

# REPORT

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FROM THE

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# CAPITAL

BJC Magazine



**New BJC Fellows begin  
advocacy journey**

**The impact of white  
Christian nationalism**

**HOLLY HOLLMAN explores  
religious exemptions to  
vaccine mandates**

**AMANDA TYLER on building  
a faith freedom nation**

# Building a faith freedom nation

One of the best ways to stand against the insidious ideology of Christian nationalism is to build a faith freedom nation. In the United States, we do not share a common religion and not all of us claim a faith tradition, but we do share a constitutional system that says there are no second-class faiths. BJC is working to ensure all perspectives are welcome to engage constructively in the public square, regardless of religious beliefs. Amanda Tyler shares how we can all create a **FAITH FREEDOM NATION** on page 3.

Respecting the rights of all communities of faith includes standing with Native American neighbors who are facing the loss of sacred land at **OAK FLAT** unless Congress takes action. Learn how you can make a difference on page 4.

An expert panel discussed the evils of **WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM** in a summer webinar. Read more about the conversation on pages 6-8, including ways you can engage your community and church in dismantling the ideology that subjugates others.

The **BJC FELLOWS** are bringing their full range of experiences to the table as they connect with new ways to advocate for faith freedom. Hear from our 2021 class on pages 14-16.

On page 17, Rabbi Michael G. Holzman and Imam Mohamed Magid share how small acts of kindness can build bridges and **CREATE A MORAL UNIVERSE** where people of different faith groups stand up for each other.

For **85 YEARS**, BJC has been working to advance a faith freedom nation. Get a snapshot of some of the ways we are continuing to stand for others on pages 11-13.

## Planning for your 2021 taxes

Fall is the season when many of us prepare to make important end-of-year financial decisions that affect our personal taxes. With your donation to BJC, you not only support the mission of advocating for everyone's religious freedom — you also may be able to reduce your future tax burdens.

### Monetary Gifts

Giving a cash donation to BJC by the end of the year is a simple process. To financially support BJC, you can send a check directly to the BJC office or give online using your credit card or a bank transfer at [BJCOnline.org/give](https://BJCOnline.org/give).

### Other Gift Options

In addition to cash gifts, you may consider several alternative methods of giving that may generate tax benefits. Here are three examples.

**1. Donate stocks.** Make an impact on BJC by donating appreciated stocks, such as mutual fund shares, publicly traded real estate investment trusts (REITs) and exchange-traded funds (ETFs).

**2. Make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) of IRA assets.** Give to BJC in your retirement through a qualified charitable distribution. This is a distribution from an IRA (other than an ongoing SEP or SIMPLE IRA) owned by an individual who is age 70½ or older that is paid directly from the IRA to BJC.

**3. Give a gift of real estate.** Support BJC's mission through a donation of real estate, such as a personal home, vacation home or undeveloped property.

Your donations are critical in moving faith freedom forward. For more information about giving to BJC, contact Dan Hamil, director of strategic partnerships, at [dhamil@BJCOnline.org](mailto:dhamil@BJCOnline.org) or 202-544-4226, extension 307.

Please consult your tax adviser for information and counsel regarding your own tax situation, potential tax benefits in donating and the deductibility of specific gifts.



## Creating a faith freedom nation

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

**A**s I write to you, we as a country have just observed the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. We remember and grieve the 2,977 people killed that fateful day. We also recall the trauma inflicted on our society by this previously unimaginable terrorism.

Over the past two decades, we have continued a national conversation about what defines us as Americans and what it means to be patriotic. Some of our instincts, inspired and fueled by fear, have been isolationist and exclusionary. We have seen a steady rise in the number and intensity of domestic hate crimes, including those inflicted against our Muslim, Sikh and Jewish brothers and sisters. Policy influenced by religious bigotry and intolerance, such as the Muslim and African travel bans instituted by the Trump administration and upheld by a majority of the the U.S. Supreme Court, also bears tragic witness to this trend.

We also have seen a narrowing definition of our national identity as a “Christian nation,” one that interprets the formation of the United States as providentially inspired and created for the propagation of Christianity and the preferencing of Christians. This ideology largely ignores the evils of race-based slavery, thereby erasing the stories of millions of Americans from this idealized version of history.

But, thankfully, some of our reactions have been more generous and more abundant. In the days immediately following 9/11 and on several later occasions, then-President George W. Bush spoke pointedly about not targeting Muslims for the isolated actions of extremist terrorists. In communities across the country, interfaith groups of neighbors came out to support the families and friends of hate crime victims. Religious pluralism continues to flourish in our country; we have a broad diversity of faiths and a growing number of Americans who do not claim a given religious tradition at all.

Over the past two years, BJC has helped lead a national exploration of Christian nationalism and specifically what a Christian response to Christian nationalism can look like. Tens of thousands of people have engaged with the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, using new resources to help understand

and explain white Christian nationalism and work to dismantle it.

These responses are examples of what we explore more in depth in this issue about how we can cultivate a **Faith Freedom Nation**. We as Americans are not united by our faith or religion. What draws us together is our commitment to standing up for each person’s religious freedom as we would our own.

Creating a faith freedom nation takes intentional work and patient listening. There is no dominant religion in a faith freedom nation. Even being religious is not the default state of being in a faith freedom nation. Instead, there is liberty for people to exercise or choose not to exercise their faith without infringing on the choices of other people.

This summer, BJC engaged in some of this flourishing work of building a faith freedom nation. After a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw the return of our BJC Fellows program. I, along with four other members of the BJC staff, gathered with eight remarkable young professionals in Colonial Williamsburg to learn from each other and from other scholars in our BJC community. Our timing was fortunate, as we were able to safely gather before the delta variant made in-person events — even for the vaccinated — more dangerous again.

I was reminded that there is simply no substitute for the power of in-person connection and collaboration. On the last morning of our seminar, our group reflected on the increased energy and stamina we found as we returned to our homes across the country. I encourage you to read more about the experiences of our newest BJC Fellows in their own words on pages 14-16 of this magazine. I cannot wait to see what these new advocates for faith freedom will do in their communities and contexts.

While we encountered many obstacles over the past two decades to the creation of a faith freedom nation, we also had clear opportunities to advocate for our neighbors as for ourselves. As Christian nationalism has become more pronounced, we have been able to name it, recognize it, call it out, and point to a better and more uniting path of religious freedom for all. I am grateful that you are working with us as we continue to build a faith freedom nation.





*BJC is working with Congress and other organizations on legislative issues that impact religious freedom. Here are two items we are tracking, and you can help make a difference!*

## Support the Save Oak Flat Act

Building a faith freedom nation means standing up for religious communities when a sanctuary is at risk of being sacrificed at the altar of capitalism. That's why BJC supports the Save Oak Flat Act (H.R. 1884/S. 915), which seeks to protect a sacred Native American site from permanent destruction.

For centuries, *Chí'chil Bítłdagoteel*, loosely translated as "Oak Flat" in English, has been the site of religious and cultural ceremonies, a burial ground, and a place for tribal members to find medicinal plants, food and water. The San Carlos Apache Tribe and others who hold Oak Flat as sacred need our help in protecting their sanctuary from irrevocable destruction.

Once part of the Apache aboriginal lands, Oak Flat currently sits within the Tonto National Forest in southeast Arizona. For decades, the federal government has protected the land but is now poised to transfer the land to a foreign mining company.

The mining company intends to use a technique called "block caving" to quickly and cheaply extract the copper ore underneath Oak Flat. This highly destructive technique will create a large crater that will completely consume Oak Flat.

The anticipated crater would be nearly two miles wide and up to 1,000 feet deep — or twice the length of the Golden Gate Bridge and deep enough to stack the Statue of Liberty three and a half times!

The Save Oak Flat Act continues to gain support in Congress, but more outreach is needed before it can become law.

You can support our indigenous neighbors' faith freedom by taking these two steps:

- Reach out to your representative and senators today to tell them you support the Save Oak Flat Act. When you call the office or email them, also ask them to cosponsor the Save Oak Flat Act.

- On Indigenous Peoples Day (Monday, October 11), share on social media your support for the San Carlos Apache Tribe's fight to protect their sacred space. Here is a sample tweet you can use or modify: *#FaithFreedomForAll includes protecting the sacred sites of indigenous people. Congress should pass the bipartisan #SaveOakFlat Act. Don't sacrifice this indigenous sacred site to foreign capitalism. Keep it protected within the Tonto National Forest.*

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## Stay tuned for a new blasphemy resolution

Last year, the House and Senate each passed a resolution condemning the enforcement of blasphemy laws around the world — which stifle religious expression and undermine human rights. The resolutions also called on the administration to take seriously a country's use of blasphemy laws when engaging in diplomacy.

Some countries continue to criminalize blasphemy

through fines, imprisonment and even death sentences. Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Maryland, plans to introduce a new resolution to hold them accountable for doing so.

BJC will let you know when the blasphemy resolution is filed, and we will ask for your help to ensure passage of this important resolution highlighting religious freedom abuses around the world.

To be the first to learn about these and other #BJCAdvocacy opportunities, join the BJC Advocacy Team! You will get additional email updates from BJC on ways you can make a difference. To sign up, visit [BJCOnline.org/subscribe](https://BJCOnline.org/subscribe) and check the box when you join our email list. Or, if you already subscribe, you can update your information.

## Religious exemptions to vaccine mandates

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Each year, I co-teach a seminar on church-state law at Georgetown University Law Center. It covers major themes in religious liberty law and gives students an opportunity to explore topics in depth for a paper and class presentation. Invariably, at least one student picks a topic related to religion and health care.

I don't think that's because religious objections to medical care are common. More likely, it's because religious claims that conflict with health measures vividly illustrate the tensions between individual freedom and collective responsibility. Wherever possible, we should protect both: freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin.

As our class met online this year due to the pandemic, the topic of religious exemptions in health care was especially popular. Since the spring semester, issues presented in hypotheticals have moved from classrooms to courtrooms and political debates, with high stakes for both public health and the integrity of religious liberty law. As vaccine mandates become more widespread, here are a few things to keep in mind.

The purpose of a vaccine mandate is to achieve a level of herd immunity that protects the community at large, including those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. Claims for religious exemptions often arise in response to government orders, typically issued at the state and local level. Other times they arise as requests for religious accommodations in the workplace that should be granted unless they cause undue hardship for the employer. In both contexts, there is a weighing of burdens and benefits that may support exemptions to the mandate.

Regardless of context, the more exemptions allowed (beyond medical exemptions consistent with the mandate's purpose), the less effective the vaccine mandate. COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be safe, effective and widely available, while the virus continues to cause devastating harm. Absent higher rates of voluntary vaccinations, mandatory policies and interest in religious exemptions will both become more widespread. Under current law, religious exemptions seem unlikely to be required.

Several Supreme Court cases from the first half of the 20th century are often cited to support the constitutionality of vaccine mandates. Those cases upheld the government's power to create

ordinances that protect safety and public health, including by mandating vaccines for smallpox and for school enrollment.

All 50 states have compulsory school vaccination laws. Before the rise of COVID-19 and the politicization of efforts to stem its spread, there was relatively little controversy about mandatory vaccinations beyond a small, vocal contingent that opposes vaccinations altogether and is willing to withdraw kids from schools. While most compulsory vaccination laws have exemptions, recent outbreaks of illnesses in areas with low vaccination rates demonstrate the danger. In response, some states have eliminated non-medical exemptions, including religious exemptions. These reversals reveal that exemptions to vaccine mandates can be difficult to accommodate; limiting exemptions can promote the public health goals vaccine mandates are designed to accomplish.

The burden of a vaccine may be substantial on those whose religious practices reject medical interventions or avoid medical care altogether in lieu of prayer. At the same time, the government's compelling interest in public health may outweigh those burdens. In light of the important public health purpose served by vaccines, some question whether there is any good faith basis for claims of religious objections. No major religions oppose vaccines; most encourage them as a way of caring for their adherents and their surrounding communities. But more than a few pastors and lawyers are making a business of assisting those who seek religious exemptions. Some provide counsel on how to present claims more likely to pass as resting on sincerely held religious beliefs. While a small number of such exemptions may be warranted, I agree with Curtis Chang, the former pastor and co-founder of Christians and the Vaccine, who noted in a recent *New York Times* op-ed: "The biggest threat to any legitimate right is the illegitimate abuse of that right."

Current members of the Supreme Court have questioned some of the precedents regarding vaccine mandates. No doubt the politics of COVID-19, along with the Supreme Court's shifting constitutional standards and recent deference toward religious claimants, will ignite intense debate on these issues. Until courts sift through the claims, the impact of vaccine mandates and religious exemptions will depend primarily on decisions made by individuals that promote or undercut the goals of public health and the responsible exercise of religious liberty.

# The many manifestations of white Christian nationalism

*‘Symbols have the power to shape narratives’*

By Cherilyn Crowe

When the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement launched in 2019, one particular sentence sparked many new conversations: the line that says Christian nationalism “often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation.”

“That one line got more pushback than anything else in the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement, and we heard self-righteous indignation from the detractors,” BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler said.

On July 14, BJC hosted a webinar to explore further how Christian nationalism undergirds racism, featuring a conversation about research and personal experiences with Dr. Jemar Tisby and Dr. Robert P. Jones, moderated by Tyler.

Tisby is a historian and the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* and his most recent book, *How to Fight Racism*. Jones is the CEO and Founder of PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute) and the author of *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* and *The End of White Christian America*.

Scholars define Christian nationalism as a cultural framework that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life, including in the way history is interpreted, in the symbols considered “sacred,” and in public policies espoused by a nation. And, within that framework, the voices and experiences of white people are often elevated above the voices

and experiences of all others.

When we talk about Christian nationalism, according to Jones, it really comes down to a form of white Christian nationalism, which involves “white Christians having a very deep-seated idea that America is really their own private promised land, meant for them and divinely so, set out by God.”

Tisby noted that this concept is centuries old, and often in these conversations the term “Christian” represents more of a political identity. He said people have to be trained to know what Christian nationalism looks like in practice and how it manifests itself in various ways, such as having an American flag in a pulpit, internet memes of a European-looking Jesus hovering over a White House, massive church celebrations of the Fourth of July, and an elevation of the Constitution to something that is co-equal to Scripture.

“Symbols have the power to shape narratives,” Tisby said.

He and Tyler noted that Mississippi changed its state flag last year, removing the flag design that included the Confederate battle flag. The new state flag includes the words “In God We Trust.”

Tisby shared that when he drove from Arkansas to Mississippi during his Ph.D. program, he passed the Mississippi flag several times.

“Every time, as a Black man whose commute is literally through cotton fields, you see this former state flag that flew for 126 years — this flag survived the Civil Rights Movement, a referendum in



*“There’s something unholy, unrighteous that happens when you combine this concept of whiteness and white supremacy with Christianity.”*

Dr. Jemar Tisby



the early 2000s, the early Black Lives Matter movement,” he said, adding that the fact that the flag with the Confederate emblem didn’t come down until 2020 raises some questions.

“What does that communicate in the state that has the highest proportion of Black people than any other state?”

When they changed the flag, Tisby said the provision that required the words “In God We Trust” on the new flag can be interpreted as a sign of Christian nationalism — it’s an example of using power to shape a new narrative.

“What’s it saying to people who are not Christian or who don’t subscribe to any particular set of religious beliefs?” Tisby asked.

He said if people try to take those words off the flag, people will interpret it as messing with religious belief.

Jones added that the debate over the flag brings up the ways symbols impact us, noting that the Confederate symbol was added to Mississippi’s flag in 1894 as the South was wrestling with Reconstruction.

“You will see the allegiance and power of those symbols as soon as you try to take them down,” said Jones in rebuttal to those who say words or monuments are mostly symbolic without any additional meaning.

“Every church that has a white Jesus in its stained glass has got work to do,” Jones said. “This is an explicit racialization of God. It’s a statement of power, and it’s about white Christian power,” Jones continued.

Jones said we are often misunderstanding the threats in front of us because we tend to give Christianity a pass, but the symbols on January 6 during the insurrection were clear: people storming the Capitol carried Confederate flags and anti-Semitic symbols as well as Christian symbols, Bibles and flags.

“Those people are telling us who they are,” Jones said. “Far too often we say they are extremists or white supremacists, but the ‘Christian’ piece just kind of falls off the radar. If we’re really

going to understand what animates this reaction, we’ve got to understand that piece.”

“There’s something unholy, unrighteous that happens when you combine this concept of whiteness and white supremacy with Christianity,” said Tisby. “In the Bible it says any addition to the Gospels negates the Gospels — it’s no longer the Gospel. When you add this gospel of nationalism to Christianity — to the Gospel of Jesus Christ — it’s no longer recognizable as the faith of the founder of Christianity.”

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*“You can’t actually repent and believe the Gospel unless you’ve told the truth about who you are and why you need a savior.”*

—Dr. Jemar Tisby

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Tisby said that one of the most pernicious aspects of Christian nationalism is the fact that it’s all some white Christians know.

“It’s so familiar that when you call it ‘Christian nationalism,’ they think ‘Well, that’s just Christianity,’” Tisby said. “And when you try to disentangle the nationalist and racist portions from Christianity, they think you’re unraveling their faith itself,” he continued.

In order to combat white Christian nationalism, Jones and Tisby recommended sharing personal testimonies and starting the conversation focused on what you are learning about the differences between Christianity and Christian nationalism.

“If you try to start with the facts, the figures, the statistics, even the history — a lot of times there’s a wall and you can’t have a good conversation,” Tisby said, noting that moving into the history can be helpful.

“If we want to refute the idea that the Civil War was just



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Dr. Robert P. Jones

## How can we talk with others about white Christian nationalism?

- Share what you are learning about how elements of your faith have been tied to cultural assumptions.
- Be honest about previous ideas you held and how uncomfortable some truths can be for those in the majority.
- Don't get bogged down in discussions on other topics, such as Critical Race Theory. Stay focused on threats posed by those who combine Christianity with other ideas that are not from the Bible, harming the faith and demeaning others.
- Know the country's history and point to verifiable facts.

about this sort of abstract idea of states' rights when it was really about preserving race-based chattel slavery, you don't have to take my word for it," Tisby said. "Go to the Mississippi Articles of Secession which say our cause 'is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery — the greatest material interest of the world.'"

*"Hospitality is about making space for everyone, and if white Christians could do that, I think that's a real antidote for the nationalist impulse."*

—Dr. Robert P. Jones

Tisby said that the forces of Christian nationalism are adept at dictating the terms of the debate, and they will use terms like "Critical Race Theory" to appeal to a more visceral reaction, pushback against the idea of systemic racism, and often de-rail a conversation.

Tisby pointed out that when someone says Critical Race Theory is a problem, others respond by defining Critical Race Theory to say why it's not the main issue, which can lead to getting bogged down in that instead of discussing the issues of Christian nationalism.

Tisby said we need to be savvier. When people mention it to him, he starts with his experience working in middle schools to explain that Critical Race Theory is not being taught to schoolchildren.

Tisby then brings the conversation back to the topic of Christian nationalism and its dangers, sharing findings from the Department of Homeland Security that the biggest domestic terror threat was from white supremacist extremists.

"So, let's talk about that," he said.

Jones agreed and added that the current discourse on Critical Race Theory is not about the academic concept — which is decades old — but it's instead a coordinated propaganda campaign that is reacting to our country's current moment of racial reckoning.

"It's a protectionist move to pre-empt an honest reading of history — not only of the country, but our churches," Jones said, adding that we have a current crisis of white Christians who are not willing to tell the truth about themselves and the country.

"If we care about our churches and if

we care about our country, we can't be too cowardly and too self-interested to really look at our history honestly — that's the only way to help," he said. "We can never build a healthy future based on lies or ignorance."

Tisby said it's important to combat misinformation and untruths. "You can't actually repent and believe the Gospel unless you've told the truth about who you are and why you need a savior," Tisby said.

"In a similar way, unless we tell the truth about this nation when it comes to race and Christianity, there's not going to be any repentance, there's not going to be any repair, and there's not going to be any reconciliation."

Tisby also implored viewers to learn from the Black Church, which exists because of the sin and heresy of white supremacy. Black people were denied equality by white churches, so they created their own.

"The very historical development and theological development of the Black Church tradition — which is many and varied — has immense resources already for fighting racism, white supremacy and Christian nationalism," Tisby said.

Tyler noted that Christian nationalism prevents making space for others. "Christian nationalism, by its definition, has Christians taking up all the space in the American story," she said.

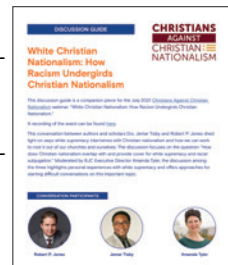
Jones says that growing up in Mississippi, he used to see the state's motto on license plates: The hospitality state. He said we can combat nationalism with the virtue of hospitality.

"Hospitality is about making space for everyone, and if white Christians could do that, I think that's a real antidote for the nationalist impulse."

### Video and study guide available

Visit BJC's YouTube channel to watch the entire webinar and access a study guide for further reflection and small group conversation.

Visit [BJCOnline.org/resources](https://www.bjc.org/resources) for more, including BJC's resources on race and religious liberty.



# CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

## NOW AVAILABLE: Curriculum on responding to Christian nationalism

A new curriculum invites you to hold a conversation on defining Christian nationalism, recognizing it in your church and community, and developing ways to counter it.

BJC created “Responding to Christian Nationalism,” a 3-session curriculum that is available for free on the Christians Against Christian Nationalism website. Partnering with Vote Common Good, BJC distributed it nationwide to the media, churches and individuals.

More than 1,000 people across the country accessed the curriculum in the first two months of its release, and it has been highlighted nationwide, including a featured conversation on NPR’s “All Things Considered” with BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler and Texas pastor Michael Mills.

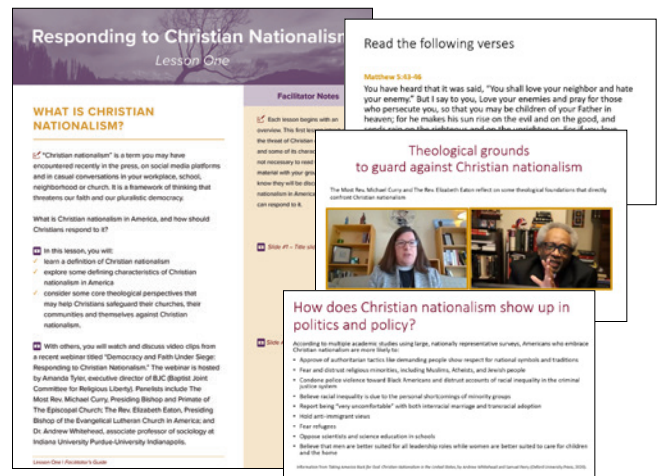
The curriculum is based in part on a January webinar led by Tyler, featuring a conversation in the wake of the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The panelists were the Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church; the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Dr. Andrew Whitehead, associate professor of sociology at Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis.

The curriculum packet includes self-study guides, materials designed for small group discussions, and resources for pastors to develop sermons. Alongside conversational guides, the curriculum includes Scripture passages that directly confront Christian nationalism. It also comes with a facilitator’s guide and PowerPoint presentations with embedded video clips to watch together.

“BJC developed this curriculum after the strong response to the webinar program, along with repeated requests from pastors and other church leaders for additional resources,” Tyler said. “We know that no one study guide will fit all audiences, so we plan for this curriculum to be just the first of many.”

“The Jan. 6 insurrection made it clear that the growing presence of Christian nationalism in our communities demands an urgent response,” said Vote Common Good Executive Director Doug Pagitt. “The launch of this new campaign demonstrates that hundreds of our Christian brothers and sisters are ready to rise to the occasion. We have come together to speak out against hatred and violence for the sake of our country and for the sake of our faith.”

Access the curriculum for free by visiting [ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org](https://ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org) or by scanning the QR code to the right.



**“White Christian nationalism is the deadly infectious spiritual disease of our time. These lessons tailor the essential historical, social, and theological treatment to help heal what harms us.”**

—Rev. J. Andrew Daugherty  
Senior Pastor of Pine Street Church  
Boulder, Colorado

**“This curriculum equips congregations across the country with the tools needed to identify Christian nationalism when they see it and to have the difficult yet necessary conversations to confront it. Where these conversations are happening, both our Christian faith and our American democracy will be strengthened.”**

—Rev. Michael Mills  
Pastor of Agape Baptist Church  
Fort Worth, Texas

# Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In honor of David R. Cook Jr.  
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You can honor someone at any time with a gift to BJC, which supports our programs.

Send a note with your check or visit [BJCOnline.org/give](https://BJCOnline.org/give) to make a donation.

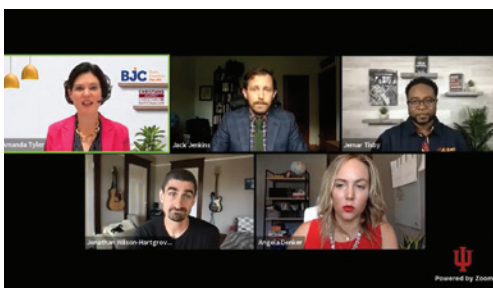
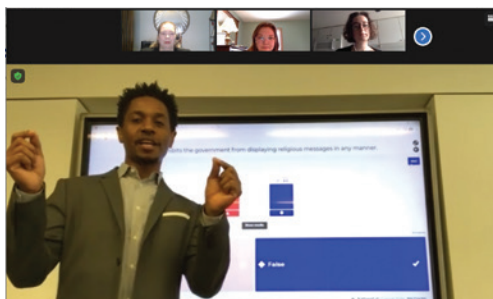
For more information, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at [dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org](mailto:dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org).

## BJC continues to come to you

At BJC, we are dedicated to teaching others about the importance of faith freedom for all, sharing about the constitutional and Baptist commitment to religious liberty.

As the COVID-19 pandemic changes our regular patterns, BJC staff members continue to speak virtually and in-person as safety protocols allow.

Do you want to start important conversations with your community? Would your students, church or civic group want to see what it's like to make change in Washington as advocates for religious freedom? Learn about the options for booking a BJC session by visiting [BJCOnline.org/education](https://BJCOnline.org/education).



**MOVING FAITH FREEDOM FORWARD**

**BJC 85**

BJC celebrated 75 years of service in 2011. In the 10 years since, BJC never lost sight of our primary mission to protect and extend religious liberty. But we've also advanced our vision and efforts for faith freedom for all. We have listened, learned and grappled with ways to best advance religious liberty in a diverse culture where all people and all voices have not been equally respected and heard.

**To mark our 85th anniversary, we are highlighting some of BJC's achievements over the past decade. We celebrate these successes and renew our commitment to moving faith freedom forward.**



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“BJC’s voice on faith freedom has been honed from over eight decades of directing traffic at the intersection of church and state. Their staff doesn’t add to the noise; they make sense of it. With thoughtful, incisive analysis informing advocacy that is grounded in both the Constitution and biblical faith.”

**Oliver “Buzz” Thomas,**  
former BJC General Counsel



## **Advancing** advocacy

BJC is equipping people to use their voice powerfully as members of the BJC Advocacy Team, learning how to engage Congress and their local communities in defending faith freedom for all.



## Advancing a legal legacy

BJC's *amicus* briefs at the U.S. Supreme Court showcase the historic Baptist commitment to religious freedom, and our briefs and legal positions have been noted in the courtroom, in opinions, and in major media outlets.



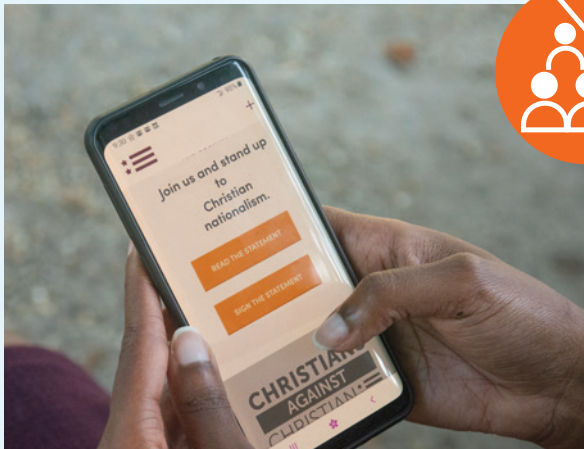
“BJC has long understood that religious faith is a first principle of identity and personhood for countless people, and as such the freedom to practice one’s faith — or no faith at all — without interference from others should be protected. During this highly polarized era, BJC advocates for religious freedom with a clear voice that is firm, highly respected and sorely needed.”

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Haggray,  
Executive Director of American Baptist Home Mission Societies



## Advancing faith freedom for all

BJC stands shoulder-to-shoulder with friends of all faiths and none in the midst of rising anti-Muslim sentiment and hate crimes targeting people based on their beliefs. We take action in the streets, online, in the courts, in Congress, and with presidential administrations.



## Advancing a response to Christian nationalism

BJC is mobilizing a movement to call out Christian nationalism, providing a platform for individuals to speak with a united voice and creating resources to combat the ways the ideology threatens our faith and our country.



## Advancing the next generation

BJC's focus on education includes programs that connect with students of all ages, equipping young professionals through the BJC Fellows Program, and creating new resources to foster conversations in churches and community groups.



## Advancing a more truthful reckoning

Religious freedom has been white too long, and BJC is working to promote a more robust understanding of how faith freedom intersects with personal freedom and racial justice. Creating the Project on Race and Religious Freedom, BJC is sharing new truths and expanding our collective knowledge of what it means to be truly free.

**Please help us  
in moving faith  
freedom forward.**

*"The BJC Fellows program was game-changing for me. Learning about religious freedom in a multi-faith classroom and experiential settings allowed the Baptist origins of this crucial American value to come to life!"*

Sarah Henry, 2019 BJC Fellow

To honor our 85th anniversary, we launched BJC's Project on Race and Religious Freedom. This initiative will help us better understand the intersection of race and religious freedom and allow us to create resources on this topic that you can share with your community.

**Thank you!** Many have already donated in celebration of our 85th anniversary.

If you haven't given yet, consider giving an additional gift — over your regular gifts to BJC — of \$85, \$850 or \$8,500.

**Give at [BJCOnline.org/give](https://BJCOnline.org/give)**



# New BJC Fellows develop firm foundations for advocacy

Eight young professionals gathered in Colonial Williamsburg this July for the 2021 BJC Fellows Seminar — the first in-person event hosted by BJC since the start of the pandemic. Following COVID-19 safety protocols, the group heard from historical interpreters as well as BJC staff members and other experts about the historical, legal and theological underpinnings of religious liberty.

This year's class also visited an archaeological dig site, excavating the original First Baptist Church of Williamsburg and the discovery of an African American graveyard. The dig is yet another example of understanding important elements of our country's history: the original church was founded by free and enslaved Black worshippers in the 1800s, making it one of the country's earliest African American congregations. The building was purchased and destroyed in the 1950s when Colonial Williamsburg was being developed as a tourist site to showcase the Colonial era. Once human remains were uncovered, the project leaders sought input and heard from descendants of the church's earliest members. The descendants asked that the project continue in order to learn more about the church's congregation and the deceased so the individuals can be properly honored. The BJC Fellows learned how archaeologists are identifying grave shafts and making plans for DNA analysis of the remains.

The BJC Fellows Seminar prepares young professionals for a lifetime of religious liberty advocacy. Hear more about the experience from our 2021 class in their own words:



“I think a lot of us came into the week with a strong sense of what religious freedom is and is not, but I know I would have had a hard time articulating it before my time in Colonial Williamsburg. The BJC Fellows Seminar gave us a vocabulary to have a more nuanced dialogue about religious freedom issues, as well as an action plan to advocate for the version of religious liberty we wish to see in the world.”

**Andy Brookshire**  
Dallas, Texas



“As we explored the history of our nation, the Baptist tradition and religious liberty in general, freedom was a constant theme. Freedom is often thought of too narrowly and individually. If we are to achieve true religious freedom, we must look beyond ourselves and lift up the most marginalized among us.

Religious freedom is an ideal of our nation that needs the support of our faith groups. Our founding framers recognized this when they argued that faith cannot be forced, and we have seen the danger of Christian nationalism up close and personal in recent years. The foundations of the Baptist faith compel us toward a freedom for others that in turn, offers more freedom to us.”

**Rev. Kat Kimmel**  
Memphis, Tennessee



“At the start of Dr. Sabrina Dent’s presentation, she asked participants to share what identity markers were most salient for them. The identity categories that are most salient for me are my gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, race, and region of origin. As I shared and listened to others share, my belief that ‘we bring all of who we are to the spaces and places that we frequent’ was reaffirmed. Also, in seeing how different each participant was, I found hope that despite our differences, we were committed to religious liberty for ALL. ...

As a Black, Queer woman from the South, who has spent most of my life as a low wealth person, I am committed to fighting for a just and equitable world. That fight also includes religious liberty for ALL.”

**Kristan Pitts**  
Charlottesville, Virginia



“During a session with Michael Meyerson, he told us about meeting Ruth Bader Ginsburg. He asked her to tell him the most important wisdom she could give to the next generation. She said without hesitation, ‘The growth of America is in the phrase “We the People.”’ This statement was profound for me because of the ‘we.’ We all have the power to change the arc of history for the better. And like [the historical interpreter portraying] Thomas Jefferson said, ‘Where we stopped, others must carry on.’

Building a better future begins with redeeming the growing edges of yesterday in order to create a better country for all people tomorrow. Religious liberty is the cornerstone.”

**Rev. Erica Whitaker**  
Louisville, Kentucky



“After this historical grounding, the BJC staff conducted sessions that looked at religious liberty from a legal standpoint and provided specific considerations on how to better advocate for religious freedom in the present. I have always been passionate about religious freedom for all, but I have also often struggled with what exactly to do about it. I found these sessions to be extremely valuable, as they set the stage for each of us to have an opportunity to practice an advocacy visit. Participating in this kind of training gave me the knowledge and confidence to prepare to do more involved advocacy work as I move forward in my life and ministry.”

**Rev. Christian McIvor**  
Greensboro, North Carolina





BJC Fellows pose with an interpreter portraying Gowan Pamphlet, an enslaved man in Colonial Virginia who was a preacher and the founder of Williamsburg's First Baptist Church.



“Religious liberty for all is incredibly important to me, and it was wonderful building relationships with BJC Fellows and staff who also clearly hold this commitment. I’m very happy that we had a range of voices present. I am not Baptist, and am not religious, but I still felt very welcome and respected in our conversations around religious liberty, which is a crucial right for those of any religion as well as for those who are not religious. ...

The ability to talk through religious liberty issues with other BJC Fellows — particularly with those who are members of or heads of houses of worship with members who may not agree with BJC’s commitments to religious liberty — really helped me appreciate BJC’s work even more.”

**Bryan Kelley**  
Denver, Colorado



“The group cultivated an intimate and authentic bond in a very short period — so much so that we kept the brave conversations going all the way to the airport.

Overall, during the pandemic, I haven’t had a chance to eat out too much or socialize because of health concerns of myself and my loved ones. This environment of learning and growing with classmates was — to quote our friends Bill and Ted — ‘most excellent.’ All the BJC staffers were super passionate, hardworking, and caring. They truly reflect the mission of the organization in an intentional and authentic manner.”

**Chaplain Adeel Zeb**  
Los Angeles, California



“Throughout our time together, we would learn to consider new perspectives and to look for the narratives that have been tucked away in the shadows. We would invite both Thomas Jefferson and Gowan Pamphlet [a Black preacher in Colonial Virginia] to help us consider what religious liberty looked like at our country’s founding from very different perspectives. We would tour the prison where dissenters who pushed back against established religion would preach from their jail cells. And we would stand in the middle of an archaeological dig site.

As we stood there, right smack in the middle of history, it occurred to me that this is what we were there to do. We were there to dig past layers of casual conversation and biased assumptions, to excavate narratives that had been disregarded and covered up, and to push beyond the prejudices and misconceptions that privileges some while limiting others, until we could begin to see the foundation of what held us together: a deep desire to protect the faith and freedom of all people.”

**Rev. Brittany Stillwell**  
Little Rock, Arkansas

# The power of tiny acts to create a moral universe

By Rabbi Michael G. Holzman and Imam Mohamed Magid

**T**he horrific attack of September 11, 2001, was an attack on all of humanity, and we remember all the victims and first responders who died that day. In the world of the terrorists, the presence of outsiders in their homeland — including Americans, Europeans, and non-Muslims generally — was a mortal threat. In reprisal, they chose violence. We might be tempted to see this medieval world view of theirs as the root of the violence, but that outlook would ignore the deeper and more universal truth of xenophobia. The events of that day showed us the danger of this truth — that humans tend to fear outsiders. Our experience over the last 20 years has taught us how to overcome that fear.

On 9/11, one of us was a student at the Hebrew Union College campus in New York, while the other was leading one of the largest Muslim communities in America, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS). A few hours after Rabbi Holzman watched humans jumping from the collapsing buildings, Imam Magid decided to close his religious school because he feared reprisal attacks against Muslims.

The reprisals that Imam Magid anticipated did arrive, as too many Americans fell into the moral trap of fearing all Muslims, and some Americans went so far as to label all of Islam as a religion of violent hatred. Hateful graffiti appeared on Imam Magid's current building, and the sign on the future ADAMS building site was burned. But then, on the first Sunday after the attacks, the local interfaith community, led by members of the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation (NVHC), arrived in force to reject the hatred. Children from NVHC's religious school produced an enormous banner with messages of love. Imam Magid realized something special was afoot in his corner of America.

Nationwide, Americans embraced a fortress mentality, increasing surveillance of American Muslims, enacting travel restrictions, creating no-fly lists, and inventing the term "Islamofascism." As Imam Magid was confronting increased profiling and stereotyping of Muslims, he could see that our local community was taking a different direction: Muslims were now part of the social fabric, and the faith community, led by Jews, would not tolerate Islamophobia in our neighborhood.

Embedded in our faith traditions is the power of the prophetic voice, the imperative that God expects more from humanity than mere survival and security. Perhaps this yearning for humanity's better instincts led Muslims to flock to join ADAMS in those years, fueling an expansion that required satellite locations for Friday prayers. And perhaps it was that same yearning that inspired NVHC to open its doors and welcome ADAMS members weekly and every night during Ramadan to pray in a synagogue.

What accounts for this reaction? The answer is something tiny, yet powerful — something exemplified in an incident Rabbi Holzman witnessed on 9/11. As he walked from Hebrew Union College to his home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan along a route that began over a mile from the Twin Towers, he witnessed people still running north in the deserted streets. He saw one man who had stopped to catch his breath, together with a crowd that had gathered to help him. The man gestured that he could not hear because his ears were clogged with gray ash. A woman ran into a drug store, returned with cotton swabs, and began cleaning the man's ears as he broke down in tears.

Compared with the enormity of the 9/11 attacks, acts like these seem minuscule. But through the hands of the woman with the cotton swabs acted the power of God that the terrorists had pushed away as they steered planes into buildings. Over the past twenty years, this same power brought members of each of our congregations to rally to each other in times of crisis: when a young member of ADAMS was murdered, during the wars in Gaza, when the Muslim travel ban was enacted, after the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" march, and following the Tree of Life synagogue shooting.

As the story of the partnership between NVHC and ADAMS has rippled around the world, we have come to believe that tiny acts — like the installation of a Muslim foot bath in a synagogue bathroom — have the power to overcome the xenophobia that has been one of humanity's failings since the beginning of time. We have both seen it. After hearing an anti-Semitic sermon, Imam Magid approached the speaker and described the synagogue where his members pray. The man immediately admitted his mistake. When Rabbi Holzman recently sat with eight Muslim men in an Arab Israeli town, they eyed him with suspicion until he showed them a BBC video on his phone of Friday afternoon Jumma prayers at the shul.

Though seemingly insignificant compared to the security of our nation — or even of our local houses of worship — tiny acts are the most significant thing we can do to create a moral universe. When a Jew stands in the parking lot welcoming a Muslim to pray in a synagogue, or Muslims host Jews for an Interfaith Passover Seder at the Masjid, we cannot know where or how those acts will reverberate. But we can know that after the next incident of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, those Jews and Muslims who engaged in those tiny acts will have the authority, expertise and conviction to recognize that the "other" is no longer anonymous. And that is enormous.

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*This article first appeared on [ReformJudaism.org](https://www.reformjudaism.org).  
A condensed version is reprinted here with permission.*

## James Dunn Legacy Circle

As BJC marks our 85 years of service, we are continuing to plan for the future of religious liberty, knowing the next 15 years and beyond are key to continuing the fight for faith freedom for all. We are grateful for our donors who are members of the James Dunn Legacy Circle, investing in the next century of our work while honoring someone who sparked a commitment to BJC in so many.



### Who is James Dunn?

The Rev. Dr. James M. Dunn (1932-2015) was known for his stalwart defense of religious liberty, colorful turns of phrase and ubiquitous bow tie. He made contributions throughout Baptist life, including leading BJC through the 1980s and 90s. He consistently fought for a strong Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause while simultaneously shepherding the organization through a tumultuous time in Baptist denominational history.

When hired to lead BJC, Dunn promised an “aggressive, broad-based” approach in his new position, and he delivered. Known as a firebrand, his words provoked many — including government leaders, denominational heads, pastors, church laypeople and students — to respect anew the importance of religious freedom in our nation.

After retirement from BJC in 1999, Dunn continued teaching the next generation as a professor and a mentor to future leaders.

It is hard to overstate how passionate and influential James Dunn was in advancing BJC’s core mission of protecting religious liberty for all, and how his enthusiasm infected others to care and advocate strongly for faith freedom in their churches, communities and nation.

That’s why BJC chose to name our planned giving program after James Dunn. To celebrate BJC’s 85th year, we encourage you to consider becoming part of the James Dunn Legacy Circle by making a planned gift to BJC.

### What is planned giving?

It is simply the process of making an intentional charitable donation — whether big or small — during one’s lifetime or at one’s death. James Dunn himself provided a planned gift for BJC in his estate planning. Gifts like his continue to provide financial resources for BJC’s current work.

“I chose to leave the BJC in our estate plan because the separation of church and state, as explained by the BJC, is an essential corollary of the deeply held theology of Baptists in our dedication to soul freedom,” Dunn said.

One way for you to provide for BJC’s future work is to create a planned gift. You can include or modify language in your will or trust, specifying a gift to BJC as part of your estate. Another way is to name BJC as a beneficiary in your insurance or retirement account. Some use these gifts as a tax benefit within their estate planning.

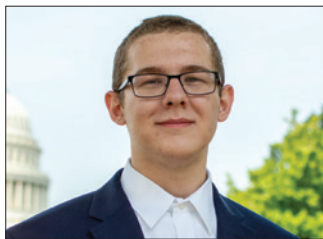


If you have included BJC in your estate plans or would like more information about naming us as a beneficiary of a will, insurance, or retirement plan, please contact Dan Hamil, BJC’s director of strategic partnerships, at [dhamil@BJCOnline.org](mailto:dhamil@BJCOnline.org).



## BJC welcomes fall intern

**THOMAS FORD** from Webster, New York, is a senior at Binghamton University, double majoring in history and political science. He previously completed internships at the Legal Aid Society of Rochester and Legal Assistance of Western New York.



Ford is the son of David Ford and Mary Lou Philbin. He plans to continue his education after the internship, either by attending law school or pursuing a master of public administration degree.

## Supreme Court to hear case on ministers in execution chamber

The U.S. Supreme Court granted a late-night reprieve to a Texas death row inmate in September and announced an accelerated briefing schedule to hear arguments in his case on November 1.

John Henry Ramirez said that the state's denial of his request for his pastor to pray out loud and lay hands on him during his lethal injection violates his religious freedom rights under a federal law designed to protect the religious liberty rights of inmates.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals previously upheld 2-1 the trial court's refusal to stay the execution, citing the safety reasons for policies that allow clergy to be in the chamber during execution but do not allow clergy to touch the prisoner or to speak during the execution.

"Cases about the religious exercise of prisoners boil down to the tension between protecting the ability of inmates to practice their religion and ensuring the safety and security of the prison," said BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks. "In agreeing to hear this case, the Court takes on the weighty question of whether the safety protocols of an execution justify denial of a prisoner's free exercise."

This is the fifth time in two years that the Supreme Court has been presented with a question regarding a spiritual adviser in the execution chamber.

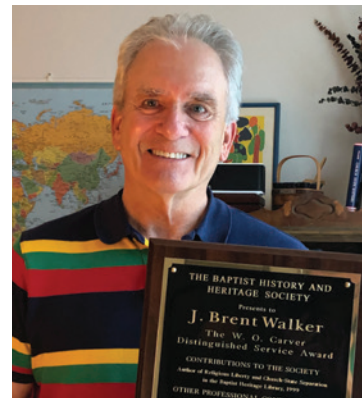
Earlier this year, the Supreme Court left a stay in place halting the execution of an Alabama prisoner when Alabama had refused to allow his pastor in the chamber with him. In that case, Justice Elena Kagan wrote, "[t]he law guarantees [Willie] Smith the right to practice his faith free from unnecessary interference, including at the moment the State puts him to death."

This is the first of these cases where the Court has granted full review, including briefing and oral argument. Unlike the other four cases which focused on whether a spiritual adviser can be in the execution chamber, the *Ramirez* case examines the question of what that adviser may do in the chamber.

—Don Byrd

## Walker honored by Baptist History and Heritage Society

Former BJC Executive Director Brent Walker received the W.O. Carver Distinguished Service Award this year, recognizing his contributions to Baptist history through writing, teaching, service, and more. In addition to his time leading BJC, Walker is an author and he has been a guest preacher and lecturer at churches and universities around the world.



The Baptist History and Heritage Society presented the award to Walker during a virtual event this summer.

## Biden announces nominees for religious freedom posts

Pending approval by the U.S. Senate, the next U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom will be Rashad Hussain, currently the director for partnerships and global engagement at the National Security Council.

President Joe Biden announced his intention in August to nominate Hussain, who would be the first Muslim to hold the State Department position. Former U.S. Senator and Kansas Governor Sam Brownback was the most recent person to hold the position, taking office in 2018 and leaving office in 2021 at the end of the Trump administration. Previously, the office was held by Rabbi David Saperstein (2014-2017), the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook (2011-2013), John Hanford (2002-2009), and Robert A. Seiple (1999-2001).

As BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler said on Twitter, "Promoting religious freedom for all around the world is an important mission that has broad bipartisan support."

The White House named Deborah Lipstadt to serve as Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, a post recently elevated to ambassador status. Lipstadt is professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University.

Lastly, President Biden made two appointments to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF): Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum and Khizr Khan. Kleinbaum previously served on the USCIRF and is spiritual leader of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York City. Khan is founder of the Constitution Literacy and National Unity Project, but he is perhaps most famous for his speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2016, when he criticized then-candidate Donald Trump for his call to halt all Muslim immigration into the United States.

—Don Byrd



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We are attorneys, Capitol Hill insiders, ministers, mobilizers and scholars. We file briefs in pivotal Supreme Court cases, advocate for and against legislation, testify in Congress and unite with others across faiths to ensure that all Americans have, and will always have, the right to follow their spiritual beliefs.

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## REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

**Amanda Tyler** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**Cherilyn Crowe** EDITOR

## MORE FROM BJC



### 85 years of BJC

We continue to celebrate the many people who have supported, cared for and challenged us to advocate for religious freedom for all for 85 years. See pages 11-13.



### Voices of Hispanic and Latin American Faith Freedom

BJC is hosting live conversations on Facebook during Hispanic Heritage Month. [BJConline.org/facebook-live](https://www.bjconline.org/facebook-live)