

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

VOLUME 74 NUMBER 2



A THREAT TO
ANYONE'S
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
IS A THREAT

Discussing an inclusive approach to religious liberty

AIDSAND WRIGHT-RIGGINS speaks on race, resistance, religion and rage

AMANDA TYLER shares the need for difficult conversations

HOLLY HOLLMAN on sex, race and civil discourse

Remembering former BJC Executive Director James E. Wood Jr.

Dr. Corey Walker speaks alongside Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler during the BJC Dinner, focusing on those who are often left out of conversations about religious liberty. See more on pages 8-11.

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

Go beyond these pages: **Additional resources**

Pages 8-17 of this edition of *Report from the Capital* focus on the connections and conflicts central to discussions about race and religious liberty. Continue the conversation by going deeper on these issues.

Videos: The BJC's YouTube channel has videos you can share on your social media feeds or with your small group, Bible study or Sunday school class. You can find video of our BJC Dinner conversation on an inclusive approach to religious liberty as well as the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins' presentation on race, religion, resistance and rage.

Podcasts and Resources: Listen to the presentations, and access additional conversations on this topic in our podcast library. Visit our website at BJCOnline.org/Podcasts or search for "BJC Podcast" on your favorite podcasting platform. We also have a variety of printable resources, including one on religious liberty and the black church, online at BJCOnline.org/Resources.

Connections: Several groups provide ways you and your congregation can work across racial lines. Here are a few:

- New Baptist Covenant (NewBaptistCovenant.org) brings together churches of different ethnic backgrounds to build relationships and work for racial justice in their communities.
- The Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative (cbf.net/mccall-initiative) from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship creates avenues for the church to move toward meaningful unity between racially diverse communities.
- The Angela Project, a collaboration between the Progressive National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America International, Inc., and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, focuses on racial justice, reconciliation and re-engaging the church in activism.

Looking for more? Have a resource you want to share? Email us at bjc@BJCOnline.org.

Advocacy spotlight: Missouri

This spring, Missouri Baptists raised their voices in the state capitol as lawmakers considered several bills with troubling church-state implications.

On April 16, the Senate Education Committee discussed a bill that would authorize a class on the Bible in public schools, something that is already permitted. The language of the bill elevates the Bible over other religious texts and is unclear on some elements of the implementation.

Five Baptists went to Jefferson City to register their dissent.

"I love the Bible, but I am here today to oppose this bill," said Carol McEntyre, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri, during her testimony, explaining the theological problems that would accompany the enactment.

McEntyre was one of three Baptists who spoke in front of the committee. Cynthia Holmes, an attorney and former member of the BJC Board, and Brian Kaylor, the associate executive director of Churchnet and editor of *Word & Way*, also shared their concerns.

"The Bible cannot be reduced to simply an elective literature class," said Kaylor, pointing out that properly teaching about the miracles would either lead to sectarian instruction or an undermining of the miracles to keep the class non-sectarian.

Brian Ford, the executive director of Churchnet, and Brittany McDonald-Null, a pastoral resident at First Baptist Church of Columbia, came to the hearing and submitted written testimony in opposition. Four other Baptists also submitted their concerns.

Throughout the course of this year's legislative session, Kaylor also testified against three other problematic bills, sharing his concerns as a Baptist who is committed to ensuring freedom by keeping the institutional separation of church and state.

"I've seen that, when someone of faith shows up and testifies on one of these bills and makes the argument that we should stand for true religious liberty for all, it gets the attention of state legislators," said Kaylor. "It changes their stereotype, and it's part of our public witness as Baptists and our four centuries of standing for religious liberty for all people."

At press time, the bill was passed out of committee and headed to the full senate for additional debate. To hear the testimony and learn more, check out episodes 55 and 68 of the "Baptist Without an Adjective" podcast at podcast.wordandway.org.



Rev. Brittany McDonald-Null, Rev. Carol McEntyre, Rev. Brian Ford, and Rev. Brian Kaylor at the Missouri State Capitol.

Tackling tough conversations together

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director



In her sweeping new book, *These Truths: A History of the United States*, Jill Lepore writes about summer 1619 in Jamestown: “Twenty Englishmen were elected to the House of Burgesses. Twenty Africans were condemned to the house of bondage. Another chapter opened in the American book of genesis: liberty and slavery became the American Abel and Cain.”

It seems appropriate that this summer, as we commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first enslaved Africans brought to British America, that we dedicate much of this issue of *Report from the Capital* to religious liberty and race.

We share in these pages powerful challenges issued by the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins at the 2019 Shurden Lectures hosted by Central Baptist Theological Seminary in March, and those from Dr. Corey Walker and Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges at the BJC Dinner held in conjunction with the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering in Washington, D.C., in April.

These voices “complicated the narrative,” as the newly popular phrase goes, urging us to think about the implications of the fact that our modern-day constitutional right of religious liberty was born in a country that had slavery as one of its founding values. “All men are created equal” was a cruel aspiration in the stark reality of enslavement, despite the Declaration of Independence’s claim.

I asked Dr. Walker about the apparent contradictions in the Colonial era: Founders like Jefferson and Madison espoused religious freedom while owning slaves; Baptist leaders like John Leland fought for religious liberty while not maintaining the same force of advocacy for abolition throughout their lives. He gently responded by saying that, in his view, it’s not a contradiction but instead entirely consistent. Jefferson, Madison and Leland (among others) were fighting for religious liberty for the people that they considered to be human.

From our beginning more than 80 years ago, BJC has brought together a diverse group of Baptists, united in their commitment to religious freedom. But, regrettably, our coalition has not always represented or included the full breadth of our denominational partners and their understandings of religious freedom.

I hope that, as we delve into the history of religious liberty and how we have lived it in our denominational and organizational history as Baptists and Americans, we will deepen not only our understanding of but also our commitment to protecting our neighbors’ freedom as our own. As we add more voices and perspectives to these discussions, our defense of religious freedom will be more robust and, I believe, more successful in defending and extending religious liberty for all.

These conversations are difficult and may be painful, but they are necessary if we are to achieve our mission of defending religious freedom for all of God’s children — those who share our religion, those who practice a different faith, and those who do not claim a given spiritual tradition. Religious liberty for all will only be a reality when we revise any theology or ideology that renders some of our neighbors to be less than human.

To lead these complicated conversations, we know we have to speak with honest clarity about what we mean when we say “religious liberty.” This summer is an important time at BJC as we equip advocates like you with the resources you need to talk about freedom with your neighbors, at your family gatherings, in your workplaces and community spaces, and with your social media networks.

On June 21, you will see a new look for BJC, one that we hope captures the immediate relevancy of our work, expresses the excitement and passion of BJC in action and invites more people to join with us. We are revamping BJCOnline.org to be more accessible and action-oriented. We are eager to welcome more advocates into our work, learning from each other about how we can best respond to the many challenges we face today. I hope you will save that date and join us on Facebook during our luncheon to learn more about how you can be a part of BJC’s exciting future.

Our shared future will undoubtedly mean continuing to take critical and authentic appraisals of our past. Defending religious liberty for all will take all of us working together. My hope is that we make “all” a reality, not just aspirational, for the generations that follow.

Public Schools Week 2019

BJC and partner organizations support public dollars for public schools

In March, as public school students across the country prepared for standardized testing and spring break, the Baptist Joint Committee joined other national groups in recognizing Public Schools Week by organizing several events and speaking on Capitol Hill.

Public Schools Week is a time when organizations, educators and students come together to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring the continued vitality of the public schools, including making sure taxpayer dollars continue to support public schools. For BJC and supporters of religious liberty, this includes opposing private school vouchers, which violate religious freedom by requiring taxpayers to pay for religious education. Vouchers also threaten the autonomy of religious schools by opening them up to government audits, control and interference.

BJC, alongside organizations including Pastors for Texas Children, AASA (The School Superintendents Association), Americans United for Separation of Church and State and others, raised awareness about the dangers of school vouchers by visiting offices of several members of Congress. The group also organized a staff briefing at the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Rev. Charles F. Johnson of Pastors For Texas Children led a conversation with faith and community leaders at the BJC's office.

Scenes from the week are featured here. Be sure to listen to our podcast with Johnson on his work with pastors in support of public schools, accessible via Apple or Google Podcasts, Stitcher or [BJCOnline.org/Podcasts](https://www.bjconline.org/Podcasts).

By Ilana Ostrin, BJC Associate Director of Communications

Want to get involved in BJC advocacy efforts?
Email Christine Browder,
Associate Director of Mobilization, at
cbrowder@BJCOnline.org for details on how you
can join our team and receive action alerts.



Rev. Charlie Johnson of Pastors for Texas Children with BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks outside an office during their visits with several members of Congress to share why people of faith are opposed to school vouchers



Rev. Charlie Johnson leads a discussion on the dangers of private school vouchers at the BJC office with a group of interfaith advocates.

 LISTEN TO A
PUBLIC SCHOOLS WEEK PODCAST
Why Do Pastors Care About
Public Schools?



An interfaith panel of leaders talks to staffers in the U.S. House of Representatives about the threat private school voucher schemes pose to the public school system. Pictured are (L to R): Suhag Shukla, Hindu American Foundation; Leslie Marie Wilson, People for the American Way; Allison Grossman, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; Charlie Johnson, Pastors for Texas Children; and moderator Maggie Garrett, Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Sex, race and civil discourse

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Sex, race and religion are protected categories in federal employment law, which means employers can't treat employees differently based on sex, race or religion. In various other federal and state statutes, discrimination based on these and other distinct categories may be prohibited. In some anti-discrimination laws, religious entities may be exempted in order to maintain their character and protect the exercise of religion. Religious liberty considerations require that religion be treated in special ways in certain circumstances.

While this quick summary may suggest otherwise, the complex relationship between religion and other protected categories is anything but easy. Theological understandings vary and impact perceptions about what constitutes injustice and unlawful discrimination. That dynamic has been particularly evident in public debates over LGBT rights, which are not explicitly protected in federal law, as well as in recent Supreme Court decisions.

Given the constitutional protection for same-sex marriage and religious exemptions, debates over LGBT rights increasingly have focused on claims of religious liberty. Many advocates believe LGBT discrimination should be treated the same as race discrimination. Some religious objectors consider that assertion inherently hostile to religion.

Fortunately, the separation of the institutions of government and religion promotes equal rights among citizens, while respecting religious diversity. Our constitutional tradition allows us to engage in vigorous debate about the law regarding sex, race and religion, among other issues.

Advocates will continue to fight in legislatures and the courts. In May, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it will review three cases that could result in nationwide protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Those cases rely on current civil rights laws that protect against sex discrimination in employment. In two cases, the question is whether the prohibition against employment discrimination ("because of ... sex" in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964)

encompasses discrimination based on the individual's sexual orientation. In another case, the question is whether the same law prohibiting sex discrimination implicitly bans discrimination against transgender people.

These cases demonstrate how various claims of discrimination are related and how legal doctrines can develop beyond their legislative origins. The Court may decide that an LGBT employee is protected in similar fashion as someone who claims sex discrimination by providing evidence that "but for" the employee's sex they would have been treated differently. Likewise, the Court may decide that an LGBT employee's claim of sex discrimination is similar to a race discrimination case based not on the employee's race but on the employee's marriage to someone of another race. If so, an LGBT employee should not be discriminated against based upon the sex of his partner. The Court may also decide whether an employer's discrimination against a transgender employee is the same as discrimination against a female employee who allegedly failed to meet expectations of how a woman dresses or acts.

Regardless of the Court's view in these cases, we should work together to protect LGBT individuals and preserve religious liberty. Even without consensus about how to balance LGBT nondiscrimination and religious exemptions, religious communities should continue to engage in dialogue to understand competing claims and to model civil discourse.

Neither legislatures nor courts will resolve the theological differences about human sexuality that have been so prominent in denominational disputes in recent years. Likewise, we are far from achieving a society that is free from race discrimination. Courts will not end racism or heal the damage it causes.

Diverse religious communities dedicated to protecting religious liberty for all, however, can play a constructive role in public debates that go beyond any "winner take all" legal dispute. Today, religious communities must lead by example to engage in civil dialogue and mediate deep differences of opinion and belief.



The legacy of former BJC leader James E. Wood Jr.

James E. Wood Jr., the accomplished author and scholar who led the Baptist Joint Committee in the 1970s, passed away March 24, 2019, at age 96. A former missionary and professor, Wood left his mark on the church-state field around the world through his academic pursuits, personal work and eight years leading BJC.

“James Wood was a prolific scholar of church-state relations, not only domestically in the United States, but internationally as well,” said Derek Davis, who worked with Wood at Baylor University. “He understood the subject, theologically and politically, as well as anyone.”

Born in Portsmouth, Virginia, on July 29, 1922, Wood’s vast academic experience bookended his time at the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (then called the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs). After earning undergraduate and seminary degrees, Wood and his wife, Alma, served as missionaries in Japan from 1950-1955 and then as faculty members at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Wood’s move to Baylor was the dawn of a new era of church-state studies at the school. He created courses and became the second director of what is now called the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, named for BJC’s first executive director. Wood launched the *Journal of Church and State* and expanded the institute and offerings on campus to include graduate courses in church and state, a research center and an annual lectureship/symposium on the topic.

After much success at Baylor, Wood came to the Baptist Joint Committee in September 1972 “because of a growing sense of the rightness of it in term of God’s direction for my life,” according to Davis’ biographical portrait of Wood in *The Separation of Church and State Defended*.

In his inaugural address as head of BJC, Wood said the concern of the church for religious liberty “must necessarily include the concern of the church for all civil liberties as inalienable rights of all men.” His scholarly knowledge of the issue was vast, and his Christian commitment to

the cause was evident in his work. He saw the issue also through the lens of God’s care for every human. “To be true to its mission, therefore, the church must be involved in public affairs because it seeks to minister to the whole man in the world, and no aspect of life can be regarded as outside of God’s concern, dominion, and power,” he said.

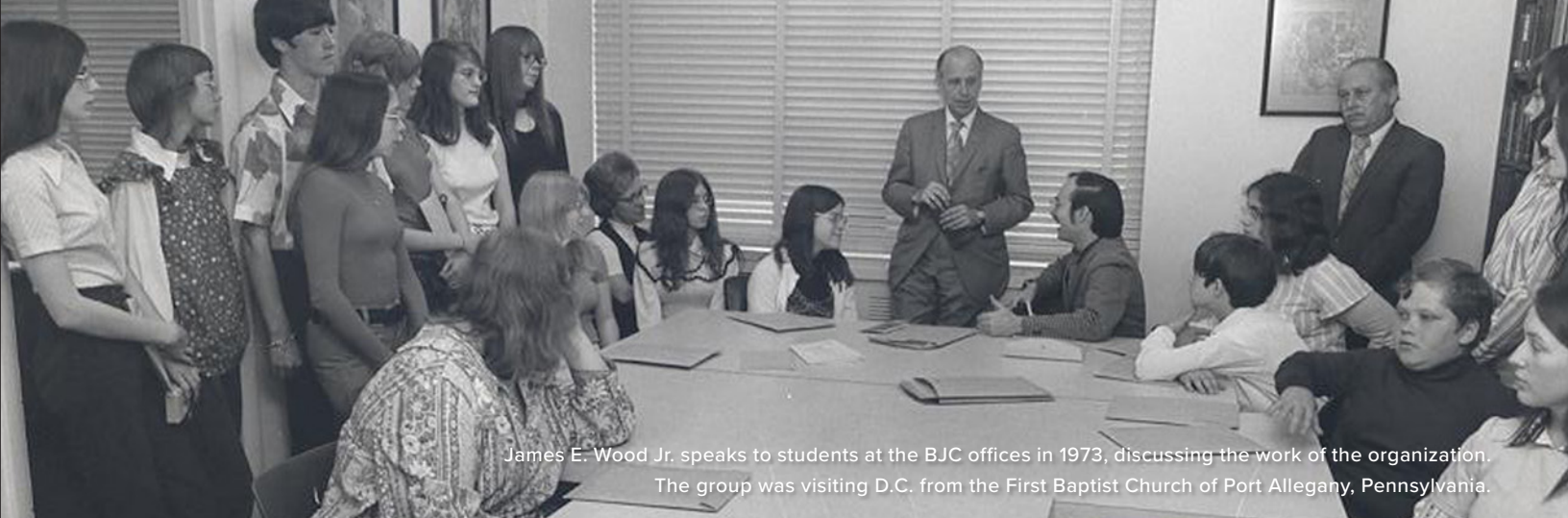
In his eight years at the Baptist Joint Committee, Wood expanded the mission of the organization and emphasized a range of policy issues, including international human rights and ending the nuclear arms race.

Wood’s human rights emphasis began with “the historic Baptist conviction that the human spirit is innately sacred,” according to Stan Hastey, who worked with Wood at the Baptist Joint Committee.

“It is safe to say that James Wood’s views were known inside the White House and the Department of State and that they helped the Carter administration lay a sound foundation in formulating an international policy based in large measure on the bedrock commitment of Baptists and others to freedom of conscience,” Hastey said. For example, Hastey remembers that Wood’s impassioned pleas on behalf of the imprisoned Soviet Baptist dissenter Georgi Vins were instrumental in securing Vins’ release from the USSR.

“James Wood was indefatigable, working tirelessly on a wide range of public policy issues he considered the rightful agenda of the Baptist Joint Committee,” said Hastey. When some wanted to move BJC’s work to other agencies, Hastey recalls Wood standing strong and rallying leaders to “make the case that the Baptist voice advocating religious liberty in the nation’s capital should remain one voice.”

In 1980, Wood left BJC to return to academic life and his position as the director of the J.M. Dawson Institute at Baylor and also as the Simon and Ethel Bun Professor of Church-State Studies on campus. His return continued the expansion of the institute and the academic pursuit of church-state issues on campus, including the eventual addition of a Ph.D. in church-state studies offered in the mid-1990s. He remained at Baylor until his retirement in 1999.



James E. Wood Jr. speaks to students at the BJC offices in 1973, discussing the work of the organization. The group was visiting D.C. from the First Baptist Church of Port Allegany, Pennsylvania.

Wood's background in world religions also led him to an active role overseas as communism began to decline in Europe. As president of the International Academy for Freedom and Belief, he consulted with a number of nations in the New Europe to assist in implementing protections for religious liberty in their constitutions, including Hungary and Russia.

For his lifetime of work, Wood received numerous awards and honorary degrees. He was an abundant author as well, writing or editing more than 20 books on church and state, as well as hundreds of articles on the subject. His most recent award came in 2012, when he was recognized for his lifetime of service with the Abner V. McCall Religious Liberty Award from the Baylor Alumni Association.

Davis remembers Wood as a committed Christian who saw the separation of church and state as essential to the protection of the freedom of religious belief as well as basic civility. "Much like Roger Williams, a fellow Baptist, he believed separation of church and state not to be a divine mandate, but rather a practical tool — to prevent government, even unwittingly, from favoring one or more religions over others, and to protect the private religious practice of all people of all religions," Davis said.

In his final column for *Report from the Capital*, Wood wrote, "I am deeply committed to Baptist representations to government as rooted in the theological principle of the mandate of involvement." He lived that commitment in his various endeavors.

Wood was preceded in death by his wife, Alma, and is survived by their son, James E. Wood III.

For more on James E. Wood Jr., read *The Separation of Church & State Defended: Selected Writings of James E. Wood, Jr.*, edited and with an introduction by Derek Davis.



Charles G. Adams and James E. Wood Jr. look at a copy of *Report from the Capital* in this 1976 photo. Adams was the newly elected chairman of the BJC, representing the Progressive National Baptist Convention.



James E. Wood Jr. greets former Congressman Brooks Hays, who also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, at a 1979 Baptist Joint Committee breakfast honoring Baptist members of Congress.

By Cherilyn Crowe, BJC Director of Communications

Elevating an inclusive approach to religious liberty

“The task right now is to desegregate God”

Religious liberty conversations often fail to include discussions of slavery and oppression, and the BJC Dinner explored the need for a new narrative. Held in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering, the April event brought together leaders and religious liberty supporters and showcased the work of some of the BJC Fellows.

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, along with Dr. Corey Walker, a professor at the University of Richmond, and Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges, president of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (BTSR), took the stage for a frank discussion on race, difficult Christian roots and history in this country, and how they impact the future of religious liberty.

Two words, many meanings

Tyler began the conversation by asking Bridges and Walker for their definition of religious liberty, since “the words ‘religious liberty’ don’t always have a clear meaning anymore.”

Bridges defined religious liberty as “the freedom to give expression to my religious consciousness, or not,” and Walker described it as “not only the freedom to exercise any sort of religious belief, practice, understanding, ritual, or not, but it is also the ability to be able

Photos by Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey





Several BJC Fellows shared during the event.

to do that in a manner that is unobstructed by the legitimate powers of the state, and unobstructed by fellow citizens who may disagree with that particular practice.”

Race and religious liberty

The trio participated in leading a course on religious liberty and religious dissent organized by BTSR last summer (see Tyler’s column in the July/August 2018 *Report from the Capital* for details). During the course, they explored the Richmond Liberty Trail and the Richmond Slave Trail, which pose a stark contradiction.

Walker noted the pride many Baptists have around the Baptist principles of soul freedom and religious liberty. But, he continued, pride can often block one from seeing the truth or acknowledging an unflattering history. Instead of “this heroic narrative that Baptists gave us this unique vision of religious liberty,” he said, “we began to look at the reality.” He pointed out that Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, is the home of many contradictions, including the two trails.

“We cannot think ‘religious liberty’ outside of the enslavement of Africans. We cannot think of religious liberty outside of the genocide of Native Americans,” Walker said, calling for a new narrative. “Although we can all call and claim the concept of religious liberty, how is it that it means so many different things to so many different people? We can actually deny liberty to those who want to seek as our fellow citizens and who begin to challenge the very boundaries of religious liberty.”

Bridges shared more about the course and the importance of including intersectional history. She reached out to Walker with the course idea, telling him, “Let’s walk into the capital of that Confederacy together and do something together.”

With his help, she says, the narrative changed.

“It was not enough just to extol the virtues of our Baptist forebears, but it was trying to understand what it was to really live together, and it was our work and it was important for us to talk about these things together,” she said. “We could be

From the BJC Fellows

“Being a BJC Fellow means extending the invitation for people of color and marginalized communities to be included in a larger conversation that impacts not only our religious freedom but our human rights.”

Dr. Sabrina Dent
2015 BJC Fellow

“As a seminary professor and a community activist, being a BJC Fellow means modeling responsible faith and citizenship, encouraging my students and the faith communities they represent to understand both more fully, and working within my community to protect religious liberty for everyone.”

Dr. Courtney Pace
2017 BJC Fellow

“Being a BJC Fellow is the most patriotic thing I do — working alongside wise women and men to ensure that our foundational truth of being a secular state is not overtaken by the tempting myth of Christian nationalism.”

Dr. Kristen Nielsen Donnelly
2017 BJC Fellow



born with ecumenical diversity and also have racial inclusion.”

Ready to be troubled

Tyler posed a hard question for the group: “What do we do about honoring the contributions of people like [Baptist preacher John] Leland, who helped influence the writing of the First Amendment, and helped influence the 1786 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, without ignoring the fact that the authors of that legislation were themselves slave owners?” She added that we also cannot ignore the fact that some Baptist ministers at the time were slave owners.

“What do we do with this? How do we hold this contradiction?” she asked.

Walker said one way to begin is to recognize that these questions and issues are never simple.

“The task right now is to desegregate God,” he said. “We have to go deeper to the very idea of the creator that we have created in our own limited image that then gives birth to one singular mode of what it means to be human in the world.”

Walker also elaborated on how this viewpoint feeds into damaging narratives,

such as Christian nationalism.

“That’s why we have this idea of religious liberty that is now being tethered to a new expression of American nationalism: America as this Christian nation is inextricably linked with the exercise of white supremacy.”

To undo this damage, Walker said we must strive for authenticity.

“We have to be authentic and true to the Gospel of Jesus as Baptists in the world today,” he said.

“How do we do that? We do that by operationalizing a desegregated theology: a theology that is inclusive of all of God’s creation, and that inclusive aspect means we have to revise the narrative. We have to tell a new story. We have to sing new songs. We have to begin to imagine a whole new world.

“It’s not something that is very easy. It’s very difficult, because it’s going to go to the very root of what we believe,” he continued. “That’s the radical nature of this proposition; that’s the radical nature of religious liberty. It means giving, it means having the capacity, having the disposition, cultivating the virtue to begin to host that which is other in all of its ‘otherness’

not assimilating it to the same. If we can do that, then it’s quite possible that we can give birth to a new expression — a much more robust expression not only of religious liberty, but also of human community beyond ‘nationalism.’ Shall we say, ‘A beloved community?’”

Bridges echoed Walker’s statements, and expounded upon the contradiction of the birthing of a nation on the notion of religious freedom, while ignoring the soul freedom and chained humanity of slaves.

“Here were groups of people [slaves] that had a religious consciousness but in order to be subversive, or submissive, rather, to their master, they had to absorb a Christian position,” she said. “They were beaten into submission to be Christian.”

So, when thinking about Baptist history and the role of religious freedom, Bridges said that it’s important to “stand in the stones and to sit in the pews and see how belief had been coerced ... How could we talk about religious liberty with those Baptist forebears unless we talked about what they were doing?”

Where do we go from here?

As the conversation came to a close,



BJC Board Member Jason Smith, Congregational Engagement Specialist for the Alliance of Baptists, welcomed the crowd and spoke of BJC's "liberational" work.

Tyler asked the panelists what attendees could do to continue changing the narrative once they left that night's dinner.

Walker shared poetic advice, saying "Be open, be honest and willing to revise the ways in which you understand, convene courageous conversations that are in the spirit of advancing beloved community and maintain hope for the emergence of our new humanity."

Bridges' response was a simple, "May I just say 'Amen' to that?"

Voices of the next generation

Also at the dinner, BJC Fellows shared how they are using the lessons they learned to make an impact on their community conversations.

Dr. Sabrina Dent, who was a member of the first class of BJC Fellows in 2015, said, "Being a BJC Fellow means extending the invitation for people of color and marginalized communities to be included in a larger conversation that impacts not only our religious freedom but our human rights. It's because of my introduction to the BJC that I have been able to pursue this passion through my work at the Religious Freedom Center [part of the

Freedom Forum Institute at the Newseum in Washington, D.C.] by centering the perspectives of African Americans on this topic."

Chelsea Clarke, a 2018 BJC Fellow, shared the weight of the conversations she's having in the nation's capital. "As a person of faith, living in Washington, D.C., as a lay leader at First Baptist D.C., and as someone who works four blocks north of the White House at a major media company, this carries with it a weight of responsibility to be actively engaged in the national conversation, particularly when it comes to conversations around the First Amendment – protecting, defending and extending religious liberty for all, the freedom of speech and of the press, and the right to peacefully assemble – which is an almost weekly, sometimes almost daily, occurrence here in D.C."

Head to our YouTube channel to watch the conversation, or listen to a podcast recording at [BJCOnline.org/podcasts](https://www.bjc.org/podcasts).

By Ilana Ostrin, BJC Associate Director of Communications



Go online for more from the BJC Dinner, including photos, video and a podcast.

Religion is a motivator for justice

By May Lample
Race Discourse Officer, U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs

When I explain to people that the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs organizes interracial and interfaith conversations about the role of religion in eliminating racism as a force in society, people often wonder, "What does religion have to do with eliminating racism?"

It's a fair question, especially given that religious practice has played a role in promoting racial hierarchies and segregation. However, in order to understand how religion can contribute to eliminating racism, we have to understand religion beyond the practices people carry out in the name of religion.

Religion, as I understand it, is a channel of moral guidance that reaches the root of human motivation, awakening in people the capacity to love, to create, to sacrifice, and to overcome prejudice. Religion has assisted humanity to overcome lower impulses of selfishness, othering and mistrust to work together across color, nationality and creed.

Thinking about religion in this way allows us to understand the value of exploring our spiritual nature. At the heart of the Baha'i Faith is the principle of the oneness of humanity — the idea that all human beings share a spiritual nature that transcends all other identities. This principle is far more than a slogan or an abstract and unattainable ideal. It has profound implications for both personal behavior and for the way society should be organized. It challenges many assumptions that structure our current society and revolutionizes our conceptions of the relationships that should exist between the individual, society and its institutions.

Awareness of the spiritual reality of human beings carries with it the moral responsibility that all should be given every opportunity to fulfill their potential and contribute to the advancement of our society. It's only when we understand our spiritual identity that we can begin to value characteristics of our human identity, including race. We can value all aspects of one another's identity through an awareness of the underlying spiritual nature that all human beings share.

Religion can be a source of motivation to help us to remain engaged in difficult conversations on race. It centers our intentions in the knowledge that human beings are



inherently noble. It supplies hope in our abilities to find constructive solutions to problems that seem insurmountable. And, it taps us into our love for God — a love that translates to a love for humanity and a desire to see everyone be prosperous. Qualities such as self-sacrifice, justice and love are spiritual qualities — the common trust given by God to all humanity through all true religion. Religion can provide consistent motivation to practice those spiritual qualities in all areas of society, translating high ideals into action. The systems and structures upon which the United States is premised lack a firm commitment to these qualities. Too often,

our society takes its cues from theories of competition and scarcity. In their shadow, racism thrives.

Among its many symptoms, racism erodes trust between people, preventing us from building a shared understanding of our spiritual qualities and how to apply them to heal ourselves and society. Spaces for meaningful conversation among people of different faiths and races help rebuild this trust. Although people might have different responsibilities in establishing racial justice, there must be trust in the capacity of others to do their part.

Trust is a reciprocal relationship — one must offer it and accept it. Trust requires the telling of truth. Without truth, the full nature of injustice — its effects and the actions needed to end it — become obscured. We should be uncompromising in defense of the truth, yet infinitely gentle and loving as we bring our spiritual principles to bear on the needs of the time we are living in.

Through honest and open dialogue, we challenge our assumptions, reorient our perspectives and expand our consciousness — crucial practices we need to establish racial justice. In religion, we find both the call to justice as well as the means to achieve it.

May Lample co-coordinates the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs' collaboration with individuals, organizations and agencies in the United States that are engaged in public discourses and policy advocacy directed toward racial justice and racial unity. Learn more about her work on page 13.

PARTNER PROGRAMS

Dialogue on Faith and Race

On March 14, BJC hosted the ninth Dialogue on Faith and Race, a series of gatherings convened by the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs and the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies (IPR) at The Catholic University of America.

The dialogue is an ongoing effort to create a space for deeper consideration of the role of the faith community in promoting racial justice and unity in the country. It brings together individuals from a variety of religious, non-religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds to foster open, honest and inspired reflections. The interactive and participatory sessions are off-the-record, designed to examine the underlying dynamics of our current challenges and enrich the individual work of the participants.



New course explores African American perspectives on religious freedom

A first-of-its-kind program is bringing together African American scholars and seminarians for an intensive look at religious freedom. The Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute partnered with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University to create the three-year program, funded by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

The first session was a four-day seminar for graduate students at Historically Black Theological Institutions, held at the Newseum, the Baptist Joint Committee and other D.C. locations. Featuring a variety of speakers, the participants had the chance to dive into this important topic, creating a foundation for future scholarship and advocacy.

"This project serves as a reminder that one cannot shine the spotlight on religious freedom without uncovering the darkness of race in America," said Dr. Sabrina Dent, who organized the course. Dent works at the Religious Freedom Center and is a 2015 BJC Fellow.

On June 7, the Religious Freedom Center will host a daylong symposium called "Disrupt the Narrative: Centering African American Perspectives on Religious Freedom" at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. The event is free and open to the public. Registration is required.

Photo by Focus Fine Photography



Suzan Johnson Cook (left), former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, poses with students from Virginia Union University's School of Theology. Cook spoke at a course session that was held at the Newseum.



Sabrina Dent of the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute (left) and BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. (right) with panelists from the session held at BJC.

Race, religion, resistance and rage



Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins challenges audiences to see the connections between race and religion and how we can move toward a more just future

“If we truly desire a world of racial justice and religious integrity, understanding the sin of white supremacy — that is racial and Christian — and the church’s role within it is an important step forward.”

The Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins called attendees at this year’s Shurden Lectures to re-examine their preconceptions about race and justice. Co-hosted by Central Baptist Theological Seminary (CBTS), the 2019 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Separation of Church and State were held in the greater Kansas City area, at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, and on CBTS’ campus in Shawnee, Kansas.

In his presentations, Wright-Riggins — an ordained American Baptist minister with more than 40 years of community and congregational service who currently serves as the mayor of Collegeville, Pennsylvania — explored the contradictions and the “cracked clay pots” of racism and white supremacy that often carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sharing his personal experiences encountering racism and reflecting on the colonization of cultures by Europeans, Wright-Riggins pointed out that white supremacy is not just the result of bias, discrimination or hostility; there

is another dimension that depicts non-Christians and people of color as the “other.”

“This long-term and persisting way of framing reality was created in the origins of the United States as a way of justifying the exploitation of non-white, non-Christian peoples from the very beginnings of American Christianity,” he said.

But, he offered hope.

“The Jesus I encountered in my youth and attempt to grow closer to with each passing year was a radical,” he said, noting how Christ protected the poor, rebuked the abuser of power, and celebrated the “least of these,” the disenfranchised and the vulnerable.

“If there ever was an anti-colonial, anti-hierarchical force on this earth, it was Jesus,” he said. “It was this Jesus, who died upon the lynching tree to remind the marginalized everywhere, ‘I know exactly what you’re going through. I am there with you. I will be with you.’”

After reviewing the roots of rage and frustration in cultures built on supremacy, Wright-Riggins offered hope and a path forward, resisting the temptation for anger by focusing on repentance.

“We are called to repent of our complicity and toleration of white supremacy,” he said.

BONUS CONTENT ONLINE

Visit our website to watch a video of Aidsand Wright-Riggins’ lecture at CBTS, and listen to two new podcast conversations: one with BJC’s Amanda Tyler and Wright-Riggins, and one with Tyler and CBTS President Molly Marshall.

"We are called to have the courage and commitment to be honest about what has been done in the name of Christ, under the flag of God and what the very clear incarnational and structural damage that has been done in the name of Christian supremacy."

He said we also can resist by re-imagining evangelism, making sure that sharing the Gospel is not treated as a contest "chalking up souls like notches on a belt and as mission targets of opportunity to advance our notions of empire, religious and otherwise."

Instead, he called listeners to focus on Jesus' Great Commission, directing followers of Christ to build a "world house" where the relationship of humanity and creation is "based on the cruciform call to love God with all of our heart and mind and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves."

Disciples of Christ are not simply "believers," he said, but "becomers, belongs, and counter-cultural behaviors in an inclusive and just community."



"If we truly desire a world of racial justice and religious integrity, understanding the sin of white supremacy — that is racial and Christian — and the church's role in it is an important step forward."

AIDSAND WRIGHT-RIGGINS

Moving from supremacy and ranking to a place of reparation and reconciliation requires more than a simple "kumbaya" moment, Wright-Riggins said.

"The project of reconciliation is daring to learn a new calculus of decolonializing a society that was built through the theft of land, labor and lives.

"Jesus talks about this as the Kingdom of God," he said, reminding the crowd that it's up to them if they will just see it as a "pie in the sky" concept or dig in and fight for a just future for all.

While in the Kansas City area, Wright-Riggins also spoke to groups outside of the scheduled lectures. He spent time with students in a class on religion, conflict and peacebuilding at William Jewell College, discussing his work at the intersection of race and religion, including his time serving as the Director of Peace with Justice at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Wright-Riggins also appeared on the local NPR affiliate's "Up To Date" program, talking about his work as a mayor of a small town in Pennsylvania and the confluence of faith and politics.

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

In spring 2020, the Shurden Lectures will be held on the campus of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. For more information, visit BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures.

By Cheryl Crowe, BJC Director of Communications



Wright-Riggins speaks in a class at William Jewell College.



Wright-Riggins at Central Baptist Theological Seminary



Wright-Riggins talks with students after his lecture at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri.



Central Baptist Theological Seminary President Molly Marshall, Aidsand Wright-Riggins and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler



Rev. James Ingram on portraying Gowan Pamphlet

For more than 20 years, the Rev. James Ingram has been portraying Gowan Pamphlet at Colonial Williamsburg. His presentation as Pamphlet, an enslaved man and founder of an 18th century all-black church, is always a highlight of the BJC Fellows Program. An ordained Baptist minister himself, Ingram has a special connection to this man from the Colonial era, which he explains during an interview with BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr.

Read about his experiences portraying Pamphlet, including the difficult dichotomy of speaking about religious freedom from the perspective of someone who, during Colonial America, did not have full personal freedom. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

BJC's Charles Watson Jr.: How did you first learn about Gowan Pamphlet?

James Ingram: I did not know about him until about 1997. I had portrayed at least 25 different characters before a director at the time introduced me to Gowan Pamphlet and asked if I would think about performing him as a character. Literally, the only bio we had on him was two paragraphs — that was the entirety of what the historians had come up with since 1979 when Gowan was first introduced as a character for Colonial Williamsburg.

What about Gowan's story impacts you the most?

Well, I realized in those two paragraphs that he was the first black preacher — in 1791 — to be chosen to join the all-white Dover Baptist Association. And as you probably know, one of the people of importance in the Dover Baptist Association was (Baptist preacher) John Leland.

But, Gowan was the first black preacher ordained by any denomination in 1772, and he would become the first black preacher to join an all-white Baptist association. I immediately felt a connection because, in 1988 when I graduated from Virginia Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, I joined the Dover Baptist Association. And so, it was immediately a connection there. He's a Virginian, I'm a Virginian. He was a Baptist preacher, I'm a Baptist preacher. He's a pastor, I'm a pastor.

How did you end up at Colonial Williamsburg?

Divine inspiration. After teaching up in Richmond and working with a church called Rising Zion Baptist Church in Cumberland, I was coming down to Williamsburg every now and then for a respite. ... One day, at a stop sign, for whatever reason, right in front of me was a sign that said there were jobs in Colonial Williamsburg. Now, you have to understand, even coming to Williamsburg for the times that I had, I always thought Williamsburg was a playground for those who like to dress up in 18th century costumes to come and play around. I never thought it was a formal way of really working.

So, curiosity killed the cat; I just followed the signs, and as I walked downstairs into a building, I saw people in costume. What struck me in the foyer was a lot of offerings of different ways you can work in Colonial Williamsburg. But, what really hit me like a deer in the headlights

was a booth that said: "Department of African American History and Presentation." And right next to that was "Department of Religion."

Sometimes in life, you just know your life is going to change. And that was it. Because I had no idea Colonial Williamsburg had a focus on the history of slaves or religion, and both of those were my specialties.

Gowan lived a life of some religious freedom but lacked personal freedom as an enslaved person. How do you communicate this dichotomy to the Williamsburg visitors?

Easily now, but earlier, it was a sort of struggle to come up with an answer that makes sense, but this is a continuous project. We literally now have volumes of information on Gowan. It's actually Gowan's owner, Jane Vobe, who owned him as an enslaved person at the King's Arms Tavern and who gave him permission to be ordained in 1772 by 30 white Baptist preachers over in Surry County. He was literally ordained on the plantation of Nathaniel Bacon (who was responsible for Bacon's Rebellion in 1676). ...

I not only talk about the fact that Gowan was allowed this privilege by his owner, who owned King's Arms Tavern and 13 other slaves, but she gave him permission for ordination in 1772 and permission to start his church, the first Baptist church congregation, in 1776. She had allowed him every Sunday off to be with the church from 1776 all the way to his death more than 20 years later. His owner had a lot to do with it, and I think Jane Vobe had undergone a spiritual change herself because of the Great Awakening. She left the Bruton Parish Church — an Anglican Church — to join the Presbyterian congregation. And I think the Presbyterians' message of equality in the eyes of God really was a message that helped her make the decision to allow him to be ordained.

With the tensions around both race and religion today, what lessons can everyone learn from Gowan's story?

I really think about Gowan's world and what Gowan had to face in the 18th century, especially as a pastor of a congregation that had a majority of enslaved people but was racially diverse. ... You were dealing every day with race and the issue of race and equality. Probably one of Gowan's greatest moments to talk about this issue was his participation in the Revolutionary War — he did a lot of recruitment of



Speaking to the 2016 BJC Fellows



With the 2017 BJC Fellows

African Americans, especially enslaved people and free black people [and others], to join the Continental army. He was definitely a staunch patriot, mainly because he was trying to get people to understand the necessity of winning the war against Great Britain to bring about religious liberty.

And so, some of the same problems of race in the 18th century we're still struggling with today, and those answers to this problem are about the same. It's laid right there in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," and that word "unalienable" is very, very important because those are rights that man cannot give. They only come from God, and to get people to understand the meaning of those words, I think we're becoming a little bit more successful in getting them to understand what this struggle is all about.

This year will mark the fifth year that a group of BJC Fellows will meet you in Colonial Williamsburg.

I tell you what I get every single time you guys come is those wide-eyed, hungry, young religious leaders that you have in your group. ... I'm passing on a mantle so they can run as far as they can run and make those positive changes as much as they can. I love the energy that you all bring.

How do you stay in character? How do you transition back to your persona after playing Gowan and keep those identities separate? Or do they just come together?

I'll tell you the truth, it just depends on the day, and the hour, and the moment. Sometimes, you know, I can come out of character for a day or so. It doesn't take that long for me to get into character. Once I know the particular group I'm meeting at whatever particular time, I immediately start to process and emerge in myself in the 18th century because I have to get into that period to bring whomever – especially the BJC Fellows – into the period with me. So, the things I say and that I talk about are absolutely the things I'm seeing as I am moving you all through the different aspects of Gowan's life in the 18th century. But sometimes when I finish, it takes me a while to come out of character. I've had people tell me, "Well you know you're not really totally out yet, so I'll wait until you finish transcending before we carry

on our conversation." I think it's something that we learn to do in this kind of business and this kind of character. This is a lifetime venture for us, so we are always in character.

For those who have never visited Colonial Williamsburg or heard of Gowan Pamphlet, what is something they should know?

There would not be an America if it wasn't for Williamsburg – if not for people like Gowan Pamphlet and, of course, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry and all the rest of the nation builders that participated in the building of this country. But, also, the denominational leaders are very, very important in the establishment of the United States of America. It's important for people to understand that they are as much a part of this fabric of the 18th century and the building of this country. ...

Much of that war in 1776 was almost a pinnacle of The Reformation. ... The Constitution of the United States established the freedom of religion and especially the wall of separation, which is very, very important. As you well know, Thomas Jefferson corresponded with the Danbury Baptists and described that idea of a wall of separation, which means we would never, ever be ruled by another established church ever in our lives: we always have a choice of choosing our means of worship.

For more information about The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, Virginia, visit their website at ColonialWilliamsburg.com. To learn more about the BJC Fellows Program, visit our website at BJCOnline.org/Fellows.



Ringin' the Freedom Bell at the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg with the 2018 BJC Fellows



The next natural step in my philanthropy

By Madison McClendon
BJC Board Member

In middle school, I spent a period of time studying Baptist history for a school project. I became captivated with the Baptist Joint Committee, especially because I was dedicated as only a child can be to certain core ideals: love for one another, defending those who have less power or prestige than others, and the rights of friends of mine to live their faith without discrimination. I was enamored of the organization's commitments to stand up for religious liberty for everyone, and I was impressed that they did so not in spite of but because of a uniquely Christian and Baptist faith commitment.

I was in high school when BJC announced that it was looking for supporters willing to make a monthly gift to the organization's mission. In honor of their 70th anniversary, they were asking people to make a gift with a "7" somewhere in the monthly amount. I had just begun working as a youth assistant at my church; so, with a regular biweekly paycheck of about \$100, I didn't think twice – for a teenager, my disposal income was through the roof. I started giving \$7 each month. Since then, I've increased my monthly gift, and through college, grad school, post-school unemployment and my professional career, I've managed to maintain a monthly gift.

When BJC announced they were looking for members to join the James Dunn Legacy Circle, it was a natural next step in my own philanthropy. I had a small 403(b) growing, and it didn't take much work to designate the BJC as one of the percentage beneficiaries on the policy, alongside my important family members.

I know, too, that although my retirement accounts are small, after a long career of dedicated saving, they will be much larger in

the future. Given all BJC does educating our community, hosting and traveling to events, advocating for our values with legislators and judges, and proclaiming our commitments in the public square every day, I am thrilled to know that one day I might be able to make a much larger gift to this work than I ever could during my lifetime, simply by living and saving as I am now.

If you are considering an estate gift to join the James Dunn Legacy Circle, consider no more. Each of us has the opportunity to give every day to the causes and people we see in front of us. But this is an opportunity to do something more: to give to the brothers, the sisters, the siblings of our faith and of different faiths who will be born into the world we leave for them. Their hearts will beat in them as free as yours and mine, with the God-given right to believe or not believe as their own convictions guide. My gift, planned in advance, is for those of all and no faiths, so that they, like me, might secure the same and greater freedom in a country that maintains and expands its commitment to free souls, free people and free consciences.

If you have included BJC in your estate plans or would like more information about naming BJC as beneficiary of a will or retirement plan, visit BJCOnline.org/Planned-Giving and fill out a simple form. You may also contact Taryn Deaton by email at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226.



Up next

June 2:

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman speaks at the Anti-Defamation League's Leadership Summit in **Washington, D.C.**

June 7:

BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. is a panelist for "Disrupt the Narrative: Centering African American Perspectives on Religious Freedom" at the Newseum in **Washington, D.C.**

June 21:

BJC Luncheon is held in **Birmingham, Alabama**, in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly.

June 22:

BJC participates in the Roger Williams Fellowship Dinner at the American Baptist Churches USA Biennial in **Virginia Beach, Virginia**.

July 24-27:

The 2019 BJC Fellows Seminar convenes in **Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia**.

August 5-7:

BJC staff members attend the Progressive National Baptist Convention Annual Session in **Atlanta, Georgia**.

For additional BJC events, visit BJCOnline.org/Calendar

BJC to launch new look and resources this summer

On June 21, BJC will launch a refreshed brand and retooled website at BJCOnline.org.

"We are excited to introduce our supporters and the broader community to BJC's new look and, more importantly, new resources as we help lead conversations around religious liberty and how to protect it for all people in these challenging times," said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler.

"We've designed the new site to both tell the story of BJC's many contributions to church-state law and policy over the past 80 years, and to provide multiple opportunities for engagement and advocacy for individuals — those who have partnered with BJC for many years and those who will be meeting us for the first time."

BJC will introduce the new brand and website at its annual luncheon, held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, in Birmingham, Alabama. Tyler's remarks will be broadcast live on BJC's Facebook page during the event.

For more details, be sure to follow BJC on social media and subscribe to our email updates at BJCOnline.org/Subscribe.

BJC expands staff

CARLTON GRACE GAY has joined the BJC staff in the new role of executive assistant, where she will provide administrative and operational support to the executive director.

A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Gay recently completed a spring semester BJC internship. She is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English with a minor in business communications.

You can contact Gay and welcome her to the staff by email at cgay@BJCOnline.org.



Follow us on social media

One of the best ways to stay abreast of the latest religious liberty news and work of BJC is to follow us on our various social media channels.

Subscribing to our YouTube channel means you'll be among the first to know when we post new video resources. Plus, our Facebook and Twitter feeds are great places to read our latest news and to see photos of recent BJC events.

And, if you are connected with us on Instagram, take note that we have a new handle! Be sure to follow and tag us in your posts by using [@BJContheHill](https://www.instagram.com/BJContheHill). We'll see you online!



BJC in the news

BJC provides commentary and analysis to members of the media on a variety of church-state topics. To see when we are quoted in major publications, be sure to follow our social media feeds. Here are a few recent items of note.



Religion News Service: How outrage for a death row inmate may have flipped the justices for religious liberty

In the previous edition of *Report from the Capital*, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler wrote about the troubling Supreme Court decision that denied a Muslim inmate in Alabama the ability to have his imam in the execution chamber. Following publication, a similar case involving a Buddhist inmate in Texas had a different result.

Tyler's comments on the first case were picked up by NPR and, after the second case, Tyler wrote an op-ed for Religion News Service discussing the difference in outcome. She asked, "My question for the three justices who switched their votes: How could it be that Alabama's policy did not discriminate against Muslims, while Texas' policy did discriminate against Buddhists?"



Beliefs podcast

Tyler discussed those cases at length on the April 7 episode of the *Beliefs* podcast, produced by Religion News Service and available online at ReligionNews.com/category/podcast.



Religion News Service: Christians and Jews Agree: The Cross is no Secular Symbol

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman and Marc Stern of the American Jewish Committee wrote an op-ed on the Bladensburg cross case, explaining why it's important that the Supreme Court recognize the religious character of the cross and rule against the display. "The court should reject government actions that divide citizens according to religion, including any attempt to secularize sacred symbols under the false pretense of honoring veterans," they wrote.

Hollman was quoted in several news reports on the case, including coverage from NPR and *The Los Angeles Times*.



Politico: The sanctification of Donald Trump

Tyler spoke to *Politico* about troubling rhetoric conflating patriotism and religion, particularly a widely-shared statement on Twitter that referred to the president as a "savior."

"Christians should beware of a political use of the word 'savior,' which goes to the very heart of our faith. This particular statement is a gross expression of Christian nationalism, which I define as equating Christian and American identities," Tyler said in the article. "People of faith know that God is much larger than any one candidate, party, election or country."



State of Belief radio

Tyler expanded on the dangers of Christian nationalism in an interview for *State of Belief*, the radio show and podcast hosted by Welton Gaddy, the president emeritus of Interfaith Alliance. She is interviewed on the May 4 episode, which is available online at StateofBelief.com.



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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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Shurden Lectures

Read about the 2019 Shurden Lectures, featuring the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins' call for new understandings on pages 14-15.



Share your religious liberty reading!

Share a photo of your issue of our magazine, and we may share it on our social media channels! Tag BJC on Twitter or Instagram: [@BJContheHill](https://twitter.com/BJContheHill).