

Prayer at West Point Under Fire

Prayer at **West Point** is the latest **Christian** expression to come under fire. A secularist group protested **invocations** at various West Point events. The **Alliance Defending Freedom** (ADF) opposed this protest in a letter Jan. 9 on behalf of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

“The **First Amendment** allows public officials to acknowledge our nation’s religious heritage,” said Alliance Defending Freedom Senior Legal Counsel David Hacker. “Since the Revolution, the U.S. Army has offered soldiers the opportunity to hear invocations. West Point has continued this tradition since its founding in 1802. Anti-religious groups with misguided ideas about the **First Amendment** should not be allowed to destroy a time-honored and perfectly constitutional American custom.”

A 1981 West Point graduate, James P. Trainor, also signed the letter. Trainor is one of nearly 2,200 allied attorneys with Alliance Defending Freedom.

“Chaplains, cadets, and staff have been praying at West Point events since its founding in 1802. These prayers have legal right to continue,” said Chaplain (COL) Ron Crews, USAR retired, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty. “We are grateful for the services of Alliance Defending Freedom in providing a legal analysis that supports the religious liberty of all cadets at West Point.”

In December 2012, **Americans United for Separation of Church and State** (AUSCS) wrote to the military academy and claimed that invocations at West Point events – including Plebe Parent Weekend, Ring Weekend, Thanksgiving Dinner, the Martin Luther

King Award Dinner and graduation – were unconstitutional and coerce cadets to participate in and endorse **religion**.

The Alliance Defending Freedom letter offered a different precedent: “The historical practice of offering prayer, especially at military and university functions at West Point does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.”

The letter pointed out that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit has stated that these invocations “solemnize public occasions, express confidence in the future, and encourage the recognition of what is worthy of appreciation in society.”

Contrary to AUSCS’s accusations, ADF’s letter said: “West Point does not require cadets to participate in the invocations or even listen to them” and “two federal courts of appeals rejected the notion that **prayers** at significant public university events coerce attendees to participate in religion.”

“Our Founding Fathers opened their meetings with prayer and ensured this freedom would be protected in the Constitution,” said Hacker. “It is unfortunate that groups like Americans United disrespect the history behind our brave **military** men and women, who train to preserve this freedom for future generations.”

Added Crews: “Chaplains and military personnel have been praying since General George Washington established the Chaplain Corps in July 1775. We encourage the leadership at West Point to continue offering public invocations.”