

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

AMANDA TYLER reflects on the State of the Union address

HOLLY HOLLMAN on the role of faith communities in elections

BJC hosts screening of new film on Christian nationalism

A look at voting rights and freedom

Ensuring freedom continues

In this election year, it's never too early to consider the role you can play in our country's commitment to faith freedom for all by ensuring our free and fair elections continue in the United States.

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent discusses how protecting VOTING RIGHTS is a matter of human dignity and justice as she shares her generational story on page 6. You can see the evolution of voting rights in our country on pages 7-9 in a timeline from the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation.

Holly Hollman shares about the FAITH IN ELECTIONS playbook and how churches and people of faith can be involved in our country's nonpartisan elections on page 5.

Amanda Tyler attended this year's STATE OF THE UNION address. On page 3, she reflects on her experience, including how it illuminated new ways to consider who represents our country when lawmakers gather together in Washington, D.C.

Read about a special viewing of the documentary GOD & COUNTRY at the U.S. Capitol on pages 10-11, and see how our work COMBATING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM is expanding in Texas on pages 12-13.

On page 19, learn about our upcoming event in Los Angeles, featuring a conversation on RACE, RELIGION AND CITIZENSHIP for the 2024 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures.

Groups came together to combat a misguided Texas plan to put "CHAPLAINS" IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, and now other states are considering the idea. Pages 14-15 have more on the victories in the Lone Star state and how you can stop new legislation.

For the second time in history, the four major Black Baptist denominations met together. The Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland reports on the NATIONAL BAPTIST JOINT BOARD SESSION on pages 16-17 and some of the key issues addressed.

This magazine also remembers the Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams (page 18), shares new research on BJC's history (pages 20-21), shows a few recent BJC appearances (page 23) and much more.

Join the BJC team

BJC is hiring a policy counsel and a development director

BJC is currently hiring for two full-time positions on our staff: A Director of Development and a Policy Counsel.

Policy Counsel

Working with BJC staff, the Policy Counsel will advance the organization's strategic efforts to promote faith freedom for all, primarily in legislative and other policy arenas. A successful candidate will be an attorney who has a strong commitment to BJC's mission, an ability to work well with a variety of constituencies internally and externally, and flexibility to adjust based on changing needs of the organization.

The Policy Counsel position requires

a J.D. degree and 3-7 years of experience in a position of a similar level. Based in the Washington, D.C. area, the position reports to the general counsel.

Director of Development

The Director of Development will lead a comprehensive fundraising program at an exciting point of change for BJC. Newer initiatives — including the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation and the BJC-led Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign — provide emerging opportunities for engagement and partnership development from a broader and more diverse base of supporters.

The Director of Development will

manage all integrated fundraising strategies, including annual, major, monthly and planned gifts; foundation giving; denominational and church giving; gift processing and stewardship; data management; and events.

The position requires at least 10 years of progressively more responsible fundraising experience. Working across the organization, this position reports to the executive director.

More information

Additional details about both positions are available at BJCOnline.org/bjcjobs. The preferred start date for both positions is no later than June 1, 2024.

Democracy in action

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director



I make it a point each year to watch the State of the Union. This year, I had the privilege of attending it in person, representing the millions of Americans who are concerned about the dangers of Christian nationalism. It was an honor to take your concerns and share them directly with our nation's leaders at this critical moment in American history.

We all know that members of Congress are elected to represent us in Washington, and we see most of them gather together for this speech every year. But you may not know that each member of Congress also gets to invite one guest to attend the speech. I was invited by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., who has been an important ally in calling out the dangers of Christian nationalism.

As an invited guest, I watched the speech from the House gallery — the upper level seating section surrounding the House floor. Though the members of Congress sit according to party, their guests had randomly assigned seats in the gallery. I was surrounded by people who came at the invitation of both Republicans and Democrats, and we were there to represent our country, albeit in a different way. Some were invited because of their relationship to the member of Congress — be they a spouse or a staffer. Many of us were there because we have a connection to a political issue of importance to the member of Congress who invited us.

Rep. Huffman's invitation to me was surprising to some. We have found common cause in drawing attention to the urgent threat Christian nationalism poses to our democracy. Rep. Huffman is the only member of Congress who has spoken against Christian nationalism in a floor speech — an act that can have both political and personal consequences. I have testified twice in Congressional committees about how Christian nationalism distorts Christianity and violates religious freedom, including by inspiring white supremacist violence.

We've worked together across lines of difference — I'm a Baptist, and he, as a Humanist, is the only openly non-religious member of Congress. The American Humanist Association, which

has been a coalition partner of BJC for many years, defines Humanism as "a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good."

Pluralism in our country isn't watering down each other's beliefs — it means being open, honest and dedicated in our beliefs. And, we don't have to share a religious identity to work together on important issues, even as we come to the work from our own religious or secular perspectives.

As a guest of a member of Congress, I was able to attend a reception to meet some of his colleagues in the House of Representatives. In fact, thanks to our shared cause, Rep. Huffman often made it a point to tell others about our work at Christians Against Christian Nationalism, specifically how Christians are calling out Christian nationalism as a gross distortion of the teachings of Jesus.

I'm inspired by Rep. Huffman, who used his one invitation to shine a spotlight on this issue — not just to his constituents, but to his colleagues, too. Who do we know in our own communities that might be open to talking about this if we find a way to break the ice? How can we encourage the leaders of this country to have the political courage to name this threat and take it seriously?

In this fraught political year that is so often marked by division and discord, it can be tempting to succumb to despair. But on a beautiful March evening in the nation's Capitol building, I experienced a hopeful moment of representative democracy. Meeting with members of Congress and their guests, I expressed the concerns that matter to us, and I listened to and was inspired by the stories of Americans from diverse backgrounds. I was honored to be there to create new conversations and show that yes, there are Christians who know the dangers of Christian nationalism, and we are ready to work with anyone to stop it.

Listen to more of Tyler's reflections on attending the State of the Union on Respecting Religion (Season 5, Episode 20).

New rule from nine federal agencies safeguards religious freedom

The Biden administration announced a final rule in March, jointly issued by nine federal agencies, entitled “Partnerships with Faith-Based and Neighborhood Organizations.” The rule is designed to protect the religious liberty rights of federally funded social service beneficiaries by, among other things, reinstating key safeguards removed during the Trump administration.

BJC has long supported the bedrock principle that when federal tax dollars are used to provide services for individuals in need, both the beneficiary and the taxpayer should be assured that the services are not being administered in a way that discriminates on the basis of religion or as a means of coercing religious activity. This new rule protects “the religious liberty rights of people in need,” according to BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman.

“Our country’s principle of religious freedom means that someone does not have to be a certain religion — or be any religion at all — to access the same taxpayer-funded services,” Hollman said. “We appreciate the intensive interagency work that has gone into clarifying and strengthening these protections.”

Among other things, the announced final rule:

- Requires that social service providers receiving direct federal funding notify beneficiaries of their right to be free of discrimination on the basis of religion
- Encourages the funding agency to inform beneficiaries

of alternate providers if the beneficiary objects to a faith-based provider’s religious character

- Prohibits social service providers from requiring beneficiaries to attend or participate in explicitly religious activities to receive government-funded services

The nine agencies involved — The United States Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs and the United States Agency for International Development — initially proposed the joint rule in January 2023. The announcement finalizes the rule after a lengthy public comment period, in which BJC participated by sending its own comments and joining comments from a group of religious liberty advocates known as the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination.

Religious institutions that want to provide social services can apply for and receive federal funding that is also available to secular social service providers. Federal funds rightly come with regulations that protect taxpayers and beneficiaries alike.

Hollman and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler spoke at length about the proposed rule in a March 2023 episode of the Respecting Religion podcast titled “Biden, Trump and federal regulations.”

—Don Byrd, BJC Researcher and Writer

HHS announces final conscience protection rule, repealing some Trump administration provisions

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a final rule governing the Biden administration’s interpretation and enforcement of laws protecting health care providers that object on religious or moral grounds from providing certain services. The move revises sweeping changes put forth by the Trump administration in 2019, including repealing certain provisions that courts had ruled unlawful. The 2019 rules, which never took effect due to legal challenges, would have greatly expanded the rights of providers to deny health services.

Entitled “Safeguarding the Rights of Conscience as Protected by Federal Statutes,” the Biden rule seeks to balance the rights of objecting service providers with the rights of patients to access the care they need. The rule retains the structure of the 2011 conscience protections implemented by the Obama administration, which “handled conscience matters on a case-by-case basis,” while incorporating some elements of the 2019 rules.

According to HHS’ Fact Sheet, the final rule:

- Clarifies that the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is designated to handle conscience complaints

- Restores OCR’s enforcement process, including the authority to investigate complaints, enforce regulations and make referrals to the Justice Department when appropriate
- Encourages entities to post a notice to inform providers and patients of their rights under federal conscience statutes

“Protecting conscience rights and ensuring access to health care are critically important, no matter who you are, where you live, who you love, or your faith and conscience. Our office has statutory mandates to protect people across the country and takes this responsibility very seriously,” said Office for Civil Rights Director Melanie Fontes Rainer. “We are proud of today’s rule, which advances conscience protections, access to health care, and puts our health care system on notice that we will enforce the law. As a law enforcement agency, we are committed to this work.”

In invalidating the 2019 rules, a federal district court in New York called the Trump administration’s claim justifying the rules that there had been a “significant increase” in conscience protection complaints “factually untrue.”

—Don Byrd, BJC Researcher and Writer

Faithful involvement in elections

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

“**B**ut, can we do that without violating the separation of church and state?” That’s a question I hear each election year as churches consider their role in their civic community and are asked to engage in political debates. Sometimes it’s hesitation from a pastor who doesn’t want to get involved in an issue. Sometimes it’s an attempt to silence an opposing point of view. Sometimes it’s based on misinformation that the government is going to shut down churches if they espouse a position that disagrees with the White House.

Let’s be clear: churches and other houses of worship have a role in protecting democracy, and the institutional separation of church and state does not require a banishment of religion from public life. You cannot divorce religion from politics or separate Christians from the duties of secular citizenship.

As we say in the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement: People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square. In other words, no matter your religion — or even if you are religious at all — you have the same rights and duties as a citizen in the United States.

Religious people have the same right as anyone to communicate convictions in the marketplace of ideas, working for public policies by preaching, teaching, lobbying, voting and running for office. Living out your faith is not — and need not be — limited to private devotion or activities in a house of worship.

As Baptists, we know this from our own history. Colonial Baptist leaders John Leland and Isaac Backus were both ardent defenders of the institutional separation of religion and the government, and they were involved in public policy debates and attempts to influence legislation in their day.

One thing that often comes up in these conversations are the tax-exempt rules for 501(c)(3) organizations — which churches qualify as. The First Amendment protects the religious expression of churches in many ways, including their right to speak out on important issues. But, if a house of worship wants to receive that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, they — like all nonprofits who want that status — have to abide by certain restrictions on lobbying and campaign activity. The so-called “Johnson Amendment” set that rule up in the 1950s, and it continues to protect houses of worship and other nonprofit organizations from political pressure and additional dangers that come with endorsing and opposing candidates.

So, can your house of worship get involved in issues? Yes. Can it officially endorse a candidate? Not if it wants to be a 501(c)(3) organization. Can it work to protect our democracy and ensure a free and fair election? Absolutely.

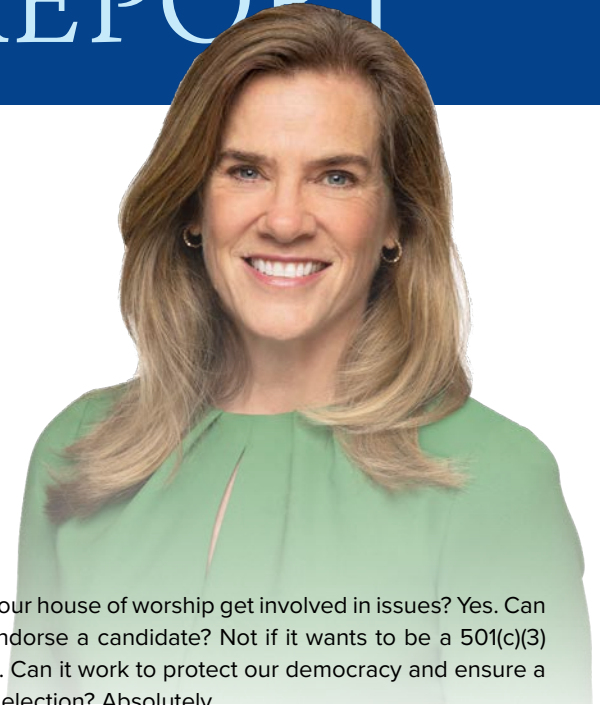
As we approach various voting deadlines for the 2024 election, there’s a new resource available for houses of worship looking to do just that. The “Faith in Elections” playbook is a nonpartisan resource from Interfaith America and Protect Democracy. On a recent episode of our Respecting Religion podcast, I spoke with Chris Crawford from Protect Democracy, and he mentioned that 20 percent of polling locations are houses of worship, most of them churches, and it’s more than 50 percent in some states.

The statistic might surprise most people, but we know houses of worship can provide services to the general public, similar to what a community center can do. It’s a way of loving our neighbors. In many communities where there is a shortage of adequate places to serve as polling places, churches can fill a real need. Of course, loving our neighbors well also means making sure those activities are open to all people — we don’t want people to think there is any religious test for being able to vote. And, as Crawford told me on the show, “As a Catholic, I don’t want a polling booth right in front of where the Eucharist is or right at the foot of a crucifix. I see that as protecting my religious faith in addition to protecting the state.”

Protecting democracy is related to religious freedom. Free and fair elections are foundational elements to having a country that protects other rights. When we vote, we recognize citizens draw upon their diverse religious perspectives. “Our rights don’t exist in a vacuum,” Crawford told me. “We need a system of government that allows us to debate our disagreements, to have different, competing visions for what’s best for a society — including visions that are informed by faith,” he said.

As you and your house of worship approach this upcoming election year, I want to encourage you to take bold stances on issues that impact you and your neighbors, and consider ways you can help protect our free and fair elections. On the next four pages, a timeline shows the history of voting rights in the U.S. and is a reminder that not everyone has truly had access to the right to vote.

Even if we disagree about religion or disagree about where our particular faith takes us on an issue, we should be dedicated to sharing reliable information with others. Let’s speak out, be involved, and love our neighbors well during this election year.





Protecting voting rights is a matter of human dignity and justice

By Dr. Sabrina E. Dent
Director of the BJC Center for
Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

The fight to protect and expand voting rights in the United States is one that resonates throughout generations.

I grew up in Petersburg, Va., a predominantly African American city in the South with a deep connection to the Civil War and the Confederacy, and my parents always emphasized the importance of voting. Although my hometown has a complicated history for Black people, my parents never focused on partisan politics as much as the values they upheld as law-abiding citizens. In addition to being active in church, my father was a Pentecostal preacher who worked for the Boy Scouts of America, and my mother worked retail and served as president of the local chapter of the American Business Women's Association for one year. In our household, the expectation was at age 18 that you would register to vote because the right to vote was a matter of dignity and full inclusion in a civilization that is quick to reject certain people.

Voting is essential to democracy. In addition to shaping policies and laws that address our social needs and concerns, it has been utilized by American citizens for centuries to determine the basic functioning of society, how schools will be funded, and who will represent the best interest of our communities and families. Citizenship has always been an essential criteria of one's ability to vote in America. History teaches us that not all Americans have been afforded this freedom equally, and it has — and continues to — come at a cost to those who fight to pursue it.

In 1790, what it meant to be a citizen — according to the Naturalization Act — was that you were a white, land-owning male with voting rights, even if you were a descendant from Western Europe who was not born in the United States. This excluded poor whites, women, Blacks and Indigenous people who were already in the country — mainly because the latter two groups were not seen as human but rather as property without any rights. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation ceremoniously liberated enslaved Black people, citizenship rights were not granted until 1868 with the passage of the 14th Amendment, but it still did not guarantee the right to vote.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment made it possible for African American men to have the right to vote in the United States. This

took place during the Reconstruction era, which opened many opportunities for African American people to thrive in the country — including the right to run for public office. With the South having a higher population of Blacks with voting rights, more than 1,500 African Americans served as elected or appointed officials. However, over the years, voting did not come without governmental challenges, restrictions and barriers to their full participation in democracy.

From Jim Crow laws through legalized segregation in the 20th century, voter suppression and intimidation took many forms. My paternal grandfather, Kever Howard Dent of Chesapeake, Va., was one of millions of African Americans who experienced voter suppression in the 1960s. As required by law, he paid the polling tax months ahead of voting. However, when he arrived at the polls, he was confronted with bigotry when he was asked to guess the correct number of jelly beans in the jar before he could cast his vote. My grandfather stood his ground and refused to participate in this discriminatory test to prove his worthiness as a voter. Ultimately, he was given a ballot and allowed to vote, but it came at emotional and mental cost — not only to him, but also to my uncle and father who bore witness to the event as children. How do you begin to leverage your agency in a society that undermines your worth?

After voting in the Virginia primary elections this year, I experienced a nuanced form of voter intimidation myself when an electoral judge made an unnecessary comment. As I exited the polling location, the judge thanked me for coming out and then stated that I should invite my friends to come back because they would be there until 7 p.m. Then, his remarks became awkward when he said, "We are running a special: One person, one vote." Given the history and complexities of this principle, it reminded me of how the perceived threats to democracy about voter fraud ring loud in the minds of some Americans. However, there was a deeper mental and emotional impact as I began to wonder why he decided to make that comment toward me. This included thoughts about my personhood and assumptions about my political affiliation. No voter should ever feel this way. Being a concerned citizen who has been engaged in voting rights and mobilization work, I contacted the Election Protection hotline

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The evolution of voting rights in the United States

Religious freedom is not possible without personal freedom, and our rights are interconnected. The right to vote and the importance of free and fair elections allow us to have a functioning system of government that protects our rights, including our right to religious freedom. The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation encourages you to think about how you can use your freedom to protect other freedoms — as well as others' freedoms. Dr. Sabrina Dent shared her generational story in this magazine, and this 3-page timeline provides a look at changes over time to the suppression of and ability to vote.

● 1789: Constitution gives responsibility of overseeing elections to the states

Article I of the U.S. Constitution allowed the states to determine who is qualified to vote, giving them the responsibility of overseeing elections. Most states limited voting rights to white men who owned property. The requirement to own property began to be relaxed over time, sometimes in favor of a tax to vote that was often called a “poll tax.” However, most of those taxes were abandoned by the mid-1800s.

to report the incident because communities are impacted when we as individuals fail to exhibit moral courage.

In 2024, the work has to continue. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, there were 356 voter restriction bills considered across 47 states in 2023 — bills that target disenfranchised groups, including communities of color, college students, people with disabilities, seniors, LGBTQ+ people, and returning citizens.

We should continue to protect and expand voting rights in ways that dignify every citizen. That means all of us must speak out when we witness voter suppression or voter intimidation tactics — whether it's new policy proposals or statements from our leaders that undermine voter confidence. The actions we take may not be grand or create a Supreme Court case, but they help us move closer to having a democracy that reflects the concerns of every person.

We must not cowl to the threats of voter intimidation, suppression and discrimination. Instead, we must remember the history in our country and rightfully demand our place as citizens. We must reaffirm the right to vote as a right to dignity and acceptance in our democracy. That takes not only our words but our actions.

To learn more about voting suppression, visit the website of the Brennan Center for Justice: [brennancenter.org](https://www.brennancenter.org)

● 1870: The 15th Amendment grants Black men voting rights, followed by Jim Crow suppression

Five years after the amendment ending slavery, the 15th Amendment declared that the right to vote cannot be denied because of race. But many states took steps in the decades that followed to enshrine white supremacy during the Jim Crow era. For example, former Confederate states passed laws that created literacy tests to vote, “grandfather clauses” excluding those whose ancestors had not voted or been able to vote, new poll taxes, and other ways to disenfranchise Black voters. In 1896, the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* declared that segregation did not violate the Constitution, ensuring suppression of freedom and voter intimidation for more than half a century.

● 1915: *Guinn v. United States* ruling strikes ‘grandfather clause’

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1915 ruling in *Guinn v. United States* said Oklahoma's “grandfather clause” exemption to literacy tests violated the 15th Amendment. That clause allowed voters to be exempt from literacy tests for voting if their grandfathers had the right to vote before 1866. Local officials also interpreted the state's law as allowing them to refuse to administer literacy tests to Black people or to impose unreasonable ones. After the Supreme Court ruling, states found other ways to suppress Black voters.

● 1920: The 19th Amendment grants voting rights to women

Women were allowed to vote in a handful of states in the 1900s, but women nationwide won the right to vote with the 19th Amendment.

● 1964: The 24th Amendment ends federal poll taxes, all poll taxes end in 1966

Poll taxes continued to exist in five states in 1962, expressly designed to keep Black people and low-income white people from voting. Some states had grandfather clauses, allowing higher-income white people to avoid the tax. After other efforts failed, the 24th Amendment became law, but it only abolished poll taxes for federal elections. In *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966), the Supreme Court ruled poll taxes unconstitutional in any U.S. election under the Equal Protection Clause. Evelyn Thomas Butts was part of that case, and you can read about her in the box on this page.

● 1965: The Voting Rights Act

Southern states continued to use various methods to suppress voters of color. A 1965 march to spotlight the issue in Alabama ended in a brutal attack by police and others in Selma, known as “Bloody Sunday.” Congress passed the Voting Rights Act later that year, which barred many policies and practices used by states to limit voting among targeted groups. The Act also required jurisdictions with a pattern of race-based voter suppression to submit proposed changes in election laws to the U.S. Department of Justice for approval, a process known as “preclearance.”

● 1971: The 26th Amendment lowers the voting age to 18

States generally restricted the voting age to 21 and older, but the reality of Americans aged 18 being drafted to fight in Vietnam created a call to lower the voting age. The 26th Amendment prohibited states and the federal government from using age as a reason to deny the vote to anyone 18 and older.

● 1975: Voting Rights Act addresses language barriers

Congress expanded the Voting Rights Act in 1975, adding protections for members of language minority groups. The new section required areas with significant numbers of voters with limited English proficiency to provide voting materials and assistance in other languages.

● 1982: New protections for people with disabilities

In extending the Voting Rights Act for another 25 years in 1982, Congress added provisions to make voting more accessible for the elderly and people with disabilities. This part of the Act was not subject to any formula to determine who qualifies for assistance.

Fighting the poll tax: Evelyn Thomas Butts

In 1963, Evelyn Thomas Butts, a Black woman in Norfolk, Va., challenged the poll tax required to vote. A mother of three and a seamstress, she could not afford to pay the tax, so she sued the governor of Virginia for violating her rights. Her case was later combined with *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*, and the Supreme Court ruled in her favor in 1966, finding poll taxes for any election violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.



Photo courtesy of the Evelyn Thomas Butts family

As a civil rights and public education advocate on this and other issues, Evelyn Thomas Butts also influenced thousands of people to register to vote, fighting back against illegal and unethical practices that minimized the electoral power of the Black community. Her moral courage — like so many Black women throughout history — models how we can systematically address injustices that often disenfranchise voters of color, college students, people with disabilities, seniors and many others.

● 1993: National Voter Registration Act

In making voter registration more accessible, this Act required states to allow voter registration when citizens apply for drivers' licenses and to offer mail-in voter registration. In its first year, more than 30 million people completed or updated their registration through methods made available by this law.

● 2002: Help America Vote Act

After problems in the 2000 election, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act. It mandated significant changes in election administration, such as the replacement of outdated voting equipment, creation of statewide voter registration lists, and provisional ballots to ensure that eligible voters are not turned away.

● 2013: *Shelby County v. Holder* guts Voting Rights Act

The U.S. Supreme Court declared the "preclearance" part of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. On the same day, Texas officials instituted a strict voter identification law that previously had been blocked. Similar laws began to appear in other states.

● 2020: Widespread claims of voter fraud without evidence

President Donald Trump and his allies pushed baseless claims of mass voter fraud in cities that are majority Black or have significant Black populations.

● 2019-present: Legislation to restore voting rights

There are two voting rights bills currently in Congress. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would create an updated preclearance formula and revitalize the Voting Rights Act. It passed the House in 2019 and 2021, but it did not pass the Senate. The Freedom to Vote Act contains various provisions that protect ballot access. Both were mentioned during the 2024 State of the Union address.

Current state of (dis)voting

An estimated 4.6 million Americans are barred from voting due to a felony conviction, according to the Sentencing Project.

The more than 600,000 citizens who live in the nation's capital of Washington, D.C., do not have voting representation in the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. This is because D.C. is a federal district and not a state and, under the Constitution, only states are apportioned congresspersons.

The more than 3 million U.S. citizens and non-citizen nationals who reside in American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the United States Virgin Islands are not entitled to electoral college votes in U.S. presidential elections — these territories do vote in presidential primaries, but without representation in the electoral college, they do not get a vote in the general election.

● 2024: Various deadlines loom for the November election

Every state and every local municipality has different deadlines to register to vote and to sign up to be an election worker. Visit your local and/or state's election administration websites to see your opportunities, and check out the Faith in Elections playbook (see page 5) for ways you and your house of worship can work to ensure free and fair elections, such as sharing trustworthy information about voting registration deadlines with others or signing up to be an election worker. The nonpartisan U.S. Vote Foundation website can help you find local information: usvotefoundation.org.

For more information on the history of voting rights in the United States, read "Voting Rights: A Short History" on the Carnegie.org website and "America's long history of Black voter suppression" on the CNN.com website.

U.S. Capitol hosts screening of film exploring Christian nationalism



By Amethyst Holmes
2023 BJC Fellow

To better understand the events of the Jan. 6 insurrection, you have to understand the role Christian nationalism played in that fateful day. A new film explores the upsurge of religious extremism and its potential dangers to our nation.

“God & Country” chronicles the rise of Christian nationalism — a cultural and political ideology championing the formal fusion of church and state — and its threat to democracy. The 90-minute documentary, which began its theatrical run Feb. 16, makes an impressive attempt to reveal foundations and throughlines of a political ideology wrapped in Christian rhetoric.

In the film, prominent theologians, scholars and pastors who have studied Christian nationalism describe a version of conservative evangelicalism that views America as an exclusively Christian nation with extraordinarily well-funded and highly organized efforts to sway public policy and gain government control, all while abandoning core principles of the Christian faith to exert political power. This is coupled with a devotion to former President

Donald Trump, whom many immersed in this ideology see as “God’s chosen one” with a magnetism similar to a televangelist who is divinely ordained to rule over our nation. To see evangelicals who historically have championed morality and decency show consistent support for Trump — a twice-impeached former president who made more than 30,000 false or misleading statements during his time in office and who is the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination facing 91 felony counts across four cases — is not surprising, yet it is unnerving.

The documentary gives a glimpse of a significant portion of the country’s electorate that is deeply invested in realizing a theocracy and a type of exceptional American mythology by any means necessary in response to a changing world, rather than accept a true rendering of our nation’s history and its inclusive future.

This brand of religious extremism and the rise of this movement’s political influence has rightly captured national attention, but this threat of religious violence,

anti-democratic views and anti-pluralism have always existed throughout our nation’s history. The film takes time to outline how Christianity has been used to justify everything from slavery and genocide to the terroristic nature of the Ku Klux Klan and the bitter fight against integration waged by white evangelicals. Those same threads of nativism, militarism, white supremacy and patriarchy continue to guide today’s politics.

The first screening of the film was held Jan. 11 at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, an event organized by the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign and the office of Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., who is a founding member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus.

Watching a film that contextualized the insurrection from a faith perspective in the very building where it took place was a bit disconcerting. I’m grieved and infuriated that a perverted expression of Christianity — one that betrays core tenets of the faith tradition, abandons the teachings of Jesus and is characterized by an insatiable



appetite for power — is the one most recognized as “Christianity” by many in the U.S.

Not only is this type of spiritual malformation and biblical illiteracy a serious threat to our American experiment, but it is a clear indicator that those of us who are Christians have a duty to call out a version of our faith that is antithetical to the Gospel.

During a post-screening Q&A, director Dan Partland said he hopes the film is an entry point of conversation for viewers to reconnect around the core ideas of the Constitution and what it means to live in a free society that honors equality and fairness for all.

“All countries are a people movement, especially democracies. It really is on us, on ‘We the People’ to make it that country that we want to be,” Partland said.

Film producer Rob Reiner said the 2024 election presents an “existential choice” voters have to make in order to preserve democracy. “What we can do as an electorate is to make sure that 248 years of self-rule is not destroyed,” Reiner said during the Q&A.

The creators of “God & Country” stated that they hope the documentary will spark conversations. My hope is that the film would compel Christians to deepen our call to embody the teachings of Jesus: to do justice, welcome the stranger, love our neighbor and to be courageous in speaking truth to power.

We have a responsibility to take seriously the witness and experiences of people of color, LGBTQ+ communities and religious minorities who have been on the receiving end of violence inspired by Christian nationalism. My hope is that Christians would join interfaith coalitions, build relationships across spiritual differences and work toward the common good together by supporting a democracy struggling to find its strength.

As the Rev. William J. Barber II said in the film, “Christianity at its best is committed to love and truth and justice. If we do this right, what a country this will be.”

Amethyst Holmes is a freelance journalist based in Washington, D.C. She is an Ethical Leadership and Racial Justice Fellow at Howard University School of Divinity and is a member of the 2023 class of BJC Fellows.



Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., greets the crowd at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center for the premiere of “God & Country.”



Rob Reiner and Dan Partland participate in a Q&A after the premiere.

Hear more on Respecting Religion

While in Washington, Reiner and Partland stopped by BJC’s headquarters to talk about what they learned making the film. “This is not in any way bashing Christianity,” Reiner said. “It’s the opposite.” They also shared about the vitriolic backlash received by people interviewed in the film, especially from and for conservative Christians.

Hear their conversation with Amanda Tyler on episode 12 of this season’s Respecting Religion podcast.



CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

BJC's first field organizer is fighting Christian nationalism in North Texas

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global

The first-ever field organizer for BJC has been charged with organizing opposition to Christian nationalism in Texas.

A native of Dallas-Fort Worth where she is now based, Lisa Jacob said she was drawn to the position after seeing the effects of white supremacy on parents and other loved ones who emigrated to the U.S. from India.

"It stems from being the daughter of immigrants and seeing much of my family and community being part of this struggle and experiencing the weight of discrimination," she said. "As a second-generation immigrant, I've always seen the fight for justice as part of the vision of my life."

Jacob's organizing work as a BJC staff member will be conducted in the context of Christians Against Christian Nationalism, a project of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

"We're expanding our work in North Texas with our first-ever field organizer now on the ground. We're also planning to recruit volunteers across the country to lead local projects in their communities," BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler said in a recent video update on Christians Against Christian Nationalism, which she serves as lead organizer.

BJC had been laying the groundwork for the North Texas pilot project for some time before Jacob's arrival, said Tyler, a Texan who recently relocated to Dallas. (BJC's offices remain on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.)

"We successfully mobilized Texans to oppose legislation to put posters of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom and worked with Texas chaplains to oppose a new effort to replace counselors with chaplains" in public schools, she said.

Once the North Texas pilot project is fully up and running, other communities across the country will be considered for Christians Against Christian Nationalism efforts, Tyler said in her column in the winter 2023 edition of *Report from the Capital*. "Join our movement in fighting Christian nationalism. Together, I believe we will finally achieve religious freedom — not just



for some, but for all."

Jacob said she is working under the assumption that Christian nationalism can be eradicated. In her video, Tyler echoed that sentiment by announcing the title of her forthcoming book: *How to End Christian Nationalism* (see page 27).

The first step in the process is to accept that victory will not be achieved overnight, Jacob said. "I do believe we can see an end to Christian nationalism, but we have to recognize that it is a part of the history of our nation. So, we have to be committed to the long-haul work if we want to see that happen."

But that achievement may not be too far off, she added. "I feel very hopeful about the next generation, which is more willing to engage in the hard conversations. My hope is in their lifetime we could see an end to this."

Jacob said her social work and justice ministry experiences

helped prepare her for the long-term battle against Christian nationalism. She has served as a clinical therapist and as a pastor of community mobilizing, missions and spiritual formation in nondenominational churches. She earned a degree in counseling from Dallas Theological Seminary after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin.

That service has led to this moment, she said. “God has opened my mind and heart to the brokenness of our world and to where God is working in the margins of our society.”

Jacob admitted she has her work cut out for her. Her responsibilities include continuing the partnerships BJC has established with groups like Faith Commons, Texas Impact, the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, Fellowship Southwest and numerous local churches. The goal is to grow that base and to connect with individuals who have signed on to the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

She already was engaged in the effort to thwart a Texas law designed to replace mental health professionals with unlicensed chaplains in public schools. School districts had until March 1 to vote on whether to adopt the policy. Read more about that on pages 14-15 of this magazine.

“I do believe we can see an end to Christian nationalism, but we have to recognize that it is a part of the history of our nation. So, we have to be committed to the long-haul work if we want to see that happen.”

Lisa Jacob

That effort has produced evidence that BJC’s Christians Against Christian Nationalism program is working, she added. “A small victory is that quite a few school boards have voted to reject the policy and not adopt. I was able to comment in one school district that voted not to change what they already do, so they are not adopting.”

Jacob said she’s also providing connections and resources to school boards and parents concerned about outside conservative groups trying to influence school district policies.

This work is personal to her, she said. “One of the quotes I live by is from Fannie Lou Hamer: ‘Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.’ That is what I want my life to be about. It’s about bringing to fruition this concept of beloved community and dreaming about the day we actually see that come to pass.”

Read more about Jacob on page 27. If you’re interested in joining the work in North Texas, you can contact her by email at ljacob@BJCOnline.org.

Updates from the North Texas chapter of Christians Against Christian Nationalism



In December, Lisa Jacob testified at the meeting of the Mansfield Independent School District, sharing why they should reject the option to add “chaplains” to the public school system. You can watch her testimony on our YouTube channel.



In January, we hosted an organizing meeting in Dallas to discuss the impact of Christian nationalism in North Texas and ways to combat it. The meeting was followed by a screening of “God & Country” at a local theater in Dallas.

We loved connecting with the 40+ people who came for the conversations. Want to be part of the next North Texas event? Email Lisa Jacob at ljacob@BJCOnline.org.



Chaplains and advocacy groups work together to stop school ‘chaplain’ programs

New letters counter proposals in 14 states, after top Texas school districts rejected the misguided idea

In three open letters to state lawmakers on March 6, more than 200 individual chaplains, along with dozens of faith groups and civil rights organizations, are speaking out against a wave of proposed state legislation seeking to install chaplains in public schools across the country. These efforts came days after the close of the voting period in Texas on the program, where the biggest school districts in that state did not create public school chaplain programs that might have replaced some professional school counselors.

By early March 2024, bills in at least 14 states have proposed allowing public schools to employ (or accept as volunteers) chaplains to provide student support services, including counseling and other mental health assistance. The legislation follows a similar measure passed in Texas in 2023, which gave school districts across the state until March 1, 2024, to vote on whether to create the programs.

Fighting proposals nationwide

The new open letters highlight the dangers of allowing chaplains, who are typically not trained or certified to provide educational or mental health services to youth, to assume the responsibilities of qualified professional school counselors and other school staff.

In addition, allowing chaplains in public schools would violate students’ and families’ religious freedom rights by inevitably leading to religious coercion and evangelizing of students. As explained in the chaplains’ letter, chaplains are trained to provide religious counseling to people in spiritual need. Not only are they unqualified to provide student mental health services, but chaplains typically do not have the necessary experience or training to ensure that they adhere to schools’ educational mandates and avoid veering into proselytizing and other promotion of religion, which is unconstitutional when undertaken by school employees or volunteers.

At press time, school chaplain bills had been introduced in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana (pre-filed), Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma and Utah in 2024. The three open letters urge state legislators to protect the integrity of public schools, as well as students’ religious freedom and mental well-being, by rejecting proposed chaplaincy programs.

“As trained chaplains, we strongly caution against the

government assertion of authority for the spiritual development and formation of our public school children,” states the letter from more than 200 individual chaplains in 40 states. “Families and religious institutions—not public school officials—should direct the religious education of our children.”

“Government-sanctioned chaplains may be permissible in some limited settings—but not in our public schools,” the 38 faith groups write. “For example, our government has provided chaplains in the military, prisons, and hospitals—places where chaplains are needed to accommodate the religious-exercise rights of people who would otherwise not be able to access religious services. Public school children face no such barriers.”

Take action!

Are you a chaplain? We’re still collecting signatures on our letter from chaplains across the country warning about the dangers of legislative proposals to install chaplains in schools.

BJCOnline.org/publicschoolchaplains

“All should feel welcome in public schools,” write the 34 civil rights organizations. “Even well-intentioned chaplain policies will undermine this fundamental premise of our public-education system and violate our longstanding First Amendment principles.”

“Houses of worship and families are best equipped to provide religious education and spiritual guidance for children and youth,” said Holly Hollman, general counsel of BJC. “Efforts to put religious leaders in official roles in the public schools invade a realm of religious freedom that is properly protected by the separation of the institutions of church and state. Families and the religious decisions they make in raising children are properly shaped by congregations chosen by families and not the government.”

Victories in Texas

Faith-based groups, including BJC, Interfaith Alliance, ADL, Texas Impact and Religious Action Center of Reform



At a news conference on the steps of the Texas Capitol on Feb. 29, 2024, Texas state Rep. James Talarico speaks with reporters about the numerous districts across Texas that rejected the misguided idea to hire chaplains to do the work of school counselors. Behind him are representatives from BJC, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Fellowship Southwest and Texas Impact.

Judaism, were part of a movement in Texas to combat Senate Bill 763, which granted school systems the right to use hired or volunteer chaplains as long as school boards voted by March 1, 2024, to participate.

“From our members, we know that the largest 25 school districts in Texas have all rejected creating a new chaplain program,” said Joshua Houston, advocacy director for Texas Impact, a nonprofit organization that equips faith communities to advocate for justice.

Among the largest districts opting out of the program were Houston Independent School District, Dallas ISD, Aldine ISD, El Paso ISD and Humble ISD.

The largest 25 districts “account for one in three of all school children in Texas. So, 1.8 million out of about five and a half million children go to a school in one of those districts,” Houston said during a press conference on the steps of the Texas State Capitol in Austin.

The rejection also transcended partisan divides, he said. “These districts are politically diverse. They include places like Austin, but they also include places like Katy ISD, Conroe, Frisco, Plano and North East ISD in San Antonio. That’s why we say we’re confident that Texas public schools are still safe for every faith.”

Advocates who led the charge against the Texas measure also cautioned the fight is just beginning due to bills filed in other states.

“This is a fight that’s far from over. We’re happy to celebrate the victories here in

Texas at the local level, but we’ve got to do so much more to resist Christian nationalism across the country,” said state Rep. James Talarico, a Democrat who represents the cities of Round Rock, Taylor, Hutto and Georgetown.

“Let me be very clear: There is nothing Christian about Christian nationalism. It is the worship of power — political power, social power and economic power in the name of Christ. And it is a betrayal of Jesus of Nazareth,” he said. “Jesus never asked us to ban books, silence teachers or defund schools. Jesus never asked us to control women’s bodies. Jesus never asked us to establish a Christian theocracy. All he asked was that we ‘love thy neighbor.’”

Religious liberty advocates facing similar bills in other states should look to Texas as an example, said Emily Bourgeois, Texas director for the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

“When we raise our voices as one community of faith here in Texas, we win. Let this be a lesson to all of the states where this battle is still in front of them. When we raise our voices together against the spread of this legislation, we will win. And if we can win in Texas, we can win anywhere.”

For Jewish groups, opposing the school chaplains was a must because it represented an existential threat, Bourgeois said. “We know that the chaplains being brought into schools in this legislation are not reflective of our community. And we know that the backers of this bill

rejected protections against attempts to convert our children to Christianity.”

Permitting untrained and unlicensed adults into schools represents a danger to the spiritual well-being of children, said the Rev. Deborah Reeves, a board-certified chaplain and BJC’s representative at the news conference.

“It also violates the rights of parents and guardians to choose the religious leaders who influence their child’s spiritual journey. A law that allows school districts to create chaplain programs ignores the reality of religious diversity among public school students and assumes a religious role that public schools do not have.”

The Rev. Reeves was not alone in that perspective. She and more than 170 other chaplains across Texas signed a letter organized by BJC that protested the lack of credentials required to work with children under the law.

“Within my faith tradition, having been through a rigorous certification process and having to maintain board certification with 50 hours of continuing education each year, I am equipped and trained to serve individuals seeking spiritual care without imposing my own faith traditions upon them,” the Rev. Reeves said.

“As the pastor to children at First Baptist Church of Austin, I care deeply about spiritual discernment and flourishing faith communities. Our houses of worship and other religious institutions are free to serve the needs of families in all spiritual matters.”

—Information from BJC staff reports with reporting from Baptist News Global

Black Baptists meet in historic convening to address critical issues facing the community

The nation's four Black Baptist denominations gather for the second time in history



By Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland
BJC Board Member

For only the second time in history, the four Black Baptist denominations — the National Baptist Convention USA, Progressive National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention in America, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention — held a joint meeting in Memphis, Tenn., from Jan. 22-25, 2024.

Thousands of clergy and lay leaders were in attendance for the National Baptist Joint Board Session under the theme “We Are Better Together,” with Ecclesiastes 4:1-9 as the Scripture reference. The historic convening brought Baptists together from across the country for corporate worship, symposia on critical issues, fellowship, and opportunities to strategize about meaningful collaborative efforts that will positively impact the Black community.

The first joint Black Baptist meeting was held in 2005 in Nashville. A separate historic meeting of Baptists occurred in

2008 in Atlanta, which drew representation from every Baptist denomination in the United States except the Southern Baptist Convention, and it drew Baptist participants from Canada and Mexico. Former President Jimmy Carter was an important part of the Atlanta meeting, which resulted in the formation of the New Baptist Covenant, an organization that brought Baptist churches from different racial and ethnic groups together to work to end racism.

In an effort to galvanize around an agenda and strategize about ways to work collaboratively in this critically important year, the joint meeting included several symposia on topics crucial to the Black community, including, voting, reparations, mental health, and white Christian nationalism.

Notably, the session on white Christian nationalism provided an opportunity for open and honest dialogue about this



Pictured from left to right: Renaldo Pearson, Faith for Black Lives; Rev. Dr. Willie Francois, Senior Pastor of Fountain Baptist Church, Summit, N.J. and co-chair of social action for the Progressive National Baptist Convention; Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland, BJC Board member and Senior Associate General Secretary and Advocacy Director for the National Council of Churches; Rev. Dr. Dwight Radcliff Jr., Academic Dean for the Center for Black Church Studies and Assistant Professor of Mission, Theology, and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary; Rev. Darryl Gray, Director General of Social Justice, Progressive National Baptist Convention.

“Stopping [Christian nationalism]’s destructiveness is critical to the future of this country, particularly as it impacts marginalized and disenfranchised people.”

Rev. Darryl Gray

important issue that confronts the intersections of faith, race, and nationalism within the context of the Black Church. Titled “Unholy Wedlock: The Black Church’s Resistance to White Christian Nationalism and Dismantling Its Myths,” the panel discussion delved into the Black Church’s steadfast resistance to the idolatry of white Christian nationalism and the critical task of dismantling the myths upon which it is based.

The Rev. Dr. Willie Francois, chair of the National Social Justice Commission for the Progressive National Baptist Convention and Pastor of Fountain Baptist Church in Summit, N.J., moderated the panel of scholars, faith leaders and activists, including Renaldo Pearson, Faith for Black Lives; the Rev. Dr. Dwight Radcliff Jr., Academic Dean for the Center for Black Church Studies and Assistant Professor of Mission, Theology, and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary; and the Rev. Darryl Gray, Director General of Social Justice for the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

As a participant myself — both due to my service on the BJC Board of Directors and my work as the Senior Associate General Secretary and Advocacy Director of the National Council of Churches USA — I was grateful for the space to have an important and long overdue discussion about white Christian nationalism and how it is impacting Black churches, in particular. I appreciated the depth and honesty of the conversation, which underscored the dangers to our democracy and our faith as followers of Jesus Christ. It’s hard to fight something that you don’t understand or aren’t aware of. The panel discussion was forthright and unequivocal; it not only laid out the very real threat that white Christian nationalism is to American society and to the Black Church, but panelists also discussed how to recognize, resist, and challenge it wherever it shows up.

“It’s imperative that church leadership — especially Black Church leadership — expose the falsehoods and fallacies perpetuated by Christian nationalism,” said the Rev. Gray. “The panel discussion exposed the years of lies and misinformation perpetuated by white Christian nationalism, which has been a spiritual and political detriment to Christians in America. Stopping its destructiveness is critical to the future of this country, particularly as it impacts marginalized and disenfranchised people.”

A landmark moment occurred at the convening when the Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart became the first woman to preach during the rare joint session. She is the Senior Pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis and the first female president of the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Society. In a fiery sermon titled “What Shall We Do with Jesus of Nazareth?” she spoke of the ways Jesus spoke truth to power and challenged the status quo, and she called others to speak up.

The historic convening ended with the presidents of the four

conventions committing to work together to cooperatively and strategically increase their collective efforts to address critical issues facing the Black community.

The Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland is a faith leader, public theologian, and justice advocate who serves as Senior Associate General Secretary and Advocacy Director of the National Council of Churches USA. She is also a member of the BJC Board of Directors. She is an ordained Baptist minister and is dually aligned with the Progressive National Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches USA.

Additional news coverage of the National Baptist Joint Board Session

The Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart
to Religion News Service
about preaching at the meeting:

“This moment amplifies the shared stories of millions of women who daily rise against the crushing weight of patriarchy, misogynoir, and other interlocking systems of oppression that seek to diminish the value of women and marginalized communities.”

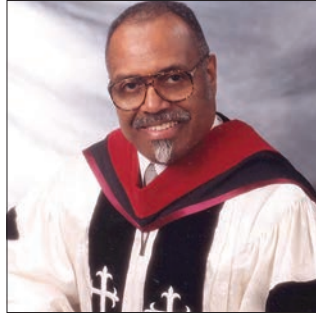
The Rev. Dr. David Peoples, president of PNBC,
calling for a ceasefire in Gaza at the meeting,
quoted by *Word&Way*:

“We the Progressive National Baptist Convention, we not only are concerned about our brothers and sisters and the killing that’s taking place in the streets and even in our own communities. ... We are concerned not only about this country, but we’re also concerned about affairs on the waters and across the seas. We are concerned about what is taking place in Gaza.”

To watch gatherings from the National Baptist Joint Board Session, visit the YouTube channel of the meeting, and click on the “live” tab: [YouTube.com/@2024NationalBaptistJointBoardS](https://www.youtube.com/@2024NationalBaptistJointBoardS)

Remembering Charles G. Adams, former BJC chair and legendary Detroit pastor

The Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams, retired pastor of Detroit’s influential Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, died Nov. 29, 2023, at age 86. He was a respected leader not only in Detroit but nationally, including longtime service on the BJC Board of Directors.



“The world lost a prophetic and powerful witness with the passing of the Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams,” said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler. “We celebrate his contributions to our shared work and his many more contributions to the life of our nation.

“His advocacy for social justice and religious freedom throughout his decades of dedicated service continue to ring true,” she added. “Adams shared how the church is called to be God’s instrument of hope, and he was part of that hope during his time ministering to this world. His wisdom and leadership made this world a better place.”

The Rev. Dr. Adams graduated with honors from the University of Michigan and Harvard University and went on to become a doctoral fellow at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. From 1962 to 1969, he served as pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Boston, followed by an appointment as pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit — a post he held for 50 years.

In 2019, he was succeeded by his son, the Rev. Charles C. Adams.

The elder Adams became known as “the Harvard Hooper” for his Ivy League intellect and animated preaching style. He became well-known across Detroit not only for his preaching but also for his social advocacy and ministry creativity.

He worked as an aide to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was a vocal opponent of South African apartheid and led an economic boycott of Dearborn, Mich., when the city closed its parks to nonresidents. Locally, he was known for using the church’s resources to foster economic development.

Among his affiliations, Dr. Adams played active roles with the Baptist World Alliance, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the Congress of National Black Churches, Morehouse College and Morris College.

Amid his long tenure on the BJC Board, he served as chairman of the board from 1976 to 1978 and board secretary

from 1989 to 1991.

“God needs no help from government to remain God,” he said while delivering BJC’s 2008 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State.

Dr. Adams also foresaw the conservative trend currently polarizing America — as early as 1976.

“America has never lived up to the principle of human equality declared in and by her birth,” he said that year in an address discussing the need for equal educational opportunity and affirmative action.



In this 1976 photo, the Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams, then serving as chair of the BJC Board of Directors, speaks with BJC Executive Director James E. Wood Jr. in Washington, D.C.

“Had the Founding Fathers been literally truthful concerning their actual beliefs and practices,” he said, “they would have said, ‘All men are created equal with the following exceptions: slaves, Negroes, Catholics, Asians, atheists, women, Jews, non-proprietors, Indians, heretics, etc.’”

He continued: “Even Thomas Jefferson owned slaves who had no guarantee or protection of life, no liberty and were restrained from any protracted pursuit of happiness.”

Then he noted public opinion in America was swinging “toward the right in fear and reaction” to advances of minorities and cultural diversity. Citing champions of human rights, he asked, “Are there any current replacements for John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr. or ... William O. Douglas?”

—Mark Wingfield, *Baptist News Global*

“God needs no help from government to remain God.”

Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams, 2008

Race, religion and citizenship in focus for 2024 Shurden Lectures

Join us April 2 at the University of Southern California

“Whose country is it anyway?” That’s the question at the center of an event exploring how different communities approach the concept of “rights,” including the right to religious freedom.

This year’s event, the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Symposium on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State, will feature two public scholars who bring their unique experiences and expertise to the conversation on religious and racial identity. In partnership with the Berkeley School of Theology and the University of Southern California, the event will be April 2 in Los Angeles. Featuring the Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans and the Rev. Dr. Christopher The, the public dialogue will take place at 4 p.m. on the University Park Campus of USC. It is free and open to all, and RSVP details are available on our website.

The Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans is the tenured J. Alfred Smith, Sr. Endowed Professor and Chair of Theology in the Public Square and Director of the Center for Truth, Racial Healing and Restorative Justice Center at the Berkeley School of Theology. His research interests include Classical and Contemporary Rhetoric and how each informs social movements and liberation theologies and sermon preparation and delivery.

The Rev. Dr. Christopher The serves as the director of student research and initiative management for the Association of Theological Schools. His public scholarship includes works on resourcing

immigrant churches for civic engagement, leveraging evaluative principles for character formation in theological education, understanding the unique mentorship needs of doctoral students of color, and surveying the placement of diasporic Indonesian communities among world Christianities. A member of the 2016 class of BJC Fellows, the Rev. Dr. The serves as the secretary of the BJC Board of Directors.

This annual series was established in 2004 with a gift to BJC from Drs. Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden of Macon, Georgia. For the latest information about this year’s event — including how you can watch it online — visit BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures.



Evans



The

Court rules the destruction of Oak Flat likely does not substantially burden religious exercise

A sharply divided 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the U.S. government’s transfer to a mining company of sacred land called *Chí’chil Bitdagoteel* — loosely translated in English as “Oak Flat” — would likely not constitute a substantial burden on religious exercise under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) or First Amendment. The land is sacred to Western Apaches and other Indigenous people.

The court denied the plaintiff’s request for a preliminary injunction that would have prevented the land transfer before a full trial on the merits is conducted.

Fortunately, the Biden administration has already halted the process of transferring the property, which was mandated by an act of Congress, after withdrawing a flawed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released during the final days of the Trump administration. Until and unless a new EIS is issued, Oak Flat will remain in government hands and available for religious and recreational uses. Still, the 9th Circuit’s disappointing ruling strikes a blow to the efforts of the nonprofit citizens group Apache Stronghold to stop the transfer of the property on religious liberty grounds, leaving the U.S. Supreme Court as potentially the next court to

weigh in on that argument.

The complex 241-page ruling includes six separately written opinions covering a range of legal issues related especially to the application of RFRA. Does “substantial burden” have a specific definition? If so, what is it? Is it the same as “prohibiting the free exercise of religion” under the First Amendment? What counts as “prohibiting?” These disputes may prove irresistible to the U.S. Supreme Court. If so, it could result in the most significant ruling yet by the Court on the application of RFRA, impacting not only the fate of Oak Flat but numerous religious freedom disputes.

Importantly, the campaign to save Oak Flat is ongoing regardless of the ultimate outcome of these religious freedom arguments. The Biden administration has provided no timeline for when, or if, a new environmental impact statement will be issued. Meanwhile, litigation on other grounds continues, including in two additional lawsuits brought by the San Carlos Apache Tribe and a coalition of tribal and conservation groups.

For more information on the work to protect this sacred land, visit BJCOnline.org/saveoakflat.

—Don Byrd, BJC Researcher and Writer

For decades, BJC struggled to live up to its ‘joint’ representation of Blacks and whites



By Dr. Andrew Gardner

Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C., is and has been an institution long championed by moderate and progressive Baptists for its defense of religious liberty for all people. Since 1936, Baptists from across geographic and racial lines have partnered together to protect and defend the principle of religious liberty.

At least, that is the story many of us, including BJC, have been told.

While I was serving on the board of BJC, Tisa Wenger, a historian of American religion, published her work *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal*. In this work, Wenger shows how the idea of religious freedom often has functioned to privilege and prioritize the power and authority of white Americans. Focusing on the importance of religious freedom has intentionally been utilized to eclipse other rights and freedoms, particularly those of people of color.

One culprit of this use of religious freedom, she argued, was BJC.

In response, during my tenure on the board, BJC set out to interrogate its history and challenge the standard narrative of BJC’s founding. This dive into the organization’s history sought to help give renewed attention to the ways in which race and religious freedom are intertwined.

After my time on the board concluded, I independently continued researching BJC’s history. Recently, I published an article in *The Journal of Church and State* titled, “Race, Religious Freedom, and the Institutional Limitations of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.” In this piece, I document that despite the organization’s multiracial origins, BJC had much stronger relationships with its predominantly white Southern and American Baptist constituents. As a result, the organization often neglected directly or indirectly the concerns of its predominantly Black constituents. The piece examines the organization from its founding to the early 1970s.

Black Baptist participation in BJC

From its inception, one of the biggest challenges BJC faced was establishing meaningful relationships with Black Baptist denominational leadership. After an informal period of cooperation in the 1930s and early 1940s, BJC formally organized in 1946 as a cooperative venture between the Southern Baptists and American Baptists as well as the historically Black National Baptist Convention Inc. and National Baptist Convention of America. From the beginning, however, BJC’s leadership was unsuccessful in soliciting individuals to serve as representatives on the board from these Black denominational bodies.

For decades, BJC leadership struggled to navigate the bu-

reaucracy of Black denominational bodies. Executive Directors J.M. Dawson and Emanuel Carlson lacked the relationships and friendships within Black denominational bodies they held within the predominantly white SBC and ABC. Regularly, these BJC leaders sent letters requesting basic information from the NBC and NBCA. They often acknowledged the limitations of their knowledge.

For example, under Carlson’s leadership of BJC he wrote to NBCA President C.D. Pettaway in the late 1950s requesting someone be appointed to the board to represent the NBCA. Carlson confessed in the letter, “I am not sufficiently acquainted with your organization to know whether it comes within your power to designate representation from your convention.” In this letter, BJC’s leadership confessed they did not know the mechanisms through which one of its four major denominational partners appointed board representation.

BJC’s lack of relationships with and institutional knowledge of predominantly Black Baptist bodies meant the direction of the organization more often was steered by white Baptists from the SBC or ABC.

Pay to play

Board members from the ABC and SBC also were not the most welcoming of Black Baptist representatives. Issues of money and financial contributions were indicative of who held the power in the organization. As the ABC and SBC were the two largest denominational contributors to the work of BJC, they held the most sway in the organization.

In the early years, BJC operated within a rather precarious financial position. Money was tight. White Baptist denominational representatives regularly addressed the lack of financial contributions coming from the NBC and NBCA. Some Black Baptist denominational representatives even confessed they felt bad attending board meetings if their organizations had not been able to contribute that year.

In 1959, William Lippard, a representative of the ABC, took it upon himself to write a series of letters to NBC President J.H. Jackson. In his correspondence, Lippard refused to accept Jackson’s reasons why the NBC was unable to financially contribute to BJC at the time. In one letter, Lippard concluded, “I hope that you will be able to see your way clear to come to the help of this committee.” In another he wrote, “It is indeed most regrettable and deplorable that our Negro brethren are taking almost no interest in the work of this important joint committee.”

The emphasis on financial contributions by many of BJC leadership and board members did not create a welcoming environment for Black Baptist denominational leadership to

participate in the work of the organization. This coupled with the lack of informal relationships and denominational bureaucratic knowledge made Black Baptist participation difficult.

Religious freedom — a singular issue

BJC's almost singular focus on religious freedom additionally created barriers to Black Baptist participation. Although the organization was initially named the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the organization almost solely addressed religious freedom. While some board members pushed the organization to address issues like civil rights, others would respond that such issues were outside the purview of BJC.

Southern Baptists like Walter Pope Binns, president of William Jewell College, adamantly opposed BJC addressing "moral and social problems" including segregation. Binns contended the SBC had established the denomination's Christian Life Commission to address issues like segregation and civil rights. Should BJC address issues of race, he argued, the organization would be stepping outside its mandated agenda from the SBC.

As an intended or unintended consequence of the SBC's unwillingness to fund two organizations that might address issues of race and segregation, BJC was limited in its agenda to defend religious freedom. As Black Baptist churches throughout the South were bombed, the organization did relatively little to cover these issues as issues of religious freedom.

In 1960, BJC Executive Director Emanuel Carlson received a phone call followed by a letter from a legislative consultant regarding "the predicament of Rev. T.D. Wesley." This legislative consultant relayed correspondence from Wesley, a Black pastor, who had served two churches in Shelby County, Ala.

In Wesley's correspondence, he wrote of his experience being harassed and kidnapped by 15 to 20 members of the Ku Klux Klan "posing as law officers." They accused him of preaching integration, put him "in one of their cars and carried (him) into the woods," beating him "unmercifully."

After getting out of the hospital, the harassment continued and "a dummy was thrown on (his) porch with red paint on it and a note taped to it stating ... to get out of the south in 10 days." He agreed to the demand but continued serving as pastor of his two churches. On Sunday, Nov. 16, 1958, his New Mt. Moriah Baptist Church was shot at 17 times. He resigned.

His letter concluded: "These and many other acts of violence and intimidation made it impossible for me to continue to live or to preach in what I must sorrowfully call my former home. ... Can this be America? Yes, this is America. What protection will America give to her loyal citizens?"

This legislative consultant relayed Wesley's correspondence to BJC presumably because they thought BJC would do something about it. In my research, I could not find any response from Carlson or BJC.

The challenge of loving Baptist Joint Committee

Both Southern Baptists and American Baptists are implicated in the history of BJC neglecting the voices of its Black Baptist consti-

tuents. There is a unique challenge, however, for formerly Southern Baptists today in celebrating and indeed loving the work of BJC.

For those individuals who once were Southern Baptist and perhaps now find themselves participating in CBF or the Alliance of Baptists, BJC is cherished for its defense of religious liberty for all people. BJC carries on the legacy of Roger Williams, John Leland, Isaac Backus and many other historic Baptists who fought for and established religious freedom in the United States. There is no difficulty in loving BJC in this regard.

For formerly Southern Baptists, however, BJC represents something more. As moderate and progressive Southern Baptists lost control over institution after institution in the 1980s and 1990s, BJC stayed the course. The "joint" nature of BJC inhibited the SBC's more conservative faction from exerting its influence over the organization and as a result the SBC withdrew and in 1997 founded its Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

In this way, BJC represents part of the past that was not taken away from formerly Southern Baptists. It is loved and cherished because it did not "fall" as other institutions did. It helps historically anchor moderate and progressive Baptists in the South. Loving and cherishing BJC in this way, however, remains part of loving and cherishing what was lost. It remains part of loving and cherishing the SBC's tradition of treating religious freedom as a discrete and isolated issue, completely unrelated to other rights and social issues.

The challenge of loving BJC for formerly Southern Baptists rests in the reality that the organization is loved for both good and bad reasons at the same time. It is loved explicitly because it institutionally embodies the Baptist commitment to religious freedom for all people. It also is loved implicitly because it serves as a continuation of power and control among white, moderate Baptists in the South who historically fought primarily for themselves.

Disentangling these two loves is stubbornly difficult.

The organization has taken great strides in recent years to address its past failings. I have seen this firsthand as a former board member. From addressing Christian nationalism through the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign to interrogating the relationship between race and religious freedom, BJC has done much good work over the past few years.

It is important, however, to remember the "joint" nature of BJC. The organization is only as strong and prophetic as its constituent bodies empower it to be. Its failures are a reflection of our own. This history shows that white Baptists have too long prioritized their own conceptions and concerns of religious freedom over those of Black Baptists.

For BJC to begin to rectify and address this history, formerly Southern Baptists and American Baptists must do so as well.

Dr. Andrew Gardner is a lecturer in religious studies and philosophy at LaGrange College. He is the author of

Binkley: A Congregational History and

Reimagining Zion: A History of the Alliance of Baptists.

This article was originally published by Baptist News Global.

In 2019, BJC appointed a Special Committee on Race and Religious Liberty to study BJC's past, and Dr. Gardner was a member. That committee launched BJC's Project on Race and Religious Freedom, reimagining our mission at the intersection of race and religious freedom and knowing that religious freedom is not possible without physical freedom. This is an ongoing project for BJC, housed under the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation. Read more at [BJConline.org/Center](https://bjconline.org/Center).

Public Schools Are Not Sunday Schools

Op-ed by Holly Hollman for TIME magazine, Feb. 13, 2024



... Like many parents, I sent my children to public schools to receive a tax-funded education, and I sent them to Sunday school at my Baptist church for religious education and spiritual development in a specific community—a place supported by the tithes and offerings of the congregation. Both the state and the church had an important role in my children’s development, but they weren’t the same. Nor should they be. The separation between the institutions of church and state is essential to both. ...

Beyond concerns that chaplains in schools may cause discomfort to students with differing religious beliefs, the Texas law’s rock bottom qualifications to serve as a chaplain open the door for potential abuses of authority and put vulnerable students already struggling with mental health challenges at even greater risk. ...

Christians Against Christian Nationalism translates TikTok activism to local politics

By Kathryn Post for Religion News Service, Jan. 8, 2024



Standing outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2023, Georgia McKee witnessed two very different responses on the second anniversary of the infamous mob attack.

Circled together and holding candles, one group of faith leaders condemned Christian nationalism, calling it a “poisonous ideology” and “gross distortion of our Christian faith.”

The other group marched in front of the Supreme Court building, shouting into megaphones, wearing MAGA hats, waving American flags and holding signs saying, “One Nation Under God.”

McKee took some videos on her phone, spliced them together to contrast the two gatherings and showed the final video to her co-workers at the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty Next, she created a TikTok account and posted the video. In the year since, it’s had over half a million views. ...

Many of her TikToks are intended to educate viewers on the topic. She’ll highlight the Christian nationalism of figures such as Sean Feucht, Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene while also celebrating Christians, such as Shane Claiborne and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, who oppose the ideology. McKee also uses the platform to connect people to resources for addressing Christian nationalism in churches and in local politics.

“We’ve really seen the impact of online to offline organizing with TikTok,” said McKee. “We multiple times have helped people develop their public comment that they’re going to go and share that evening at their local school board or city council meeting.” ...

The Billionaire Bully Who Wants to Turn Texas Into a Christian Theocracy

By Russell Gold for Texas Monthly, March 2024

... Amanda Tyler ... has observed the rise of [Tim] Dunn’s dominion. He already wields control over the Texas Senate through his influence over Lieutenant Governor Patrick, and I asked her what Texas would look like if he managed to do the same in the Texas House. “I think it could create a second-class citizenship status for anyone who doesn’t agree with the elected leaders and their religious views,” she said. “And that looks like discriminatory laws and policies if they don’t align with a fundamentalist reading of the Bible. I also find that it would be profoundly undemocratic.”

She said Dunn is an ambassador of Christian nationalism, not Christianity. “I believe the central message of Christianity is the gospel of love,” she told me. “And Christian nationalism is a false idol of power.” ...

BJC in the world

BJC welcomes student groups to our offices in Washington, D.C., throughout the year, and we also travel the country to share about our work defending and extending religious freedom for all. Here are a few recent visits — invite us to come to your town, or visit us!

Learn how at BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc or BJCOnline.org/invite-bjc-to-your-community.



BJC's Dr. Sabrina E. Dent and Danielle Tyler, along with 2023 BJC Fellow Amethyst Holmes, attended the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference in Chicago this February. Dr. Dent spoke at a plenary session titled "Democracy at Stake! Labor, Wealth and the Power of our Vote."



BJC's Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, Georgia McKee, and Jaziah Masters attended and led a workshop at Creating Change 2024, hosted by the National LGBTQ Task Force in New Orleans. They led a workshop titled "Co-Creating a Vision for Religious Freedom and LGBTQ+ Freedom," guiding participants through discussion about the role of religious freedom and Christian nationalism in the movement for LGBTQ+ rights.



Dr. Mehmet Saracoglu (center of photo), a 2023 BJC Fellow who works at the Rumi Forum, hosted an iftar dinner with BJC to share about the holy observance, as well as to provide a space for people in the community to connect and learn more about the Rumi Forum and BJC. Members of BJC's staff, along with interns and other local friends, gathered for the event at the American Turkish Friendship Association in Virginia.



BJC's Jennifer Hawks led an educational session for students from The Ohio State University visiting the BJC office in Washington, D.C.

Honorary and memorial gifts

Any gift you make to a BJC-related program can be in honor of or in memory of someone. You can make a gift to **BJC**, a gift designated to the work of the **BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation** or a gift directly to the **Christians Against Christian Nationalism** campaign.

Simply send a note with your check or specify who the gift should recognize when you give online at BJCOnline.org/give, BJCOnline.org/Center or ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org.



Gifts to Christians Against Christian Nationalism

In honor of Phil Becker By Allison Becker	In honor of Rev. Victoria Robb Powers By Larry Brown	In memory of Richard Huber By Katherine Bull
In honor of Rev. Elaine Bomford By Keith Penniman	In memory of Jamie and Beverly Jones By Rusty Jones
In honor of President Jimmy Carter By Brandon Austin	In memory of Janet Barnes By Janet Iler	In memory of Larry Johnson By Lisa Manske
In honor of Sarah Henseler By Lois Henseler Phyllis O'Connell	In memory of George Buie Jr. By Cynthia Astle	In memory of Timothy Keller By Ronald Keith
In honor of Holly Hollman By Robert Tuttle	In memory of Eleanor Finch By Candice Howren	In memory of Mathilde Krim By Sergio Kapfer
In honor of Jim Hopkins By Randle Mixon	In memory of Merle Hamburger By MaryBeth Hamburger	In memory of DJ Rawlings By Joan Rawlings-Boyd
In honor of Josephine D. Jobe By Ann Wynia		In memory of Herbert Rodgers By Diane Tiedeman



Gifts to the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

In honor of Sabrina Dent By Linda M. Bridges	In memory of Lloyd Elder By Joyce Reed
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Thank you for your generosity!

It's an election year, and so much is at stake for our country. Your support for BJC, the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, and our Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign makes a direct impact on protecting our democratic form of government and preventing authoritarian theocracy. We see government leaders deeply engaged in Christian nationalism, while the U.S. Supreme Court has opened the floodgates for more mixing of religion and government. State legislatures are taking up this crusade and passing new laws. It's unclear what remains of the First Amendment's "No Establishment" Clause. Our work is resonating at the highest levels of American society, and we've been able to rise to new challenges. We ask for your continued financial support. Plus, you can join our team as our next Director of Development! See page 2 for details.

Gifts to BJC

<p>In honor of Lynn and Bob Behrendt By Dorothy J. Kassanoff</p>	<p>In honor of Aaron Rubinstein By Gary Simson</p>	<p>In memory of Carolyn Burrell By John Burrell</p>	<p>In memory of Robert Linder By JeanAnn Linder</p>
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<p>In honor of Rosemary Brevard By Susan & Allen Hill</p>	<p>In honor of Amanda Tyler By George & Susan Reed May Sebel</p>	<p>In memory of Rev. David Nordan Canady By Jeanne Canady</p>	<p>In memory of Orba Lee and Peggy Malone By David & Mary Malone</p>
<p>In honor of Tom and Carol Caulkins By Rachel M. Chang</p>	<p>In honor of Anita Tyler By Amanda Tyler & Robert Behrendt</p>	<p>In memory of Russell Chappell By Ka'thy G. Chappell</p>	<p>In memory of Calvin Metcalf By Karen Eickoff</p>
<p>In honor of David Cooke By Bryan J. Whitfield</p>	<p>In honor of Valentina Valencia By Anyra R. Cano</p>	<p>In memory of Dr. Thomas Corts By Marla Corts</p>	<p>In memory of June McEwen By Melanie M. Dover</p>
<p>In honor of Mary and Carol Day By Austin & Betty S. Connors</p>	<p>In honor of Garrett Vickrey By Martha Morse</p>	<p>In memory of J.M. Dawson By Edward Purden Jr.</p>	<p>In memory of Robert Muncy By Meredith Muncy</p>
<p>In honor of Janelle Handley By Alicia Riedy</p>	<p>In honor of Brent Walker By Stephen D. Marlowe John Fuller Brent T. Sjaardema George & Susan Reed Barry Jones</p>	<p>In memory of James and Marilyn Dunn By Melissa Rogers</p>	<p>In memory of R. Gene Puckett By Blake Dempsey</p>
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<p>In honor of Jeanette Holt By Ann A. Quattlebaum</p>	<p>In memory of Ann Ashcraft By Randall Ashcraft</p>	<p>In memory of Dr. Donald J. Dunlap By Kay F. Dunlap</p>	<p>In memory of Ann Sharp By Kathy Sharp</p>
<p>In honor of Rev. Dr. Kathryn Kimmel By Greer & Carol Richardson</p>	<p>In memory of Dr. Charles G. Adams By Timothy T. Boddie</p>	<p>In memory of Roy Gene Edge By Cindy L. Edge</p>	<p>In memory of Irene Shireman By Wayne Shireman</p>
<p>In honor of Rick Lawhon By Larry Lawhon</p>	<p>In memory of Dr. John W. Baker By Gerald Marsh</p>	<p>In memory of Lloyd Elder By David Byrd</p>	<p>In memory of James F. Strange By Carolyn Strange</p>
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<p>In honor of Jason Osborne By Kaz Ramos</p>	<p>In memory of Babs Baugh By David C. & Carolyn Hennessee</p>	<p>In memory of Barbara Dunn Jackson By Sadye Doxie</p>	<p>In memory of Jean Taylor By Amy Butler</p>
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	<p>In memory of William R. Brown By Sandra Brown</p>	<p>In memory of David A. Jones By Nancy Jones</p>	<p>In memory of Jack Young By Alicia Riedy</p>

Have you kept up with Respecting Religion?

BJC's Respecting Religion podcast is in its 5th season, bringing you weekly conversations about religion, the law and what's at stake for faith freedom today. Hosted by BJC's Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman, season 5 includes discussions about news from the presidential campaigns, the Alabama Supreme Court ruling that halted IVF treatments, the 30th anniversary of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the trouble with school vouchers and religious charter schools, and much more. We also have an episode focused on the church-state legacy of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, looking at her career after her passing in December. Plus, the podcast released speeches given at a BJC event by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan and by Coretta Scott King that had not been heard in more than 30 years.

Be sure you are subscribed to Respecting Religion for the latest episodes. You can access the show wherever you get your podcasts.

To see a full list of episodes and read transcripts of the programs, visit our website at BJCOnline.org/RespectingReligion.



Jordan



O'Connor

Walker serving BJC in interim development role

J. BRENT WALKER returned to the BJC staff this spring, serving as Interim Director of Development. Walker is Executive Director Emeritus, having led BJC from 1999 until retiring in 2016. Both a member of the Supreme Court Bar and an ordained Baptist minister, Walker earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Florida, a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Seminary, and a J.D. from Stetson University College of Law. You can connect with him at bwalker@BJCOnline.org.

This interim role follows the departure of the Rev. Dr. Dan Hamil from the BJC staff for a new opportunity in Sacramento, Calif., in January. He served as BJC's Director of Strategic Partnerships, often speaking at churches and organizational events, and he connected with a network of supporters across the country. A longtime supporter of BJC himself, Hamil served as BJC Board Chair before joining the staff in 2020, and he continues in a temporary contract role.

BJC is currently hiring a full-time Director of Development to lead our comprehensive fundraising program. Learn more on page 2 of this magazine or by visiting BJCOnline.org/bjcjobs, and share the opportunity with others.



Walker



Hamil

Hawks joins CBF to lead advocacy efforts

After spending a decade on the BJC staff, the Rev. Jennifer Hawks joined the staff of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in February as their Director of Advocacy.

During her time at BJC, Hawks inspired countless young people to care about religious freedom by teaching BJC Fellows, interns and student groups, as well as leading workshops and preaching across the country. On Capitol Hill, she defended the Johnson Amendment, explained the dangers of blasphemy laws, and fought to protect Indigenous sacred lands. She was a key part of several *amicus* briefs filed at the Supreme Court during her tenure. She first joined BJC as staff counsel in 2014 and was promoted to associate general counsel in 2016.

Hawks is continuing in a temporary contract role with BJC to teach student groups, and she continues leading efforts to protect the sacred land of *Ch'ichil B'itdagoteel* — loosely translated in English as "Oak Flat" — for both BJC and CBF, which is a supporting body of BJC. You can contact her at jhawks@cbf.net.



BJC hires North Texas field organizer

LISA JACOB joined the BJC team to serve as the North Texas Organizer for the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. She provides on-the-ground coordination and leadership to pilot the first local organizing project of the national campaign.



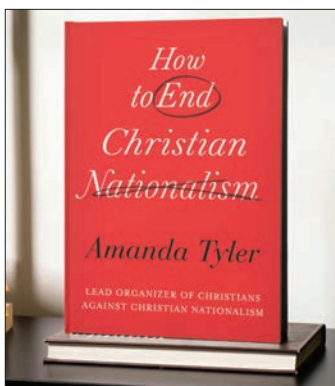
Born and raised in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Jacob has substantial experience as clergy within Texas, including in large megachurch and multi-site evangelical churches. Before coming to BJC, she served as a pastor at Gateway Church – Austin, leading community-based strategy, organization and mobilization initiatives. She previously served as a college pastor and later as a mission pastor, both in the DFW area. Jacob also has experience as a clinical therapist and a social worker.

Jacob is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, and she earned her master's degree in counseling from Dallas Theological Seminary. Jacob also participated in pastoral cohorts through Fuller Theological Seminary.

Based in North Texas, Jacob is working to grow a base of support for Christians Against Christian Nationalism in the area. Contact her at ljacob@BJCOnline.org to get connected to the work combating Christian nationalism in Texas, and you can read more on pages 12-13 of this magazine.

Tyler's book to release October 22

How to End Christian Nationalism, a book by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, is set to be released October 22 by Broadleaf Books.



The book will distinguish Christian nationalism from the teachings of Jesus and demonstrate how the former serves as a cover for white supremacy. It also unpacks key truths we can share with others: Patriotism is not the same as nationalism. Religious freedom means little if it's not for everyone. Christians follow a gospel of love, not the idol of power.

The book is now available for pre-order. For details and additional information, visit EndChristianNationalism.com.

Meet BJC's spring interns

ERIN GUETZLOE, from San Antonio, Texas, is a graduate of Harvard University, earning a degree in Government with a minor in Religion. During her time in college, she served as co-executive director of the Small Claims Advisory Service, an undergraduate-staffed legal aid organization that provides free information about small claims court to Massachusetts residents.



The daughter of Greg and Schehera Guetzloe, she grew up in the Church of Christ tradition. After the internship, Guetzloe plans to attend law school, where she is interested in exploring more about the relationship between religion and law.

VALERIE MARKS, from Richmond, Virginia, is a graduate student at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond. She is pursuing a master's degree in Public Theology and expects to graduate in May. She earned her bachelor's degree in Government and Politics at the University of Maryland (College Park), and she has experience working in public policy in Virginia state government.



Marks grew up in the tradition of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. After her internship with the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, she plans to pursue a second career in advocacy work.

XAVIER SANTIAGO, from Reading, Pennsylvania, is a senior at Alvernia University, working toward a degree in Human Resource Management. Santiago has extensive experience in retail and the digital management realm and is committed to translating this into successful office operations.



After graduation in May, he is looking forward to exploring opportunities in operations, recruitment/talent acquisition, and advocacy.

Interested in a BJC internship?

The deadline to apply for the fall semester is June 30. Visit BJCOnline.org/internships for deadlines and details about the various opportunities.

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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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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe Guy EDITOR

MORE FROM BJC



Join the BJC team

We are hiring for two positions — check out page 2 to learn more, and see if you know someone who might be a good fit!



Faithful involvement in elections

Read about the Faith in Elections playbook on page 5, and learn more about the history of voting rights on pages 6-9.