

McMaster supports councils who pray in Jesus' name

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANDERSON, S.C. — State Attorney General Henry McMaster says he will take on the American Civil Liberties Union if the group takes a city or county council to court over prayers said before meetings.

McMaster wrote a letter to the Piedmont Chapter of the ACLU, after the group wrote its own letters to the Oconee County Council and the Anderson and Seneca city

councils in September, asking them to follow a federal court order to stop using the name of Jesus Christ in prayers.

"There is no federal or state law which tells people that they must pray or not pray in any particular way, as this would be in direct conflict with the express words of the United States and South Carolina constitutions guaranteeing the free exercise of religion," McMaster wrote.

McMaster's letter was

addressed to ACLU chapter president Mike Cubelo, who wrote back to the attorney general saying he is mixing up "government prayer issues with individual freedoms."

"This dispute has never been about an individual's right to pray as he chooses," Cubelo wrote. "The ACLU supports this right wholeheartedly ... Our dispute, however, is about government prayer which favors one religion or denomination over others."

McMaster said his office will support a council if the ACLU takes it to court. "The point is the ACLU's intent is to find fault with any prayer and that is contrary to the South Carolina and U.S. Constitutions," McMaster said.

The dispute is over a July 2004 ruling by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upholding a lower judge's decision that prayers before meetings of the Great Falls Town Council were unconsti-

tutional because by mentioning Jesus' name, they honored one faith over another.

The ACLU's letters reminded the councils of the decision and warned lawsuits may follow if members do not follow the ruling.

Since the group wrote its letter, Oconee County Council member the Rev. Bill Rinehart ended his prayer before a meeting asking for wisdom, direction and guidance "in the name of Jesus."

"The attorney general supports our premise all along that we do not forfeit our personal rights just because we are elected to office," said Rinehart, who also is a pastor for a Seneca church. "The attorney general has come forward and issued a real strong rebuke and we have won this round. How many councils, school boards have acquiesced just because the ACLU rattled their saber?"

Sons of Jehovah's Witnesses return from war without welcome

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CANTON, Ohio — Jason and Johel Woodliff came back from Iraq with their comrades in a Marine Corps battalion that lost 48 members, greeted by a mile-long parade attended by thousands of strangers.

But not by their family. Thomas and Mia Woodliff, who are devout Jehovah's Witnesses, were so upset by

their sons' decisions to join the Marine Reserves that they did not meet them at the airport upon their return last month.

"I begged my mother to come, but I knew she wouldn't," Johel Woodliff, 20, told The (Canton) Repository for a story Saturday.

The parents say they respect their sons' choices but can't reconcile them with

their beliefs.

"Our two sons were taught to be peace-loving followers of Jesus Christ," the couple said in a statement. "Instead, they have chosen a different path. We respect their right to choose whatever lifestyle they wish. And we hope one day for reconciliation so that we can be a united family again."

The parents are behaving according to the doctrines of their faith, said a spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters in New York.

"As Christians, we're neutral with respect to the conflicts that nations have," said J.R. Brown, director of public

information for the Watchtower Bible Tract Society. "Our neutrality is just in regards to conflicts of men. This doesn't mean we're adversaries. We try to (convay) that to the person as best we can, but because they're usually partisan, they think we're against them."

Jehovah's Witnesses who volunteer for military service have essentially opted to leave the church and abandon neutrality, Brown said. Such a move can mean the end of their relationships with other church members, even family, he said.

Jason Woodliff, 23, said he

was kicked out of the house for telling his parents he wanted to join the Marines.

"I was 18 years old, living by myself in a trailer," he said. "I haven't had a conversation with my dad in five years. For him, it's 100 percent about the religion."

Johel Woodliff said his parents reacted similarly when he announced plans to turn down a college scholarship and enlist.

"When they found out I

wanted to join, they were very upset about it. I let them know that as I grew older, I had done some research on the religion, and that it didn't abide with my beliefs," he said.

The brothers say they consider themselves nondenominational but still fervently believe in God. Johel Woodliff carries a camouflage Bible and wears a medallion of St. Michael, the warrior angel, on

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Open to the call

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different if Paul had neglected the leading of the Holy Spirit. At the proper time, God allowed Paul to minister in Asia for two years so all who dwelt there heard the word.

Tattoo artist

Continued from page 8B


"These wonderful folks are not going to be reached by a traditional style of church very easily, so Brian is able to remove some of the barriers between those people and a relationship with the Lord," he said.

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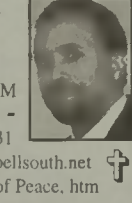
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