

AMANDA TYLER testifies
before Congress

HOLLY HOLLMAN on finding
common ground in polarizing debates

BJC, others speak out against
blasphemy laws on Capitol Hill


A conversation with
AIDSAND WRIGHT-RIGGINS

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty



Ms. Amanda Tyler

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler testifies before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution on Oct. 2, 2018, in a hearing on threats to religious liberty around the world. Read more on pages 6-7.

A THREAT TO ANYONE'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS A THREAT TO EVERYONE'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

How can you support the Baptist Joint Committee?

We all have a part in defending religious liberty. Your year-end gift affirms your partnership in the BJC's mission.

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Baptist Joint Committee
200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
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BJC in action

Follow the Baptist Joint Committee on our social media channels to see more photos of our staff.



On October 9, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler was the guest lecturer for the Fall 2018 Wamble Symposium at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, hosted by the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies. Photo: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies



At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto, Canada, Amanda Tyler spoke on a panel on November 4 titled "Baptists Whose Passion is Justice" alongside (left to right) Stephen Reeves of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and Elijah Brown of the Baptist World Alliance. Rob Sellers, theology professor at Hardin-Simmons University, moderated the panel.



In September, BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks visited five cities in South Carolina to lead conversations about religious liberty on a tour organized by CBF of South Carolina.



BJC Associate Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. led a workshop at the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches Annual Meeting in San Jose, California, on October 13.



A joyful calling

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

One of the joys of my job is hearing from donors about why they support the work of the BJC. When I got a note from one of our Jewish supporters recently, I asked his permission to share it with you:

"A week or so ago, I ran across on the web a Jewish group working on religious liberty. I said to myself, 'Hey, they must be just like the BJC' – the name kind of sounds the same. Then I did my research on their website. I very quickly discovered that names can be deceiving.

I was wrong. Big time. They're nothing like the BJC.

At the end of my research I laughed out loud and I said to my wife: 'I've got more in common with the Baptists than the Jews – how funny is that.'

I originally started my support in 2015 at a modest level, which continued in 2016 and 2017, and then ramped up recently in response to the increasing attacks on everyone's religious liberty."

I'm honored to have the loyal support of someone from outside the Baptist tradition, and I am grateful for his message. It tells me that labels can be misleading, words can be confused, and good internet research is important!

It also speaks to the challenge of our continued work. After 82 years of faithful service, the BJC's enduring mission now lives in a new and fluid environment. "Religious freedom" has been swept into noisy, partisan, polarized debates where the words themselves carry an uncertain meaning. We are left searching for a vocabulary with which to defend what has historically been intended by religious liberty. New groups are springing up claiming to defend religious liberty while often confusing the issues, misrepresenting the facts, and ignoring half of our constitutional protection that ensures that the government will not take sides when it comes to religion and its practice.

It would be easy to be discouraged by the current reality, but we are not. Instead, we are energized by the opportunities that the BJC has to bring needed clarity, understanding, and bridge-building to our civil discourse.

And we have a plan to make it happen. In early 2019, the BJC will be making strategic changes to our messaging and communications to give you – our friends and advocates – resources with which to carry out this work. This will include:

- *Refreshing our Brand and Image:* New visuals and messages are being developed to rapidly communicate with various audiences.

- *Introducing a New BJC Website:* By mid-year, we will launch an overhauled BJC website that will allow us – and you – to welcome and introduce new supporters to our work. We will keep you informed and engaged on the latest religious liberty news and commentary from Washington and elsewhere.

- *Equipping Advocates:* We anticipate offering more explicit opportunities for individuals to engage in religious liberty advocacy beginning in 2019. We will provide advocacy campaigns that identify specific goals to organize around and to recruit other advocates from Baptist as well as other faith backgrounds.

These projects also will allow us to reach beyond labels to welcome colleagues and donors from many traditions to support our urgent mission, while expressing gratitude for our Baptist roots.

Within days of receiving my friend's note, unimaginable tragedy struck when 11 Jewish people were killed in the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre. I joined many other faith leaders, decrying anti-Semitic hatred that inspired the murderer, standing in solidarity with our Jewish neighbors and calling the violence for what it was – a direct attack on religious liberty (see pages 10-11 for more reaction).

No matter your faith tradition, you can count on the BJC to stand up for you and your religious freedom. We view our calling to advocate for religious liberty as a responsibility and one that we accept joyfully. We also know that we do not do this work alone: we work in coalition with other faith groups, secular organizations and individual advocates committed to equal freedom for our neighbors. Protecting religious liberty for everyone will take all of our collective energy and resolve.

Your gift today will affirm your partnership with the BJC as we join together in this joyful responsibility of defending and extending religious liberty for all.

BJC and others speak out against blasphemy laws

BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks speaks at a Senate briefing on Oct. 16.

Organizations are coming together to oppose blasphemy laws around the world, which – at their core – stifle religious expression.

On October 16, BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks participated in a Senate briefing opposing blasphemy laws alongside a variety of religious, government and secular leaders sharing different perspectives on the problem. The briefing was organized by the American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry and Secular Coalition for America. Hawks highlighted stories of Christian persecution under laws that criminalize blasphemy.

Although the details vary by country, a blasphemy law seeks to punish those who insult, offend, demean or denigrate religion (including religious doctrines, important figures, symbols and texts) with fines, imprisonment or even the death penalty. Approximately one in three countries has at least one blasphemy law on the books.

“At their core, blasphemy and apostasy laws are a dangerous blending of the institutions of religion and state,” Hawks said during the briefing. She also reminded the crowd why Baptists are strong supporters of freedom for all, pointing out that Baptists were once a persecuted religious minority.

“Marginalized Baptist pastors fought not only for their own religious freedom [in Colonial America] but consistently spoke of the need for Jewish, Muslim, atheist and all of our neighbors to be free to worship God, or not, as they feel led,” Hawks said. “As an ordained minister, I would argue that critically thinking about religion is what keeps religion vital and applicable to our daily lives.”

Knox Thames, the special advisor for

religious minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia at the U.S. Department of State, explained why the United States opposes blasphemy laws. “Blasphemy laws, and the often related laws of apostasy, are increasingly common tools used by governments in oppressing freedom of belief and expression,” he said, noting that some individuals also cite these laws as a pretext to incite violence.

Thames also spoke of the recent Poto-mac Declaration, an action plan to protect religious freedom around the world, and noted that it specifically calls on countries to repeal such laws.

The list of countries with blasphemy laws includes countries generally associated with human rights restrictions, such as Pakistan, Iran and Russia; but it also includes frequent American allies, such as Canada, Germany and Israel. Several smaller countries, including Antigua, Comoros and San Marino, also have them.

Elizabeth Cassidy, who serves as the director of international law and policy at the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), shared facts on blasphemy laws. She said most of them are vaguely worded, part of the criminal code and do not require the showing of intent. “So, basically, you can be charged with a crime without intending to have committed a crime,” she added.

While some countries do not enforce their blasphemy laws, Cassidy explained that having them on the books is problematic because oppressive regimes point to other countries – particularly western democracies – to justify their own laws.

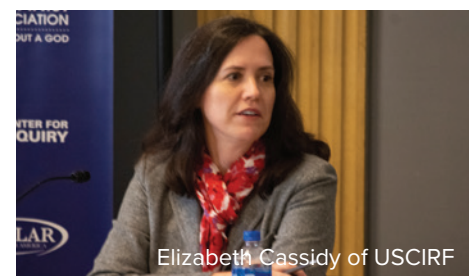
As an example, the last person in Ireland to be convicted of violating a blasphemous

my law was in 1703 (before the country was independent). However, Aasiya Noreen spent eight years on death row in Pakistan for violating a blasphemy law before her conviction was overturned in October 2018.

Pakistan, however, will no longer be able to use Ireland to justify its blasphemy law, as Irish citizens voted to repeal it on October 26. This repeal effort had been supported by various groups, including the Irish Catholic Bishops who called the provision “largely obsolete.”

The BJC is currently working with religious and secular partners to fight blasphemy laws and support international repeal efforts. Thames said the government appreciates the partnership of non-government organizations and members of Congress as they work to encourage reforms around the world.

BJC Staff Reports



Finding common ground amid contentious debates

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Does the U.S. Constitution require religious exemptions to certain LGBT rights? Can state laws protect the full and equal enjoyment of public facilities by LGBT people despite religious objections of some store owners? The U.S. Supreme Court has not answered those questions squarely. In the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case decided in June, the Court sided with a baker who refused to prepare a wedding cake for a same-sex couple because it found the bakery had not received a fair (religiously neutral) hearing. The Court neither resolved the broader conflict that has arisen between religious objections and state anti-discrimination laws nor offered guidance for the many related legal conflicts facing civil rights and religious liberty.

While the challenges will continue for the foreseeable future, a much-needed, thoughtful resource is now available. *Religious Freedom, LGBT Rights, and the Prospects for Common Ground* is a collection of essays that brings together leading voices from different perspectives, including the BJC's, to take on some of the most difficult issues between LGBT rights and some faith communities. As described in the introduction, the essays are intended to offer a "360-degree view of culture war conflicts around faith and sexuality." The book explores "whether communities with such profound differences in belief are able to reach mutually acceptable solutions in order to live with integrity."

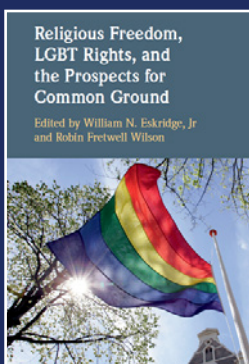
The book's editors, William N. Eskridge Jr. and Robin Fretwell Wilson, convened an open dialogue and search for common ground by engaging an impressive group of ecclesiastical leaders, LGBT rights advocates, seminary presidents, theologians,

and equality and religious liberty scholars and activists. Their discourse and feedback led to the essays, which examine the possibilities and perceived limits of reconciling differences.

The book is organized to help frame civil dialogue and find guiding principles to mediate conflicts, as well as explore specific perspectives from faith traditions and civil rights law. It also addresses the significant practical challenges that arise in the context of higher education and public accommodations laws.

The variety of conflicts that arise is vast. The difficulty of even discussing many of them has taken a toll. But accommodating religious differences is not a new challenge under our constitutional order, which is why I focus my chapter on putting the conflicts in a broader perspective. Drawing on our first principles that protect religious liberty for all, "Why Money Matters: LGBT Rights and Religious Freedom" reviews the historical and practical ways we live with our religious differences. The United States' legal tradition of protecting religious liberty seldom operates in absolute terms; religious liberty is not protected the same way in every context. When religious institutions accept government money, for example, they undercut their broad claims for religious autonomy.

The book's editors note that "[r]eaders almost certainly will disagree with something in the volume. But whatever policy prescription Americans ultimately embrace, it is essential to develop a public understanding of what is at stake." Indeed, the BJC is deeply grateful for the way this effort reveals the complexity of the issues and the tremendous good will needed to build bridges and find a positive way forward in our policy debates.



"As the list of contributors makes clear, this volume represents an honest attempt to give parity of treatment between communities and ideas without prejudging the outcome. Our contributors are especially suited to open this dialogue. All have written extensively about LGBT rights, same-sex marriage, or religious liberty. Many have long had a foot in the policy and legislative worlds and so bring a healthy respect for how difficult that task may be. All approach the subject with good will and a recognition that these are hard issues that go to who we are as individuals and as a people. To enhance the cohesion of the book, the editors have added references throughout the chapters to other chapters. As you read the volume, we hope you will share our optimism that people of good will can forge new ways to reconcile the needs of the faith and LGBT communities."

William N. Eskridge Jr. and Robin Fretwell Wilson, editors

The book will be available from Cambridge University Press by 2019. View the table of contents and purchase the book online at bit.ly/CommonGround2019 and use the code WNESKRIDGE2018 for a 20% discount.



Tyler to Congress: We must attend to current religious liberty challenges

“Maintaining the United States’ strong leadership in defending religious liberty around the world requires that we attend to challenges at home as well as abroad.”

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler relayed that message to members of Congress on October 2. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, Tyler spoke boldly about the challenges to our first freedom at home and abroad.

Spectators packed the room to attend the hearing, titled “Threats to Religious Liberty Around the World.” Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, chairs the subcommittee and presided over the hearing, alongside ranking member Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii.

“Since our founding, the United States has been a world leader in protecting religious liberty,” Tyler said during the first portion of her testimony. “The American legal tradition protects religious liberty in a distinct way that has served this country well.”

Tyler spoke of the importance of Article VI of the Constitution, which provides that “no religious test shall ever be required” for office in the United States, and she discussed the importance of both of the protections for religion in the First Amendment — the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. Together, they ensure that living in America is not contingent on one’s theological views or religious affiliation.

Tyler outlined five threats in our current

climate that demand attention.

“First, we must restore our reputation in the wake of President Trump’s statements against Muslims and the travel ban policy,” she said. “While the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the administration’s third iteration of the travel ban, the harm to religious liberty remains since the original order sent the un-American message that only certain faiths are welcome here.”

Tyler then focused on the danger to religious liberty posed by the acts of individuals in word and deed. “We must acknowledge and address violence and rhetoric directed against religious minorities in the U.S. and abroad,” Tyler said, pointing out that the rise in hate crimes against religious minorities is both a global and domestic issue.

“Third, we must reject overreaching on religious liberty exemptions, which threatens widespread support for religious freedom,” Tyler said. “Some assert a right to exemptions of unprecedented breadth without recognizing the competing government interests or effects on third parties that must necessarily be considered in a pluralistic democracy. These represent a growing misunderstanding — and sometimes willful distortion — of the Free Exercise Clause.”

During her fourth point, Tyler turned to the importance of religious protections

for social service beneficiaries, asking Congress directly to address recent backtracking on those key protections. Tyler said that anyone seeking government-provided services from an organization partnering with the government should get a referral to receive the service elsewhere if the person objects to the religious nature of the organization. And, those in need of services should receive written notice of that protection. “In an Executive Order President Trump issued in May of this year, he struck these notice requirements,” Tyler reminded the senators. “Congress should consider ways to restore these protections through legislation to ensure that no American is forced to choose between having her needs met and practicing — or choosing not to practice — her faith.”

Finally, Tyler reminded all in attendance to beware of the use of the term “religious liberty” to promote bad policy. She shared the example of President Trump’s campaign to destroy the “Johnson Amendment,” which is a shorthand term for the provision in the tax law that separates partisan campaigning from 501(c)(3) organizations. “Every religious denomination to address the issue is united in their support for the current law,” Tyler said. “Changing the law would fundamentally change their nonpartisan character, distract them from their core mission and threaten their independence.”

Two others were called to testify at the hearing. Dr. Thomas Farr, president of the Religious Freedom Institute in Washington, D.C., focused on the need to protect the free exercise of religion. Also testifying was the Rev. Dr. Bob Fu, founder and president of the ChinaAid Association based in Midland, Texas. Fu spoke of alarming trends in China restricting religious freedom and shared his personal story of persecution and imprisonment when he was a house pastor in China.

By Cheryl Crowe

Go online for more

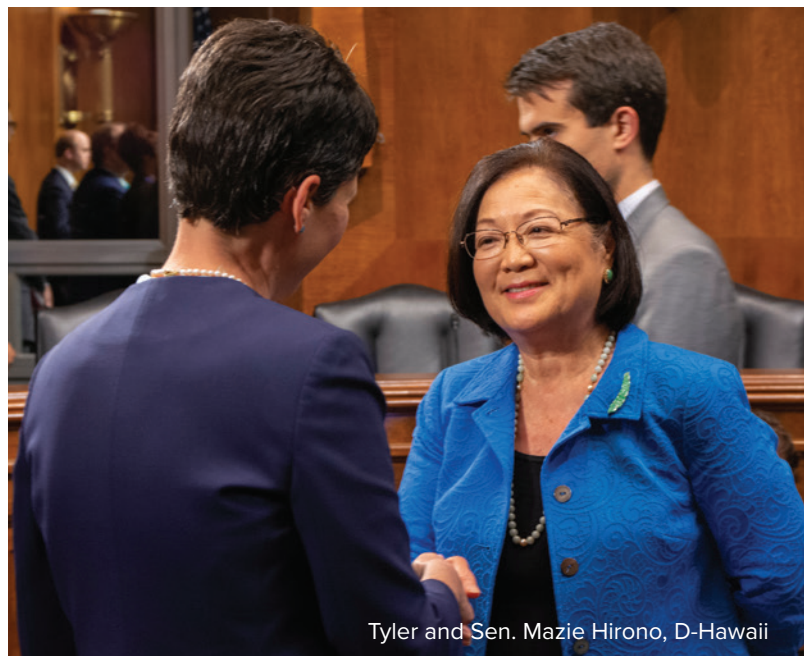
Visit our website to watch a video of the testimony or to hear it as a podcast. You can also find a link to a video of the entire subcommittee hearing and Tyler’s submitted written testimony.



BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler prepares to testify alongside her fellow panelists: Dr. Thomas Farr and the Rev. Dr. Bob Fu.



Tyler and Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas



Tyler and Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii



A conversation with Aidsand Wright-Riggins

On March 26-27, the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins will deliver the 2019 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State in the greater Kansas City area. Hosted by Central Baptist Theological Seminary, the presentations are free and open to all — see below for details.

An ordained American Baptist minister with more than 40 years of community and congregational service, Wright-Riggins was recently elected the mayor of Collegeville, Pennsylvania. Before running for office, he served as CEO of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies and Judson Press. Wright-Riggins also served as a pastor in California for almost 20 years and as the Director of Peace with Justice with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

He spoke with Report from the Capital about his passion for justice and his plans for the lectures.

You were elected mayor of Collegeville, Pennsylvania, in 2017. After decades of service in ministry, what made you decide to run for office for the first time?

I didn't exchange ministry for political office but chose to seek to be elected as a public servant as an extension of my ministry. I was disappointed by the lack of civility and paucity of character I saw in the 2016 presidential campaign, and I wanted to point to a better way of being and acting. Thinking globally and nationally, I thought the best way to make a difference in our world was by becoming more engaged locally. I chose to run for mayor of my small town because the mayor helps set the tone and culture for our community.

What do you see as the biggest threat to religious liberty today?

I am deeply concerned about a growing ethos that the United States is or should be a Christian nation and that only certain faiths are welcomed here. Hate speech and hate crimes against religious minorities are on the rise in large part because of the tone set by President Trump and the complicit silence by both political and faith leaders.

You worked to bridge concerns between groups during your time serving with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. What advice can you give for others working to create stronger communities?

Strong communities are the result of strong relationships. Those relationships can lead to alliances for the betterment of communities if they are built on respect. In groups, that often requires trusting ambiguity and not debating on who is right or wrong but on what policies are right or wrong for the community or the least within those communities.

What drew you to American Baptist life?

I was initially drawn to become an American Baptist because of the racial-ethnic, gender and theological diversity I experienced in that denomination. That diversity was not only evident during denominational gatherings but in the highest levels of leadership.

What interests you about the Shurden Lectures?

I am excited to have been invited to be this year's Shurden Lecturer. I am anxious to help stir the pot of historic Baptist ideas and ideals that contribute to soulful religion and a sane and steady state. The Shurden Lectures have historically energized us to champion and preserve these commitments, and I want to play my role in making sure that my children and grandchildren enjoy religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

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

My hope is that we emerge from the lectures with a commitment to "stay woke" or super-vigilant to the growing threats to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. We are at a critical moment in the life of our republic where the courts, the commander-in-chief and clergy themselves pose threats to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. We need to respond to this moment with an ongoing movement where the BJC serves as our drum major.

**2019 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures
on Religious Liberty and
Separation of Church and State**
Hosted by Central Baptist Theological Seminary

Lecturer: Aidsand Wright-Riggins

Tuesday, March 26
Liberty, Missouri
Campus of William Jewell College

Wednesday, March 27
Shawnee, Kansas
Campus of Central Baptist Theological Seminary

BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures

New videos:

Working together in Washington

In a series of three videos from the BJC, hear from different organizations about what it's like to work together in Washington. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler and General Counsel Holly Hollman share their experiences alongside several of our coalition partners, discussing Supreme Court advocacy, protecting the Johnson Amendment, working for the Equal Access Act in the early 1980s, and more.

Visit [Vimeo.com/BJCvideos](https://vimeo.com/BJCvideos) for these and other videos from the Baptist Joint Committee, or subscribe to our YouTube channel.



Dwayne Leslie
Seventh-day Adventist Church

“As we look and decide how to partner, we don’t look for groups where we share the same theological beliefs, but groups that have the same principles.”



Kim Colby
Christian Legal Society Center for Law and Religious Freedom

“Some groups are stronger with the Democrats, some groups are stronger with the Republicans. ... Nothing gets done in D.C. without working with other groups.”



Maggie Garrett
Americans United for Separation of Church and State

“When we go in to congressional offices, it is really powerful to show up with a broad range of groups. ...They might ask a question about how people’s faith would affect something.”



Tim Delaney
National Council of Nonprofits

“When we’re divided, people don’t hear us. We’re fragmented. So what we try to do, wherever we can, is to unite with others so we have a stronger collective voice.”



Gurwin Ahuja
National Sikh Campaign/ Know Your Neighbor Coalition

“The Baptist Joint Committee was able to give us space to host conversations, and their experience working with so many different organizations was critical to working with institutions like the White House.”



Michael Lieberman
Anti-Defamation League

“On a number of occasions, the BJC brought together folks on every side of the church-state divide to try and figure out how we have common principles ... and that’s been some of the best work I’ve been involved in.”



Striving for a safe and just future for all

By Ilana Ostrin
BJC Associate Director
of Communications

As a child, I remember learning about hate groups such as the Nazis in Germany and the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. I'd run to my parents' room at night, fearful and in tears, due to dreams that men in white robes or soldiers marching to the praises of Hitler were coming to get my family.

My family is Jewish, and my parents — raised in the shadow of the Holocaust — assured me that my fears were naught. They assured me that such things don't happen anymore, especially in America, the land of the free. We were safe, or so we thought.

Still, our synagogue always had a team of security guards, and our worship services were often flanked with long lines due to various safety checks. My grandparents requested that my parents give my brother a name other than Ya'akov ("Jacob") so he could choose when to safely disclose his Jewish identity, rather than have it assumed by anti-Semites.

So how safe were we really? Was it an illusion or an abundance of caution? Or was it that we knew anti-Semitism lay in the heart of many, and we merely hoped and prayed that — with the help and actions of others — we could remain safe for another day?

In recent days — and really, since the lead up to the 2016 election — I've wondered how my parents would answer my question or quell my fears had I come to them in our current climate. Safety is no longer just an illusion or willful denial — it's simply not a reality for many.

The shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh that took the lives of 11 people is a solemn reminder that terrible, hateful things do happen in America, to many religious and racial minorities. But these acts of hate shouldn't merely be accepted as a fact of life or considered a one-time variable. In the Book of Job, it is said that: "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Whatever god you pray to, I hope we can all agree that any god could have never envisioned the lives of those peacefully practicing their faith would be taken away so cruelly, in a house of worship, devoted to His prayer.

Thankfully, organizations like the BJC are active in fighting hate and

urging religious equality. In the days after the Pittsburgh shooting, I found myself wholly grateful to be working for the BJC. In witnessing the sincerity of the BJC staff in their grief, anger and bewilderment at how religion could be used as a false cover for such hatred, I also saw the sincerity of BJC's response. Despite the fact that staff was furious, upset and shaken, not one BJC member hesitated to earnestly act, respond and help the BJC's long-time friends and coalition partners — Jewish or otherwise.

Had I not been working with and for the BJC during this time, I think my despair over this tragedy would have been even more harsh and severe. After all, Pittsburgh is only a few hours' drive from the BJC's office in Washington, D.C. When a tragedy hits so close to home, both physically and emotionally, it is always felt more. I felt the weight of that terrible Saturday instantly. I pulled up Twitter and saw that "Pittsburgh Synagogue" was trending. Without even seeing any news reports or headlines, I knew that something terrible had happened.

But, because I got to stand alongside colleagues who are true to their God-given calling of fighting for religious liberty for all, I was filled with hope and encouragement from the BJC and other interfaith partners. This was where I was meant to be during this time — joined by those filled with hope and responsibility, rather than feeling fearful and alone in an America where some citizens feel justified in turning a blind eye to the founding principle of religious liberty.

Many Christian Americans enjoy more privilege than Americans in religious minorities. The BJC uses its privilege to enhance the equality of religious minorities. Some may find it odd that as a Jew, I work for a Christian organization. But to me, it was never odd. As the organization ramps up its interfaith work in new ways — through finding new interfaith partnerships and outreach opportunities, for instance — my own community has begun to feel BJC's support and love. The BJC has long been a leader in Washington in working in partnership with others, despite theological differences.

Let us pray together that perhaps the future will be just and safe for all.



An interfaith response to Pittsburgh

Here are just a few responses to the murder of 11 Jewish worshippers attending Shabbat services in October.

Hindu American Foundation

@HinduAmerican

Reading in horror this Saturday morning about the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh. Our condolences go out to the victims and community. No justification for such violence directed toward houses of worship. Om shanti.

Kathryn Freeman, 2017 BJC Fellow

@KathrynAnnette

This week Jewish and African Americans have been targeted and killed because of hate. How are you sincerely loving minority communities who are living under threats of physical violence? What does it look like for the church to lead in clinging to good and stop ignoring evil?

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, minister and activist

@RevDrBarber

I'm reminded of what Dr. King said after four little girls were murdered in an Alabama church: "We must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderer."

Progressive National Baptist Convention

@PNBCINC

We continue to pray for those that lost their lives and their families and friends. The "Land of the Free" must mean that everyone is free to worship. America must be a safe place for all!

Eboo Patel, founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core

@EbooPatel

Am in Oxford for a conference and went to a vigil for the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting. Felt comforted by Hebrew prayers and the gathered from all over the world. Deeply affected watching a father explain why people were lighting candles to his daughter.

Amanda Tyler, executive director of the BJC;

Dr. Sayyid Syeed, president of the Islamic Society of North America; and

Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky, director of the Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Jewish Theological Seminary, in a joint op-ed published by *The Hill*:

"We live in a nation that lifts up religious liberty as an essential ideal. It isn't a luxury; it is core to what it means to be an American. And yet, when we see people targeted in their very places of worship, we know this ideal is not yet realized."

Sikh Coalition

@sikh_coalition

11 people dead. Hate crime charges brought. Yet another targeted killing inside a house of worship in America. Our thoughts and prayers remain with our Jewish brothers and sisters and everybody impacted by this tragedy.

Young professionals: Apply to be a BJC Fellow

The Baptist Joint Committee is now accepting applications for the 2019 BJC Fellows Program, which offers young professionals the opportunity to deepen their legal, historical and theological understanding of religious liberty.

The program is open to anyone with six years or less experience in their current profession — there is no religious requirement. Those chosen will attend the BJC Fellows Seminar, an educational program in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, from **July 24-July 28, 2019**. During the seminar, BJC Fellows will engage in conversations about religious

freedom advocacy, and they will learn from BJC staff members and other scholars.

Lodging, meals and most travel expenses are covered for the program. BJC Fellows must commit to being advocates for religious liberty in their communities and houses of worship upon completion of the Seminar, and they will design and implement an individual project.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Fellows for application materials and additional information. Applications for the 2019 class must be postmarked by February 15, 2019.

2018 BJC Fellows in action

Many members of our most recent BJC Fellows class have completed projects impacting their communities:

BRITT LUBY leads a Texas Christian University Interfaith Initiative called “Better Together” that focuses on building community among students across faith traditions. She is facilitating conversations about both freedom of speech and freedom of religion on campus.



TANNER BEAN used his experience to inform his legal training presentation on religious liberty before the meeting of the Richard C. Fields American Inn of Court in Boise, Idaho. More than 100 attorneys attended, including veteran judges.

ERIKA PEREZ taught a Sunday school class for students at Iglesia Bautista Jerusalén in Pharr, Texas, focused on religious freedom, and the students were asked to write down things they can do because of religious freedom.



telegram.com
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Entertainment & Life

Keep the Faith: Opposition applied the spice

By The Rev. Brent A. Newberry

Posted Sep 28, 2018 at 12:20 PM

Updated Sep 29, 2018 at 9:43 AM

This seems to have been the rallying cry of The First Baptist Church of Worcester in its earliest years of existence. Decades before its founding in 1812,

REV. BRENT NEWBERRY regularly writes for the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* in Massachusetts, and he devoted a column to the importance of religious liberty. As the pastor of First Baptist Church in Worcester, he is also preaching on the topic this fall.



CLAIRE HEIN BLANTON

used her experience to teach a Sunday school series on religious liberty. She led the series for one class at church, and she plans to teach it in other classes in 2019. She also teaches lessons of civic participation and religious liberty at home.



High school juniors and seniors: Enter the essay scholarship contest

Entries are now being accepted for the 2019 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, offering high school juniors and seniors a chance to win scholarship money and a trip to Washington, D.C.

To enter, students must write in response to the following prompt regarding the “Johnson Amendment”:

Houses of worship play an important role in American culture, often addressing issues of public concern. The current tax code permits 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofits, including houses of worship, to be political but not partisan. These religious and secular charitable organizations enjoy favored tax-exempt status and may engage in advocacy to address any moral and/or political issues. They may not, however, tell people who to vote for or against. President Donald Trump supports eliminating what is referred to as the “Johnson Amendment,” but most people of faith support the current law.

In an essay, share whether you think the “Johnson Amendment” should remain.

Your essay should review why we have the “Johnson Amendment” in our current law and how it affects houses of worship, religious organizations and other charitable nonprofits.

Entries must be between 800-1,200 words and postmarked by **March 8, 2019**. For the complete rules and entry forms, visit BJCOnline.org/contest. For questions, contact Charles Watson Jr. at cwatson@BJCOnline.org.

Q&A with **Lauralyn Lin** 2018 Religious Liberty Essay Contest Winner



Lauralyn Lin of Mettawa, Illinois, earned the grand prize in the 2018 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, which focused on public school calendars and religious holidays. Olivia King of Medford, Oregon, earned the second place prize, and Abigail Lindner of Attleboro, Massachusetts, took third place.

The daughter of Huiqun Zhang and Tao Lin, Lin came to Washington to share her essay with the BJC Board of Directors in October. These are excerpts from her conversation with BJC Associate Director of Education Charles Watson Jr.

Charles Watson Jr: *What made you want to enter our scholarship contest?*

Lauralyn Lin: I’m currently undecided at Wellesley College, but I like political science. ... I also really like writing, so this essay contest is just perfect, tying everything that I like together. I also have a friend who is Jewish, and she really had to fight for the accommodations for her faith in school districts.

What did you think when you found out the contest was from a Baptist organization?

I thought it made a lot of sense, I think it’s really wonderful that the Baptist tradition has a long history of supporting religious liberty and church-state separation.

You mentioned your friend who is Jewish is part of your relationship to this topic.

Yes, in the fall, the school somehow managed to schedule a major event on basically all of her holy days, and we also go to a residential school, so she’s basically

not going to see her family. Yom Kippur was the day of homecoming, so her mom called the school and had to plead her case, and the school basically ignored her. This happened twice again, and I really had her in mind when I was writing the essay. I’m not very religious, so I never really had to fight for my own rights, but it was kind of a wake-up call for me to see her fight, and I saw it really was an issue that affects everyone.

What did you learn writing this essay?

Mostly just how many religions there are in the United States, and I think it’s incredible how much diversity we have, but it wasn’t really something I recognized before I did all the research for this. ...

I would really like to say thank you to the Religious Liberty Council for sponsoring this contest. I learned a lot, and it was really fun writing. I want to say thank you to all of you for having me here and my mother, it’s really a pleasure coming to the nation’s capital.



BJC Board gathers in Washington for annual meeting

On Oct. 1-2, the BJC Board of Directors reviewed the organization's recent work, passed an operating budget and discussed current threats to religious liberty.

The BJC Board — comprised of representatives of the BJC's supporting bodies — also engaged in strategic conversations about the future of the organization, including how the BJC can continue to reach new people, mobilize younger generations and address threats to religious liberty. The BJC will be working in the coming months to make strategic changes and develop new resources for religious liberty advocates, equipping them to stand up in their local communities and offer clarity to church-state issues.

On day two, during a special visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, board members heard from Brad Braxton, the director of the Center for the Study of African American Religious Life and the supervisory curator of religion at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Braxton explained that the museum, which has only been open for two years, is a "temple of freedom, that shares the stories of both grotesque inhumanity and indomitable hope." The museum documents and showcases the African American experience from the 1400s to the present, including the impact on American and world history.

"You must be prepared for seeing what it looks like when an entire nation uses its powers to desecrate and dehumanize a people," Braxton told the board.

The meeting also included an interview with the winner of the 2018 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest (see page 13) and in-depth discussions of a range of issues, including concerns about Christian nationalism and how it threatens the concept of religious liberty for everyone.

Members of the board also celebrated the second anniversary of naming Amanda Tyler as the BJC's executive director. Noting the challenges facing religious liberty, the board passed a resolution of gratitude. "Amanda and the BJC remain as strong as ever in our call to defend and extend religious liberty for all."



National Museum of African American History and Culture



Brad Braxton speaks to the board



Braxton and board members prepare to enter the museum's Contemplation Court

Browder joins BJC staff in mobilization role

Christine Browder joined the BJC staff in October as the associate director of mobilization. Her work is focused on providing resources and opportunities for individuals and congregations to take action and engage in supporting religious liberty.

Browder comes to the BJC from Baylor University's Texas Hunger Initiative. She held various roles there, including director of government relations and strategic partnerships, No Kid Hungry Campaign Manager, and Faith-Based Initiatives Coordinator. She served as liaison to elected officials and government agencies as well as national nonprofit partners. Browder also oversaw training and support for staff, local community partners, lay leaders and student groups on effective advocacy, mobilization and engagement.

Browder is a graduate of Baylor University, the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, and George W. Truett Theological Seminary. She was ordained to the Gospel ministry by Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut.



Tyler honored as one of country's top nonprofit leaders



Dion King Photography, Washington, D.C.

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler was named one of the top 50 nonprofit leaders in the United States by *The NonProfit Times*. Calling her a "rising star," the magazine noted that she is a "powerful advocate working well for the faith community."

She and the other 49 — including leaders of AARP, American Heart Association, Anti-Defamation League, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Habitat for Humanity, and more — were honored at an event at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., this fall.

New publication schedule for *Report from the Capital*

In 2019, *Report from the Capital* will be published four times per year instead of six. We will continue to share real-time news and updates with you on our digital channels (website, social media, emails, etc.) while providing you with the thoughtful analysis and commentary you expect from this magazine.

If you do not currently receive emails from the Baptist Joint Committee, please visit BJCOnline.org/subscribe to sign up and let us know your email preferences. And, to stay on top of the very latest from the BJC in-between magazine publications, visit our website at BJCOnline.org/connect to make sure you are following us on our various social media platforms.

You can also follow BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler on Twitter: [@AMandaTylerBJC](https://twitter.com/AMandaTylerBJC). Pictured at right is her tweet on the day of the tragic shooting in Pittsburgh.



Mark your calendar for 2019

Help us by reaching out to your friends and neighbors, sharing these important opportunities and deadlines with them:

February 15:
Postmark deadline for BJC Fellows applications

March 1:
Summer internship applications due

March 8:
Postmark deadline for essay contest entries

March 26-27:
Shurden Lectures in the Kansas City area

June 21:
BJC's annual luncheon in Birmingham, Alabama, in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly

For additional BJC events, visit BJCOnline.org/Calendar



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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, legislation and mobilization, 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

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cherilyn Crowe EDITOR

Ilana Ostrin ASSOCIATE EDITOR



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Photo: Jonathan Tasler/Visit KC

2019 Shurden Lectures

Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins will deliver the lectures in the greater Kansas City area on March 26-27. See page 8 or visit BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures for details.



Essay Scholarship Contest

High school juniors and seniors can win money for college by writing about the Johnson Amendment. Details available at BJCOnline.org/Contest.