

REPORT *FROM THE* CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty



BRENT WALKER
honored at board meeting

AMANDA TYLER
named executive director

HOLLY HOLLMAN on
religious liberty and the
Supreme Court

Essay contest winner
visits Washington

BJC board elects next executive director

Dear friends and BJC supporters,

I am pleased to inform you that, on September 26, 2016, the Baptist Joint Committee Board of Directors named our next executive director: **Amanda R. Tyler**.

The vote was held upon the recommendation of the BJC's Search and Succession Committee, which I had the pleasure of chairing. Over the past 11 months, we identified areas of giftedness and expertise we desired in our executive director, solicited and received recommendations from trusted advisors in the Baptist world, and considered candidates through the application review process and interviews.

We were honored to serve on your behalf, and we were pleased with the caliber and diversity of the candidates. Because of the prominence of the BJC and its excellent reputation, we received many stellar resumes and had the opportunity to speak with some exciting people in the world of religious liberty. When we spoke with Amanda Tyler, it became clear to us that she possessed the qualities we desired.

Amanda is well-prepared and eager to lead the BJC staff in implementing our vision. She represents both the BJC's history and its future. Having served on staff at the BJC under the leadership of James Dunn and Brent Walker, Amanda knows the rich legacy of ministry and advocacy we enjoy. She also realizes the steep climb we have before us, for our work is never done. Her history with and passion for the BJC, paired with her professional experience, give her a unique ability to articulate the value of the BJC and the ideals we champion.



In our conversations together, Amanda clearly voiced the Baptist principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state — why they are important not only in the history of our nation, but also to her personally and spiritually. Drawing upon the BJC's visioning statement, she articulated her ability to lead us in outreach, mobilizing, and being first-responders when threats to religious liberty arise.

Amanda is an excellent and experienced communicator, and she has leadership qualities that complement the current staff and fit our vision in important ways. We believe that Amanda will bring fresh thinking to how we apply our mission today and build support with new audiences.

Amanda Tyler is the right person to lead the BJC forward with grace and tenacity to defend and extend religious liberty in an ever-changing world. She will assume her role as executive director at the beginning of January.

With prayerful excitement,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Daniel E. Glaze".

Daniel Glaze
Chair, BJC Board of Directors

Amanda Tyler, a native of Austin, Texas, grew up hearing about the cherished Baptist principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state as a member of Highland Park Baptist Church. Because she was committed to these principles, Tyler sought out the Baptist Joint Committee when she moved to Washington to attend Georgetown University, and she began volunteering in the office.

Tyler graduated from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown with a bachelor's degree in foreign service, *magna cum laude*. She was hired by the BJC to serve as assistant to the general counsel, working closely

with Brent Walker, James Dunn, Melissa Rogers, and Holly Hollman. During this time, she wrote columns for *Report from the Capital*, drafted statements on religious liberty issues, presented educational programs, and coordinated the broad coalition in support of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act.

Tyler left the BJC to enroll in The University of Texas School of Law. After graduating with honors, Tyler worked in private practice and served as a law clerk for a U.S. district court judge in Dallas, Texas. She later joined the staff of U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett in Austin and Washington, D.C.

In Austin, Tyler served as the congress-

man's district director, leading the staff in the development and execution of an outreach agenda for a 7-county congressional district, as well as serving as a spokesperson for his office. She is currently Rep. Doggett's counsel for the Ways and Means Committee.

Throughout her career, Tyler continued to stay connected to the BJC. She is a long-time monthly financial supporter and served on the board from 2010-2016.

A member of First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., she lives in the city with her husband, Robert Behrendt, and their son, Phelps.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Amanda-Tyler.

The unique protections of our church-state separation

By Brent Walker, BJC Executive Director

Separation of church and state can mean different things to different people. Some see it as a mechanism to try to scour religion from American public life and religious expression from the public square. Others see it as an excuse for people of faith and houses of worship to refrain from engaging in politics or even public policy debates. Still others think it is a bogus concept altogether and would merge church and state if they could.

Each of these ideas is woefully wrong. The separation principle is simply another way of saying government should not try to help or hurt religion, but it should leave religion alone. Under the First Amendment, there should be both no establishment and free exercise of religion. These clauses, taken together, command an institutional and functional separation as a constitutional means to the end of ensuring religious liberty for all.

In short, government must be neutral towards religion — a friendly, accommodating and “benevolent neutrality” as the U.S. Supreme Court put it. Yes, government needs to refrain from propping up religion or picking and choosing favored religions, but sometimes it must accommodate or protect religious choices by lifting government-imposed burdens. On the knife edge of American neutrality, we must come down on the benevolent side, not the malevolent side.

This notion is unique to our country. Just compare it to the concept of separation in other countries. Now, I am not talking about hotbeds of persecution or intolerance such as China, the Central African Republic or the Sudan. Even some progressive Western democracies get it wrong. They often pay lip service to religious liberty ensured by separation, but in practice they promote a pervasive secularism that is hostile and unfriendly to religion in public places.

Three examples come to mind.

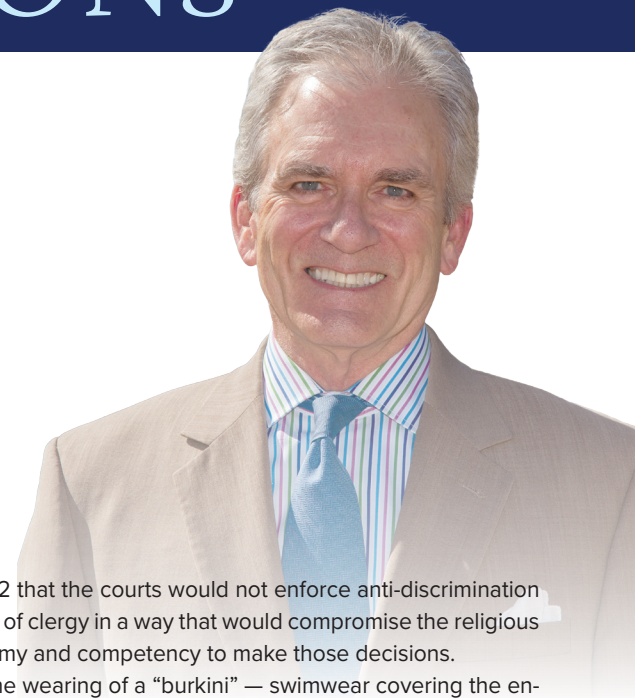
A Canadian appeals court in Alberta ruled that its civil courts have jurisdiction to review membership decisions by a Jehovah's Witness congregation. In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled that it could penetrate the church's autonomy shield when property rights are involved or where a nebulous “breach of the rules of national justice” is asserted. In the U.S. system, nothing is more inviolate than the idea that houses of worship should make their own decisions about membership selection and discipline, hiring and firing of clergy, property division in case of church splits, and matters of internal administration. Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the *Hosanna-Tabor* decision — a case about the firing of clergy teaching in a religious school — ruled unan-

imously in 2012 that the courts would not enforce anti-discrimination laws on behalf of clergy in a way that would compromise the religious body's autonomy and competency to make those decisions.

In France, the wearing of a “burkini” — swimwear covering the entire body to ensure Muslim women's modesty — has been banned by a number of French cities as an unacceptable public expression of religion. This intolerance of religious expression by private citizens (not government actors) comes on the heels of disputes about forbidding hijabs or headscarves by public school students and the banning of burqas that cover the face outright. Thankfully, a French court struck down the ban in late August, but this insistence upon a secularity that condemns private citizen expression of public religion continues to fester. How different in our country! In the recent *EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch* (2015) decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that a qualified potential employee could not be denied a job because wearing her hijab would contravene the clothing retailer's “look policy.” Also, public school students can wear religious garb and don headgear such as yarmulkes and turbans. And a walk down almost any street in an American city will reveal a mottled tapestry of religious clothing and accoutrements that reflect our religious pluralism.

Finally, Denmark removed a religious exemption from animal cruelty laws in 2014, now making it illegal to slaughter animals to produce kosher or halal meat in accordance with Jewish and Muslim traditions. In fact, Denmark's Minister of Agriculture and Food is quoted as having said, “Animal rights come before religion.” Even though Denmark does not have a separation of church and state — the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the established, state-supported church — this policy is obviously intended to target Jewish and Muslim minorities. How different was the outcome in a 1993 landmark case from the U.S. Supreme Court, *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*, where the High Court unanimously condemned an attempt to ban the ritual sacrifice of animals by Santeria practitioners in South Florida.

Don't get me wrong. We don't always get it correct. That the Baptist Joint Committee has been busy for eight decades is confirmation that the American legal system sometimes misses the mark of perfect neutrality on both establishment and free exercise issues. Charles Haynes' column on page 9 of this issue is a good current example. But it's fair to say that, at our best and most of the time, our system has been committed to benevolent neutrality on the part of the government that allows religious practice to flourish without government dictating religious choices.



Symposium on religious liberty and the black church coming Nov. 10

The Baptist Joint Committee is bringing an in-depth discussion of religious liberty and the black church to Washington, D.C. On Nov. 10, the Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock will give a lecture and participate in a panel discussion with a variety of voices, all on the campus of the Howard University School of Divinity and School of Law.

“Throughout the history of the black church, pastors and leaders have strived to deliver the prophetic word while also trying to adhere to the principle of church-state separation,” Warnock said. “I am honored to partner with the Baptist Joint Committee to explore the dynamic relationship between the black church and the state.”

Warnock is the senior pastor of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, which was the spiritual home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Active in the community, Warnock is the recipient of numerous honors and awards and a frequent commentator in the national media. He is the author of *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*.

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Haggray, executive director of American Baptist Home Missions Society, will moderate a panel discussion as part

of the symposium, which features Warnock, Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner and the Honorable Judge Alex Williams Jr. Skinner is the president of Skinner Leadership Institute and a former director of the Congressional Black Caucus, where she helped found the annual Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Prayer Breakfast. Williams served as a federal judge in Maryland for two decades, and he teaches at the Howard University School of Law and School of Divinity.

Dr. Harold Dean Trulear, a professor at the Howard University School of Divinity, will offer a response to the first lecture. Trulear is also director of the Healing Communities Prison Ministry and Prisoner Reentry Project of the Philadelphia Leadership Foundation.

The symposium begins with Warnock’s lecture at 11:30 a.m., followed by a response from Trulear. The panel discussion will be a “lunch and learn” session, beginning at 1 p.m. in the dining hall.

Both the lecture and the panel discussion are free and open to the public, and they are also part of the Howard University School of Divinity Centennial Alumni Convocation. For full details on the event, visit BJCOnline.org/HowardSymposium.



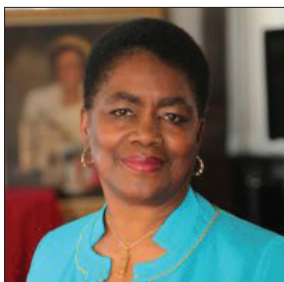
Warnock



Trulear



Haggray



Williams-Skinner



Williams

Nevada court halts school voucher program as improperly funded

The Nevada Supreme Court ordered a permanent injunction to halt the state’s school voucher program on Sept. 29, but not for the reason sought by many religious liberty advocates, including the Baptist Joint Committee.

Nevada’s Education Savings Account (ESA) program, enacted in 2015, allowed parents to apply for funding that can be used to send their children to private schools, including sectarian religious schools. The court rejected plaintiffs’ argument that the ESA program violates state law prohibiting the use of public funds for sectarian purpose. Instead, the court’s reason for the injunction is that the legislature failed to separately fund the program. It is not permitted under Nevada law to pay for vouchers out of funds appropriated for public education.

The court did address the religious liberty argument, which rests on a provision of the Nevada Constitution that states, “No public funds of any kind or character whatever, State, County or Municipal, shall be used for sectarian purpose.” So-called “no-aid” provisions like Nevada’s are common in many state constitutions,

and they are traditionally interpreted to offer even more robust church-state protections than the First Amendment requires.

In this case, however, the lower court ruled that Nevada’s no-aid provision offers the same protections as the First Amendment, prompting many advocates to speak out. The BJC filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging the state Supreme Court to reject the district court’s cramped interpretation of the no-aid provision.

In the ruling, the Nevada Supreme Court did not comment on that specific dispute, instead holding that the no-aid provision does not apply here because funds held in the ESAs belong to the individual parent and thus are not “public funds” subject to that church-state limitation.

Despite giving broad approval to Nevada’s voucher mechanism (if the legislature funds it properly), the Nevada Supreme Court’s reasoning on the religious liberty question stopped short of the district court’s sweeping limitation of Nevada’s no-aid protection.

By Don Byrd

Observations on religious liberty and the U.S. Supreme Court

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Each year at this time, we look to a new term at the U.S. Supreme Court in anticipation of important religious liberty developments. The Court is expected to hear at least one church-state case this term, *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Pauley*, which could have a considerable impact on religious institutions that seek government funding. (See BJCOnline.org/TrinityLutheran for details about the case and the BJC's brief.)

While we wait for action on other petitions pending before the Court, we recognize this is not a typical time at the Court, which remains short-staffed. The U.S. Senate has refused to hold confirmation hearings for Judge Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama's nominee to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February. With only eight justices, the Court has granted fewer cases than usual. Several high-profile petitions have been denied likely due to the risk of a 4-4 tie, which simply allows the lower court ruling to stand without giving any guidance for pending and future cases.

After Justice Scalia's death, the likelihood of tied decisions became apparent. The Court in fact issued a few 4-4 decisions in high profile cases, notably involving immigration and public unions. Avoiding another potential split may have led to the strange result in *Zubik v. Burwell*, where the Court ordered additional briefing after oral arguments, before ultimately issuing an unsigned opinion sending this latest challenge to the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate back to the lower courts in the hope that a settlement is possible.

Since February, we have seen something else that is unusual in Supreme Court practice: two written dissents from a denial of review. The Court agrees to hear less than two percent of the petitions filed, usually with no indication as to why the others are denied. Although extremely rare, on occasion an impassioned justice writes a dissent from the Court's denial. When written, such dissents warrant notice and tell us something about the Court's divisions and inner workings.

Since Justice Scalia's death, Justice Samuel Alito has twice written lengthy dissents to denials in church-state cases. One case involved a Jewish prisoner who was prohibited from meeting with other Jewish prisoners to study the Torah. Justice Alito's dissent asserted that the prison is violating the Constitution by holding

Jewish small groups to a different standard than small groups for other religions. The other case involved a pharmacy challenging state regulations limiting the ability of pharmacists to make conscience-based referrals. This dissent asserted that the regulations improperly targeted religious beliefs.

We do not know why the other justices refused to vote to grant these petitions, but it is doubtful it was because they are opposed to religious freedom. The pharmacy case had a complicated procedural history that may have limited its precedential value. Perhaps the justices pragmatically feared another split on a controversial case, with the pharmacy losing and the Court being forced to hear another conscience-based refusal case in a future term.

These dissents from denials are noteworthy not only for their rarity but also for their dire language. In the prisoner case, Justice Alito expressed "disappointment" and bemoaned "the Court's indifference to this discriminatory infringement of religious liberty." In the pharmacy case, his dissent (which Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Clarence Thomas joined) was even starker in tone. Describing the case as "an ominous sign," the dissent garnered headlines and attention beyond the usual circle of court-watchers.

This rhetoric appears to reflect not only frustration with the Court's denials and division, but also intense anxiety about religious liberty law in the U.S. when it comes to the hotly debated conflicts over religious objections relating to contraceptives. As a recent Pew Forum poll indicates, the public is deeply divided over claims of conscience that threaten to affect the rights of others to access goods and services, particularly in the commercial context.

Only time will tell if Justice Alito's dire warnings merely reflect the disappearing middle ground in political debates or accurately foretell a governmental retreat from accommodating claims of conscience. Tough cases challenge us, but they do not need to doom the future of our first freedom. People of goodwill, committed to religious liberty, can disagree on the outcome of hard cases. The legacy of religious liberty we have inherited, however, is too important to surrender to partisanship. Instead, we must continue to work to uphold our principles toward the goal of religious liberty for all, including in the difficult contexts that divide the public and the Supreme Court today.



BJC board honors Walker, prepares for the future

Representatives of the BJC's member bodies name Amanda Tyler next executive director

The Baptist Joint Committee Board of Directors began the next chapter in the organization's history at their annual meeting in Washington on Sept. 26-27. Representatives of the BJC's 15 member bodies passed an increased operating budget, honored Executive Director Brent Walker and named his successor.

Upon the recommendation of the Search and Succession Committee, the board elected Amanda Tyler to be the organization's sixth executive director in history (see page 2). She will begin her role in January 2017.

Stan Hastey received the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award during the meeting, recognizing his stalwart defense of religious liberty throughout his life. A longtime BJC staff member, Hastey was the first executive director of the Alliance of Baptists and is the author of a history of the BJC.

The board honored Walker's career with a gathering at the Newseum in Washington. Walker, who has been with the Baptist Joint Committee since 1989 and served as executive director for the past 17 years, retires at the end of December. The event included a charge from Charles Haynes of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute for all to continue to protect religious liberty, remarks from former BJC General Counsel Melissa Rogers (who now serves as the executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships), a video message from Rabbi David Saperstein (who serves as the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom), and memories from BJC General

Counsel and Associate Executive Director Holly Hollman.

Calling Walker "one of our nation's great advocates for the cause of religious liberty," Haynes said that the BJC is needed now more than any time in history. Noting that denial of religious liberty is one of the leading causes of oppression across the world, Haynes said that, by representing Baptists, Walker has "represented every American — people of all faiths and none" and modeled constitutional principles that sustain freedom of conscience for everyone.

Rogers spoke about working with Walker when they both served at the BJC, including their task of "serving as lawyers for James Dunn." She said there are many people who would want to thank Walker for his lifetime of work, including "every house of worship that has been protected from overreaching land use powers" and public school students who have not had to choose between their conscience and participation in football games or graduations. "[W]e as a country are so much better off because of Brent's contributions and leadership," Rogers said.

Saperstein, who worked closely with the BJC for four decades when he led the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, spoke of the BJC's relentless dedication to religious liberty. "If ever there were a time that the world needed to take the legacy of a Brent Walker and to ensure that it would be the reality not only of our nation, but other nations across the globe, it is right now," he said.

By Cherylyn Crowe



Left: Stan Hastey receives the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award. Right: Brent Walker addresses the board during the final meeting of his tenure as executive director. His successor, Amanda Tyler, and General Counsel and Associate Executive Director Holly Hollman look on.



Charles Haynes



Holly Hollman



Melissa Rogers



Left: Kay and Walter "Buddy" Shurden, who established the BJC's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State, joined the celebration of Brent Walker's career at the Newseum. Right: New Baptist Covenant Executive Director Hannah McMahan and Director of Programs and Communications Elijah Zehyouse with the BJC's next executive director, Amanda Tyler, at the Newseum event.



To honor Walker's retirement, several current and former BJC staff members — whose service spans six decades of the organization — gathered at the Newseum.

Contest winner presents essay in Washington

Out of hundreds of entries across the country, Colorado high school student earns scholarship

Alyssa Bragg of Colorado Springs, Colorado, won the grand prize in the 2016 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee. This year's topic asked students to consider whether elected or appointed government officials should be able to opt out of certain aspects of their job because of a closely held religious belief.

The daughter of Phillip and Kandis Bragg, she received a \$2,000 scholarship for her essay, titled "Duty Comes First," and a trip to Washington, D.C. Bragg met the Baptist

Joint Committee staff and shared her essay with the board of directors. A 2016 high school graduate, Bragg is now a first-year nursing student at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California.

Second place went to Haley Warren of Charlottesville, Virginia, and Ellie Gardiner of Bernalillo, New Mexico, won third place.

Below are excerpts from Bragg's essay, sharing her personal perspective. For details on the 2017 contest, visit BJCOnline.org/contest.



"Duty Comes First" by Alyssa Bragg Colorado Springs, Colorado

Since the ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791, there have been many contentious Supreme Court rulings about the free exercise of religion and the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. The phrase "no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" is not as clear as it seems. Today's common translation refers to the separation of church and state. Supreme Court cases such as *McCullum v. Board of Education*, *Engel v. Vitale* and *Sherbert v. Verner* challenge the historical interpretation of the First Amendment. One specific topic that is currently in the headlines is the right of government officials to opt out of certain job duties when those job duties conflict with their religious beliefs. This is a controversial topic because it is a clear conflict between people's personal religious beliefs and their professional obligations as public servants. I personally feel connected to this topic because I am a Christian and also a strong believer in our democratic government. However, I believe that since becoming a public servant is a voluntary action, professional obligations outweigh personal beliefs. If a person is unwilling to meet their service obligations, he or she should withdraw from government service. ...

... There is also a practical reason for not allowing these exceptions. If the government were to make these accommodations, many officials will be overburdened by their coworkers' inability to uphold their duties. The government employs a certain number of people to do specific jobs. If these officials are doing only a portion of their job, the government will have to hire more employees to achieve the desired outcome. This will lead to higher taxes and bigger government, which I do not support.

Throughout life, people encounter difficulties when their personal beliefs and their job obligations collide. However, if everyone ceased to complete his or her duties because of religious beliefs, nothing would get accomplished. This is especially true for government employees. After all, someone who works in the government has higher obligations than those who work in private companies. For government employees, duty comes first.

The deeply troubling federal report targeting religious freedom

By Charles C. Haynes,
Director of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute

Nearly 225 years after the ratification of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the cause of conscience protected by the principles of “no establishment” and “free exercise” may be losing support in the minds and hearts of the American people.

Appeals by religious individuals and groups for exemption from government laws and regulations that substantially burden religious practice are increasingly unpopular and controversial. So much so that many in the media have taken to using scare quotes, transforming religious freedom into “religious freedom.”

Now the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights appears to be recommending that we make it official: Our first freedom is first no more.

According to a commission report released Sept. 7, “civil rights protections ensuring nondiscrimination, as embodied in the Constitution, laws, and policies, are of preeminent importance in American jurisprudence.”

If we accept this assertion, it means that conflicts between religious freedom and nondiscrimination principles are resolved by denying accommodation for religious conscience — except perhaps in very rare and narrow circumstances.

According to the findings of the commission:

“Religious exemptions to the protections of civil rights based upon classifications such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, when they are permissible, significantly infringe upon those civil rights.”

The findings and recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights — an independent, bipartisan, fact-finding federal agency — carry weight with government officials responsible for national civil rights policy and enforcement.

Robust protection for civil rights is, of course, essential in a democratic society. But so is protection for liberty of conscience. Despite dark chapters of religious discrimination, the United States has a long and honorable history of taking claims of conscience seriously. From conscientious objection to war to religious accommodations in the workplace, the American experiment in religious freedom seeks (on our best days) to ensure that people are free to follow the dictates of conscience in matters of faith.

Yes, accommodations for religious practice often affect the lives of other people. But the aim must be to balance competing claims and interests, minimizing harm while protecting conscience.

Consider, for example, the bitter conflict over allowing county clerks to opt out of performing same-sex marriages. Last year, Utah passed legislation designed to prohibit discrimination against LGBTQ people



while simultaneously protecting religious freedom.

A key provision of the Utah law ensures that county clerk offices perform marriages and that a clerk be readily available to marry same-sex couples. A clerk may opt out of performing a same-sex marriage if, and only if, another clerk is available to issue the license and perform the ceremony. Under this balanced approach, same-sex couples are provided the service (without knowing who, if anyone, has opted out in the clerk's office) and religious conscientious objectors are accommodated.

Unfortunately, the commission's report does nothing to encourage — and, I would argue, actually discourages — efforts like the one in Utah to find a balance between nondiscrimination and religious freedom.

The title of the commission's report alone speaks volumes: “Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles with Civil Liberties.” First, the wording suggests that religious freedom is a “civil liberty,” when in truth it is a fundamental, inalienable right protected by the First Amendment. And second, the commission's report is less about reconciling differences and more about asserting the primacy of nondiscrimination over religious freedom.

Peaceful coexistence is not difficult to achieve if one side declares victory and demands that the other side concede defeat before the argument even begins. In real life, of course, peace between those who worry that religious claims are code for bigotry and those who seek religious accommodations will not be possible without setting aside name-calling, committing to civil dialogue and working for common-ground solutions.

The commission's report arrives at a time when popular support for religious accommodations — particularly for minority faiths — has been eroding for decades as our increasingly secular society relegates religion to the purely private sphere. In recent years, culture wars over abortion and gay marriage have accelerated the public distaste for religious conscientious objectors, often poisoning the well for religious freedom claims in the public square.

Without getting into finger-pointing, there is enough blame to go around. Some religious freedom advocates have pushed for accommodation while simultaneously opposing even the most basic nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people. And some LGBTQ advocates have mistakenly labeled all efforts to seek religious exemptions as a form of bigotry.

It's time for all sides to reaffirm equality and liberty as twin pillars of the American republic. Authentic peaceful coexistence requires moving from the zero-sum game described in much of the commission's report to the level playing field required by our constitutional commitment to both nondiscrimination and religious freedom.

Why We Give

We started giving to the Baptist Joint Committee a number of years ago, and in 2011 we became monthly donors to support the good work that the BJC does defending and extending religious liberty for all. We first learned about the BJC when Charles was an intern there 16 years ago. It was the summer that the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) was passed. Being an intern gave Charles a front row seat to witness the abilities of the BJC to build a diverse coalition around an important issue, and do real good in the end.

The BJC is unique because of its laser focus on the traditional Baptist tenets of separation of church and state and religious liberty for all. No other group has that uniquely Baptist history and perspective. Our founding fathers were wise to enshrine freedom of religion with no government intervention for or against religion as the first freedom in our Bill of Rights, and the BJC defends this from the understanding that true religious freedom is a gift from God for all of us.

The BJC really stands out in three areas:



education, legislation and litigation. They have educational materials for students, clergy, congregations and lawmakers. They build coalitions with other groups to help defend everyone's religious liberty. They watch crucial court cases and help us understand their implications for religious liberty and even participate by writing briefs for the court detailing our Baptist perspectives.

We chose to become monthly donors to the BJC because we feel like it is good for us and good for the BJC. Being able to spread

out our gift over the year helps us to plan our budget and enables us to give more in the end than if we gave once or twice a year. We also don't have to remember to write and mail a check — our donation is an easy recurring payment. It helps the BJC because they know that steady and reliable donations are coming regularly.

Become a monthly donor for you and for the BJC! It is easy to set up and once you do, you can read *Report from the Capital* each month knowing that you're making a difference in the fight to defend and extend religious liberty for all!

By Charles and Kim Cates
Falls Church, Virginia

Make a lasting investment in religious liberty by becoming a monthly donor today. Visit BJCONLINE.ORG/GIVE-MONTHLY to set up your gift or contact Taryn Deaton, senior director of operations and development, at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226.

Religious freedom lacking for three-fourths of world's population, ambassador says

The U.S. State Department warned that religion-based terrorists as well as some governments across the globe are threatening the liberties of religious minorities.

"One of the best ways to deny these murderers their victory is by ensuring that those they have sought to destroy not only survive, but thrive," said Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, announcing the 2015 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom on Aug. 10.

Though the report has often focused on serious violations of religious freedom by governments across the globe, Blinken said it also details the "major threat" by groups like Daesh (or the Islamic State group), al-Qaida, al-Shabab and Boko Haram.

The document, in its 18th year, includes details of how almost 200 countries are faring in protecting the religious liberty of their citizens.

David Saperstein, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, said 24 percent of the world's countries have serious restrictions on religious freedom, based on government policies or hostile acts by individual organizations or societies.

He highlighted the report's emphasis on laws around the globe about blasphemy and apostasy: "No one region, country or religion is immune to the pernicious effects of such legislation."

The report notes that people are imprisoned with death sentences in Mauritania and Pakistan for allegedly criticizing the Prophet Muhammad or desecrating the Quran, while Saudi Arabia has overturned a poet's death sentence for apostasy charges but he was instead sentenced to

eight years in prison and 800 lashes.

State actions based on blasphemy charges include Iran's executions of prisoners of conscience for their beliefs, Pakistan's arrests of Muslims and Christians and the fining of an avowed atheist in Muenster, Germany, for bumper stickers that challenged Catholic beliefs.

Saperstein, who has visited 25 countries in the year and a half he has held his State Department role, said the U.S. is working with governments and other organizations to press for changes in the laws. He cited Iceland's dropping of its blasphemy law last year as a model for others.

But he also credited those outside government for taking action to fight blasphemy laws as well as working to protect religious minorities in other ways. He praised groups, including Muslim youths, who formed human rings around synagogues facing anti-Semitic threats and Muslims who attended Masses in France in solidarity with their communities after the recent beheading of a Catholic priest.

The State Department also designates "Countries of Particular Concern," which are known for ongoing religious freedom violations. In February, it announced the current list of those countries: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

By Adelle Banks, Religion News Service
with BJC Staff Reports

Baptist Joint Committee welcomes fall interns

The Baptist Joint Committee is pleased to have two fall semester interns working alongside our staff in Washington, D.C.



Boddie



Guzman

MAYA BODDIE, a native of the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, graduated from Hampton University this May with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in strategic communications with a minor in Spanish. She served as local and world editor of *The Hampton Script*, the school newspaper. She is the daughter of Timothy "Tee" Boddie, general secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and Geulia Boddie, a high school counselor. Following her internship, Boddie plans to begin her career in communications, focusing on social justice and public policy.

STEPHEN GUZMAN, a native of Belleville, New Jersey, is currently in his final year as an undergraduate student at Rutgers University—Newark. He joins us as he pursues his Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in political science and minor in psychology. He previously served as an intern at the ACLU of New Jersey as well as Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), a nonprofit organization dealing with immigration. Guzman plans to enter law school after graduating in 2017.

Support the BJC on #GivingTuesday

On Tuesday, Nov. 29, partner with the Baptist Joint Committee to participate in #GivingTuesday, a global day dedicated to giving. We invite you to join us on this day by making a donation and telling others in your circles of influence why you care about defending and extending religious liberty for all. This marks the fourth year the BJC has participated.

Getting involved is simple. #GivingTuesday falls after "Black Friday" and "Cyber Monday," and it gives us the opportunity to focus on causes we care about in the middle of the holiday shopping season. Take a moment to write a social media post about why you care about religious liberty, share resources from the BJC's website, or just be intentional about discussing religious liberty in your daily interactions. And, take the opportunity to give to the BJC's work — you can donate any time by going to BJCOnline.org/donate.

Last year, more than 45,000 organizations in 71 countries came together to celebrate #GivingTuesday. Use this chance to share why you care about the religious liberty of all people, and visit our website at BJCOnline.org/GivingTuesday for more ideas on giving back.

Report offers good (and bad) news about the state of American faith



A new survey of Christian beliefs and practices opens with what many in the church world would consider very good news: nearly three-quarters of Americans claim to be Christian.

Meanwhile, a fifth claim no religious belief or affiliation at all, Barna reported in "The State of the Church 2016," which it released on Sept. 15.

"Not only do most Americans identify as Christian, but a similar percentage (73 percent) also agree that religious faith is very important in their life," according to the report.

But the report also presents a lot to be concerned about.

Barna found that there is a huge chasm between identification with, and the practice of, faith.

As little as 31 percent of believers can be classified as "practicing Christians," which Barna defines as attending a religious service at least once a month.

Minority status is underscored by including the "post-Christian" measurement, Barna said. That metric considers disbelief in God or identifying as atheist or agnostic. Lack of participation in activities like Bible study, prayer and worship attendance also are included.

Barna found that 48 percent of Americans can be labeled as post-Christian. Another 41 percent are non-practicing Christians. Among Christians, 55 percent can be considered "churched," meaning they have attended a church service with varying frequency within the past six months.

The study covered several other aspects of faith, including generosity and giving, the influence of evangelicals and various views about evangelism, politics and other issues.

"Barna researchers argue this represents a more accurate picture of Christian faith in America, one that reflects the reality of a secularizing nation," the report said.

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global





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Phone: (202) 544-4226
Fax: (202) 544-2094
Email: bjc@BJCOnline.org
Website: www.BJCOnline.org

BJCOnline.org/blog [@BJContheHill](https://twitter.com/BJContheHill)
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The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty defends religious liberty for all people and protects the institutional separation of church and state in the historic Baptist tradition. Based in Washington, D.C., we work through education, litigation and legislation, often combining our efforts with a wide range of groups to provide education about and advocacy for religious liberty.

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Watch Amanda Tyler's story

Get to know the next executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee in a video that details her 20-year relationship with BJC and passion for religious liberty. Visit BJCOnline.org/Amanda-Tyler.



BJCOnline.org/podcasts

Listen to Beth Echols describe working for the BJC in the 1960s, as well as interviews with BJC staff members and supporters on our podcasts page.