



Deus Vult: Pete Hegseth's Christian Nationalist Crusade to Remake the U.S. Military

- January 19, 2026

On January 16, 2026, the Office of the Secretary of War sent an email to Pentagon employees inviting them to a "Christian prayer and worship service" the following Wednesday. The invitation, featuring a graphic resembling a tombstone against an American flag backdrop, was nothing new. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has held such services monthly since taking office. What was new: the email also went, unsolicited, to defense contractors. And it made its way to the [Military Religious Freedom Foundation \(MRFF\)](#).

From: OSW Protocol Prayer Service <osw.protocol.prayer-service@war.mil>
Sent: Friday, January 16, 2026 12:31 PM
To: OSW Protocol Prayer Service <osw.protocol.prayer-service@war.mil>
Subject: Wednesday - Pentagon Prayer Service -- Wed, January 21, 1200-1230

Some people who received this message don't often get email from osw.protocol.prayer-service@war.mil. Learn why this is important osw.protocol.prayer-service@war.mil.

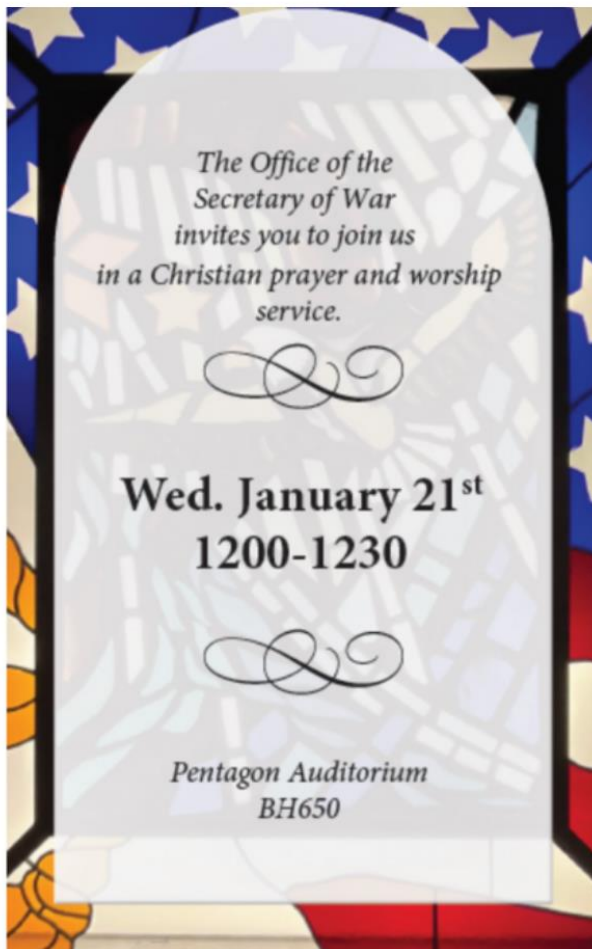
Good afternoon,

The Secretary of War invites you to join him for a Christian prayer and worship service next Wednesday, January 21st, in the Pentagon Auditorium (BH650) at 1200. This is an optional service that is open to all Department staff stationed at, or with access to, the Pentagon – due to seat limitations, no visitors or external guests will be accommodated.

Seating will be accommodated at a first come, first served basis. Seat reservations can be confirmed for GO/FO and Senior Leaders only by RSVP to osw.protocol.prayer-service@war.mil

If you are unable to join the service, it will be livestreamed internally on Pentagon TV Channel 2 and via DVIDS: www.dvidshub.net/webcast/37333

Please feel free to forward this invitation widely to members in your organization.



For information regarding weekly religious services provided in the Pentagon, contact the Office of the Pentagon Chaplain.
Phone: 703.695.3336
Email: usarmy.pentagon.hqda-pentchap.mbx.pentagon-chaplain@army.mil
Chaplain/Chapel Request Portal: <https://pentagonchaplaincac.army.mil/>

V/R,
Office of the Secretary of War

Within hours, MRFF began receiving panicked calls. “For the first time that we’re aware of, it went to DOD contractors,” MRFF founder Mikey Weinstein told GPAHE. “If you’re probably at Martin Marietta, General Dynamics, Boeing, you start wondering if we don’t make an effort to be there by not going, will we turn out to be a tarantula on a wedding cake?”

The expansion of Hegseth’s prayer campaign to the private sector marks a new front in the religious transformation he is waging at the Department of Defense, one that threatens the constitutional bedrock of religious pluralism that has sustained the American military since George Washington’s Continental Army.

On December 16, 2025, Hegseth [announced](#) sweeping changes to the military's Chaplain Corps. He [claimed](#) that military chaplains had been operating as therapists rather than ministers "in an atmosphere of political correctness and secular humanism."

His first target: the Army's 112-page Spiritual Fitness Guide, which Hegseth [mocked](#) for mentioning God only once while referencing "feelings" 11 times and "playfulness" nine times. "In short, it's unacceptable and unserious, so we're tossing it," he [declared](#). The guide, designed to support service members of all faiths and belief systems, has since been [scrubbed](#) from the internet entirely.



A Denomination of One

Hegseth's critics aren't all atheists or secular humanists. Many are Christians themselves, alarmed at what they see as the imposition of one narrow theological perspective on an institution that [includes](#) roughly 70 percent Christians among its active-duty personnel alongside substantial numbers of atheists, agnostics, Jews, Muslims, and followers of Eastern religions.

"Hegseth is overstepping his boundaries, trying to become the denominational policeman for members of the military," Reverend Justin Cohen, a Baptist chaplain, [told](#) *The Daily Mail*. One chaplain endorser, speaking anonymously, [characterized](#) the current environment as "the weirdest era we've ever seen when it comes to the chaplain system."

Mikey Weinstein, the former Air Force JAG officer who [founded](#) MRFF in 2006, didn't mince words. He [called](#) Hegseth's moves "multi-generational damage to the US military" and "a tidal wave of unconstitutional destruction fueled by his fundamentalist Christian nationalistic

arrogance and hubris.” MRFF [represents](#) over 100,000 military personnel, with 95 percent identifying as Christians.

Weinstein has been warning about Christian nationalism in the military for two decades. “When we first started in the early 2000s, I remember people would look at me and go, ‘Mikey and his family and his foundation, they’re like wearing little tinfoil hats. Oh, the bad Christians are going to take over’” he told GPAHE. “Well, they have.”

Deus Vult

Hegseth’s Christian nationalist credentials [predate](#) his Pentagon appointment. In the week following the January 6, 2021, domestic terrorist attack on the U.S. Capitol, a D.C. National Guard security officer [flagged](#) a National Guard member who worked as a Fox News host. Pete Hegseth [sported](#) tattoos, including the Latin words “Deus vult,” meaning “God wills it,” a Christian battle cry from the First Crusade that has become [popular](#) among white supremacist groups, including the Proud Boys and Three Percenters. The phrase [appeared](#) in the racist manifestos of the Allen, Texas, shooter and Anders Breivik, an anti-Muslim bigot who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011.

Hegseth’s superiors [pulled](#) him from Guard duty during President Biden’s inauguration. Perceiving himself as being targeted for his views, Hegseth [resigned](#) from the National Guard.

His 2020 book *American Crusade* [depicts](#) America in a struggle fought by conservative white Christians and “freedom-loving people everywhere” protecting their God-ordained superiority and dominance. In it, Hegseth [wrote](#) that Islam “is not a religion of peace, and it never has been” and [likened](#) the current era to the medieval Crusades: “Our present moment is much like the 11th Century. We don’t want to fight, but, like our fellow Christians one thousand years ago, we must.” The book [concludes](#): “See you on the battlefield. Together, with God’s help, we will save America. Deus vult!”

Weinstein sees a direct line from Hegseth’s crusader rhetoric to real-world consequences. “We don’t just look like the latest iteration of the crusaders. We are the 21st-century Christian crusaders,” he told GPAHE. “And the price for this kind of shit is not paid in anything less than blood. And by blood, I don’t mean little creeks, or ponds, or streams, but oceans and oceans of blood.”

The Idaho Network

Understanding Hegseth’s vision requires understanding his religious community. The defense secretary [attends](#) Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship, a member church of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), an archconservative, Christian nationalist network [co-founded](#) by Pastor Doug Wilson of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell [confirmed](#) Hegseth’s affiliation and noted that the defense secretary “very much appreciates many of Mr. Wilson’s writings and teachings.”

Those writings include a 1996 book that [depicted](#) antebellum slavery as a “beneficent American institution” that cultivated “affection among the races.” The CREC network [practices](#) complementarianism, the patriarchal belief that men and women have distinct God-given roles, and forbids women from holding church leadership positions. Pastors within the network have [argued](#) that women should not have the right to vote; Hegseth recently [shared](#) a CNN video featuring those arguments on his social media, adding the CREC slogan: “All of Christ for All of Life.”

When CNN [asked](#) Wilson whether establishing CREC’s new Washington, D.C., church was part of a mission to turn America into a Christian nation, his answer was unequivocal: “Yes.” Wilson [added](#): “This is the first time we’ve had connections with as many people in national government as we do now.”

Hegseth is [devoted](#) to the ideology of the late Dominionist founder R.J. Rushdoony, an extremist educator opposed to equal rights and human rights who was determined to eradicate secular public schools. On a Christian Nationalist podcast, Hegseth [called](#) for classical Christian schools to serve as “boot camps for winning back America” and an “educational insurgency” to “build” an “army” of young people who will rise up and obliterate liberalism, secularism, and intellectualism.

Women Under Review

The religious ideology is [translating](#) directly into Pentagon policy.

NPR [obtained](#) a memo showing the Pentagon has launched a six-month review to determine the “operational effectiveness of ground combat units 10 years after the Department lifted all remaining restrictions on women serving in combat roles.” Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel Anthony Tata [requested](#) that Army and Marine Corps leaders submit data on the readiness, training, performance, casualties, and command climate of ground combat units by January 15.

Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson [stated](#) that “Under Secretary Hegseth, the Department of Defense will not compromise standards to satisfy quotas or an ideological agenda.”

Hegseth’s opinion of women in the military is nothing new. As far back as 2013, he was denigrating their presence. “If they’re not physically capable of doing that which a man would do, if you’ve got a wounded soldier or marine on the battlefield who needs to be dragged off, who needs to be medevaced, who needs to be pulled, can I count on that female soldier to do the same thing?” he [asked](#) on Fox News. “Dads push us to take risks. Moms put the training wheels on our bikes. We need moms. But not in the military, especially in combat units,” he [wrote](#) in his 2024 book *The War on Warriors*. “I’m straight up saying we should not have women in combat roles. It hasn’t made us more effective. Hasn’t made us more lethal. It has made fighting more complicated,” he [told](#) podcast host Shawn Ryan on November 7, 2024.

An Iraq war veteran who lost both legs in combat, Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, [warned](#) that the review “is clearly intended to shrink the number of women who bravely serve in combat roles, which would be devastating to our military readiness.”

Ellen Haring, a retired Army colonel and West Point graduate who [serves](#) as a senior research fellow at Women in International Security, was more direct: “It’s exactly what he said all along. He’s against women in combat, and he’s going to get them out.”

Currently, about 3,800 women [serve](#) in Army infantry, armor, and artillery units. More than 150 [completed](#) the arduous Ranger training. Around ten [passed](#) Green Beret training. The Marines [have](#) about 700 women in ground combat jobs. All of them [meet](#) the same standards as their male counterparts.

The God of War

The December service offered a window into the theology being promoted. Evangelist Franklin Graham [stood](#) before uniformed military personnel at the Pentagon on December 17, 2025, and delivered a sermon about a God who hates. “We know that God loves, but did you know that God also hates? That God is also a god of war?” Graham asked, then [read](#) from the Book of Samuel, recounting the divine command to slaughter the Amalekites, women, children, and animals included.

The Graham service was one of many. Since May 2025, Hegseth has [held](#) regular monthly worship services during working hours at the Pentagon. The first [featured](#) dominionist pastor Brooks Pottenger, the [pastor](#) of Hegseth’s Tennessee church, who [prayed](#) about “President Trump, thank you for the way that you have used him to bring stability and moral clarity to our land.”

Weinstein’s organization has [received](#) complaints from more than 150 service members who reported that names of those attending religious services were being recorded and that personnel felt coerced to attend. “When you’re told that he’s going to have a Christian praise service, and that is quote ‘optional,’ you’re being voluntold,” Weinstein [said](#).

The January 21 service marks the ninth monthly “optional” Christian worship event since Hegseth took office. MRFF’s client load has tripled since the Trump inauguration. Chaplains who resist the Christian nationalist tide face marginalization. “If you’re not a hardline Christian nationalist as a chaplain, you are in serious trouble,” Weinstein said. “Your leadership will move you and say, basically, go to the corner, pick up the crayons, and just color.”

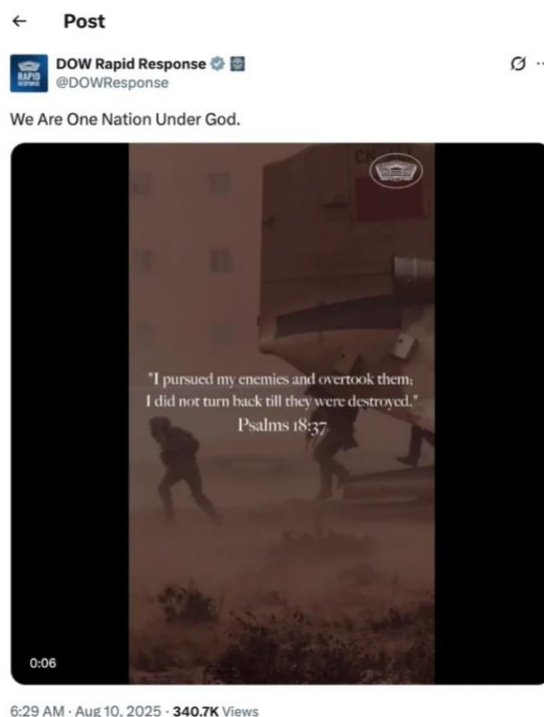
The practice is metastasizing. On January 14, MRFF [announced](#) 32 new clients at a military installation where two commanders have been holding biweekly Christian-only prayer services during duty hours in “All Hands” auditoriums. The commanders [claim](#) the services are “non-mandatory” while their staffs record attendance. Twenty-five of the 32 objecting service members are Christians.

Dividing the Ranks

The Pentagon's embrace of Christian nationalism is [dividing](#) the military's ranks. Kristofer Goldsmith, CEO of the nonprofit Task Force Butler, which investigates extremism in the military, [reported](#) an increase in messages from active duty troops reaching out about the growing influence of religious nationalism. "Every time Hegseth does one of these things, I'm getting messages from active duty troops, reaching out to me more and more, saying, 'How do I get involved?'" Goldsmith [said](#). "We've got active-duty troops who recognize that the military they're serving in has become a threat to democracy."

Goldsmith [warned](#) that "We're gonna see a lot of Christian nationalists join the military... and our national security will suffer for a generation for it, because those that don't wash out will be toxic leaders."

The Pentagon, [rebranded](#) by executive order as the Department of War in September 2025, has [infused](#) recruitment campaigns with biblical themes. A video [posted](#) to the department's X account, titled "We Are One Nation Under God," showed paratroopers jumping out of a plane and soldiers wielding assault rifles as Psalm 18:37 flashed on screen: "I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed."



The Original Intent

George Washington [established](#) the Chaplain Corps in 1775, one of his first actions as commanding general. Military chaplains provide pastoral care to service members and their families, and operate on a "perform or provide" mandate. A Catholic priest performs Mass for Catholic soldiers, but when a Muslim service member needs support, that same chaplain [arranges](#)

access to an Imam. Washington himself [warned](#) against forcing soldiers toward “a mode of Worship which they do not profess.”

More than 9,400 military members currently [serve](#) in the Chaplain Corps: over 6,000 in the Army, 2,300 in the Air Force, and 1,100 in the Navy. They represent dozens of faith traditions and none. For 250 years, that diversity [reflected](#) the constitutional premise that those who fight for this country should not have their religious beliefs dictated by those who command them.

Logan Davis, a political columnist who [grew up](#) in the same classical Christian education movement that shaped Hegseth, [explained](#) the ideology of “sphere sovereignty” that animates the CREC network: “There is an understanding of different authorities being given to the church, the state, the family. And ultimately, the church is above all of those.” Hegseth’s lack of traditional credentials for leading the Pentagon, Davis [warned](#), means he will likely be “leaning on these controversial faith leaders in his life more than someone with adequate experience.”

The review of women in combat roles is [due](#) in six months. The complaints to MRFF keep [coming](#). And the worship services at the Pentagon show no sign of stopping.

On January 6, 2021, military veterans and active duty personnel [led](#) the breach of the U.S. Capitol. More than 200 with military backgrounds were [arrested](#). Over half were [affiliated](#) with the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, or Three Percenters, groups that share Hegseth’s fondness for “Deus Vult.”

Weinstein framed the stakes starkly. “America first means one thing,” he told GPAHE. “It means white first, male first, straight first, and not just Christian first, but Christian nationalist first.”

“Christian nationalism is the jet fuel of MAGA,” he added.