

# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

**AMANDA TYLER**  
speaks out against  
politicizing churches

BJC condemns  
'back-door bar' on  
Muslim refugees

**HOLLY HOLLMAN** on  
the Trump administration

A conversation with  
**WALTER B. SHURDEN**



# Tyler begins tenure at helm of BJC

On January 3, 2017, Amanda Tyler began her work as the sixth executive director in the 81-year history of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

Tyler joins the staff after spending the last eight years working in Congress, serving various roles in the office of U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett in both Austin, Texas, and Washington, D.C. She has a long history with the BJC, first joining the staff as a college student in 1999. Throughout her career, she stayed connected to the organization: Tyler is a longtime monthly financial supporter and she served on the board from 2010-2016. For more on her story and career, visit [BJCOnline.org/Amanda-Tyler](http://BJCOnline.org/Amanda-Tyler).

At the BJC, Tyler's priorities include implementing the BJC's visioning statement to expand the outreach, mobilization and response efforts of the BJC to face current religious liberty challenges. "We are very concerned about intolerance and the marginalizing of people of minority faiths," Tyler told a reporter from the *Deseret News* during her first week on the job. "Defining and defending religious liberty in our age of increasing pluralism is a challenge that manifests itself in many different areas."

Tyler's schedule for her first few months include plans to speak at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, participate in the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina (see page 9), and give a keynote address at the Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies gathering in Richmond, Virginia.

Tyler is also meeting with coalition partners across the country and



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in Washington as she works to continue longstanding partnerships and develop new ones. Her predecessor, Brent Walker, is working part time at the Baptist Joint Committee in an executive consultant role to ensure a smooth transition.

"The Baptist Joint Committee, with its rich history and deep expertise, is uniquely positioned to be a voice for all people who want to defend and extend God-given religious liberty for generations to come," Tyler said. "I truly believe that our entire world has never needed the BJC as much as it does right now, and there is no limit to what God can do through us to preserve religious liberty for all of God's children."

From BJC Staff Reports

## BJC denounces Executive Order's 'back-door bar' on Muslim refugees

The Baptist Joint Committee decried an order from the White House that preferences refugees based on their religion.

On January 27, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order that affects immigration and refugee programs. It temporarily halts immigrant and non-immigrant entry into the United States for individuals from seven countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It also implements a 120-day suspension of the entire U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees.

At press time, the order had been halted nationwide by one federal judge, and it is facing ongoing court challenges.

In the Executive Order, the resumption of the refugee program includes a directive that the government should prioritize refugee claims made by individuals on the basis of religious persecution, "provided that the religion of the individual is a minority religion in the individual's country of nationality."

The clause and its implications drew a direct response from BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, who said it is "a back-door bar on Muslim refugees, telling an entire faith group that they are not welcome on our shores."

"Any attempt to ban Muslim refugees based on their religion betrays our values and sends the un-American message that there are second-class

faiths," Tyler continued. "Our country, founded by immigrants who established religious freedom as a bedrock principle, is better than this."

"A threat to anyone's religious liberty is a threat to everyone's religious liberty, and we as Baptists stand with those facing religious persecution around the world, regardless of their faith."

In light of the order, the BJC also joined with fellow members of the Know Your Neighbor coalition — a group of organizations committed to increasing understanding across religious lines — to suggest ways to respond, such as reaffirming basic American values.

The coalition of faith-based and humanist organizations called for an increase in interfaith engagement, education about Muslims and Islam, and a commitment to and training in being "upstanders" who respond supportively to victims of incidents of hate and bigotry.

The coalition also urged everyone to maintain an attitude of charity and openness to all, including those with whom we most profoundly disagree.

"In our statements, we will condemn actions but not persons. We will speak firmly but respectfully of and with those whose words and actions we oppose," the statement said.

By Cherilyn Crowe

## Gratitude for what we're fighting for

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

**M**any people have asked me how I feel as I step into the role of executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee. Excited? Anxious? Unsure about what the future might hold as our country goes through this period of great change and uncertainty?

Yes, I have felt all of those emotions and more, but my overarching feeling is one of gratitude. First, I am thankful to God and for all those in my life who have brought me to this place at this time, to focus on defending and extending religious liberty for all. Second, I am grateful for the BJC's supporters and staff and my predecessors.

We could not do our work without the steady and generous support and encouragement of so many Baptists and non-Baptists, who are our partners in this cause. Thank you for the many words and acts of encouragement you have already shared. I will be calling on you to become even more engaged in the days to come. I hope that you will reach out to me and others on our team when you encounter issues impacting church-state separation and religious liberty in your communities so that we can be responsive and helpful on the most pressing problems.

I am grateful to the committed and extraordinarily talented BJC staff, who have been working on these important and difficult issues for years. Each of them has gifts and expertise I draw on daily as I get off to a running start.

I am thankful for this organization and for the cloud of witnesses who have come before me both as executive director and in the many positions of service over the past eight decades. Their invaluable contributions to the cause have made the BJC a trusted voice for this time. Having been appointed in September, I could not have predicted the current landscape in which we find ourselves and the immediate and pressing needs for engagement by Baptists committed to religious freedom. The world has never needed the BJC as much as it does right now.

In December, as I was preparing for my move into this position, I watched Barack Obama's final foreign policy speech of his presidency. In a section near the end of his remarks, he spoke of freedom in a way that caught my attention:

So let my final words to you as your Commander-in-Chief be a reminder of what it is that you're fighting for, what it is that we

are fighting for. The United States of America is not a country that imposes religious tests as a price for freedom. We're a country that was founded so that people could practice their faiths as they choose. The United States of America is not a place where some citizens have to withstand greater scrutiny, or carry a special ID card, or prove that they're not an enemy from within. We're a country that has bled and struggled and sacrificed against that kind of discrimination and arbitrary rule, here in our own country and around the world.

While President Obama was addressing a military audience, his words of "what it is that we are fighting for" ring true for me as a centering point at this critical time of transition. What it means to be an American includes the promise of religious freedom. And being a Baptist includes the responsibility to defend religious liberty. The Baptist history of persecution as a religious minority teaches us that the blood, struggle and sacrifice are not metaphorical and not just from the battlefield. The BJC fights for both the constitutional protection of religious liberty through separation of church and state and – more fundamentally – for religious freedom as necessary for soul freedom to build a relationship with God free from outside interference.

At the September celebration of Brent Walker's remarkable 27 years of ministry at the BJC, I had the honor of offering the benediction. I revisit and share these words as an expression of not just my prayer of gratitude for Brent's selfless leadership, but also of my hope for our shared days ahead. I remain grateful and ready to continue to fight for religious freedom.

Freedom-giving God, we thank you for sharing your remarkable servant Brent with all of us, whose lives he has touched in immeasurable ways, and for the countless others who are not here with us tonight but whose religious liberty has been protected and enhanced by Brent's ministry at the Baptist Joint Committee. Let each of us leave this place inspired anew to do the hard but rewarding work of not just loving but really knowing our neighbor, of speaking truth to power in all its forms, of listening to your call in each of our lives to find our own unique ways to make a difference in this beautiful yet broken world that you love so much. Amen.

# Trump sworn in as 45th president



Donald J. Trump placed his hand on two Bibles and took the oath of office in a swearing-in ceremony that featured prayers and pronouncements of God's favor by the largest assortment of clergy in inaugural history.

It also drew protests around the nation's capital.

A crowd along the National Mall watched the presidential inauguration on Jan. 20 as Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath of office to the new president in front of the Capitol. Trump chose two Bibles for the occasion — a family Bible and the Lincoln Bible, which also had been Barack Obama's choice.

And he followed it with an inaugural address that drew cheers from the crowd for promises the United States would unite the world to eradicate "radical Islamic terrorism" and "most importantly ... be protected by God."

"These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public," Trump said.

He briefly quoted Scripture, drawing on Psalm 133: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" And, he added, "When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice."

The ceremony began with Scripture readings and an invocation by prosperity gospel preacher Paula White, the first clergywoman ever to fill that role. Other religious figures offering prayer and readings during the one-hour ceremony included the Rev. Franklin Graham, Bishop Wayne T. Jackson, Rabbi Marvin Hier, the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez and Cardinal Timothy Dolan.

White, Graham, Jackson and Rodriguez all made their comments "in Jesus' name." In 2008, Pastor Rick Warren caused controversy by including the phrase in his invocation

at Obama's inauguration.

Graham, who has said God allowed Trump to win the presidential election, made brief remarks before reading from 1 Timothy 2. He pointed out that a rain shower fell just as the new president began his inaugural address.

"In the Bible, rain is a sign of God's blessing," he said.

The rain forced many in the crowd to cover themselves with plastic ponchos, since umbrellas were not permitted for security reasons.

Rodriguez read from Chapter 5 in the Gospel of Matthew, including the Beatitudes and the "city on a hill" passage so central to America's founding ideal and so popular in U.S. politics.

And instead of the more traditional translation of the opening of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Rodriguez used a different take from the New Living Translation of the Bible: "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him."

He told Religion News Service afterward that his use of the translation was intentional. "I want to heal. I want to reconcile. I want to bring good news to the suffering."

Trump, who identifies as Presbyterian, also seemed to allude to the "city on a hill" imagery famously used by a 17th century Puritan New Englander, John Winthrop, and by the late President Ronald Reagan.

The Republican was elected with strong conservative Christian support. And he's taking the reins of a government with a cast of high-level appointees, many of whom share religious views.

"Some of my conservative friends and I, we have been pinching ourselves," Richard Land, former head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said according to Baptist News

Global.

"Are we hallucinating, or is this actually happening?"

Land, a member of Trump's evangelical advisory board, said he was consulted five times for personnel recommendations.

In recent weeks, the Senate has held confirmation hearings for Trump's Cabinet picks. They include an education secretary who supports school vouchers to get more children into private religious schools, a climate-change denier and a national security adviser who called Islam "a political ideology hiding behind a religion."

Conservative Christian leaders have made no secret of their expectation that President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, who describes himself as "a born-again, evangelical Catholic," will reward their votes with legislation to defund abortion providers and by judicial appointments with a record of anti-abortion views.

White evangelicals voted for Trump in record numbers — 81 percent cast their ballot for him — and some of them were among the early arrivals on the National Mall to reinforce their support even as they recognized Trump's personal shortcomings.

Roger Willis, a warehouse worker from Riverdale, Maryland, identifies as a Christian but said his faith "really didn't have anything to do with my vote."

Willis does believe that "God put everybody where they need to be. There's a reason Donald Trump is president. God knows what he is going to do," he added, meaning it as a statement of fact rather than concern.

**Reporting by  
Religion News Service  
with BJC Staff Reports**



## Religious liberty on the political horizon

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



**W**hat does the presidency of Donald J. Trump mean for religious liberty? Specific church-state issues rarely arose during the presidential campaign, and the Baptist Joint Committee found nothing prior to Trump's candidacy to indicate that he has given much thought to the matter.

That said, we face serious challenges. In his first two weeks, President Trump issued an Executive Order that included a religious prioritization for refugees (see page 2), he made a promise to change an IRS rule that would open the door to church electioneering (see pages 6-7), and the administration is reportedly considering an Executive Order that, according to the leaked version, would purport to protect religious liberty while advancing a narrow and incomplete view of the term.

With each new administration, we expect the president's influence on religious liberty through policy initiatives, appointments and statements that inevitably will shape the public's understanding. Here are three areas to watch:

1. Trump has not asserted a defined vision of religious freedom that would lead to particular policies. He has not affirmed the American tradition of religious exemptions or articulated a commitment to the separation of church and state. It is not yet clear what his priorities will be. During the campaign, he made only a few statements about positions in this area.

At press time for *Report from the Capital*, there continued to be rumors of an Executive Order with "religious liberty" in the title. The leaked draft order includes language mirroring legislation that did not make it through Congress last year, including the First Amendment Defense Act and the "Russell Amendment." FADA is one of several pieces of legislation introduced last Congress that purports to resolve some conflicts between LGBT protections and the rights of organizations and individuals with religious beliefs against same-sex marriage. The "Russell Amendment" refers to a controversial amendment proposed in last year's National Defense Authorization Act that would have authorized government contractors to discriminate in hiring based on religion while using taxpayer funds. The defense bill was passed without that provision.

2. Trump appointments throughout the executive branch will certainly affect religious liberty, based on each official's views and commitment to strong constitutional values. His nominees for attorney general, secretary of state and secretary of education all had to answer questions related to religious liberty during their confirmation hearings. There has

been no word yet on who he will name to head the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and what direction that office may take under his presidency. He also has an opportunity to name an ambassador for international religious freedom (a post last held by Rabbi David Saperstein).

Most significantly, he will appoint federal judges (see page 10). President Trump has said that he wants to appoint justices and judges in the mold of the late Justice Antonin Scalia, which is not reassuring for religious liberty advocates. Scalia is known in religious liberty circles as the author of the decision that eviscerated the Free Exercise Clause (*Employment Division v. Smith*) and for having a weak view of the Establishment Clause that would allow government to favor religion (at least monotheism).

3. As a candidate, Trump made vague references to attacks on religious freedom and said he would be a champion for Christians. He referred to the potential of our country if we worked together "as one people, under one God, saluting one flag." He asserted that when he is president we will say "Merry Christmas." Such statements can erode the public's understanding of religious freedom. Most worrisome are some of Trump's statements regarding Muslims. No matter the policy details, rhetoric singling out for detrimental treatment a group of people based on religion harms religious liberty.

Putting aside where the blame lies, the presidential election has left our country deeply divided. A great deal of work is needed across a number of important issues. Religious liberty is a treasured American ideal with a long history of bipartisan support, at least with regard to the major principles. Our first priority is working to ensure understanding and continued support.

As Baptists and Americans, we recognize that all have the right to religious liberty, and we owe that freedom to our forebears who fought for the separation of church and state. We believe that strong protections for free exercise and no establishment are essential, and our mission will continue to guide our work and direct our activities, just as it has through presidential transitions over the past eight decades. As always, the BJC is watching closely, working with allies and listening to concerns to find common ground. With your continued support, we will engage the new administration and Congress in various ways and continue to lift our voice for religious liberty for all.

*This is an updated version of a column available at [BJCOnline.org](http://BJCOnline.org).*





During a briefing at the U.S. House of Representatives, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler holds up a copy of the tax guide for churches and religious organizations who choose to be classified as 501(c)(3) organizations.



# BJC stands against politicization of churches

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In Congressional briefings, Amanda Tyler discusses how the current tax code protects houses of worship

When President Donald Trump took the stage at the National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 2, he announced his intent to open the door to church electioneering by changing a longstanding provision of the tax code.

"I will get rid of and totally destroy the Johnson Amendment," President Trump told the crowd, "and allow our representatives of faith to speak freely and without fear of retribution."

Just like in the movie, that Groundhog Day proclamation is part of a discussion that's been happening repeatedly for decades, usually accompanied by misinformation and misunderstandings. His promise would result in the politicization of houses of worship, according to the Baptist Joint Committee.

The president's use of the term "Johnson Amendment" refers to a statutory provision dating back to 1954 that applies to all 501(c)(3) organizations. It gets its name from President Lyndon Johnson, who proposed the statute when he was in the U.S. Senate.

When you give money to any nonprofit group classified by the tax code as a 501(c)(3) organization, your donation can be deducted as a charitable contribution from the income you report for your federal taxes. Donors to all nonprofit groups designated as 501(c)(3) organizations – which includes the vast majority of churches – enjoy that benefit. The designation encourages donations, and those nonprofit groups also are exempt from paying sales tax and other taxes as they conduct business. The tax benefits for 501(c)(3) organizations come with a rule that protects against using those monetary gifts and tax-exempt dollars for candidate electioneering.

Trump's pledge at the prayer breakfast drew an immediate rebuke from BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, who said repealing the rule would harm our houses of worship.

"Politicizing churches does them no favors," she said. "The promised repeal is an attack on the integrity of both our charitable organizations and campaign finance system."

"Inviting churches to intervene in campaigns with tax-deductible offerings would fundamentally change our houses of worship. It would usher our partisan divisions into the pews and harm the church's ability to provide refuge," Tyler said.

"To change the law would hinder the church's prophetic witness,

threatening to turn pulpit prophets into political puppets."

The announcement came only two days after Tyler spoke on the very same issue to congressional staff. In briefings organized by the American Humanist Association, Tyler told staffers in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House why repealing that IRS provision would be unnecessary, unwanted and unwise.

"Pastors and churches now can engage in a wide variety of activity impacting the public square and politics while still claiming tax-exempt status," she said.

Tyler explained that preachers already can – and do – speak about a wide range of moral and ethical issues from the pulpit. Additionally, church leaders can – and do – participate in the political process as much as they wish as long as it's clear they are speaking for themselves and not using church resources.

Because of that most-favored tax status, a house of worship cannot tell churchgoers who to vote for or against, nor is it allowed to make political donations. "But, if a house of worship wants to wade into that political morass, it can give up its 501(c)(3) designation," she said.

Tyler discussed how the current tax code protects the church's "prophetic voice," allowing it to speak truth to power without being co-opted by the government or others in control.

"As soon as the church joins at the hip with a particular candidate or party, its prophetic witness is hindered," she said. The rule and the separation of church and state are good for the church, protecting its independent voice.

The president is not the only person claiming the current tax code is a limit on religious freedom. Lawmakers are also introducing bills that seek to change the provision. A bill dubbed the "Free Speech Fairness Act" has been introduced by Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., and Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La. It would change the law for all 501(c)(3) nonprofits, allowing them to directly endorse or oppose candidates.

During her remarks at the briefings, Tyler also shared polling numbers that show most Americans don't want politics in the pulpit. In 2016, LifeWay Research found eight out of 10 people said it is inappropriate for pastors to endorse a candidate in church.

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By Cherilyn Crowe



# Protecting religious liberty and preventing discrimination in government-funded partnerships

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By BJC General Counsel  
Holly Hollman

**Y**ears ago, the BJC produced bright blue stickers that said “Religious Liberty! The original faith-based initiative.” People loved them. It was a succinct reminder of our foundational principles prepared in response to confusing and controversial executive action. At the time, President George W. Bush was promising to expand the role of religious organizations in government-funded programs. He was also creating government offices dedicated to promoting what came to be known as the “faith-based initiative.” As the initiative has changed and shifted focus through the Bush and Obama presidencies, it has provided religious liberty lessons and continuing challenges for the future.

The BJC responded with more than stickers, of course. We care about how the institutions of government and religion interact, especially when it comes to financial entanglements, which we know can harm both. Guided by first principles, including guarding church-state separation as an essential means for protecting religious liberty, we warned against “the wrong way to do right.”

Our advocacy during the Bush era was a continuation of efforts the decade before. We were early critics of “charitable choice,” a legislative proposal inserted into a handful of social services laws aimed at increasing participation of religious organizations in government-funded programs. In our view, there was no need to “level the playing field” for religious organizations to participate in the provision of federally funded social services. In fact, there had long been a tradition of religiously affiliated organizations providing social services for those in need, at times with government funds, acting within constitutional boundaries and without religious discrimination in government-funded programs. The BJC was skeptical about efforts to fix something that was not broken.

By highlighting our concerns, including the prospect of government-sponsored religious discrimination, the BJC and its allies defeated the Bush administration’s effort to expand “charitable choice” legislation across the federal government. Bush then pursued his policy through a series of Executive Orders that outlined guidelines for partnerships between religious organizations and the government. We met with administration officials and tried to strengthen protections. The guidelines included essential, but minimal, constitutional standards to prevent federal dollars from funding inherently religious activities and to prevent religious discrimination in the distribution of social services. The Bush administration resisted other safeguards and continued to emphasize the rights of religious organizations, often at the expense of religious liberty protections for individuals. Particularly troubling, the president signed an Executive Order exempting religious institutions from the ban

on religious discrimination in federal contracts, an issue that remains highly controversial today.

Though some religious liberty advocates urged him to shut them down (the BJC did not), President Barack Obama maintained the faith-based offices and put his own stamp on the initiative. A former constitutional law professor and community organizer who had worked with religious organizations, he had a unique perspective of the promises and perils of such partnerships. He first amended one of President Bush’s Executive Orders and renamed the office the “White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships,” placing an emphasis on the variety of organizations that government would work with to accomplish its goals. At the same time, he established a bipartisan advisory council to guide the work of the office and a task force dedicated to shoring up the constitutional and legal basis of the offices and policies.

The advisory council’s recommendations formed the basis of an Executive Order and administrative process that brought more transparency and clearer safeguards for religious organizations and the beneficiaries of social services. Government funding cannot be used to fund “explicitly religious activities,” such as worship, religious instruction or proselytization. Beneficiaries must be given written notice of their rights, and services must not be conditioned on any religious requirement. Today, there is wide agreement that these regulations reflect important protections for religious liberty – both for organizations providing services and beneficiaries who receive them.

The issue of discrimination in government-funded jobs remains a source of division. Despite Obama’s campaign promise to the contrary and consistent lobbying by religious liberty and civil rights advocates, the troublesome policy exempting religious organizations from the prohibition on religious discrimination with federal funds remains. While religious organizations enjoy special solicitude under the law to ensure religious autonomy, including exemptions from laws that prohibit religious discrimination in employment, no one should be denied a federally funded job because he or she is the “wrong” religion.

Religious liberty means protecting individuals and religious institutions. Through tremendous efforts to increase clarity, consistency, transparency and accountability in the rules that govern them, our country’s faith-based partnerships have been strengthened. Growing conflicts, however, over LGBT rights and religious objections to same-sex marriage threaten to exacerbate divisions on discrimination in government-funded jobs. As we monitor Congress, the courts and the executive branch, the BJC will continue to encourage responsible exercise of our religious freedom in ways that not only comply with the law but that are constructive and fair, to ensure it for the future.





# A conversation with Walter B. Shurden

*In 2004, Walter and Kay Shurden – longtime professors at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia – made a gift to the Baptist Joint Committee to establish an annual lecture series. A signature event of the BJC, the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State are still going strong more than a decade later.*

*On March 27-28, BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman will deliver the 2017 lectures, which will be at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina. A familiar voice in Report from the Capital, Hollman has been part of the BJC staff since 2001, and she also serves as an adjunct professor of law at the Georgetown University Law Center.*

*We asked Dr. Walter Shurden, known to many as “Buddy,” to tell us more about the impetus that led to the lectures and how he and Kay feel about the series that bears their names.*

## **What led you and Kay to establish this lecture series?**

I walked out of my first course in church history at seminary almost 60 years ago convinced and certain that religious freedom is one of the basic human rights. Deny religious liberty and oppression prevails; refuse freedom of conscience and people suffer. Religious freedom is a justice issue. It alleviates suffering. It gives wings for soaring. It helps us become more fully human. Kay believes this even more than I do, so we decided to pitch in on the issue.

## **This year, BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman is delivering the lectures. What does she bring to the table?**

Holly exudes a contagious passion for religious liberty. She excites because she is excited about freedom issues. She knows the difference between religious freedom for a few and religious freedom for all. A lawyer with nuanced insights into the complicated issues of religious liberty and the separation of religion and government, she is also a Baptist marinated in the tradition of Roger Williams, John Clarke, Isaac Backus, John Leland, James Dunn and Brent Walker. Kay and I have wanted Holly Hollman to present the Shurden Lectures for several years, and we are delighted that she will do so in 2017.

## **You’ve spent a career in education, including establishing these lectures and continuing as a “minister-at-large” for Mercer. Why is education so important to you?**

Education transforms. It has changed Kay’s life and my life. We have watched with delight as it has changed others. But when a people grow up where religious liberty is a given, it is hard to keep them from yawning at the idea. We want these lectures to be a can opener for minds and souls indifferent, insensitive or closed to the preeminent value of religious liberty. We deeply hope that religious freedom will be seen as a liberating practice, not simply an arid theory.

## **Why did you decide to create these lectures in partnership with the Baptist Joint Committee?**

The BJC, one year older than I am, has a track record. All of its life the BJC has proclaimed that one of the ways we love God is to “do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” All of my life the BJC has been preaching that freedom of conscience is God’s will for creation. The BJC is not simply a Baptist thing; the BJC is a human thing. It does not matter whether you are Baptist or Buddhist, Meth-

odist or Muslim, Assembly of God or atheist, the BJC is a guardian of God-given freedoms for ALL of our children and grandchildren.

## **You are the author of some of the seminal works on being Baptist, including “The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms.” What about the Baptist message is important for people today?**

Baptist spirituality, the way the Baptist people have envisioned the religious life, is rooted in the freedom to believe according to conscience and to serve freely according to the commands of Christ. Because Baptists claimed that rarified freedom for themselves, they have been willing to grant that freedom to others. Freedom of religion is at the heart of Baptist spirituality.

## **This will be the 12th installment of the Shurden Lectures. How does it feel to see the event continue after more than a decade?**

Kay and I have often said to each other that providing this lecture series is one of the best things we have ever done. We are enormously grateful for the careful stewardship the BJC has shown with the lectures, and for the quality, character and commitment of the presenters. We are thankful the BJC and the lecture series will outlive us.

### **2017 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State Lecturer: Holly Hollman**

**Campbell University • Buies Creek, North Carolina**

**Monday, March 27**

**10 a.m.** Hollman delivers first lecture  
(students only - closed to the public)

**Tuesday, March 28**

**10:40 a.m.** Amanda Tyler speaks in chapel  
**7 p.m.** Hollman delivers second lecture  
(both events open to the public)

**For more details, visit  
[BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures](http://BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures)**

## Baptist Joint Committee welcomes spring interns

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



**RICHARD CHUNG (left)**, a native of Los Angeles, California, graduated from Yale University in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in political science. During his time at Yale, he served as the president of the United Church of Westville, a non-denominational campus ministry and church. He previously volunteered for the Immigrants' Rights Project at Public Counsel, a pro bono law firm in Los Angeles. Following his internship, Chung plans to attend law school.

**DARRELL HAMILTON II**, a native of Edmond, Oklahoma, graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in political science. He will graduate this May with a Master of Divinity degree from Wake Forest University School of Divinity. Following his internship, Hamilton, an ordained Baptist minister, plans to further explore the intersection of faith and politics. He is the son of Darrell Hamilton Sr. and ReGina Hamilton Benford.

## Trump nominates Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court

On Jan. 31, President Donald Trump nominated Judge Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court to fill the vacancy created when Justice Antonin Scalia passed away in February 2016.

Gorsuch, 49, has spent the last decade on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of appeals in his native Colorado. He was a Harvard Law classmate of President Barack Obama, and he clerked for Justices Anthony Kennedy and Byron White. In 2004, Gorsuch earned a Doctorate of Philosophy degree from Oxford University.

After the nomination, Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director Amanda Tyler released the following statement:

"President Donald Trump has taken the first step in returning the Court to full strength. We look forward to the opportunity to review Judge Neil Gorsuch's record on church-state matters and hope that the Senate will take its responsibility seriously to evaluate him in the confirmation process.

"The Baptist Joint Committee does not support or oppose judicial nominees but seeks to educate the public about the Court's role in upholding religious liberty for all people. A strong commitment to both protecting the free exercise of religion and preventing government establishment of religion is essential to upholding our constitutional commitment to America's first freedom."

Gorsuch, who is Episcopalian, would be the only Protestant on the current Supreme Court if confirmed.

By Jordan Edwards

## Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

**Grand prize**  
**\$2,000 + Trip to Washington, D.C.**

**Second prize: \$1,000**

**Third prize: \$500**

**- 2017 Topic -**

**Religious tests and immigration**

- Open to all high school juniors and seniors
- No faith requirement for entering
- Postmark deadline: March 10, 2017

**BJCOnline.org/contest**



# ***Honorary and Memorial Gifts to the Baptist Joint Committee***

**In honor of Marjorie and Joe Brake**

By Richard and Wendy Brake

**In honor of W.D. Broadway**

By Jim and Jerene Lowder

**In honor of Karen and Robert Brown**

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*- Gifts honoring Brent Walker will be featured in an upcoming issue of Report from the Capital -*

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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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