

# REPORT *FROM THE* CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty



**DR. CHARLES HAYNES** challenges students at the Shurden Lectures

**AMANDA TYLER** on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**HOLLY HOLLMAN** explores what divides us and unites us



# Johnson Amendment survives threat in omnibus spending bill

Tyler: Churches can 'breathe a sigh of relief,' but the battle is not over

The protections of the Johnson Amendment survived another threat as lawmakers scrambled to pass a spending bill to keep the government open.

On the evening of March 21, Congress released the text of the omnibus spending bill, a piece of legislation to fund the government. In such cases of "must-pass" legislation, politicians often try to tack on extra unrelated riders and amendments to sneak in pet projects or unpopular policies.

As Congress put together the text of the bill behind closed doors, on the table were requests to add language undermining the Johnson Amendment, a provision in the federal tax code that applies to all 501(c)(3) organizations (including most churches). This section prevents charitable nonprofits and private foundations from partisan campaigning, protecting their nonpartisanship and shielding churches and nonprofits from aggressive political pressure.

The final bill did not contain language affecting the Johnson Amendment, which was a win for churches and nonprofits. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler released a statement soon after the bill text was made public.

"Those who depend on houses of worship and community nonprofits can breathe a sigh of relief, as concerted efforts to weaken the longstanding law that keeps the 501(c)(3) sector free from partisan campaigning were rebuked yet again," Tyler said. "Some hoped they could slip a bad policy change into must-pass legislation, but advocates for keeping nonprofits nonpartisan spoke up and prevailed."

President Donald J. Trump signed the bill into law on March 23.

While this latest threat to the Johnson Amendment is over, others could come as riders on future bills or through other methods. The graphic on the right side of the page shows a timeline of activity surrounding this issue throughout 2017.

Earlier this year, the BJC sent an action alert email, asking constituents to contact their U.S. Senators to share why they want to keep the Johnson Amendment, and people responded to the call. To stay current on the latest threats to the Johnson Amendment and to be notified when you can make the most impact by calling your congressional representatives, be sure to sign up for our email list at [BJCOnline.org/Subscribe](http://BJCOnline.org/Subscribe).

To learn more about the issue, visit our new website page at [BJCOnline.org/JohnsonAmendment](http://BJCOnline.org/JohnsonAmendment).

By Cherilyn Crowe



## Dr. King and religious liberty

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director



**O**n April 4, we mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King was a modern-day prophet who led a movement for seismic societal change; he fought bravely, nonviolently and sacrificially for freedom and racial and economic justice. It's important, as we rightly reflect on all he did to improve this nation in his too-short life, also to consider all that is left to be done to fulfill his legacy.

As we remember, we should not omit the important role that religious liberty played in his ministry. Religious liberty is a bedrock American value that has allowed dissidents — including King — the freedom and autonomy to fight for the causes of their consciences. Like the foundation of a building, we can take religious freedom for granted until it starts to crack and crumble. Without it, the entire structure of our free society would fall. I think we can fairly say that without religious liberty, the Civil Rights Movement would not have been possible.

The institutional separation of church and state provided King a platform from which to preach, organize and lead. The Progressive National Baptist Convention — a supporting body of the BJC for the past 47 years — was King's denominational home from 1964, and he spoke at every annual session until his death.

King knew the power of an independent church to effect change. As he wrote in *Strength to Love*, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."

In the past year, we've seen some opponents of the "Johnson Amendment" tell untruths to make a political point. Those looking to eviscerate the protections in the current law have at times pointed to King and other religious leaders of the Civil Rights Movement as pastors speaking out on political issues, arguing that their speech would be censored now by the IRS. I am always puzzled by these examples. The requirement that 501(c)(3) organizations not engage in partisan campaign activity was added to the tax code in 1954 — more than a year before the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nothing in that

law prevented the prophetic speech of King and others, and it does not prevent pastors today from speaking out on moral and political issues.

But, King very intentionally declined to endorse candidates in his official capacity. In October 1960, King was arrested in Atlanta at a student-led sit-in and jailed in a maximum security state prison — a dangerous and possibly deadly place for him to be. John F. Kennedy, then the Democratic nominee for president, called both Georgia Gov. Ernest Vandiver and King's wife, Coretta, to express his concern. Within hours, King was released.

Many wondered if King would express his gratitude to Kennedy with an endorsement. A week before the election, King made it clear in a statement that he would not endorse, both because he served as the "titular head" of the nonpartisan Southern Christian Leadership Conference and because of how partisanship would impede his ministry. "The role that is mine in the emerging social order of the South and America demands that I remain nonpartisan. ... [D]evoid of partisan political attachments, I am free to be critical of both parties when necessary," he wrote. Perhaps he also knew the divisive impact an official endorsement might have on the diverse coalition he was building for the movement. King needed to unite many in an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. He did so, mobilizing a generation for action and inspiring future generations of activists to the present day.

King simultaneously made statements indicating his private support for Kennedy, as pastors and other nonprofit leaders can do without jeopardizing the tax-exempt status of their organizations. Kennedy's religion was a factor for many voters, but King said, "I never intend to be a religious bigot. I never intend to reject a man running for President of the United States just because he is a Catholic. Religious bigotry is as immoral, un-democratic, un-American and un-Christian as racial bigotry."

King understood that defending religious liberty was critical to protecting civil rights, and that an independent and inclusive church could change the world through social action. This lesson is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago, as we seek to do the work required to make his rhetorical "dream" for harmony across our divisions a reality.

# Join us for this year's luncheon in Dallas

Connect with advocates and future leaders of religious liberty on Friday, June 15

You are invited to a special Religious Liberty Council Luncheon featuring the next generation of religious liberty advocates in Dallas, Texas, this summer.

On Friday, June 15, you will meet some of our BJC Fellows, a group of 30 dynamic young professionals who are proving to be the voices of the future, using their gifts and skills to advocate for religious liberty for all people in their spheres of influence.

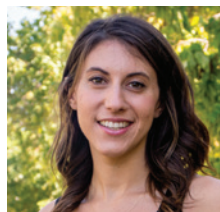
Each BJC Fellow participated in an intensive seminar with BJC staff and other scholars in Colonial Williamsburg to deepen their theological, legal and historical understandings of religious liberty. At this year's RLC Luncheon, you'll hear how they are putting what they learned into practice, standing up for our first freedom in their congregations, communities and professions.

Our program features a discussion with three outstanding BJC Fellows:

**REV. AURELIA DAVILA PRATT '17**, Pastor of Spiritual Formation, Peace of Christ Church, Round Rock, Texas;

**MS. SOFI HERSHER '17**, Assistant Communications Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.; and

**REV. COREY MITCHELL '17**, a speech language pathologist in Raleigh, N.C., and Associate Minister for Children and Youth,



Hersher



Mitchell



Pratt



Mason

Rock Spring Missionary Baptist Church, Creedmoor, N.C.

The Rev. George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, will facilitate the discussion, and you also will be introduced to our other BJC Fellows as well as members of the Class of 2018. Be there to hear the innovative ways they are making a difference, and find out how you can join and amplify their voices by engaging them in your congregations and communities.

The luncheon is open to the public, but you must have a ticket to attend. Tickets are available for \$45 each, and a table of 10 tickets — which includes a designated table and recognition in the print program — is \$500. Young ministers with 5 years or less experience and seminary students can purchase tickets at a discounted rate of \$25.

Purchase tickets online and learn more about this year's event by visiting [BJCOnline.org/Luncheon](http://BJCOnline.org/Luncheon).

## 2018 Religious Liberty Council Luncheon

Friday, June 15

11:30 am

Hyatt Regency  
Dallas, Texas

Tickets: \$45 each

Young minister and seminary  
student tickets: \$25 each

Table of 10 tickets: \$500

(includes assigned table and  
recognition in print program)

Purchase tickets online:  
[BJCOnline.org/Luncheon](http://BJCOnline.org/Luncheon)

Advance ticket sales end June 10

## Bring the BJC to you

Members of the Baptist Joint Committee staff welcome the opportunity to speak to your congregation, community, or interfaith event about religious liberty and various church-state topics. Visit [BJCOnline.org/bring-the-bjc-to-you](http://BJCOnline.org/bring-the-bjc-to-you) to let us know if you're interested in bringing the BJC to your area.



March 13: BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler discusses the Johnson Amendment at a gathering of nonprofit leaders in D.C.



Jan. 30: BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks speaks on an interfaith panel at a Religious Freedom Summit in Orlando, Florida.



## New threats to religious liberty require new efforts to build a stronger vision

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



**F**or many reasons, it seems our work is getting more difficult. As BJC staff members talk to student groups, travel to speak at universities and participate in conferences, we often find confusion about religious liberty. Even among individuals and churches who have long supported our work, we hear worries about divisions. Friends are straining to hold on to the common ground we share as people who have fought for religious liberty. Regardless of the group to whom I'm speaking, I have learned not to assume much about the audience's understanding and expectations of religious freedom. In the current environment, opinions are often shaped by emotionally charged — and often unnecessarily contentious — arguments surrounding recent challenges.

The BJC is responding to these increasing and difficult challenges. Many are particularly divisive, including conflicts over legislative proposals to protect civil rights and religious exemptions, deliberate efforts to exploit fears about religious minorities, and an intensity of partisan rhetoric that echoes in social media. We have maintained our commitment to a traditional understanding of religious liberty, informed by the lessons of history and a dedication to our values. We've stepped up our engagement to participate in each new debate, and it is clear that we must do more.

We have overcome threats to religious liberty in the past, including from candidates and elected officials who use religious differences or misleading rhetoric about the law to seek other agendas. But, it has become more difficult as we now face new threats from beyond our borders. As reported earlier this year, foreign entities are using our differences to harm us. The U.S. intelligence community found that Russia sought to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process and used particular issues to interfere with the 2016 presidential election. In its indictment of 13 Russian nationals, the U.S. Department of Justice found that religion was used to sow discord through fictionalized stories and social media accounts. The content included demonized images of Hillary Clinton, claims that President Obama wanted to convert American children to Islam and other conspiracy theories. While religion was not the only — or even primary — area of focus, it is striking that

our religious diversity would appear to provide fertile ground for those seeking to pick at our vulnerabilities, stoke fears and undermine our institutions.

Though they used a wide variety of means to sow discord, the foreign actors' investment in social media certainly magnified and multiplied their efforts. Even before the reports of Russian interference, plenty had been written about the dangers of false news reports circulating on social media. The problem cuts across all demographics and should be particularly alarming for religious people. As Wheaton College's Ed Stetzer has urged, Christians — as people of truth — should be especially cautious on social media. I agree with his advice that we should guard our integrity by never sharing what we can't verify and apologizing when we are wrong.

The Russia indictments tell us that we may be even more vulnerable than we think. The stakes are getting higher as social media becomes more integral to our lives as a means for information and interaction with others. As our divisions seem to cut deeper — not only along geographic and party lines, but within local communities, denominations and families — it is not enough to defend ourselves against misinformation and manipulation. We need to be more connected to each other as human beings, not divided based on our worst stereotypes. When it comes to religious liberty, we need listen to each other, seek understanding and reclaim a vision that can bridge our divisions and protect religious liberty for all.

I don't think it has ever been easy. But the effort is worth it. I believe that most Americans would agree that working to defend and extend religious liberty for all, as the BJC's mission demands, is vital, important work. It reflects a fundamental promise of our American constitutional tradition. For historic Baptists, religious liberty is also a defining aspect of faith, crucial to our understanding of God who created us free and responsible.

We should revisit old lessons but also be willing to learn new ones. We must tell our stories truthfully and listen to each other with compassion. Only through understanding what divides us can we find common ground in our religious liberty tradition like Americans did before us. With that, our tradition can continue to be a source of strength, not a weakness to be exploited.



Dr. Charles C. Haynes speaks on the campus of Mercer University for the 2018 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. Photos courtesy of Mercer University.

## Shurden Lectures 2018: Follow your conscience and raise your voice

What does the First Amendment mean for Americans today? How can we continue our country's commitment to religious liberty?

Dr. Charles C. Haynes spoke on the campuses of Mercer University to shed light on these questions and more during the 2018 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State.

The founding director of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute, Haynes has been a longtime collaborator with the Baptist Joint Committee and a national leader in discussions on the role of religion in public life.

He began by noting the current climate in our culture, with growing harassment of religious minorities in the United States.

"At this defining moment in American history, we the people face a stark and momentous choice," he told the crowd during his first lecture on the campus of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta.

"Will we reaffirm and renew our commitment to the guiding principles of religious liberty that enable Americans to realize the dream of 'E Pluribus Unum' – out of many, one? Or will we succumb to forces of intolerance and hate that are the root cause of religious and ethnic division, conflict and violence in this country and across the globe?"

Haynes shared stories of the first two arrivals of Jewish families seeking a safe haven from persecution in what is now the United States.

First, in 1654, a boat containing Jewish families landed in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (now New York), but the colony's governor considered Jews to be "a repugnant and disgusting" race. While he allowed them to remain (mostly for economic reasons), he did succeed in denying the families basic rights, including the right to build a synagogue and worship openly and freely.

"This hostile reception is rooted in a distorted reading of Scripture that supports a 'Christian nation,' by which they mean their version of Christianity married to the state," Haynes said. "In such a society, one group imposes their faith through government and, at best, tolerates others to live there."

Four years later, another vessel carrying Jewish families landed. This time, the boat landed in Rhode Island, where the families were told they were free to practice their faith openly and freely as citizens of the colony. "Jews had not heard this anywhere else in Christendom," Haynes said.

This reception for the Jewish families was due largely to the religious vision of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and "an eccentric Puritan minister." He's also the founder of the First Baptist Church in America, even though he was



only a Baptist for about six months (which, as Haynes pointed out, was a long time for Williams).

Williams modeled core principles and virtues, according to Haynes, that are necessary to sustain any experiment in religious liberty, including upholding an absolute commitment to “soul liberty” as an inherent right for all.

“All are free to persuade others to their truth, but no one — not even the founder of the colony — may use the engine of government to promote one religion over another,” Haynes explained.

Williams also practiced civility, which Haynes said is an essential virtue in a democratic society. “Conflict and debate are vital to democracy, but *how* we debate, not only *what* we debate, is critical.”

In his second lecture, Haynes expanded on what it means to continue embracing liberty of conscience in our country. Speaking to students on the campus of Mercer University in Macon, he shared the “secret sauce of social change” in America: putting our First Amendment freedoms to work.

Highlighting the impact of the survivors of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Haynes said the students’ message is powerful: it is a call to conscience shaped by witnessing the deaths of friends and classmates. While the gun-control debate is not a religious issue, Haynes said it is a cause of conscience for many of those students.

“What we call the religion clauses of the First Amendment — no establishment and free exercise — are better named the ‘religious freedom’ or ‘liberty of conscience’ clauses,” he said, explaining that they create a civic framework that allows Americans to debate ideas, negotiate differences and, where possible, find a common vision.

While three-fourths of the world’s people live in places with high restrictions on liberty of conscience, Haynes noted that denying people the right to follow their God or deepest convictions

“is the leading cause of conflict and violence throughout the world.”

He shared examples from American history of students of conscience standing up for justice and freedom, such as Mary Beth Tinker who wore a black arm band to high school in 1965 to protest the Vietnam War. While her family received threats, her act of conscience led to a 1969 Supreme Court decision establishing that students don’t leave their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse door.

“Far from being too young to make a difference, students who follow their conscience have always been and are now our nation’s best hope for changing what is wrong and unjust,” Haynes said.



“Far from being too young to make a difference, students who follow their conscience have always been and are now our nation’s best hope for changing what is wrong and unjust.”

CHARLES HAYNES

Haynes shared a First Amendment vision for religious liberty in public life when he spoke on the campus of Mercer University’s Walter F. George School of Law.

“The First Amendment provides the civic framework — ground rules, if you will — that can bring us together and help us find com-



Students and community members attend the lecture on the campus of Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta.

mon ground,” he said.

Haynes shared his strong conviction that the future of the American experiment in freedom requires getting religion and religious liberty right in the public square.

For nearly 30 years, Haynes has worked on the role of religion in public schools with local school districts, as well as with religious and civil liberties organizations. Much of his work led to the creation of consensus guidelines on religion in the public schools.

During his lecture, Haynes reminded everyone that, under current law, students have robust rights, including the right to pray in public schools — alone or in groups — as long as the activity does not disrupt the school or infringe on the rights of others; the right to share their faith; the right to express personal religious views in class or as part of a written assignment as long as the speech is relevant to the discussion and meets the academic requirements; the right to form student-led clubs in secondary schools if the school allows other non-curriculum-related clubs; and more.

“When religious liberty principles are properly applied, schools are able to go beyond the failed policies and practices that either imposed religion or banished religion — and create what I call a ‘First Amendment public school,’” he said.

Nevertheless, he noted that conflicts remain and new clashes keep rising.

“If we have any hope of living with our deepest differences going forward — especially our religious differences — we must do the hard work now of renewing our shared commitment to the core civic principles and ideals that bind us together as a people,” he said.

Throughout his presentations, Haynes reminded students that American citizens are “heirs to the boldest and most successful experiment in liberty of conscience the world has ever seen.”

Haynes also provided an inspirational charge to the next generation: “Follow your conscience, raise your voice, petition your government — work to create a more just, free and safe society.”

In 2019, the Shurden Lectures will be held March 26-27 on the campus of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas.

Dr. Walter B. and Dr. Kay W. Shurden endowed the annual lecture series in 2004. It is held at Mercer every three years and at other colleges, universities or seminaries the other years.

For more information on the 2018 Shurden Lectures and to watch videos of Haynes’ presentations, visit our website page at [BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures](http://BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures).

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By Cheryl Crowe

Students attend the lectures in Macon, Georgia, on Mercer University’s undergraduate campus and law school. Bottom right: Shurden Lecturer Charles C. Haynes pictured with BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler and Kay and Walter “Buddy” Shurden.





# Florida commission rejects proposal to eliminate state ‘no-aid’ clause

A groundswell of support from Baptist, Jewish and other religious liberty supporters saved an important protection in the Florida Constitution during a year-long review process.

The Florida Constitution requires lawmakers to reevaluate it every 20 years and propose additions or deletions to it; voters then approve or reject the proposals at the ballot box. This process is accomplished through the Constitution Revision Commission (CRC), with members appointed by various state officials.

The BJC and our Florida supporters have been monitoring this year’s CRC as the commission had been considering one specific proposal to repeal an important protection for religious liberty: the state’s “no-aid” clause.

Thirty-nine states have some sort of a “no-aid” constitutional provision that prohibits the state from spending money to support a house of worship. These provisions have a long history, with some even pre-dating the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Baptists and other colonial religious dissenters fought for these early religious liberty protections that separated their churches from state funding and control.

During this current debate, Baptists joined with other Christian, Jewish and non-Christian neighbors to support the state “no-aid” clause, reaffirming the importance of this provision in providing religious freedom for all Floridians. Advocates signed letters opposing the proposal to remove the “no-aid” clause, testified at public hearings and called state lawmakers.

“No-aid” clauses ensure that taxpayers are not forced to finan-

## The No-Aid Provision in Florida’s State Constitution:

- Protects the integrity of our faith communities
- Allows religion to flourish
- Keeps religion and government independent

Graphic: Americans United for Separation of Church and State

cially support houses of worship. Voluntary assemblies, not coerced government-approved ones, promote a vital faith.

After its meeting on March 21, the CRC voted to send 25 proposals for finalization. The entire CRC will reconvene in April to consider these 25 proposals and vote on which ones will be placed on the 2018 general election ballot. Despite its introduction early in the process, repealing the “no-aid” clause is not among the 25 proposals to be considered in that April meeting.

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By Jennifer Hawks, BJC Associate General Counsel

# Survey: Protestant church diversity ‘heading in the right direction’

More than 4 in 5 Protestant pastors say their congregations are predominantly made up of one racial or ethnic group.

That 81 percent figure is high, but it’s not as high as it was four years ago, according to a study published March 20 by LifeWay Research.

It was 86 percent in a similar survey of both mainline and evangelical churches by LifeWay in 2013.

“Protestant churches are still mostly divided by race, but they’re heading in the right direction,” LifeWay Research Executive Director Scott McConnell said in a written statement.

Pastors of churches with 250 or more congregants were less likely (74 percent) to say their churches are mostly one racial or ethnic group.

Denominationally, Pentecostal pastors were least likely (68 percent) to say their churches are made up of predominantly one race or ethnicity. Lutheran pastors were most likely (89 percent)

to report a lack of diversity.

The LifeWay data does not include the actual racial and ethnic makeup of churches — only how pastors responded to the statement, “My church is predominantly one racial or ethnic group.”

Its publication comes just over a week after a report in *The New York Times* described a “scattered exodus” of black churchgoers from predominantly white evangelical churches after their white pastors failed to address police brutality and their white congregants overwhelmingly voted for President Donald J. Trump. Earlier reporting by Deborah Jian Lee in *Religion Dispatches* said Trump’s election “forced a reckoning” for evangelicals of color.

LifeWay’s survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted by phone from Aug. 30 to Sept. 18, 2017. It had an overall margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

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By Religion News Service staff

# Religious liberty differs from Christian exceptionalism

By 2017 BJC Fellow Kristen Nielsen Donnelly

“**R**eligious liberty,” my friend said hesitantly, “sounds to me like people trying to make sure the rest of us say ‘Christmas’ instead of ‘holidays.’”

I stirred my coffee, picking my next words carefully. “I’d call that something different. When I use ‘religious liberty,’ when organizations like the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty use it, and when Thomas Jefferson used it, it means that everyone gets to worship who or what they want, and the government has no say in it, nor will they establish a state church.”

“Oh, so separation of church and state stuff,” my friend said, clearly more comfortable with where the conversation was going. “Well, that’s a core of the Constitution, right? We can’t mess with that.”

I took a long sip of my coffee and launched into the explanation that, yes, religious liberty is enshrined in our Constitution, but people can certainly mess with it because the U.S. Constitution is a living and amendable document.

One of the foundations of the American experiment — this radical notion that people can govern themselves through elections and written documentation and town hall meetings and conversations and compromise and negotiation and sheer determination — is that the state cannot impose a godhead on the people. If the government established a state religion, for example, it would declare that the deity worshipped by that religion was owed allegiance by all citizens and would place that deity above the people’s participation in the state.

Right there, in the First Amendment, the Framers declared their belief that a state church and a republic were mutually exclusive. With those bold strokes of a few phrases, the United States of America became a promise to peoples of all faiths and traditions — to be a citizen will never require participation in a religious institution. You will never have to be baptized into a church to be allowed to own property, you will never have to pray at a certain temple to be an elected official, you will never have to swear to a god or goddess before enrolling your children in school.

Religious liberty, therefore, is ensuring that everyone has the right and freedom to worship who or what they want, where they want, and how they want. Any limits placed on that should be about protection from harm (religious ter-



rorism is not religious liberty, for example), and not about emotional discomfort. To put it more bluntly, when people use “religious liberty” to describe their belief that America is a Christian nation, that’s not religious liberty — that’s Christian exceptionalism, and *those are different things*.

Theologically, there are a lot of rabbit holes we can fall down about how someone’s beliefs regarding free will frequently determine his or her stance on this issue, but those debates are best left for another time. Instead, I want to conclude with a gentle reminder.

The American experiment, which is fundamentally what this country is, relies on participation — not only voting (which it demands) but also *participation*. Showing up. Rolling up the proverbial sleeves. Having ideas, putting feet to them, and making them work. That also means America evolves. The very nature of participation means that the system is changed by those who participate in it; that’s simply how systems work.

If you are of the conviction that religious liberty is sacrosanct to the core of America, then you need to protect it. Pay attention to it. Nurture it. Practice it in your own congregational spaces and personal life. And, if you need assistance in doing that, my personal favorite resource for the conversation is the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. Non-Baptists, fear not. “Baptist” is a nod to the priority Baptists have always placed on religious liberty — not an exclusionary label.

A commitment to religious liberty means a commitment to ensuring that there is room for all faiths: Buddhism, Islam, Rastafarianism or one’s self. It means dialogues of understanding around tables full of patience and grace, as we break bread with those who are different than us and yet the same. It means work and dedication and bravery. But it also means patriotism, because to protect and foster religious liberty is one of the most fundamental pieces of this land that we love.

*Kristen Nielsen Donnelly, M.S.W., M.Div., Ph.D., is COO of Abbey Companies, executive vice president of Abbey Research and a member of the 2017 class of BJC Fellows.*

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# Thank you to our supporting churches

The Baptist Joint Committee is grateful for the more than 200 churches who partnered with us in 2017 to advance our mission. Churches not only provide nearly \$100,000 in annual support to the BJC, but they are also the key avenue for educating people about religious liberty and the separation of church and state. We appreciate the close connections we have to the communities of Christians that worship and serve in the historic Baptist tradition.

These churches contributed \$1,000 or more to the BJC Annual Fund in 2017:

Agape Baptist Church,  
Fort Worth, Texas  
Broadway Baptist Church,  
Fort Worth, Texas  
Central Baptist Church,  
Wayne, Penn.  
Calvary Baptist Church,  
Washington, D.C.  
College Park Baptist Church of  
Greensboro, N.C.  
Commonwealth Baptist Church,  
Alexandria, Va.  
First Baptist Church,  
Big Lake, Texas  
First Baptist Church,  
Frankfort, Ky.  
First Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

First Baptist Church,  
Silver Spring, Md.  
Grace Baptist Church,  
Richmond, Va.  
Highland Baptist Church,  
Louisville, Ky.  
Highland Park Baptist Church,  
Austin, Texas  
Knollwood Baptist Church,  
Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Monte Vista Baptist Church,  
Maryville, Tenn.  
Northminster Baptist Church,  
Jackson, Miss.  
Northside Baptist Church,  
Clinton, Miss.  
Northside Drive Baptist Church,  
Atlanta, Ga.

Ravensworth Baptist Church,  
Annandale, Va.  
River Road Church, Baptist,  
Richmond, Va.  
Riverside Baptist Church,  
Washington, D.C.  
Second Baptist Church,  
Little Rock, Ark.  
University Avenue Baptist Church,  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
Watts Street Baptist Church,  
Durham, N.C.  
Williamsburg Baptist Church,  
Williamsburg, Va.  
Wilshire Baptist Church,  
Dallas, Texas  
Woodland Baptist Church,  
San Antonio, Texas

If your church is interested in joining these in supporting the BJC, please contact Taryn Deaton, senior director of operations and development, at [tdeaton@BJCOnline.org](mailto:tdeaton@BJCOnline.org) or 202-544-4226.

## Other places to find the BJC this spring

### April

Apr. 15 | The BJC conducts a workshop at McLean Baptist Church in McLean, Virginia

Apr. 16 | BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler preaches at First Baptist Church Rochester in Rochester, New York

Apr. 17 | Tyler speaks at the Third National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue in Great Lakes, Wisconsin

Apr. 17 | BJC staff talk with Carson-Newman University students via video conference

Apr. 22 | The BJC visits adult and youth Bible school classes at Vienna Baptist Church in Vienna, Virginia

### May

May 5 | Tyler is the keynote speaker at the Cleveland (Ohio) Baptist Association's Quarterly Training Institute; the BJC will also conduct a workshop

May 31 | Tyler speaks to students from the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond

### June

June 14 | BJC staff lead a religious liberty workshop at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Dallas, Texas

June 15 | Religious Liberty Council Luncheon in Dallas, Texas



For more BJC events, head to [BJCOnline.org/Calendar](http://BJCOnline.org/Calendar).  
To learn about bringing the BJC to your community,  
email [bjc@BJCOnline.org](mailto:bjc@BJCOnline.org).

## Moving?

## Have an update?

## Want to stay on our mailing list?

## *We need to hear from you!*

The Baptist Joint Committee is upgrading our database and updating our subscription list. **If you haven't been in contact with us recently or if you have a change in your family or your mailing address**, we want to hear from you!

Send an email to [bjc@BJCOnline.org](mailto:bjc@BJCOnline.org) or give us a call at 202-544-4226. Just confirm your information and let us know if you want to stay on our list, if you want to be removed from it, or simply share an update.

We always want to hear from you! Contact us at any time with questions or comments, and stay in touch!



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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.

## SUPPORTING BODIES of the BJC

Alliance of Baptists  
American Baptist Churches USA  
Baptist General Association of Virginia  
Baptist General Convention of Missouri (Churchnet)  
Baptist General Convention of Texas  
Converge  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina  
National Baptist Convention of America  
National Baptist Convention USA Inc.  
National Missionary Baptist Convention  
North American Baptists Inc.  
Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.  
Religious Liberty Council  
Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

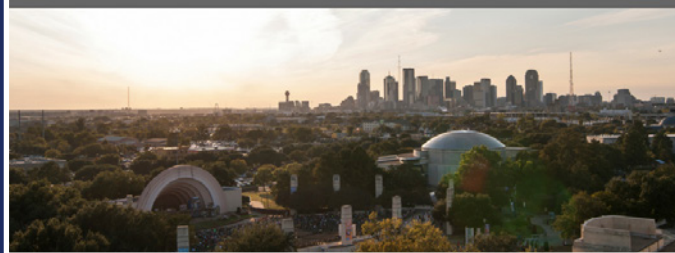
## REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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**Ilana Ostrin** ASSOCIATE EDITOR



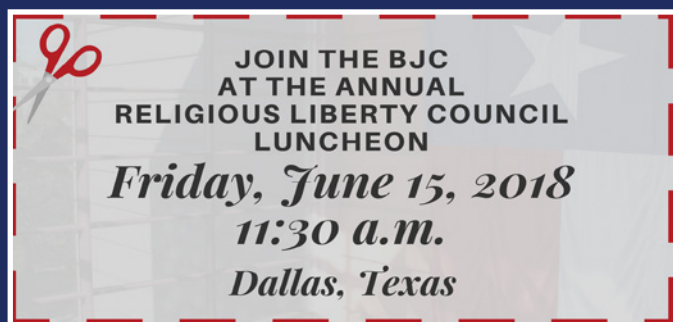
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For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee at [bjc@BJCOnline.org](mailto:bjc@BJCOnline.org).

**WANT TO ATTEND THE RLC LUNCHEON,  
BUT ON A STUDENT BUDGET?**



**Discounted tickets are available for students  
and young ministers**

Visit [BJCOnline.org/Luncheon](http://BJCOnline.org/Luncheon) for more information to help you connect with other religious liberty supporters in Dallas.



### Save the date!

Cut out this reminder so you won't forget this year's RLC Luncheon! See page 4 for all of the details.