

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

BEHRELL'S
The nationally
famous
Breads Baked 1851
Used Feb. 24, 1900
"One of the best breads
ever baked in America!"

Launching the Religious
Freedom Immersion Experience

AMANDA TYLER reviews recent
attacks on religious freedom

HOLLY HOLLMAN on protecting
churches from immigration raids

Listening to lived experiences
in *African Americans and
Religious Freedom*

Remembering former
President Jimmy Carter

The power of local organizing and advocacy

At BJC, we are committed to defending religious liberty and resisting Christian nationalism, and we know this work is strongest when it pairs local organizing with advocacy at the national and state levels. Thanks to your generosity, we've been able to support grassroots efforts, influence public policy and amplify voices that call for justice and equity.

New LOCAL GROUPS are emerging across the country to counter Christian nationalism, and they are key to this work. Read more from our community partnership manager, Joy Pettigrew, on pages 12-13.

The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation piloted a new RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IMMERSION EXPERIENCE, lifting up narratives that often are overlooked or ignored. Focused on sites in and around Richmond, Va., the program used innovative experiences and interactions to create new connections about religious freedom. Read about this experience on pages 16-21.

Across the country, BJC is working to oppose harmful legislation that threatens religious freedom. In addition to ACTION ALERTS to contact lawmakers about an effort to declare a sermon a "distorted message" and a national push for school vouchers (see more on pages 6-7), we're also pushing back against state legislation that harms religious freedom. We helped mobilize people of faith in Montana to call out the dangers of a bill that would mandate posting the Ten Commandments in public schools, and similar efforts are happening in Alabama, Texas and other states.

We're also working IN THE COURTS, filing briefs to defend faith freedom (see page 4) as well as working to bring groups together to challenge harmful immigration policies that violate the religious freedom of churches and congregations (see page 5).

In partnership with the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, we re-launched *AFRICAN AMERICANS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES*, an important collection of essays providing novel interpretations of religious freedom informed by African American culture, history, ideas and religious experiences. Read more on pages 8-11.

Your contributions make it possible for us to equip individuals with the tools to protect rights and ensure faith remains voluntary, not coerced. We remind courts and lawmakers alike that it is not the role of the government to dictate religious beliefs or favor one faith tradition over others.

Your support impacts our country — locally and nationally. Together, we are building a movement to resist Christian nationalism, defend religious liberty, and promote a vision of faith rooted in justice and equity. Your generosity fuels this mission.

You can support our shared work by donating online — either at BJCOnline.org/give or using the QR code on this page — by mailing a check directly to our headquarters (payable to BJC), or through planned giving instruments, such as donor advised funds, stock transfers and bequests. If you have questions about how you can contribute to our mission, please contact the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Davis, BJC's director of development, at jdavis@BJCOnline.org.



COVER PHOTO: The Rev. Dr. George C.W. Lyons Jr., pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Va., speaks to participants in the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience about Black clergy who engaged in collective resistance and advocacy. He included the story of the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, who pastored the church from 1953 to 1960 and served as the president of the local chapter of the NAACP. The Rev. Walker then became the first full-time executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and helped organize major protests for civil rights. Read more about the immersive experience that lifted up stories and created connection on pages 16-21 of this magazine.

Attacks on religious freedom

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

In the midst of the intentional chaos of the first weeks of the second Trump administration, there has been a concerning string of attacks on religious freedom, including on the freedom of Christians. The threats are made more acute by the fact that they come from a strongman leader and his enablers who claim to be acting on behalf of Christians.

It began immediately after President Trump took the oath of office in the Capitol rotunda on Jan. 20, 2025. “Just a few months ago, in a beautiful Pennsylvania field, an assassin’s bullet ripped through my ear. But I felt then and believe even more so now that my life was saved for a reason,” he said during his inaugural address. “I was saved by God to make America great again.” This declaration of a religious anointing of President Trump mixes religious and secular authority in dangerous ways.

But less than 24 hours after he said those words, President Trump lashed out at the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, Mariann Edgar Budde. At the end of her sermon during an interfaith prayer service on Jan. 21, Bishop Budde spoke directly to the president, appealing to his faith and asking him to show mercy to the people who are scared, specifically gay, lesbian and transgender children and children of immigrants afraid that their parents may be deported. Some members of Congress have since moved to officially denounce Bishop Budde’s sermon as an act of political activism and not a true interpretation of Scripture.

The religious motivations and integrity of Catholic and Lutheran organizations that deliver social services to people in this country and around the world have also been maligned by Vice President JD Vance, Elon Musk and former general Michael Flynn in the first days of the administration, including the latter making baseless claims of “money laundering” by Lutheran agencies partnering with the government through USAID contracts.

While attacking Christians that oppose his policies, President Trump also has signaled that he intends to promote the views of other Christians whose positions align with his priorities. On Feb. 6, President Trump signed an executive order to establish a task force “to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias.” The examples of existing bias given in the order include prosecutions of anti-abortion activists

who attempted to block access to legal abortions, including through threats towards and attacks on clinic employees and women seeking health care. The document states: “My Administration will ensure that any unlawful and improper conduct, policies, or practices that target Christians are identified, terminated, and rectified.”

The order is troubling in several ways. First, there is no widespread anti-Christian bias in the United States, which is a majority Christian country. Doubling down on this false narrative detracts from the very real Christian persecution that is happening in other countries around the world today, as well as this country’s high levels of antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias and violence.

Furthermore, there is a real possibility that this task force will be used to try to impose a theological conformity through government action that will harm everyone’s religious freedom, including the freedom of Christians whose views diverge from the policies of the Trump administration. The hypocrisy of an administration targeting Christians with false accusations and denigrating rhetoric on the one hand and promising protection of Christians on the other shows favoritism for certain views instead of promoting religious freedom for all.

In 1804, Baptist preacher John Leland wrote, “Experience, the best teacher, has informed us, that the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity, has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did. Persecution, like a lion, tears the saints to death, but leaves Christianity pure; state establishment of religion, like a bear, hugs the saints, but corrupts Christianity, and reduces it to a level with state policy. Magistrates frequently love the advantages of Christianity more than the precepts of it, and flatter themselves that they are doing much for God, and themselves, when they make laws to protect what they esteem the truth of Christianity, and to reward the preachers of that truth, but every law which they make of that complexion, proves their aversion to the scheme of pure Christianity.”

Beware the invocation of “religious freedom” by an administration that has already shown that it will move to marginalize people and organizations — including Christians — that are critical of its policies. The prophetic advocacy of Christians to these injustices and attacks on liberty are crucial in these perilous times.



Supreme Court to hear three religion cases

Since the previous edition of this magazine, the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review three separate cases in its current term that could impact church-state jurisprudence.

Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission

In a case set for oral argument March 31, the Court will review a decision of the Wisconsin Supreme Court concerning the interpretation and application of a religious exemption in the state's unemployment compensation laws. Wisconsin law provides a statutory exemption for churches and religious organizations operated primarily for religious purposes. In this case, Catholic Charities challenged a ruling that denied the exemption based on criteria it asserts violates the First Amendment.

Oklahoma Virtual Charter School Board v. Drummond, consolidated with St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School v. Drummond

In these consolidated cases, the Court will weigh in on a closely-watched controversy in Oklahoma that threatens to reshape the landscape of church-state law surrounding government funding of religion. It will consider whether the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause requires Oklahoma to include privately owned religious schools in its charter school program, despite Oklahoma law and decades of Establishment Clause jurisprudence barring direct taxpayer funding of religious instruction.

The fact that the U.S. Supreme Court decided to review the charter school funding case — after the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled against it — raises concerns that a majority of Supreme Court justices are poised to further erode constitutional safeguards restricting taxpayer funding of religion.

The consolidated cases arise out of a 2023 decision by the Oklahoma Charter School Board to approve a Catholic school's application for charter school funding, making it the first religious charter school in the country. The board's action drew immediate condemnation. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler warned that "funding private religious schools with public dollars violates core

legal principles protecting religious freedom for all." Oklahoma's attorney general blasted the move as "contrary to Oklahoma law and not in the best interest of taxpayers." The Oklahoma Supreme Court agreed, striking down the charter school approval as unconstitutional under both the Oklahoma and U.S. Constitutions. Oral arguments for the case will take place April 30.

Mahmoud v. Taylor

Another case the Court will hear involves parents challenging a Maryland school district's actions of removing the parents' ability to opt out of reading curriculum assignments that they object to on religious grounds.

The Court agreed on January 17 to review the recent decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* from the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in which the appeals court declined the parents' request for an injunction that would require the school district to reinstate an opt-out provision while the litigation is pending. By a 2-1 vote, the 4th Circuit emphasized that the record in the case is "threadbare" and lacks sufficient evidence that the parents suffered a "cognizable burden" on their religious freedom. The fact that an opt-out from reading assignments is not available, the court wrote, is not in itself enough to satisfy that requirement.

The trial court ruling, which the appeals court upheld, said, "Public schools are not obliged to shield individual students from ideas which potentially are religiously offensive, particularly when the school imposes no requirement that the student" violate the student's faith during classroom instruction.

With or without an opt-out right, the parents remain free to pursue their sacred obligations to instruct their children in their faiths. Even if their children's exposure to religiously offensive ideas makes the parents' efforts less likely to succeed, it is not clear that the impact would amount to a government-imposed burden on their religious exercise. Oral arguments will be heard April 22.

Decisions in all three cases are expected by the end of June.

—BJC staff reports

BJC files brief in Ten Commandments case

One significant church-state test this year surrounds a troubling Louisiana law (H.B. 71) that requires the Ten Commandments to be posted in every public school classroom.

BJC filed an *amicus* brief with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in *Roake v. Brumley*, arguing that the law violates the religious freedom provisions of the First Amendment. Joining BJC on the brief are The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the General Synod of the United Church of Christ; the Rev. Jihyun Oh as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and The Most Rev. Sean W. Rowe, Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church.

The brief emphasizes that there are many versions of the Ten Commandments. H.B. 71 chooses a particular version, picking sides and improperly expressing a preference in long-standing religious debates among and between religious denominations.

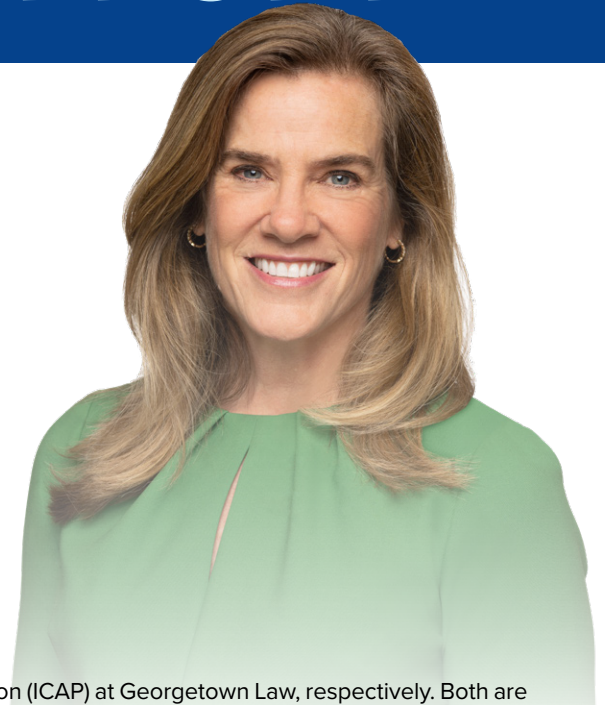
"When the government mandates the posting of a preferred version of a religious text to hang on each classroom wall, it is acting beyond its authority," said BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman.

The 5th Circuit heard oral arguments on January 23, but a decision had not been released by press time for this magazine.

—BJC staff reports

Defending churches and other sensitive locations from government intrusion

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



In response to the torrent of Trump administration executive orders that have unsettled so much, churches are continuing to do what they do best: providing a safe place for congregants and community members to gather, to listen, to mourn, to pray, to study, to organize, to serve and to hope. This exercise of our first freedom — the freedom of religion — is a mark of a free society, and it is something that should never be taken for granted.

At times, exercising religious freedom requires using the courts and Congress to stop government action that would undermine it, such as a recent change in immigration policy that threatens to make churches a target of wide-ranging expansion of law enforcement.

Among its plans to increase immigration enforcement and execute mass deportations, the Trump administration recently abandoned guidance that — for decades — has limited immigration enforcement activity at or around “sensitive locations,” such as schools, health care facilities, houses of worship and social service establishments. By rescinding that policy, our government threatens to disrupt essential services and cause maximum disruption in communities. The new policy gives government agents enhanced discretionary power to carry out enforcement actions — such as searches, surveillance and arrests — at places that were formerly considered off-limits except in the most extreme circumstances.

The negative impact of the policy change on attendance at churches in certain areas was immediate. Fortunately, the opposition to this policy change — particularly by religious communities — has been swift and clear. In two separate lawsuits filed in federal courts, dozens of religious entities from a variety of denominations — including BJC member bodies Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Fellowship Southwest, and Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas — challenged the new policy as a violation of their religious freedom, particularly their freedom of association and rights under the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). The groups in the separate lawsuits are represented by Democracy Forward and the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy

and Protection (ICAP) at Georgetown Law, respectively. Both are experienced nonprofit litigation organizations.

As stated in ICAP’s press release, “By subjecting their places of worship to ICE enforcement actions without judicial warrant or exigent circumstances, the plaintiffs assert that the government is interfering with their religious activities and their ability to fulfill their religious mandate to welcome and serve immigrants.”

In the Democracy Forward case, the district court judge granted a temporary restraining order that prevents any enforcement action at the houses of worship that brought the litigation. While both cases work their way through the courts, members of Congress also are looking for ways to reinstate the sensitive locations policy and make it permanent. Legislation aimed at doing that is gaining support, but it has a long way to go.

While lawmakers and litigators are necessary to prevent encroachment on houses of worship and other sensitive locations, we all have a role to play. Decades of neglect of our immigration system have created a complicated reality for our country — one that law enforcement should navigate with care for human dignity and religious freedom. It is not surprising that many Americans want to see better enforcement of the laws, but at the heart of the decades-old policy against immigration enforcement at sensitive locations is an understanding that the execution of enforcement policies can have a profound impact on communities. It is the responsibility of law enforcement to ensure that its actions do not harm other important interests.

Religious communities depend on the freedom to gather for communal worship as a fundamental aspect of the exercise of religion. In general, churches, synagogues, mosques and other houses of worship provide gathering space for services and other ministries that are offered without regard to immigration status. The lawsuits, alongside the demands of citizens to the executive branch and members of Congress, should be a clear directive for the government that an increase in immigration enforcement need not violate essential notions of religious freedom and human dignity.

BJC partners with others in face of threats, confusing guidance from new administration and Congress

President Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as the 47th president on Jan. 20, 2025, returning to the White House after his first term from 2017-2021. In the first weeks of his second term, President Trump unleashed a flurry of executive orders and policies, some of which are harmful to religious freedom and our country's promise of a democracy for everyone.

BJC is partnering with a number of organizations to promote religious freedom in this time and push back against actions that would undermine it. Holly Hollman and Amanda Tyler mentioned some of our activities on pages 3 and 5, including our work with groups challenging the rescission of the "sensitive locations" policy and calling out the "anti-Christian bias" task force. Here are a few additional actions we're watching and responding to, and we have ways you can participate on the next page.

For the latest updates and action alerts, make sure you are signed up to receive emails from BJC by visiting BJCOnline.org/subscribe.

Attacking faith leaders who criticize the administration:

In the wake of Bishop Mariann Budde's sermon at Washington National Cathedral on Jan. 21, several members of Congress are co-sponsoring House Resolution 59, which seeks to declare Bishop Budde's sermon a "distorted message." While differing opinions on matters of faith and interpretation of Scripture are to be expected in a free country, we must continue to be clear: it is the role of faith communities, not that of the government, to decide what is true and right in matters of faith. We have a form linked on the next page to use to contact your representative.

Attempts to defund public schools, create nationwide school vouchers and close the Department of Education:

BJC opposes President Trump's various actions that gut the federal Department of Education and purport to divert taxpayer funds away from public schools and other federally funded programs to private schools, including to private religious schools.

In March, the Trump administration engaged in a series of actions, including Reduction in Force orders, to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. "Public schools are the only education system where students' rights to religious freedom are guaranteed to be fully protected," said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler. "Weakening federal oversight eliminates protections for religious freedom for all students, students with disabilities, and low-income families. It is a blatant move to privatize education, redirecting public funds toward private sectarian schools at the expense of public institutions that serve all children." BJC created a form you can use to contact your

members of Congress about this issue, which is linked on the next page.

President Trump's Jan. 29 executive order titled "Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families" made clear that the administration is going to try to defund public schools in order to fund private education, including private religious education. The order explicitly instructs the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Interior to make recommendations and reports on ways they can use federal funds and grants to support school voucher programs.

"Public funds should be for public uses," Tyler said in BJC's statement opposing the executive order. "The government should not compel taxpayers to furnish funds in support of religion, regardless of whether they adhere to that religion or not."

At press time, Congress is considering two bills that would create a national, federal school voucher program and funnel \$10 billion per year in taxpayer money to private schools and families who homeschool. BJC encourages everyone to let their members of Congress know their concerns about using taxpayer money for religious education, and we created a form you can use about those two specific bills, which is linked on the next page. We continue to raise our concerns on Capitol Hill about the need to protect religious freedom in education through our work with the National Coalition for Public Education.

Targeting religious social service organizations:

Elon Musk and Mike Flynn accused some Lutheran social service organizations of "money laundering" without any evidence, and they promised to halt government payments on contracted funding for social services. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler released an op-ed calling out this issue with Jennifer Walker Thomas of Mormon Women for Ethical Government and Aaron Dorfman of A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy. The comments are not just an attack on the Lutheran community — they are an attempt by one individual to redefine, without consulting Congress or the people, who is worthy of dignity, who is worthy of help and who is allowed to offer that help. It is an assault on the carefully constructed government systems that enable our collective ability to serve the most vulnerable, and it is a direct violation of the principle of religious freedom at our nation's core. An interfaith letter calling for oversight of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency was sent earlier this year, but you can read it at the QR code on the next page and add your name for the future.

—BJC staff reports

Take action!

Scan the QR codes below to go directly to a form that lets you take quick action on each issue, or visit our website at BJCOnline.org/make-a-difference for a list of current opportunities to contact your lawmakers.

Share concern about H.Res. 59

Contact your member of the U.S. House of Representatives about **House Resolution 59**, which seeks to declare Bishop Mariann Budde's sermon — a religious message, spoken freely and in a house of worship during an interfaith prayer service — a "distorted message." Differing opinions on interpretations of Scripture and matters of faith are to be expected in a free country, but it is the role of faith communities — not that of the government — to decide what is true and right in matters of faith. No one has to agree with Bishop Budde's message to oppose this resolution, which wrongly indicates that the government should decide what is acceptable in matters of religion.



Say 'no' to school vouchers

Contact your federal representatives about **H.R. 833 and S. 292**, bills that would create national school voucher programs. Ask them not to divert funding away from our public education system, the only one in the country that guarantees religious freedom protections to all students. Diverting funds away from public schools harms students, families and communities. You can learn more about school vouchers from the National Coalition for Public Education at novouchers.org. Congress needs to hear from people who care about religious freedom in their districts about why school vouchers will undermine religious liberty in their communities.



Protect the Dept. of Education

In March, the federal Department of Education cut its workforce in half, essentially gutting the ability of the agency to fulfill its obligations to students across the country. This reckless move threatens aid for low-income students, resources for students with disabilities, and civil rights protections for all students in federally funded schools. As people who value religious liberty, we recognize that public education is the only system that guarantees students the right to practice (or not practice) religion without coercion. Tell your members of Congress that dismantling the Department of Education eliminates critical oversight that protects religious freedom in public schools.



Ask for oversight of DOGE

In the wake of attacks on Lutheran social service agencies and halts to funding, an interfaith letter calls on Congress and President Trump to provide oversight to the newly-created Department of Government Efficiency, ensuring government does not infringe upon the freedom for religious organizations to practice and honor their faith. Faith-based groups can and do disagree on policy, but there are two things without which Americans of faith cannot be free: 1) a healthy democracy in which faith-based communities can act with courage and discernment and without fear of intimidation or targeting from the government and 2) the right and privilege afforded by the Constitution to freely pursue their values and missions. The letter has been sent, but you can read it and add your name for the future.





Dr. Corey D.B. Walker moderates a panel discussion during an event for the re-launch of *African Americans and Religious Freedom*, held at Wake Washington Center in Washington, D.C.

‘African Americans and Religious Freedom’ aims to get readers on same page concerning democracy

By Rev. Starlette Thomas

The second edition of *African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities* illuminates the need to critically examine religious freedom in our contemporary moments.

The collection of essays explores religious freedom through the lens of African American history and lived experience, rich and dynamic in religious practices, political cultures and knowledge traditions. First released before the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and democracy, a new preface addresses the need for religious freedom to undergo a deep interrogation in our perilous times.

The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation and the Wake Forest University School of Divinity co-hosted an event in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 28 to mark the re-launch of the book, featuring new

conversations with the co-editors, contributors and thought leaders.

“The new preface underscores what many of us have long understood: religious freedom is not a static ideal, but it is a concept that must evolve alongside the realities of our time,” said Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation and co-editor of the book. “This book offers a bold and fresh perspective on what religious freedom means for communities that have been continuously fighting for justice and dignity.”

Dr. Corey D.B. Walker, dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity and co-editor of the book, emphasized the need for more public conversations on religious freedom in our political moment. “The release of the second edition of *African Americans and Religious Freedom* provides a critical opportunity to deepen public conversations on how African American intellectual traditions and faith practices can shape and enrich our understanding of religious freedom,” he said. “In the face of mounting threats to democracy, these conversations are not only timely, they are crucial for reinforcing the foundations of our shared freedoms.”

Contributors Rahmah Abdulaleem and the Rev. William H. Lamar IV joined Dr. Dent and Dr. Walker at the event, alongside Elizabeth Reiner Platt, director of the Law, Rights, and Religion Project at Columbia Law School. During the program, they named the current political reality, expanded attendees’ understandings of religious freedom, and called for a fuller and freer democracy. Like the book, each panelist also offered insights from their personal experiences during their presentations.

Abdulaleem shared her experiences of invisibility in religious spaces, wherein Islam is not considered. “Whose religious freedom are we really talking about?” she asked the audience.

“I stand before you today as an African American Muslim woman lawyer,” she said. “Let’s be honest. When you



“[The Proud Boys] were not just tearing up a ‘Black Lives Matter’ sign, but they were engaging in spectacle. They were engaging in political violence designed to quiet us.”

Rev. William Lamar IV

“Whose religious freedom are we really talking about? Let’s be honest. When you think about religious freedom, you don’t picture someone like me.”

Rahmah Abdulaleem



“[T]he religiosity of the business owner who doesn’t want to sell the cake ... [is] not questioned, but when we get to folks who are ‘speaking truth to power,’ ... they’ve been labeled all sorts of things.”

Elizabeth Reiner Platt





“In the face of mounting threats to democracy, these conversations are not only timely, they are crucial for reinforcing the foundations of our shared freedoms.”

Dr. Corey D.B. Walker

think about religious freedom, you don't picture someone like me.”

Abdulaleem, who serves as the co-chair of the Religious Freedom Committee of the American Bar Association, Section of Civil Rights and Social Justice, noted the different uses of the idea of religious freedom by people who want to simplify it to meet their own desires. “For too long, religious freedom has been used as a sword rather than a shield, a privilege rather than a right,” Abdulaleem said. “If we truly honor this fundamental freedom, we must recognize its full complexity.”

The Rev. Lamar is pastor of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., which was vandalized by the Proud Boys in 2020. A court ordered the Proud Boys to pay the church \$2.8 million, but their failure to do so led to a court awarding ownership of the Proud Boys' trademark to the

church itself. During the event, the Rev. Lamar spoke about the recent ruling and the impact of targeted destruction.

“[The Proud Boys understood] that what they were doing in attacking these churches was attacking the very root of the spaces that have tried to make democracy real here,” he said. “They were not just tearing up a ‘Black Lives Matter’ sign, but they were engaging in spectacle. They were engaging in political violence designed to quiet us and to keep us from asserting our rights to protect ourselves and to worship.”

Platt spoke about the impact of reading the first edition of the book. “*African Americans and Religious Freedom* really pushed me — in a very good, positive way — to take a step back from the Supreme Court and to take a step back from the doctrine and analysis and think about how race has played a [part] in the history and contemporary picture

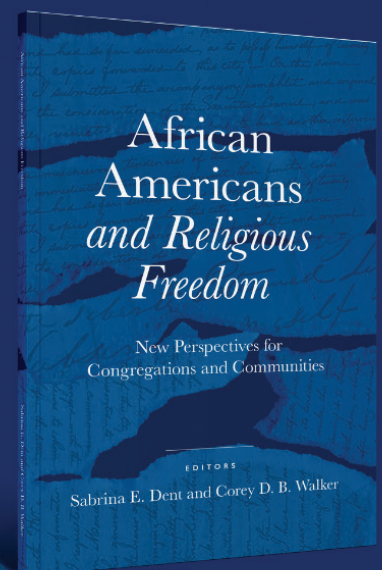
of what religious freedom means,” she said.

Platt offered parallel examples of how the religiosity of groups is treated based on the sociopolitical construct. “So the religiosity of the business owner who doesn't want to sell the cake, their authentic religious beliefs are not questioned. But, when we get to folks who are ‘speaking truth to power’ — when we get to people like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or groups like the Nation of Islam or in Philadelphia the group called ‘MOVE’ — they've been labeled all sorts of things: a communist front, a political group, a gang, including, in some cases in actual legal opinions,” Platt pointed out.

After the individual presentations, Dr. Walker moderated a panel discussion and took questions from the audience. Their inquiries named a desire for even more representation and inclusion

Exploring the cover art

Featuring torn paper with text from David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, the new cover of *African Americans and Religious Freedom* symbolizes the ongoing quest by African Americans to realize a truly just and equitable American democracy for all people. The torn edges serve as a visual reminder of unfulfilled justice — a theme central to this collection of essays. Just as Walker's vision outlived him, this book's second edition continues the urgent conversation on religious freedom, drawing from African American history, culture and ideas to reimagine its meaning today.



“This book offers a bold and fresh perspective on what religious freedom means for communities that have been continuously fighting for justice and dignity.”



Dr. Sabrina E. Dent

of diverse perspectives on faith.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Dent reminded participants that *African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities* is a free resource, and she encouraged everyone to share it widely with the hope that Americans can get on the same page.

The Rev. Starlette Thomas is director of The Raceless Gospel Initiative, an associate editor and host of the Good Faith Media podcast “The Raceless Gospel,” and the author of Take Me to the Water:

The Raceless Gospel as Baptismal Pedagogy for a Desegregated Church.

Read and share the book



You can access a PDF copy of this collection of essays free of charge. By making this resource available without cost, students, faith leaders, scholars, activists and all communities can engage with these critical perspectives on religious freedom without any financial barriers.

Scan the QR code to access the book as a PDF. For a flip-through edition of the book and a recording of the launch event, visit our website at BJOnline.org/AfricanAmericansReligiousFreedom.



Panelists at the launch event, held at Wake Washington Center (left to right): Elizabeth Reiner Platt, director of the Law, Rights, and Religion Project at Columbia Law School; Rahmah Abdulaem, co-chair of the Religious Freedom Committee of the American Bar Association, Section of Civil Rights and Social Justice; and the Rev. William Lamar IV, pastor of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM



Creating change through local groups

By Joy Pettigrew
Community Partnership Manager

When you think about resisting Christian nationalism, you might feel overwhelmed. It can seem too daunting. The problem is too large. It's too entrenched. It's everywhere. Where do you begin?

Christian nationalism gains traction when communities feel powerless and disconnected. Since joining BJC last year as the community partnership manager, I'm actively engaging in conversations with people across our country who are looking for ways to take action. I also am connecting with people who might not be Christian or part of any faith who recognize the importance of Christians providing a counter-witness to Christian nationalism. People in large and small communities are eager to fight back and live out the values of democracy, pluralism and upholding the human dignity of all people.

So one simple — but important — way to resist Christian nationalism is by building and participating in local, civically engaged communities. It doesn't matter what type of community you choose to participate in — it could be joining a book club, volunteering at a community center, or participating in your local Parent Teacher Association. Relationships in your local community are crucial because lasting change happens when people work together. These connections create opportunities for local organizing. All of us can amplify voices, share resources and create a network of mutual support that

“It's not just about resisting — it's about transforming our communities into spaces of inclusion, equity and shared strength.”

can counteract harmful ideologies and policies. It's not just about resisting — it's about transforming our communities into spaces of inclusion, equity and shared strength.

At the start of January, we created a new form that welcomed people to share their interest in starting or joining a local group. At press time for this magazine, we have received more than 540 submissions! Out of those, 128 people specifically signed up to start a local group with our campaign, and that number is still growing.

Sometimes, a special event can spark something bigger, opening the door for new conversations and deeper connections. That's exactly what happened in Winston-Salem, N.C., after an event for Amanda Tyler's book *How to End Christian Nationalism* last year. Recognizing the urgency of the moment, the Rev. Dane Martin of Ardmore Baptist Church took the lead in organizing a local initiative, bringing communities together to chart a path forward. This effort culminated in a powerful first gathering in February.

Although 42 people had registered for the Winston-Salem meeting, more than 96 showed up — filling the room with energy and a shared sense of purpose. People weren't just there to listen; they were eager to act. In small groups, they discussed their hopes and dreams for Winston-Salem, identifying the issues impacting their community and envisioning a better future. They wanted to learn more, connect with one another and take meaningful steps together.

Many other groups are emerging in locations across the country, and we are building our infrastructure and capacity to equip these initiatives. Whether it's a hyper-local or statewide group, people are working to strengthen connections, support vulnerable communities and take tangible steps to uphold the dignity and inclusion of all

people through organizing, education and advocacy. We are actively listening to what these emerging groups need and providing support.

This includes:

- Supporting local groups with the technological infrastructure we have at BJC, including our constituent database that helps us connect people to each other.
- Providing webinars and trainings on skills needed to organize a group and engage in strategic planning. We had our first training February 28, and we are planning several more!
- Offering one-on-one coaching and support, as needed for individual leaders.
- Providing resources, such as a new guide to the first three steps in starting a local group.
- Creating a new fund for local groups, which will provide financial support for their organizing and advocacy efforts. You can learn more about local groups and give to support them by scanning the QR code below.

In addition to community-building, local groups also are able to engage in efforts to push back against harmful policies rooted in Christian nationalism. Across the country, state legislatures are considering bills that blur the line between church and state, such as bills that mandate the display of the Ten Commandments and laws that would create “chaplains” in public schools as a replacement for trained counselors. These policies, often promoted under the guise of religious freedom, actually advance a narrow, exclusionary form of Christianity in public spaces. To support local groups in responding to these challenges in their specific communities and states, we also are sending out action alerts to help people stay informed and make their concerns known to their lawmakers.

If you have a local group working on issues related to Christian nationalism, we want to know! We now have a way to register a group with us, and we’re hoping to feature registered groups on our newly expanded Christians Against Christian Nationalism website. Alternatively, if you’d like to join or start a group, please fill out our involvement form. We can support you, and we will connect you with emerging groups in your area if one is forming!

Together, we can resist Christian nationalism and build communities rooted in justice, equity and love. Change begins with connection — let’s get to work.

Updates from the North Texas group of Christians Against Christian Nationalism

The Texas Legislature returned to Austin in January, and the North Texas Coalition is ramping up its advocacy efforts to push back against school vouchers and anti-immigrant policies.

North Texas Organizer Lisa Jacob (below, far right) joined members of her local group as they traveled to Austin to meet with their lawmakers as part of Fellowship Southwest’s advocacy day.



Plus, after the Texas State Board of Education approved — by one vote — a new curriculum that would infuse the Bible into public school lessons about other subjects, the North Texas Coalition is partnering with groups to train people across the state to take the next step: voicing concerns to local school districts to prevent them from adopting the harmful curriculum. We held a training in February alongside Texas Impact, Texas Freedom Network, Temple Emanu-El, Makom Shelanu, and Arapaho UMC.

Learn more about our North Texas Coalition on their website page: ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org/northtexas

New ways to connect and get involved

As we expand our work and focus on supporting local groups, we are updating our Christians Against Christian Nationalism website, creating a new page for local groups and organizing our resources to make it easier to take action. Go to our new “Start Here” page on the website to see what’s new, and use the QR code on the right to let us know how you want to be involved.



Support local groups

If you aren’t ready to start a local group yourself, you can support this work with a donation as we work with groups across the country in their various stages of development. Scan the QR code to learn more or visit ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org/localgroups.



Jimmy Carter’s Commitment to Religious Liberty Should Guide Us All

By BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler
 Published by TIME on Dec. 29, 2024

... President Carter will be remembered for living out his devout Baptist faith through his pursuit of peace and support for human rights as well as acts of service, such as building homes for Habitat for Humanity. When it came to following Jesus, Carter walked the walk.

Lesser known, and particularly relevant for American politics today, is our 39th president’s commitment to the Baptist value of religious liberty. The United States’ most religious president in recent memory was also the most committed to the separation of church and state. ...

“I just look at death as not a threat,” Carter said during an interview in 1976. “It’s inevitable, and I have an assurance of eternal life.” As we remember his life and mourn with his family, we are also concerned about the threats to the separation of church and state—an American ideal that Carter championed throughout his life. Sadly, people who seem inclined toward a theocracy instead—like many who were part of the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021—continue to organize and gain political power. ...

Thank you, my dear brother in Christ, for being the epitome of a faithful Christian in American public life. May we remember and be inspired by your life during these challenging days for our country and our faith.

For more on the life and legacy of Jimmy Carter, see pages 24-27 of this magazine.



Christian nationalism is rising. So is the Christian resistance

By Benjamin Cohen
 Published by The Forward on Feb. 18, 2025

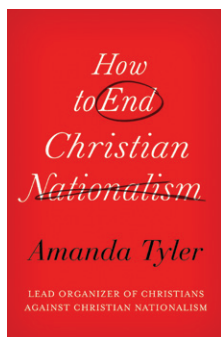
Amanda Tyler didn’t need President Donald Trump to tell her that Christian nationalism was on the rise. She had seen it reshape churches, rewrite textbooks and realign politics.

But when Trump took the podium last month for his second inaugural address, claiming divine intervention in the assassination attempt — “I was saved by God to make America great again” — she saw something even more unsettling.

The standing ovation.

It wasn’t just applause for a president. It was a moment of ecclesiastical fervor, a collective confirmation that America had not just an elected leader, but an anointed one.

Tyler, a lifelong Baptist and executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, was unsettled but unsurprised. She is leading a growing movement within Christianity that is resisting Christian nationalism — not from the outside, but from inside the church itself. “We’re disgusted to see our faith being used to justify discriminatory policies of all kinds,” Tyler said in an hourlong phone conversation. ...



RNS picks for religion and spirituality books of 2024

By the staff of Religion News Service, Published Dec. 24, 2024

Religion News Service named *How to End Christian Nationalism* a top book of 2024. Here’s their description:

As Christian nationalism becomes an increasingly ubiquitous and provocative term, many have struggled to distill what exactly it is, what it looks like and how to confront it. Enter attorney Amanda Tyler, lead organizer of the Baptist Joint Committee’s Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. Her book is a guide for understanding and dismantling Christian nationalism in your home and church and on a political scale.

What a Latina pastor to an immigrant community wants you to know

By Rev. Anyra Cano

In the first weeks of the new Trump administration, ICE began detaining and deporting immigrants across the country, redefining what counts as criminal activity to include presence in the United States without documentation. Fellowship Southwest and the Rev. Anyra Cano share these 10 reminders for all of us during this time.



- 1. This is an opportunity for the Church to unite and live out Jesus' teaching.** It is a time to remember, "Jesus loves ALL the children of the world: brown, red, yellow, black, and white."
- 2. We are One community.** This is not the time to divide ourselves, our ministries, or our love for neighbor by making distinctions between "authorized" or "unauthorized" immigrants — or by drawing lines between the "good" and "bad" immigrants. Let go of terms like "legal" and "illegal." They are dehumanizing and only trigger more division.
- 3. The immigrant community is diverse — across color, race, ethnicity, faith, and backgrounds.** Many immigrant families are made up of mixed statuses. Most of us live in collective communities, where what happens to one of us affects all of us. Our lives are interconnected.
- 4. The Church is not called on to judge who deserves to be here.** We are called to welcome the foreigner, love our neighbor, and share Good News. The Good Samaritan never asked whether his neighbor was authorized, nor did he question why he was in that dire situation. He simply loved through action.
- 5. This is not just a "Latin@" issue. It's a racial issue** — a question of who looks or sounds "American" enough. Racial justice is at the root of our immigration perspectives. It's about upholding human dignity for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin. Black immigrants are at risk, and Native Americans have also been targeted, even advising their communities to carry proof of citizenship.
- 6. This is not just an immigrant issue. It is the Church's issue,** especially when churches are having to make difficult decisions about who they can serve or if they will allow ICE to come into their sacred spaces. Jesus flipped tables when religious leaders set up barriers that kept outsiders or the marginalized from entering the Temple. Church, what tables or unjust barriers placed on immigrants are we willing to flip in our churches? What are we willing to do to create space for refuge, spiritual formation, leadership, and family?
- 7. Immigrant communities and people of color shouldn't be the only ones told to refuse to answer questions about their citizenship status from law enforcement, hospitals, or ICE.** We can all stand in solidarity by resisting and choosing not to answer those questions.
- 8. Help your neighbors by contacting your local school districts** to inquire about their plans to protect children and families from ICE raids during school hours or events. If they don't have one, offer to help them.
- 9. Bills are being introduced to bar undocumented children from attending public schools.** We need your help to advocate against them. In the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe*, it was ruled unconstitutional to deny public education based on immigration status. Additionally, immigrants pay taxes and deserve for their children to have access to the same rights as all other taxpayers.
- 10. Yes, we are fearful and stressed, but we are resilient, and together, we are strong.** Your prayers and thoughts are needed, but we also need your genuine friendship. We need you to empathize with us. Build relationships with immigrant churches in your community. Partner together as resources for one another. Speak up and act with courage.

The Rev. Anyra Cano is the director of programs and outreach at Fellowship Southwest, which is one of BJC's member bodies. Visit fellowshipsouthwest.org to learn more about their work and advocacy. She also serves as chair of the BJC Board of Directors.

Immersing ourselves in religious freedom



A new program expands the narrative and elevates key perspectives



By Dr. Sabrina E. Dent
Director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

“Powerful.” “Challenging.” “Reflective.”
“Truth-telling.” “Necessary.”

That’s how participants described the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience, hosted by the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation in partnership with Wake Forest University School of Divinity. A diverse cohort of 12 individuals joined us January 6-10 in Richmond, Va., for this week-long educational initiative. Designed for seminary students and community members to critically engage with the contentious politics of race and religious freedom in American public life, our journey became an unforgettable lesson in history, community, pluralism and collective resistance.

Our multifaceted program allowed the Immersion Scholars to hear from academics, grassroots organizers, creatives, faith leaders and policy advocates, and we provided a broader story of religious freedom through guided tours and contextual learning at historic

sites, combining theological, museum and civic education. In curating the experience, we paid particular attention to the ways power, violence, knowledge, ethics and pluralism form and frame the discourse across time and space.

Many of our plans changed as two snowstorms and a city-wide water crisis created tour cancellations, business closures and other obstacles. A year’s worth of planning had been reduced to hour-by-hour decisions to move the program forward while ensuring the safety and well-being of the participants. Nevertheless, we persisted as a community of people committed to learning while caring for one another.

You may wonder, why did we go to Richmond? It was the heart of the Confederacy during the period of the Civil War, and there are few better places to explore stories about race, religion and politics while seeking pathways to communal healing that reimagine faith freedom for all. Every location in Rich-



Immersion Scholars read about the grounds of Lumpkin’s Jail, which transformed from a place of abuse to one of learning.

“Every location in Richmond was a clear reminder that symbols, language and diverse perspectives matter.”



ABOVE: The Religious Freedom Immersion Scholars stand outside The Valentine Museum in Richmond, Va. It includes the workshop where many Confederate monuments were crafted as part of an attempt to create a new narrative that the Confederacy's engagement in the Civil War was a noble cause instead of an act of treason.

BELOW: The bronze statue of Jefferson Davis, which was created in the museum and stood in Richmond from 1907 until it was taken down by protesters in 2020, is displayed in the museum in its toppled state, complete with the paint thrown on it and torn pieces of toilet paper still around the collar.

mond was a clear reminder that symbols, language and diverse perspectives matter.

The group felt the gravity of history in our visits to the site of Lumpkin's Jail, also known as the "Devil's Half Acre." It is a place where enslaved people were violently tortured and whipped into obedience, but the property itself eventually became Virginia Union University — a Historically Black College and University founded by American Baptist Home Mission Societies in 1865. It is now referred to as "God's Half Acre" thanks to Mary Lumpkin, a formerly enslaved Black woman who sold the property to create a place of liberation where Blacks could learn to read and write.

We visited The Valentine Museum, which displays various artifacts and statues, including the vandalized statue of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, that once stood tall in Richmond and was crafted by the museum's namesake, Edward Valentine. The 1907 unveiling of the Davis statue contributed to the "Lost Cause" myth, an attempt to rewrite history through a counternarrative that the Confederacy was actually a noble and just cause instead of an act of treason against the United States. This birthed lies about the war being fought to protect the South's rights instead of the profitable institution of slavery and that slavery benefited both the enslaved and oppressor. There was an eeriness to observing these exhibits in the very studio where several Confederate statues and racist caricatures were created.

Marrying the arts with the experience helped all of us reimagine





ABOVE: Dr. Kyran Pew leads participants through the “Graphic Facilitation” exercise to capture and interpret conversations in new ways.

BELOW: The visit to The Valentine First Freedom Center included viewing the first 16 words of the First Amendment and the text of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, keeping the program grounded in the civic pieces of exploring religious freedom.



Instructors and facilitators during the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience:

Rahmah Abdulaleem, co-chair of the Religious Freedom Committee of the American Bar Association, Section of Civil Rights and Social Justice

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation

Imam Michael Abdul Hakim, teacher and leader at Masjid Bilal

Holly Hollman, general counsel and associate executive director of BJC

Rev. William H. Lamar IV, pastor of Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C.

Leslie Luck, director of operations at Polegreen Church

Rev. Dr. George C.W. Lyons, Jr., pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church

William “Bill” Martin, director of The Valentine Museum

Dr. Keisha McKenzie, public strategist and founder of McKenzie Consulting Group

Dr. Kyran Pew, creative and founder of The Black Seminarians Table

Rev. Dr. Nathan Taylor, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies

Dr. Corey D.B. Walker, Dean, Wake Forest University School of Divinity and Wake Forest Professor of the Humanities

a new way of elevating narratives about religious freedom. Dr. Kylan Pew, founder of The Black Seminars Table, led us through an exercise known as “Graphic Facilitation” that uses visuals, colors and words to capture and interpret conversations, ideas and shared experiences. He inspired the cohort to creatively respond to the question, “What is your North Star?” Immersion Scholars designed badges that reflected their guiding principles or grounding place to illuminating a path toward liberation and human flourishing.

Our visit to the historic Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Va. — which also happens to be my hometown — elevated stories about Black clergy who engaged in collective resistance and advocacy to provide pathways to education for children in the segregated city. The ability to touch and browse the church’s archives made the stories about the congregation real and tangible beyond our imagination.

In contrast, our visit to Masjid Bilal in Richmond created opportunities for communal fellowship across differences and respect for other traditions. As we participated in Jumah, known as Friday prayer, we observed the beautiful mosaic of people practicing

IMMERSION continues on page 21



During the program at Gillfield Baptist Church (pictured on the cover of the magazine), the group learned about the contributions of many Black Americans, including Amaza Lee Meredith who is memorialized on this church fan. She was an educator and architect who established Virginia State’s School of Fine Arts Department.

Finding the missing cups at Polegreen

By Natalie Johnson-Abbott

“Whose cup is missing from the table?”

That was a question posed to us at the beginning of the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience by Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center of Faith, Justice and Reconciliation. In her lesson to frame our discussion, she led us through an exercise known as “The Cup Ritual” created by Dr. Itihari Toure, who currently serves as the Senior Director for Major Grants for Program Development at the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. This ritual is an African practice of naming the many communities whose voices are important but often missing and unrepresented from the narrative. On display was an African print tablecloth with an assortment of cups, mugs and glassware, each representing a person. In conversations about religious freedom, every story matters. Dr. Dent spoke with our group about being a vocal advocate for the people who are often left out of the conversations surrounding religious freedom by elevating their voices. I found the session to be powerful and motivating, but I did not expect to see so clearly a need to be that advocate during our experience.

On Thursday afternoon of the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience, our journey brought us to the historic Polegreen Church. Located 12 miles outside of downtown Richmond, Polegreen touts its connection to “the story of Rev. Samuel Davies and how he started Historic Polegreen Church, one of America’s first non-Anglican churches,” according to its website. While the original structure was destroyed during the Civil War, an open-air venue was built upon the original foundation to allow visitors to see it and to keep the story alive. Since then, the foundation that maintains the site acquired an additional 147 acres of land surrounding the church, all with significance to Patrick Henry, Virginia’s first governor, and the Rev. Davies. The foundation’s goal is to preserve the history of the site and continue to tell the story of the Rev. Davies. On their

CUPS continues on page 20

White beams outline the area where Polegreen Church originally stood.



CUPS continued from page 19

website, Polegreen states, “By accomplishing this mission, we preserve the memory of Hanover Dissenters who struggled courageously and successfully for civil and religious freedom in Virginia and in so doing increase appreciation for the liberties that we enjoy today in the United States.”

As the director of operations revealed the story of the Rev. Davies, one thing in particular stuck out to me: part of the renown of the Rev. Davies was his “pioneering effort” in educating enslaved Black people. As the story goes, he would line up the enslaved people and teach the first person in line to read from the Bible; then, that person would teach the one next to him, and so on and so on. This story has been told hundreds of times to thousands of visitors to Polegreen through the years, and it is a story that created fascination and a sense that the Rev. Davies’ actions were compassionate and inspirational. In a room full of people passionate about religious freedom, however, the primary feeling was shock.

We sat in silence for a moment before Dr. Dent spoke up, saying that the portrayal of these reading lessons is inauthentic to the narrative of the enslaved people who were forced to take part in church services and forced to read the Christian Bible. During this horrendous period in the American story, the idea of giving enslaved people access to the reading of the Bible may have been considered “free thinking” of the Rev. Davies — and it could have been done with good intentions — but something crucial was missing. By not mentioning the fact that the lessons were compelled

“The fight for religious freedom is not a silent fight — it requires standing tall in spaces that seem intent to shrink you. It requires being the loud one in spaces where your silence is expected.”

and the likelihood that there were consequences for not taking part in them, this story is sanitizing the horrors of the enslaved peoples’ experience. Their cup was missing from the table.

This experience showed me that I need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. The fight for religious freedom is not a silent fight — it requires standing tall in spaces that seem intent to shrink you. It requires being the loud one in spaces where your silence is expected. And, as Dr. Dent modeled for us, it involves living every day with the belief that all people have the right to soul freedom. Even if it’s awkward. Even if the people impacted have long departed this earth. We have to be vocal and unafraid in our defense of it. We must not romanticize barbaric institutions for any reason — if we do, we are in danger of slipping down the same slope of white supremacy.

A preacher lining up slaves and forcing them to learn to read with no intention of those lessons being used to free them or of using his own position to advocate for their freedom is not something to be celebrated. The same enslaved people that are seen as background noise did not have a choice. Their participation in his “reading lessons” was not voluntary. Their attendance at this church was not voluntary. As BJC often says, for faith to be authentic, it must be freely chosen and not imposed by any authority. While the Rev. Davies was a remarkable individual whose accomplishments for those he did not enslave were numerous, using these lessons as an example of his greatness and compassion actively participates in the erasure of enslaved people from this narrative.

Of all the lessons I learned during the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience, the greatest of them was to always challenge myself to ask the question, “Whose cup is missing?” and then be loud and persistent in the pursuit of their inclusion. And, if I am ever in a space where there is no cup set out for me, as Dr. Dent said, “I will bring my own.”



Natalie Johnson-Abbott is an education equity advocate in Central Virginia. She also serves as a programs coordinator for the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation.

IMMERSION continued from page 19

their faith in unity, and one participant shared how it created a new appreciation of the worship style of those practicing Islam. The existence of a predominantly Black Muslim presence in the Church Hill area of Richmond — where Patrick Henry spoke the words “Give me liberty or give me death” — reinforces Masjid Bilal’s commitment to equality and economic justice as issues that point to the intersection of advancing faith and freedom for all.

Cultivating appreciation for religious diversity is essential to achieving religious pluralism. It goes beyond acknowledgment to full engagement. Important to our discussions was illuminating the imbalance of power, including investigating how Black Muslims’ contributions to religious freedom are too often overlooked and asking ourselves, “Who speaks for God in public?”

This pilot program is not for the faint of heart, and this reflection only scratches the surface of what we experienced and learned together. This is ongoing, communal work that invites all people to engage in unapologetic truth-telling with a healthy curiosity and commitment to creating systemic change. As we brought together a diverse group, we found new communities, new revelations and new ways to deepen our commitment to religious freedom in listening to and uplifting all perspectives and experiences.



ABOVE: Immersion scholars after engaging in fellowship with members of Masjid Bilal mosque.

BELOW: Many presentations shifted from in-person experiences to virtual ones, including this session featuring insight from Dr. Corey D.B. Walker.



Your gifts make the Religious Freedom Immersion Experience and other communal efforts possible. Together, we are expanding and deepening understandings of religious freedom with a broader justice lens and inviting more people into the conversation.

Learn more and make a gift dedicated to the work of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation by visiting BJCOnline.org/center.



The Valentine Museum is now the home of the original lunch counter and stools from the Woolworth’s that was located on East Broad Street in Richmond. On Feb. 21, 1960, Virginia Union University students conducted a sit-in at that counter, and Woolworth’s chose to close it rather than serve Black customers. Two days later, 34 VUU students were arrested at Thalhimers department store for conducting their own sit-in.

Honorary and memorial gifts

The following gifts were made to BJC in honor of individuals who inspire acts of generosity and commitment to our shared mission. Additionally, we recognize gifts made in memory of those who have departed this life, celebrating their legacy and the lasting impact they have had on others. We are deeply grateful for these meaningful contributions, which support our work to defend faith freedom for all.

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.

In honor of Ann and Thomas H. Caulkins By Rachel M. Chang	In honor of Reggie McDonough By R.M. Harton	•••••
In honor of Paula Clayton Dempsey By Brooks Wicker	In honor of Maggie Monroe-Cassel By Christy Smith	In memory of Joyce D. Alexander By Danielle A. Tyler
In honor of Elizabeth and Mark Edwards By Libby Mae Grammer and William Underwood	In honor of Skip Newman By Zimin Mineo	In memory of Ann P. Biggers By James A. Biggers
In honor of Kirby Godsey By Drayton and Mary Etta Sanders	In honor of R.Y.A. Newson By Perry Y. Newson	In memory of the Rev. Tommy Bratton By Jeff and Brenda Gorsuch Deborah Miller
In honor of Jim Hopkins By Dale Edmondson	In honor of Paula Pozmantier By Janet Pozmantier	In memory of William Franklin and Jimmie Mae Brown By Charles W. Brown
In honor of Holly Hollman By Cathryn and John Baskin Susan Borwick Elizabeth Harris-Lamkin and James Lamkin	In honor of Drs. Walter and Kay Shurden By Paula Shurden Batts Sherry Shurden Brewer and Dan Brewer	In memory of Preston Callison Sr. By Melissa C. Kremer and Richard Kremer
In honor of Diane Jordan By Elizabeth Jackson-Jordan and David M. Jordan	In honor of Jenny L. Smith By Ronald Williams	In memory of the Rev. David Nordan Canady By Jeanne Canady
In honor of Stevie and Wilfred King By Meriah J. Tigner	In honor of Amanda Tyler By Don Barlow Elizabeth Harris-Lamkin and James Lamkin Julie and Michael Lowenberg Kathryn Luckett	In memory of President Jimmy Carter By David Booth Heidi Dahlin Ben Floyd Gary Gunderson Cameron Pennybacker Jeannette F. Scholer
In honor of Mitzi Manning By Pat Hielscher	In honor of Brent Walker By Charles Haynes	



Spring is a great time to make a tribute gift that honors a friend, family member or influential person in your life

To make a gift in honor of or in memory of someone, 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/give.

In memory of Shawnte Chandler
By Sabrina E. Dent

In memory of
the Rev. Dr. John Claypool
By Charles W. Darwin

In memory of Art Coltharp
By LaNell Coltharp

In memory of
the Rev. Dr. Jack Colwell
By Joan A Denney

In memory of
Sara F. Crawford
By Sylvia Dunn

In memory of Beverly Davison
By Dave Hunt

In memory of
the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Dunlap
By Kay Dunlap

In memory of James M. Dunn
By Robert Lemons
Melissa Rogers
Elizabeth D. Thompson

In memory of
James and Marilyn Dunn
By Judy Higgins

In memory of Judy Hancock
By Judith and
Omer J. Hancock Jr.

In memory of
Relma Hargus
By Patricia Parish

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

In memory of
the Rev. Dr R Quinn Pugh Sr.
By Reuben Pugh

In memory of Jim and Oletha Sapp
By Sarah and Rodney Macias

In honor of Phil Strickland
By Carolyn Strickland

In memory of Alicia Seavey
By George Seavey

In memory of
Mrs. Martha Wright
By Clay L. and Cindy Mulford

Include BJC in your estate plans

Spring is a season of renewal and planning. It is an ideal time to reflect on your legacy and the values you want to uphold for future generations. By including BJC in your estate plans, you can help safeguard religious freedom and continue the fight against Christian nationalism for years to come.

The James Dunn Legacy Circle honors those who make a planned gift to benefit BJC's mission. Named after the Rev. Dr. James Dunn — an unwavering advocate for religious liberty — this circle ensures his dedication to faith freedom lives on. Known for his stalwart defense of religious liberty, colorful turns of phrase, and ubiquitous bow tie, the Rev. Dr. Dunn was executive director of BJC through the 1980s and 1990s. In retirement, he continued to raise funds for BJC to create a lasting financial legacy supporting religious liberty long into the future.



James Dunn Legacy Circle

If you believe that religious freedom for all and ending the influence of Christian nationalism in local communities are values to be sustained, then now is the time to build a legacy. In that case, your support, whether through a will, trust, retirement account or insurance policy, helps advance BJC's work for inclusivity and justice.

A planned gift of any size advances BJC's work, promoting faith freedom for all for years to come.

To learn more about leaving a legacy gift, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.



Rev. Dr. James M. Dunn



Remembering President Jimmy Carter

By J. Brent Walker
BJC Executive Director Emeritus

Photo of President Carter in 2012, courtesy of Good Faith Media.

For more than a century, James E. Carter Jr. incarnated a life of stellar public service and demonstrated how to be a Baptist Christian extraordinaire. He was a friend and supporter of BJC, and his death on Dec. 29 was a solemn loss. I can recall several touch points between Carter and BJC — either due to my direct participation or of which I have reliable knowledge.

Soon after the Carters arrived in Washington in January 1977, they joined the First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C., eight blocks north of the White House.

The Carters thought about keeping their membership back home at Plains Baptist Church. But, reflecting on this decision later, Carter said he remembered the advice of his grandmother who had often instructed, “When you move your cook stove, you move your church membership.”

So, they followed his grandmother’s advice and joined the Baptist church nearest the White House. Nine-year-old daughter Amy quickly made a profession of faith and asked to be baptized.

Although during his campaign Carter had spoken of his Christian faith — such as being “born again” — more freely than any of his recent predecessors, Washington journalists needed some help in understanding the impending Baptist rite.

As a fitting welcome to the Carters, BJC’s director of information services and Baptist Press bureau chief, W. Barry Garrett, was dispatched to tutor the White House press corps on the ordinance of believers’ baptism by immersion in Baptist life.

Amy’s February 6, 1977, baptism by First Baptist’s pastor, the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Trentham, was reported in various media outlets. *The New York Times*, for example, the next day explained, “Baptism in the Baptist Church is not conducted until it is believed that a child is old enough to understand what he or she is doing.”

It appears Barry Garrett had done some good! But the *Times* reporter could have used a lesson in Baptist polity: there is no “Baptist Church,” only Baptist churches, some of which are connected in conventions or associations.

The Carter family attended First Baptist faithfully when in residence at the White House, and the new president even taught Sunday school quite often.

Carter was the third Baptist president, after Warren G. Harding and Harry S. Truman. When Bill Clinton — the fourth Baptist president — was elected, First Baptist and BJC co-sponsored an inaugural eve prayer service in the church



President Carter’s official White House portrait in 1977.

“[W]hen asked what kind of Baptist I am or BJC is, I have usually said, ‘A Jimmy Carter kind of Baptist.’ Those six words saved me 600 almost every time.”

sanctuary. It was a Baptist-only affair — within the “family,” so to speak — and by invitation only. No press was invited, and no photos were permitted. Hundreds of giddy Baptists packed into the lovely cruciform sanctuary like sardines!

Both former President Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter attended, and he spoke along with Bill Moyers, Rep. Barbara Jordan and the Rev. Dr. Gardner Taylor, among others. Christian singer-songwriter Ken Medema composed and sang short ditties on the spot — appropriate to each presentation — and prayers were offered throughout.

Former President Carter expressed delight with the election of another Baptist president (and a Baptist vice-president, Al Gore, to boot!) and reminisced about his family’s days at First Baptist. As Clinton and Gore and the rest of us listened, he shared how he landed at that same church during his presidency thanks to that sage advice from his own grandmother.

BJC gave President Carter the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award in 1996. It is BJC’s flagship accolade designed to recognize special Baptists who champion religious liberty, defend the separation of church and state, and support BJC’s work. Others receiving the Dawson Award over the years include Bill Moyers, Sen. Mark Hatfield, Rep. Barbara Jordan, Patsy Ayres, Tony Campolo and Bill Leonard.

President Carter’s recognition was special in that it was awarded at the celebration of BJC’s 60th anniversary. Normally, BJC provides a trophy consisting of a crystal flame to recipients, but our physical gift to Carter signifying the award was instead a first-edition book from 1818 authored by William Wilberforce, a British statesman and abolitionist.

Returning the compliment, President Carter praised BJC for embracing and articulating “the principle of the separation between church and state, so that the people who want to worship freely will not be unnecessarily influenced by the government. And on the other hand, that the government should not be interfered with by the church.”

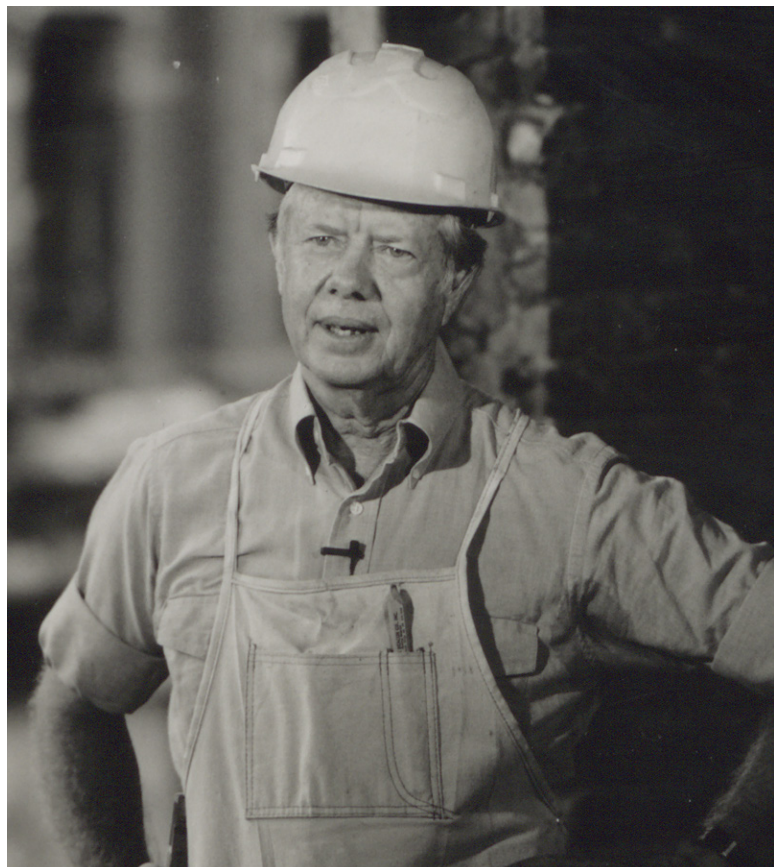
For four centuries, we Baptists have been a clamorous and contentious bunch. We have squabbled with each other as much as we have with outsiders. Maybe more. In the early 2000s, Carter envisioned and then rolled up his sleeves to bring to fruition a pan-Baptist movement of comity and cooperation. It was to be called — and was named — the New Baptist Covenant.

I recall attending a heady meeting at the Carter Center on January 9, 2007, where many gathered to begin planning the effort. Joining former President Carter at the meeting were former President Bill Clinton and Bill Underwood, the president of Mercer University (and the first BJC intern in the early 1980s), along



Former President Jimmy Carter speaks July 4, 1985, at the Baptist World Congress in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

“No matter what our profession, it is neither possible nor proper to divorce our commitment to Christ from the routine duties of our working day,” he said during his address. “I have often been asked, ‘How have you dealt with the many incompatibilities between politics and religion?’ You may be surprised at my answer: I have never been faced with any serious conflicts between my duties as a Christian and my oaths to honor the Constitution and laws of the state and country that I served.”



Former President and Mrs. Carter worked with Habitat for Humanity in Americus, Ga., in 1984, and they formed a partnership with the organization. During their lifetimes, the Carters worked on numerous Habitat builds both in the United States and around the world. This undated photo is provided by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.



Photo of President Carter in 2008, courtesy of Sema Films.

with representatives from 40 groups that spanned the Baptist landscape. The Southern Baptist Convention, unfortunately, chose not to participate.

A year's work culminated in a three-day convocation and celebration in Atlanta of 15,000 participants enjoying harmonious fellowship, education, worship and planning. Baptist historian Dr. Walter "Buddy" Shurden called it "a major step in racial reconciliation and gender recognition of Baptists in North America." He also said, "It's the most significant Baptist meeting in my life, after playing in the Baptist yard 55 years or so."

President Carter's vision did not end with the "love-in" at the Georgia World Congress Center. Rather it spawned an

organization and numerous efforts that carried forward the new covenant's spirit and ministry to this day.

The highlight of my personal interactions on behalf of BJC with President Carter was a wonderful one-on-one meeting with him in his Carter Center office on February 16, 2006. My purpose for seeking the half-hour meeting was first to thank President Carter for his support for religious liberty and BJC over the years. But, specifically, I wanted to ask him to endorse BJC's capital campaign to finance our proposed Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill. It would be a nerve center for education and training of advocates and serve as

Carter: Magnanimous in defeat, hopeful for future

By Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley

Without question, one of the highlights of my career as a working journalist was the interview conducted with former President Jimmy Carter on Sunday, May 24, 1981, four months after he left the White House. Arranged by Robert L. Maddox, one of Carter's speechwriters and special assistant to the president for religious outreach, the interview was conducted at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga. My co-interviewer that day was Alvin C. Shackelford, then editor of the *Baptist & Reflector*, the weekly news journal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

As Baptist Press bureau chief in Washington and director of information services for the Baptist Joint Committee, I remember an acute sense, in roughly equal measures, of anticipation and anxiety that began the day Maddox called to say the now-former president had agreed to an interview with Baptist journalists. After all, this would be Carter's second sit-down with reporters following

his departure from the nation's capital the previous January 20 with the inauguration of his successor, the former governor of California, Ronald Reagan. Only Helen Thomas, chief White House

correspondent for United Press International and the dean of the White House press corps, had been invited to Plains for an interview before ours.

On the appointed day, we sat with



In this 1981 photo taken in Plains, Ga., the Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley (far right) is pictured with (left to right) Al Shackleford, editor of the *Baptist & Reflector*; former President Jimmy Carter; and Bob Maddox, former presidential liaison to the religious community. This photo by Joe Thompson ran in the July-August 1981 edition of *Report from the Capital*.

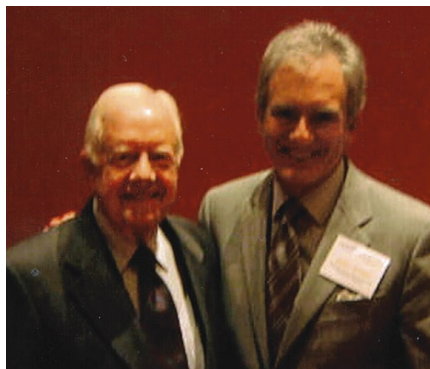
BJC's Capitol Hill offices.

The delightful meeting was an admixture of pleasantries and business. He was friendly and gracious and asked how I was doing at BJC, leading the organization after the legendary James Dunn. He was kind enough to sign and inscribe his new book, *Our Endangered Values*. (I wish I had brought a baseball for him to sign!) President Carter explained that he could not personally contribute to the capital campaign because his charitable giving (after his church tithe) was committed to go to the Carter Center, but he enthusiastically agreed to endorse both our Center and the campaign.

In his written endorsement, President Carter said, "The Baptist Joint Committee does important work under trying conditions. A Center for Religious Liberty, and a capital campaign to make it possible, is essential to allow the BJC to do its work

effectively."

The necessary funds were raised, and we opened our Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill on October 1, 2012, with remarks by Supreme Court Justice Stephen A. Breyer. The Center continues to thrive as the headquarters of BJC.



Throughout my 28-year tenure at BJC and thereafter as executive director emeritus, when asked what kind of Baptist I am or BJC is, I have usually said, "A Jimmy Carter kind of Baptist." Those six words saved me 600 almost every time. I'll continue to say so for the rest of my life — even if God's grace makes me a centenarian too.

The Rev. J. Brent Walker is executive director emeritus of BJC. He is pictured with former President Jimmy Carter in 2009.

former first lady Rosalynn Carter near the front of the sanctuary of Maranatha church and listened as President Carter taught the day's Sunday school lesson to a full house. He then joined us on the pew for the worship service, including a sermon by the church's pastor, the Rev. Bruce E. Edwards. Then, after church, we were led to the interview site, a children's classroom. There, sitting in three-quarters-size chairs, the built-up anxiety I'd sensed over the previous days and weeks quickly dissipated as we settled in. President Carter's easy demeanor saw to that, as did Rosalynn's warmth.

Preparing for the encounter, Shackelford and I had decided I would lead off with a series of questions having to do with political and public policy matters. He, in turn, would ask questions about the president's future plans, including any anticipated involvement in denominational affairs.

Having covered the rise of what then was called the Religious Right over the previous few years, beginning roughly with the rise to prominence of the Rev. Jerry Falwell and his so-called Moral Majority, I was aware that exit polls following the 1980 election showed that whereas four years earlier — when Carter narrowly defeated incumbent President Gerald R. Ford — Southern Baptists this time

had flipped their support from Carter to Reagan. In 1976, two-thirds had voted for their fellow Southern Baptist; in 1980, two-thirds had rejected him in favor of the California governor.

Since learning of this unexpected opportunity to interview the now-former president, I'd known what my first question had to be: "How significant was the role of the Religious Right in your defeat?" Given the numerous issues that had plagued his presidency — including severe oil shortages with long lines at gas stations, soaring inflation and interest rates, and above all, the hostage crisis in Iran — I'd wondered if he might downplay the impact of the movement on his defeat.

Instead, his answer was immediate and forceful. The Religious Right, he declared unequivocally, had "a very profound effect" on the election results. He quickly added that he harbored no "bitterness or ill feeling" toward leaders of the movement, some of whom had bitterly denounced him. "I think that there is too much wisdom present in the collective body of Christians for that sort of distortion to prevail more than a short period of time," he said. "I think they are deeply committed Christians who are sincere in their belief, who let prejudice get the best of them for a while."

Forty years later, sadly and menacingly, that has not turned out to be the case, as an ever more vitriolic brand of what we now call Christian nationalism has taken deep root in the body politic, threatening liberties we once thought unassailable. By the time of Carter's death at age 100, he certainly knew the force that figured so largely in his defeat was greater than anyone could have imagined back in 1980.

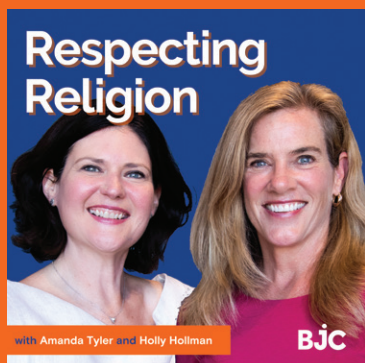
Yet defeat did not undo him. As our interview concluded, he described Jan. 20, 1981, the day of his successor's inauguration, as "one of the happiest days of my life." He was referring to the long-awaited release that day of the remaining 52 hostages who had been held in Tehran for an agonizing 444 days.

"So I didn't go out of office at all with a feeling of despair or anguish or even of thanksgiving for the relief of burdens," he declared. "I enjoyed the presidency and I appreciated every day the chance to serve."

The Rev. Dr. Stan Hastey served on the BJC staff and was a reporter and news analyst in the Washington bureau of the Baptist Press news service from 1974-1988. He later served as the first executive director of the Alliance of Baptists.

Respecting Religion

Keep up with the latest news and analysis on our award-winning podcast



Season 6 of the Respecting Religion podcast continues as Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman share their insight and analysis on current events and the latest news impacting religious freedom. From conversations about Supreme Court cases to government mandates to post the Ten Commandments to the flurry of executive orders from the Trump administration, they are breaking down the news and equipping you for conversations about hot-button topics with your friends and neighbors.

Respecting Religion is available on your favorite podcasting provider, and you can access show notes and transcripts of episodes by visiting BJCOnline.org/RespectingReligion. Below is an excerpt from one of our recent programs.

Excerpt from Season 6, Episode 09:

Threats to religious freedom from the Trump administration and a look at the growing resistance

Released Feb. 13, 2025

AMANDA: When we think about how the Trump administration is talking about religious freedom, I think we're seeing quite a big disconnect between how we understand religious freedom and what's actually being talked about in the public square.

And one of those events is an annual event called the National Prayer Breakfast. It always takes place on the first Thursday in February — or at least in recent memory, it has. So for this year's National Prayer Breakfast, there were actually two events. There was the official event that was held in the Capitol, in the Capitol rotunda, and then there was the second event that was held off-site later in the day. ...

HOLLY: What stood out to you as far as this president and this iteration of the National Prayer Breakfast? ...

AMANDA: I first saw just a lot of repeating of "Christian nation" mythology by President Trump in his speech and things that are just not in line at all with the historical record, saying things like, "From the earliest days of our republic, faith in God has always been the ultimate source of the strength that beats in the heart of our nation." He also said, "Deep in the soul of every patriot is the knowledge that God has a special plan and a glorious mission for America. It is his hand that guides us every single step of the way."

HOLLY: That's a lot.

AMANDA: It's a lot. It's a lot. And I will say that this idea of God's providence has become a theme of Trump's speech recently, particularly given the assassination attempt earlier.

I will also say this was clearly the scripted part of his speech, something I think that was an intentional insertion of Christian nation mythology into the subject matter of the speech. I also found it, I think, a little galling that he invoked Roger Williams, whom we view as kind of a hero of religious freedom — and particularly for Baptists since he did found the First Baptist Church in America. It was Roger Williams who once wrote that "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils."

To hear him invoked in the midst of this example of Christian nationalism just didn't seem in line at all with Roger Williams. Roger Williams, I think, would almost certainly not approve of the idea of a National Prayer Breakfast or of what was coming out of President Trump's mouth.

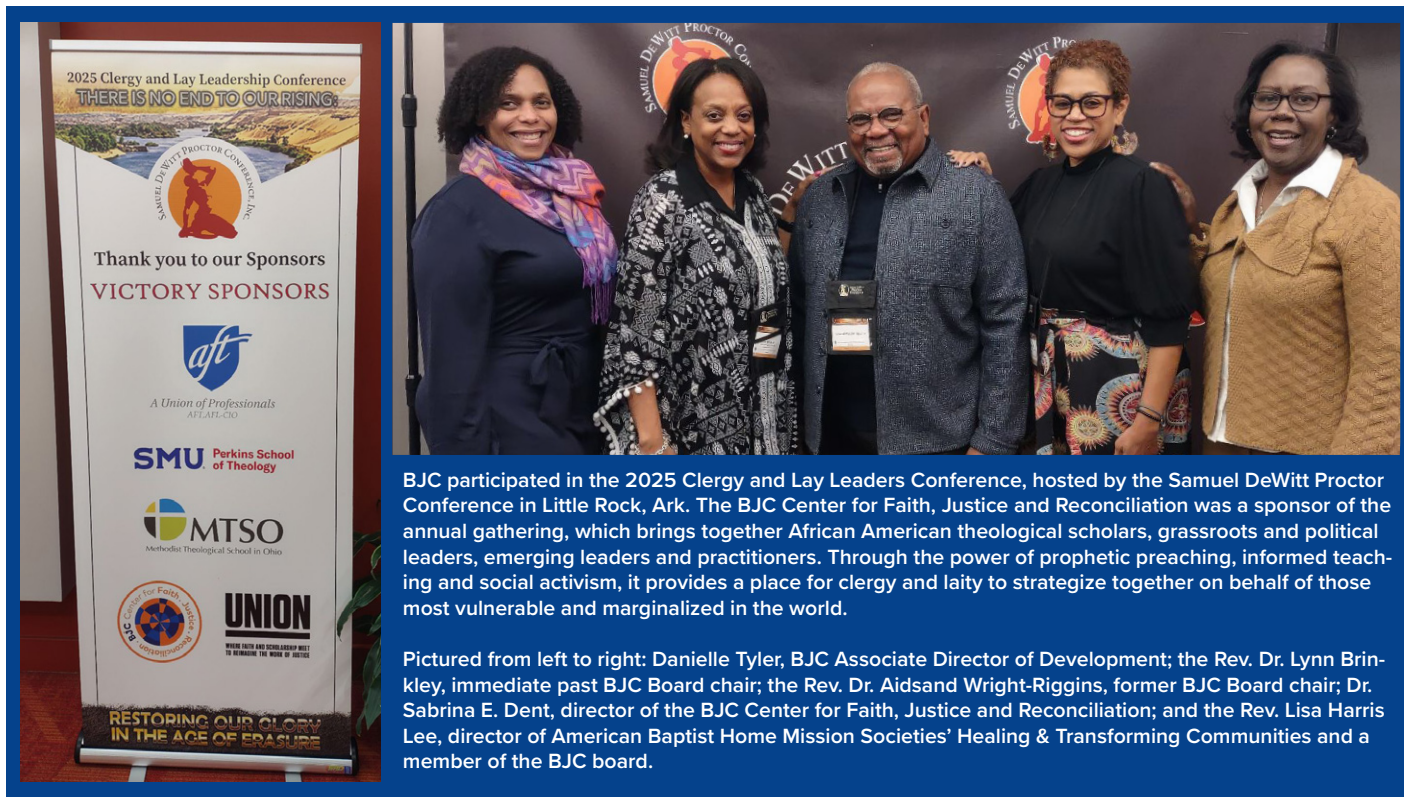
HOLLY: Yeah. For those of you who don't know, that's where we look for that language of separation. We find it in the words of Roger Williams, talking about "separating the garden of the church from the wilderness of the world." So the idea that Roger Williams would be used in a speech that mixes so many ideas and ways that are harmful and confusing about America's religious freedom tradition is upsetting.

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BJC in the world

BJC staff members travel the country to share about our work defending and extending religious freedom for all, and we welcome student groups to our office in Washington, D.C., throughout the year. Here are a few recent events — learn how you can invite a speaker to your community or visit our office at BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc or BJCOnline.org/invite-bjc-to-your-community.



BJC participated in the 2025 Clergy and Lay Leaders Conference, hosted by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference in Little Rock, Ark. The BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation was a sponsor of the annual gathering, which brings together African American theological scholars, grassroots and political leaders, emerging leaders and practitioners. Through the power of prophetic preaching, informed teaching and social activism, it provides a place for clergy and laity to strategize together on behalf of those most vulnerable and marginalized in the world.

Pictured from left to right: Danielle Tyler, BJC Associate Director of Development; the Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley, immediate past BJC Board chair; the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, former BJC Board chair; Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, director of the BJC Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation; and the Rev. Lisa Harris Lee, director of American Baptist Home Mission Societies' Healing & Transforming Communities and a member of the BJC board.



Lisa Jacob, North Texas Organizer for the Christians Against Christian Nationalism Campaign, speaks at Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, during a “lunch and learn” event on Feb. 26. She talked about the importance of working locally to respond to the challenges proposed by Christian nationalism.



BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler spoke to nearly 450 people at First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., on Feb. 11. The event brought together church and community members to discuss her book *How to End Christian Nationalism*, the ways Christian nationalism threatens religious liberty, and how Christians can respond.



Karlee Marshall, BJC's media and resource manager, speaks to a group of students from Loyola University Chicago visiting our office in Washington, D.C. BJC continues to host groups of students, clergy or lifelong learners in our office for educational programs about our history, our current work, our country's ideal of separation of church and state, and the Baptist commitment to religious freedom for everyone.

Faithful Witness Wednesdays

Every Wednesday in March, BJC is joining with Sojourners and many other partners from the Washington Interfaith Staff Community for a series of multi-faith vigils at the U.S. Capitol. These gatherings offer prayers and raise a prophetic and pastoral call to Congress to serve as a check and balance to advance the common good. Here are a few images from the March 5 event.



Igualate joins BJC staff as communications director

ISAREL IGUALATE is the communications director at BJC, working with the BJC team to tell stories, shape messages, and make religious liberty matter to more people.

Before coming to BJC, Igualate was a speechwriter in the Biden administration, serving as Deputy Director of Speechwriting at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and later as Director of Speechwriting at the U.S. Department of Labor. Previously, he worked as a journalist for NHK, writing and producing stories from across North America.

Igualate holds a master's degree in national security studies and a bachelor's degree in communications and political science from California State University, San Bernardino.

He lives in Washington, D.C., but California will always be home. You can contact him at igualate@BJCOnline.org.



New resource: Being Baptist in a Democracy

Is your church interested in discussing Baptist engagement in democracy but unable to cover travel costs for a speaker? The “Being Baptist in a Democracy” resource may be just what you need, featuring BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler.

Developed by Mercer University's Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership, this resource is for church leaders, educators and anyone seeking to explore the intersection of Baptist faith and public life. In the 4-session recorded video series, Tyler guides participants in understanding how Baptists can thoughtfully engage with issues of justice, religious freedom and civic responsibility. The resource includes discussion guides for use by the leaders and participants within the church context.

This curriculum provides a rich, accessible way to deepen your understanding of these critical topics from a BJC speaker without the need to pay for travel. Scan the QR code to learn more about the curriculum and the cost, or contact the Rev. Harrison Litzell, leadership associate at The Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership, at litzell_ha@mercer.edu.



BJC welcomes spring semester interns

IONA GORDON, from San Diego, Calif., is a 2024 graduate of Auburn University, majoring in Hospitality Management and minoring in both Business Administration and English. She served as a hospitality ambassador on campus with the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management and as president of Auburn's pre-law honor society.

The daughter of Joanne and Terry Gordon, she grew up in the Baptist tradition and is currently a member of First Baptist Church of Opelika, Ala. Gordon plans to attend law school following her internship.



SABRINA STRICKLAND-HARRIS, from Columbia, S.C., is a 2024 graduate of Furman University, majoring in both Sociology and Religion and minoring in Poverty Studies. While in school, she was a research fellow studying the sociology of religion for Dr. Claire Gilliland, and Strickland-Harris co-authored the final research publication that will be printed in *Sociological Focus* this year.

The daughter of Samantha Harris, she plans to attend law school after the internship.



Join us on Bluesky and Threads

Keep up with the latest news by following us on your favorite social media channels. We recently expanded to two additional social media platforms: Bluesky and Threads.

You can follow BJC on Bluesky at [bjconthehill.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/org/bjconthehill) and on Threads [@bjconthehill](https://www.threads.net/@bjconthehill). The Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign is on Bluesky at [endcn.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/org/endcn) and on Threads, the campaign is using [@endchristiannationalism](https://www.threads.net/@endchristiannationalism). Amanda Tyler is also on Bluesky at [amandatylerbjc.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/org/amandatylerbjc), and she is on Threads [@AmandaTylerBJC](https://www.threads.net/@AmandaTylerBJC).

As always, you can continue to keep up with BJC on Instagram, Facebook, X, and YouTube, and you can follow the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign on Instagram, TikTok, and in our private Facebook group.

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

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe Guy EDITOR

MORE FROM BJC



African Americans and Religious Freedom

A new preface leads the second edition of an important collection of essays that shares lived experiences. Read more on pages 8-11.



Remembering Jimmy Carter

We honor the life and legacy of former President Jimmy Carter and share his touchpoints with BJC over the years on pages 24-27.