

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY

FAITH + JUSTICE



Georgetown event focuses
on dangers of white
Christian nationalism

AMANDA TYLER on the ideal
of religious freedom

HOLLY HOLLMAN explores
lessons from recent elections
and polls

New ways to make an impact

As white Christian nationalism makes headlines, new research shows that a majority of Americans have HEARD NOTHING AT ALL ABOUT CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM (see page 11). At BJC, we're calling it out in new ways, answering questions from supporters and the media, and forging new partnerships. This magazine explores the year of progress and how we're expanding our reach while staying true to our roots of defending and extending faith freedom for all.

Amanda Tyler shares her journey and how we must tell the truth to achieve religious freedom, reaffirming that our belonging in society should never depend on what we believe or how we worship. Read WHAT IT WILL TAKE on page 3.

What do people think about the Supreme Court? What did we learn at the ballot box? Holly Hollman shares lessons from POLLS AND ELECTION RESULTS on page 5.

Combating and calling out WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM was the focus of a public discussion with Bishop Michael Curry, the Rev. Jim Wallis, Amanda Tyler and Dr. Samuel Perry. Read about their ideas for making an impact on pages 6-9.

Members of Congress, high school students and the religious freedom community are showing UNITY ON OAK FLAT, standing up for the rights of Indigenous neighbors who too often have been expected to sacrifice their religious practices on the altar of capitalism. Read more on pages 12-13.

What else have we been up to this year? Look at BJC BY THE NUMBERS on pages 14-15, see some recent visits on page 25, and join us in this work every day. Your support makes this possible, and your gifts to BJC are tax deductible. Make a gift online at BJCOnline.org/give.

Applications now open for 2023 class of BJC Fellows

Share this unique opportunity with young professionals



We are now accepting applications for our 2023 class of BJC Fellows, which brings together ten people with an interest in and dedication to religious freedom. The program kicks off with the BJC Fellows Seminar — an intensive educational program held at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, on **August 2-6, 2023**. There, BJC Fellows will learn about religious liberty from BJC staff members and other experts.

The program is open to individuals with diverse educational, cultural and professional experience. There is no religious requirement — people from any or no religious background are welcome. Applicants must be **between the ages of 25 and 45**, and they must commit to advocating for religious liberty.

BJC Fellows will have projects to complete during the seminar as well as individual projects afterward. They will serve as liaisons between BJC and their communities and will be expected to use their skills for public engagement, such as leading educational sessions, writing op-eds and using social media to advance the cause of protecting faith freedom for all throughout their careers.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Fellows to learn more about the program, see the members of previous classes and access this year's application. You must submit your materials by **February 20, 2023**, to be considered for the 2023 class.

REFLECTIONS

What it will take to achieve religious freedom

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director



I had the privilege to present a TED-style talk about BJC's work confronting Christian nationalism at the Belief and Belonging Festival in Waco, Texas, in November. I always enjoy visiting my home state of Texas, and this was a special trip. I had the chance to talk about my upbringing and how my views have changed as I've studied American history and advocated for religious freedom for all. I want to share the concluding remarks from my speech with you. If you're interested in watching the full recording, it's available on BJC's YouTube channel.

If we care about religious freedom for all, we must dismantle Christian nationalism.

James Baldwin wrote, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

We have to tell the truth about who we are. For some of us, that means telling the truth about what our ancestors did. For others, it means telling the truth about what our ancestors experienced. And for all of us, it will be an act of vulnerability, courage and openness. We have to be willing to complicate a narrative that has given divine sanction to all kinds of evil committed in God's name. We have to be willing to understand that telling a more honest version of history is an act of patriotism, not an insult to it. And we have to call out the myth of the founding as a "Christian nation" as what it is — a lie that perpetuates white supremacy and bigotry.

This is going to be hard. But, if we do it, we will have the opportunity to tap into that ideal of religious freedom: that belonging in American society should never depend on what we believe or how we worship or how we identify religiously.

And for those of us who are white Christians, we have to be willing to interrogate and understand how we've benefited from Christian nationalism. When I look back at that 18-year-old me in front of the VFW Post, I understand why she was

so starry-eyed about American democracy and freedom. Growing up white and Christian in Central Texas was not too hard. And I found a way of being Baptist that would affirm my calling as a woman.

But since then, through time and experience and — most of all — relationships, I have come to appreciate how what I experienced as "freedom" is really Christian privilege. And how it is preventing my neighbors from having full religious freedom. Fannie Lou Hamer famously said, "Nobody's free until everybody's free." And I would add ... nobody's free until we dismantle Christian nationalism.

This poison has been seeping for so long that the work to dismantle it will be long. It will take a concerted effort from a diverse coalition working together for everyone's freedom.

And for those of us who are Christians, it gives us an opportunity to tap into *whose* we are, to lean into the gospel of love that can repudiate this false idol of power. At ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org, there are resources to help have these honest conversations about Christian nationalism and its threat to American democracy and to Christianity. Join our movement in fighting Christian nationalism. Together, I believe we will finally achieve religious freedom — not just for some, but for all.

I had great conversations with BJC supporters while I was in Texas, and I'm excited to share that BJC will be devoting more resources to our work in the state, specifically the North Texas region, in 2023. We're currently raising money to start a local chapter of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign there. Once we get underway in North Texas, we'll be looking to other communities across the country as well. I hope you will help support our work to root this campaign in local communities where there is so much work to do to defend religious freedom. You can make a gift at BJCOnline.org/give.

Bill to protect same-sex and interracial marriage appears likely to become law

In a rare example of bipartisan cooperation, the U.S. Senate advanced the Respect for Marriage Act Nov. 16, clearing the way for likely passage of a bill that would protect same-sex marriage beyond future court challenges.

By a 62-to-37 vote, the Senate overcame the biggest procedural hurdle, the 60-vote threshold to prevent a filibuster. Twelve Republicans joined the 50 Democrats in the Senate to advance the bill. At press time, it had not yet been voted on formally by the Senate. It then must be sent back to the House and then signed by President Joe Biden to become law.

Among changes to the bill, Senate negotiators added language ensuring that churches, universities and other nonprofit religious organizations will not lose tax-exempt status or other benefits for refusing to recognize same-sex marriages and will not be required to accommodate the celebration of any marriage. Additional language says the bill does not require recognition of polygamous marriages.

The bill would protect against the perceived threat to same-sex marriage espoused by Justice Clarence Thomas' concurrence in this summer's *Dobbs* decision — the decision that

reversed the federal right to abortion. The concurrence from Justice Thomas said the Court should use the ruling to revisit other cases, including the one that legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. He believes that case, like *Roe v. Wade*, was wrongly decided by the Court.

Technically, the new legislation would repeal the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act and require the U.S. federal government to recognize same-sex and interracial marriages.

"We applaud Republicans and Democrats working together to advance civil rights protections for same-sex and interracial couples, while reaffirming existing religious freedom protections," said BJC's Amanda Tyler. "Lawmakers are right to recognize a diverse range of views on marriage among religious traditions as they work to pass legislation to ensure every American is equal in rights and dignity. We believe marriage equality and religious freedom are compatible."

The Respect for Marriage Act would also codify the right of churches or ministers to refuse to host or officiate same-sex weddings.

—Mark Wingfield, *Baptist News Global* with BJC staff reports

Federal appeals courts rule on legislative, judicial prayers

Two different federal appeals courts recently ruled on cases involving prayers offered at official government proceedings. Here's a look at these cases and the questions they pose.

First, a unanimous 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel in *Gundy v. City of Jacksonville* held that legislative prayer offered at the start of city council meetings in Jacksonville, Florida, is "government speech" and not "private speech," overturning a district court finding to the contrary. The question arose out of a lawsuit filed by a minister who offered an invocation to open a council meeting but had his microphone cut off for using the invocation to attack the city's executive and legislative branches. Pastor Gundy claims that the council violated his Free Speech and Free Exercise rights under the First Amendment. The appeals court dismissed his case, explaining that as government speech the prayers are not protected by Free Speech and Free Exercise principles.

The court explained that although the invocation-giver is a private individual, the individual is acting as an agent of the council when offering the official invocation, which is thus not subject to Free Speech or Free Exercise protections.

Recognition that legislative invocations are government speech reinforces the fact that such prayers are subject to Establishment Clause limitations, as the court pointed out. It also serves as a reminder of why clergy may want to think twice before agreeing to offer a prayer as an agent of the government in the first place. As this

case makes clear, it is difficult to pray both as an agent of the state and retain your prophetic voice in calling out government actions.

In another important prayer case decided in recent weeks, a divided panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted summary judgment to Judge Wayne Mack, a Justice of the Peace in Texas, dismissing a suit brought under the Establishment Clause that challenged his daily practice of opening courtroom sessions with a chaplain's prayer. A 2-1 appeals court panel concluded that the practice fits within history and tradition and does not fall outside the guardrails set by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway* (2014), which among other constraints suggested that the Establishment Clause would not permit a government prayer practice that was used to "coerce or intimidate."

A dissenting opinion by Judge Grady Jolly argues that the majority failed to consider properly the coercive nature of Judge Mack's practice, explaining that "[j]udicial ceremonies ... present an even greater risk of coercion than legislative prayers."

Whether a particular government prayer practice violates the Establishment Clause continues to involve a highly fact-contingent analysis. Regardless of where those lines are drawn, when we have business before an official state proceeding — whether at a council meeting or a court hearing — our religiosity (or choice not to be religious) never should be taken into account.

—Don Byrd, author of the "Latest News" section of BJC's website

Elections and polls offer hope for faith freedom supporters

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



One conclusion drawn from the recent midterm election results is that voters rejected extremism, at least in many parts of the country. Candidates who favored the most severe restrictions on abortion access and those who continued to deny the validity of the 2020 presidential election tended to lose — decisively. Candidates who ran campaigns espousing the worst rhetoric of Christian nationalism were defeated in most cases.

But that isn't the whole story, as Amanda and I discussed on recent episodes of the Respecting Religion podcast. Regional differences and various factors impacted the outcomes in specific elections. Results are still coming in as I'm writing this column, and it takes time to analyze the campaigns and review voting data to determine why voters made the choices they made. Regardless of the lessons learned for governing and for planning future campaigns, we know Christian nationalism isn't going away.

Still, I am hopeful that despite its real effect on our politics, polarization appears to have its limits as a political strategy. Part of my hope comes from experience working as an attorney for faith freedom for all for the past two decades. I've seen many attempts to skew public opinion with exaggerated claims and misinformation about the meaning and implications of separating church and state. I've also seen BJC's advocacy, grounded in the historic Baptist tradition of religious freedom, play an essential role in coalition efforts that bring people together, despite deep differences.

My hope is also grounded in two recent public opinion polls that showed there is a broad American consensus in favor of faith freedom for all.

Most Americans (83%) oppose the idea of Supreme Court justices bringing their own religious views into how they decide major cases, according to a Pew Research Center survey. Even two-thirds of white evangelical Protestants, the group most open to the idea, say justices should not do this. 65% of Americans disagree with the idea that the government should favor Christianity over other religions, and 58% of Americans think the government should enforce the separation of church and state, according to FiveThirtyEight. Two-

thirds of Americans reject the idea that God has called conservative Christians to control politics and culture, according to the same poll.

These polls suggest a more positive and complex picture than is often reported. Of course, BJC will continue to work to ensure that more Americans embrace faith freedom for all. In the meantime, I'm heartened by this evidence that our values are shared by most Americans.

The survey data also shows how much work we have left to do. A plurality (44%) of Americans say Supreme Court justices have relied too much on their own religious beliefs in recent decisions, according to Pew. Religious minorities are the most concerned: 70% of Jews, 90% of atheists, and 82% of agnostics share this concern. BJC's work at the Court to defend faith freedom for all remains vitally important. Decisions that reverse long-standing precedents and those that ignore guiding principles that have protected religious liberty inevitably cause concern that justices are relying on their own personal religious beliefs instead of performing their constitutional duties. Moreover, their decisions can distort how the public understands the proper relationship between the institutions of government and religion.

Another concerning survey discovery is that a majority (56%) of Americans believe far-right Christians are trying to impose their beliefs on other people, according to the FiveThirtyEight poll. BJC will continue to press our elected leaders to uphold faith freedom for all. We will continue to explain that people of all faiths and no faith have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square, and that religious differences should be respected. When most Americans believe a group of Christians are trying to impose their beliefs on everyone, our mission as a Baptist organization in support of religious freedom for all becomes even more important.

In these polarizing political times, the most extreme candidates and views on church-state separation often get the most attention. But the midterm election results and these surveys show us that extremist views aren't as popular as we might think. Most Americans value faith freedom for all, and it's up to us to confront Christian nationalism and ensure extremist ideologies don't gain further ground.

Measure your political ideology against the life and witness of Jesus, Bishop Curry advises

Live event in D.C. brings together Curry, Tyler, Perry and Wallis to discuss the dangers of white Christian nationalism

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global, with BJC staff reports



Don't be fooled by the "Christian" in Christian nationalism, warns The Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church.

"What we're actually describing is an ideology that's not really a religion, but it looks like a religion and uses and invokes language and symbols that have religious trappings. ... I think some innocent people are being fooled by it," The Most Rev. Curry said during a panel discussion on white Christian nationalism hosted by the Georgetown University Center on Faith and Justice and moderated by its director, the Rev. Jim Wallis.

The term "Christian nationalism" has become so pervasive that it could be misunderstood, he warned.

Bishop Curry was joined on the panel by Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC and lead organizer of Christians Against Christian Nationalism, and Dr. Samuel Perry, a University of Oklahoma sociologist and co-author of *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*.

The Oct. 26 conversation began with a question on how to define "Christian nationalism" given the term's increased use amid the rise of American cultural and political tensions. Bishop Curry expressed concern that citizens in the political and religious middle may confuse the ideological movement with faith itself.

"Part of our task is to help normal people, the sensible center, to be clear that Christianity is about the way of Jesus of Nazareth, it is about the way of living love in our lives. Anything that's not that, is not Christianity."

Dr. Perry said Christian nationalism is an ideology that glorifies and champions a blending of U.S. civic life with a very specific brand of Christianity.

"That is a Christianity that isn't characterized by giving my life to Jesus or wanting to be a good disciple, but it is about a white Christian ethno-culture," he said. "For white Americans, it seems to connect with this idea of nostalgia for an earlier time when the 'right' people were in charge and when the 'right' cultural values held sway."

Christian nationalism also is a political strategy often used by leaders who are not necessarily Christian nationalists themselves, Dr. Perry said.

"A good example of this is [former president Donald] Trump. ... I think it's fair to say that Trump probably doesn't believe much of anything other than winning, and he believes in his own influence. And yet he is more than willing to leverage white Christian nationalist rhetoric to be able to mobilize those audiences."

Dr. Perry said recent research has found a decline in the percentage of Americans who believe the federal government should declare the U.S. a "Christian nation," which is one of the tenets of Christian nationalism. But that decline since 2017, from 30% to 20%, comes as the ideology is being increasingly adopted by the Republican Party and politicians "trying to appeal to a reactionary white Christian base who is very anxious and very angry."

That makes the ideology very dangerous to democracy and faith, Tyler said. "It's the single biggest threat to religious freedom because Christian nationalism, as a political ideology and a cultural framework, creates second-class citizens for everyone who's not Christian in their view."

But the allure of Christian nationalism runs deep because its goal of establishing a white, Christian nation has existed since the founding of the United States with the blessing of institutions of faith, she said. "Based on how complicit the church was in slavery, in segregation, in lynchings, in all of those things, we have to acknowledge that American Christianity has been compromised by Christian nationalism for centuries."

Christians Against Christian Nationalism was in part founded to inspire Christians and congregations to examine their beliefs and practices for ele-



“Silence right now is complicity, so we have a moral obligation to speak out. ... To be political is not the problem; the problem is when you insist that the government reflect your theological views or you think that only people who are like me religiously belong fully in the country.”

Amanda Tyler



“[C]hattel slavery in America was justified by pro-slavery, Christian-sounding voices. When you take those arguments and lay them alongside Jesus of Nazareth ... you will see a wide gap that cannot be closed. The same is true if you look at the complex of white Christian nationalism as an ideology — you lay it alongside Jesus of Nazareth and we’re not even talking about the same thing.”

The Most Rev. Michael Curry



“A good story beats a good argument, so if we just argue about this forever we’re going to be stuck in those little binary categories. So what’s the story that gets us out of those categories?”

Rev. Jim Wallis



“Jesus said wherever two or three gather together in my name, there I am in the midst of them,” Bishop Curry said in response to a question from the audience. He shared the importance of and risks of people of color speaking out against Christian nationalism and injustice. “We must speak up whether we like it or not, and sometimes that’s risky, but it’s also important to join hands with our sisters and brothers,” he continued, reaching out to Amanda Tyler and Sam Perry as he spoke. When they had a hard time connecting, he said, “I’m trying to hold y’all’s hands!” to laughter and a lighthearted moment amid a serious discussion.

ments of this heresy, Tyler said. “If we don’t get right with our own theologies and our own practices first, we won’t be able to be the kind of witness we need to be to the rest of the world to dismantle Christian nationalism.”

Being that witness begins with comparing the messaging of Christian nationalism with that of the four Gospels, Bishop Curry said.

“Let us not forget that chattel slavery in America was justified by pro-slavery, Christian-sounding voices. When you take those arguments and lay them alongside Jesus of Nazareth ... you will see a wide gap that cannot be closed. The same is true if you look at the complex of white Christian nationalism as an ideology — you lay it alongside Jesus of Nazareth and we’re not even talking about the same thing.”

Bishop Curry also called for “ecumenical, interfaith, bipartisan,

multiracial, multicultural, multireligious” coalitions to push back against Christian nationalism with a compassionate counter-narrative.

“There does have to be the kind of education that ... there actually is a way of being Christian that is not exclusive, that you may vote your way and I may vote my way based on our values and our own discernment.”

The worst thing Americans can do is to do nothing to oppose Christian nationalism, he added. “Silence is complicity, and silence creates a context in which something like that can grow, and when something like that can grow ... it just starts spreading ... so you’ve got to confront and name it.”

You can watch the entire conversation on the YouTube page of the Georgetown University Center on Faith and Justice.

“For white Americans, [Christian nationalism] seems to connect with this idea of nostalgia for an earlier time when the ‘right’ people were in charge and when the ‘right’ cultural values held sway.”

Dr. Samuel Perry



CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

The statement is now available in Spanish:
ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org/leer-la-declaracion

Cristianos contra el nacionalismo cristiano

Como cristianos, nuestra fe nos enseña que todos somos creados a imagen de Dios y nos ordena amarnos unos a otros. Como estadounidenses, valoramos nuestro sistema de gobierno y el bien que se puede lograr en nuestra democracia constitucional. Hoy en día, estamos preocupados por una amenaza persistente, tanto para nuestras comunidades religiosas como para nuestra democracia: el nacionalismo cristiano.

El nacionalismo cristiano busca fusionar las identidades cristiana y estadounidense, distorsionando tanto la fe cristiana como la democracia constitucional de Estados Unidos. El nacionalismo cristiano exige que el cristianismo sea privilegiado por el Estado e implica que, para ser un buen estadounidense, uno debe ser cristiano. A menudo se superpone y proporciona cobertura a la supremacía blanca y la subyugación racial. Rechazamos esta ideología política dañina e invitamos a nuestros hermanos y hermanas cristianos a unirse a nosotros para oponerse a esta amenaza a nuestra fe y a nuestra nación.

Como cristianos, estamos comprometidos con Cristo, no por la ciudadanía, sino por la fe. Creemos que:

- Las personas de todas las religiones y los que no tienen religión tienen el derecho y la responsabilidad de participar constructivamente en los asuntos públicos.
- El patriotismo no requiere que minimicemos nuestras convicciones religiosas.
- La afiliación religiosa de la persona, o la falta de ella, debe ser irrelevante para la posición que ocupa en la comunidad cívica.
- El gobierno no debe preferir una religión sobre otra, ni la religión sobre la ausencia de ella.
- La instrucción religiosa es mejor dejarla en manos de nuestras casas de culto, otras instituciones religiosas y las familias.
- El compromiso histórico de Estados Unidos con el pluralismo religioso permite a las comunidades de fe vivir en armonía cívica entre sí, sin sacrificar nuestras convicciones teológicas.
- Confundir la autoridad religiosa con la autoridad política es idólatra y a menudo conduce a la opresión de las minorías y otros grupos marginados, así como al empobrecimiento espiritual de la religión.
- Debemos enfrentarnos y hablar en contra del nacionalismo cristiano, especialmente cuando inspira actos de violencia e intimidación, incluidos el vandalismo, las amenazas de bomba, los incendios provocados, los crímenes de odio y ataques a lugares de culto, contra comunidades religiosas en el país y en el extranjero.

Ya sea que adoremos en una iglesia, mezquita, sinagoga o templo, Estados Unidos no tiene religiones de segunda clase. Todos son iguales bajo la Constitución de los Estados Unidos. Como cristianos, debemos hablar con una sola voz condenando el nacionalismo cristiano como una distorsión del evangelio de Jesús y una amenaza para la democracia estadounidense.

Research on religion in public life

A new Pew Research Center survey reveals that only 5% of Americans hold a favorable view of Christian nationalism, while just over half remain unaware of it altogether, despite growing public attention to the term over the course of this year.

The survey, conducted Sept. 13-18, 2022, is the latest entry in the Center's long-running effort to gauge the public's perceptions and attitudes related to religion in public life — including views about how much influence religion has in American society and how much it ought to have. Here's more from the Pew Research Center survey:

54% of Americans say they have heard **nothing at all** about Christian nationalism

In an open-ended question about the meaning of the term “Christian nationalism,” more than one-in-ten Americans “say the term implies some form of institutionalization or official dominance of Christianity, such as theocratic rule or a formal declaration that the U.S. is a Christian nation with Christian inhabitants,” according to the Pew Research Center's write-up of their findings. “At the same time, many Americans who say they hold a *favorable* view of Christian nationalism describe it in ways that suggest it promotes morality and faith without necessarily being in a position of formal, legal dominance.”

About 3/4 of adults say houses of worship should *not* come out in favor of candidates during political elections. “This view is expressed by majorities across the religious and political spectrums, and by most people who say the U.S. should be a ‘Christian nation,’ as well as by most people who say it should *not* be a Christian nation,” according to the Pew Research Center's write-up. “For instance, 62% of White evangelical Protestants and 63% of Black Protestants say churches should avoid endorsing political candidates, as do 70% of Republicans and 84% of Democrats.”

77% of Americans believe that houses of worship should refrain from endorsing political candidates



In the community

In Branson, Missouri, Christians offered an alternative public witness to the ReAwaken America tour. Brian Kaylor (in the blue BJC T-shirt) noted that the tour “has nothing to do with Christianity and everything to do with gaining political power.”

Photo by Beau Underwood of *Word&Way*.

What's next?

In November, we reached 30,000 signers of the statement, but there is more to do. We are planning to focus our work against Christian nationalism in **four specific areas** in the years ahead:

1. Ridding Christian nationalism from our public schools
2. Stopping Christian nationalism-inspired violence
3. Freeing policy debates from Christian nationalism
4. Equipping churches to offer an alternative witness in the public square

Your financial gifts to BJC help us expand this campaign and reach more people in local communities. Make a gift at any time by visiting BJCOnline.org/give.

Updates from
Christians Against
Christian Nationalism



Photo courtesy of Krista Beazley

Oak Flat Unity Summit shows strength of the Save Oak Flat coalition

By Rev. Jennifer Hawks, BJC Associate General Counsel

Members of Congress joined high school students from Arizona and advocates from across the country to call for the protection of sacred land at an Oak Flat Unity Summit in Washington, D.C.

On Nov. 15, the students came together with Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Arizona, Rep. Sharice Davids, D-Kansas, and Betty McCollum, D-Minnesota. Each lawmaker gave remarks about the importance of the Save Oak Flat Act (H.R. 1184/S. 915) and answered questions from the students.

In addition to participating in the summit, the students had dozens of lobby visits with members of Congress and officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the week.

Since 2021, the students have participated in Oak Flat prayer runs held annually in February. Several students focused their remarks at the unity summit on these annual prayer runs. Not only do they pray while running, but running itself is an act of prayer as their feet massage the earth with each step.

Kiana Beazley, a junior who is White Mountain Apache, described the importance of the sunrise ceremony in Apache life, noting that one purpose of the 4-day-long female coming-of-age ceremony is “to allow the girl to fall back on her sunrise dance” and know she can overcome difficulties that may come in the future.

In describing her own ceremony,

she said, “I felt the presence of my ancestors and the ultimate support of my community coming and praying for me to overcome any obstacle that stands in my way and to have a bright future and fight for what I know is right.”

Turning to Oak Flat, Beazley said she is fighting to protect Oak Flat because “Oak Flat [is] sacred and holy land to the Indigenous community who surrounds Oak Flat.”

Camilla Simon, executive director of Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO), was one of several partners to address the summit. “We’re uniting our members all to come around and support this and use their power as local elected officials and community

leaders to speak out against this,” she said. “HECHO is out there with you all. We’re here in solidarity with you all.”

BJC has been working for two years with many participants in the Unity Summit to bring the religious and religious freedom community together to support the continued protection of *Chí'chil Bítadagoteel*, which is loosely translated as “Oak Flat” in English. We have two primary goals: increase awareness among individuals who care about religious freedom for all people and recruit religious and religious freedom organizations to join the fight. I’m excited to report that we are gaining traction towards both goals.

Unlike most issues that stand alone, religious freedom advocacy is typically an intersecting issue. Saving Oak Flat absolutely is an important environmental issue. But it’s also an important religious freedom issue. Holy ground not marked with a steeple is no less deserving of protection than a big steepled church that is the heart of a downtown.

On Earth Day this year, BJC created a list of 18 things anyone could do to get involved in the effort. Why 18? We wanted to hammer home the 1.8 mile-wide crater that will be created if mining commences at Oak Flat. We asked people to consider how big a hole with a 1.8 mile diameter really is: it’s the size of the National Mall in D.C. or the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

In addition to connecting individuals who care about religious freedom, BJC knew that we needed to recruit organizational support from the religious and religious freedom community to save Oak Flat. So far, we’ve recruited a total of 120 organizations to sign advocacy letters and encourage their members to join the effort. Half of these groups are national while another 10 are Arizona statewide religious groups.

BJC is grateful for the positive response we have seen across the theological spectrum, including from The Episcopal Church, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for Religious Liberty, the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Legal Society, the National Council of Churches, the Union for Reform Judaism, National Council of Jewish Women, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Hindu American Foundation, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Interfaith Power and Light and so many others. The coalition we have built is strong, diverse and proud to support the San Carlos Apache Tribe in their efforts to save Oak Flat.

BJC will continue recruiting organizational support within the religious and religious freedom communities and leveraging that support in the halls of Congress. In November, BJC sent a petition to Congress signed by more than 1,200 advocates from across the country demanding swift passage of the Save Oak Flat Act. The petition continues to gather signers and will be re-released as often as needed to get Congress to take action.

Together, we’ve made it clear that saving Oak Flat is a priority for protecting religious freedom in the United States today.

Too often our Indigenous neighbors have been expected to sacrifice their religious practices on the altar of capitalism. For far too long, we have ignored their calls to protect the Earth in order to feed our greed to extract as much as we can, as fast as we can. It’s time to change course and answer the call to save Oak Flat.

To learn more about BJC efforts and see how you can get involved, please visit BJCOnline.org/SaveOakFlat.



Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minnesota, and Rep. Sharice Davids, D-Kansas.



Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune from the National Council of Churches, BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks, and Susie Faria from The Episcopal Church.



Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Arizona

BJC's year in numbers

This year, BJC continued to lead new projects while returning to more in-person events. We're continuing to find new ways to connect with others as we expand our work and mission to protect faith freedom for all people.

Thank you. Because of your support, BJC is creating new conversations and equipping individuals across the country to make a difference. Here's a brief look at what we're able to do, together, and how we made a difference this past year.

10,702
podcast downloads

BJC's award-winning Respecting Religion podcast continues to bring key conversations to new ears, and we recorded one episode in front of a live audience.

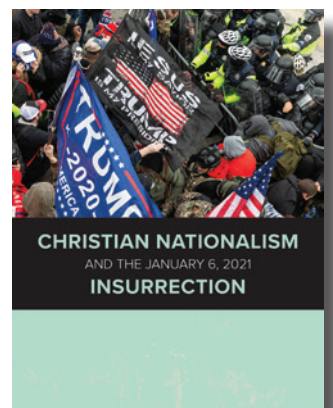


New signers and supporters continue to find and share the statement, going on the record that they are opposed to the political ideology of Christian nationalism.

30,000
Christians Against
Christian Nationalism

7
contributors to a
seminal report on
Christian nationalism
and January 6

In February, BJC joined with the Freedom From Religion Foundation to create a comprehensive report and webinar delineating the role Christian nationalism played in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Seven leading scholars and experts on Christian nationalism contributed to the report, which has become the go-to resource for journalists and members of Congress.



From local newspapers to national programs, BJC is speaking out in the news media about faith freedom for all and the dangers of Christian nationalism.

200+
media appearances



For the first time in two years, we gathered for an in-person luncheon this summer, bringing together hundreds of religious liberty supporters to listen to and learn from Indigenous voices on faith freedom.

600+
people at the
BJC Luncheon

1,000+
people asking Congress
to Save Oak Flat

BJC defended the religious freedom of our Indigenous neighbors, delivering a letter to Congress from people across the country and from many faith backgrounds. We are asking for the continued protection of *Chi'chil Biłdagoteel*, sacred land to many tribes.



Our cohort of young professionals poised to advocate for faith freedom throughout their careers stands at 68 strong, with 10 new individuals joining the ranks this year.

68
BJC Fellows



3
Shurden Lectures



195
student visitors

3
briefs in Supreme Court
cases decided this year

In Supreme Court briefs, BJC defended the religious rights of death row inmates and of public school students, and we defended a state's decision not to fund religious schools.

159
new donors
to BJC

We are grateful for the support of so many friends, and we are able to expand thanks to new people who want to join this work.

You make this work possible! Because of your financial support, we are able to speak to the media, host new student groups, visit communities across the country, write Supreme Court briefs, meet with members of Congress, and create resources for others to use to better understand topics that are often misunderstood.

If you are a regular reader of *Report from the Capital* but haven't supported BJC recently, please consider giving. Give online at BJCOnline.org/give or scan the code.



Why we made our letter to the January 6 Committee public

By Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, BJC Communications Director

Earlier this year, BJC was asked by an investigator with the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol to organize a letter from Christian leaders about the role of Christian nationalism leading up to and during the attack. In addition to BJC's Amanda Tyler, the letter was signed by leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, The Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Home Mission Societies, Presbyterian Church (USA) Advocacy Offices, Friends Committee on National Legislation, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas, Sojourners, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and The National Baptist Convention of America International, Inc. The letter was also signed by prominent evangelical leaders Shane Claiborne, the Rev. Jim Wallis, and the Rev. Doug Pagitt.

The letter, dated June 2, 2022, states: "As Christian leaders who are deeply concerned about Christian nationalism and its danger not only to our constitutional democracy but in its distortion of Christianity, we urge you to focus questioning and discussion on Christian nationalism and the role it played in bolstering, justifying and intensifying the January 6 attack. We saw how the attackers used Christian language and the name of Jesus to try to cloak their indefensible actions as religiously inspired or directed. Tragically, January 6 is just one example of how Christian nationalism in the hands of violent extremists can turn deadly."

As of the publication date for this magazine, the January 6 Committee has not addressed the role of Christian nationalism in

the attack. There is still hope that the letter will be mentioned in the committee's final report. We also know that the letter will be included in the Congressional Record, the official record of the proceedings of the United States Congress.

We decided in early November to release the letter publicly to the press. We granted Religion News Service reporters Jack Jenkins and Emily McFarlan Miller exclusive access to a copy of the letter, which they published in an article titled "Major Christian leaders asked Jan. 6 committee to investigate Christian nationalism." We hoped additional publicity around the letter would raise public awareness about the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

"The letter speaks to increasingly vocal criticism of Christian nationalism among faith leaders, often led by mainline Christian and Black Protestant voices," Jenkins and Miller reported. "The Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement alone has accrued more than 30,000 signatures. Institutions such as Georgetown have hosted events condemning the ideology, and a recent effort spearheaded by activist group Faithful America decried various public figures and activists who espouse iterations of Christian nationalism as 'false prophets.'"

Whether or not the January 6 Committee ends up mentioning Christian nationalism, we know that exposing the ideology and organizing an alternative Christian witness remains a pressing issue for religious freedom advocates.

Read the entire letter at: <https://bjconline.org/christian-leaders-to-january-6th-committee/>.

Media spotlight: ABC News

ABC News spoke with Amanda Tyler and BJC Fellow Meriah Tigner for its "Democracy in Peril" series. Here are a few excerpts:

Faith leaders have taken notice of the rise in Christian nationalism, and some are speaking out. ...

"When we first started [the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign], Christian nationalism, as a term, was relatively unknown," [Amanda] Tyler told ABC News.

But the use of Christian imagery in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol and the embrace of Christian nationalism by some politicians shifted the conversation and brought it to a point "where we risk normalizing Christian nationalism," Tyler said. ...

Rev. Meriah Tigner speaks against religious nationalism in terms of how it contradicts her faith and her identity as an American.

"I'm a Baptist, and Baptists believe in something called soul competency. And it's this idea that God gave us a brain to be able to make decisions, and that God doesn't even force us to follow



God," Tigner said. "But God gave us the ability to decide to choose God or not choose God ... that really hits at my personal belief that no government should dictate how I should believe."

Christian nationalism, Tigner said, also "really bucks up against our foundation as a country" as a place founded in part for freedom of religion.

Tigner told ABC News that she tries to combat the spread of Christian nationalism through face-to-face conversations and dialogue. ...

"So, for me, I feel very convicted about engaging in conversations with people and teaching about the dangers of merging our American civic life with our Christianity; that we can be patriots and we can be Christians, but when you blend those things together, it changes both of them."

Be part of our daily work

By Danielle Tyler, BJC Associate Director of Development

Faith FULL Community



BJC is actively telling the truth about Christian nationalism in the news media, pulpits and classrooms across America. You, our BJC supporters and donors, continue to play a critical role in calling out this dangerous political ideology. I know you believe deeply in this cause. Your support continues to sustain the mission and work of BJC 86 years after we began.

As stakeholders, you are essential to quelling the tides of Christian nationalism and addressing threats to faith freedom. Your financial support of this important work is key to expanding our efforts. We also want to specifically thank our Faith FULL Community, a group of 180 donors who give monthly to BJC's work.

As we come to the end of 2022, consider joining our Faith FULL Community of monthly donors. A regular gift to BJC ensures we can continue to get louder and bolder. Regular support — in any amount — provides the BJC staff with the knowledge that others are in this fight with us, day in and day out. We also provide special communications to members of the Faith FULL Community, with regular updates on our work.

Be a part of this faith freedom movement. To join the Faith FULL Community and set up a monthly gift to BJC, visit BJCOnline.org/give-monthly.

Monthly donors are the best representative of BJC's mission, work, and vision for the future. Their loyal support of BJC's work ensures that we are equipped to secure a faith freedom nation for all Americans.

If you have questions or want to learn more, you can contact me by phone at 317-523-4076 or by email at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org. Below are just a few of the members of this robust group!



Are you subscribed to the Respecting Religion podcast?

If you want access to the latest conversations from BJC, check out the “Respecting Religion” podcast! Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman are providing up-to-date analysis of Supreme Court decisions, Christian nationalism in campaigns, and other issues impacting religion and government.

Season four launched in October, and the podcast has already appeared in *USA Today*, Voice of America, Baptist News Global, and other news outlets.

To listen to the podcast, just search for “Respecting Religion” on your favorite podcasting provider. And, new for season four, you can also read transcripts of each episode online. For a list of our recent episodes and transcripts, simply go to RespectingReligion.org.

Have a question for the podcast? You can send an email to Amanda and Holly by writing to RespectingReligion@BJCOnline.org, and you might hear your question on a future show!

Check out the next page for excerpts from two recent episodes.



Excerpt from Season 4, Episode 02:
**Justice Alito and religion at the
Supreme Court: Previewing the
new SCOTUS term**

Released October 13, 2022

AMANDA: And so the Supreme Court granted review of [*303 Creative v. Elenis*] to decide this question: whether applying a public accommodation law to compel an artist to speak or stay silent violates the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment.

HOLLY: Yes. This is sort of a preemptive lawsuit. Right? So her web design [business] was going to include putting together the stories about how a couple met and how they came together and what their wedding will be like. So it has that narrative kind of function that makes it a little bit different, ... it's odd because [this part of the business] hasn't yet started.

And some of you may be listening and thinking, this sounds familiar, and of course it does, because it's just the latest high-profile conflict between states with laws that protect access to market goods and services, sometimes called "public accommodations," particularly for LGBTQ customers, and the conflict with business owners or service providers that have religious objections to same-sex marriage.

It also may sound familiar, because this case was brought to challenge the same Colorado statute that was challenged by Jack Phillips in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*. That case made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, decided in 2018. The Masterpiece Cakeshop, you may remember, provided custom wedding cakes but refused to serve Charlie Craig and David Mullins, a same-sex couple, who had approached Phillips to bake their cake.

Just a quick reminder about what happened. The Court ruled for Masterpiece Cakeshop because it found that the business had been treated unfairly by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission. ... The Court did not decide the ultimate question of whether the Free Exercise Clause allows a business owner to refuse service to a customer in a protected category because of the owner's personal religious beliefs.

In that case, the Court also notably affirmed several times that members of the LGBTQ community deserve equal dignity, and, it states, may choose to expressly protect their civil rights alongside other protections, protections for race, religion and other categories. So the Court noted that but left this kind of conflict to reoccur in other cases.

Excerpt from Season 4, Episode 04:
**A religious freedom
right to
an abortion?**

Released October 27, 2022

AMANDA: So what is the role of religion in abortion debates post-Roe? You know, first, this should not be surprising that there is a wide diversity of religious views on all kinds of things, including on abortion. I think that one thing that we will see in a post-Roe world is more religious voices and more varied religious voices and positions on this contentious and deeply personal issue.

There is not one religious position on abortion. I don't think that can be emphasized strongly enough, because sometimes we see in popular conversation around this issue "religion" versus "women's rights." That's reductive. That's not accurate. And so we think it's important to underscore that point.

There's an excellent article that we can recommend from Religion News Service, an opinion piece written by Samira Mehta, a scholar of gender and religion, and it's a very thoughtful piece that includes a variety of religious views on abortion.

First she talks about the tremendous interfaith diversity on the issue of abortion, and she's talking not only about Christian and Jewish and Muslim beliefs, but also Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. She talks about the concept of ensoulment and how different religious traditions approach that question. And I think it's an extremely educational article on religious literacy from that basis alone.

HOLLY: I agree, Amanda. There are going to be more conversations in general. People are going to be concerned about how the *Dobbs* decision affects their own medical care, and I think that we have to talk more about this, I guess, among each other and with our lawmakers and with our families. And I think that will lead to people exploring what role religion has.

And so I think that, to the extent that people really want to understand that and have more productive conversations, this article is really helpful, just to make sure that you can enter a conversation with someone and all the religious thinking that someone might bring to the conversation and kind of have an understanding of that.

AMANDA: And I think you're right, Holly. When individuals bring their advocacy to the public square, we can see that tremendous diversity, not just between different faiths, but even within the same faith tradition.



BJC Board gathers in Washington

The BJC Board of Directors gathered in Washington, D.C., Oct. 4-5 to hear updates from the staff, share ideas and insight, and discuss the next phase of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. The group also heard a special presentation from the Rev. James Ingram, who portrays preacher Gowan Pamphlet in Colonial Williamsburg.

BJC is supported by several Baptist organizations in the United States, and our board of directors is composed of representatives from each of those denominational groups. BJC is also supported by thousands of churches and individuals across the country. Get to know the members of our board, who come from a variety of careers, states and faith traditions, by visiting our new website page: BJCOnline.org/bjcboard.

Read a special message from our chair on the next page.



“It was a joy to welcome the BJC Board of Directors to the BJC headquarters in Washington, D.C., for our first in-person meeting since before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

On the night before the meeting, I was reading the book ‘Vanguard’ by Martha S. Jones. I am inspired by so many women of color for centuries who fought for voting rights and equality for all! Because of my time chairing this group and being in the fight with these leaders, I am living my ancestors’ wildest dreams.”



Rev. Dr. C. Lynn Brinkley
Chair, BJC Board of Directors

Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In honor of Pat and Carolyn Anderson
By Raymond E. Johnson Jr.

In honor of Billie Sue Kibbons
By Paula J. Settle

In honor of Brent Walker
By Shirley Camp

In honor of Kurt Corbett
By Megan Pike

In honor of Walter Shurden
By Robert V. Thomason

In honor of Charles Watson Jr.
By Chris Sanders



In memory of David Canady
By Jeanne Canady

In memory of Robert Holt
By Parma Holt

In memory of
Rev. John R. and Marcia Neubert
By Richard N. Myers

In memory of Art Coltharp
By LaNell Coltharp

In memory of
Patton and Irene Clarke Ingle
By Patricia I. Gillis

In memory of Stewart A. Newman
By Stephen M. Fox

In memory of James Dunn
By Clarendon L. Mulford

In memory of Charles and Jamie Petty
By Anthony C. Petty

In memory of Roy Gene Edge
By Cindy L. Edge

In memory of Moncrief Jordan
By Diane Jordan

In memory of Alicia Seavey
By George Seavey

In memory of Billy and Louise Fox
By Stephen M. Fox

In memory of June McEwen
By Lynelle V. Mason

In memory of R. Dean Stewart
By Dean R. Stewart

Do you want to recognize someone this holiday season?

Make a gift to BJC in honor of or in memory of someone, and we'll publish your gift in our spring magazine. Simply send a note with your check or specify who the gift should recognize when you give online at BJCOnline.org/give. For more information, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at dtyler@BJCOnline.org.

Responding to Christian nationalism with reconciliation

What is the role of prophetic leadership, the church and the act of reconciliation in combating the rise of Christian nationalism? The Rev. Dr. Jonathan C. “Jay” Augustine shared his understanding of reconciliation during a panel discussion alongside BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr.

“Reconciliation for me, as a ministry that Jesus left the church, is really twofold because Jesus came not just to save lives but came to usher in a reign of equality for all of God’s children,” said Dr. Augustine, an author who serves as pastor of St. Joseph AME Church in Durham, North Carolina. He also delivered BJC’s 2022 Shurden Lectures.

The panel discussion, titled “Responding with Reconciliation: Prophetic Leadership and Christian Nationalism,” was held at Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, on Nov. 13. The event was moderated by the Rev. Caitlin Childers Brown, associate pastor at Freemason Street and a member of the 2022 class of BJC Fellows.

Watson explained how Christian nationalism is not a new narrative, but it is a narrative that has been strengthened over time by historical events and doctrine.

When asked about the role that race plays in Christian nationalism, Dr. Augustine discussed how “white” has maintained dominance in the social and economic structures of America because of a doctrine that “put certain people over another.” Watson added that “the power structure of white supremacy can be on a face that is not white” because of the “power structure that America has pushed.”

Both panelists emphasized the role of the January 6 insurrection and how this event can be considered an example of people defending power structures that put certain groups of people over others.

“Jesus came not just to save lives but came to usher in a reign of equality for all of God’s children.”

—Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine

“We want America to reach her full potential ... and we came dangerously close to everything going wrong on January 6,” Dr. Augustine said.

Dr. Augustine used gumbo as a metaphor to explain how, unlike the traditional metaphor of the melting pot which requires groups of people to erase parts of their unique identity, gumbo allows each American who comes to be a part of this “gumbo” to “compliment one another in their diversity” and keep their personal and familial identity.

The Rev. Brown asked Dr. Augustine what he thought about the “evangelical push favoring Christian nationalism.”



Rev. Caitlin Childers Brown with Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine and BJC's Charles Watson Jr. at Freemason Street Baptist Church.

“I do think that there is a movement going forward because of the extremity of the Make America Great Again narrative. I think people are no longer going to just toe the party line. I think you have a lot of people who are going to question and a lot of people who will move toward the center, politically and religiously, [instead of] being on the far-right fringe.”

Watson added that, because of their focus on evangelism, white evangelicals “should be the first ones to want religious freedom.” He said, “If you don’t have religious freedom, you can’t convert.”

The Rev. Brown asked both Dr. Augustine and Watson what prophetic leadership looked like in the face of Christian nationalism, what role the church can play in reconciliation, and what the audience could do to take action.

“Educate more people about the role of prophetic leadership,” Dr. Augustine said, emphasizing that prophetic leadership looks like “speaking truth to power or speaking truth to institutions of power.” When you educate people on prophetic leadership, Dr. Augustine said that “people of the church will become contemporary prophets and speak out against the norms of Christian nationalism and people that want to make us a ‘Christian nation.’”

Watson added that this prophetic leadership does not have to be just from the pulpit or even the pew. “Some of the prophets that I see are speaking truth to power, and some of them don’t reside in the pulpit or pew. Truth is truth, no matter where it comes from, and so it should be listened to in that way.”

Dr. Augustine examined 2 Corinthians 5 and the idea that reconciliation is a ministry that Jesus left to the church.

“Paul writes about this in very emphatic terms, in very impassioned terms,” Dr. Augustine said. “So, we, as Christians, as followers of Christ, should be Christ-like and I think should carry the mantle [of reconciliation].”

You can watch their entire conversation on the church’s Facebook page at [Facebook.com/Freemasonstreet](https://www.facebook.com/Freemasonstreet).

—Elizabeth Tadlock, BJC intern

‘Christian nation’ myth is fundamental to Christian nationalism

One of the scariest things about Christian nationalism — especially for a Black Baptist minister — is its symbiotic relationship with white supremacy expressed through the myth that America was founded as a “Christian nation,” the Rev. Christopher McKee Jr. explained to an interfaith audience in Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 20.

Just as alarming is the insidious way Christian nationalism is reshaping much of American Christianity from a path of liberation in Jesus into a religion of political and racial control, said the Rev. McKee, senior pastor of the Church of Oakland, a Baptist congregation in Jacksonville.

“Its language becomes the language of subjugation and oppression which, sadly, has been so much part of this nation’s fabric, which builds into this myth,” he said. “It makes it OK for us to have this false idea that to be racist, to be complicit in systems and structures of oppression, makes you Christ-like. For me, that’s the antithesis of who Jesus is.”

The Rev. McKee spoke during “How Christian Nationalism Threatens Democracy and Christianity,” an in-person event featuring a presentation by Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC.

The gathering was presented by the University of North Florida’s OneJax Institute, the Interfaith Council of Northeast Florida, BJC and South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church.

Tyler launched into the myth-busting theme in her opening remarks, noting that the nation’s Founders made no reference to Christianity in the Constitution.

“That’s pretty peculiar. If you’re forming a Christian nation, why wouldn’t you mention Christianity in your founding documents?” she asked.

The Constitution also expressly forbids the use of a religious test for public office, she added. “Again, peculiar. You’re setting up a Christian nation. Why would you prohibit any religious test in order to hold public office?”

The First Amendment goes even further by building a wall between government and religion in direct opposition to the intimate relationship between faith and politics claimed by Christian nationalists, Tyler said.

And this, in turn, distorts Scripture: “Not only does this Christian nation myth belie history in the constitutional texts, but it also works against a Christian understanding of a global church. In John’s Gospel, ‘God so loved the world,’ not ‘the United States.’ This idea that America is singled out for special treatment by God goes against the Gospel itself.”

Christian nationalism has even twisted what it means to be patriotic in part by usurping phrases such as “In God We Trust” and “God Bless America” into racially and politically charged litmus tests “to be true Americans,” Tyler said.

“Fighting Christian nationalism doesn’t require us to cease being patriots. It’s quite the opposite. Because Christian nationalism is



McKee



Tyler



Hutto

such an urgent threat to American democracy, I believe patriotism requires us to fight against Christian nationalism.”

Embracing that political ideology often also means embracing racism, she added. “The ‘Christian nation’ myth includes slavery. If you’re going to say that God’s providential hand was at work in the founding of the country, you can’t stop and say, ‘except for that slavery thing.’ So, ‘Christian nation’ imbues God’s favor on slavery, on racial violence, on segregation. And in this way, people can use the language of Christian nationalism as code in exchange for more explicitly racist language and imagery.”

Christian nationalism also erodes the natural curiosity many Americans have for religions other than their own, said the Rev. Rebekah Hutto, a Presbyterian minister and executive director of the Interfaith Center of Northeast Florida.

“The issue of Christian nationalism and interfaith dialogue is this myth that we’re all from one origin, which is to deny the pluralism that existed in this country when it was founded and before it was founded,” she said. “And it denies the pluralism that exists now. That we are a ‘Christian nation’ is fake news.”

Christian nationalism has undermined the ability of Christians to have meaningful conversations and disagreements with each other on matters of faith, said the Rev. Hutto.

The Rev. McKee added that the rise of Christian nationalism has co-opted what it means to be an evangelical because the term has become synonymous with the right-wing movement.

“If you push a narrative that says, somehow or other, to be white and Christian makes you superior, then it’s not hard to caboose that to racism. If you are white and Christian and superior, then you can suppress everybody who doesn’t fit in those boxes — even folks who might share your faith but not share your race.”

—Story by Jeff Brumley, *Baptist News Global*
with BJC staff reports
Photos courtesy of Dan Harris photography

My Baptist journey to interfaith work

By Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush



All second-year students at my seminary in New York City were required to take Field Education, and I was urged to work in a church. I wasn't so sure, but my adviser encouraged me to think expansively; and so I found myself in the Social Hall at Union Theological Seminary sitting across from a pastor and the head of the lay leadership at a small Baptist church in Manhattan.

It shouldn't have surprised me that the most exciting position was in a Baptist church. The reason I was at seminary at all was because of Judson Memorial Church in the Village. When I arrived in New York in the late 1980s, my cousins invited me to come, and although I wasn't very "churchy," I had majored in religion in college and was experiencing something of a spiritual awakening. And so I went.

Judson had a preacher, the Rev. Howard Moody, who had been involved in justice work in the Village for decades, including in abortion rights in the pre-Roe era, and it was also famous for the Judson Dance Project in the 1960s. On Sundays, I heard stories of Jesus alongside radical sermons on racial and economic justice, I saw a safe space for LGBTQ people and spent volunteer hours creating needle cleaning kits for IV drug users so that their addiction would not also result in AIDS infection. It was at that church that someone urged me to go up to Union Seminary, saying they thought I might make a good minister. I doubted it, but two years later, when it came down to making a decision on where to do my field education placement, I went with the Baptists.

The pastor of Madison Avenue Baptist, the Rev. Mike Easterling, described it to me as a "subway church" — on Sunday morning attendance was about the same number of people that could fit in a subway car in New York City, and we were just as diverse. At that church, we had unhoused people on the program committee alongside Upper East Side matrons and greeters on Sunday morning that included a corn-fed midwestern church woman in tandem with a dancer from Japan who spoke almost no English.

I did a research project with our membership, asking for three words to describe God, three words to describe Jesus and three words to describe our church. There was almost no overlap of understanding of God or Jesus, but complete agreement of words to describe the church, including home, respect, loving and freedom.

It surprised me, but not the pastor, who delighted in explaining the Baptist concept of "soul freedom." The orthodoxy that mattered to the church was not that everyone believed the same thing about God but that they treated each other with mutual respect, caring, and welcome. I eventually was so moved by this idea and by the love of the members of that church that I was rebaptized and eventually ordained in the Baptist tradition. At my ordination I asked a cousin from the Jewish branch of my family to offer a prayer, and she delighted in being present and offering her blessing on my different but equivalent tradition.

The example of my church that combined soul freedom with a mandate to recognize and respect people who are different from ourselves is what I long for in my country and informs my work as a Baptist minister and as the president of Interfaith Alliance. For almost three decades, Interfaith Alliance has brought people together from the widest possible range of faith and no faith, to build a nation that does not require that we believe the same thing, or look the same way, or love a certain way in order to be treated with equal respect and dignity under the law.

I thank the small Baptist subway church for teaching me that such a vision is possible and beautiful, and I continue to work for the soul freedom of all as we all find our seats together in that big, messy, but potentially glorious subway of our country.

The Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush is president and CEO of Interfaith Alliance. An ordained Baptist minister, he is the great-grandson of the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis, and great-grandson of Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch.



BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. went to North Carolina in October, visiting with students at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity for Baptist Partners' Day and speaking to a class. While he was in the area, he also led a presentation at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.



BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks went to Florida in October, speaking at Markham Woods Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Longwood and then giving a presentation later in the week at the Pastors for Florida Children Interfaith Leadership Summit on Protecting the Separation of Church and State in Public Education.



BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler attended the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina's 155th Annual Session, held in Wilmington. She spoke to the session and visited with the Rev. Dr. Robert Charles Scott, senior pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church in Charlotte, a historically significant congregation with nearly 5,000 disciples serving in the region since 1900.

"Far too often, an American understanding has centered a white perspective to the exclusion of others and to the detriment of all of our call to freedom," Tyler said. "So we must be intentional about listening to and learning from people from many backgrounds, identities and experiences."

We continued to open our doors this summer and fall to student groups, welcoming new people and future leaders to learn about our work protecting faith freedom for all.

During educational sessions, BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. and Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks lead students through discussions of religious freedom and what it means, including how it is expressed in our country. They also review current Supreme Court cases and have fun with questions and general discussion with the students. Some schools, including The Ohio State University and Loyola University Chicago (both pictured below) bring students each semester.

If you are interested in bringing a group to BJC's office on Capitol Hill, go to BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc. We welcome student groups of all ages and backgrounds, as well as life-long learners.



2023 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

Open to high school juniors and seniors

Topic:

The struggle over the sacred land of *Chí'chil Biłdagoteel* — loosely translated in English as “Oak Flat.”

Visit our website for the writing prompt and entry details:

BJCOnline.org/contest

Entry
deadline:
March 17,
2023

Grand prize: \$2,000 scholarship
and trip to Washington, D.C.

Second prize: \$1,000
Third prize: \$500

Winners of the 2022 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

For the 2022 contest, BJC asked high school juniors and seniors to write an essay exploring whether prisoners should be afforded the right to have a religious adviser present in the execution chamber. We received essays from across the country, and we offer our congratulations to this year's winners, who received scholarship prizes.

Grand prize winner:

Bethany A. Crist from Greenbrier, Tennessee

In her essay titled “Freedom in Both Life and Death,” Bethany reviewed the First Amendment protections and the standards of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, applying them to recent cases to illustrate how prisoners do not lose their right to religious exercise absent a compelling governmental interest.

“Religion is important for people both in life and in death, so giving prisoners the peace they need at the end of their life is a basic freedom that I believe the Founding Fathers would have understood. ... The United States has worked hard to ensure our rights are protected. If our nation has fought and died for us to live with our rights, why should we not let prisoners die with their rights as well?”

Second prize:

Samantha Podnar
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Third prize:

Caleb Asher McWhorter
Dawsonville, Georgia



Marshall joins BJC staff

KARLEE MARSHALL is the communications manager at BJC, with a primary focus on digital communications and media relations. A former BJC intern, she also served BJC in a contractor role assisting with the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.



Marshall previously served as the Assistant Director of Community Partnerships at Crossroads Youth and Family Services in Norman, Oklahoma.

Marshall earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Oklahoma in 2018, majoring in communications and nonprofit studies. A citizen of the Choctaw Nation, Marshall interned with CBF of Oklahoma during her undergraduate studies, helping coordinate partnerships with Native American communities in Oklahoma. She also completed internships with Oklahoma Policy Institute and Metro Baptist Church in New York City after graduation.

You can contact her at kmarshall@BJCOnline.org.

A giving opportunity for those 70 1/2 and older

If you are 70 1/2 or older, you can help protect and extend faith freedom for all while limiting your own tax liability.

The IRS requires traditional IRA owners to make annual withdrawals starting at age 72. These withdrawals are known as Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), and the income from the withdrawal is considered taxable. As an alternative, you can donate from your taxable IRA directly to a qualified charity such as BJC without having to pay income taxes on the donation. This type of transaction is commonly called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). Individuals can donate up to a maximum of \$100,000 per year, while couples who submit tax returns under "married filing jointly" status each qualify for an annual QCD of up to \$100,000.

For a Qualified Charitable Distribution to count toward your current year's Required Minimum Distribution, the funds must transfer from your IRA by the IRS deadline, which is generally December 31 each year.

If you'd like more information about making a Qualified Charitable Distribution to BJC, please call Dan Hamil, BJC's director of strategic partnerships, at dhamil@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226.

Please consult with your attorney, accountant and/or tax advisor for advice concerning your particular circumstances.

New video resources



[What is Christian nationalism?](#)

[Is the United States a "Christian nation"?](#)

[Can churches engage in political campaigns?](#)

[What does the Bible teach Christians about religious freedom?](#)

Get answers to these questions in a new series of videos produced by BJC, as Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman provide clear, direct responses. You can find these videos on BJC's YouTube channel and share them with others.

And, be sure you are subscribed to BJC's YouTube channel for the latest videos, including episodes of our Respecting Religion podcast and some "shorts" optimized for your phone. Find us with our new YouTube handle: [YouTube.com/@BJContheHill](https://www.youtube.com/@BJContheHill).

Mark your calendar for 2023

February 23:

Deadline to apply for the 2023 BJC Fellows Program

March 17:

Deadline to enter the Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

June 30:

2023 BJC Luncheon in Atlanta, Georgia

Keep up with our latest events on our website at any time:

[BJCOnline.org/calendar](https://www.BJCOnline.org/calendar)

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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.

SUPPORTING BODIES OF BJC

Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches USA
Baptist General Association of Virginia
Baptist General Convention of Missouri (Churchnet)
Baptist General Convention of Texas
Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas
(Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas)
Converge
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
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Religious Liberty Council

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe Guy EDITOR

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2022 by the numbers

Take a look at our past year on pages 14-15, and join us in advocating for faith freedom for all with a gift before December 31: BJConline.org/give.



Is the United States a "Christian nation"?

Get answers to frequently debated topics in our latest video series. See page 27 for details, and visit our YouTube channel: YouTube.com/@BJContheHill.