

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BJC Magazine



Meet the 2024 class of
BJC Fellows

AMANDA TYLER shares about
taking action in Texas

HOLLY HOLLMAN on the state
of the Supreme Court

How would Project 2025
impact religious liberty?

Your support fuels our mission

As we open this edition of *Report from the Capital*, we are filled with gratitude for the profound impact your generosity has on our mission. Every gift you make directly supports BJC's critical work championing faith freedom for all. Your contributions fuel our efforts to resist the rising tide of Christian nationalism, support grassroots advocacy and provide the legal and policy expertise that is crucial in these times.

This summer, our BJC Fellows Program — an integral part of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation — brought together emerging leaders and scholars from across the country. Their shared dedication to faith freedom and social justice will ripple through communities for years to come. Thanks to your support, we continue to cultivate a new generation of advocates who are passionate about protecting religious liberty for everyone. Meet our 2024 class on pages 6-10.

As we look ahead, Amanda Tyler's upcoming book tour will take our message to even more corners of the nation. All proceeds from her book will directly fund our fight against Christian nationalism, ensuring that BJC's voice remains a powerful and clear advocate for religious freedom in the public square. You can read an excerpt on pages 18-19.

Every dollar you contribute — no matter the amount — makes a difference. You are not just supporting an organization; you are actively participating in a movement that strives for justice, equality and the protection of foundational human rights and freedoms. Together, we are making a lasting impact.

Thank you for partnering with us in this work. Will you help us build a future where faith freedom thrives? Make a difference with your gift today and help empower our ongoing efforts at BJCOnline.org/give.



Are you ready to vote this November?

This is the last edition of *Report from the Capital* before Election Day 2024, and the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation wants to remind you to be ready to vote this November. With reports of voters being removed from rolls and efforts to create confusion in order to suppress the vote in some communities, it's a good idea to ensure you're prepared to vote. Here are some things you can do to get ready for November 5:

Check your voter registration status and polling location

No matter if you are a regular voter or an occasional voter, it's a good idea to double-check your voting registration so you can avoid any surprises or confusion at your polling location on Election Day. Be sure to visit nass.org/can-i-vote, a website provided by the National Association of Secretaries of State. There, you can choose your state and find a way to check

your registration to make sure everything is up to date. You also can double-check your polling location — polling locations can change, so make sure you go to the right place on Election Day and make a transportation plan for getting there.

If you or someone you know is not registered to vote, check the deadlines in your state to register — some states require registration at least a month before Election Day to vote in that election, while others offer same-day registration. Know the rules where you live, and make sure you meet any deadlines relevant to you.

Learn about your early voting options

Election Day is not a federal holiday, and voting on a Tuesday during work hours is not feasible for many. Some states offer early in-person voting options or mail-in voting options that allow you to avoid lines on Election Day or to cast a ballot if you are unable to be at your polling location

on November 5. Each state has different criteria about who is eligible for these early voting options, so know the rules where you live.

Help others and spread education

All voices should be heard on Election Day, and there are many groups offering a variety of volunteer opportunities — ranging from voter ID education to serving as a poll watcher. Check out the opportunities offered by **VoteRiders**, **Fair Count** and **Faiths United to Save Democracy** for ways you can help others exercise their right to vote.

You also can shed light on the voter suppression and election subversion challenges facing our country by hosting a screening of the new film "Suppressed and Sabotaged: The Fight to Vote." For details, visit bravenewfilms.org/suppressed.

To access more information about casting a ballot, visit vote.org.

REFLECTIONS

Do something

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

A little more than a year ago, I moved back home to Texas with my husband and our son. We moved for family reasons, though I knew at the time that being outside of the Washington Beltway meant that I, and therefore BJC, would have more opportunities to be involved directly in advocacy work for religious freedom — not just in Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court but on the state and local level, too.

What I didn't expect was how quickly those opportunities would arise. In late May, I was listening to a local news program in Dallas when I heard about a new proposed curriculum from the Texas Education Agency that would teach Bible stories in reading and language arts curriculum to kids as young as five years old in Texas public schools. I knew that teaching about the Bible in objective, age-appropriate ways could be part of a well-rounded public education, but what I heard about this curriculum led me to believe that something else was happening here.

I reached out to Dr. Mark Chancey, a professor of religion at SMU who is also one of the country's leading experts on the teaching of religion and Bible in schools. I have known Dr. Chancey for many years, and I even interviewed him for my book, *How to End Christian Nationalism*. He told me he had started to read the massive curriculum and also had concerns that the material would be taught in devotional ways and present faith claims as fact, which was particularly troubling for such young students who did not have the intellectual maturity to discern the difference.

Dr. Chancey put me in touch with other advocates who had experience with debates about curriculum at the State Board of Education (SBOE), which sets this policy. I met with Lisa Jacob, BJC's North Texas Organizer for Christians Against Christian Nationalism, and we started meeting with our local leaders to review the curriculum together and devise a plan of action. We worked with our interfaith partners at Texas Impact, several Jewish advocacy groups, and Texas Freedom Network to host webinar trainings on how to navigate the complicated state bureaucracy to submit public comments. Written comments had an August deadline, and we also explained how to register to provide live testimony before the SBOE hearing in Austin in September. I joined the dozens of people

who traveled from across the state and region to testify about their concerns with the curriculum and the impact on religious freedom. (Read about that day on pages 16-17.)

I worked with the BJC team to carefully review the curriculum's teaching of religious freedom. We submitted a public comment with our concerns about how the curriculum cherry-picks history and reinforces the mythology of America as a "Christian nation" rather than providing an accurate telling of history and religious freedom, including the separation of church and state. I also submitted comments personally on problems with lessons that preached to kindergartners about the Sermon on the Mount, taught the Parable of the Prodigal Son to first graders, and provided a telling of the crucifixion and resurrection narrative to third graders during their study on ancient Rome.

It was gratifying to find out, through the panicked social media postings of people who embrace Christian nationalism, that our efforts were making a difference. For example, Lance Wallnau, a prominent preacher in the extreme dominionism wing of the Christian nationalism movement, posted a cell phone video from a moving car to urge his followers to send an email that day to express their support for the curriculum, noting that messages of opposition to the curriculum had numbered 2,000 compared to only 200 in support. Wallnau's involvement also confirmed what we already suspected: that the curriculum is part of a larger concerted effort to push the teaching of Christian nationalist ideology in public schools.

As I write this column, we don't know what the outcome of our advocacy will be. The SBOE is set to vote on the curriculum in November. If they vote to adopt the curriculum as written, our advocacy efforts will shift to the more than 1,200 school districts in Texas, which will then decide on whether they will teach this curriculum to their students. Given the size and influence of the Texas public education system, other states are watching what happens in Texas and, if this curriculum is adopted, they may attempt to make a similar change in their states.

These experiences of on-the-ground advocacy have shown me just how empowering, effective, and yes, even fun, it is to be an active part of a democratic movement pushing back against a bold attempt to create a theocracy, starting in the public schools.



What does Project 2025 say about religious liberty and the separation of church and state?

Project 2025, a 900+ page policy agenda published by the Heritage Foundation, made headlines throughout the summer. The document is a playbook designed to guide the next presidential administration in governing major federal agencies in a conservative image. Project 2025 plans for a complete upheaval of the structure, priorities and initiatives of the federal government. What it envisions for religious liberty and the role of religion in governance, both explicitly and implicitly, is striking and troubling.

“What’s different about Project 2025 is the sweeping nature of its plan,” BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler told the *Guardian*. “It would really rewrite the federal government and change policies in so many different areas at once in a way that would hasten our journey down that road to authoritarian theocracy.”

Here is a brief summary of three areas of potential impact on faith freedom for all:

EDUCATION

Project 2025 eliminates the Department of Education, leaving most all education funding responsibility to state and local governments.

With a goal of maximum “school choice,” the plan envisions every family having government-funded “education savings accounts” to use for any school, public or private. (p. 319)

The proposal lowers federal charter school regulations (p. 331), and it prohibits accrediting bodies from requiring policies or standards that “conflict with the religious mission or religious beliefs of the institution.” (p. 352)

For those schools that are under federal control (D.C. public schools, Department of Defense schools, Bureau of Indian Education schools), Project 2025 seeks to set a policy-making example for states and local governments by requiring public schools to allow employees and contractors to live out their faith in the classroom regardless of the impact on students and parents, including the right to “use a pronoun that does not match a person’s biological sex if contrary to the employee’s or contractor’s religious or moral convictions.” (p. 346)

FAITH-BASED FUNDING

Most of the religion references in Project 2025 concern the access of religious organizations to government funding without having government regulations attached. If enacted, these proposals would upend long-standing church-state protections that bar direct taxpayer funding of religious organizations without significant safeguards in place.

Project 2025 would increase USAID partnerships with faith-based organizations. “Within weeks of Inauguration Day,” the plan says, the Office of General Counsel “should issue clear guidance on the eligibility of faith-based organizations for USAID funding ... [which] should build on, not compete with, private-sector initiatives launched by global churches ... ” (p. 265, 272)

The proposal also would rescind regulations that make certain religious organizations ineligible for Small Business Administration

loans. The plan would eliminate the religious eligibility determination process — which currently ensures that such loans do not run afoul of the Establishment Clause. (p. 754-55)

Additionally, it would not only protect from regulation but “prioritize” faith-based programs in receiving federal grants under both the Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education and the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs. (p. 480-481) Project 2025 says the federal government should “maintain a biblically-based ... definition of marriage and family” and should allow organizations that believe that marriage exists only between a man and a woman to affirm that view in “healthy marriage” programs subsidized by taxpayer funds. (p. 481)

CONSCIENCE PROTECTIONS

Project 2025 would terminate the case-by-case evaluation of religious and faith-based organizations requesting a religious exemption to provide foster care and adoption services. Under the proposal, all states and agencies requesting waivers from nondiscrimination requirements in placing children and selecting foster care parents must be granted. (p. 494)

Project 2025 would also allow health care insurers (p. 483) and health care workers (p. 491) broad exemptions from requirements to provide services to which they have religious and moral objections. It says that all “HHS components” would be required to cooperate with investigations conducted by the Office of Civil Rights related to enforcement of conscience laws, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. (p. 494)

Via Executive Order, Project 2025 would establish “that religious employers are free to run their businesses according to their religious beliefs, general nondiscrimination laws notwithstanding, and support participation of religious employees and employers as federal contractors and in federal activities and programs.” (p. 586) It also says Congress “should encourage communal rest by amending the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to require that workers be paid time and a half for hours worked on the Sabbath.” (p. 589)

Taken as a whole, this set of policy proposals would do particular damage to religious liberty protections in place for taxpayers and for beneficiaries of government services. It would open a free flow of federal funds to grantees empowered to use those funds for religious purposes while also declining to provide important services they object to on religious and moral grounds. Project 2025 envisions an executive branch that recognizes no line of institutional separation between church and state, let alone a wall. At the same time, federal agencies under this plan see virtually no limit to religious exercise. Public school teachers could disregard the well-being of their students, health care workers could deny requests of their patients, adoption agencies could set aside the needs of foster children — all if those are done in the name of Free Exercise. A terrible outlook for religious liberty for all.

—Don Byrd, BJC researcher and writer

The Court at a crossroads

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

Every four years, the people who are most politically engaged in American law and politics tend to focus their autumn energy on the upcoming November election. The annual October kickoff of the U.S. Supreme Court term may be overlooked.

That is certainly the case in light of the tumultuous turns of events in this year's election cycle, though at least some of the interest in this presidential election could be attributed to dramatic developments at the Supreme Court in recent years. Decisions that overruled long-standing precedents and revelations raising concerns about judicial ethics have even inspired real conversations and concrete proposals about reforming the Court itself.

Fortunately, the Court did no direct damage to religious freedom in the term that ended this summer — there were no cases addressing the Religion Clauses, and none have been granted review in this October term (yet). This surprising respite is well-deserved, coming after a half-dozen decisions impacting the relationship between religion and government were issued in the previous two terms. That blitz of religion-related cases included a decision that required a state to fund private religious schools and one that abandoned a decades-old test for interpreting the Establishment Clause. In the latter case, the Court provided little guidance other than requiring that courts look to “historical practices and understandings,” leaving lower courts to struggle on where to draw judicial lines consistent with the promise of religious freedom in the First Amendment.

That said, the previous Court term was highly consequential. There were several cases where religious values and religious organizations have something to say, including cases about access to abortion, voting rights, homelessness and gun control. Not surprisingly, those cases were overshadowed by the most headline-grabbing 6-3 decisions: *Trump v. U.S.*, the case in which the Court found broad presidential immunity from criminal charges; and *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, the case that overruled the *Chevron* case that forms the basis of long-standing principles for administrative law.

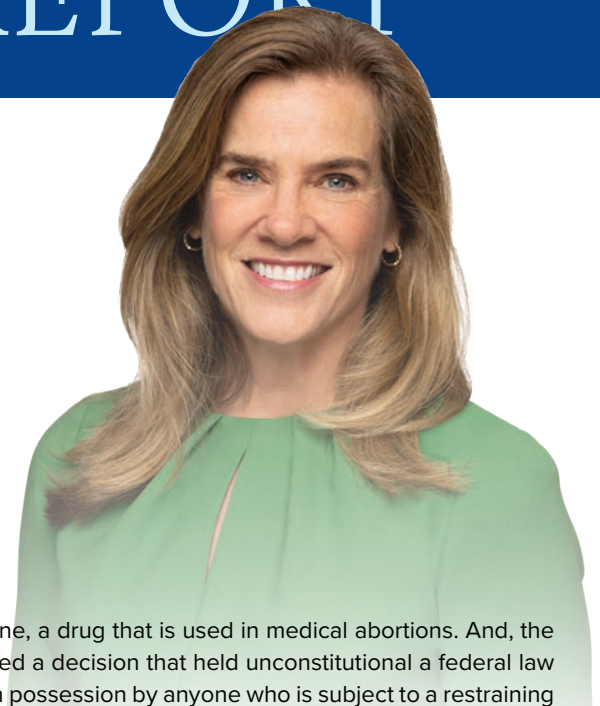
In the shadow of those cases, two decisions appeared to mark the outer limits for extreme arguments aimed to push a highly political Court. The Court rejected “standing” (the right to sue) for a group of doctors that challenged regulations governing the distribution

of mifepristone, a drug that is used in medical abortions. And, the Court reversed a decision that held unconstitutional a federal law that bars gun possession by anyone who is subject to a restraining order for domestic violence.

In the latter case, *United States v. Rahimi*, the Court addressed and somewhat refined its newly adopted “history and tradition” test in Second Amendment jurisprudence. The 8-1 decision (with only Justice Clarence Thomas dissenting) upheld the federal law as consistent with the nation's history and tradition of firearm regulation to stop individuals who threaten physical harm to others from misusing firearms. The law at issue had been challenged successfully in the court below by a violent abuser with factual circumstances that exposed the preposterous ends to which the Court's history test could be pushed.

Rahimi provided an opportunity for Chief Justice John Roberts to state that some lower courts have misunderstood recent case law, noting that the Court's jurisprudence was “not meant to suggest a law trapped in amber.” The proper question, he said, is “whether the new law is ‘relevantly similar’ to laws that our tradition is understood to permit, applying faithfully the balance struck by the founding generation to modern circumstances.” Moreover, he said that courts should focus on the purpose of the regulation at issue and the burden that it places on the constitutional right conferred by the Second Amendment.

The justices voted 8-1 on the *Rahimi* decision, which corrected an egregious lower court decision. But, there were multiple concurrences, demonstrating serious disagreement among the justices. The case highlights problems with the Court's recent overreliance on history as the key both to constitutional interpretation and to supposed bias-free decision-making from the bench. History, of course, has an important role to play in judicial analysis by justices across the ideological spectrum. It is certainly a significant part of what we, as religious freedom advocates, have long relied on to protect the free exercise of religion and against government establishments of religion. Yet, we also know there are dangers to a rigid adherence and narrow telling of history in our flawed country. It inevitably leaves people out of the promises of our Constitution and undercuts the fight for freedom and justice, upon which our commitment to religious freedom is based.





BJC Fellows explore new narratives, prepare for advocacy

What does it mean to recognize and protect faith freedom for all? Which stories have been ignored or overlooked by the common historical narratives? How do we create a brighter future that recognizes everyone's humanity? These are just some of the questions our newest class of BJC Fellows explored during their seminar in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. These young professionals compose our ninth class of BJC Fellows since the program began in 2015, and the total number of faith freedom leaders named as BJC Fellows now stands at 86.

While engaging in experiences that provide a theological, historical and legal look at religious freedom, the BJC Fellows also explored the importance of listening to all narratives. In addition to the stories on the grounds of Colonial Williamsburg (read more from the Rev. Dr. Corey Walker on page 9), the class heard from an archaeologist who explained how building structures were previously prioritized in archaeology instead of the stories of the people who lived and were buried there. The BJC Fellows also heard from other classes, explored the intersection of belief and nonbelief, trained for advocacy and discussed ways to combat Christian nationalism. Hear more from this class in their own words, and visit BJCOnline.org/Fellows for more on this program, which is led by the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation.



Margaret Hamm, Somerville, Mass.

I came to the BJC Fellows Program passionate about the history of religious freedom and eager to become a better advocate for its present and future. As a Ph.D. student in American religious history, much of my knowledge about religious lib-

erty comes from the classroom. ... Through my experience as a BJC Fellow, I've gained a renewed appreciation for the historical roots of religious freedom in America and a newfound confidence in my role as a voice for religious freedom both inside and outside of the classroom.

On our very first day in Colonial Williamsburg, the Rev. Dr. Corey D. B. Walker posed two questions to us that stuck with me in a meaningful way: "Why are we writing the stories we write? For whom?"

These questions centered my time in Colonial Williamsburg and will continue to animate my work going forward. While they're certainly important questions to ask for purely academic work, I find them even more crucial to consider as a budding

scholar-advocate. Effective advocacy is all about storytelling, and the story of religious freedom in America should include people of all religious traditions and none, people of all races and ethnicities, and people of all gender identities and sexualities. For me, it's imperative to acknowledge how systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia and xenophobia have historically kept many out of the narrative of religious freedom and to correct those injustices going forward.

One of the most impactful moments for me during our time in Colonial Williamsburg was getting out of the classroom and taking a walking tour of some of the historical sites in the area. Whether walking through the rooms in George Wythe's house or

standing in front of the archaeological site of the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg, the Rev. Dr. Walker's questions were made real right in front of me. I tend to think of religious freedom as something that's found in law school textbooks or Supreme Court decisions, but the walking tour reminded me that religious freedom is a theological, political and cultural ideal that exists vibrantly within our places of worship, our schools and our homes. Ultimately, this experience affirmed to me that the history of religious freedom in America is deeply contested, and it's up to us not only to reclaim this narrative but to create a new history for future generations.



Brittany Washington, Fort Worth, Texas

Growing up in the church, I saw how religion could uplift people and provide a sense of community, but I also saw how it could cause significant harm — primarily through sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, racism and favoritism. Watching beloved LGBTQIA+ members leave the church because of how they were treated — and seeing how that shattered their sense of worth, identity and belonging — fundamentally changed how I viewed the church I thought I knew. This, coupled with broader research into religious abuse and its devastating impact on individuals, families and communities, fueled my commitment to creating ministries that are truly

diverse, equitable, inclusive, justice-oriented and trauma-informed.

The path forward in the religious landscape and the public square requires a strong commitment to healing justice, a movement that heals the deep wounds of the past, while addressing disproportionality and injustice amongst minority and marginalized communities. My experiences at the BJC Fellows Seminar and up-bringing in the church deepened, clarified and revived my vision for and call to the work of religious justice. I am committed to the principles of love, compassion and respect, which ensure that all people — especially those who have been marginalized and minoritized — find a place where their humanity is honored and their voices are heard.



Jamil Grimes, Nashville, Tenn.

What I read and heard as a participant in the 2024 BJC Fellows Seminar reframed my understanding of religious liberty, powerfully shifting its focus from a legal to human constitution.

During the seminar's reading and discussion of Dr. Michael Meyerson's *Endowed by Our Creator: The Birth of Religious Freedom in America*, I recalled his description of John Leland, a Baptist leader who pushed for religious freedom. "Fundamental to his philosophy was the belief that the 'rights of conscience and private judgment' were inalienable rights,"

wrote Dr. Meyerson, echoing some of Leland's words, "that no government could acquire and no individual could surrender: 'Like sight, hearing, thinking and breathing, they are always attached to individuals.'" To be sure, the legal underpinning of religious liberty remains deeply important. Dr. Meyerson opened a window into the strenuous efforts to craft a sufficient legal articulation of religious liberty, efforts complicated by both the diversity of beliefs in early America and the beliefs of the Framers themselves. There is truly much at stake in this hard-fought expression of religious freedom. ... But the more I engaged with the early history of religious freedom, the more I realized that there is a higher plane in the fight for freedom of religion. That higher plane is nothing less than an understanding of what makes us human and who we include in that "human." Religious freedom is not just about our legal reasoning. It is about our moral imagination. ...

Our session with Dr. Sabrina Dent concretized religious freedom as a human right and a matter of human dignity, universal in aspiration but limited in application. This moment offered a sober reminder that not all people have been recognized as being fully human, that the same Enlightenment thinkers responsible for liberal ideas like religious tolerance also perpetuated racist hierarchies in which distance from whiteness meant an absence of cherished human virtues, such as rationality. And as someone of African descent, I think especially of Black people, long valued for their bodies but not for their minds. Dr. Dent encouraged me to see that thinking and writing more expansively about religious liberty requires that we expand our scope to take in far more than those figures frequently cast as religious dissenters. The work of religious freedom advocacy depends on our ability





to recognize the limits of religious liberty at the margins, among underrepresented and vulnerable communities. Religious liberty proponents must reckon with the history and ongoing denial of religious liberty that proceeds less from a perception of religious difference than one of human difference.



Rev. Leigh Curl-Dove, Seattle, Wash.

As a pastor, I spend a good deal of time thinking about the words I use and paying attention to the words I hear all around me. It seems more and more that I hear words of hate and harm coupled with the words of my Christian faith. I hear Bible verses used as reasoning to deny reproductive and gender-affirming health care. I hear rhetoric around God's "chosen" presidential candidate. I see lawmakers in other states trying to mandate teaching the Bible or posting the Ten Commandments in public schools. Christian nationalism is nothing new, but it is a consistent and ever-growing danger. ...

During our time in Colonial Williamsburg, the speakers continually reminded us of how intersectional religious freedom is. We cannot talk about religious freedom for all people unless we look at the full history and see who is missing from the narrative.

The reality is that the United States was founded by white, land-owning men.

The Founders wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution with people who looked like them in mind. When they wrote, "all men are created equal," did they really mean all men or just white, land-owning men? If all "men" are created equal, what about women? When they said "We the People," did they mean all people or just the people they considered to be people — to be human? These words that most Americans know, words American children have grown up memorizing in school, have shaped our world and our mindset. Apart from the full story, these words have created a harmful narrative of idealism and exceptionalism erasing those the Founders did not consider "people" from the story.

My time in Colonial Williamsburg further showed me just how crucial it is to tell the whole story, to resist the urge to sanitize or idealize. We can create a better world where all people truly are people, but not until we pay attention to the full history — not until we pay attention to and listen for the stories of the people who were not given seats at the table, who were not given a voice.



Rev. Margaret Conley, Cartersville, Ga.

The unmitigated gall of this nation's Framers in creating documents that spelled out freedom and humanity has led us to believe these documents, such as

the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, are infallible and inerrant, which completely disturbs my very being. What I think is missing from the narrative of the conversation around the creation of the country and the work of religious freedom is the psychological framework of the Framers.

I make this statement because, as a black embodied, queer female, I am aware that I was never a part of the Framers' thoughts when they created the documents that framed and shaped what we now know as the United States of America. During one classroom conversation, I felt as if I had made a quantum leap into the space of my transhumanist thought of weaponizing my own body as a technology for use when we discussed that "'We the People' is still expanding." The shock of those words hit me at my core because clearly, at one point, someone was not included in this opening phrase of a document that created this "land of the free..."

... The Framers had an opportunity; they took it upon themselves to define what humanity is, and thus, this brings me to my thoughts about how "We the People" are still being defined. What I did gather from this week ... is that America was built on its own trauma response to the Framers of this nation. And those who came — those who in some other place and time appeared to have lost some level of dignity and personhood — attempted to gain their understanding of humanity again by saying they discovered something that was already inhabited. The Framers were trying to make right for themselves with no focused thought on how they were bringing pain, harm and death to others. ...

Though we seem to think it radical the offer of religious freedom in the work that framed this country, we also like to dismiss what that term really meant and even how segregation in the settlements

of this nation started with their wounds from the lack thereof. I am saddened, yet I embrace levels of hope that, one day, we will move away from the ever-expanding thoughts of defining bodies and humanness. We will move into allowing people to genuinely experience religious freedom from the context of their humanity because “We *are* the People,” and that is something that does not need to be defined.



Lakia Marion, Atlanta, Ga.

Although the Constitution’s language speaks of a diverse and free nation, I discovered through our readings and open discussion that the plight of those on the margins remained limited. For example, enslaved peoples and other ethnic groups were not seen as human or worthy of freedom — racial or religious freedom. Simply put, their human rights were not considered. They were invisible and treated as spiritual and economic commodities. The experience of walking the grounds at Colonial Williamsburg and learning the history of my ancestors’ plight is one of the reasons I woke up to a lament. Still, most importantly, tears filled my eyes because America’s history demonstrates that our inability to embrace “otherness and difference” originated during colonization. ...

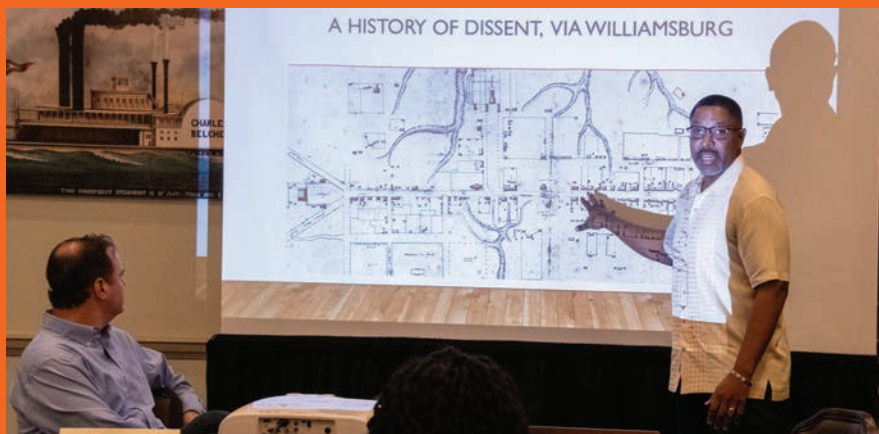
Dr. Sabrina Dent asked, “Who has the right to be human?”

I instinctively answered “everyone” in my heart.

The answer to this question is obvious, right?

We all have the right to be human. Yet, in our world, we are quick to label, categorize and make snap judgments about each other before learning the essence of our neighbor.

After my 2024 BJC Fellows Seminar experience, this question echoes in my heart and mind: “Who has the right to be human?” This question has broadened



Toward a new religious freedom in Colonial Williamsburg

By Rev. Dr. Corey D.B. Walker

Walking the streets of Colonial Williamsburg, one cannot help but be captured by the colonial panorama on display. History and imagination combine to extend an invitation to creatively revisit a day in the life of colonial America. Yet, Colonial Williamsburg is “the world’s largest living history museum.” As such, it conveys multiple narratives about the past and is also very much a product of the present. It is this quality that makes Colonial Williamsburg such an interesting site for the annual BJC Fellows Seminar.

In 2019, the Rev. Dr. Nathan Taylor and I came together to develop a novel tour of Colonial Williamsburg for the BJC Fellows. Nathan is executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society with a deep knowledge of Baptist history in Virginia. Five years later, we reprised our tour for the 2024 BJC Fellows Seminar. The prosaic title of our tour, “A Baptist History of Dissent,” takes on multiple meanings as we reimagine the geography of Colonial Williamsburg as a geography of religious freedom. The tour is one where questions are welcomed, openness is valued, and closed, totalizing answers are eschewed.

The Capitol Building and the Public Gaol not only represent law and order, they also represent the struggles for religious liberty and the limits of religious dissent. The Raleigh Tavern and the King’s Arms Tavern emerge as distinctive spaces of a new commons where public discussions of liberty, including religious liberty, were daily fare. The home of Robert Carter and Bruton Parish Church are key sites where the existence of freedom and slavery mark the limits of traditional narratives of religious freedom. Colonial Williamsburg crystallizes a complex and complicated past that exists as a living legacy in our contemporary moment. That is what makes this living history museum an exemplary classroom for exploring the multiple histories of religious freedom in America.

Colonial Williamsburg is a prescient reminder that there is no single “real” history of colonial America or “real” story of religious freedom. The BJC Fellows come to critically recognize this important point as they walk the streets of this living museum. They learn that interpretations of the past are influenced by our constructions of the past and by the contingencies of the present. And they become cartographers of new geographies of religious freedom that is not “out there” waiting to be discovered in some pristine state. Rather, it is always in a process of becoming as we continue this grand experiment of democracy in America.

Rev. Dr. Corey D. B. Walker is Dean of Wake Forest University School of Divinity and Wake Forest Professor of the Humanities at Wake Forest University. He also serves as a member of the advisory council of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation.



my view of God and who I am to be in relation to others. My faith in God and my commitment to follow Jesus convicts me to love my neighbor as myself. My neighbor is whoever I encounter, and I am to love them regardless of race, class, gender or religious belief. I walk away from this experience with a more pronounced understanding that we share a common humanity. ...

I will use the insights from this experience to engage in courageous conversations that challenge injustice and inequalities so that reconciliation may abound in families, communities and nations.



Rev. Wesley King, Nashville, Tenn.

Since returning from the BJC Fellows Seminar, I have been energized to get to work. ... I often see threats to religious liberty in my own context, and it feels overwhelming with how blatantly Christian nationalism is intertwined into our state politics in Tennessee. One of the most helpful things that BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler pointed out was that Christian nationalism exists on a spectrum.

Not every example of Christian nationalism or every threat to religious liberty is as blatant and overt as the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. This framing helped me re-examine the instances in my own context in which Christian nationalism or Christian supremacy might exist. ...

As a Christian pastor in the Disciples of Christ tradition, I am called to ask, "What voices aren't being heard? Which voices are not at the table?" Thus, I must fight against Christian supremacy to ensure that *all* of my neighbors' voices are being heard.

There are certainly examples of blatant Christian nationalism in Tennessee. For example, people in Rutherford County protested and attempted to block the building of a mosque, which finally did open in 2012. Some citizens didn't consider Islam a religion, therefore they didn't feel they were infringing on their neighbors' right to the free exercise of religion. There are also many less overt examples. Earlier this year, the Tennessee General Assembly passed HB 2125, which names the month of November as "Christian Heritage Month." This bill doesn't mandate the teaching of Christian heritage in public schools or mandate observation by state employees, but I would argue that it is still Christian nationalism because it seems to elevate one faith over the others. ... Framing Christian nationalism as a spectrum ensures that my colleagues and I aren't just waiting for the more blatant and dangerous examples before we act.



Sejana Yoo, Temple, Texas

Early on our final morning of the BJC Fellows Seminar, I chose to interact with someone online who was upset that I

shared a post that they didn't agree with on Instagram. In one of their replies to me, the phrase "Christianity is what our Country was founded on, we have completely turned from that..." caught my attention. I had just spent several intensive days taking a close look at the Constitution and the First Amendment, which laid out faith freedom for all as a central idea — not faith freedom for one particular faith tradition. This person was letting me know that, as a Christian, they felt I was wrong in sharing a post that didn't align with their stance. They thought that, as a Christian, I should want everything in our nation and government to be centered around Christianity, but I don't share that view.

This online conversation was my opportunity to practice respectfully speaking up about matters in which we thought differently. So, using my chaplaincy and spiritual direction interpersonal skills alongside information from the BJC Fellows Seminar, I crafted a response that acknowledged this person's feelings of concern while sharing that I disagreed, but I left the door open for future conversations.

I shared about this experience with our BJC Fellows group, and my peers felt I modeled well how to have tense one-on-one conversations. I also heard some say that they would not have engaged that person, but I found myself declaring, "No, we need to be open to having conversations with people who think differently than us. Otherwise, how can any change take place?"

I believe that anyone can listen to a different viewpoint, even when it challenges us. It's those very conversations with people different than us that help us all to develop and grow.

[Read more from this class of BJC Fellows and see additional photos on our website at \[BJCOnline.org/BJCFellows2024\]\(https://BJCOnline.org/BJCFellows2024\).](#)

Baptist World Alliance resolution calls out religious nationalism worldwide

During its meeting in Lagos, Nigeria, in July, the Baptist World Alliance General Council passed a resolution lamenting the rise of religious nationalism around the world. It was one of three resolutions unanimously approved by the Council; the other two address world hunger and peace in the Middle East.

“Religious nationalism is the co-opting of the language, symbols, imagery, sacred texts, or holy figures of the dominant religion to justify wielding legal, political or social power or privilege, and may depict a nation or political party as divinely approved and guided,” says the BWA Resolution on Religious Nationalism. Reflecting on Baptists’ long-standing commitment to religious freedom, the resolution affirms “our Baptist heritage of fighting for more than 400 years for a radical separation of the institutions of religion and government as the best way to protect the religious freedom of all people.” It decries “the harm caused by all forms of religious nationalism that may include discrimination against and silencing of religious minorities and other marginalized communities, resulting in vandalism, harassment, violence, arrest, forced displacement, and death.”

The resolution acknowledges that “Baptists and other Christians are not immune to this dangerous trend” and recognizes Christian nationalism as a “form of idolatry.” Baptists are urged to support “positive Christian engagement in the public square” in alignment with a Christ-like model of civic involvement “characterized by love and sacrifice for one’s neighbors.”

In addition, the resolution commends Baptists around the world leading opposition to religious nationalism in their contexts, and it calls for increasing multifaith advocacy to support

religious freedom for everyone. It specifically applauded BJC’s Christians Against Christian Nationalism Campaign and the Freedom of Religion or Belief course from the International Baptist Theological Seminary in the Netherlands.

The BWA Resolution on World Hunger acknowledges global systemic issues that contribute to this worldwide issue and recognizes that “addressing structural and systemic changes is necessary to eliminate hunger and poverty disparities.”

The BWA Resolution on Peace in the Middle East was drafted in response to the deadly Hamas-led attacks on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza that emerged in the ensuing months due to the sustained conflict and violence. That resolution “condemns the attacking, kidnapping, and killing of civilians” and calls for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution of the conflict while recognizing “it must be a peace with justice ... with a hope rooted in the equal opportunity for a flourishing freedom for both Palestinians and Israelis.”

Founded in 1905, the Baptist World Alliance is a fellowship of 266 conventions and unions in 134 countries and territories comprising 51 million baptized believers in 178,000 churches. As noted on the BWA website, resolutions and other collective statements “are not binding on Baptist individuals or churches. They intend to share wisdom and raise consciousness rather than to demand or coerce conformity or hinder the soul freedom and responsibility of people to follow God according to the dictates of their own Christ-led conscience.” You can read the full text of the resolutions by visiting Baptistworld.org/resolutions.

—BWA press release and BJC staff reports

Empower change: 12 ways you can give to BJC



Online contributions
(one-time gift or monthly)



Planned giving or bequests



Event sponsorship



In the mail
through cash or check



Matching gifts



Peer-to-peer fundraising



ACH transfer



Donor-advised funds (DAFs)



Payroll deduction



Stock transfers



Property deed transfers



IRA and 401(k) contributions

To make a tax-deductible contribution to BJC’s work empowering leaders, defending faith freedom for all and countering Christian nationalism, you can scan the QR code, visit BJCOnline.org/give, or contact BJC Associate Director of Development Danielle Tyler at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.





A conversation with Shurden

Lecturer Dr. John Compton

Dr. John Compton will deliver the 20th annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State, held on the campuses of Mercer University in Macon and Atlanta, Georgia, this November. Visit BJConline.org/ShurdenLectures for details on his three presentations and additional information, including how to join us in person or remotely.

A professor of political science and chair of the department at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., Dr. Compton's lectures will focus on the process of secularization and diminished religious authority and how they impact politics and civic life. He spoke with Report from the Capital to preview some of his topics.

In your book *The End of Empathy: Why White Protestants Stopped Loving Their Neighbors*, you note that there has been a deterioration of religious authority since the 1960s. How is that affecting our country today?

A striking feature of the current religious landscape in the U.S. is that many people who claim to be Christian believers have weak ties to organized religion. This is a major change from, say, 20 years ago. Moreover, when we look at believers who are active members of congregations, it turns out that authority dynamics within congregations are usually very weak. Church members typically do not expect their leaders to tell them what to believe or how to act in society. Instead, they expect leaders to echo or reinforce their preexisting beliefs about religion, politics and everything else. In short, power has shifted from clergy and denominational leaders to the people in the pews.

With this background in place, certain features of the current political landscape begin to make more sense — for example, the evangelical community's embrace of Donald Trump, and also the various failed efforts to mobilize a progressive counterweight to the “religious right.” People often forget that Trump faced strong opposition from many evangelical figures and institutions in 2016, but in the end it didn't matter: rank-and-file evangelicals liked Trump, and evangelical elites therefore had little choice but to fall in line. Similarly, there have been some large and well-funded cam-

paigns designed to mobilize evangelicals on behalf of left-leaning causes like climate change and immigration reform, but most have ended in failure. The reason, again, is that evangelical elites have little ability to influence the views or behavior of their purported followers. Increasingly, politics tends to drive religion instead of the other way around.

How does the decline of religious authority relate to the rise of Christian nationalism in our country?

I have mixed feelings about the boom in research and writing on Christian nationalism. As others have pointed out, there are several competing definitions of “Christian nationalism,” and some are so broad as to not be particularly useful. But setting that to one side, I think the biggest misconception is that Christian nationalism is being fueled primarily by conservative churches and denominations. In reality, the evidence suggests that it's more of an individualistic phenomenon. People who subscribe to this blend of right-leaning, hyper-patriotic, conservative Christianity are more likely to have their thinking shaped by social media personalities or political elites than by ministers or church leaders. As mentioned earlier, many of them have very weak ties to organized religion. Hence, for people who are interested in pushing back against Christian nationalism, I think the first step is to move beyond outmoded frameworks for thinking about how these ideas are popularized and spread to the wider population.

What do you hope the audience takes away from your lectures?

For years, many people assumed that the decline of organized religion — or what we might broadly term “secularization” — would be a boon to the political left. Moreover, they assumed it would bolster public support for democratic norms, since citizens who were not under the sway of organized religion would be more open-minded and more tolerant of disagreement. But, in reality, secularization has not brought increased support for civil liberties or democratic values in the United States. Rather, religious participation and democratic values are both in decline. In light of this fact, my lectures will explore some of the negative social and political dynamics that have accompanied the process of secularization in the U.S. I will also try to offer some positive thoughts about how we can mitigate these dynamics and rebuild public support for democratic values and civil liberties.

20th annual
Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden
Lectures on Religious Liberty
and Separation of
Church and State

Nov. 13-14, 2024
Held on the campuses of
Mercer University in
Atlanta and Macon, Georgia

BJConline.org/ShurdenLectures

Louisiana requires Ten Commandments in classrooms

By Ken Camp for the Baptist Standard, June 24, 2024

... Holly Hollman, general counsel and associate executive director of [BJC] lamented the Louisiana action.

"It is a sad day for religious freedom when government officials in America take on the role of high priest, selecting favored Scripture passages and mandating their permanent display in public school classrooms," Hollman said. "Families, not government authorities, are responsible for teaching and guiding children in religious matters."

Mandating the display of Scripture in public schools is the "kind of government sponsorship of religion" that "weakens respect for government and religion," Hollman said. ...

MSNBC's AYMAN

Ayman Mohyeldin interviewed BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler on August 25, 2024, for a segment on the AYMAN show about a Christian conservative push to ban in vitro fertilization and how that intersects with Christian nationalism.



AMANDA TYLER:

I think in a post-Roe world, after the *Dobbs* decision a few years ago, we've seen anti-abortion activists move to a total ban on abortions and embracing this ideology of fetal personhood that is reflected not just in these concerns about IVF treatments but also criminalizing abortions and restricting access to birth control. It is about seizing political power. It is less about a given theological point of view, again, which is not shared by people of all religions or even all Christians.

For example, Jewish scholars often hold the belief that life begins when breath is first drawn. And, many Christians do not hold the view that life begins at conception, and even those who do don't hold the view that that view should be imposed on everyone else. We have separation of church and state in this country. We have this idea that we should not have religious coercion, including religious laws. ...

This fetal personhood movement has only just begun, and I think we can see from the reporting and the tactics that they are using that they know that this is deeply unpopular. They know that this is undemocratic, and that the majority of Americans would reject these ideas, so they are using other tactics, including through the courts, to try to impose their theological view on everyone else to the detriment of everyone's health and safety.

Trump assassination attempt lays bare deep religious divisions in the U.S.

By Jason DeRose for NPR, July 18, 2024



... "When one tries to imbue God's providence or God's blessing on a certain event like this," [Amanda Tyler] says, "where lives were lost and lives were forever altered, that is very problematic theology." That theology is called Christian nationalism, says Tyler, who is also the lead organizer of the group Christians Against Christian Nationalism.

She describes Christian nationalism as an ideology and a movement that tries to merge American and Christian identities, and "relies heavily on this mythological telling of American history and American present as being a, quote-unquote Christian nation, as being a country that has been singled out by God for God's special providence and God's special design in the world."

Tyler finds that belief troubling because it contradicts the foundational values of religious freedom and the separation of church and state. But she also finds it alarming from a religious perspective, because, she says, critique of government by people of faith and houses of worship is crucial when they believe elected leaders are pursuing policies that can oppress or marginalize.

"It has always been important to have a healthy separation," Tyler says, "for the religious institution to maintain the necessary freedom to speak truth to power."

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

A snapshot of signers on our fifth anniversary

By Ashleigh Hampson and Reagan Williams, Summer 2024 BJC interns

How are people finding our Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement? We're asking ourselves the same question as Christians Against Christian Nationalism hit 40,000+ signers and celebrated its fifth anniversary this summer. Spanning across all 50 states and dozens of denominations, people find the statement through a variety of paths: from news articles, viral TikToks, church events, friends and family members, or even simple Google searches about Christian nationalism. After sifting through the data, here are three of the most recent, significant means of drawing people to our Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

Social media shares

By far, the most common way people found the statement was through social media.

Whether that be through our TikTok and Instagram accounts that both use the handle [@endchristiannationalism](#), the new Christians Against Christian Nationalism Facebook community group, or the posts shared by supporters like you, people are talking about Christian nationalism on social media platforms and urging others to take the first action step by signing the statement of principles and connecting with the campaign.

Social media is a powerful and easy-to-use tool for raising awareness about both the campaign and basic facts about what is and is not Christian nationalism, and you do not have to be an influencer to start the conversation. While we see people with large followings — such as the Rev. Ben Cremer (meet him on the next page); historian and author Dr. Jemar Tisby; and the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — share the statement on their accounts, many of our signers find us when their personal friends, family members and church communities discuss the campaign on social media.

Current news

This summer, several events and stories in the news created new questions about the influence of Christian nationalism in various communities. When it comes to public schools, we saw legislation in Louisiana requiring the Ten Commandments be posted in every classroom, school “chaplain” proposals in several states, and Oklahoma lawmakers mandating the Bible be taught in schools — all examples of how policies influenced by Christian nationalism are impacting the youngest population. Other news raising questions about Christian nationalism include the discovery that the controversial “Appeal to Heaven” flag was flown at one of Justice Samuel Alito’s homes and the rhetoric surrounding the assassination attempt against former president and current Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

As people sought to better understand the driving force behind the policies, proposals and rhetoric connected to these events, many people discovered our website and found the statement as a way of signaling their commitment to rejecting the damaging political ideology of Christian nationalism. Various news outlets also featured our statement and our voice about the dangers of Christian nationalism, including CNN, NPR and TIME.

“I’m tired of faith being used as an excuse for hatred, bigotry, and ignorance to facts.”

Signer from New Jersey

“Church and state should always be separate. No one has the right to impose religious beliefs on anyone else.”

Signer from Illinois

Spotlight on sharing: Rev. Ben Cremer

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rev. Ben Cremer recognized a need to expand pastoring into the digital realm. Over the next four years, he amassed a thriving virtual congregation, reaching thousands of readers, listeners and followers far beyond his home in Boise, Idaho. The Rev. Cremer found our Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign on his own, and he has been a stalwart supporter — consistently featuring our website as a resource in his weekly blog posts and sharing our statement across his popular social media platforms.



We noticed the impact of the Rev. Cremer's digital ministry when we saw more than 1,000 new signers in just 24 hours, thanks to one of his posts. Our staff reached out to thank him for his support and hear more about his work.

When we shared the signer update with the Rev. Cremer, he was ecstatic to see such a quick impact, but he knows that is not the end of the story. "When we enter a conversation, we expect a quick result," he told us. "But change often comes over time — that's discipleship. It's about moving the needle one degree." He understands the challenge in addressing an audience with diverse denominational and political views, yet the Rev. Cremer offers a thoughtful approach to bridge these divides. "There is a desire to find commonality with those who don't believe what you do," the Rev. Cremer said. When asked about his strategy for initiating these conversations, he emphasized, "Find areas of commonality; then conversations become much more compassionate, and empathy leads the way over hostile disagreement."

Community conversations

Hearing about the statement directly from friends and neighbors proved to be the most organic and effective way of leading people to the campaign. Never underestimate the power of personal connections: the conversations you have with friends and family, the discussions that happen in your church, and the thoughts and concerns you share at community events about topics important to you hold real power and can be catalysts for meaningful change. Sometimes that happens as communities gather to watch and discuss documentary films. For example, many signers mentioned Stephen Ujlaki's new documen-

tary *Bad Faith* as a reason they sought out our work and signed our statement, and other documentaries — such as *God & Country* — are leading people to seek out what they can do about the dangers of Christian nationalism.

Both in-person and virtual screenings of movies like these are powerful ways to spark enlightening discussions about the issue. Whether through intimate conversations with people in your life or at large gatherings, it might be easier than you think to bring awareness of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement to a wider audience.

"This country was founded on the idea of freedom; freedom of religion must be protected in order to stay true to our very founding ideals."

Signer from North Carolina

The Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign's statement of principles provides a place for Christians to call out Christian nationalism and the threat it poses to the Christian faith and to our government.

If you have signed the statement, we encourage you to tell the people in your life about why you did so! Change starts in our communities, and you can be part of that change. Whether that be posting about the statement on your own social media platforms or having a conversation with your pastor or broader congregation, there are many ways to begin raising awareness of and dismantling the ideology of Christian nationalism in our communities, in our churches and in ourselves.

Would you be willing to tell **five** of your friends about this?
Go to **ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org** to sign or share the statement.

Take action!

Texas state Rep. James Talarico speaks at a press conference on Sept. 10, 2024, in Austin, Texas, with people from many faith backgrounds who are opposed to the proposed curriculum.

Saying 'no' to Bible-based curriculum in Texas

Texans traverse the state to make their opposition known to the State Board of Education

A proposed Bible-based language arts curriculum is causing concern for Texans who believe that public schools should be welcoming to all students, regardless of religious belief, and that religious instruction is best left to families and houses of worship.

BJC and Christians Against Christian Nationalism are working in partnership with Texas Freedom Network, Texas Impact, ADL Texas and Shalom Austin to defeat or rework the K-5 curriculum under consideration by state education officials, hosting webinars and trainings to empower Texans with the tools they need to make their comments known.

The proposed curriculum is replete with overtly Christian and other biblical references commonly taught in churches, and it uses stories about biblical figures such as King David and Jesus to address academic subjects and in a way that depicts religious beliefs as facts while offering minimal and sometimes disparaging information about other world religions. The Goldilocks fairy tale is used to teach children about the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule.

The material also contains misleading and inaccurate material taught to children as young as kindergarten, and it cherry-picks Founding Era history to tell a one-sided story that overstates the religiosity of the Founders and ignores concerns about government intrusion into religion and “no establishment” principles that led to the First Amendment of the

U.S. Constitution.

The proposed curriculum changes sparked significant concern from many people of faith and nonreligious people across Texas, who argue that these changes threaten the separation of church and state and infringe upon the religious freedom of Texas students and their families. The advocacy groups organized two webinars this summer to train people on the best ways to register their opposition to the proposed language arts and reading curriculum, which the Texas Education Agency introduced without disclosing the identity of the publisher or its cost.

“It’s clear ... this curriculum heavily favors Christianity and presents religious claims in a very literalistic fashion to the youngest of our children, which turns public schools into Sunday schools,” said Dr. Mark Chancey during one of the preparatory webinars. He is a professor of religious studies at Southern Methodist University.

The religious intent of the material surfaced with the passage of a 2023 law that changed the way Texas approves public curricula and granted teachers who use state-approved teaching plans immunity from violations of the U.S. Constitution’s Establishment Clause.

“Public education should provide a space where children from all backgrounds can learn without religious influence being imposed upon them,” said Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC

and lead organizer of Christians Against Christian Nationalism. “We call on all Texans who value religious freedom to join us in opposing this dangerous curriculum.”

One deadline to submit written comments was in August, and the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Education were deluged with written comments overwhelmingly opposed to the curriculum. BJC submitted public comment with specific instances of misleading and inaccurate material taught to children, such as a reference to a Baptism in early America as an “expression of religious freedom” instead of a religious ceremony tied to a faith tradition.

On Sept. 10, 2024, people from across Texas convened in Austin to share comments directly with the Texas State Board of Education during a Public Comment Period, including members of the BJC staff and volunteers committed to the cause.

“I love my state and I love my faith tradition,” said Lisa Jacob, the North Texas Organizer for the Christians Against Christian Nationalism Campaign during her public testimony. “But believing and valuing my faith does not give me license to institutionalize my religion above others, as is the case with this OER curriculum.” She noted that teaching about religion is not an issue, but that is not the case with this proposed curriculum.

“America is not a ‘Christian nation’ — it is a nation of diverse beliefs, and our public schools should reflect that diversity,” said the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Davis, BJC’s

director of development.

Testimony in opposition to the curriculum far outnumbered testimony in favor of the materials, with those registered to speak “against” the curriculum tripling the number registered to speak “for” it.

During the day-long comment period, those opposed to the curriculum held a press conference to share why, which included comments from people from a variety of faiths and Texas state Rep. James Talarico, a Democrat who represents an area north of Austin.

“There is a difference between preaching and teaching, and this curriculum is preaching,” Rep. Talarico said. “I’m all for teaching students about the great faith traditions of the world. They need that — to understand literature, to understand history, to enter into a global

economy and interact with people from different faith traditions,” he said. “But by elevating one religion over the rest, we are violating the First Amendment of our Constitution.”

BJC and partner groups “have been working hard to make the democratic process easier and to help every Texan be able to express their opinions about this curriculum to the State Board of Education,” Tyler said. For more on this effort, read Tyler’s column on page 3.

If you live in Texas and have not yet submitted any comments, it’s not too late! Texans also may email their state education board members directly until a vote is taken in November. See below for how you can get involved.

—Baptist News Global
and BJC Staff Reports



Lisa Jacob, North Texas Organizer for Christians Against Christian Nationalism, is pictured with a bus of concerned citizens heading to Austin from Dallas to testify against the curriculum.

Tips on crafting your public testimony

If you live in Texas, it’s not too late to weigh in on this troubling proposal. BJC encourages you to write an email to your representative on the State Board of Education sharing your concerns. For this issue — and for any future issue — remember that your story is the most effective testimony for or against any policy proposal, as it speaks to your personal experience. The various identities you carry are part of the power you bring to such testimonies. Your story also demonstrates the impact that these decisions have on real people.

Here are tips for crafting an email to make an impact with the Texas State Board of Education, created in partnership with the Texas Freedom Network:

Introduction

Share your name and identify yourself as a constituent of the district. Then, share who you are by telling your representative the identities that shape your experience and the communities in their constituency (a community of faith, a community of parents, etc.) that you represent.

Personal Story

Share your experience or vantage point. Are you a current or former student? Reflect on your experiences in school that exemplify the importance of inclusive environments. Are you a parent? Reflect on what you want for your children and share any barriers this curriculum presents toward making those dreams a reality. Are you a current or former educator? Reflect on your personal experiences in the classroom and what benefits your students. Don’t fit in any of those categories? Reflect on why you care despite your indirect impact.

Close with your “ask”

Be clear that you want the State Board of Education to amend the proposed TEA curriculum to remove unnecessary religious instruction and historical inaccuracies that uphold Christian nationalism.

Not sure who represents you on the Texas SBOE? Visit <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>. If you send an email, let us know! You can contact us at operations@BJCOnline.org.

Updates from the North Texas chapter of Christians Against Christian Nationalism

This summer, we launched a pastoral cohort, bringing together pastors to learn together and with us about what it means to lead others through discerning our public witness as faith communities.



The North Texas Organizing Project is increasing the frequency of its coalition meetings, hosting one each month to discuss ways to combat Christian nationalism in local communities throughout North Texas. Want to be part of the next North Texas event? Email Lisa Jacob at ljacob@BJCOnline.org.

Exclusive preview of *How to End Christian Nationalism*

How to End Christian Nationalism, a new book written by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, will be released October 22. Published by Broadleaf Books, it distinguishes the political ideology of Christian nationalism from the teachings of Jesus, and the book provides Scripture and action steps at the end of each section for further work and reflection. Be sure to pre-order your book before it is released!

Tyler is touring the country this fall, speaking at a variety of events connected to the release of her book. You can see a few upcoming events on the next page, but new dates are still being added. Visit EndChristianNationalism.com for the latest events, as well as a link to order the book from the publisher or local booksellers.

We are pleased to provide an exclusive excerpt of the book in this magazine:

*Excerpt from Step 6:
Organize for Change, pages 148-153*

IMPACT AND RESPONSIBILITY

When thinking about individual roles within the larger collective of a community organizing project working to end Christian nationalism, we need to consider questions of impact and responsibility.

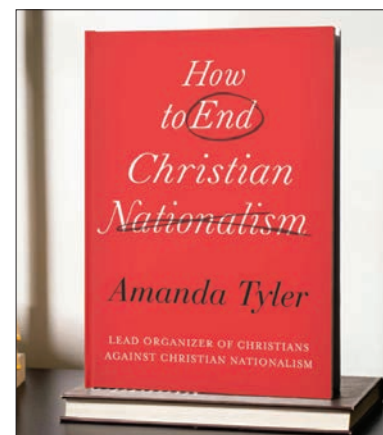
We are all impacted by Christian nationalism, but the impacts are not all the same. People of color, people who are not Christian, LGBTQIA+ people, and people who belong to more than one of those identity groups are those most directly endangered by Christian nationalism. Policies and laws aimed to further entrench Christian nationalism cause inordinate harm to people who are excluded from this narrow ideology. Physical violence and threats of physical violence are a constant threat to people who are relegated to the lower rungs of the caste system perpetuated by Christian nationalism. The toll — both psychological and material — this takes on BIPOC, non-Christian, and queer communities is enormous and irreparable.

White, heterosexual, cisgender Christians are also impacted by Christian nationalism. The fundamentalist Christianity that is imported into Christian nationalism draws the circle of belonging so tightly that it excludes many white Christians based on other

identities and values they hold. But since Christian nationalism perpetuates both white supremacy and Christian supremacy, white Christians are still at the top of the caste system created in part by Christian nationalism.

More than fifty years ago, James Baldwin wrote about the lie of white supremacy and the destructive force that it exerts. “I will state flatly that the bulk of this country’s white population impresses me, and has so impressed me for a very long time, as being beyond any conceivable hope of moral rehabilitation,” Baldwin wrote. “They have been white, if I may so put it, too long; they have been married to the lie of white supremacy too long; the effect on their personalities, their lives, their grasp of reality, has been as devastating as the lava which so memorably immobilized the citizens of Pompeii.”

What rings so true to me about Baldwin’s words is how the lie of white supremacy has impeded the progress and self-actualization not only of BIPOC communities and persons but also of white communities and persons. If I as a white person have been socialized to believe in my own innate superiority, by virtue of my heritage, religion, or skin tone, how can I build authentic, loving, and equal relationships across lines of difference? Where do I learn from others who look different than I do, speak a different language than I do, or worship differently than I do?



How can I be fully human while I am attached to the lie that I am inherently better or more important or more loved by God than my neighbors are?

Organizing to end Christian nationalism provides an opportunity for people to explore the impact that Christian nationalism has on them as individuals and as a community. There is only so much one can understand about this topic from reading a book, listening to a lecture, or viewing a film. Being in relationship with people with similar and different life experiences, all committed to ending Christian nationalism, will help us understand better the systemic problem of Christian nationalism and how it is affecting our lives and those of our neighbors.

Then, building from that understanding, communities can begin to discern the specific issues that the group will address. [In their book *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*,] Dr. [Alexia] Salvatierra and Dr. [Peter] Heltzel call these “*kairos* issues”: issues that “the whole community discerns as key to moving a social movement forward, allowing shalom justice to take room in a specific time and place.” This is a collective discernment, not an individual decision. Collective discernment often can be derailed by white people who either are unaware of the power dynamics in the room or lack the self-awareness to recognize when they are steering

the discernment. Collective discernment requires faith that the whole body, working together, is better than its individual parts. It requires prayer and reflection. It requires equity and humility. It is difficult but worth it.

Once the group examines impact and discerns *kairos* issues, it can then consider the question of responsibility. Just as the impacts of Christian nationalism vary based on our identities, our experiences, and our relative positions to power, so too do the responsibilities that we each hold when it comes to ending Christian nationalism. In the organizing model, the process of power mapping allows the coalition to determine who holds power, defined as “the capacity to act or to influence others to act.” The power-mapping process asks questions such as these: Who has the capacity and legal right to make public decisions? Who and what influence their decision-making process?

While white Christians generally have not experienced the greatest negative impact of Christian nationalism, I believe

white Christians bear the most *responsibility* in working to end it because we have benefited the most from it and done the most to perpetuate it.

But *how* we exercise that responsibility requires special care. In determining the question of responsibility, white Christians in the coalition might be tempted to take leadership roles, to be out front in public advocacy. This only serves the organizing goals if the entire coalition has discerned it. While a white Christian’s intentions may be noble, we must pay attention to the impact on our community.

When people of color are willing to share with us the full impact of our actions, it is a gift, and we can learn and heal. We have to prove ourselves to be trustworthy, however — and even once that trust is built, our own actions can easily destroy it. Without careful attention, white Christian leaders, in countering Christian nationalism, could tend to perpetuate the very white supremacy and Christian supremacy that we are organizing against.

White Christian coalition members

should also be aware of and avoid white saviorism. This phenomenon, also known as the white savior complex, occurs when white people, from a position of power, try to “rescue” or “liberate” people of color. BIPOC communities are far ahead of most white communities in organizing against oppression. Though the term *Christian nationalism* is fairly new, the ideology and its presence in law and policy are very old, predating the Constitution. Organizers have been waging campaigns for voting rights, immigrant rights, economic justice, criminal justice reform, and more for many decades. Organizers might not use the phrase *countering Christian nationalism* to describe their work, but that might be a powerful outcome of the organizing they are doing.

Our neighbors don’t need saviors; they need allies. As allies, we who are white Christians need to recognize and follow the leadership of the BIPOC community in our organizing. We should discern how we leverage the power we have in the overall goal of redistributing that power.

Join the book tour!

Amanda Tyler could be coming to a city near you! Visit EndChristianNationalism.com for a full list of stops on the book tour, and make plans to join us for an event. Here are a few upcoming dates:

Los Angeles, California

October 16

First Congregational Church of
Los Angeles

Dallas, Texas

October 20

Royal Lane Baptist Church

Charlotte, North Carolina

October 22

St. John’s Baptist Church

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

October 29

Knollwood Baptist Church

Minneapolis, Minnesota

November 11

Hennepin United
Methodist Church

Richmond, Virginia

November 24

River Road Church, Baptist



Difference does not mean division



By Jaziah Masters

Research Fellow for the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

This summer, I found answers to some surprising questions: Who is the only woman whose name appears on the Declaration of Independence? *Mary Katharine Goddard, printer to the Continental Congress.* Who was the American World War II spy who had a wooden leg? *Virginia Hall, who worked for the British Special Operations Executive.* What is one rule that evens the playing field at the Paralympics? *All runners in the “blind” race wear blindfolds because several different vision levels are classified as “blind.”*

These questions represent the breadth of topics I encountered as a summer circulation assistant at the Peabody College Library at Vanderbilt University. Working at a library seems straightforward. People come in, pick out a book or two, and hand their selections to me; I scan the book, and the patron enjoys their new reading material. While that could have the makings of a repetitive summer job, I gained great insight working at the library and seeing the significant role these institutions play in our community.

Libraries are culture centers, inviting us to see the world around us — both in books and in person, across the generations.

The Peabody library hosts an extracurricular summer program, offering local Nashville students the chance to hear from community leaders. Plus, a neighboring early childhood care center visits each month for “story time,” when librarians read some of their favorite books to the kids. It also services Vanderbilt University’s College of Education and Human Development, providing resources on topics including special education, school leadership, education policy, child develop-

ment, human physiology and educational neuroscience — all at the tip of the fingers.

The children’s section of the library even more clearly illuminates the impact of this place on others. As you turn the corner to enter the children’s section, it can be jarring. You are greeted with the most colorful array of books imaginable. All shapes, sizes, conditions and (unfortunately) misplacements are a staple of this little section of the library. You may even find a puppet or two lying around. What feels chaotic to me brings joy to the children! Here, I saw many children grab a bean bag chair and get lost in a good book. I also saw parents sound out more advanced words as they helped their children read. Every so often, a kid would pick up a bilingual book and try translating it. Our growing dual-language collection offers children’s books in English and Spanish, French, Japanese, Kurdish, Navajo and Chinese (traditional and simplified).

“Efforts to ban books see differences — such as religious differences — as a threat instead of understanding the benefits of lifting and listening to diverse voices and experiences.”

All libraries offer the chance to see our stories and experiences alongside so many others. In my library, you can find books about historical injustice, suffragettes, mindfulness, immigration, same-sex parenting, disability inclusion, math, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, engineering, refugees and natural disasters. Here, children, youth, seniors and everyone in between have the chance to see themselves represented. It matters. Every one of these topics can be told in a way that is age-appropriate, detailed, well-researched and — above all else — meaningful. Libraries are increasingly offering various online resources, too, including audio books and movie streaming services.

There are religious liberty lessons here. How can we protect faith freedom for all when we do not know or appreciate others’ approaches to faith? Libraries can teach us that appreciation. But an even more important lesson they teach is that difference does not mean division. Differences can — and do — co-exist, even under the same roof! There are even elaborate classification systems in libraries to help visitors not only find exactly what they need but also anything else that might be relevant to the topic they have on their mind.

I am incredibly disheartened to know that so many libraries and librarians are being caught in the crosshairs of efforts to ban books. These malicious attacks often target books about religious, cultural and ethnic minorities for exclusion. Efforts to



Responding to book bans

Here are some ways to support the freedom of information provided by books and our libraries.

Civic engagement: Know the positions of your school board and town council members. Testify on the importance of book freedom at local meetings.

Library support: Give your money and your time to your library, providing a steadfast presence.

Sharing books: Read and engage in dialogue about banned books, and work to dispel myths and rumors.

ban books see differences — such as religious differences — as a threat instead of understanding the benefits of lifting and listening to diverse voices and experiences. Many of these book bans come from those who espouse and adhere to the dangerous ideology of Christian nationalism, which seeks to merge American and Christian identities and tries to find ways to privilege a narrow version of “Christianity” rooted in nativism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, patriarchy and militarism. Christian nationalism demands that identities and experiences outside the mainstream be excluded. The ideology seeks to impose specific tenets of what is acceptable and demonizes anything that challenges its narrow narrative of what it means to be Christian and what it means to be American. Make no mistake: book bans threaten religious freedom, just as Christian nationalism does.

We should all appreciate the important roles libraries serve — in our universities, in our communities and in our families. These are not the places to wage culture wars. Instead, these are places of refuge, exploration, pluralism and possibilities. That is why libraries are such a threat to the exclusionary narratives peddled by Christian nationalism. If there are any battles to be waged, it is in defense of libraries! In our current political climate, we see people attack libraries for making books available that they don’t personally like. These threats are public and personal, sometimes leading to budget cuts or the intimidation of people who work in the libraries themselves. Often, the books at the center of these “controversies” are by and about historically marginalized communities, addressing topics such as racism, sexuality or gender identity. You can see the seriousness of the problem by looking at the targeting of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison. One of the world’s most celebrated and

decorated authors, Morrison was the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her writings on the many facets of Black life and Black experiences — addressing some of the darkest moments in American history, such as slavery and its ongoing legacy and trauma — are regularly among the most challenged.

Our elected officials need to hear how much libraries mean to our communities. Most often, that means local civic engagement on our part. It means voting in every local election for people and policies that will defend libraries, even when library funding is not directly on the ballot. It means going to city council or school board meetings (or possibly another local institution in charge of government funding) and sharing your support of libraries.

If you haven’t been to your local library in a while, I encourage you to visit! Say hello and share an encouraging word with the staff there. Get a library card or renew yours. Check out a diverse range of books. Most libraries have a local Friends of the Library group, and you can donate to their programs. Be sure to attend events at your library, too.

Why do libraries matter? I found the answer to that in every book I touched, every person who came through the door, and every librarian I talked with this summer. In a world where we see concentrated efforts to promote narrow views of society and citizenship and exclude differing experiences, our libraries continue to serve as a place where all of us can come together. They remind us that there is room for all our stories, and they leave open the possibility of new ones.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Center for the online version of this column, which includes links to books that can tell you more about the topics mentioned.

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.

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PNBC panel: ‘Theological revolution’ needed to bring liberation to jails and prisons

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global

Viewing jail and prison inmates as more than souls to be saved requires the church to apply a social-justice lens to its theological understanding of incarceration and the incarcerated, insisted the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson, second vice president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

“Most of us were taught that our whole purpose and existence is to get somebody saved,” the Rev. Dr. Thompson said during an Aug. 7 panel discussion held at PNBC’s annual session in New Orleans. “So it makes sense that we were going to the prison because, surely, they are there because somehow they have sinned, they are sinners, and that is our job to get them saved.”

But a “theological revolution” is needed to motivate Christians to bring a message of liberation to jails and prisons disproportionately populated by people with Black and brown skin, noted the Rev. Dr. Thompson, senior pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, Calif.

“It comes with an understanding that charity is the work of the church, but it’s not just charity — there has to be justice,” she said. “Don’t keep giving people sandwiches without walking down the street to figure out why they are hungry every Tuesday.”

Preachers will also have to revamp their views of the nation’s criminal punishment system and to call out the white supremacist theologies that help rationalize it. “But that is not something we have often challenged one another or challenged our churches to do,” she conceded.

Issuing that challenge was the purpose of the “De-carceration and Democracy” panel discussion moderated by the Rev. Dr. Willie D. Francois III and the Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes III, co-chairs of PNBC’s social justice commission.

Participants covered the social, racial

and economic ramifications of the nation’s mass incarceration complex. They also brainstormed ways churches might create holistic prison ministries capable of bringing justice and systemic change.

The theme of the PNBC annual session centered around sounding a call to wider social, racial and political action ahead of the 2024 presidential election. The organization is one of the nation’s leading Black Protestant denominations and was the home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. PNBC also is one of BJC’s member bodies.

During a press conference ahead of the panel discussion, the Rev. Dr. Haynes warned Black Baptists that Project 2025 (see page 4) is a white supremacist effort to destroy racial, educational and economic justice.

“Project 2025 is dangerous. It in essence will result in the complete dismantling of the civil rights movement,” the Rev. Dr. Haynes, senior pastor of Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, said. “Project 2025 endeavors to put an end to anything having to do with diversity, equity and inclusion” and to dismantle the Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Justice Department.

“Project 2025 is anti-democracy in a real sense,” he added. “It is neo-fascism that is wrapped in white supremacy in the name of white Jesus — and we all know white Jesus has been hell for Black people, not to mention this nation. Project 2025 is anti-liberty, it’s anti-justice and it’s something that all of us ought to rise up in rebellion against.”

But the Black Church faces some serious theological impediments to rising up against mass incarceration, the Rev. Dr. Francois, senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., said during the ensuing panel talk.

Among those impediments is an em-

brace in some quarters of theologies of oppression used to rationalize and protect the expansion and crowding of jails and prisons.

“I’m seeing a lot of Billy Graham theology in dashikis,” he said, referring to the traditional West African tunic worn by some African Americans. “And we’re calling that Black Church and Black theology.”

“It’s white theology in blackface,” injected panelist Dr. Andre Johnson, professor of rhetoric and media studies at the University of Memphis.

The Rev. Dr. Francois agreed. “What we call American church, it’s really carceral apologetics,” he said. “There’s a theology that lives underneath why we keep putting Black folk in prison, and Black folk are OK with Black folk going to prison. How do we get to liberation theology or a theological framework that actually allows us to do justice that can’t be co-opted by white nationalism?”

One place to start is in one-on-one interactions with prisoners with the tables turned on the prison minister, Dr. Johnson responded.

“When they are speaking their truth, challenging our presuppositions, we get frustrated because here is someone with a different perspective who can help us grow and develop,” he said. “Maybe we just don’t have all the answers, and maybe we can say that and feel good about that.”

The problem with attacking the mass incarceration system is that the authorities’ efforts to dehumanize and “other” inmates has succeeded in alienating them from a society that, in turn, assumes the worst about them, said Janet Harold, legal director for Justice Catalyst Law.

As a result, few Americans know or care that states like Alabama and

PNBC panel continues on page 27

Touring the International Civil Rights Center & Museum

By Rev. Adrian Bullock



This year, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina's Annual Gathering in Greensboro, N.C., included touring the International Civil Rights Center & Museum. The location is on the site of the F. W. Woolworth's store where the Sit-In Movement began on Feb. 1, 1960, when four N.C. A&T students — David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan) and Joseph McNeil — requested and were refused service at the whites-only lunch counter. The Rev. Adrian Bullock offered this reflection after visiting the location with the CBFNC family.

My first visit to the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro took place when I was a teenager, around 15 or 16 years old. I walked through the doors of the museum that first time feeling as if I already knew so much about the information that was going to be shared because of my upbringing.

I was reared by my maternal grandmother, who was born during the height of Jim Crow segregation. I would often sit with her, listening to the stories of how she had grown up during this period woven into the fabric of American history. Because I was still young and very immature, I did not fully take in everything that I possibly should during my first visit to the Civil Rights Center. Since then, I have been afforded the opportunity for three additional visits, including the special tour offered by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina's Racial Equity & Justice Team during the 2024 Annual Gathering in March.

This time was different. It has been over a decade since I first came to the museum. But this past March, when I first walked through the doors of the building with the sign "Woolworth's" still etched over the doors, I thought about what Elm Street would have looked like back in 1960.

Having lived in a society that killed young children like Emmett Till and rejected students from attending their school based solely on the color of their skin, I wondered, as I entered the very doors that the "North Carolina A&T Four" entered over 60 years before, were their hearts racing? What made them so fearless at a time when you could lose your job just by checking off a box to vote?

When I see their pictures in the lobby of the museum, especially Franklin McCain, I see myself. I think about being a six-foot-tall student walking into another historic Black college, North Carolina Central University in Durham, not necessarily involved in athletics and just trying to grow strong connections with friends. I wonder, if I was put in the same space, would I have been bold enough to do what they did?

After having lunch together in the upper lobby of the building, we toured the museum and saw several artifacts and pictures

that make up the Black culture within American history. As a group, we saw caricatures of Black people with extended lips and worn-out clothing, the gown of a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, the shard of glass from a bombed stained-glass window of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, the unequal prices on Coca-Cola machines for Black and white people, and the wall of martyrs who were killed trying to seek a better life for their children and grandchildren.

After crossing through the hall of lynching and killings, we were able to view the actual place where the Sit-In Movement began. At the end of the visit, we saw a display which showed the different pictures of living and deceased people who gave their lives for freedom around the world.

I was honored to take the tour with so many that I have come to know and love within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina. And in this tour, it was also great to hear the different stories from those on the tour with me who lived during portions of the Civil Rights Movement.

In a real sense, I needed that moment. With the constant movement of life, it was great to pause, not only to remember the sacrifices of people who have gone before me, but to reflect on the similarities of injustice and bigotry that can be seen and viewed even today. As a minister, as a young Black male and a citizen of the United States, this tour reminded me that history is not something that just takes place in the past. Every second of our lives is a part of a constant story that is being created.

On Feb. 1, 1960, those four college freshmen were not trying to make history; they were trying to make life better and use the time they had wisely to make ripples across America. And with the time that I have, what am I going to do to make life better for my future children and others within our world?

Unlike that first tour when I was a teenager, I visited this time with eyes wide open to see where I fit in this continual story. I pray that offerings like this by CBFNC continue as part of our Annual Gathering and our continuing work towards racial equity and justice.

Rev. Adrian Bullock is the Triangle area campus minister for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, which includes the campuses of N.C. State, Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. CBFNC is one of BJC's member bodies, and this article originally appeared in The Gathering, the magazine of CBFNC. It is reprinted here with permission.

BJC in the world

BJC staff members travel the country to share about our work defending and extending religious freedom for all, and we welcome student groups to our office in Washington, D.C., throughout the year. Here are a few recent events — learn how you can invite a speaker to your community or visit our office at BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc or BJCOnline.org/invite-bjc-to-your-community.



BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman spoke about BJC's work at Advocacy in Action in Washington, D.C. This program of the Co-operative Baptist Fellowship brings together CBF staff, ministers and laypeople to engage in advocacy by learning from partner organizations and meeting with lawmakers. Pictured with Hollman in the left photo is the Rev. Jennifer Hawks, who serves as CBF's Director of Advocacy and is the former associate general counsel for BJC.



Photo by Kamal Moon

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler spoke at events held during the two major political parties' national conventions. On the left, she shares about Christian nationalism during a panel organized by the Jewish Democratic Council of America, held in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention. On the right, she speaks about Christian nationalism during an event organized by the Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope, held in Milwaukee during the Republican National Convention.

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, spoke at the inaugural Black Humanist Studies Association Conference, which was a virtual event bringing together scholars from across the country.

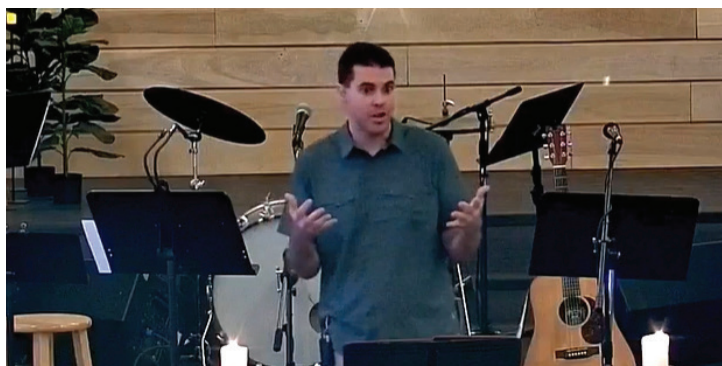
Her presentation was titled “Religious Freedom as a Tool of Black Resilience: Holding Space Between Faith and Unbelief,” and it was part of the session on application beyond the academy.



Lisa Jacob, the North Texas Organizer for the Christians Against Christian Nationalism Campaign, spoke at the Democracy Needs us Now event in August, which offers ways to improve voter turnout and illuminates the growing threats to democracy.

Jacob is pictured in the center of this photo, alongside Amy Ramsey of Defense of Democracy (right) and Rhoda (left), a signer of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement who brought a “Christians Against Christian Nationalism” yard sign that she made herself and which she proudly displays at her home.

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Davis, BJC’s director of development, preached during morning worship at Violet Crown City Church in Austin, Texas, in September. His sermon looked at how to address conflict when the nature of the conflict is religious, and he talked about the dangerous influence of Christian nationalism. He spoke as part of the church’s sermon series on neighbors, looking at how Jesus invites us to consider who is our neighbor and how we love them during a divisive time in our nation.



BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler attended the annual meeting of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, held in New Orleans (see page 22 for a story on the event). She is pictured here with the Rev. Dr. David Peoples, president of PNBC and pastor of Jabez Missionary Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky.

During the opening night session, Tyler brought greetings and thanked PNBC for their continued partnership and leadership in the work for justice. “We come to this work because of our shared commitment to religious freedom for all people,” Tyler said.

Davis joins BJC as director of development

REV. DR. JONATHAN DAVIS

is the director of development at BJC, leading all of our fund-raising and donor stewardship activities.

Ordained in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Rev. Dr. Davis joined BJC after serving as the associate vice president of communications and chief information officer at the Jesse C. Fletcher Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. He helped the seminary develop sustainable funding in partnership with churches and networks from more than ten denominational groups. He previously served in parish ministry for 20 years.

The Rev. Dr. Davis is the author of multiple books, including *Sea Change: Equipping Rural Churches for the Tides of Cultural Upheaval*, which explores how postmodernity has impacted rural faith communities in North America, including the rise of Christian nationalism.

He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Logsdon Seminary at Hardin-Simmons University, and he earned a Master of Divinity degree from the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. A graduate of Howard Payne University, he majored in Communications Studies.

Originally from Houston, he now resides in Georgetown, Texas, with his spouse, Audrey, and their three children. His family belongs to Peace of Christ Church in Round Rock, Texas, where he previously served as the interim pastor of worship and preaching. You can contact him at jdavis@BJCOnline.org.



New callings for departing staff members

BJC said goodbye to some of our colleagues this summer as they moved to new adventures and positions. Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, who served as BJC's Director of Communications, left to start a new position as Senior Director of Policy & Advocacy at Interfaith Alliance, which has been and continues to be a close partner with BJC. Former BJC Executive Director Brent Walker completed his service as our interim development director after onboarding the Rev. Dr. Davis (see above) and returned to retirement. Julia Bradley, who worked as Donor Database Coordinator, left BJC to start a graduate school program. Georgia McKee, who served as a BJC intern and then in a part-time capacity as Digital Communications Associate while attending the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, left BJC and began the pastoral residency program at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. We celebrate these new positions and callings!

Barrack joins BJC in operations role

SARA BARRACK is the operations manager at BJC, providing administrative support for BJC's educational and advocacy programs.

Prior to joining BJC, she served as assistant director of Jewish life at Sixth & I in Washington, D.C. She previously served as leadership development manager at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Originally from New Jersey, Barrack is a graduate of The George Washington University, and she works out of our Capitol Hill office. You can contact her at sbarrack@BJCOnline.org.



Rice joins BJC as digital strategist

REV. DR. DAVID RICE is BJC's digital strategist, leading online engagement for the organization and its Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

Ordained in the American Baptist Churches USA, the Rev. Dr. Rice previously served in rural parish ministry and started his own communications consulting firm.

He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree in missiology and organizational leadership from Western Theological Seminary and a Master of Divinity degree from the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. His undergraduate degree is from Huntington University, where he studied youth ministry and Bible.

The Rev. Dr. Rice lives in Michigan with his family. You can contact him at drice@BJCOnline.org.



We're hiring!

Interested in joining the BJC team? We are currently hiring for roles in our communications department, development department and legal department.

Visit BJCOnline.org/bjcjobs

for details about the positions, and share them with anyone who might be a good fit!

Meet BJC's fall interns

SERA GUERRY, from Charleston, S.C., is a graduate of Wofford College, earning a bachelor's degree in Religion. She has experience working in education, both in higher education at Wofford in Spartanburg, S.C., as well as in elementary and secondary education in Athens, Ga.

The daughter of Amy Gordon Guerry, she is an aunt, sister, and transgender woman. Guerry plans to attend graduate school in religious studies and pursue a career in the academia and advocacy spaces.



ELLA JOHNSON, from Fort Collins, Colo., is a graduate of Texas Christian University, earning both a bachelor's degree in Religion and a bachelor's degree in Political Science. Her previous experience includes internships with Refugee Services of Texas - Fort Worth, Tarrant County's 4th Justice of the Peace Court in Texas, and the Boys and Girls Club of Larimer County in Colorado. Johnson also worked as a summer site director for Be The Neighbor, a justice-centered service learning trip organization that equips youth and adults to live lives of love, service and justice.

The daughter of Joann and Tim Johnson, she grew up in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination and is currently a member at both Heart of the Rockies Christian Church in Fort Collins and Galileo Church in Fort Worth. Johnson plans to continue working in youth ministry and pursue a Master of Divinity degree.



NATALIE JOHNSON-ABBOTT, from Fredericksburg, Va., is a graduate of the University of Mary Washington, earning a bachelor's degree in Political Science. After 15 years in hospitality management, she is settling into nonprofit work and plans to begin graduate school to study public policy next fall.

A proud wife and mother in her blended family of six, she is the daughter of Edmond and Detra Johnson and the youngest of five children. Johnson-Abbott plans to continue working in the nonprofit world and contribute to research related to the root causes and far-reaching effects of Christian nationalism.



New lawsuit challenges Johnson Amendment

In August, the National Religious Broadcasters and two Texas churches filed a lawsuit seeking to remove the portion of the tax code known as the "Johnson Amendment," which includes rules for nonprofits that want to claim the most-favored 501(c)(3) tax status. The plaintiffs say they are "constrained from speaking freely about political candidates by the Johnson Amendment and by the arbitrary and capricious interpretation and enforcement by the IRS."

This lawsuit is the latest attempt to remove the protections of the Johnson Amendment, a part of the tax code that protects houses of worship and other 501(c)(3) nonprofits from political pressure and additional dangers that come with endorsing and opposing candidates. The Johnson Amendment does allow all 501(c)(3) organizations to speak out on political issues; if a nonprofit organization wants to endorse a candidate, it is free to do so as long as it gives up that special tax status.

BJC was one of more than 100 religious groups that urged Congress not to weaken the Johnson Amendment when it was targeted throughout 2017. Surveys do not show widespread support for churches and other houses of worship to endorse candidates; in fact, in 2017, more than 4,500 faith leaders from all 50 states and more than 5,500 nonprofit leaders urged Congress to keep the Johnson Amendment.

In February 2017, President Donald Trump said he would "totally destroy" the Johnson Amendment. He issued an Executive Order in May 2017 to limit enforcement, but tax law can only be changed by Congress. In the final stages of negotiations over a tax bill in December 2017, the Senate parliamentarian ruled that language undermining the "Johnson Amendment" would violate the Byrd rule and therefore should be kept out of the final tax bill. In early 2018, BJC successfully joined with others to push lawmakers to keep the Johnson Amendment intact in debates over other spending bills.

For more on this issue, including guides for nonprofits, visit BJCOnline.org/JohnsonAmendment.

—Cherilyn Crowe Guy, BJC Content Strategy Director

PNBC panel continued from page 22

Louisiana have created systems of prison day labor in which inmates work for little or nothing outside the walls of the penitentiary, often in lieu of parole, she charged.

Justice Catalyst Law is part of a lawsuit against the practice in those states. "Part of the systemic change is increasing the amount of contact, because there's so much we don't know because we bought the thing that was sold, which is that we are 'we' and they are 'other,'" Harold said.

Another important step comes when inmates are released, Dr. Johnson added. "It starts with denouncing the rhetoric that they are not worthy and embracing them and working on what it is we can do to accept and embrace who they are as human beings."

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Suite 301
Washington, D.C. 20002

202.544.4226

BJC@BJCOnline.org

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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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National Baptist Convention of America

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North American Baptist Conference

Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.

Religious Liberty Council

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cherilyn Crowe Guy EDITOR

MORE FROM BJC



Saying 'no' to Bible-based curriculum

Texans came to the state capital to make their concerns known about a troubling proposal by the State Board of Education. Read more on pages 16-17.



Meet our newest BJC Fellows

Hear from the young professionals who joined us this summer in Colonial Williamsburg on pages 6-10.