

# REPORT

FROM THE

# CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

**AMANDA TYLER** testifies before Congress on white Christian nationalism

Announcing the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

Christian leaders hold vigil to mark January 6 anniversary

**HOLLY HOLLMAN** on the Supreme Court's religious accommodation case

**MS. TYLER**

# New frontiers for our work

This edition highlights new ways BJC is working to defend and extend religious liberty for all, bringing our message to new audiences and forging new partnerships to ensure that we are looking at a full picture of how religious freedom intersects and impacts other freedoms in our world.

We are excited to announce a new phase in our work, launching the BJC CENTER FOR FAITH, JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION. Learn about this new era for BJC on pages 16-17, welcoming new partners and new staff to expand the application of our efforts.

For the first time, Congress heard TESTIMONY ON THE DANGERS OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM at a hearing in December 2022. Pages 12-14 recount the hearing and Amanda Tyler's testimony about dangers to our democracy.

Christian leaders are changing the images associated with January 6, holding a CANDLELIGHT VIGIL AT THE CAPITOL on the two-year anniversary of the violent attack on our nation's government. Read about the prayers for peace and the gathering on pages 6-9.

On pages 10-11, read about the NEW PHASE of our Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign and the four priorities driving those efforts this year.

The media is taking notice of our work and we have new opportunities to proclaim the importance of faith freedom for all IN THE NEWS. See a few recent examples on pages 24-25.

We're joining forces with many religious groups to defend religious accommodations for employees in the case of GROFF v. DEJOY. Holly Hollman describes the case and our role as a friend of the court on page 5.

## Join us at Old North Church in Boston for a special event May 31

### *Dr. Catherine Brekus to deliver the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures*

Explore the myth of American "chosenness" in a special event to be held at one of America's oldest churches on May 31.

Dr. Catherine Brekus, Charles Warren Professor of the History of Religion in America at Harvard Divinity School, will be our keynote speaker for this year's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State.

The event will take place at Old North Church in Boston, Massachusetts, which is the site where two lanterns were hung in 1775 as a signal to Paul Revere that the British were coming by sea, igniting the American Revolution.

Dr. Brekus will deliver a lecture on the evening of Wednesday, May 31, which will be followed by a discussion for further engagement and conversation.

The Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State were established when the Shurdens made a gift to BJC in 2004. The annual event is held at Mercer University in Georgia every three years and at another seminary, college or university in the intermediate years.

The event is free to all, but we ask that you register to attend. Additional details about this year's event and registration information can be found on our website at [BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures](https://BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures).



## Celebrating religious freedom with new citizens

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

**O**n Friday, January 13, I had one of the most patriotic experiences of my life, welcoming neighbors as new citizens.

I attended a naturalization ceremony in the ornate Indian Treaty Room in the Old Executive Office Building on the White House grounds, where I had the honor of witnessing new U.S. citizens take the oath of allegiance. The two rows in the front of the room were filled with 15 new citizens, hailing from 15 different countries, with their family members and other invited guests.

Thanks to an invitation from Melissa Rogers, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, I joined several other advocates for religious freedom at this ceremony, held in honor of Religious Freedom Day. In her speech, Rogers said, “A key religious liberty principle is that there are no second-class faiths under the U.S. Constitution. ... Everyone is free to practice their faith, to change their faith or practice no faith at all.”

The ceremony was the first time the White House hosted this event in honor of Religious Freedom Day. Each January 16, Religious Freedom Day marks the anniversary of the passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, authored by Thomas Jefferson and shepherded by James Madison. It’s the state statute that served as the precursor to the First Amendment’s dual religion clauses, which protect the free exercise of religion and prevent against a government establishment of religion. Tying the naturalization ceremony to Religious Freedom Day sent a powerful signal about the centrality of religious freedom to American identity.

I also got to see diversity — both in religion and national origin — reflected in the program participants. Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff gave the opening greeting, reflecting on the immigrant experience of his grandparents. Emhoff is Jewish, and

he is the first spouse of a president or vice president to have any religious identity other than Christian. The oath of allegiance was administered by Ur Jaddou, Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, who herself is the daughter of immigrants from Mexico and Iraq.

This ceremony celebrated some of the best of our country’s commitment to freedom and the ability to bring one’s faith into the public square without demanding conformity. Eugene Cho, CEO of Bread for the World, received the Outstanding Americans by Choice Award during the ceremony. He spoke personally of his Christian faith, while also acknowledging that not everyone shared his religious views. I found his remarks to be the embodiment of what it means to bring our whole selves into public life, without using our power and privilege to suggest that others must believe as we do to have equal citizenship.

As all of us in the room rose to say the Pledge of Allegiance in unison, I felt tears well in my eyes. There’s beauty in being united as citizens and united across our lines of religious difference. One religion can never unite us as Americans, given the rich religious pluralism that has marked our country since its framing. But our promise to support and defend the Constitution, including its guarantees of religious freedom for everyone, can unify us.

With religious freedom, our patriotism should never require us to sacrifice our religious commitments and theological convictions. If we are forced to choose between religion and country and we sacrifice our religious beliefs, then our patriotism has drifted into the dangerous territory of nationalism.

As I speak across the United States about the dangers of Christian nationalism and the faithful advocacy of Christians Against Christian Nationalism, I am often asked, “What brings you hope?” The patriotism I both felt and witnessed at the naturalization ceremony brings me both hope and resolve to continue speaking up for religious freedom for all and against Christian nationalism.



# Proposed rules would bolster religious liberty protections for social service beneficiaries

In January, nine agencies of the Biden administration announced new rules that would strengthen religious liberty protections for beneficiaries of federally funded social services.

The United States Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the United States Agency for International Development, issued the proposed rules, which seek to ensure “that all beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries have access to federally funded services and programs without unnecessary barriers and free from discrimination.”

Among other things, the announced rules would reinstate:

- The requirement that social service providers receiving direct federal funding notify beneficiaries of their right to be free of discrimination on the basis of religion
- The requirement that faith-based service providers inform beneficiaries of alternate providers if the beneficiary objects to the faith-based provider’s religious character
- The requirement that beneficiaries of indirect federal assistance must have at least one secular option for the use of the indirect assistance

In addition, the rules would rescind a provision added by the

Trump administration allowing faith-based service providers to require beneficiaries to attend “all activities that are fundamental to the program,” including religious activities.

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman praised the proposals as “an important return to religious liberty principles that protect all Americans.”

“Federal agencies have a responsibility to ensure that Americans who qualify for taxpayer-funded social services will not be coerced into participating in religious activities,” Hollman said.

“Americans who need to access food banks, homeless shelters, elder care facilities or a range of other services should never have to meet some religious requirement to get the help they need. Americans of all religious traditions and nonreligious Americans will be freer to access taxpayer-funded services under these proposed regulations.”

Faith-based institutions that provide social services have the same opportunity to apply for and receive federal funding that secular service providers enjoy. However, federal funds rightly come with federal regulations, including those designed to protect taxpayers and ensure that beneficiaries of that aid have full access to services regardless of their faith or whether they choose to practice a faith.

These proposed rules will go through a public comment period before the agencies issue a final rule.

—Don Byrd, “Latest News” section of BJC’s website

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## Supreme Court hears website designer’s case for refusing wedding sites for same-sex couples

On Dec. 5, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*. The case is being preemptively brought by a Colorado website designer who wishes to create wedding websites, but she does not want to make them for same-sex weddings because of her religious belief that they are “false.”

She is asking the Court to overturn — on Free Speech grounds — an appeals court ruling that found her refusal would run afoul of Colorado’s nondiscrimination law, which prohibits businesses that are open to the public from discriminating against customers on the basis of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

During questioning, a majority of the Court sounded poised to side with the website designer and find that requiring her to provide websites for same-sex weddings amounts to compelled speech in violation of the Free Speech guarantee of the First Amendment. But, both justices and advocates alike struggled to articulate a precise framework for how courts should distinguish between discriminating against a customer based on the customer’s

sexual orientation — which would not be protected by the First Amendment — and refusing to express a certain message about same-sex marriage, which the First Amendment does protect.

Even though this is not a religious liberty matter (the plaintiff initially claimed her Free Exercise rights were violated, but that claim was rejected by the appeals court and specifically not taken up by the Supreme Court), there are significant reasons for religious liberty advocates to care about how this case is decided. For starters, religious speech should be protected, but so, too, should the right to access the public marketplace without being discriminated against because of one’s faith. This is a delicate balancing act — with liberty interests on both sides — that requires a carefully crafted legal framework. How the Court decides the case may be as important as which side it lands on.

For more on this case, listen to the Respecting Religion podcast or read the excerpt on page 29 of this magazine.

—Don Byrd, “Latest News” section of BJC’s website

## The Supreme Court's latest religion case offers opportunity to restore statute's meaning

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



**R**eligious litigants have been on an unprecedented winning streak recently at the U.S. Supreme Court. That trend is likely to continue in *Groff v. DeJoy*, a case brought by a part-time mail carrier in rural Pennsylvania who lost his job for failing to work on his Sabbath after the U.S. Postal Service began Sunday deliveries for Amazon.

In addition to demonstrating this Court's continuing interest in religion cases, the case seems likely to generate more conversations about religion in general. The plaintiff in the case is a Christian, and the idea of Sabbath is deeply ingrained in various religious teachings and history. Adherence to an absolute prohibition on work on the Sabbath, however, is less common in many denominations. In a culture of capitalism that places great value on constant productivity, the case will likely spark debate about workers' rights and demands for better work conditions in general. And, because of recent decisions in which the Court abandoned settled precedents and ignored principles that have long guided religious liberty law, many will view the case with skepticism.

This case presents simpler questions that should be less divisive. It involves the interpretation of a provision of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal statute that is the centerpiece of our country's federal civil rights laws. It prohibits discrimination in employment based on a variety of protected categories, such as race, sex and religion.

In 1972, the statute was amended to define "religion" broadly and required employers to accommodate employees' religious observances and practices unless doing so would result in "undue hardship on the conduct of the employer's business." The legislative record indicates that this provision was enacted with the concerns of religious minorities in mind, specifically including those whose Sabbath is Saturday.

The statutory language was designed to balance the religious needs of the employee and the business needs of the employer with expectations of resolving a conflict in a way that protects against religious discrimination in the workplace. The law lost much of its force, however, in the 1977 *Trans World Airlines, Inc. v. Hardison* decision, when the Supreme Court said that an employer suffers an "undue hardship" whenever an accommodation would require "more than a *de minimus* cost." In other words, the employer had little obligation

to make an adjustment for an employee (or prospective employee) whose religious practice conflicted with some aspect of the employer's business.

In his dissent in *Hardison*, Justice Thurgood Marshall said the Court's interpretation "made a mockery of the statute." BJC supported Justice Marshall's view of *Hardison* then and now. We supported several legislative efforts to restore a stronger standard including the Workplace Religious Freedom Act that would have amended the law to define "undue hardship" as "significant cost or difficulty." Despite numerous opportunities, neither the Court nor Congress have corrected *Hardison's* misinterpretation of Title VII.

In the *Groff* case, the Court finally has this chance. The Court will address two questions: 1) whether the "*de minimus*" standard for refusing religious accommodations should be disapproved; and 2) whether an employer may demonstrate "undue hardship on the conduct of the employer's business" under Title VII merely by showing that the requested accommodation burdens the employee's co-workers rather than the business itself.

For us, the answers are: 1) yes; and 2) no. Both questions offer an opportunity not only to clarify the statute's meaning and its purpose of prohibiting discrimination in the workplace but also to explain the nature of respecting religious differences. The "reasonable accommodation" provision in the federal statute recognizes that avoiding discrimination based on religion may involve more than simply saying that all qualified employees are welcome without regard to religion. Religion affects the lives of individuals and faith communities in specific ways. Providing a workplace that is free of religious discrimination requires consideration of how some religious observances conflict with general work rules and business operations.

Lower courts decided the *Groff* case in favor of the employer on a factual record that showed some effort to accommodate Groff and some impact on fellow employees who worked additional shifts to cover the workload. But the decision gives insufficient weight to the statutory requirement to accommodate religion, and it improperly assumes that an impact on other employees (even a minor one) creates an undue hardship under the statute. That's why BJC joined an *amicus* brief signed by a broad coalition of religious entities in favor of Groff. Congress got the balance right, and the Court should restore it.



BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler opens the prayer service before dawn on January 6, 2023.

# Remembrances and a report: Two years after January 6

Faith leaders gather at dawn, and the Select Committee's report comes out without mentioning Christian nationalism

By Cherilyn Crowe Guy, BJC Content Strategy Director

Two years after a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol, a solemn scene emerged as our country remembers and moves forward.

On January 6, 2023, Christian leaders gathered at dawn to pray on the same ground overrun by insurrectionists two years earlier. They remembered those we lost, honored those who defended our country, recognized the trauma suffered by many and prayed for our nation.

The gathering, organized by BJC's Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign and Faithful America, provided a different message than those holding Christian symbols and waving Christian flags as they attacked the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

"This morning, we are providing a counter-witness, a way to bring our faith into the public square in productive ways," said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler at the vigil.

Christian nationalism is a political ideology and cultural framework that seeks to merge Christian and American identities, often misappropriating Christian symbols and Christian language to point not to Jesus but to a political figure, party or ideology.

The leaders called out Christian nationalism both as a distortion of Christianity and something that threatens our country's system of government.

"We reflect today on the January 6, 2021, insurrection," said the Rev. Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, co-convenor of the National African American Clergy Network. "Thank you, God, for holding back the tide of white minority rulership and white supremacy that shamefully includes white Christian nationalism in an increasingly diverse America."

## January 6 Select Committee Report

The gathering came two weeks after the release of the highly-anticipated report from the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

Published December 22, 2022, the 800+ page report included an examination of the "Big Lie" regarding false claims about the 2020 election results, various legal theories and a detailed analysis of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. It also had 11 specific recommendations, including proposed laws, reforms to criminal statutes and referrals for prosecution.

The report was the result of the bipartisan January 6 Select Committee's extensive work over two years. The Select Committee and its staff interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses, held multiple hearings — some



Left to right: Rev. Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, co-convenor of the National African American Clergy Network; Rev. Jim Wallis, director of Georgetown University's Center on Faith and Justice; Mary Novak, executive director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice; Jeanné Lewis, interim CEO of Faith in Public Life.

in primetime — and obtained millions of pages of documents. But, the detailed report did not include the role of Christian nationalism in justifying and bolstering the attack.

“We cannot fully understand the attack on the Capitol without reckoning with the role of Christian nationalism in events leading up to it and on that infamous day,” Tyler said.

The final report’s failure to mention the role of Christian nationalism was not due to a lack of information.

In February 2022, BJC and the Freedom From Religion Foundation co-published the most comprehensive report to date on Christian nationalism and the insurrection. And in June, BJC organized a letter from Christian leaders asking the Select Committee to investigate the role Christian nationalism played in the attack.

“This investigation into Christian nationalism is important so that history does not repeat itself and so that we understand this threat to our country’s historic commitment to religious liberty and the importance of defeating it,” the letter said, which was signed by prominent Christian leaders representing The Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, National Council of Churches, Sojourners, and NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice.

While Christian nationalism was not called out by name in the report, the ideology made appearances during the hearings. For

example, at the end of the June 9, 2022, hearing, video shown of the attack included an attacker waving the Christian flag. During the June 13, 2022, hearing, a person interviewed in video footage was wearing a shirt that said, “I stand for the flag, I kneel for the cross.” The idea that the U.S. Constitution has been “divinely inspired” was mentioned several times by both witnesses and Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo. At the very first public gathering on July 27, 2021, D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges testified, “It was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians,” noting he saw the Christian flag and a flag saying “Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president” in the hands of the attackers.

On episode 10 of season 4 of the Respecting Religion podcast, Tyler and BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman discussed their disappointment that the final report did not explore the role of Christian nationalism. They pointed to a likely hesitation to wade into the issue and fear it would be seen as an attack on Christianity.

“We believe it would have been helpful and appropriate for the Select Committee to recognize [Christian nationalism]’s impact,” Tyler said.

The report marked the culmination of the Select Committee’s work — the group was disbanded by the new 118th Congress. But, there are continuing repercussions from its work.

“We know that several members of the committee either did not



Left to right: Rev. Dr. Trisha Miller Manarin, executive minister of the DC Baptist Convention; Dr. Jemar Tisby, author and historian; Rev. Emily Holladay, pastor of Village Baptist Church in Bowie, Maryland; Rev. Alyssa Aldape, organizer with the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice and a BJC Fellow.



Left to right: Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune, COO of the National Council of Churches; Rev. Dr. Kip Banks, pastor of East Washington Heights Baptist Church of Washington, D.C.; Shane Claiborne, co-founder of Red Letter Christians; Rev. Nathan Empsall, executive director of Faithful America.

run for reelection or lost their reelection bids, in part because of the polarizing nature and how this work became partisan,” Hollman said on the podcast.

**A new witness to the day**

While Christian symbols continue to surface in images of the January 6 attack, the 2023 prayer vigil took note of the impact that has on people and how they might see Christianity.

“Christians bear a special responsibility in continuing to draw awareness to Christian nationalism, working to explain how it is a threat to our democracy and to showing how it is a gross distortion of the Christian faith that we hold dear,” Tyler said at the vigil.

Jeanné Lewis, the interim CEO of Faith in Public Life, shared the importance of staying focused on Christ instead of misusing his name to advance political agendas. “We know that Christ invites everyone to the table, and that every one of us is equally beloved in your eyes,” she prayed.

The Rev. Dr. Cassandra Gould, senior faith strategist for the Faith in Action network, prayed for justice and for Christians to reclaim their identity.

“We come this morning because the identity of Christians was stolen and paraded around on the steps and in the House two years ago today,” she prayed.

“Time is up for white Christian nationalism,” she continued. “We come this morning to say that we stand against the idol that white Christian nationalism and the fraudulent God of white supremacy has erected.”

“As the sun rises around our Capitol this morning, remind us of the new day that is dawning because of your creative work,” prayed the Rev. Emily Holladay, pastor of Village Baptist Church in Bowie, Maryland. “Help us to join you in action toward justice so that our country might see the transformation that we know is possible because of you.”

Several prayers came from leaders representing a wide variety of Christian backgrounds, calling for Christ’s love for all.

The Rev. Nathan Empsall, executive director of Faithful America, concluded the vigil by praying for those going to work at the Capitol and for those whose loved ones were injured or killed there as a result of the attack.

“We know that white supremacy and Christian nationalism are not Christian, and yet the people who espouse this ideology are our fellow Christians,” he said. “Help us always remember this, that we may not be corrupted by hate.”

You can watch a video of the vigil on Faithful America’s Facebook page and on the Instagram page of Christians Against Christian Nationalism at [@EndChristianNationalism](#).



Rev. Dr. Cassandra Gould, senior faith strategist for the Faith in Action network, leads prayer at dawn in front of the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2023.

# CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

## The next phase of this campaign



By Jaziah Masters, BJC Advocacy and Outreach Manager

**32,000.**

By the time you read this, the Christians Against Christians Nationalism campaign will boast more than 32,000 signers. To put that in perspective, there is not a single arena used by any team in the NBA that can hold every signer of the statement, and we are just getting started!

Since its beginning in 2019, Christians Against Christian Nationalism has been a grassroots movement of Christians from across the ideological spectrum taking a public stance against Christian nationalism. While it is important to say what we are against, it is even more important to say what we are for: at the center of this campaign is a statement of principles, which express our commitment to religious freedom for everyone as well as our commitment to both America's constitutional democracy and our Christian faith.

Christian nationalism demands that Christianity be privileged by the state, and it implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. The ideology relies on a mythological telling of the history of the United States that ignores the experiences and contributions of so many ethnic and religious minorities.

Christian nationalism also overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. While this line in our statement has received the most pushback, it is a point that cannot and should not be ignored. Christian nationalism creates and perpetuates a sense of cultural belonging that is limited to certain people associated with the founding of the United States, namely native-born white Christians. The defense of that warped ideology manifests as violence, often targeting certain houses of worship and racial minorities.

I am so encouraged by those who have joined our work combating Christian nationalism. Speaking to these signers throughout the country and hearing of the good work being done in their local communities has been uplifting, and I am even more excited to see the campaign evolve and our reach expand as we enter into the next phase of this work.

### Our next phase

Our campaign is continuing to evolve to meet our present moment as we work to call out and dismantle Christian nationalism in our communities and in ourselves.

Earlier this year, the campaign made its first foray into social

media, launching a specific presence on both Instagram and TikTok (follow us on both: [@EndChristianNationalism](#)). There is so much disinformation and misinformation peddled on social media, and we needed to respond. Instagram and TikTok also allow us to introduce our work to a younger generation searching for an alternative Christian witness. Our presence there has grown tremendously since launch.

Expanding the campaign also means pursuing new strategies and ways to engage our supporters. While we are incredibly proud of the work we have done so far, there is only so much we can do from our national headquarters in Washington, D.C. The next phase means bringing this work to communities and regions across the country. When looking at where our resources and commitment could make the most difference, we identified North Texas as the best place for a pilot program.

Full disclosure: North Texas was the place I was born and came of age before moving and joining the BJC staff. Bias aside, however, the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex is an ideal location for this pilot project. The region has a diverse racial and religious composition, which includes a growing immigrant population. BJC also has deep and historic connections in this area with denominational bodies, churches and individuals. BJC is no stranger to convening difficult conversations, and we look forward to this opportunity to meet this challenge.

Christian nationalism is a daunting and complex issue, so much so that it is difficult for many people to wrap their heads around the problem. Realizing this, BJC dedicated time to "cutting the issue" to translate Christian nationalism into four priority areas where we can make the most difference.

### 1. Countering violence

Example after example proves that the ideology of Christian nationalism fuels violent extremism, especially white nationalist violence. The Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign is committed to combating the violent rhetoric that stems from Christian nationalism and white supremacy. Christian nationalism inspires acts of violence and intimidation — including vandalism, bomb threats, arson, hate crimes and attacks on houses of worship — against communities at home and abroad. Specifically, this campaign is dedicated to understanding how Christian nationalism contributes to radicalization.

## 2. Protecting public schools

Christian nationalism carries assumptions about nativism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, patriarchy and militarism. That is why it is particularly alarming to see Christian nationalism infect public education. Public schools serve 90% of our nation's most impressionable population: children. Our nation's public schools help us learn how to live together as one community, but Christian nationalism in public schools stokes fear and confuses students. We've seen a coordinated effort in several state legislatures to draft and pass bills informed by Christian nationalism — such as legislation requiring public schools to prominently display the phrase “In God We Trust.” These seemingly innocuous bills provide footholds to pass even more dangerous legislation that undermines America's historic commitment to religious pluralism. This campaign is dedicated to ridding our public schools of Christian nationalism and opposing state and federal legislation that injects Christian nationalism into public education.

## 3. Separating Christianity from Christian nationalism

One of the most frequent requests we receive is to explain the difference between Christianity and Christian nationalism. For many, it is difficult to tell the two apart because Christian nationalism uses the language, symbols and imagery of Christianity in its pursuit of power. Christian nationalism distorts and limits the Christian faith. It drives people away from churches and makes it harder to claim the teachings of Jesus without having partisan assumptions tied in.

It is appalling to witness the Gospel distorted in such a vicious way. Yet we are convinced that we cannot let Christian nationalism go unchallenged as Christians. Christians Against Christian Nationalism is distinctive because we assert our Christian identity. We know that calling out the dangers of Christian nationalism is work we, as Christians, need to do first. This campaign is dedicated to empowering churches and supporters to offer an alternative Christian witness in the public square.

## 4. Freeing policy debates from theological debates

While Americans can have passionate disagreements about immigration, taxes, gun control, foreign policy and health care, we all should agree that policy debates must be free from Christian nationalism. Every Christian committed to democracy must resist theocracy.

When Christian nationalism is infused into policy debates, it hinders and undermines our democratic process. Not every issue is religious, and not every disagreement is a theological contest. Christians and people of any faith tradition should engage in the public square. But, when we see Christians demand a privileged place in our society through public policies that benefit their religion and not others, they are also treating people of different faiths — as well as those without any religious affiliation — as second-class citizens. Christian nationalism contends that all are not equal under the Constitution. Our goal is to raise awareness about and oppose the use of Christian nationalism in policy debates.

## Get involved

This spring is an exciting time for our ongoing campaign! We are starting the next phase of this work, and we are grateful for the many people who have invested specifically in this. They have made it possible to begin this next chapter. You can help by making a direct donation. Visit the campaign's website by going to [ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org](http://ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org) and look for the “give” button on the top of the home page, or use the QR code on this page.

Coordinating this campaign has been one of my great honors during my tenure at BJC. I can't wait to see our impact in these four priority areas, our continued growth on social media, and the insights and strategies we glean from our pilot project in North Texas. And, as always, visit the website to read and share the statement with others as we work to raise awareness and dismantle the ideology.

# Honorary and memorial gifts to the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign

In honor of Janelle Handley  
By Alicia Riedy

In honor of Jesus of Nazareth  
By Simon Templar

In honor of Steven Reynolds  
By Lori Wilson-Reynolds

In honor of Holly Hollman  
By Robert Tuttle

In honor of Gary McCaslin  
By Daryl Denning

In honor of Clair Rogers Jr.  
By Barry Rogers



In memory of  
Helen Anderson  
By Robin Beck

In memory of James Dunn  
By Mel Williams

In memory of  
Heather Heyer  
By Rebecca Good

In memory of Laszlo Kish  
By Mike Ross

In memory of  
MaryLou Bushnell  
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In memory of  
Carol Jean Dunning  
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In memory of  
Lawrence Johnson  
By Lisa Manske

In memory of  
George Koonsman  
By Carl Koonsman

In memory of  
Harvey Cutting  
By Linda Cutting

In memory of Kathy Ellis  
By Thad Emrick

In memory of  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther  
King Jr.  
By Susan Meier

In memory of Dan Springer  
By Tom Cashman

In memory of  
Tim Van Tongeren  
By Jennifer Abbott

*You can make a gift directly to the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. Visit the website and click on the “give” button, and your gift will be earmarked for this work. You can also scan the QR code above to make a gift.*



# Amanda Tyler testifies before Congress against Christian nationalism

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global, with BJC staff reports

For an ever-so-brief moment Dec. 13, 2022, a congressional hearing on the rise of anti-democratic extremism morphed into a Sunday school lesson as Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC, fielded questions on the history of Baptists and religious freedom.

The short theological session began with a question from Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md. The chairman of the House Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties asked Tyler why BJC decided to actively oppose white Christian nationalism.

“The problem of white Christian nationalism exactly fits with our mission of defending and extending religious freedom for all people,” Tyler responded. “And that’s because Christian nationalism strikes at the heart of the foundational ideas of what religious freedom means and how it’s protected in this country, and that, of course, is with the institutional separation of church and state.”

Rep. Raskin immediately followed with another question:

“Everybody knows about [Thomas] Jefferson’s famous letter to the Danbury Baptists, but why have the Baptists always been such strong champions of religious freedom and pluralism and toleration?”

Tyler didn’t miss a beat. “It really goes back to the beginning of the Baptist movement in the early 17th century and Thomas Helwys, who wrote the first defense of universal religious freedom in the English language and was imprisoned by King James I for his advocacy,” she replied. “It continued with Roger Williams, who founded the First Baptist Church of America.”

Tyler added that the spirit of those and other early Baptists continues to inspire those engaged in today’s struggle for religious freedom beset by Christian nationalism and white supremacy.

“What unites these early Baptist advocates with modern-day advocates like me and others at the Baptist Joint Committee is our theological commitment to soul freedom and our living out of Jesus’ command to love our neighbor as ourselves,” she said.

“We protect the religious freedom of our neighbors as we protect our own religious freedom, and we do it in our constitutional democracy by defending the First Amendment.”

Tyler’s comments came toward the end of the subcommittee’s two-hour hearing, “Confronting White Supremacy (Part VII): The Evolution of Anti-Democratic Extremist Groups and the Ongoing Threat to Democracy,” which was livestreamed on YouTube.

Joining Tyler were other experts whose testimony ranged from the role of social media in racial and political violence, the expansion of armed militias, and the tactics used by anti-democratic forces to intimidate local governments, school boards and LGBTQ individuals and groups.

Tyler zeroed in on Christian nationalism and white supremacy in her opening testimony and explained that BJC launched Christians against Christian Nationalism in 2019 to oppose the threats to religious freedom and democracy.

“Christian nationalism is a political ideology and cultural framework that seeks to merge American and Christian identities. It suggests that ‘real’ Americans are Christians and that ‘true’ Christians hold a particular set of political beliefs.”

But the Christianity presented by the movement is more of an “ethno-national identity” than a religion, she said. “Opposition to Christian nationalism is not opposition to Christianity, and a growing number of Christians feel a religious imperative to stand against Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism uses the language, symbols and imagery of Christianity — in fact, it may look and sound like Christianity to the casual observer. However, closer examination reveals that it uses the veneer of Christianity to point not to Jesus the Christ but to a political figure, party or ideology.”

Tyler further explained that Christian nationalism gives cover to, and overlaps with, white supremacy by placing the highest value on white, native-born Christians.

It also masquerades as patriotism, but it is anything but that, she warned. “Patriotism is a healthy love of country. Nationalism is an allegiance to country that demands supremacy over all other allegiances.”

The ideology doesn’t even get U.S. history right, she said. “Christian nationalism relies on a cherry-picked and misleading

version of American history in order to thrive. The ‘Christian nation’ myth must downplay or ignore the role of indigenous communities, Black Americans, immigrant populations, religious minorities, secular Americans and all others who undercut the false narrative that the U.S. is special because it was founded by and for white Christians.”

Christian nationalism undermines the Constitution, especially its prohibition against religious tests to hold public office, Tyler told the subcommittee.

“Christian nationalism uses the language, symbols and imagery of Christianity — in fact, it may look and sound like Christianity to the casual observer. However, closer examination reveals that it uses the veneer of Christianity to point not to Jesus the Christ but to a political figure, party or ideology.”

Amanda Tyler

“As a Baptist, I became a leader in the fight against Christian nationalism because of my increasing alarm about the violence it has inspired at our country’s houses of worship: Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston [S.C., in 2015], Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh [Pa., in 2018]; and Chabad of Poway near San Diego [Calif., in 2019].”

In opening the hearing, Rep. Raskin described the anti-democratic movement as an enemy of civil rights and voting rights. “Violent white supremacy and its partner, anti-democratic extremism, today constitute the most serious domestic terror threat facing our people,” he said.

Amanda Tyler and the other in-person witnesses listen to members of the House Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Next to her are witnesses (left to right) Oren Segal of ADL; Alejandra Caraballo, an instructor at the Cyberlaw Clinic at Harvard Law School; Asra Nomani of the Independent Women’s Network; Tyler; and Mary McCord of the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University Law Center. Eric Ward of the Western States Center testified virtually.

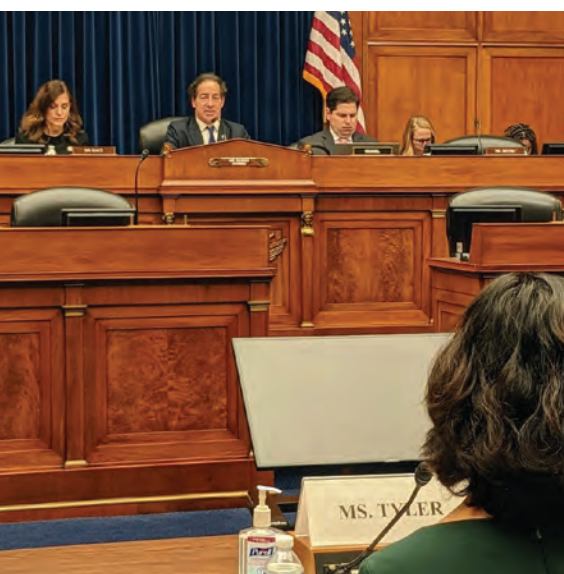




Violent white supremacy is part of “the most serious domestic terror threat facing our people,” said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., who served as the chair of the subcommittee.



Part of the American experiment is the ability to debate ideas “and not fear the threat of attacks,” said Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., who served as the ranking member.



The anti-democratic movement has continued, despite 900 prosecutions stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, attempt to overthrow the U.S. government, and it can be witnessed in incidents like the October 2022 assault on Paul Pelosi, husband of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and attempts to intimidate local school boards, LGBTQ events and other threatening outbursts, he said. “But the threats have not subsided and are very much still with us today.”

Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., was the ranking subcommittee member. She joined other conservatives on the panel in emphasizing that left-wing extremists can be just as dangerous as those getting most of the attention: “We must recognize that violence as a solution to problems or as an expression of extreme and hateful ideas, whether from the far right or the far left or anywhere in between, cannot be tolerated.”

But, Rep. Mace added that democracy must be protected. “The only alternatives to our constitutional system of government are a descent into authoritarianism, fascism or the embrace of anarchy,” she said.

“Part of the American experiment ... is the ability to debate these ideas and not fear the threats or attacks,” Rep. Mace continued. “Our viewpoints may be met with strong criticism, but they must never be met with violence or censorship.”

Witness Eric Ward, executive vice president of Race Forward and senior adviser for the Western States Center, agreed with Rep. Raskin that the insurrection did not end with the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. Instead, it spread across the nation with local government officials, election workers, law enforcement, health care professionals and others “bearing the brunt of intimidation, physical violence and acts of domestic terrorism.”

He added that the movement’s various actors are united by their belief in the Great Replacement Theory, which claims Jews and people of color are trying to marginalize and eliminate whites.

Extremists also are inspired by social media, said Oren Segal, vice president of the ADL Center on Extremism.

Fringe beliefs and conspiracy theories that take root in public discourse typically emerge from “a deadly blueprint” that includes extremists’ social media strategies, he said, adding that virtual spaces are “the lifeblood of extremism.”

Ideas spread online often translate into physical acts, including violence, with domestic terrorists frequently livestreaming their attacks for supporters and other viewers, he said.

In a conversation on the Respecting Religion podcast, Tyler and BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman noted that, in terms of congressional hearings, there was a lot of agreement in this one, particularly when it came to concerns about violence, a concern shared by many.

“We can all condemn violence and white supremacist violence in particular and want to find solutions to address those issues,” Tyler said.

Listen to episode 9 of season 4 of the Respecting Religion podcast for their full conversation and to hear Tyler’s testimony. A video of her testimony is also available on BJC’s YouTube channel.



Rep. Jamie Raskin and Amanda Tyler spoke after the hearing.



# A look at the religious makeup of the new Congress

There are more Baptists in the 118th United States Congress than any other Protestant denomination, but Catholics and generic Protestants take the top faith spots.

Pew Research's analysis of the newly seated Congress — which began in January 2023 — finds the 534 members of the U.S. House and Senate are more religiously affiliated — and more Christian — than the American population as a whole.

While religious affiliation continues to dwindle in American life, it remains strong among those elected to national office.

Since 2007, the share of Christians in the general population has dropped from 78% to 63%, with nearly 30% saying they are religiously unaffiliated. In contrast, Christians make up 88% of the members of Congress — only three points lower than the level in the late 1970s.

Only one member of Congress — Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, who recently switched from Democrat to independent — identifies as religiously unaffiliated. Democratic Rep. Jared Huffman of California describes himself as humanist, and 20 others (3.7%) did not disclose their religious affiliations.

Protestants account for 57% of the current Congress, while Catholics account for 28% and Jews are 6%. The number of Protestants in Congress today is higher than it has been in eight years.

In other data about the religious makeup of the new Congress:

- 67 members (12.5%) identify as some kind of Baptist, close to the 11% of American adults who are Baptists.
- Methodists and Episcopalians each have four fewer members than last term, with Methodists down to 31 and Episcopalians down to 22. And Presbyterians have one fewer member, down to 25.
- 148 members are Catholics, down 10 from last term.
- Catholics make up 28% of Congress, compared to 21% the U.S. population.
- Nine are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Eight are Orthodox Christians.
- 33 members (6.2%) are Jewish, compared to 2% of the U.S. population.
- Congress now has one Messianic Jew, Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna of Florida.

- Among the 20 who declined to describe their religious identification is Republican Rep. George Santos of New York, who has confessed to fabricating parts of his resume and has been ambiguous about his faith tradition.
- There are three Muslims in Congress: Rep. André Carson, D-Ind.; Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn.; and Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich.
- There are two Hindus: Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill.
- There are two Buddhists: Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., and Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii.
- There are slightly more Christians in the House than in the Senate, by percentage.

—Mark Wingfield, *Baptist News Global*

## Opportunity for action!

After an extended vote for Speaker of the House, the 118th Congress is in session. The beginning of a new Congress offers a natural opportunity to get involved with advocacy. Here are ways you can make connections with your elected officials:

- Subscribe to your elected officials' email newsletters
- Introduce yourself to your representatives through a phone call, email or letter
- Attend a town hall in your local community

Join the **BJC Advocacy Team** if you're interested in opportunities to connect with Congress and make an impact this term. Visit [BJCOnline.org/subscribe](https://BJCOnline.org/subscribe) to subscribe to BJC's email list, and click the box to join the team. If you are already on our email list, you can update your profile by clicking a link at the bottom of emails you receive from us.

# Announcing our newest chapter: The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

BJC is proud to announce its acquisition of the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation, an organizational leader advancing justice and building cultures for reconciliation. The new **BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation** marks an exciting new chapter for both organizations.

The acquisition includes welcoming Dr. Sabrina E. Dent to the BJC staff as the director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation (see page 31). Dent has, until now, served as president of the free-standing Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation and a member of the BJC Board of Directors. She resigned her position on the board before joining the staff. The Center was originally born out of the legacy of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, which opened its doors in 1991 and closed in 2019.

“Across the organization, BJC recognizes that religious freedom has been white too long,” BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler said. “BJC acquiring the Center deepens our commitment to working for racial justice as a critical part of our mission to ensure religious freedom for all.”

The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation will be the home for BJC’s Project on Race and Religious Freedom. The Center will also host a new program called the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience, debuting in early 2024. It will continue its annual Religious Freedom Mobile Institute, with this year’s theme centered on fostering dialogue between Black nontheists and Black Church leaders.

Dr. Anthony Pinn, Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities at Rice University, will collaborate with the Center to facilitate the dialogue. “The growth in the number of African Americans claiming to hold to no particular religious orientation has grown during the 21st century,” he said. “And this demographic shift raises important questions needing our attention: How does this population of nones impact the Black Church? What assumptions concerning Black Christianity are challenged by the growth in the number of Black nones? Do we need a new vocabulary for life meaning? Now is the time for explicit and public attention to these questions, and I can think of no institution with which I’d rather partner than BJC. It has a proven track record, and I look forward to our shared conference on these important questions.”

“The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation will broaden the conversation about religious freedom,” Dr. Sabrina E. Dent said. “For too long, we’ve had a narrow understanding of religious freedom that has shut too many people out of the conversation. Religious freedom impacts so many issues, including voting rights. How can we ensure religious freedom without equal access to the

ballot box? Who benefits when religious freedom is ideologically boxed off from other issues? These are the types of questions we ask as this work continues into a new phase.”

The respective boards of directors of BJC and the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation enthusiastically approved BJC’s acquisition of the Center.

“I am thrilled that BJC has acquired the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation,” said the Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley, chair of the BJC Board of Directors. “This gain will strengthen BJC’s mission, educational programming, and influence by embracing a more inclusive understanding of religious freedom. May this accomplishment lead to a more unified world that is just and reconciled.”

The members of the Center’s board will now form an advisory council for the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation. They are the Rev. Dr. Brad R. Braxton, President and Professor of Public Theology at Chicago Theological Seminary and Founding Senior Pastor of The Open Church; the Rev. Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at Salem College and Former President and Founding Faculty Member of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond; Steve Law, Principal at Financial Leadership for Churches and Nonprofits, LLC; the Rev. Dr. Bill J. Leonard, Founding Dean and Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Wake Forest University School of Divinity; Dr. Keisha E. McKenzie, Senior Vice President of Programs at Auburn Seminary; the Rev. Dr. Corey D. B. Walker, Interim Dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity and Professor of the Humanities; and the Rev. Dr. Bill Wilson, Director of the Center for Healthy Churches and Former Chair of the Board of Trustees of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Learn more about the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation online at [BJCOnline.org/Center](https://BJCOnline.org/Center).

## Next event: Oct. 26-27

The 2023 Religious Freedom Mobile Institute will focus on fostering dialogue between Black nontheists and Black Church leaders. It will be a joint virtual symposium hosted by the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation and the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning.

Visit [BJCOnline.org/Center](https://BJCOnline.org/Center) for details and updates!



“This gain will strengthen BJC’s mission, educational programming, and influence by embracing a more inclusive understanding of religious freedom. May this accomplishment lead to a more unified world that is just and reconciled.”

Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley  
BJC Board Chair



“Through the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, the spirit of BTSR’s vision continues to light the way forward, seeking to build a truly inclusive, beloved community that offers religious freedom for all.”

Rev. Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges  
Founding Faculty Member and President  
Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (BTSR)



“This is an exciting and significant relationship because ... it deepens the witness of both organizations academically, racially, and nationally. ... [T]he witness of both movements is essential ‘for such a time as this.’”

Rev. Dr. Bill J. Leonard  
Founding Dean and Professor of Divinity Emeritus  
Wake Forest University School of Divinity



“Now is the time for explicit and public attention to [key] questions, and I can think of no institution with which I’d rather partner than BJC. It has a proven track record, and I look forward to our shared conference.”

Dr. Anthony Pinn  
Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities  
Rice University

# Black Baptist leaders gather for historic meeting

Presidents of four major Black Baptist conventions gather to discuss issues facing African Americans

Millions of congregants were represented in a historic meeting of the leaders of our nation's four major Black Baptist conventions, discussing collaboration to address issues facing African Americans across the country.

The presidents of the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), the National Baptist Convention of America International, the National Baptist Convention USA, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America met together January 25.

"There is no doubt our people continue to experience racism and systemic racism, in particular," said the Rev. Dr. David Peoples, pastor of Jabez Missionary Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., who serves as president of PNBC.

Dr. Peoples orchestrated the meeting of the four leaders, which took place in Jackson, Miss., at New Hope Baptist Church.

Joining Dr. Peoples for this important conversation were the Rev. Dr. Jerry Young, the president of the National Baptist Convention USA and pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson; and the Rev. Dr. Samuel Tolbert, pastor of the Greater Saint Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., and the president of the National Baptist Convention of America International, Inc. The Rev. Dr. Anthony Sharp, who serves as the president of the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, participated in the meeting virtually.

Dr. Peoples noted that the meeting was to reconnect a national social and political force to address urgent and critical issues facing African Americans.

"We continue to address police brutality, voter suppression, economic disparities, and so many more issues," said



Gathered at New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi (from left to right): Rev. Dr. Samuel C. Tolbert, president of the National Baptist Convention of America International; Rev. Dr. Jerry Young, president of the National Baptist Convention USA; and Rev. Dr. David Peoples, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Rev. Dr. Anthony Sharp, president of the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, participated virtually.

Dr. Peoples, adding that many states are pushing politics that deny the history of African Americans and contributions made by them to the country.

"Our history should not be a legislative struggle and a divisive matter, nor should it be whitewashed," he said. "It should be appreciated, taught and accredited."

Two days after the meeting, video was released of the beating of Tyre Nichols by police officers in Memphis, Tenn., which led to his death. Dr. Peoples pledged to make police accountability an issue that PNBC continues to champion.

"It is unconscionable that an unarmed Black man, Tyre Nichols, could not make it home after a traffic stop," said Dr. Peoples after the video was released.

"Unfortunately, it is tradition in America

for Black lives to suffer to predation of law enforcement instead of protection. The culture of policing in America is violent, unaccountable and anti-Black, even when it involves Black police officers. This is a grueling fact from Memphis to Manhattan, Ferguson to Fort Worth."

PNBC continues to champion the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act and equivalent bills in state legislatures.

Dr. Peoples noted at the meeting of Black Baptist leaders that the United States will be voting for president and other federal offices in 2024, and the four organizations agreed on having a joint session that year.

"Our voices will be heard," Dr. Peoples declared.

—PNBC staff reports

# Nat Turner: A preacher of conflict and controversy

By Lt. Greg Johnson

There are voices blowing in the wind, through the corridors of time, which guide us as we move through this challenging world. One such voice has all but been muted: the voice of Nat Turner. Turner is a controversial figure in American history and to many a source of contention. His legacy is one of conflict and controversy. Yet we miss much when we avoid conflict and controversy.

Growing up in Virginia, I was keenly aware of the “institution of slavery” and the impact it had on America and particularly African Americans. It was striking how many notable figures were lifted as being instrumental in the struggle for freedom. However, little was said about a preacher and prophet who lived not far from me, two centuries prior. Nat Turner lived an hour away from where I grew up. Yet I did not come to learn that he was a literate preacher until I was an adult. As a child, the only stories I heard about Turner revolved around his leading a slave rebellion and killing white people. Yet this literate preacher influenced others to follow him. He acclaimed himself to be called by God to deliver his people from slavery.

An individual’s calling into ministry, while personal, is a public announcement. Turner was in keeping with what is considered a call narrative. In early American history, the preacher was the community leader and influencer. This view is one that was inherited from Scripture. Many may turn to the apostle Paul as the quintessential preacher of the New Testament, outside of Jesus. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is recorded as being called by God to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus of Nazareth recited the prophetic utterance of that Old Testament prophet Isaiah, in his own declaration concerning his call (Luke 4:14-20). Both conflict and controversy followed most prophets and preachers of the Old and New Testament. Jeremiah was beaten, put in the stocks, and thrown down a well. According to Jewish and Christian tradition, Isaiah was sawn in two. John the Baptist was beheaded. And Jesus was crucified. Like many of these prophets and preachers, Turner received extreme contempt and brutality, being hanged, skinned and dismembered following his arrest and trial. It seems that the rebellion, as told by white America, was used to reduce Turner’s influence and stature.

While there is no grave and very few markers or monuments that call attention to Turner’s life, his legacy of fighting for freedom is still heard. The life which many attempted to extinguish continues to be present. Turner’s legacy reveals

that turning away from conflict and controversy does not help but hurts. Looking at Turner’s life yields much for America and any other nation that speaks of freedom and liberty for all. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial proclaimed that “America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked insufficient funds.” Turner’s rebellion was the product of a country who had not seen the fires that she had set ablaze in the hearts of slaves. It is noted that Turner’s passion against slavery was nurtured by his mother. It appears that Turner was no stranger to conflict from an early age, as he learned from his mother.

Conflict, in and of itself, is neither positive nor negative. Whether one views conflict as either positive or negative is based on our own experience with conflict in general. Ignoring Turner’s role in American history because it is filled with conflict prevents growth. Our lives are inundated with conflicts, yet we choose to engage in some and ignore others, simply because we find them unpalatable. Turner lived in a contentious period in American history. His willingness to face conflict is evident in his actions. Slavery, by any measure, is an institution that is inhumane. This is a conflict to the moral compass of humanity. Particularly that of the founding documents of the United States of America.

Turner’s legacy is one that continues over a century after his life, despite attempts to silence it. In 2016, Nate Parker shared the life and legacy of Nat Turner in the film, “The Birth of a Nation.” It was because of Turner’s voice, which could not be silenced, that Parker was able to breathe fresh air into Turner’s legacy. History is not only past events, but it is also portraits of lessons to learn. When we ignore history because it is unpleasant, we run the risk of harming ourselves. With conflict there is an opportunity to grow. It takes courage to face conflict. When conflict is embraced as an opportunity, we have the potential to grow emotionally. Everyone has the capacity to grow, the choice lies within every one of us. I am thankful that Nate Parker did not yield to fear or the unpleasantness of conflict to share Turner’s story — a story that we must continue to wrestle with today.

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*Lt. Gregory Johnson serves in the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps. The opinions expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Navy or the Department of Defense. This article was first published by the Christian Citizen and is reprinted here with permission.*

## Exposing the overlap

February is designated as Black History Month, a time set aside to celebrate the achievements and contributions of Black Americans. In honoring Black History Month this year, BJC's social media channels highlighted advocates and partners as we explore how Christian nationalism overlaps with white supremacy and racial subjugation. Here are a few videos we released across our platforms during the month. Follow us on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube at [@BJContheHill](#) to see these and other videos illuminating the connections and sharing important perspectives.

### Dr. Corey D.B. Walker: More than just one story



Forms of political nationalism that we see in our society today are deeply intertwined with how we understand what it means to be human, and most importantly, how we understand our humanity and relation to God.

Christian nationalism cannot be disentangled from the pernicious and invidious histories of racism in the modern world and its unique instance in the United States. *White Christian nationalism is undergirded by superior forms of thinking, including white supremacy. ...*

We cannot disentangle ideas of Christian nationalism from the long and pernicious history of white supremacy in the modern world and its unique distinctions in the United States.

More importantly, we're reminded that the ideas of white Christian nationalism and white supremacy are rooted in a very deficient vision of what it means to be human. It denies the worth, value and dignity of all of humanity. And more importantly, it seeks to order our world in ways that continue to denigrate the humanity of others.

*Dr. Walker is Interim Dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity and the co-editor of the book African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities.*

### Bishop Michael Curry: 'Christian-sounding voices' supported slavery



Let us not forget that chattel slavery in America was justified by pro-slavery, Christian-sounding voices. Now, when you take those arguments and lay them alongside Jesus of Nazareth — let's just take Matthew 5, 6, and 7, the Sermon on the Mount, I'm just picking one passage, or let's just take Luke 4, or let's just take Matthew 25, or let's just take all four of the Gospels. Lay the image of Jesus of Nazareth you see there alongside the arguments that were used to maintain slavery, and you will see a wide gap that cannot be closed.

*The same is true if you look at the complex of white Christian nationalism as an ideology — you lay it alongside Jesus of Nazareth, and we're not even talking about the same thing. ...*

I think it's important to make a distinction between what is an ideology — which, in America, you have the right to hold, but you don't have a right to claim that it's Christian.

*The Most Rev. Curry is the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church. This quote is from the 2022 event titled "How White Christian Nationalism Threatens Our Democracy" hosted by the Georgetown University's Center on Faith and Justice.*

## Rev. Dr. Jaimie Crumley: Untold history of Old North Church



Old North was established in 1723 as the second Anglican congregation to be founded in the city of Boston. Of course, Boston at the time was a very congregational city. Most of the white English people who attended Old North were those who wanted to maintain social and economic connections with their homeland, and they found that by worshipping here and by preserving the religious tradition of England, that they could remain connected to a tradition that meant so much to them. But we also know that there were some Black and Native peoples who worshipped here. They were baptized here. They were married here. And some of them were even buried here. And we know that, like other churches in early America, at the Old North church seating was segregated, both by social class and also by race. ...

Of course, this segregation was meant to set them apart, to let them know that they were not equal to the white parishioners who could sit on the main level. But what the records reveal is that **here at the church, they found sites of sociality and connection**. They bonded with each other. They built deep connections with each other.

In the late 18th and early 19th century as slavery ended in the state of Massachusetts, Boston became a hub for Black abolitionists, who did a lot of their work through the space of the church. They founded Black churches like the First African Church and Twelfth Baptist Church, and in those churches, they continued to build a sense of community. They continued to lead. **And they were at the forefront of the struggle to end not only slavery, but also anti-Black racism**. And so this church, this 300-year-old-building, is a site of contradictions, is a place where people encounter unfreedom and injustice on the basis of both race and class, but it is also a place where people forged long and lasting connections, with each other and with God, that ultimately led to a sense of freedom, especially for people who were never intended to be free.

*Dr. Crumley is the Research Fellow at Old North Illuminated, the secular 501(c)(3) that oversees tourism, education and preservation for the Old North Church Historic Site. She is an Assistant Professor of Gender Studies and Ethnic Studies at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, and she is a member of the BJC Board and the 2016 class of BJC Fellows.*

## Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine: Difference in ethnic and racial discrimination



Race, we know, is a social construct. It is based on immutable characteristics. When one looks at me and one sees me, one can say, “There is a Black man,” because society says that someone with my physical characteristics is deemed as Black, which goes back in history to say the opposite of white, and therefore, it’s less valued, so forth, so on. **Certainly white Christian nationalism has devalued Blackness in America**. There’s no doubt about that. ...

But in terms of ethnic discrimination, that for me has been very problematic with our history, and I made reference to it [in my book *When Prophets Preach*] with Catholics and Jews who may look — at face value — like part of the dominant class. But because they are from a different culture or because their religious practices are different, because some of their familial practices are different, some of their cultural norms are different, and they don’t fit in with the “myth of America being God’s chosen nation” and the original Founders and what they embraced as white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Then oftentimes, those individuals are castigated or subjugated, too.

The narratives of racial discrimination and ethnic discrimination have continually played out through the history of America in various ways, and oftentimes, the core or the root of it is white Christian nationalism, a power grab that is certainly laced and intertwined with racial discrimination.

*Dr. Augustine is a pastor, professor and attorney. His latest book is *When Prophets Preach: Leadership and the Politics of the Pulpit*. This excerpt is from his appearance on episode 13 of season 4 of the *Respecting Religion* podcast.*

# Finding the beauty and strength of our commitment to all

Cassandra Lawrence is a BJC Fellow and member of our Faith FULL Community. She works with the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign as the communications and community engagement manager, where she equips, connects and mobilizes faith communities and people of goodwill to counter anti-Muslim discrimination. We asked her to share more about her work and her support of BJC.

## What's a highlight from your time in the BJC Fellows Program?

I loved being in a learning space with law students, clergy and community leaders, all learning together and with each other. After attending the BJC Fellows Seminar, I understand more clearly that it is the details of how we form our “more perfect union,” establish justice, and the “blessings of liberty” where the beauty and strength of our commitment can be found.

## How does your work at Shoulder to Shoulder intersect with your advocacy for religious freedom?

The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign is a multifaith coalition addressing anti-Muslim discrimination and violence through engaging faith communities. We believe that anti-Muslim discrimination is not just a “Muslim issue” but a problem that impacts us all. We work to help faith communities better understand how anti-Muslim discrimination impacts Muslims in their daily lives. We help faith communities and faith leaders connect their ideals and values to this work, supporting them as we continue to create a country where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.



Our work intersects with religious freedom when schools fail to provide appropriate and legally mandated accommodations to students, teachers and administrators so they can have Eid as a holiday or fail to provide halal food for the cafeteria. It shows up in prisons when a person who is sentenced to death is not allowed to have an Imam with them in their final moments when a Christian is allowed to have a pastor or priest. It shows up when city zoning boards create burdensome regulations and zoning requirements for a new mosque, masjid or Islamic center while not enforcing those same requirements for new church buildings.

## Why do you choose to support BJC every month?

BJC helps me navigate the complex Supreme Court cases and government policies in a way that I can respect, even if I don't always agree. It helps Christians like myself understand the ways Christian nationalism hurts our churches, our religious communities and our country. It helps Christians know and join the community of people who are putting their faith ideals into action to protect faith freedom for all.

## As a vegetarian, what restaurant is next on your list?

This might be controversial, but I don't really like the Impossible or Beast burgers. I've heard that Shouk, a local chain in the Washington, D.C.-area, has a delicious burger I've been meaning to try, and this question now made my Friday plans.

Join Cassandra and others in our Faith FULL Community of monthly donors. Regular support — in any amount — provides the BJC staff with the knowledge that others are working and supporting us in our work, day in and day out. BJC also provides special communications to members of the Faith FULL Community, sharing updates on our work.

To join the Faith FULL Community and set up a monthly gift to BJC, visit [BJCOnline.org/give-monthly](https://BJCOnline.org/give-monthly). If you have questions or want to learn more, you can contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, by phone at 317-523-4076 or by email at [dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org](mailto:dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org).

# Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In honor of Joel Avery  
By Lynelle V. Mason

In honor of Pam Durso  
By Ashlee E. Ross

In honor of Ellen Martin  
By Gary Simson

In honor of Jenny Smith  
By Ronald Williams

In honor of Dan & Janet Bagby  
By Daniel & Andrea Glaze

In honor of Libby Grammer  
By Adam Underwood

In honor of Gary & Lou Anne Mauldin  
By Jorene & Frank Swift

In honor of Elizabeth Tadlock  
By Dale Tadlock

In honor of Lynn & Bob Behrendt  
By Dorothy J. Kassanoff

In honor of Rev. Dr. Truitt Gannon  
By Alice Schutte

In honor of Statia Carter McNeese  
By Joseph T. Lewis

In honor of Leta Tillman  
By Valerie R. Storms

In honor of Claire Hein Blanton  
By Gillian Kruse

In honor of Helen Harris  
By Carolyn Neal

In honor of Jackie Baugh Moore  
By Charles F. Johnson

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By Ilana Ostrin  
Carolyn Strickland  
Lynn Brinkley  
J. G. Reed

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By Richard Brake

In honor of Sharon Heflin  
By Jay M. Heflin

In honor of  
Stan & Mary Margaret Ninemire  
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In honor of Anita Tyler  
By Amanda Tyler & Robert Behrendt

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In honor of Ginny & Rod Hickman  
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By Brent Walker  
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## Alex Wagner Tonight

December 28, 2022

*Amanda Tyler to guest host Alicia Menendez:*

We are trying to draw attention to what Christian nationalism is, and to provide resources — particularly to Christians, who I think, bear a special responsibility in distinguishing Christian nationalism from Christianity itself.

Christian nationalism turns Christianity’s gospel of love into a false idol of power. It turns [the gospel of] John — teaching us that God so loved the world — on its head, saying

falsely that God has a special plan for the United States or that God loves the United States more than any other country or that God has preordained election results.

This political ideology is fueling election denial in many places. It’s also fueling continuing attacks on our democracy.



## Why a group of Christians is fighting the growing threat of Christian nationalism

*By Vera Bergengruen*

*Published by TIME on December 30, 2022*

On Jan. 6, 2021, Amanda Tyler watched the attack on the U.S. Capitol unfold with a growing sense of dread—and recognition.

Like many Christian leaders, Tyler, the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, immediately noticed the presence of religious symbols in the crowd. Large crosses were everywhere, carried by protestors marching to the Capitol and depicted on flags, clothing, and necklaces. Demonstrators held up Bibles and banners reading, “In God We Trust,” “An Appeal to Heaven,” and “Jesus is my savior, Trump is my President.”

Many of the people there that day cast the attack on the Capitol to stop the certification of the 2020 election as a biblical battle of good versus evil. Christian nationalism, a resurgent ideology that views the U.S. as a Christian country and whose proponents largely define American identity as exclusively white and Christian “helped fuel the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, uniting disparate actors and infusing their political cause with religious fervor,” Tyler testified on Dec. 13 at a House Oversight subcommittee hearing. ...

“I’m really grateful that members of Congress are paying attention to how Christian nationalism overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy, and how some of these extremists are being fueled by Christian nationalism, using it to try to justify their violence as being done in God’s name,” Tyler told TIME in a Dec. 15 interview. ...

In the coming year, Tyler is hoping to use the focus on the issue to grow the grassroots national network to help other Christian organizations learn to notice the signs of Christian nationalism “in order not to be complicit with its spread,” and learn to address it. “To dismantle an ideology that’s so deeply seated will be a generational project,” she says. “But it’s one that’s urgent for our democracy and for the safety of the country.”

## Amanda on the Bakari Sellers podcast

*November 1, 2022*

Christian nationalism is a nationwide problem. There are certainly areas of the country where they see higher instances of Christian nationalism, but it is a mistake to say this is restricted to just one area of the country. ... It’s all over the country, and that’s because it’s an ideology that has permeated the American experience for so many years. It’s been there latent for all this time, and then it can be exploited by different people at different times. It is something all Americans need to take very seriously.



# The ReidOut

January 26, 2023

*Amanda Tyler to Joy Reid:*

So we see a lot of these hate groups using this ideology of Christian nationalism to bring more people to their cause, to try to cloak their actions with this veneer of respectability, using the name of Jesus, using Scripture to justify what they're doing, to code their racist language in religious language.

And for Christians like me and for those in our Christians Against Christian Nationalism movement, it is incredibly alarming and disturbing to see our faith used in this way.

We see how Christian nationalism is used by these groups to unite people from a lot of different groups and ideologies to unite them with a common language. Using this Christian language, this Christian imagery that infuses all of their actions: That suggests that God approves of their undertaking, even that God is directing their actions. It gives people this sense of God's providential hand at work in their life, that God is directing these hateful actions.

So I don't think that Christian nationalism alone can explain what's going on with these attacks to democracy — and specifically this white supremacist violence — but I don't think we are going to fully understand and get the full picture if we don't really grapple with and understand Christian nationalism.



## Religion News Service names Tyler one of 15 'emergent leaders'

*The staff of Religion News Service named BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler as one of the rising stars in religion in 2022. Referring to these leaders as "loud voices" who are "calling it as they see it," the list includes authors, journalists, activists and individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds. Here's an excerpt from their section on Tyler:*

Tyler railed against Christian nationalism in the press, penning editorials in CNN and appearing on news programs such as MSNBC. Her recurring argument: Christian nationalism, which she describes as a "gross distortion" of the faith she and others claim, is a threat to American democracy, and Christians should reject it.

A lawyer and former congressional staffer, Tyler also worked to bring her cause before elected officials. Her organization partnered with the Freedom From Religion Foundation to produce an exhaustive report on Christian nationalism's role in the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and was part of a group that briefed members of the U.S. House of Representatives on the subject in March. Come December, she was testifying about Christian nationalism before the House Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.



## Don't miss our appearances in the media

These are just excerpts from many appearances over the past few months. Be sure you are following us on social media for our latest media appearances, and you can also see a recap of our recent articles each Friday in our weekly email — you can sign up to receive our email updates at [BJCOnline.org/subscribe](https://www.bjconline.org/subscribe).

Visit our website for links to these stories and others, including in the Guardian, Baptist News Global, Deseret News, Salon, Word&Way, and more. For a full list, go to our website at [BJCOnline.org/archives-in-the-news](https://www.bjconline.org/archives-in-the-news).



# Strong public schools fight Christian nationalism

By Rev. Jennifer Hawks  
BJC Associate General Counsel

*A version of this article originally appeared in Good Faith Media in honor of Public Schools Week 2023, which was Feb. 27-Mar. 3. It is reprinted here with permission.*

As threats to public education proliferate, Public Schools Week is an opportunity for us to celebrate the positive role public schools play in our communities. Attacks on public education are often fueled by Christian nationalism, a political ideology that seeks to merge our American and Christian identities, suggesting that “good” Americans are Christians and that “real” Christians are Americans who hold certain opinions on political issues.

Christian nationalism thrives off the carefully curated myth that the United States was founded as a “Christian nation.” And it thrives off of social studies curriculum that downplays the contributions of Black Americans, immigrant communities, religious minorities, Indigenous groups, and all others who undercut the narrative that white Christians have a special role in founding and leading this country.

The easiest way to dispel the “Christian nation” myth is to read the U.S. Constitution. When our Constitution was written, most states had some form of a religious test that ensured only certain Christians were eligible to represent their neighbors in the government. This system was explicitly rejected when the no-religious-test clause was included in Article VI, guaranteeing that religious belief would not be a precondition for elected federal office.

Christian nationalism-inspired attacks on public education take several forms. Christian nationalism pushes an agenda that includes attacking curriculum, denigrating teachers and promoting religion (specifically certain expressions of Christianity) at every possible turn.

Proponents of state legislation requiring the posting of “in God we trust” in schools describe the national motto as honoring our so-called “Judeo-Christian” heritage, claiming it is foundational to our identity as Americans (even though it was not declared to be our country’s official “motto” until 1954). When pushed about how this excludes the religious beliefs of many religious and secular Americans, proponents often backtrack, saying that the represented “god” is a generic placeholder for whatever view of the Divine one might have. Apparently, the Almighty needs an undercover public relations effort!

America’s constitutional setting ensures that religion thrives in its many manifestations. Trust in God, however, is not exactly a unifying characteristic of being an American,

and our children in public schools should not be divided into insiders and outsiders based on religious belief.

Christian nationalism demands censorship of truthful portrayals of racism, sexism, family violence, and other human shortcomings which undercut the narrative of an idyllic society. It fears the conclusions that students might draw when they read an accounting of American history from a minority perspective such as the 1619 Project, a telling of American history that “plac[es] the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the national narrative.” Books can explore various perspectives and challenging topics while being age-appropriate.

Public schools may teach about the role of religion in history, but that’s not enough for Christian nationalism to succeed. Christian nationalism needs public schools to teach a version of Christianity that is compatible with state authority and freed from disagreement over interpretation. With the proliferation of Bible translations available, a class is only feasible if the curriculum has already chosen a single, correct interpretation of each passage being taught.

In statehouses across the country, the most powerful voices against Bible literacy bills have been clergy and Christian parents who testify that they don’t need the government dictating the “correct” interpretation of any biblical passage. After all, in Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian, recorded in Acts 8:26-40, the Bible itself tells us that interpretation matters!

Christian nationalism’s attack on American history also needs to transform the founding generations into super-Christians and delete the presence of other religions. Founders are transformed into devout, evangelical Christians while Islam — the religion of approximately one-third of enslaved Africans brought to the U.S. — is erased.

Since public schools educate approximately 90% of American schoolchildren, a robust history curriculum in the public schools is perhaps the most practical way to oppose Christian nationalism. Questions about whose history will be taught have repercussions far outside the classroom. If we want to fight Christian nationalism on the ground in our local communities, we should start with advocating for strong public schools whose curriculum includes all of us and reflects American history as it was, not as a small group imagines it to have been.

# Get to know the ways donor-advised funds benefit you and BJC

Financial gifts from donor-advised funds to qualified charities increased more than 60% in the past two years, and the number of gifts from donor-advised funds have grown more than 400% in the past decade, according to the National Philanthropic Trust.

Once less common, donors now give regularly to BJC through their donor-advised funds, supporting our critical work of protecting faith freedom for all.

## What is a donor-advised fund, and how can you benefit?

A donor-advised fund (DAF) acts as a charitable giving account for you or your family. The fund allows you as a donor to provide financial grants (gifts) to one or more charities — like BJC — in a single year or over a period of years.

To set up a donor-advised account, you deposit assets (e.g., cash, stocks, real estate, personal property) at a sponsoring organization. Institutions, such as community foundations, oversee funds like these, as do financial service companies such as Fidelity, Schwab and Vanguard.

After depositing your assets, you will receive a charitable tax deduction for your irrevocable contribution. The money in a donor-advised fund grows tax-free, creating the possibility of having more to give to charity over time.

The donor-advised fund allows you to recommend grants to 501(c)(3) charitable organizations — like BJC — from the created fund.

There are additional benefits to establishing a donor-advised fund. Using a DAF may simplify your charitable giving, streamline your tax filings, help you avoid capital gains tax and maximize your annual donations. Plus, the DAF can serve as the basis for a legacy gift: Donors can specify upon their death that any remaining funds be gifted to BJC.

## Interested in creating a donor-advised fund?

Simply contact a financial adviser to discuss how you can set up a donor-advised fund that meets your financial and charitable giving needs.

## What do I do after I create a fund?

If you have created a donor-advised fund and want to know how to give to support BJC's important work, please contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at [dtyler@BJCOnline.org](mailto:dtyler@BJCOnline.org).

*This information is not intended as legal or tax advice. For such advice, please consult an attorney, tax adviser or financial adviser.*

## How else can I support BJC's work?

You can make a gift to BJC at any time to continue our efforts. Here are a few other ways to give:



Planned giving through will, trust, insurance or retirement account



Stock or bond transfer



IRA disbursements



Online by credit card (one-time gift or monthly): [give.BJCOnline.org](https://give.BJCOnline.org)

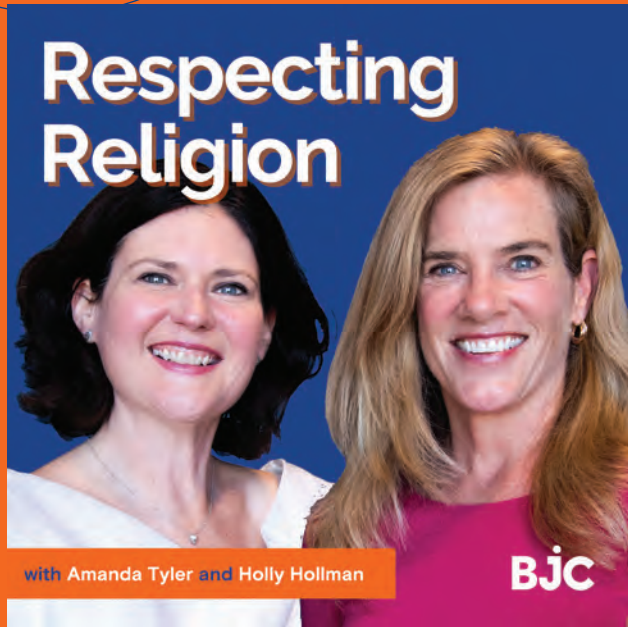


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# Catch up with the Respecting Religion podcast



Now in its fourth season, the Respecting Religion podcast continues to address key topics impacting faith freedom for all. Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman host weekly conversations on topics ranging from Christian nationalism’s impact on elections to recent Supreme Court arguments in church-state cases.

If you aren’t a podcast listener, you can read transcripts of each episode. Visit [RespectingReligion.org](https://RespectingReligion.org) and click on each episode for a transcript and a list of additional resources.

To listen to the podcast, just search for “Respecting Religion” on your favorite podcasting provider. We’re on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, Stitcher and anywhere else you listen to podcasts.

If you have a question for the show, you can always email Amanda and Holly by writing to both of them at [RespectingReligion@BJCOnline.org](mailto:RespectingReligion@BJCOnline.org). Send an email, and you might hear your question on a future show!

Here are excerpts from two recent episodes.

## Excerpt from Season 4, Episode 11:

### The National Prayer Breakfast and religious freedom

Released January 26, 2023

**AMANDA:** So even though this isn’t a government-sponsored event, the optics of it make it look and feel official and make it look like the government is sponsoring the event.

I was reflecting on the name National Prayer Breakfast. So the name itself — I mean, we have a National Football Championship. Right? That doesn’t mean that the government sponsors that game — congratulations to the Georgia Bulldogs. But it does mean that, you know, I think we have to be careful when we use that language, and then when you add to it the official seal of the United States —

**HOLLY:** On the invitations.

**AMANDA:** Yes. When you invite and the president of the United States attends, when you have members of Congress attend, then we need to be careful about what signal is being sent about the government’s role in this private event. ...

Just to be clear, if it’s not already, we do not think the government has a role in making us pray or even suggesting that we should pray.

And in talking about the National Prayer Breakfast, we have to contrast it with another similarly named event called the National Day of Prayer, which is held the first Thursday in May. And for us, the National Day of Prayer is more problematic than the National Prayer Breakfast, because it fits into this larger issue of religious exercise sponsored by the government. National Day of Prayer is definitely sponsored by the government.

**HOLLY:** And it gets to this question of: What is the role of government? I mean, it’s one thing to try to bring us all together and for members of the government to express religion in public life. But it’s another thing to usurp the role of religion in the life of citizens by sponsoring events or assuming a certain religious uniformity when there is none.

Excerpt from Season 4, Episode 08:

## Hypotheticals, reeducation, and a preemptive claim: SCOTUS hears *303 Creative v. Elenis*

Released December 8, 2022

**HOLLY:** This is a very specific case that addresses this larger ongoing issue that has — I don't want to say, dominated, but it's taken a disproportionate amount of air time in religious freedom law.

**AMANDA:** We know much more than we ever thought we would about the wedding business and all the vendors that go into getting ready for your nuptials.

**HOLLY:** And all the conflicts over what people think about marriage and how they think about it. And, some listeners might be interested to go back and see how BJC talks about marriage and how we know that part of our work is being very explicit, explaining the different ways that marriage operates, the fact that we have religious marriage and no laws that tell churches who to marry or how to conduct their sacred ceremonies. And then we have civil laws that recognize marriage as a civil union that comes with particular rights, and that can be seen very separate from someone's religious views.

This case is part of that overall discussion and debate that we're having in society. Too, often I believe that people know what they think about same-sex marriage, and if they're for marriage equality, they would say, "Oh, well, Colorado's right and they should win," or if their religious views don't allow equality for same-sex marriages, they might say, "Well, [this business owner] clearly should win."

But we know that our religious liberty tradition really is about providing a basis for navigating these differences, and so the law doesn't necessarily have to line up with one side or the other. What we're trying to do is find our ways through this kind of thicket where we have these differences. And this case, I think, is one step along the way in that process.

**AMANDA:** And part of BJC's contribution to this conversation is to provide some nuanced understanding about how nondiscrimination laws and Free Exercise claims come together in this space. So we understand the importance of nondiscrimination laws and think that while they should be enforced in almost all contexts, that there are some limits on what the government can do in order to protect Free Exercise.

And so, number one, we would not be in favor of forcing someone to participate in a religious ceremony, and we think it's important to entertain claims that someone thought that they might be participating in a religious ceremony of marriage in a way that would not align with their religious views.

We also know that there is some area — we're now getting beyond just Free Exercise claims, but into Free Speech claims. There is some area of pure speech that is protected and distinct from action that is regularly regulated in the commercial marketplace. So the validity of civil rights laws depends on ensuring access, regardless of what someone thinks about people. So the laws provide equal access, and that protects the services given in the commercial marketplace.

**HOLLY:** Right. And I think those two points show that we see the difference in essential [individual] religious practice and practice of religious institutions, congregations, and rules that apply beyond that, that affect other people in a greater way, including in the commercial marketplace.

And it's that second point that is kind of confusing in this case, because we know, as we discussed in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case, that civil rights laws can require businesses to serve people without regard to protected categories, but that doesn't mean that the law tells those business owners things that they have to say, what they agree with and what they don't.

And as this case came before the Supreme Court, distinct from *Masterpiece*, the media focused — and some of the *amicus* support for the business owner — really focused on how this is totally different; this is about Free Speech. This is a business that is speaking, and so if nondiscrimination laws apply to this business, you are making this business owner speak in a way that's inconsistent with their religion.

But as we learned in oral arguments and got closer to this case, it's not so clear that this was really an easy fact pattern to defend some area of Free Speech where the state would not be within its rights to apply nondiscrimination laws.

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## New York City mayor dismisses need for separation of church and state

New York City Mayor Eric Adams denied the need for separation of church and state in a speech at an interfaith breakfast Feb. 28.

“Don’t tell me about no separation of church and state,” he said. “State is the body. Church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies. I can’t separate my belief because I’m an elected official. When I walk, I walk with God. When I talk, I talk with God. When I put policies in place, I put them in with a God-like approach to them. That’s who I am.”

Adams also suggested prayer is the cure for gun violence and that prayer had been taken out of schools.

Adams is a Democrat who was sworn into office a year ago. He is a retired police captain and a New York native who has survived various hardships in life and preaches a message of hope for all who feel neglected.

The mayor turned the podium into a pulpit at the interfaith breakfast, and that did not digest well with those who advocate a traditional understanding of church-state separation.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State President and CEO Rachel Laser lamented the remarks.

“Mayor Adams’ comments dismissing our country’s foundational principle of separation of church and state are shocking and dangerous,” Laser said. “Our democracy, equality and rights all rely on America’s commitment to separate church and state. That separation is not anti-religion, as Mayor Adams seems to imply. Rather, it is what protects religious freedom for everyone.”

Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC, tweeted out a response: “These comments from Mayor Adams are extremely troubling. We should expect our elected officials to govern without regard to religion and respect the institutional separation of church and state, which ensures religious freedom for everyone.” Tyler’s comments also were featured in an opinion piece by Jennifer Rubin in *The Washington Post*.

The 40-minute, rambling speech given by Adams was laced with religious themes about his childhood, church experience, adversities and government work.

“I am still a child of God and will always be a child of God and I won’t apologize about being a child of God,” he said. “It is not going to happen. We need to stand up for that. That is what has happened. We need to be that every day.”

Tyler and BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman also reviewed the remarks on an episode of the *Respecting Religion* podcast. On episode 15 of season 4, they discussed how statements from Adams and other public leaders show the prominence of Christian nationalism in our society and the dangers it poses to public debate and the health of our country. They also provided some reminders about how the institutional separation of church and state does not mean the separation of religion from public life. The episode is available on your favorite podcasting provider or on [RespectingReligion.org](https://www.respectingreligion.org).

—Mark Wingfield, *Baptist News Global*,  
with BJC staff reports

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## U.S. Department of Labor restores protections against religious discrimination

On Feb. 28, the United States Department of Labor announced the rescission of a discriminatory Trump-era policy concerning religious freedom protections in federal contracting. BJC opposed the policy during the Trump administration and called on the Biden administration to rescind it.

“No one should be denied a federally funded job for being the wrong religion,” said Holly Hollman, general counsel of BJC. “The Biden administration is right to restore protections against religious discrimination for Americans who work for federal contractors.”

BJC says the action by the Department of Labor restores a workable standard. It will permit religious contractors to compete for federal contracts while protecting

American workers from religious discrimination in their jobs.

“Returning to the rules as they existed under both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama ensures that safeguards against discrimination intended to protect workers are not redefined into a broad exemption for for-profit businesses to reject qualified employees under the guise of religion,” Hollman said.

“Rooted in the historic Baptist principle of religious freedom, BJC applauds the Biden administration for restoring important protections against discrimination for the one in five American workers employed by federal contractors.”

—BJC staff reports

## Dent joins BJC staff

### DR. SABRINA E. DENT

joins the BJC staff as the director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation (see pages 16-17). She leads several of BJC's educational programs and BJC's Project on Race and Religious Freedom.

Dr. Dent served as president of the Center when it was an independent organization. She also was a member of the inaugural class of BJC Fellows in 2015 and served on the BJC Board of Directors from 2020-2023.

A leader in the interfaith community, her public scholarship addresses the complexities of religious freedom; religion and public policy; and race, religion and American public life. Dr. Dent is the co-editor and contributing author of the book *African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities*.

Dr. Dent also serves as an adjunct professor at Starr King School for the Ministry in Oakland, California, where she teaches a course on religious freedom, justice and democracy. She previously served as director of programs and partnerships for the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute and as senior faith advisor for Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Dr. Dent earned her bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech, and she earned Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. You can contact her at [sdent@BJCOnline.org](mailto:sdent@BJCOnline.org).



## Join us in June for our annual gathering

### BJC Luncheon will be June 30 in Atlanta

Join religious liberty supporters from across the country at our annual BJC Luncheon. We'll be gathering Friday, June 30, in Atlanta, Georgia, for a luncheon event that begins at 11:30 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Atlanta.

The BJC Luncheon is open to the public, but you must have a ticket to attend. Table sponsorships are also available. Tickets go on sale April 3, and you can visit [BJCOnline.org/Luncheon](https://BJCOnline.org/Luncheon) for the latest information, including details on discounted tickets for students and young ministers.

The BJC Luncheon is held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, but you do not have to attend the assembly to go to the luncheon. Don't miss this chance to gather in person with BJC staff and other supporters of faith freedom for all.



## BJC welcomes spring intern

**MOLLY RACSKO**, from Great Neck, New York, is a senior at SUNY New Paltz, majoring in political science. Previously at New Paltz, she worked as a research assistant at the Benjamin Center for Public Policy and worked with the New York Public Interest Research Group on a variety of projects, including voter registration, higher education funding and environmental activism.



Racsko is the daughter of Mary and Tamas Racsko. After the internship, she plans to continue her education and pursue a career in political advocacy.

## Keep up with BJC in real time

Don't want to wait for the magazine? Here are other ways to get BJC updates:

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**Instagram, YouTube and Twitter:**  
[@BJContheHill](https://www.instagram.com/BJContheHill)

**Instagram and TikTok:**  
[@EndChristianNationalism](https://www.instagram.com/EndChristianNationalism)

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We are attorneys, Capitol Hill insiders, ministers, mobilizers and scholars. We file briefs in pivotal Supreme Court cases, advocate for and against legislation, testify in Congress and unite with others across faiths to ensure that all Americans have, and will always have, the right to follow their spiritual beliefs.

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**Amanda Tyler** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
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## MORE FROM BJC



### January 6 vigil

Christian leaders marked a somber anniversary with a prayer vigil at dawn. Read more on pages 6-9.



### BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

We are excited to announce a new era for BJC. Read more on pages 16-17.