

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BJC Magazine



Yo estoy en contra el
nacionalismo Cristiano
por que
Jesús dijo:
"Mi reino no es de este
mundo!"

Rev. Anyra
Cano
Ministry Southwest
I ❤️ ADVOCACY!
CBF
FAMILIA

Christian Nationalism
Perpetuates
Injustice

Magana
PBC Springs
Spring, TX
CBF National Assembly
June 14-15, 2024

The debut of the Christians
Against Christian Nationalism
Action Center

AMANDA TYLER on being
Baptist in an election year

HOLLY HOLLMAN on a new law
about the Ten Commandments

The power of relationship

This edition of the magazine shares ways of building stronger communities and bonds that propel all of us forward in defending faith freedom for all and working to end Christian nationalism.

What are key mediums for making change? Lisa Jacob, North Texas Organizer for the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, talks about making impacts through AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND LOCAL ORGANIZING on pages 6-8, and we have a way you can raise awareness on page 9 with our toolkit for hosting a COMMUNITY MEETING about Christian nationalism.

The Rev. Dane Martin's experience as a BJC Fellow set him on a journey to engage in new relationships and create a trip for college students to wrestle with tough questions. Read how he is working to EXPLORE DIFFERENCES THROUGH EDUCATION in a conversation with BJC's Dr. Sabrina E. Dent on pages 12-14.

During this year's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State, panelists asked the question "WHOSE COUNTRY IS IT ANYWAY?" as they explored the relationships different communities have with the United States. Read about the conversation on pages 18-19.

Holly Hollman explores the problems with yet another push to put the TEN COMMANDMENTS in public schools on page 5.

Amanda Tyler talks about things we should all remember during an ELECTION YEAR on page 3, and Jaziah Masters shares the hard-fought history of VOTING RIGHTS on pages 22-24.

Plus, this magazine shares scenes from our Christians Against Christian Nationalism Action Center (pages 10-11), an interview with the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson (pages 20-21), milestones for the Respecting Religion podcast (pages 16-17), and more.

Connect with the Christians Against Christian Nationalism Facebook group

BJC's Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign expanded its social media presence this spring, launching a new place for connection on Facebook.

Instead of a Facebook page where BJC shares information with you, the group allows participants to connect with each other. People can ask questions, share resources, talk about news items, and find a community online.

Christians across the country who are concerned about the political ideology of Christian nationalism continue to join the group each day. Christian nationalism seeks to merge American and Christian identities, working to privilege Christians and Christianity in law and policy. Of

course, to oppose Christian nationalism is not to oppose Christianity. Many people in the Facebook group share a religious imperative to stand against Christian nationalism and work to end it in their communities.

Interested in being part of the group? Scan the QR code on this page, or search for **Christians Against Christian Nationalism — Community Group** on Facebook and request to join. Anyone who wants to participate is asked to agree to group rules. Those include treating all members with respect and civility, regardless of differing opinions; respecting the privacy of others; encouraging constructive dialogue and debate; and celebrating successes.

We hope you'll join us in this group and share it with others! And, you can continue to find the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign on Instagram and TikTok at [@endchristiannationalism](https://www.instagram.com/endchristiannationalism).



COVER: The Rev. Anyra Cano, chair of the BJC Board, and 2023 BJC Fellow Abigail Villagrana, who co-chairs the Religious Liberty Council, share why they oppose Christian nationalism at the Action Center (see pages 10-11 for more photos). The Rev. Cano is also active in CBF FAMILIA — Latino Ministry Network of CBF, a network founded on the principles of fellowship, advocacy, ministry and missions, identity, leadership, and more. Its advocacy includes educating others about the dangers of Christian nationalism. To read the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement in Spanish, visit christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/leer-la-declaracion.

Being Baptist in an election year

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

“This is the most important election in our lifetime.” Though the line sounds hyperbolic, I tend to agree. After the attempted insurrection on January 6, 2021, and with continued lies about the integrity of the election system, democracy itself is on the ballot this November — in races up and down the ballot and across the country. Our democratic system relies on all of us exercising our legal right to vote and supporting free and fair elections.

With so much at stake, I led a three-week series of conversations at my Baptist church in Dallas to discern how we could engage faithfully in the electoral process and bring the best of our Baptist identity to our community.

First, we considered what it means to “be Baptist.” I think of the Rev. Dr. Walter B. “Buddy” Shurden’s helpful framework on Baptist identity anchored in the “Four Fragile Freedoms”: Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom and religious freedom. All of these freedoms come with rights and responsibilities.

Bible freedom means that every believer is competent to interpret the Bible and has the accompanying responsibility to study the history, context and interpretations of Scripture to understand how the Spirit is speaking through it. Soul freedom honors the image of God in every person by protecting the individual’s choice to follow God in making moral and spiritual decisions. Faith must always be voluntary and not forced. Church freedom recognizes the independence of each Baptist church. Baptist polity is (small “d”) “democratic” as it accents the role of the individual in the community, keeping power with and close to the people. Religious freedom protects all three of the other freedoms for the entire community — not just Baptists — by ensuring that the institutions of government and religion are sufficiently separated as distinct lines of authority, so that religion is neither supported nor impeded by the state.

We see threats to all four of these freedoms in this election year. Politicians misuse the Bible in campaign rhetoric. There is a proliferation of policies in states like Oklahoma and Texas to require the teaching of Bible in public schools, alongside a new law in Louisiana to require the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms.

Candidates and parties attempt to co-opt churches and religious organizations for their campaigns. Widening polarization that encourages us to see our political opponents as enemies results in alienating ourselves from people who vote differently than us and obscuring our

vision to see the image of God in each person. Christian nationalism — and its merger of national and religious identities — privileges an increasingly narrow understanding of Christianity. That narrow view creates discriminatory and dangerous policies that lead to the marginalization and oppression of everyone who falls outside of the tight circle of belonging.

It can be tempting to throw our hands up and withdraw from the increasingly toxic political environment. But such a response, I believe, would betray Jesus’ teaching for us to give to God the things that are God’s and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

God asks us to love God and to love our neighbors. Or, according to the prophet Micah, to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. We are called to engage in our society in the pursuit of justice, but we are to do so without confusing political authority with our higher responsibilities to God as we work together to bring God’s kingdom and beloved community to our earthly lives.

Our “Caesar” — the U.S. government — gives us the responsibilities of citizenship, including engaging in the democratic process, staying informed on issues and volunteering in our community.

Our commitment to “being Baptist” in the best sense of our tradition can be helpful to our pluralistic democracy in this critical year.

We can allow everyone the freedom to interpret the Bible while speaking out against attempts to allow any one person’s interpretation of the Bible to be legislated in law and/or implemented in policy.

We can affirm the sacredness of individual choice, testifying that each person — created in the image of God — can make moral, spiritual and religious decisions. We do this by standing up for each person’s freedom to make choices, including in the voting booth.

We can stand firmly against Christian nationalism and affirm each person’s equality in our society without regard to religious identity.

As churches, we can value our independence and refuse to be co-opted by political parties and candidates, while using our freedom to help the democratic process in nonpartisan ways. You can find great ideas for how houses of worship can engage in the process by checking out the “Faith in Elections Playbook” from Interfaith America and Protect Democracy, as well as resources from Faiths United to Save Democracy.

I’m looking forward to engaging in the democratic process with my church community this year, and I encourage everyone to do the same. Our freedoms depend upon it.



Louisiana governor signs law requiring public schools to post Ten Commandments in every classroom

On June 19, Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry signed a law to mandate the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms and colleges across the state, despite outcry from Christians in the state and BJC.

The Louisiana Legislature passed the bill in May, requiring the Ten Commandments to be posted in every public school classroom. The bill allows that the display may also include the Declaration of Independence and other historical documents but does not require them.

While the Legislature waited for the governor to sign the bill, Baptists spoke out about their concerns. In a letter to Gov. Landry, BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman asked him to veto the measure, which passed the state Senate 30-8.

“Nobody should be told by the government how to worship, what Scripture to read, or when to pray. Government-mandated displays of the Ten Commandments disrespect religious diversity and foster conflict in our public schools. This legislation wrongly suggests that the government holds religious authority over school children,” Hollman wrote. “By sponsoring a religious display that includes the selection of Scripture, the government is intervening in religious choices that should be left to individuals and faith communities.”

Louisiana pastors and churchgoers also voiced their opposition to their state’s Ten Commandments mandate. More than 100 Louisiana Christians signed a letter also asking Gov. Landry to reject the bill. “Our communities of faith exist to help individuals and families grapple with applying biblical truth in our modern times,” they wrote. “We do not need or want legislators and other government officials interfering with and usurping this sacred role.”

The campaign to merge religious education with public school education is an especially troubling example of Christian nationalism, given the impressionable age of young school children. Adorning our public school hallways and classrooms with religious symbols and texts not only undermines the role of parents and religious leaders, it also violates the religious liberty rights of students under the First Amendment.

“I can’t wait to be sued,” said Gov. Landry on June 15 during a Republican fundraiser in Nashville, according to the *Tennessean*. Hours after he signed the bill, the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Louisiana, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation announced impending litigation to block implementation of the measure.

—Don Byrd, BJC researcher and writer
with BJC staff reports

Secret recordings reveal contrasting views of Justice Alito and Chief Justice Roberts on role of religion and morality at SCOTUS

Supreme Court watchers typically spend the month of June anticipating the Court’s most high-profile, divided and controversial rulings. This year brought an added spectacle after progressive activist Lauren Windsor released secretly recorded conversations with Justice Samuel Alito and Chief Justice John Roberts at an annual gathering of the Supreme Court Historical Society.

The conversation with Windsor, who was posing as a conservative Christian, seems to reveal a troubling perspective from Justice Alito. According to ABC News, Windsor kept pushing the justice, saying that “people in this country who believe in God have got to keep fighting for that, to return our country to a place of godliness.” He responded by saying, “I agree with you, I agree with you.”

In contrast to Justice Alito, Chief Justice Roberts resisted Windsor’s provocations, declining to agree with her that the United States is “a Christian nation.” According to ABC News, he said, “I don’t know that we live in a Christian nation. I know a lot of Jewish and Muslim friends who would say, maybe not.

And it’s not our job to do that. It’s our job to decide the cases as best we can.”

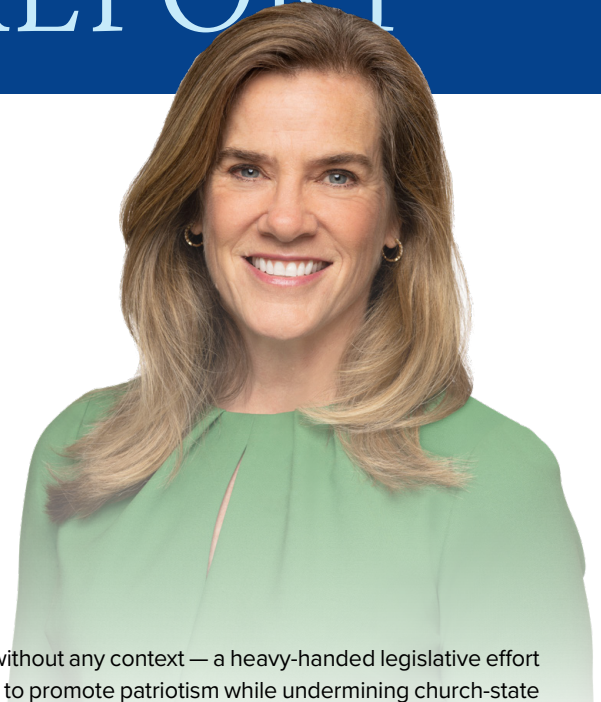
While the recording was made in secret, Justice Alito’s views on the subject of religious liberty are not. In the summer of 2022, he made news for delivering a keynote address in Rome at a Religious Liberty Summit convened by the Religious Liberty Initiative of the University of Notre Dame Law School. There, he explained his view that growing secularization in the United States and around the world poses a grave threat to religious liberty.

So, it’s not surprising that Justice Alito believes that “godliness” and religious liberty go hand-in-hand. The truth is that religious liberty — when robustly protected — safeguards the rights of religious and nonreligious Americans alike. The Supreme Court should protect the rights of all Americans to freely exercise our faith or choose not to exercise a faith, while at the same time to be free of religious entanglements with government that can make some feel excluded and marginalized — or worse yet, coerced.

—Don Byrd, BJC researcher and writer

Why is this still happening?

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Louisiana is making history, and not the good kind. As the only state with a law mandating displays of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom, Louisiana is a standout among a host of states pursuing legislative measures that would upend religious freedom as we know it. Last year, its neighbor to the west proposed a similar Ten Commandments bill. But after hearings on the matter and opposition from many religious voices, the Texas Legislature rejected that bad idea. At least for now.

You may be thinking that the Ten Commandments are part of sacred Scripture in the Jewish and Christian traditions — though the significance in those traditions differs — and that public schools must serve all children without regard to religion, right? True. So why is this happening, and isn't it unconstitutional?

The application of the First Amendment's ban on any government establishment of religion is famously nuanced. That is particularly so when it comes to religious displays on government property. Typically, both the content and the context must be carefully considered. It is important to distinguish between an appropriate artistic or historical reference to religion, such as one that recognizes religion's role in society, from an alarming attempt by the government to promote a purely religious agenda or enforce conformity.

Permanent religious displays in public school classrooms have long been seen as easily on the unconstitutional side of that equation. "The Ten Commandments are undeniably a sacred text in the Jewish and Christian faiths, and no legislative recitation of a supposed secular purpose can blind us to that fact." That's what the U.S. Supreme Court said in an unsigned opinion in *Stone v. Graham* (1980), finding unconstitutional a Kentucky law that required posting the Ten Commandments on the wall of each public school classroom. The religiously coercive purpose and effect were clear in that context and so was the constitutional violation.

The Louisiana law is designed to challenge that precedent. It is the next step in an agenda to erode religious freedom for all and to promote Christian nationalism. We've seen some states pass laws to mandate postings of the motto "In God We Trust" in

classrooms without any context — a heavy-handed legislative effort that purports to promote patriotism while undermining church-state separation. Louisiana's new law goes further by mandating that a government-edited and approved version of Scripture hangs on each classroom wall in every public school according to the government's specifications. The legislation is designed to try to stretch legal boundaries that appear increasingly elastic.

Recent cases show that the current U.S. Supreme Court is less concerned with certain government actions that threaten to create an establishment of religion than in previous years. In fact, a few days before signing the Louisiana measure, Gov. Jeff Landry said he looked forward to being sued. And, indeed, a group of nine Louisiana families with children in public schools filed suit in federal court on June 24 to block the law. The plaintiffs are represented by the ACLU, the ACLU of Louisiana, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

“Government-mandated displays of the Ten Commandments disrespect religious diversity and are likely to foster conflict over religion in our public schools.”

It is disconcerting that the Louisiana Legislature did not respect a fundamental concern that so many families recognize. As stated in a petition to the governor from faithful Louisianans (organized by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship): "The responsibility of religious education belongs to families, churches and other religious institutions, not the government. Our communities of faith exist to help individuals and families grapple with applying biblical truth in our modern times. We do not need or want legislators and other government officials interfering with and usurping this sacred role."

We agree. Government-mandated displays of the Ten Commandments disrespect religious diversity and are likely to foster conflict over religion in our public schools. By taking on the role of religious authority and enacting this legislation, the state has betrayed its role as protector of religious freedom for all.



Working for change through local organizing

By Lisa Jacob
North Texas Organizer,
Christians Against
Christian Nationalism

As BJC is in our 88th year, I've had the honor of incorporating local organizing as part of our legacy. We have done substantial work in learning what organizing is and how to move forward together, and our learning bears witness to the transformation this work can bring. I want to share some of what we've been discovering on this journey.

First, it's important to note that local organizing is just one of three key mediums of change that we use at BJC to dismantle Christian nationalism. The other two are awareness and advocacy. I find that it's helpful to understand what awareness and advocacy are, which allows us to see the distinctives of local organizing.

Awareness, Advocacy and Local Organizing

We use **awareness** because we believe that change happens in the hearts and minds of individuals, activating and equipping them to clearly see and discern the impact of certain issues on the community. From its formation, a core aspect of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign is its challenge for Christians to examine what it means to be Christian in the U.S. — ideologically, interpersonally and within the public square. At BJC, we raise awareness by going to churches and other locations to talk about Christian nationalism. We also raise awareness by creating resources for folks to talk about Christian nationalism with others. We aren't responsible for what people do with this information, but

we can reduce the barriers that people have towards taking action. We can equip them to take a next step, and that journey begins with awareness. *Change happens through awareness.*

Change also happens through advocacy. **Advocacy** is action with and without structures of power. We believe that change can happen through advocacy within federal and state policy through accountability and heightened consciousness regarding realities that impact the masses. On its website, the NAACP notes that advocacy is a "path to justice" which requires challenging "federal, state, and local laws, statutes, and policies to ensure equal protection." Advocacy goes beyond work between my community and me. Advocacy is in phone banking. It's in signing that petition. Advocacy connects us to people and movements we may not know, but we take part in advocacy in hopes to see broad scale change.

BJC was founded on this very principle of advocacy by our member bodies who have been doing this work since their beginnings, and we currently see this within BJC in different ways. We see advocacy in our testimonies before Congress. We see advocacy in the briefs we file at the Supreme Court. We see advocacy in our in-depth joint report on Christian nationalism and January 6. We also see advocacy in our nationwide work to stop the misguided use of "chaplains" in public schools. *Change happens through advocacy.*

Change also happens through local organizing. In *Faith-Rooted Organizing:*

Updates from the North Texas Organizing Project

The North Texas Organizing Project for Christians Against Christian Nationalism is increasing the frequency of their regular meetings this summer. They also are launching a pastoral cohort, which will equip religious leaders to lead others through discerning their public witness as faith communities.

The North Texas group is ramping up advocacy efforts, as there are concerns with the new curriculum being proposed for elementary students in Texas. Bible stories are infused in various components of the curriculum, which is a misguided fusion of church and state. Public comments are currently being accepted, and the group is working on the most effective way to engage with the state board of education and others on the issue.

One area of focus for the North Texas coalition is the intersection of Christian nationalism and immigration. North Texas Organizer Lisa Jacob joined Fellowship Southwest for a visit to the Texas-Mexico border this spring, listening to and learning from faith leaders serving alongside our migrant neighbors. The realities she witnessed during this trip mirrored the multiple academic studies that show a correlation between those who hold anti-immigrant sentiment and those who adhere to Christian nationalism.



CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World, the Rev. Dr. Alexia Salvatierra and the Rev. Dr. Peter Heltzel define “community organizing” as the effort of “[bringing] a community together to fight for its rights and improve its situation.” Advocacy can be part of an organizing movement, but the distinctive of local organizing is that its approach is determined and formed by the community members themselves. We engage in local organizing, believing that change happens through building communal power in the context of relationships so as to address, change and/or sustain policies and practices that impact us. There are a few key words worth highlighting.

Relationship

Local organizing happens in the context of relationship. In organizing, the primary vehicle of change is through relationships with others. Local organizing is a slow and tedious process. Oftentimes, we don’t see any substantial wins early on. But to organize communities, relationships to each other are what keep people engaged in the mission, and these relationships sustain us during the lulls and losses. In the book *Practical Radicals: Seven Strategies to Change the World*, authors Deepak Bhargava and Dr. Stephanie Luce share a thoughtful reflection on relationships within organizing from Make the Road New York, a grassroots community organization with 25,000 members. The group’s internal documents share about relationships this way:

Creating community means building relationships that go beyond any one narrow issue or campaign, and caring about each person as a vital part of the fabric of our movement. It means creating spaces that are open to all types of activity, where people can teach a music lesson, celebrate the arrival of a new baby, or dress up for Halloween. It means making

people laugh, and celebrating our collective achievements on our walls and in our meetings. ... This model has the power to create resilient relationships that go beyond narrow self-interest. Outside, in the world, we spend our lives fighting oppression and confronting its daily ugliness. Inside, we gather the strength to continue.

Relationships are not a means to an end, but rather the end in and of itself. And those relationships are the bedrock of organizing. It is in relationship that we *gather our strength*. It is in relationship that we harness our communal creativity. It is in relationship that we build power, which points us to another set of key words.

Building communal power

In building communal power, we acknowledge the power each of us holds, and together, we steward it towards a shared vision and/or goal. For example, if Sally Joe was concerned with the crime that’s happening on her street, she may want to get more streetlamps to try to make her street safer at night. Sally Joe may contact her city government or she may need to contact her homeowner’s association. But one single person — Sally Joe — can only go so far. This speaks to the need to build communal power. We all have skills, gifts and connections we bring to the table, and we can go much further together.

As an organizer, I would ask Sally Joe about who else is concerned with the crime on her street at night and willing to act. Sally Joe may have already talked to five or six other neighbors, and they’re all ready to do something. But most times, I’ve found that the Sally Joes of the world haven’t had many of these conversations. Once Sally Joe identifies and rallies neighbors who are willing to act, they can collectively go together to talk to their government official or their

“It is in relationship that we gather our strength. It is in relationship that we harness our communal creativity. It is in relationship that we build power.”

HOA. In this example, when Sally Joe rallies others, she has built communal power that constructively confronts their concerns together. In this story, I want to note that I — the organizer — am not central to the work. In fact, in this type of situation, the organizer is on the periphery and empowers people to be aware of their local context and discern next steps. It’s the actual neighbors together that are central to changing the neighborhood. And that leads us to some of our other key words.

Impact us

Local organizing is the belief that change happens through building communal power in the context of relationships so as to address, change and/or sustain policies and practices that *impact us personally*.

Local organizing is not theoretical and external to any given context. It’s rooted in a geography. Local organizing addresses what’s happening to us in our community. For example, North Texans in Tarrant County organized to push for an end to the county’s contract with a private jail that was found to have conditions well below established standards of care. Many groups came together to be part of the fight to end this inhumane treatment of their neighbors, including Unite Ft. Worth, the NAACP and several churches, including Broadway Baptist Church — which is a church that supports BJC. Because of their organizing

Christians Against Christian Nationalism across the country: Minnesota spotlight

BJC Communications Director Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons visited Minneapolis on June 8 to speak at the monthly meeting of Minnesota Christians Against Christian Nationalism. The local group was created by Jerry Gale, and the Rev. Angela Denker (author of *Red State Christians*) was the other guest speaker.



There were about 100 coalition members present at this meeting, and there are 420 members of the group, coming from more than 150 congregations in the state. The meeting was held at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, and there was a large contingent of Lutherans in attendance.

One way members of the group are taking action is by getting involved in school board advocacy. They're also trying to make sure they're reaching people in "Greater Minnesota," outside of the Twin Cities. Graves-Fitzsimmons spoke on the topic of "What are we FOR?" He stressed the need to have a positive vision of faith freedom for ALL alongside our work calling out and countering Christian nationalism. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler will return to Minneapolis for an event with her new book, *How to End Christian Nationalism*, on Nov. 11.

efforts, Tarrant County officials decided to end this contract — a huge win for the community. Local organizing addresses realities that impact us.

As we address these realities, we also work toward justice by attending to more immediate circumstances, done primarily through another avenue.

Community development

The three areas we work to see change in at BJC are awareness, advocacy and local organizing. But community development work drives change as well. Community development does not change systems or institutional practices, but it does change the circumstances of those who have to live within these broken systems.

Many churches and faith communities dive into the work of justice at the community development level. Community development can be the food drive and rental assistance programs. It's in serving at the migrant shelters and teaching the ESL classes. Without community development, marginalized communities will not have the immediate access to resources that are needed to thrive. But this work of justice must be hand-in-hand with local organizing. If we never address the systems that keep people from thriving, then we create an unhealthy dependence. If community development is giving a

person fish and teaching a person to fish (sometimes it's one, sometimes it's both), then local organizing is asking the question, "Why doesn't that person have access to fish, and why do they not know how to fish in the first place?" Local organizing is addressing those barriers.

What I love about BJC is our willingness to learn — to learn from our past, to learn from our partners, to learn from our context and present moment. As we head toward our ninth decade, engaging in local organizing is one way we have been faithful to the journey of learning. As I mentioned at the beginning, we have done substantial work in learning what organizing is and how to move forward together. Yet, we have much more learning to do. We invite you on this journey with us — it starts with this article and extends beyond these pages. It moves each of us to listen to and learn from our local communities and those who have been faithful to organizing work for generations, no matter the topic they are organizing around. It moves us to be part of change in sometimes new and unfamiliar ways. It moves us to extend beyond what might be our comfort zone and engage with our neighbors who bring new issues to our attention. And, just as every move and transition requires adaptability, we know the only way we can eradicate Christian nationalism and

continue the fight for faith freedom for all is by engaging in new strategies and learning from others. This work is worth it, and we hope you'll join us.

We know many of you already do this important work, and we are grateful to be co-laborers.

But for those of you who are new to this work, local organizing gives us the opportunity to be part of change in our own community. Plus, you can connect with others by joining our new Christians Against Christian Nationalism group on Facebook.

You also can start a local coalition to fight Christian nationalism or participate in other existing coalition work.

If you're looking to get involved in North Texas, contact Lisa Jacob at ljacob@BJCOnline.org.

Looking to raise awareness? See the next page for how you can take one step by holding a community meeting about Christian nationalism.

Host a community meeting about Christian nationalism

Looking to move the needle on Christian nationalism? We invite your church to host a community meeting about the dangers of the ideology. Not sure where to start? We have a toolkit available for everyone to use, with resources, graphics, sample agendas, activities and more. Visit our website at ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org/host for everything you need to get started.

Step 1: Set your goals and make a plan

Determine in advance what your goals are for this meeting, and that will help you know how to plan and focus it. Don't try to do too much in your first meeting — don't create pressure on yourself that overestimates what can be done in a reasonable amount of time for an initial conversation. On our website, you'll find some common goals, as well as a list of logistics to think through and common pitfalls to avoid.

Step 2: Get the word out about it

We are happy to provide you with copies of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism logo as well as sample text to promote your meeting. If you want to open up your event to people outside of your church membership, get in touch with us so we can send an email to signers of the statement in your area.

Step 3: Organize your meeting agenda

Be sure to have a clear agenda for your meeting so you know what to cover and so everyone knows what to expect. We have a sample agenda available that sets aside time for moments of spiritual grounding, time to share definitions of Christian nationalism, group activities and more. You don't have to start from scratch! Use our sample to create an organized time for activity, reflection and next steps, ensuring you can achieve your goals.

Step 4: Host your meeting!

What are the biggest concerns from members of your community who came to this meeting? Do they see areas for partnership? Do you need to focus on awareness, advocacy or something else at this stage? Engage in new — and possibly overdue — conversations. We also provide resources you can use during your meeting — such as videos and presentation slides — to keep it moving forward and make sure it's productive.

Step 5: Follow up

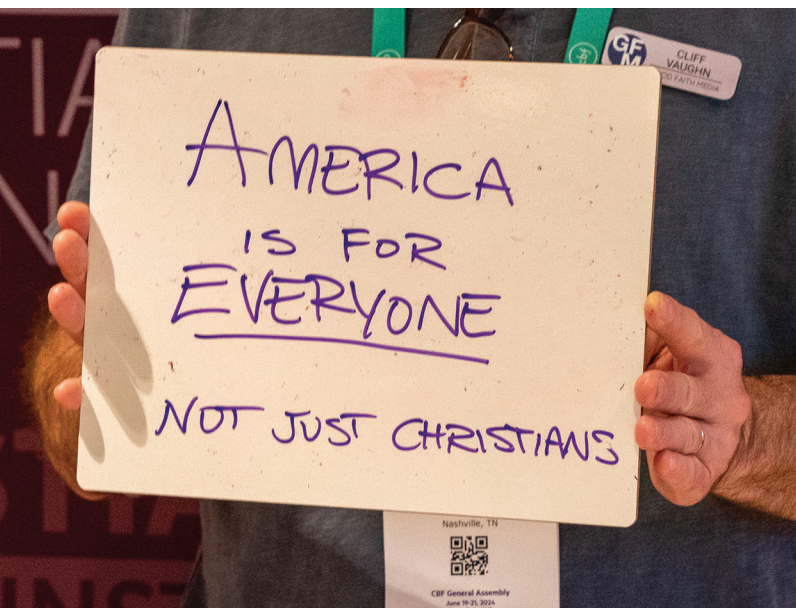
Don't let people leave without having a plan to contact them in the future, and we also want you to let us know how it went. We have ideas for follow-up emails with next steps and a way you can contact our team — we want to encourage you in this work, and we want to learn from you. We're in this together, and it takes all of us engaging to make a difference.

Have any problems accessing the toolkit? Need something not on that website page? Let us know! Email us at info@ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org with questions or suggestions on ways we can improve this toolkit.



Christians Against Christian Nationalism Action Center

During the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Greensboro, N.C., from June 19-21, BJC debuted the new Christians Against Christian Nationalism Action Center, providing guests a way to sign the statement, take a photo to empower them to make a public declaration of their opposition to Christian nationalism, and make a commitment to combat the ideology in their own community.





BJC at the CBF General Assembly

In addition to the Action Center, BJC led learning labs, hosted new events, and supported the good work of others at the 2024 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly. Executive Director Amanda Tyler had a standing-room-only crowd for her presentation on the role of Baptist theology and history related to political campaigns and elections. She also spoke on a panel of Baptist women discussing Christian nationalism and patriarchy. Digital Communications Associate Georgia McKee led a learning lab on engaging in advocacy on social media, equipping participants to make every click count. BJC also hosted a Baptist trivia night with CBF's young Baptist group, introducing BJC and Christians Against Christian Nationalism to the next generation of leaders. The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation sponsored a new event to collect narratives of America, which was organized by the Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative.





Celebrating differences through education

After attending the BJC Fellows Seminar in 2022, the Rev. Dane Martin knew he couldn't sit on the sidelines anymore. As the youth and college minister at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., he created a program to introduce college students to new ideas and prepare them to interact with the world in different ways. He spoke to Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, about why he created this program and how others can bring learning to their community.

DR. SABRINA DENT: You've talked about the BJC Fellows Seminar as a formative experience for you. When you left that week in Colonial Williamsburg, what were you feeling?

REV. DANE MARTIN: The preparation before the Seminar — such as reading the books in advance — coupled with the intensive week featuring conversations with the authors, BJC staff and others who are engaging the work of faith freedom for all, helped me gain a broader perspective of history and where our nation has been, where it is now and where it could be going. It allowed me to see beyond my more narrow scope of what I was looking at in my particular job.

And as I stepped out of the intensive week and went back to “everyday life,” I couldn't help but allow that to kind of wash over me and continue to influence what I was doing here in North Carolina, working at a church. It called me into looking around and asking questions: What does Christian nationalism look like in my own setting? My church? My city? My state? What is my role in faith freedom?

And so I started small, doing a Bible study with some of our youth and young people. And that was fine. But what's next? If we go through the BJC Fellows Program and we do what is asked and required, then what? And that's the question I continued to ask myself, leading me to develop a three-day program to take college students to Washington, D.C.

DR. DENT: How does your program work?

REV. MARTIN: The trip is centered around questions: What does it look like when religion is suppressed, and what does it look like when religion suppresses?

Our three main places we visit are



The Rev. Dane Martin (left) and his students on their 2024 trip to Washington, D.C.

the Holocaust Museum, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and BJC.

We look at those questions through the scope of the Holocaust Museum, asking what does it look like when one religion is said to be horrible and is stereotyped, trying to be knocked off the planet by others?

We visit the NMAAHC, asking what does it look like when a religion is in power and subjects others to their rule and slavery?

And so we take these two things and ask, “What does it look like when religion can go wrong, in a sense, in two ways: where one is pushed up and pushes people down, and one is pushed down to try to be removed?” And we allow them to engage in the wrestling of that.

We also got to hear about BJC's work and mission, and we took a tour of the Supreme Court. We toured the Capitol and talked about how this is where our government is housed and where they do their work. And we couldn't help but talk about the insurrection a little bit, because that was something significant in recent

memory for those students.

It's really interesting when you're walking in the city and seeing the Capitol and the various monuments — the conversations just kind of bubble up. How do we wrestle with the fact that D.C. was built by slaves? How do we reconcile things we learned at our various sites? What do we do with that?

The conversations were really interesting. Each time, it was a matter of talking with students at the end of the day, asking what they learned or what's impacting them right then. There were a variety of things shared, particularly from experiencing the Holocaust Museum and the NMAAHC. And at the end, the questions were, “Where do you see overlap in those two? Where do you see the similarities that are hitting us?”

DR. DENT: One of the great things about what you've created is that you're focused on understanding a full perspective of history, including stories often not told in our history books. Sometimes it's not until people actually see the evidence of what history has shown us that they can really

apply the lessons to life. If we don't learn from history, it repeats itself, and our liberation is tied together.

REV. MARTIN: My family comes from a family of Holocaust survivors, so when we look at that history with the group, we really home in on how the Holocaust was a huge atrocity and how there are many other types of things that have happened like that since, which get less press. How do we prevent these things from happening? It's an opportunity for me to speak into that a little bit, too.

DR. DENT: Was there a lot of interest when you launched this program? How did you share it with your church, and did it come together just like you envisioned?

REV. MARTIN: I think one of the things that really stuck with me after the BJC Fellows Seminar is the nature of being Baptist. There's a reason why BJC has kept in its name the word "Baptist" and leans into that Baptist heritage. I remember reading about how some of these Colonial Baptist ministers were advocating for religious freedom, not to benefit them, but to benefit all.

Touching on the Baptist heritage was a way to connect the congregation to the work, to share that this is part of our history. We talked about John Leland, a Colonial Baptist who advocated and spoke to people in power in our government to help navigate toward what was eventually passed down to us.

We reached out to college students that we've been connected with and said, "Hey, let's engage you in something that may be very different than what you're already getting exposed to on a campus." College is a great opportunity for growth,

development and exploration, but I don't know if we get this kind of growth and exploration unless you really seek it out. So after the spring semester ends, we offer to bring students to D.C. and engage in these conversations.

I love to take big groups. It's fun. But, the number of sign-ups was small. And what I realized is, you use what you have, and you go with it, because it provides opportunity for more one-on-one conversations and more engagement by the whole group together instead of a lot of pocketed conversations — which can be fine, but in this way, we're helping students think a little differently and look at things a little differently, and so we can help frame it for them, too.

DR. DENT: In those conversations, do you hear things that surprise you?

REV. MARTIN: I think a big thing that our students were wrestling with this trip was Christian nationalism. And I wouldn't have picked that necessarily, but they were trying to wrestle with this piece about separation of church and state. Where's the line?

We talked about how we want to recognize — in the right forums — the sacrifices people have made for our country. We want to recognize that because it's an important piece of our country's history. At the same time, we don't want to put our country into a place of worship, where we're worshipping our country or causing others to feel ostracized because we imply this is a God of America.

Our students were really struggling, not to understand Christian nationalism, but more of trying to figure out how to navigate it — to not enter into it, but also to be respectful and to be faithful in their own

religious walk, too. At the end, I said that the struggle is still with me, too, in trying to figure this out and walk the slippery slope. I don't have every answer, and I think we have to figure it out in conversation and in relationship together.

To be aware, though, is the first step. When we have this awareness and understanding of the pitfalls, then we can try to move forward in healthy ways.

Our students got a taste of that, but they got a taste of also trying to figure things out. How do I see this in my own life? How do I see this when I'm in school and when I'm a young adult living on my own? And even when I'm sharing at the end of this trip, I got comments from parents saying they learned, too. That's the hope — that it's a trickle-down waterfall that infiltrates and impacts people in positive and healthy ways, through small conversations and these small moments of education and growth that people can have.

DR. DENT: I think what you're doing is so powerful, and it excites me even more to see how the BJC Fellows Program had such an impact in your life. You've really asked yourself the question, "How can I continue to pay this forward?" and you're sharing with a younger generation, inviting them to think deeply about religious freedom, history and the role of religion in the public square in a broader sense. What would you say to others who want to take that same initiative?

REV. MARTIN: Start small — with whatever small looks like in your setting. I don't have a huge budget, but I realized that entry for a lot of these places in D.C. is free or maybe a dollar for a service fee.

So, why not? If this is truly important to you, then start somewhere. The importance really hits when we're willing to allow this to infiltrate to others and to share and to spread.

When I got back from the BJC Fellows Program, one of the first things I did is collaborate and have conversations with others in our community. I talked about the program and shared what I learned, and that allowed other conversations to happen. The trips are great. I love doing the trips. But it's three days once a year, and there's more to be done.

Start just showing up and learning

Students from Ardmore Baptist Church engage in conversation with BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman during their visit to BJC's office on Capitol Hill.



and growing and seeing what's going on in your city, in your town, in your state. That helps you be more informed, and it helps you know if you're speaking into something that is speaking to the choir or if it is something that needs to have more relational equity built up and needs more dialogue.

It's a both/and thing: Take groups and do things with young people who are excited and ready to absorb things, but don't do that on an island. Collaborate and be part of things in your own spaces and communities so that those conversations can just be natural things that grow and happen because you're overlapping so much.

DR. DENT: With all you've shared and with all of your experiences, I'd love to ask you how you think about faith freedom for all and what that can look like in our world.

REV. MARTIN: I hope that one day we can just look into spaces in our country where we love and respect each other, no matter where we are in our faith jour-



ney — no matter what that looks like or what kind of faith that is, or if it's no faith at all. We can mutually respect and care about each other as human beings who love this country and are excited about what is happening in each other's lives, and we can celebrate each other.

I think part of faith freedom for all is celebrating our differences and appreciating the nuances of who we are as the human race. And so I think that is my hope — that one day we don't judge each other based on our faith or that we don't stereotype it; that we look at each other

as fellow journey people, just taking the next step in life. And that is my hope, that is my prayer, that is what I look forward to one day.

Have an educational program you want to share with us? Let us know what you're doing! Contact the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation at center@BJCOnline.org.

If you want to bring a student group to BJC, go to BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc.

Freedom to Learn



The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation is lifting up and listening to voices on issues that impact everyone. On May 3, Center Director Dr. Sabrina Dent and fellow BJC staff members attended the Freedom to Learn National Day of Action in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, hearing from diverse communities about the negative impacts of book bans, including how Christian nationalism-inspired policies can lead to the suppression of books of different religious beliefs. They were joined by a host of organizations and multiple generations at the rally.

Students share connections between Christian nationalism and book bans

For this year's Religious Liberty Scholarship Contest, high school juniors and seniors were invited to submit an essay or a TikTok-style video illuminating the connection between Christian nationalism and book bans in the United States. We received submissions from across the country, spanning 25 different states, and we are pleased to introduce our winners and share excerpts from their submissions. Our grand prize winner in each category received a \$2,000 scholarship, and our second prize winners received \$1,000 scholarships.

Essay entries



Grand prize:
Omar Reyes
Houston, Texas

Omar Reyes will attend Johns Hopkins University this fall, majoring in economics and potentially neuroscience while fencing on their varsity NCAA team. "As a proud Muslim American, I cherish the freedom to practice my faith openly and without government interference. It's a right enshrined in the First Amendment and a cornerstone of our nation's commitment to religious pluralism," he wrote, noting that faith freedom is under threat from Christian nationalism. "Proponents of book bans often cloak their arguments in the language of religious freedom, claiming that exposure to 'offensive' or 'immoral' content violates their right to practice their faith. However, this rhetoric distorts the true meaning of religious liberty, which guarantees the right of conscience for people of all faiths and none."



Second prize:
Shreya Nallamothe
Normal, Illinois

Shreya Nallamothe is a rising senior in high school. In her essay, she shared two main reasons she saw people who embrace Christian nationalism engaging in efforts to ban books: to impose their religious beliefs on others and to turn our government into a religious government. She shared some of the country's history of religious censorship in the name of morality, noting that those who embrace Christian nationalism use book bans "to criminalize content and, by extension, to criminalize people." She said one way to support banned books is to read them. "By seeking and celebrating banned books, readers can stop the erasure of marginalized people. Moreover, exposure to diverse viewpoints fosters empathy and breaks down the fear that Christian nationalists capitalize on when censoring texts."

Video entries



Grand prize:
Nathan Monroe-Ramberg
Portland, Oregon

Nathan Monroe-Ramberg will attend Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Canada this fall, pursuing a degree in 2D + Experimental Animation. His video looked at the history of the Comstock Act in the 1800s and its current implications. The Act's namesake, Anthony Comstock, said he thought the laws of the United States should mirror the principles of the Bible. Comstock curated a collection of "immoral" books to show Congress, which then made one of the first book bans in the United States. Monroe-Ramberg encouraged all to vote for politicians that protect your right to learn, right to read and right to religious freedom.



Second prize:
Jakub Kozupa
Round Lake, Illinois

Jakub Kozupa will attend Lake Forest College, studying economics. In his video, he says those who support Christian nationalism want to censor books they deem "un-Christian" — a "broad characterization" that "includes books with LGBTQ characters and themes, depictions of heavier topics like rape or abuse, and deeper discussions about racism." Kozupa said their goal is to "demoralize youth who relate to these experiences so they won't speak out against Christian nationalism as adults." He offered ideas for change, including talking about the issue on campus, attending school board meetings and reading the banned books.



Respecting Religion marks 100 episodes and 100,000 downloads

BJC's Respecting Religion podcast continues to reach new audiences and new milestones, hitting more than 100,000 downloads just before the conclusion of its fifth season.

Since February 2020, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler and General Counsel Holly Hollman have been sitting down for conversations about religion, the law and what is at stake in our world today for faith freedom. Continuing BJC's long tradition of providing educational information and resources, the podcast offers a conversational window into our perspective and advocacy. It explores the religion angle of any story, be it something happening at the Supreme Court, in Congress or in a local community.

"Over the past five seasons, we have found plenty of content to keep us going — keeping us with our headsets on and in front of the mic for these 100 episodes," Tyler said.

"It has been a great chance to bring the rapid-response conversations we have in the office to others," Hollman said. "Something happens, and we want to bring more people into our conversations about how it impacts our shared work of defending faith freedom for all people."

Hear more from both on our 100th episode, which is episode 27 of season five. Tyler and Hollman also take listener questions on the show.

The fifth season concluded in May, and the 30 episodes include conversations with more guests, diversifying the topics and voices

featured on the program (read excerpts of two episodes on the next page). Season five also featured examinations of conscience protections in court cases involving abortion, former President Donald Trump's endorsement of a new Bible, the impact of religious holidays on school calendars, and reviewing various scenarios to determine if they are a reflection of Christian nationalism.

The summer is a great time to catch up on conversations you might have missed. Respecting Religion is available on your favorite podcasting provider, and you can access show notes and transcripts of episodes by visiting BJCOnline.org/RespectingReligion.



Excerpt from Season 5, Episode 15:

Black America's changing religious landscape

Released Feb. 8, 2024

[Dr. Sabrina Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation; and Dr. Anthony Pinn, founding director of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning at Rice University, joined Holly]

DR. ANTHONY PINN: I think there's a common assumption based upon statistical information that Black folks are more religious than any other population in the United States. A high percentage of African Americans, when asked, say they are religious. Now, the questions that prompt that response, though, are rather narrow. They don't get into the details of any particular tradition, so a large percentage of African Americans say they believe in God. Now, what they mean by that is an open question.

I think what is happening is a greater awareness of the complexities of the religious landscape of Black America. It's always been diverse. Nonbelievers have always existed. There's always been this complexity. We've just been slow to recognize it — we looked at Black communities and tried to understand them, interpret them, only through the lens of the Christian faith. Anything that didn't fit that got wiped out. ...

DR. SABRINA DENT: When I speak to people and share that I do religious freedom work, people are often confused. And depending on who I talk to, sometimes they put more effort in trying to figure out what I believe in terms of my theological or spiritual beliefs versus really understanding that I'm really fighting and advocating for everyone to believe or not believe and show up however they choose in the world according to their conscience.

And sometimes it is very frustrating, especially being a Black woman in America, as we talked about earlier. When the assumption is that I should identify as Christian and a certain type of Christian, that causes moral injury to me in the moment. ...

I'm really passionate about [the work that I do] because of the people that I know, the communities that I care about — and that is very expansive — and the people that I hold in care and that hold me accountable. ...

I've learned that that community of care might not look like me, but ... when I care about the Black community the way that I do, when someone responds differently or negatively to what I do as part of my vocation — what I do as part of what I believe is my call — I can't let that stop me from really doing the work: to continue to advance the work of protecting and advancing faith freedom for all and helping people to really understand that. It is critically important that we value what is written in the First Amendment and that we value church-state separation for the fact that it protects all of us. It allows all of us to thrive.

Excerpt from Season 5, Episode 29:

LGBTQ rights and religious freedom

Released May 16, 2024

[Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, BJC's communications director, filled in as a guest co-host for this episode]

HOLLY: There are religious traditions within Christianity and outside of Christianity that have not and probably will not, at least soon, change their views on marriage and human sexuality that are at odds with the majority of the population. And for the reasons stated earlier, it's not always easy to characterize precisely the thinking in those traditions on what can be a complex matter of theology and practice with regards to human sexuality.

But what I've seen through the years is that many within those traditions that, I would say, take a hard line or what they would call a more traditional view, that many of them want to find a way to navigate this respectfully, either as a matter of being good neighbors or just the lived reality of knowledge and love for LGBTQ people that they know. ...

GUTHRIE: We can come to compromise in a pluralistic society, but we should be respectful of people's different theological views and different public policy views and not broadly describe pro-LGBTQ individuals as secularists who are doing away with tradition on one hand or the anti-LGBTQ individuals as bigots whose religion is hate. Neither is an accurate description of many people. ...

And since you brought up *Obergefell* [the 2015 Supreme Court decision finding a right to marry], I think we should go back and reflect upon something that was in the kind of cultural and policy discussion at the time, which was that same-sex marriage, as the civil law of the land, would infringe upon the practices within religious communities, forcing pastors to do same-sex marriages or closing churches that wouldn't do same-sex marriages, and that allowing same-sex marriage to exist would be a threat to religious liberty.

That is completely unrealized, and frankly, I think it was always a disingenuous argument against making same-sex marriage the civil law of the land. And in the now almost decade since *Obergefell*, there have been no closures of churches. There have been no pastors forced to do gay weddings.

HOLLY: I remember that. There was a great deal of fear-mongering before *Obergefell*, as same-sex marriage was approved in different states. Part of the argument against it that we heard from some quarters was that it was going to harm churches.

And we always knew and often said: the civil law was not going to demand that houses of worship change how they conduct marriages. We just knew that from our experience and how churches have so many different practices when it came to marriage.

Perspectives on sharing the nation

2024 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures focus on race, religion and citizenship

By Jeff Brumley, Baptist News Global

The “Make America Great Again” movement represents not only a yearning for a mythical golden age in American history but a strident campaign to transform the United States into a totalitarian nation, says the Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans.

“What you hear in ‘Make America Great Again’ is perhaps a euphemism for full-throated authoritarianism. But to make America great again is to usurp the democratic process,” the theologian said during the 2024 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Symposium on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. The annual event is sponsored by BJC.

The Rev. Dr. Evans serves as professor and chair of theology in the public square and director of the Center for Truth, Racial Healing and Restorative Justice at the Berkeley School of Theology in California. At one time he served as interim senior pastor at historic Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta.

He was joined in the panel discussion by the Rev. Dr. Christopher The, director of student research and initiative management for the Association of Theological Schools and a scholar whose research includes a focus on equipping immigrant churches for civic engagement.

The presentation — titled “Whose Country Is It Anyway?” — was moderated by the Rev. Dr. Najuma Smith-Pollard, assistant director of community and public engagement with the University of Southern California Center for Religion and Civic Culture. The April 2 event was held at USC’s main campus in Los Angeles.

All three participants agreed that asking “Whose country is it?” is absurd because it implies there are some Americans who have a legitimate stake in the nation and some who don’t.

Yet it is the question insinuated by conservatives’ longing for pure racial and religious order, according to the Rev. Dr. Evans. “That is to say, as a matter of fact, ‘We are those who support that type of perspective. We have created God in our own image and likeness, and we are God.’”

Challenges to that political theology elicit greater determination to overthrow democracy, he warned. “Therefore, authoritarianism is now the only way that the old regime could possibly return to making America great again. So, the absurdity of the question is self-evident, but from the perspective of those who have enjoyed complete authority since the inception of this nation, the obvious answer is, ‘It is our nation.’”

But the entire premise of the MAGA movement is “absurd on face value” because it expresses a nostalgia for a racially, politically and religiously pure era in American history that never existed, the Rev. Dr. Evans added. “For somebody to say, ‘Make America Great Again,’ there are people in my tradition who would ask another question: When was it great? When you do not include all people at the table? That would be a good definition for ‘great,’ that everyone is welcome at the table.”

The Rev. Dr. The said the discussion was poignant for him as an



American of Chinese and Indonesian descent raised in a California desert community that was not multicultural or multiracial. To an extent, his answer to “whose country is it?” derived from “The New Colossus,” the poem cast on the base of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

“It’s a woman who is shining a lamp. And it seems idealistic to point to that as a symbol, but it’s not something I want to let go of. It’s something that, as absurd as it seems, I don’t want to jettison,” he said.

What if Americans actually valued the concept of sharing the nation with immigrants and others, rather than parceling it out exclusively to “the right kind of people,” asked the Rev. Dr. The. “What would sharing this space look like? Let’s not strive for who can have a bigger slice of one pie but fundamentally rethink the pie itself.”

That will require dedication and struggle to protect democracy and racial and religious justice from white Christian nationalists, the Rev. Dr. The said. “We have to wrestle with the reality that there are folks who will take advantage of a situation merely because it benefits them.”

Humility is another ingredient needed in the movement against MAGA, he added. “Humility leads to seeing others, recognizing others and then actually making commitments that interlock your fate with the other. It’s a communal type of struggle.”

Advocating for democracy can range from writing op-eds to standing up for those being actively oppressed, the Rev. Dr. Evans said. “We are in that space now that we’re going to defend the rights of all people. We are literally on the edge of losing our democratic rights. And for Baptists, that’s good fighting stuff right there.”

The annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State were established in 2004 with a gift to BJC from Drs. Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden. To hear clips of this year’s event, listen to episode 24 of season five of the Respecting Religion podcast, titled “Race, religion and citizenship.”

“The notion of ‘Make America Great Again’ is absurd on face value. For somebody to say, ‘Make America Great Again,’ there are people in my tradition who would ask another question: When was it great? When you do not include all people at table? That would be a good definition for ‘great,’ that everyone is welcome at the table.”

Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans



“Whose country is it, anyway? ... This question about ‘whose’ — not to get all grammatical with it, but there’s a presupposition there of ownership that also troubles me just slightly, because it presumes it’s something that can be and has literally been parceled out to the ‘right’ kind of people who have the capacity as citizens — or not — of a certain lineage to have land that could support and feed.”

Rev. Dr. Christopher The

“The zero-sum game mindset would suggest that we both can’t be well and live well ... which then continues and perpetuates some of the other ‘-isms’ and ‘othering’ that we see, when we’ve actually found out in other spaces that when we work together, then everyone lives well, everyone does better, and there’s actually not a loss of power but a multiplication of power.”

Rev. Dr. Najuma Smith-Pollard



Pictured on the campus of the University of Southern California (left to right): Amanda Tyler, BJC executive director; Rev. Dr. Christopher The, panelist; Rev. Dr. Najuma Smith-Pollard, moderator; Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans, panelist; Rev. Brandon Harris, Associate Dean for Religious and Spiritual Life at the University of Southern California; Rev. Janna Louie, BJC chief of staff; and Dr. Sabrina Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation.



Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson on being Baptist and working for justice

As senior pastor of the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, Calif., the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson is known as a transformational preacher, dynamic leader and trailblazer in ministry. In 2019, she became the first woman called to lead that historic African American Baptist Church, and she also serves as second vice president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, making her the first woman to have a key elected leadership role in the denomination.

This summer, the Rev. Dr. Thompson gave the keynote address at the Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice Trailblazer Luncheon during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Greensboro, N.C. She preached from the passage in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus raised synagogue leader Jairus' daughter from the dead. "Belief shapes how you perceive the world," the Rev. Dr. Thompson reminded the crowd. "It is at the root of every decision you make and influences how you treat other people." After the event, she sat down with BJC to talk about her work and mission. Here are excerpts from the interview:

BJC: The Progressive National Baptist Convention has been one of BJC's member bodies since 1970, and it is a leader in the work for social justice. Can you share with our readers some of its history and key areas of focus?

REV. DR. JACQUELINE THOMPSON: The Progressive National Baptist Convention is important not just because it was the denominational home of Dr. Martin Luther King, but it is one of the few denominations — Black Baptist denominations — that was founded specifically for the work of justice and making sure that there was a reconciliation in our country. We were founded at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. We provided a home for Dr. King, but moreover, that work still continues. And so we continue to do work in voting rights. We continue to do work with labor unions. We continue to do work with those who are marginalized in the community and for those churches who are interested in doing that work and need fellowship and need training and need resources. We provide those as well. So we come together under the banner of justice in Jesus and making sure that churches are resourced in a way that they can do the work.

BJC: What is it about Baptist theology and the Baptist Church that draws you to the work you are doing today?

REV. DR. THOMPSON: I was born Baptist — my father was a Baptist pastor, and I was raised in a Baptist church. When I got to the age where I could make a choice and was exposed to other denominations, I chose to be Baptist. And part of the reason I chose to be Baptist was the priesthood of all believers. It was the idea that every Christian, every disciple of Christ has a responsibility — every disciple of Christ has access to God, every disciple of Christ has influence and a voice in the local church. And so I think that's important. I think it's reflective of God's creative intent, and I think it's affirmed throughout Scripture. And so I love being a Baptist. Besides, John was a Baptist.

BJC: What do white Baptists need to understand about the Black Baptist experience as we all work together?

REV. DR. THOMPSON: I would want my brothers and sisters who are white Baptists to know that we have more in common than we have as differences. I would want them to know that our fellowships are safe and open. I would want them to know that the work of justice that we do is not about blame, but it is about making sure there is equity — that we are still playing catch-up, if you will, from the impact of racism and patriarchy, I dare say, in the United States. And so the work that we do, we do under the banner of Jesus Christ. In him, there's no male, there's no female; there's no Jew, no Greek, no slave, no free. We look to partner with them and to fellowship with them — not just to worship, but also to work.

BJC: Why is working for religious freedom important to you, and how do you see that in our world today?

REV. DR. THOMPSON: One, because I believe it's biblical, right? God gives us a choice on whom and how we serve. Second, it's a part of the tenets of this country. And I think it's important that those kinds of freedoms are protected. I believe when we start trying to superimpose our faith and superimpose our beliefs we are bordering on occultism. And so we have to be mindful and recognize that God is all-powerful.

God is able to bring people in relationship the way God desires to do that. And if we are going to work together, it's going to take all of us, which means there will be those who don't believe what we believe or worship the way we worship, but we are all in this together. We're stronger together, we're better together, and it's going to be good for all of us if we stay committed to each other.

Visit BJC's YouTube channel for more of this interview, and read more about the luncheon event on page 27.

The contested history of voting rights



By Jaziah Masters
Research Fellow for the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

In a democracy, power is vested in the people. The Preamble to the United States Constitution recognizes that the government’s legitimacy and point of highest appeal is to us, the people of the United States. Therefore, voting is at the foundation of American citizenship. It is no wonder why extending the right to vote has been so morally and politically charged throughout the history of this country, and we continue to see efforts cloaked in Christian nationalism that would undermine equality.

So often when it comes to voting today, many think of apathy. Obligation. Inconvenience. Many see voting as a mixed bag — an imperfect science that does not quite equate to the political or policy outcome we might desire.

But what is often lost in these conversations is a holistic understanding of the vote. In the previous edition of this magazine, we outlined the evolution of voting rights in the United States. Make no mistake, many people who worked to expand voting rights did so at high personal costs. They were fined, bloodied, persecuted, lynched, imprisoned and murdered. We will never know the names of many of these advocates. That means something.

Another aspect of voting often lost is the long history of undermining the people’s will. School children throughout this country read the Federalist Papers, a series of essays — penned by the likes of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay — that supported the ratification of the Constitution. Federalist 10, written by Madison, is notable because it addresses a worrying feature of democracy: factions. Left unchecked, the government could be hijacked by those seeking to make decisions in their own best interests and not for the public good.

What I find most interesting about Federalist

10 is Madison’s dismissal of the idea of minority factions. Madison argues that only majority factions are of concern because popular sovereignty (i.e., the vote) would prevent minority factions from taking power. The concept was revolutionary at the time, but when I read about the evolution of voting rights in the United States, I am struck by how often minority factions can use violence and monetary influence to exert their power to quell popular change. Even more surprising is how often voting has been implicated in that injustice.

Constitutional amendments on voting

There are six amendments to the U.S. Constitution that impact voting rights to this day. Though each can now be celebrated as a step towards a more inclusive democracy, none came without a fight and demand for power.

The 15th Amendment granted African American men the right to vote in 1870, but minority factions throughout the South — in the form of white mob violence — ensured that these newly enfranchised Black men would face intimidation, violence and systemic barriers, making it harder to cast a ballot. Practices like “grandfather clauses” were employed throughout the southern United States. Those clauses required only descendants of the formerly enslaved to be subject to additional requirements to voting, such as literacy tests, poll taxes and other residency and property restrictions.

The 17th Amendment provided for the direct election of United States senators in 1913. U.S. senators have the sole power to confirm presidential appointments and ratify treaties. Originally, these legislators were selected by their respective state legislatures. However, this design was rife with corruption, and moneyed

“So often when it comes to voting today, many think of apathy. Obligation. Inconvenience. Many see voting as a mixed bag — an imperfect science that does not quite equate to the political or policy outcome we might desire.”

men seeking Senate seats could easily buy votes in their state legislatures. Several senators were investigated for this charge, and when the state legislatures could not agree, no one was sent. This happened to Indiana in the 1850s, and their Senate seat went unfilled for two years.

The 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote in 1920. Of course, women's suffrage in the United States has a long and (un)surprisingly dark history. Suffragettes were routinely opposed, and their advocacy was disrupted by both male and female opponents. Even cartoonists and playwrights of the time made a mockery of the idea of women exercising the right to vote, speculating that our country's "natural social order" would be upended.

In 1961, the 23rd Amendment granted the District of Columbia electors to the electoral college so that citizens living there could have a vote in presidential elections. However, we know that the more than 600,000 citizens (roughly the same population as the state of Vermont) in our nation's capital do not have voting representation in Congress. License plates throughout the District of Columbia bear the phrase "Taxation Without Representation" to publicize that D.C. residents pay federal taxes without this representation.

The 24th Amendment ended poll taxes in federal elections in 1964. Although mostly (and accurately) associated with the South, several northern and western states — such as California, Maine, Massachusetts, Wisconsin and others — had enacted some form of payment as a prerequisite to registering to vote. Financial barriers to voting disproportionately impact and reduce the political influence of poor and working-class Americans.

Finally, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18 in 1971. During the Vietnam War, men as young as 18 were drafted into the U.S. military, requiring them to fight and possibly die without a legal say in the government's decision to wage war. A youth movement under the slogan "Old enough to fight, old enough to vote" brought about this change to allow all service-aged individuals to vote.

Challenges today

The individuals and groups behind those efforts that led to constitutional change were fighting not just for their right to vote, but they were fighting for what it meant to be a citizen in this country. At the core of that is the ability to make changes to a government designed to represent we the people. Voting has power.

That is why I am so dismayed by efforts we see today to suppress voting rights that are inspired by Christian nationalism, which conflates what it means to be an American and what it means to be a Christian. Christian nationalism suggests, and increasingly promotes, that being a good American means being a good Christian, undercutting the pluralism we have in this country. "The 'Christian' in Christian nationalism is more about identity than religion and carries assumptions about nativism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, patriarchy and militarism," explains BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler. Studies prove that the most ardent proponents of Christian nationalism are fewer than those who reject or resist the political ideology. While small, that minority faction is dedicated to outsized power and privilege to the detriment of the majority.

This spring in my home state of Texas, the state Republican Party adopted its platform, which had troubling proposals showing the influence of Christian nationalism and a way to undermine voting representation. A point entitled "Religious Freedom and Government Schools" urges the Legislature and state board of education to "require instruction on the Bible, servant leadership, and Christian self-governance." It is concerning to see Christian nationalism once again misuse "religious freedom" to advance an exclusionary agenda. The platform also calls for repealing the Voting Rights Act and demands a state constitutional amendment that would require statewide elected leaders to win the popular vote in a majority of Texas counties, not just the popular vote statewide.

As someone who grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, these types of proposals on voting representation are alarming because they specifically target racial minorities and urban voters who are concentrated in relatively few counties. In 1964, the Supreme Court rectified the malapportionment of electoral districts in *Reynolds v. Sims*. Membership to the Texas Senate was fixed at 31 members, and before that decision, each county was limited to one senator. That meant Dallas and Harris counties — the two largest in the state — could only be represented by one legislator each. This intentional design allowed the state Senate to be heavily represented by rural voters, counterbalancing towns and cities which were better represented in the state House. But in *Reynolds*, Chief Justice Earl Warren correctly explained, "Legislators represent people, not trees or acres. Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests."

Examples are not just in Texas. In Louisiana, we see these types of measures combine into a truly wicked case study of Christian nationalism, race and voting rights. When Christian nationalism co-opts the language of religious liberty in government schools, we see measures like the state's Ten Commandments mandate, signed in June (see page 4 for more). That is another effort to inject Christian nationalism into public schools and target impressionable children. In her letter to Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman asked him to veto the legislation, writing: "Nobody should be told by the government how to worship, what Scripture to read, or when to pray. Government-mandated displays of the Ten Commandments disrespect religious diversity and foster conflict in public schools. This legislation wrongly suggests that the government holds religious authority over school children." Texas was unable to pass a similar law in its previous legislative session, but Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has already vowed to join Louisiana in passing a similar bill during its next legislative session.

What is not lost on me is that many of the same legislators favoring the Ten Commandments mandate in Louisiana are also responsible for racially discriminating against Black voters in the previous legislative session. Louisiana was sued and found guilty of creating discriminatory congressional district maps in its past session that diluted the state's Black vote. One third of Louisianans are Black. Yet, the Legislature packed voters from the state's two majority-Black cities into a single congressional district. This act violated the Voting Rights Act; this year, Louisiana voters will rightfully have a second majority-Black district.

These examples illustrate the deep and insidious ways Christian nationalism is never far from — and in fact sometimes overlaps



Prepare to vote in 2024 (and beyond!)

It's never too early to make a voting plan! Whether you are a first-time or seasoned voter, here are some helpful tips and things to consider as you prepare to cast your next ballot:

Register to vote / check your registration

There are online tools provided by each state to access a voter registration form. The National Association of Secretaries of State has a helpful website page at nass.org/can-i-vote. Checking to see if you are registered to vote (and when the next upcoming election is) can take a matter of seconds, and doing it far in advance of an election allows you time to update any needed information.

Know your polling location

Do you know where your polling location is? Has it changed since the last election? Many states post polling locations and sample ballots before Election Day to make it easier to find when and where to vote.

Research candidates

Who are the candidates running for office on your ballot? What are the issues? You can find tools for understanding policies, positions and ballot measures through online research, but local newspapers are also a good source of information. If you support a particular political organization, many offer voting guides to help make informed decisions.

Learn about your early voting options

Election Day is not a federal holiday, and voting on a Tuesday during work hours is simply not feasible for many people. Early in-person and mail-in voting options are convenient ways to vote, and absentee ballots are an option for people who will not be present on Election Day. Each state has different rules about who is eligible for these early voting options, so know the rules where you live.

Find more information about casting a ballot at Vote.org.

with — efforts to limit citizenship and target historically marginalized communities, whether racial or religious. These efforts are historically rooted, and voting rights — or the lack thereof — are very much implicated in Christian nationalism's pursuit of power for a privileged few at the expense of the diverse many.

I am deeply troubled by this growing trend of flagrant disregard for the popular vote. I specifically see these efforts targeted at individuals and communities deemed as less deserving of citizenship. As religious liberty advocates, we have a duty to call out these efforts and hold individuals perpetuating these heinous acts accountable. Religious freedom is not possible without personal freedom, and our voting rights are interconnected. Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, my colleague who leads the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, is spot on when she said, "We must reaffirm the right to vote as a right to dignity and acceptance in our democracy."

What now?

At this point, you may be wondering what the way forward is. That question caused me to attend the Vanderbilt University Law School's Voting Rights in the South symposium earlier this year. The event was hosted by the *Vanderbilt Social Justice Reporter* and the Thurgood Marshall Institute at the Legal Defense Fund. Over two days, we focused on the legacy of voting rights in the South, its current situation, and strategies for ensuring a full and unequivocal right to a fair vote for Black and brown residents. What resonated with me the most was the keynote address by Justice Anita Earls, who is an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. She explained that there are four measures of the concept of an equal right to vote:

1. Equal ability to cast a ballot and have it counted
2. Each vote must weigh the same and count equally to everyone else in the jurisdiction
3. Elected officials should have equal ability to serve
4. Voters should have equal power to hold their elected officials accountable

Justice Earls correctly identifies that a comprehensive approach to equal voting rights is multi-layered. That is why attacks on voting rights impact human dignity and justice. Certain communities — ones historically marginalized — continue to rely on constitutional amendments and federal legislation that guarantee their right to vote. Efforts to undermine voting rights target their political agency and their personal autonomy.

I agree with James Madison: We need more democracy, not less. The skills we learn doing civic engagement in the public square are valuable, and they can lead to real change. These are skills that teach us to appreciate differences, empathize, build coalitions and embrace pluralism. When Christian nationalism suggests that certain Americans are more worthy than others, it is cover for certain Americans enjoying greater citizenship than others. Because voting is foundational to American citizenship, it is often implicated in this rhetoric. More work is needed to achieve the holistic right to vote. History teaches us that safeguarding democracy and citizenship starts — not ends — by casting a ballot. Vote!

Nurturing a narrative of biblical justice

LAUREN W. RELIFORD is a public and population health professional who gives each month to support BJC’s work. A member of the BJC Board of Directors, she also works as the Political Director for Sojourners and SojoAction. She earned her combined Macro-Clinical Master of Social Work at the National Catholic School of Social Service, concentrating primarily on the biological impacts of trauma in Black communities, focusing on birthing women and children as well as the need for policy solutions. Reliford’s work as a public health lobbyist allows her to address the racist, systemic and institutional structures that prevented whole health (physical, mental, behavioral, emotional) for Black and brown communities.

Faith·FULL
member spotlight

What does a political director do?

I am responsible for developing and implementing Sojourners’ policy strategy, positioning, framing, messaging and advocacy for outreach and impact on Capitol Hill and the presidential administration. In this role, I am focused on bridging the gap between social theory, spirituality, research and practice and bringing them to the forefront of our major policy decisions.

The title is somewhat deceptive because I am responsible for directing policy AND political engagement for the organization. Political engagement is more about relationships, cognizant power and political dynamics as well as understanding the “weather” of the political environment we/I am operating in. Policy engagement focuses on legislation and research; it’s looking at the laws and working with technical experts at the micro, mezzo and macro settings to set narratives and form solutions that meet the needs of individuals, families and communities. I am focused on bridging the gap between social theory, spirituality, research and practice and bringing them to the forefront of our major policy decisions.

What does faith freedom look like on a daily basis?

It means incorporating non-Christian faith perspectives in decisions and policy statements. It means working in interfaith spaces to ensure that we are not just working towards a common good for Christians only but one that is expansive and inclusive of the human experience. This largely has taken the shape of coalition work with secular and interfaith partners, primarily around issues of democracy, voting, governance and health



equity. It has strengthened and expanded my work because I can demonstrate that specific policies and politics are not just about a one-dimensional Christian understanding of values; they lean into our shared human values, regardless of religion, creed or belief system. At Sojourners, this has primarily taken the form of work within the Washington Interfaith Staff Community and the broad array of committees and working groups they have formed around crucial social justice issues.

Why do you choose to give to BJC each month?

I genuinely believe in religious freedom and value and appreciate BJC’s work. I am primarily a fan of the fact that BJC highlights what religious liberty also means for Christians as well — oftentimes, the dominant narrative around Christian political beliefs is infected with white Christian nationalism and a viewpoint of God that I am entirely unfamiliar with. I think that work is essential to help nurture and develop a different narrative of what Christian biblical justice looks like that is not dripping with hate, oppression and suppressive theology.



Become a monthly donor today. Learn more about joining BJC’s Faith FULL Community by visiting BJCOnline.org/give-monthly. For more information, you can contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at 202-544-4226, ext. 308, or dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.

School chaplain proposals continue to emerge

Chaplains across the country can add their name to a letter warning about the dangers of this legislation

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis says that public school students going through problems need some “soul craft” as part of their public education. He signed controversial legislation into law authorizing public school districts to allow chaplains to serve in schools. Under the law, chaplains would provide unspecified voluntary services to students whose parents consent.

Adding to the concern that chaplains will use the public school setting to promote their religious beliefs, many opponents noted that the law requires no specific training or credentials before working with school children as a volunteer chaplain under the program.

“As a growing number of chaplains speak out, school districts will see that these proposals are not simple support for students but, in fact, are deeply problematic.”

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman

Texas was the first state to enact legislation permitting chaplains to serve in public schools, and BJC opposed this effort from the start. In partnership with the Interfaith Alliance, BJC mobilized more than 170 Texas chaplains to oppose policies that would allow anyone claiming the title of “chaplain” to serve in schools. The state’s largest 25 school districts opted out of creating such a program. As BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler implored during debate over the Texas law, “Public schools are not the place for religious instruction — that is best left to houses of worship, religious institutions and families.”

Now both Florida and Louisiana have passed legislation to give chaplains access to children in public schools. The new Florida law will allow any school district in the state to vote on whether or not they will adopt a new chaplain policy. Unlike Texas where districts had only a few months to take up the issue, Floridians have no such timeline. Miami-Dade, the largest district in the state and the third largest in the country, was first to have voted to have the superintendent study the feasibility of implementing a chaplain policy. The superintendent is expected to report back with findings by July 17.

The Florida legislation, lacking clear qualifications and standards for participating chaplains, represents a step backward in our pursuit of religious freedom and professional mental health support in schools. As this trend spreads to

other states, our vigilance and advocacy are more important than ever to protect the integrity of our educational system and the rights of all students.

As BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman noted in an interview with the *Florida Phoenix*, advocacy is needed to counter these proposals. “As a growing number of chaplains speak out, school districts will see that these proposals are not simple support for students but, in fact, are deeply problematic,” she said.

Schools do not need chaplains to protect students. “During my time in high school, I was an active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), where I found spiritual nourishment and mentorship among peers and volunteer leaders,” said BJC Digital Communications Associate Georgia McKee. “However, my involvement with FCA was entirely separate from my academic education. We never had FCA leaders roaming the halls, attempting to replace our trained counselors with prayer — that would have been absurd! Such a separation ensured that our educational environment remained inclusive and focused on professional mental health support, while still allowing for personal religious expression.”

What can you do?

While the news cycle may seem quiet about these chaplain policies for now, we know that 2025 legislative sessions are going to be upon us soon. It is imperative that chaplains rally together to unify around the problems with these misguided policies. More than 300 chaplains across the country have already signed a letter asking state legislators to reject the idea that chaplains belong in public schools, and that effort is continuing.

“We care about student mental health and safety concerns, and we believe those concerns should be addressed by the professionals most skilled to meet those concerns,” the letter reads. “As trained chaplains, we are not qualified to address the needs of public school students that these proposals purport to address. We cooperate with mental health counselors — we do not compete with them.”

You can help us rally chaplains to this cause by sharing the letter, and you can monitor your state legislature for any concerning proposals to put chaplains in public schools. If you are in Florida or Louisiana, see if your local school board is planning to take up the issue, and consider testifying at the meeting about the problems with the idea. Visit BJCOnline.org/publicschoolchaplains for more on this issue, including links to the national letter that chaplains can sign and resources you can share.

Seminary honored for trailblazing work toward racial reconciliation

The official seminary of the National Baptist Convention of America received an award recognizing its commitment and leadership toward the cause of racial justice.

BSK Theological Seminary (previously known as Baptist Seminary of Kentucky) was honored with one of the 2024 Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice Trailblazer awards, granted by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's Pan African Koinonia. The annual award recognizes CBF individuals and ministries who charter through unequal and unjust areas of life and initiate proactive resolutions for communities, resulting in greater equity, opportunity, impact and outcomes for all.

BSK Theological Seminary's work in racial justice began as a partnership with Simmons College, a historically Black college in Louisville, Ky., solidifying its allegiance to institutional and communal change.

When BSK formed in 2002, it was a predominantly white seminary. Today, 70 percent of its student body is Black. In 2019, BSK launched the Institute for Black Church Studies, a program providing full tuition to African descendants of slavery as well as racial justice education to white congregations and their leaders.

The Rev. Dr. David Cassady, president of BSK, accepted the award during the annual Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Trailblazer Luncheon. "This was the Spirit at work, creating opportunities and beckoning us in," he said. He also shared advice for others looking to engage in new initiatives.

"People often ask me, 'How can we enter partnerships like we see happening in Kentucky between these groups?' The answer is, if you're going to begin a partnership between whites and Blacks, it needs to begin with acts of justice, something to repair the damage that has been done over generations. The concrete answer is to connect with Black leaders in your community and follow them," the Rev. Dr. Cassady said.

The National Baptist Convention of America is one of BJC's member bodies, and its headquarters are located on the Simmons College campus.

The Rev. Dr. Wayne Weathers, senior pastor of Vision of Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pa., also received a 2024 McCall Racial Justice Trailblazer Award. While a student at Virginia State University and Duke University Divinity School, the Rev. Dr. Weathers participated in and organized peaceful civil rights marches and initiatives against police brutality. He also fought for the protection of voting rights and to secure equal funding in underserved schools. He continues to fight for equality as an adjunct professor at the Center for Urban Theological Studies at Lancaster Bible College and as the Political Action Chair for both the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity and the Pennsylvania Baptist Association.

The Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson, second vice president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, was the keynote speaker at the luncheon. Hear more from her on page 21.

—From BJC, CBF and BSK staff reports



Pictured left to right: Rev. Erica Whitaker, associate director of BSK's Institute for Black Church Studies and a 2021 BJC Fellow; Rev. Dr. Samuel Tolbert, president of the National Baptist Convention of America and a member of the BJC Board; Rev. Dr. David Cassady, president of BSK Theological Seminary; Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley, CBF Pan African Koinonia Field Ministry Coordinator and immediate past BJC Board Chair; Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, CBF Executive Coordinator and a member of the BJC Board; and Rev. Kasey Jones, CBF Coordinator of Outreach and Growth.

North Dakota is the front line when it comes to Christian nationalism

BJC Communications Director Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons appeared on Live with Tyler Axness on KFGO radio in Fargo, North Dakota, on May 22, 2024



GUTHRIE GRAVES-FITZSIMMONS: When a lot of your listeners hear this term — Christian nationalism — it may conjure up something good. “Christian” — many people are Christian — and “nationalism” sounds like love of country. But Christian nationalism is an ideology that conflates our religious and political identities, and it warps and distorts both. It combines what it means to be a Christian — I’m a Christian, a Baptist, I’m one of two billion Christians all around the world, the body of Christ knows no national allegiance — and I’m also an American, and those two ideas are separate, and yet Christian nationalism tries to combine them for political gain. ...

The church should not be co-opted by any politician. The politician is free to come to the church and learn and participate in the activities as a member. But when the church is turned into a partisan political committee, that erodes any sort of independence that it has and also will limit the preaching and teachings of the church — they’re looking to some party’s platform instead of looking to the Bible.

Rastafarian whose locks were cut in prison appeals case to Supreme Court

By Fiona André for Religion News Service, May 15, 2024

On May 3, a Rastafarian serving a five-month sentence in a Louisiana state prison filed a Supreme Court petition to seek damages after his jailers cut his dreadlocks, a hairstyle he said he wore for religious reasons. ... At stake is not only [Damon] Landor’s right to grow his hair, but a provision of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which governs such regulations, regarding the payment of damages in cases of violation. ...

[BJC’s Holly Hollman] explained that the RLUIPA was passed after congressional testimonies highlighted the need for greater protection of religious rights in the fields of land use and institutionalized individuals.

But its lack of detail on the notion of “appropriate relief” leaves room for various interpretations. “It’s a wide-open term that, on its face, certainly could include damages, and it can sometimes be written to have more restrictive damages clauses, and that’s not the case here,” said Hollman, noting that without the prospect of damages, it is more difficult to ensure that prisons will respect these prisoners’ rights.

MSNBC’s AYMAN

MSNBC’s Ali Velshi interviewed BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler on June 1, 2024, for a segment on the AYMAN show about Christian nationalism in Texas and across the country.

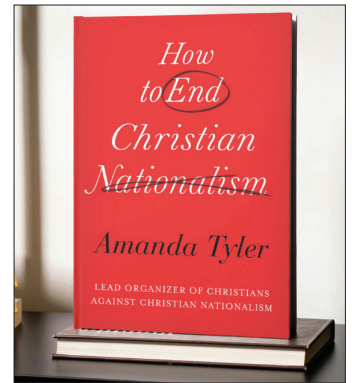
AMANDA TYLER: Christian nationalism uses the symbols and the language of Christianity, the veneer of Christianity, turning Jesus into a mascot for all of these political claims. ... For Christians like myself, we need to normalize speaking out against Christian nationalism. We are in the best position to explain to people how Christian nationalism is a gross distortion of the teachings of Jesus. How these attempts, for instance, to teach the Bible in public schools and to children as young as kindergarten — to teach the Bible as an authoritative text — is an attack on our religious freedom just as much as it is an attack on the religious freedom of our neighbors who practice different faiths or those who don’t claim a faith tradition. ...

I think it’s incumbent on Christians to take their place in the public square, to advocate from their faith-based perspective against Christian nationalism. We can have faith-based advocacy without insisting that our particular religion be privileged in law and policy. That is, in fact, the foundation of religious freedom in this country. And we are seeing that foundation of religious freedom under attack by Christian nationalism right now.



Hear what people are saying about *How to End Christian Nationalism*

A new book by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler is set to release on October 22 from Broadleaf Books. *How to End Christian Nationalism* will distinguish the political ideology of Christian nationalism from the teachings of Jesus, and it provides Scripture and action steps at the end of each section for further reflection. Pre-order your copy today! Visit EndChristianNationalism.com for a link to order it from the publisher or other sites. Here are a few early reviews of the book:



“Amanda Tyler’s book is an indispensable tool in renewing civic engagement and democracy in America in these polarizing times. With the rise of theocratic and authoritarian organizations, *How to End Christian Nationalism* is a foundational text for anyone who cares not only about America’s past but about its future.”

—**Anthea Butler**, author of *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* and Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought and chair of religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania

“Clear, concise, and compelling, *How to End Christian Nationalism* is the perfect book for anyone confused about Christian nationalism and wondering what they can do about it. All American Christians who love their country would do well to read this book and take its lessons to heart.”

—**Kristin Kobes Du Mez**, author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*



Amanda Tyler, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and Anthea Butler appear together in 2022 on a program on Christian nationalism, broadcast by Al Jazeera English.



Rep. Jamie Raskin speaks with Amanda Tyler after she delivered testimony before Congress in December 2022.

“In her soulful, unflinching, and powerful new book, Amanda Tyler gives all Americans — but especially serious Christians like herself — the means of constitutional, theological, political and psychological self-defense against the toxic ideology of white Christian nationalism. Anyone who has wondered about the relationship between this surging fanaticism and what happened on January 6 should look no further. This book is a labor of love for Tyler’s country and her faith, and it is a gift to America in dangerous times.”

—**Rep. Jamie Raskin**, attorney, law professor, and U.S. Representative for Maryland’s 8th Congressional District

“The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in human history. To achieve our potential as a country, we must welcome the contributions of people of all faiths and none, and strengthen the bonds between them. To do that, we must defeat the scourge of Christian nationalism. This book will show you how.”

—**Eboo Patel**, founder and president of Interfaith America and author of *We Need to Build: Field Notes for Diverse Democracy*



Eboo Patel delivers BJC’s 2020 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on the campus of SMU in Dallas, Texas.

Honorary and memorial gifts

Any gift you make to a BJC-related program can be in honor of or in memory of someone. You can make a gift to **BJC**, a gift designated to the work of the **BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation** or a gift directly to the **Christians Against Christian Nationalism** campaign.

Simply send a note with your check or specify who the gift should recognize when you give online at BJCOnline.org/give, BJCOnline.org/Center or ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org.

In honor of Rosemary Brevard
By Jeanette Holt

In memory of Ruth Brunner
By Mary Blessing

In memory of Christopher Moore
By Pamela Moore

In honor of Greg Carey, Ph.D.
By Henry McQueen

In memory of Billy Carter
By Crystal Carter

In memory of Roger Paynter
By Joe Phelps

In honor of Mary Carol and Dan Day
By Austin and Betty S. Connors

In memory of Russell Chappell
By Ka'thy G. Chappell

In memory of Hugh C. Peacock Jr.
By Michelle M. Peacock

In honor of Marion Dykes
By Myrl D. Quillen

In memory of Jack Clayton
By Leeann Graves

In memory of Dr. Robert Sandford
By Bettina Sandford

In honor of
Rev. Joseph and Joyce Ellwanger
By Barbara Pfarr

In memory of James M. Dunn
By Ken K. Williams
Dana B. Martin
Clarendon L. Mulford
Stephen E. Gooch

In memory of Susan Sanders
By Gilbert Sanders

In honor of James Madison
By Ray Matthews

In memory of
Sister Mary Blaise Sorensen
By Barbara Pfarr

In honor of Madison McClendon
By Michelle McClendon

In memory of Roy Gene Edge
By Cindy L. Edge

In memory of Dr. Roy Vickery
By Stephen E. Gooch

In honor of
The Rev. Canon Debbie Royals
By Susan Giamportone

In memory of Ludie Hatten
By Ivan Marable

In memory of
The Rev. Dr. Elmer West
By Nancy Plott Williams

In honor of Amanda Tyler
By Patsy Meier

In memory of June Holland
By Melanie M. Dover

In memory of Daniel Weiss
By Daniel Weiss Jr.

In honor of Brent Walker
By Mary Carol and Dan Day
Nelson Granade Jr.
John Pierce
Daniel R. Swett
Lourie Russell
Elaine Bleakney
Simeon May
Marsha Rydberg

In memory of Lucas Horan
By LaRinda Horan

In memory of Roger and Mabel Horan
By LaRinda Horan

In memory of Glenda Williamson
By James Williamson

In memory of Steve Lovell
By Beverly Godby

In memory of Robison B. James
By Anne James

In honor of Brent and Nancy Walker
By Mark Johnson

In memory of
Orba Lee and Peggy Malone
By David W. Malone

To the North Texas work of
Christians Against
Christian Nationalism
in honor of Amanda Tyler
By Nancy W. Marcus

In memory of Dr. Donald E. Meier
By Patsy Meier
Stephen E. Gooch

Your support makes an impact in our work across the country.

Thank you for your gifts that sustain our efforts to continue to protect faith freedom for all and work to end Christian nationalism. What we do is only possible with you!

Meet BJC's summer interns

ASHLEIGH HAMPSON, from Alpharetta, Ga., is a rising senior at Wake Forest University. Pursuing a degree with a double major in Politics & International Affairs as well as Religious Studies, Hampson has a particular interest in how religion and the law influence each other. She previously completed an internship with the Children's Defense Fund's Freedom Schools program, and she is active in her school's Office of Civic and Community Engagement.



The daughter of Rebecca and Nat Hampson, she is active with Wake Forest's Episcopal Student Fellowship. Hampson plans to pursue a career working in the field of religious liberty or the broader nonprofit space.

PERLEI TOOR is from the Netherlands and has been raised in South Korea, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. She is a student at Harvard Divinity School, working toward a Master of Theological Studies with a focus on Religion, Ethics and Politics. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Philosophy at University College Utrecht, where Toor worked as the university's Student Ambassador Coordinator.



She is the daughter of Jolanda Houthuijsen and Arjan Toor, and the eldest sibling of Krijn Toor and Emma Toor. After the internship, Toor plans to continue pursuing the work of fighting for faith and freedom for all in an international context.

REAGAN WILLIAMS, from Oklahoma City, Okla., is a graduate of Tufts University, earning a bachelor's degree with a double major in Civic Studies and Religion. She previously completed internships at the Boston Municipal Court in the Family and Probate department and with Boston criminal defense attorney Rosemary C. Scapicchio.



The daughter of Jana and Tyler Williams, she grew up in the Baptist tradition. Williams will attend Harvard Divinity School this fall in pursuit of a Master of Theological Studies with a focus on Religion, Ethics and Politics, and she plans to attend law school in the future.

Invite BJC to preach at your church

Looking to address what the Bible teaches us about religious freedom during your worship service? BJC loves visiting Baptist and other Christian churches to preach the Gospel, which we believe calls us to defend faith freedom for all.

We have staff members located across the country who can visit your church. They are also prepared to lead small group or church-wide discussions on religious liberty and Christian nationalism in addition to preaching.

Visit [BJCOnline.org/bjcpredaching](https://www.bjconline.org/bjcpredaching) for a collection of sermons and contact information. You can also visit our YouTube channel at [YouTube.com/@BJContheHill](https://www.youtube.com/@BJContheHill) to see additional sermons. Here are excerpts from a recent sermon by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler.

In a sermon titled "Holy Pluralism," Tyler preached on the day of Pentecost, speaking to St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., on May 19. Focusing on the text found in Acts 2:1-21, she talked about how the Holy Spirit is unbound, unpredictable, uncontrollable and unprecedented.

Pentecost, or "Shavuot" in Hebrew, is a Jewish holiday that takes place 50 days after Passover. But, modern Christians around the world celebrate Pentecost as the beginning of the church.

"This amazing event has captured our liturgical imagination, with red and dancing flames and tongues of fire," she said, recounting the events of the biblical Pentecost that included rushing wind, the vision of divided tongues, and the ability for those gathered at the first Pentecost to speak in other languages.

"I think it is telling that The Spirit does not create one language that all are able to hear but rather rejoices in the multiplicity — in the diversity — of the people gathered," she said. "This is not a Spirit of assimilation but rather a Spirit of pluralism.

"The boundless grace of Christianity, the power of the Holy Spirit, reminds us that we are continually called to return to our beginnings as a movement," she continued, noting that Pentecost reminds us how the Spirit can disrupt a worldly order.

"The love of God through the Power of the Holy Spirit is in us all. God celebrates our beautiful pluralism and yearns for our joining across borders that divide us to work together for God's kingdom on Earth. It is revolutionary, but not a political revolution. It is a love revolution that threatens empire everywhere. We may not have been in the room for that first Pentecost, but the Spirit has been poured out on each of us with this bold mandate to be witnesses for Christ to all the world," Tyler said.

Interested in a BJC internship?

The deadline to apply for the spring semester is September 20. Visit [BJCOnline.org/internships](https://www.bjconline.org/internships) for deadlines and details about the various opportunities.

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Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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Freedom to learn

BJC is listening to and learning from voices on issues that impact everyone. Read about the Freedom to Learn rally on page 14.



In the news

We are continuing to speak out about the dangers of Christian nationalism. See page 28 for some recent media appearances.