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REPORT from the Capital

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♦ Capital Campaign Update ♦

Help secure religious liberty for the next generation

We have received almost \$2 million (75 percent) of the \$2.6 million pledged to our campaign for the Center for Religious Liberty. Thank you for continuing to honor your pledges!

The campaign is far from over. With 281 pledges paid in full and 123 pledges in process (see graph), the total pledged amount is just over 50 percent of our \$5 million goal.

We are confident that, with your help, the Center for Religious Liberty can become a reality.

The BJC is uniquely poised within the religious community to deliver the message that the preservation of the separation of church and state is the best way to achieve religious liberty. The Center's state-of-the-art communication tools will enhance the BJC's ability to influence and educate our member bodies and other like-minded groups.

Videoconferencing and the use of

enhanced web technology will allow the BJC to be more places at once and will allow more individuals to be "on the Hill" without being on the Hill.

Join the campaign for the Center for Religious Liberty today and have a hand in securing religious liberty for tomorrow.

Partners in Giving

We invite you to become a

Partner in Giving by establishing an automatic monthly gift to the BJC on your credit card. Partners provide income that the BJC can count on for ongoing budget needs and are given the opportunity to help sustain the BJC as we work to secure religious liberty. Simply call or e-mail us or go online to www.BJConline.org to make a credit card gift. If you wish to set up an automatic monthly credit card gift, simply tell us so on the online form.



Our Challenge—Their Future

Securing religious liberty for our children and grandchildren



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REPORT

from the Capital

Broad U.S. religious marketplace spurs conversion, study suggests

WASHINGTON — A massive, groundbreaking new study of the American religious landscape shows that Protestants are losing their share of the nation's population — and that the nation's broad religious diversity is paired with great religious dynamism.

The Pew Form on Religion & Public Life released the "American Religious Landscape Survey 2007" Feb. 25. The study — the first in recent years to combine a huge sample size with in-depth questioning on Americans' religious affiliations — showed that 28 percent of adult respondents have left the faith of their childhood for another religious tradition or no religion at all. When those who have moved from one Protestant denomination to another are included, the figure leaps to 44 percent of adults.

"Everybody in this country is losing members, everybody is gaining members, even though There are some net winners and some net losers," said Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum, in a conference call with reporters announcing the survey results. "It's a very competitive marketplace, so if you rest on your laurels, you're going to be history."

The study involved the questioning of more than 35,000 respondents throughout the continental United States. Among its most striking findings is that Protestants now comprise a slim majority — 51 percent — of U.S. adults. As recently as the 1980s, similar surveys showed that Protestants comprised nearly two-thirds of the population.

It also showed that the Roman

Catholic Church, through immigration, has maintained the share of adults — about 24 percent of the population — that past studies have shown. However, Catholic numbers have been boosted by massive immigration by Latinos, the vast majority of whom are Catholic, in recent years. Native-born Catholics are converting to Protestantism, changing religions or leaving organized religion in significant numbers.



The study showed that evangelical

Protestants, at 26 percent of the adult population, outnumber both their mainline Protestant and Catholic brothers and sisters.

Mainline Protestants, meanwhile, continue to lose their status as the closest thing to an established religious group that the United States has ever had. The study showed that Protestants affiliated with traditionally white, moderate-to-progressive denominations (such as the United Methodist Church and the American Baptist Churches USA) comprise only 18 percent of U.S. adults.

The decline in Protestantism owes to several factors, including conversion, immigration and declining birthrates, said John Green, a Pew Forum scholar and expert on evangelicals in America.

But the decline could mark the beginning of a profound change in American culture, he noted.

"So much of the values and institutions in American life came out of Protestantism, particularly mainline Protestantism," Green said.

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Controversial Iowa prisoner rehabilitation program to end

WASHINGTON — A faith-based prisoner rehabilitation program in Iowa that was the subject of a court case will end this spring.

Prison Fellowship President Mark Earley said the Iowa Department of Corrections informed his Virginia-based ministry that the InnerChange Freedom Initiative program at the prison in Newton, Iowa, would conclude following the graduation of many of the program participants.

Earley said the action was expected because the ministry's current contract with the prison system ends in June.

"They requested and required the stipulation that we take no more prisoners into the program during this coming year," Earley said Feb. 27.

Fred Scaletta, a spokesman for the Iowa Department of Corrections, said the prison system decided the program would end when the number of its participants dropped to less than 60, which

will occur after a March 14 graduation of about two dozen people.

Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State had sued the program, saying it should not receive government funds because it is "pervasively religious." In 2006, a federal judge agreed and ordered the program to repay more than \$1.5 million the program had received since it began its relationship with the corrections department in 1999.

An appeals court later upheld that decision but lowered the amount InnerChange had to return to the state.

In light of the court action, a \$310,000 state appropriation to the program, which housed inmates in a separate unit, was halted as of July 1. Earley said InnerChange returned almost \$200,000 to Iowa and relies on private funding, not government money, for its nine programs in several states.

— RNS



CONVERSION continued from page 1

He also noted that the term "Protestant" in the United States

covers such a dizzying array of denominational groups, independent congregations, doctrinal outlooks and political perspectives as to render it almost meaningless.

"Protestantism is not just losing influence as a whole, but it is losing influence because of its divisions internally," he said.

Baptists — including those the survey counted as evangelicals and those counted as mainline or in a separate category for historically African-American denominations — have not been immune to the tendency of Americans to switch faiths.

While 21 percent of adults said they were raised Baptist, only 17 percent of the population are currently members of Baptist churches, the survey found. A full eight percent of those surveyed said they were raised Baptist but no longer identify as such.

Baptists, however, fared better than Catholics.

Religious marketplace spurs conversion

Approximately 32 percent of respondents who said they

were raised Catholic have left for another faith or none at all.

The biggest gainers from the religious flux appear to be the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated. The survey found that more than 16 percent of adults are not affiliated with any particular faith or local congregation. Surveys in the past generally showed an unaffiliated figure of less than 10 percent.

However, the survey did not show an increase over similar polls in the percentage of the population who consider themselves atheist or agnostic. Only four percent of respondents said they believe that God does not exist or that there may be a supreme being who does not intervene in human affairs. Another 12 percent said they have no religious affiliation in particular, but a majority of those said religion is important in their lives nonetheless.

— ABP



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

Navigating our diverse religious landscape

The recent Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life's survey on the U.S. religious landscape gives empirical support for what we have long known or at least suspected: religion in America is both diverse and dynamic, and many of our fellow citizens claim no religious affiliation at all.

The survey results invite the Baptist Joint Committee to re-examine its mission and its strategy for accomplishing it. For example, should we embrace our "Baptistness," as our mission statement requires, or should we distance ourselves from our denominational moorings? How best can we articulate the importance of religious liberty in a culture suspicious of denominational labels and a population that moves easily from one religious expression to another, or none?

The survey, first, confirms widespread religious pluralism. To be sure, Christianity still comprises the majority — some 78.4 percent claim to be Christians. But that number devolves into a variety of expressions: evangelicals, mainline Protestant, historically African-American, Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox and others. Only 4.7 percent claim "other religions," but that still reflects millions of Americans. All told, the religious landscape reflects more than 200 faith traditions.

The survey also shows an unprecedented fluidity. Some 44 percent of the surveyed participants report they no longer embrace the religion or denomination of their childhood. Some have switched religions or denominational preferences, and many reflect a "post-denominational" attitude that abjures entirely sectarian labels. Many point to the 2006 election of Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., a Muslim who took his oath of office on the Quran instead of the Bible as evidence of our embrace of pluralism. But not many know that Rep. Ellison is a former Catholic who converted to Islam in college.

Further, some 16.1 percent are categorized as "unaffiliated." These account for atheists (1.6 percent), agnostics (2.4 percent), and so-called "nones" (12.1 percent) who embrace "nothing in particular." These nones reflect varying degrees of religiosity: about half lean toward secularism (6.3 percent) and the rest (5.8 percent) toward some ill-defined, generic faith commitment.

These findings present the Baptist Joint Committee with both challenges and opportunities in how we craft our message about religious freedom and the

importance of church-state separation to ensure it. First of all, ever increasing pluralism demands even greater attention to the rights of minorities. In the infamous case of *Employment Division vs. Smith* (1990), Justice Scalia opined that accommodating this kind of pluralism would be to court "anarchy." That is, with so many religious traditions in contemporary America it is impossible to assiduously protect the rights of all. I think Justice Scalia is flat wrong; just the opposite is true. The very fact that we are not all of one mind demands a redoubling of efforts to make sure all Americans are protected in their religious belief. It may be messy, inconvenient and, at times, difficult. But, as James Dunn often says, if anyone's religious liberty is denied, everyone's is threatened.

Second, the constantly shifting sands of our religious landscape may indicate that people simply do not care about religion or that their religious commitment is superficial. It may also mean, however, that they are sincere seekers looking for a more meaningful expression of faith. Is this, then, a teachable moment? I think it might be. Now is precisely the time to hold up Baptist distinctives such as soul freedom, the vitality of voluntary religion, and the inviolability of the rights of conscience. Now is not the time — post-denominational age or not — to run from our Baptistness, but the time to affirm it.

The Baptist label is not sacrosanct, in and of itself. But what we stand for as Baptists — particularly our commitment to religious liberty for all — may well encounter receptive ears among our countrymen. Indeed, many of these seekers are landing in Baptist churches for reasons having nothing to do with our heritage of freedom. They need to be taught about the rich tradition of their new family of faith.

Third, the fact that so many claim to be "unaffiliated" or are not religious at all is a stark reminder that freedom of religion also entails freedom from religion — at least state-sponsored religion. Yes, the United States is one of the most religious and religiously diverse nations on the planet. But, we should always keep in mind that a sizeable percentage of Americans must be extended the right to reject any religion at all without compromising their standing as good citizens.

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"It is a time to proclaim a belief that, while we may disagree with others' religious choices, we still respect their soul freedom enough to allow them to make those decisions."

BY DAVID GUSHEE

Last summer I completed a book arguing that an evangelical center is emerging in American life and that it shows signs of displacing the vaunted but fading “Christian right” in the hearts and minds of American evangelicals — especially among younger and non-white Christian believers. Events occurring during this presidential campaign demonstrate this is happening already.

The factual argument of my book, *The Future of Faith in American Politics*, is that the American evangelical community shares core Christian beliefs but does not (and never did) exhibit political consensus. I argue that besides the widely recognized evangelical right, symbolized by figures such as James Dobson and the late Jerry Falwell, and the evangelical left, symbolized by activists such as Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo, today there is emerging a visible and increasingly powerful evangelical center, whose most influential figures are probably the megachurch pastor Rick Warren and the lobbyist Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals. My book names dozens of figures who can be placed in the various camps.

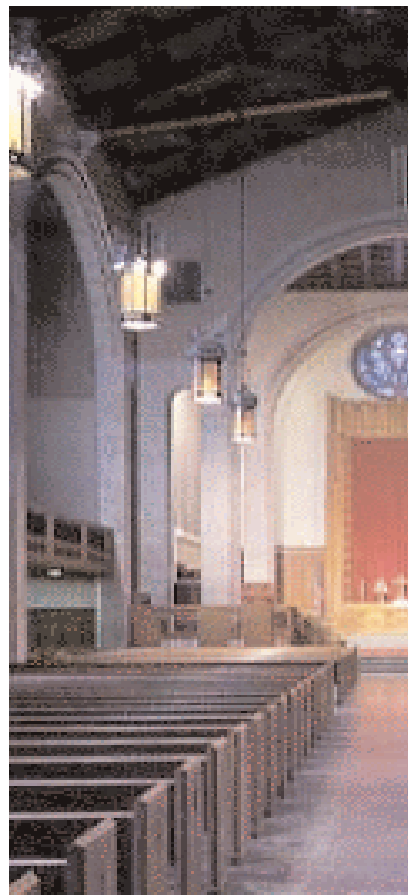
The evangelical center shares with the right its deep opposition to abortion, concern about the decline of marriage and the eroding well-being of children in our society, worries about the moral content of mass media, and rejection of the morality of sex outside of heterosexual marriage. It rejects, however, the right’s entanglement with and loyalty to the Republican Party, its relatively narrow focus on issues primarily related to sexuality, and its mood of angry nostalgia and aggrieved entitlement about the Christian role in American society.

The evangelical center, in turn, shares with the evangelical left a strong emphasis on the plight of the poor, attention to racism as a moral and policy issue, opposition to the routine resort to war by the United States, a high priority to creation care and acceptance

of the seriousness of climate change, commitment to finding a humane solution to the immigration issue, and conviction that human rights commitments require wholehearted opposition to torture in the U.S. war on terror. It tends to differ from the left in its more careful commitment to political independence, its stronger and more thorough attention to issues of abortion, family, and sexuality, and its willingness to support the moral legitimacy of some (though not all) U.S. military actions.

In some ways, the towering presence of the evangelical right has made it difficult until recently for any kind of alternative voices to gain a broad cultural hearing. For many, the word “evangelical” has equaled “Christian right.” For just as long as there has been an evangelical right (about 35 years), a small and largely ignored evangelical left has sought to carve out an alternative. Now it is time for all cultural observers to acknowledge that the evangelical political landscape is fragmented

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Emerging Evangelical Center Will Decide Election



along right/center/left lines — just like, for example, Catholics, females and Hispanics.

Polling data already available when I wrote the book led me to argue that non-white evangelicals and younger evangelicals definitely skewed in a centrist or more liberal direction overall than did older white evangelicals. This led me to project that generational change and increasing demographic diversity among the evangelical population in the United States would lead to the emergence of a strong and visible evangelical center, a more muscular evangelical left, and in some cases a center-left coalition representing half or more of American evangelicals.

These days everyone is talking about the presidential campaign and especially how evan-

gelical voting behavior has been evolving. Though there is a long journey awaiting us between now and November, outcomes so far seem to confirm at least parts of the argument I am proposing.

On the Republican side, the evangelical right was unable to coalesce around a candidate who reflected their classic positions. Perhaps the closest ones were the long-forgotten Sam Brownback and Alan Keyes. Only now is the evangelical right showing signs of closing rank around Mike Huckabee as an alternative to John McCain. But it was a long time coming, and this was no doubt because the pre-2008 Huckabee record exhibited centrist or progressive strains on such issues as immigration, the death penalty, and economic inequality. Even during the campaign, he has made what are to centrists promising comments about issues such as climate change and ending torture. As it stands, the two remaining Republican candidates reflect at least a number of commitments that point toward the center rather than the right, much to the frustration of the right.

Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both offer policy stances rooted in moral commitments sometimes openly traced to Christian values. Their positions on such issues as torture, poverty, health care, immigration, war and climate reflect stances held by both the evangelical center and left. To the extent that either or both offer clear statements on the moral tragedy of abortion and concrete policies to reduce the number of abortions, they may well succeed in gaining the support of many centrist evangelical voters who are genuine independents and could consider supporting a candidate of either party. It is not clear whether the homosexuality issue will prove as salient to evangelicals, especially centrists, as it did in 2004.

It is quite possible that the votes of centrist evangelicals — perhaps representing as many as one-third of our nation's massive evangelical community — will decide the election this fall.

I believe that the emerging evangelical center represents a maturing of the Christian public voice in American life. This is a more peaceable, forward-looking, holistic and independent approach to politics than what has come to carry the evangelical label. Its emergence is good for our nation and for evangelicals. Centrist evangelicals bear watching in this election and beyond.

Note: This piece was written before Gov. Mike Huckabee dropped out of the race on March 4.

Religious Liberty, Legacies & Liabilities

By Jeffrey Haggray

The cherished Baptist legacy of religious liberty and separation of church and state is well-established. So too is the need to preserve and defend these values for all people for the future. Some of the practical challenges we face in defending religious freedom, however, stem directly from other prominent strands within our tradition.

First, we have a tradition of “prophetic preaching.” Baptists defend a “free pulpit” and claim the right and responsibility to “speak truth to power,” which often leads to political activism. Yet some political activism, particularly involvement in the electoral process, can potentially compromise our stance on separation and give rise to liability. Second, the possibility of government funding of social services provided by churches is a strong area of temptation for Baptist congregations owing largely to our “missional” tradition. Third, respecting religious diversity and upholding the freedom to not practice religion within our pluralistic society is a potential area of liability for Baptists because of our “evangelical” nature.

Although each of these strands — prophetic, missional, and evangelical — exists throughout Christendom, they are particularly evident, and at times strident, among Baptists. These noble features of our faith can potentially give rise to conflict or compromise with our historic regard for religious liberty and the separation of church and state. If we are to continue to be protectors of religious freedom, we must be mindful of the risks and vigilant about respecting appropriate boundaries. As we acknowledge the risks, we should look for best practices for defending our liberties and avoiding liabilities.

First, the prophetic preaching strand is deeply rooted within the Baptist Experience. Baptists cannot resist a fleeting mention of Roger Williams on Religious Liberty, Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* or Martin Luther

King Jr.’s *Stride Toward Freedom* and *Why We Can’t Wait*. Their writings constitute a framework within the Free Church for the Free Pulpit that challenges injustice and the status quo and speaks on behalf of the least of these. Baptists expect to be moved from pulpits and pews to engagement with the powers that be for the enactment of real change.

We only need to say the words “Civil Rights Movement” and we are reminded of prominent Baptist prophets, such as Ralph Abernathy, Martin King, C.T. Vivian, Otis Moss, John Lewis, Jesse Jackson, Fred Shuttlesworth, and an endless list of personalities who created so much fire in the pulpit that they were forced to carry their message of justice from the church house into the streets. You remember the commands of the Southern sheriffs to the freedom fighters: “Now you all return to your homes or to your churches.”

Thank God, they did not willingly heed those commands, but fought for voting rights and against segregated lunch counters and separate, unequal schools. A prophetic pulpit challenged corrupted elected officials to do the right thing and challenged good people to answer the call to public service. It became clear that some clergy themselves would make suitable candidates for public and elected office. After all, they possessed qualities important to political success, such as integrity, strong character, critical thinking skills, gifts for compelling oratory, and the ability to influence people. With these skills, they could raise money, register voters, and hold their own in the face of adamant political opposition. In the early days of African-American engagement in the political process, the question for the church was not simply “whether or not to endorse candidates” but whether “preachers themselves” should run for elected office. This question was largely disposed of within African-American sectors by concluding, “Let the best qualified person run and win” even if that happens to be the preacher. Thus, the prophetic strand within the Baptist tradition easily gives rise to activism, and pushes toward involvement in the electoral process, also known as electioneering.

Risk: What is at stake when churches engage in electioneering?

What is most frequently cited is the risk of losing our tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). Under this code, religious organizations are free to preach and speak on moral issues, including policy issues, and to advocate for justice, with few limitations. They are not free to engage in purely political activity, such as endorsing candidates, without risking their tax-exempt status. The IRS has stepped up enforcement regarding churches and other tax-exempt organizations, creating a huge need for education of churches in this regard.

A greater concern for churches, however, ought to be protecting unity within the church community and upholding our integrity as the faith community. There will always be differences within congregations over candidates. When the pulpit takes it upon itself to choose a candidate for the entire congregation, it threatens to undermine the freedom it cherishes. Sacred

space where people are free to decide according to conscience gets turned into secular space that becomes suspect as to its judgment, integrity, and motives. Over time, the prophetic influence of the Church diminishes because its political preferences obscure its concerns for justice, equality, and fairness for all people.

Political endorsements also threaten the viability of our causes and our influence. We can insist upon accountability, integrity, honesty, and conviction from politicians, but we cannot insure them. When we align our credibility and influence with a particular candidate or party unequivocally, we potentially subject ourselves to the consequences of their political futures, good and bad. Ultimately, our credibility and influence are more important than any one endorsement.

Best practices that fit within the prophetic tradition but also can keep a church above reproach:

1. Provide teaching and training that help the faithful to translate values and beliefs into concrete policy formulations. Many concerns that resonate with Christians in a prophetic tradition are appropriate for policy discussion and activism:

- * Equal access to quality education
- * Equal access to quality health care for all people
- * Overloaded prison systems and the absence of rehabilitation
- * Unfairness in the employment industry
- * Unfairness in the housing industry
- * Police brutality and unequal justice in the courts

2. Partner with other churches to provide weekday forums where all candidates are invited to address the concerns that are important to your faith community. Tell them what you care about, not only from a values perspective, but from a policy-making perspective. Leave it to individuals to ask their own questions and formulate their own opinion about the best candidate to address their concerns.

3. Provide forums on citizenship combined with voter registration drives. It is important that we help people understand that the right to vote was obtained through blood, sweat, tears, and toil, and that the protection of our religious liberty is intertwined with exercising our civic duty. We cannot expect others to defend our religious liberties if we don't exercise our civic duties. Churches can — in non-partisan ways — provide mechanisms that raise awareness about the importance of exercising our civic duties. If the town clerk or voting clerk won't bring voter registration forms to the church, then take church members to the voting clerk's office.

4. Youth groups can teach teenagers who are approaching voter eligibility the importance of registering. Youth groups can also hold mock debates and mock elections where Christian youths debate public policies and talk about how to improve the quality of life for all people utilizing the political process. This can be done without promoting a particular

party or candidate.

5. Refrain from endorsing candidates. Yours is to cast a vision, and let the people cast the vote.

6. Encourage your members to remain active and involved in the civic process outside the election season, utilizing town hall meetings, city council hearings, neighborhood action meetings and school board meetings. It is naïve to think that we are fully exercising our moral influence by simply getting involved in the electoral process, without participating in the ongoing civic process.

Baptists also have a strong missional strand, which leads us to the field of service to help those in need. Our emphasis this week on Luke 4 reflects our commitment to furthering the mission of Jesus with good news for the poor. We are concerned to translate the good religion of our heads and hearts to our hands and feet. We believe that true religion demonstrates concern for the widowed and the orphaned; we recognize that human needs have reached monumental proportions.

Thus, our missional nature renders us susceptible to compromising our convictions regarding the separation of church and state in the area of funding services that are important to us. In recent years, there has been a growing policy emphasis on government funding of social services and programs provided by religious organizations. We recognize that times have changes from when various ministries of Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Catholics and others worked side by side to supplement the services provided by local government to provided an adequate safety net.

Today we see many needs going unmet. Ironically, government resources have been on the decline at the same time that the public need has been on the rise. Many people feel that the reduction of social services in this period is reproachful when you consider America's wealth. One of the tactics of our government has been to appeal to people of faith to take on more responsibility to meet needs.

Though the heart and will of the faith communities is in addressing social needs, churches do not have resources to meet all the needs. Federal, state, and local governments have appealed to the faith community, corporate community, foundation community, and people of good will to accept a larger share of the responsibility for providing social services with the caveat that the government will shift financial resources from government agencies to not-for-profit agencies that will provide these services, and that will include organizations that are religious in nature, or faith-based organizations.

One doesn't have to impugn the motivations and integrity of charitable organizations to recognize the lure of applying for resources that assist them in accomplishing their mission. I happen to be very sympathetic to those agencies that are doing good works, and who could do more good works if they had adequate resources to pursue their mission. However, there are compelling reasons for churches to be very cautious about soliciting government dollars to fund their social services.

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What are the risks of government funding for the social service ministries of churches?

Churches might inadvertently promote a political and social agenda of the funders that is not their own agenda. Some suspect there is a political agenda underway to under-fund or de-fund government-funded social services that are greatly needed in the public sector. The decisions to de-fund social services represent a political agenda, which many churches do not support. What may follow from funding for faith-based services is the privatization of social services including family services, social services for various types of health related and social needs, welfare assistance, and public education.

Government funding of faith-based social services potentially leads to discriminatory practices either in providing services or hiring. Citizens should be able to access needed services from their government without being required to interact with a house of worship or a set of religious beliefs that they are not interested in. Faith-based entities tend to exercise certain preferences in their hiring practices that may not be warranted with government money.

Government funding for faith-based services threatens to undermine the prophetic influence and the freedom of religious organizations by limiting their capacity to freely declare their beliefs and convictions, or to practice those interventions that are rooted in faith which they claim are the source of their success, such as prayer, Bible study, worship attendance, listening to sermons, etc. Likewise, many church-based programs also advocate for the needs of the poor and the underserved, which entails challenging government. However, that freedom can be severely limited when the government is the funder: "Whoever funds you will seek to run you!"

Best practices for a missional church cooperating with government:

- 1) Work with existing or create a separate community development corporation with its own 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status if you are considering applying for government funds. Establish a mission for the organization that does not have a religious objective or motive.
- 2) Form a separate board to manage such an entity with its own executive director, not the pastor of the church. Ideally select some directors for the board that are drawn from the community, and who have no affiliation with the church to help insure impartiality.
- 3) Separate the funds of the nonprofit from the Church's funds. Absolutely no co-mingling of the funds.
- 4) Establish firm anti-discrimination policies with respect to hiring and service provision.
- 5) Create high quality accountability structures for treasurers and bookkeepers that are responsible to the Corporation, not to the Church, and hire quality assurance officers.
- 6) Make a firm commitment to serving all people in your community who are in need of service regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, lifestyle choices, sexual preferences or physical handicaps.

7) Hire adequate personnel that are trained and certified to provide the services you are offering.

8) Space used for religious services and social programs should be separated if at all possible.

Third, Baptists have a strong evangelical strand that challenges our commitment to liberty for all. Our evangelical nature prompts us to believe that we have an obligation to declare to the world that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of the World. We believe that we own the whole truth about God in the story of Jesus, and that we've got to tell it, no matter what others think or believe. Some are even willing to be jailed to defend the right to proclaim the Good News.

The strong convictions of Christians with regard to evangelism can potentially lead to a serious conflict with another value we hold as Baptists and as Americans, namely religious liberty. The freedom to practice our religion without coercion, interference from the state, or without having that religion sponsored by the state is not a "right" belonging only to Christian Americans, but it is a "right" belonging to all people in America, whatever their religious identity happens to be. Also, in America, persons who don't identify with or observe any religion have a right to do so, no matter how enthusiastic Christians are about the Good News of Jesus.

What are the risks related to our evangelical zeal?

Our evangelical zeal at times may lead us to disregard the religious liberty of non-Christians. We may overlook or fail to recognize that many Americans do not share our enthusiasm about prayer in the public square, prayer in public schools, support for Christian candidates for elective office and support for religious entities involved in providing government services. We may even find we act out of bias and discrimination in secular arenas where preferences should not be granted for religious purposes.

Best practices:

- 1) Publicly affirm respect and support for religious freedom of diverse groups from our pulpits and during public ceremonies.
- 2) Teach our parishioners that all persons in our society have a God-given right to freely choose and exercise their faith, even though it differs from our own.
- 3) Firmly reject hatred and fear of other religions.
- 4) Intentionally practice hospitality to persons of other faiths without having "winning them to Jesus" as our objective.
- 5) Participate in interfaith activities in your community to help foster increased understanding of different faith traditions and cultures.
- 6) Oppose public policies and legislation in your localities that are designed to suppress minority religious practices or traditions that are represented in your community.

Jeffrey Haggray is executive director/minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and a BJC board member. This article was adapted from his presentation, which covered the best practices for ministries, at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in January.

Obama speech to denomination spurs IRS investigation of UCC

WASHINGTON — A speech that Barack Obama made last year to his fellow Congregationalists has spurred an Internal Revenue Service investigation that threatens the tax-exempt status of an entire denomination.

Leaders of the Illinois senator's United Church of Christ are fighting back, saying the IRS charges are baseless and "disturbing."

In a letter dated Feb. 20 and received by church officials Feb. 25, IRS official Marsha Ramirez said "a reasonable belief exists" that the denomination violated federal law. Churches and other nonprofit groups organized under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code are barred from endorsing or opposing candidates and political parties.

The UCC is generally considered the nation's most liberal large Protestant body. Obama has been an active member of Trinity United Church of Christ in

Chicago for more than two decades. Trinity is the UCC's largest congregation.

In the IRS letter, Ramirez said the agency's concerns "are based on articles posted on several websites" that described Obama's June 23 appearance at the UCC's biennial General Synod meeting in Hartford, Conn. The senator — by then an announced Democratic candidate for president — spoke to about 10,000 church members, according to the denomination and news accounts.

But UCC officials said they took pains to ensure that the speech was not perceived as a campaign event or an endorsement of the candidate.

Obama was invited "as one of 60 diverse speakers representing the arts, media, academia, science, technology, business and government. Each was asked to reflect on the intersection of their faith and their respective vocations or fields of expertise," a UCC news release said. It also said church officials invited Obama as a church member rather than in his capacity as a candidate and said they asked him to speak a year before he declared his intention to run for higher office.

"The United Church of Christ took great care to ensure that Sen. Obama's appearance before the ... General Synod met appropriate legal and moral standards," UCC General Minister John Thomas said in the news release. "We are confident that the IRS investigation will confirm that no laws were violated."

Prior to the speech, a church official told the crowd that the appearance was not intended to be a campaign event and that campaign-related material and other forms of electioneering would not be allowed inside the event venue.

The IRS letter claimed that "40 Obama volunteers staffed campaign tables outside" the Hartford Civic Center, where the event was held. But church officials said they barred any campaigning inside the venue.

Thomas said that, while he believes the investigation will ultimately acquit the denomination, he nonetheless is concerned about its effect.

"The very fact of [the investigation's existence] is disturbing," Thomas said. "When the invitation to an elected public official to speak to the national meeting of his own church family is called into question, it has a chilling

effect on every religious community that seeks to encourage politicians and church members to thoughtfully relate their personal faith to their public responsibilities."

IRS officials do not discuss such investigations with the press because tax information is private. But several ministries and local congregations have been warned and investigated in recent years for electioneering.

The agency is currently investigating Southern Baptist pastor Wiley Drake for using church letterhead and a church-sponsored radio show to endorse Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.

Last year, the IRS ended an investigation without any sanctions against All Saints' Episcopal Church in Pasadena, Calif. It had been under investigation for a guest sermon its former rector had given just before the 2004 presidential election. In it, he strongly criticized the war in Iraq but said he believed that both President Bush and his Democratic opponent, Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, were good Christians.

IRS officials contended that the sermon amounted to an endorsement of Kerry over Bush. The church contested the charge. In a September letter to the congregation announcing that it was ending its investigation without penalty, IRS officials said they continued to believe the church had illegally intervened in the election.

—ABP





K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Watch out, there is a candidate in my church!

I get the bulk of my news by radio on my commute to work. Lately, there has been a larger than usual correlation between what I hear on my way to work and what I do when I get there. News reports of presidential candidates speaking to religious audiences, and particularly from the pulpit, are rampant. Callers want to know why it is happening and what is being done about it.

Based on the biographies of this crop of candidates (from both parties), it may be natural that they would be comfortable framing political priorities in faith language and speaking in houses of worship. Still, the practice of politicians filling pulpits during campaign season raises good questions that should be considered carefully if churches are to avoid pitfalls.

There are legal issues, though they are not insurmountable. Houses of worship, like other nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, are prohibited from intervening in campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office. In short, such entities, which receive favorable tax treatment, including receipt of tax-

deductible donations, should not be used to tell people how to vote. The resources of nonprofits should be used for the educational, charitable, or religious purposes for which they are organized. Other laws govern campaigns and contributions to them. Nonprofits should not be used as a way around those laws.

The IRS regulations that prohibit endorsing or opposing candidates and thus protect tax-exempt purposes, however, are not intended to stifle the religious freedom of congregations and other religious entities or to prevent individuals from being involved in campaigns. Protections for religious freedom ensure that houses of worship and members of religious communities have the right to participate fully in public debates.

Those competing interests are explicitly recognized in the guidance issued by the IRS to explain the ban on electioneering. For example, the guidance notes that churches can have candidates speak at sponsored events either as a candidate or in an individual capacity (as a

public figure, congregant, etc.), with guidelines that address each situation. A wealth of information on the risks of church electioneering, including a link to the guidelines, is available on the issues page at the BJC Web site.

As the recently reported IRS investigation of the United Church of Christ (UCC) demonstrates, the difficulties are in the details. According to information from the denomination, the IRS investigation arises out of a speech by Sen. Barack Obama to its national meeting in 2007. The UCC has been aggressive in getting its story out and demonstrating a number of factors that support its side of the story. He was invited long before his presidential candidacy; he has long been a member of a UCC church; his participation was part of an anniversary program featuring 60 members of the church; a disclaimer on electioneering preceded his speech; and campaign activity was excluded from the premises.

Concerns cited by the IRS involved Web site links to news stories and conflicting references to the fact that the speaker, in addition to being a public figure and member of the church, is a candidate for the presidency. In recent years, the IRS has reiterated its willingness to enforce its rules, as well as providing more guidance about possible events far less explicit than a pastor's endorsement from the pulpit. Thus, even where one may have a good legal case, the costs can be high.

Quite apart from legal issues is the inescapable risk that an appearance by a candidate (even speaking as a "non-candidate") in the pulpit aligns a house of worship with that candidate or a particular political party. This risk is plain, regardless of the candidate's party affiliation, whether a church is well-known as having a particular political leaning or involvement in a political debate, and whether the candidate is a former preacher or a first-time pulpit speaker. It is a risk to the house of worship itself in that it may divide its members and do damage to its reputation in the larger community. While polls indicate a majority of voters want a candidate of some faith (and thus presumably appreciate seeing them in a house of worship), concerns for the church may weigh heavily against inviting candidates into the pulpit.

“Quite apart from legal issues is the inescapable risk that an appearance by a candidate ... in the pulpit aligns a house of worship with that candidate or a particular political party.”

Continued from page 3

This is a time to reaffirm the best of our Baptist tradition. We must tell and retell the stories about Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, John Leland and George W. Truett. It is a time to proclaim a message about religious liberty that is not self-serving, but protects the rights of others. It is a time to proclaim a belief that, while we may disagree with others' religious choices, we still respect their soul freedom enough to allow them to make those decisions. Finally, the only way to accommodate pluralism, to ensure one's right to change one's mind, and to acknowledge the full rights of citizenship of nonbelievers is to insist that government stay out of religion. Stated differently, the separation of church and state is essential to ensuring religious liberty for all and the full rights of citizenship for nonbelievers.

What could be more Baptist — and more right — than that?

Gibson joins Baptist Joint Committee as staff counsel

James Gibson, a native of Butler, Ala., is the new staff counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. He works with the general counsel, K. Hollyn Hollman, to provide legal analysis on church-state issues that arise before Congress, the courts and administrative agencies.



Gibson

Prior to joining the BJC, Gibson worked on the House Judiciary Committee staff of Rep. Artur Davis, D-Ala., and clerked for two district judges in Birmingham, Ala.

He holds degrees in political science from Samford University, where he was selected as his state's Harry S. Truman Scholar in 2002, and in law from the University of Alabama, where he was honored for outstanding study of Constitutional Law and competed on a national moot court team. Gibson is a member of the Alabama State Bar, and sits on the Truman Scholars Association Board of Directors.

Gibson and his wife, Jennie, live in Arlington, Va.

Mayor says God will stay in mission statement

HUDSONVILLE, Mich. — The mayor of this small city in western Michigan said the City Commission will continue to "strive to serve God," despite an atheist group's demand that the phrase be removed from the city's mission statement.

"We are not creating a church; we are not asking anybody to only accept what we have in that mission statement," Mayor Don Van Doeselaar said Feb. 26.

"If there are those that disagree, we are fine with that. It's a statement that reflects the community."

The Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, which asked the city to remove the phrase, said it might consider legal action.

It "is not the business of a city in our secular republic to 'strive to serve God,'" the group wrote in a letter to the city

earlier this month. "A city should have no religious beliefs."

Van Doeselaar said he consulted with City Attorney Dick Wendt, who determined the city was within its rights. The mayor said he also talked by telephone with the six other commission members, and all agreed to keep the phrase.

"We feel that we are not violating the principles of the separation of church and state," the mayor said. "As it's been pointed out to us by legal counsel, you see phrases like that in the Pledge (of Allegiance). In currency, you see, 'In God We Trust.' From time to time, our president will address the nation and end the address with the salutation that says, 'God bless America.'"

Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, disputed Van Doeselaar's arguments, saying the original Pledge of Allegiance and the country's first currency did not include those references.

"He's relying on Johnny-come-lately additions to our country that do not reflect our heritage," she said. "It's a godless Constitution; that was our founders' intent, and he (the mayor) took an oath to uphold it."

Gaylor said her group cannot consider legal action unless a Hudsonville resident steps forward to file an official complaint. The original complainant did not want to be identified, she said.

— RNS

Judge dismisses case of Sikh man who sued not to wear motorcycle helmet

TORONTO — An Ontario judge has dismissed the case of a devout Sikh man who argued his religious rights were violated when he received a ticket for riding his motorcycle without a helmet.

In ordering Baljinder Badesha to pay a \$110 fine, the court ruled that while the law does violate his constitutional right to religious freedom, it is justifiable because helmets dramatically reduce public healthcare costs and save lives.

Badesha argued that Ontario's mandatory helmet law violated his constitutional rights to practice his religion, which required him to wear a turban at all times while outside his home.

But the court ruled that safety trumps religious freedoms. "Given the nature of Mr. Badesha's beliefs, which foreclose him from wearing anything over his turban, and yet the unquestioned safety and related issues, this is one of those cases in which, unfortunately, no accommodation appears possible," Judge James Blacklock wrote.

"There is a clear increase in the risk of devastating brain injury or death with the accompanying burdens on family members and the public in terms of medical needs."

Badesha said the law was still "100 percent" discrimination. "We cannot put anything over the turban," he said outside court. "It is against our religion."

In his judgment, Blacklock said the fact that British Columbia and Manitoba have exemptions allowing devout Sikhs to ride without a helmet does not mean Ontario is compelled to follow suit.

—RNS