder and his family will soon be out of the uncomfortable environment he found himself in at Joint Base Charleston.

They're transferring to one of their favorite duty stations,
San Diego.