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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

U.S. Supreme Court hears religious display case

HOLLY HOLLMAN on defending government neutrality between faiths

AMANDA TYLER on a preferentialism that threatens everyone's freedom

A look at the religious makeup of the new 116th Congress

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, General Counsel Holly Hollman and Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks exit the Supreme Court after listening to oral arguments in the Bladensburg cross case on Feb. 27, 2019. See pages 4-5.

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

June: BJC Luncheon to feature Jonathan Merritt, BJC's new look and language

Join us June 21 in Birmingham, Alabama

This year's BJC Luncheon will feature writer and author JONATHAN MERRITT and the launch of a refreshed brand and website for BJC.

Join religious liberty supporters from across the country on Friday, June 21, in Birmingham, Alabama, for the event. It is open to the public, but you must have a ticket to attend.

An award-winning faith and culture writer, Merritt is a contributing writer for *The Atlantic* and *The Week*. He is the author of several books, including his newest book *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*. Known for his ability to tackle difficult topics, Merritt is a sought-after speaker on cultural and religious issues. He holds a Master of Divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Theology from Emory University Candler School of Theology.

Don't miss this important discussion about the language we use to talk about religious liberty and new tools from BJC for our conversations.

"BJC's clear and relevant voice is essential at a time when even using the words 'religious liberty' can lead to confusion," said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler. "We're excited to unveil our new look and resources for BJC advocates to engage in these important conversations."

Tickets are $50 each, and tables of ten are available for $600, which include a reserved table and recognition in the program. Students and young ministers can purchase tickets at a discounted price of $30 each.

Purchase tickets and learn more at *BJConline.org/luncheon* beginning April 1.

The luncheon is held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, but you do not have to attend the assembly to attend the luncheon.

April: BJC Dinner in Washington, D.C.

Join us for a special conversation on religious liberty

Amanda Tyler and other Baptist leaders will take the stage for a conversation on an inclusive approach to religious liberty during a special dinner in Washington, D.C.

COREY WALKER, visiting professor at the University of Richmond and senior scholar at the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute, and LINDA MCKINNISH BRIDGES, former president of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, will discuss recent and future collaborations that bridge racial, theological and university lines. Plus, the next generation of religious liberty advocates — BJC Fellows — share how they are standing up for our first freedom in their congregations, communities and professions.

The BJC Dinner will be Friday, April 26, at 6:30 p.m. at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., convenient to the Chinatown Metro Station and other public transit. The dinner is being held in conjunction with the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering.

All are welcome to attend the dinner, but you must have a ticket.

Tickets are available for $50, and can be bought on our website. Visit our calendar page for the link: *BJConline.org/calendar*. Table sponsorships seating 10 people can be purchased for $600.

For questions or additional information, contact Taryn Deaton at tdeaton@BJConline.org.

Bridges

Walker

A decision that will live in infamy

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

The first church-state decision of the 2018-2019 Supreme Court term wasn't a case that BJC or other religious liberty advocacy groups were actively involved in, but one whose effects could reverberate for some time. The case came to the Court on an emergency motion requesting a delay of execution. Press coverage was limited and, as other news these days, fleeting. But those who care about religious liberty for all need to know about *Dunn v. Ray* and its astonishing display of Christian preferentialism.

Domineque Ray was scheduled to be executed by the state of Alabama on February 7 for the 1995 rape and murder of 15-year-old Tiffany Harville. Ray converted to Islam in 2006 and had been meeting with his current imam since 2015. A couple of weeks before his scheduled execution, Ray requested that his imam be present in the death chamber with him and that the Christian chaplain – who was a prison employee – be excluded. Both requests were denied, and Ray's lawyers sought relief for him. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit granted his request to delay the execution, finding that the prison's decision to exclude Ray's spiritual adviser likely violated the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom. But, when the appeal reached the Supreme Court, the justices quickly ruled that the execution could go forward as planned without considering the claim, issuing its decision within hours of getting the appeal. Justice Elena Kagan wrote a passionate opinion for the four justices dissenting from the Court's decision, calling it "profoundly wrong."

The procedure involved in death penalty appeal cases is famously complex and almost always results in decisions against the condemned inmate. Constitutional lawyers know this reality and yet were uniformly astounded by the cruelty of the result. For the state to deny access to one's spiritual adviser at the moment of death carried out by the state seems to have a crossed a line for a decent civilization.

But, does it also cross a constitutional line? I agree with many church-state lawyers that it does. Religious freedom is protected by the First Amendment – specifically its first 16 words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The first clause – the Establishment Clause – provides that government must remain neutral in matters of religion, not showing a preference for one religion over another. And the latter clause – the Free Exercise Clause – protects one's right to believe and also to practice one's faith. Neither principle is absolute, but the clauses work together to protect religious freedom for a religiously diverse people.

To be sure, protecting religious freedom in prisons, where the state is charged to deny personal freedom, presents unique challenges. Congress recognized the need to be particularly concerned with prisoners' free exercise rights when it passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA). But RLUIPA, which provides even more protection for free exercise than the U.S. Constitution, failed to help here, apparently because Ray's lawyers did not plainly argue that to deny Ray's request for his spiritual adviser to be present at death was a substantial burden on his religious exercise.

That's where the other half of our constitutional protection – the Establishment Clause – could have produced a different, more humane, result. The state of Alabama had already designed a system that allowed for a Christian chaplain to be present to minister to the inmate in his or her last hours, lifting a burden on religious exercise. But of course, that system also implicitly assumes that the person will need a Christian minister. As the Court of Appeals decision succinctly stated, "If Ray were a Christian, he would have a profound benefit; because he is a Muslim, he is denied that benefit." At the 11th hour, while still denying his request for an imam to be in the room, the state granted Ray's request to exclude the Christian chaplain. This attempted fix did nothing to protect Ray's religious freedom rights and instead tried to erase the Christian supremacy inherent in the original policy.

Beyond the irreversible wrong to Ray, who was executed on February 7 without his spiritual adviser at his side, this decision damages religious freedom. The case is another that can be cited by those who rightly observe two rules for religious liberty in this country – one for Christians, and one for everyone else. Unless the Court returns to enforcing Establishment Clause principles ensuring government neutrality in matters of religion, we will continue to see these unjust results, which directly harm religious freedom for religious minorities and indirectly for us all.

Justices address array of concerns about cross display during oral arguments

On Feb. 27, the U.S. Supreme Court spent more than an hour hearing arguments on the constitutionality of a 40-foot-cross in Bladensburg, Maryland.

At issue in the cases consolidated as *The American Legion v. American Humanist Association* is a cross with a complicated history. The cross now sits at the middle of a busy intersection on government land and is maintained by the government. The BJC filed a brief in the case, joined by five other Christian and Jewish groups, saying the display is unconstitutional. It violates the government's fundamental obligation to remain neutral between competing religious claims.

Proponents for the display say that the cross has an objectively secular meaning that simply memorializes all war dead. The BJC brief stands up for the religious meaning of the preeminent symbol of Christianity. For more, see Holly Hollman's column on page 5.

The questions during oral arguments reflected a wide array of concerns: Which test should judges use in cases like this? Should it matter how long the cross has been standing, or which war it commemorates? Or that the makeup of the country is markedly more religiously diverse than when this memorial was erected in the 1920s? What happens if the government cross is ruled unconstitutional?

The BJC brief, written by church-state scholar Douglas Laycock, appeared to have informed many of the questions posed by the justices. The Court spent a significant amount of time addressing a core argument in the BJC brief: the cross is the preeminent symbol of Christianity and cannot be secularized or otherwise stripped of its religious content to justify maintaining it on government land.

"There is a brief here that says that, to deeply religious Christians, secularizing the cross is blasphemy," Justice Sonia Sotomayor said to attorney Neal Katyal, who argued on behalf of keeping the display. "Christ died on the cross. He was resurrected from his grave. So those people don't view secularizing the cross as something — it's not just Jewish people or Hindu people who might be offended. It could be Christians as well."

Justice Elena Kagan noted that it is understandable that people want to memorialize the dead and use religious imagery. Where Christianity is dominant, she said, "the preeminent symbol to memorialize the dead is the Latin cross … and so they gravitate toward that symbol as a way to memorialize the dead. But, at the same time, for members of other faiths, that symbol is not a way to memorialize the dead and does not have that meaning."

In a question to the solicitor general who was arguing to keep the display, Justice Kagan reiterated the central point of the BJC's brief. "I mean, it is the foremost symbol of Christianity, isn't it? It invokes the central theological claim of Christianity, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for humanity's sins and that he rose from the dead. This is why Christians use crosses as a way to memorialize the dead," Justice Kagan said.

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, General Counsel Holly Hollman and Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks were all in the courtroom, and Hollman spoke to reporters afterward. A ruling is expected by the end of June.

By BJC Blogger Don Byrd and Staff Reports

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman answers a question from NPR's Nina Totenberg, who used Hollman's comments in her story on the case.

Christians must defend the cross and government neutrality among faiths

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

It is odd to have to explain the explicitly religious meaning of a Latin cross. The cross is an immediately recognizable representation of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. For Christians, it is a singular, powerful symbol of God's love and the promise of eternal life. It is not something we expect the government to display and call a "cross-shaped memorial" or universal symbol of valor.

The First Amendment's religious liberty protections ensure that the government remains neutral in matters of faith, not picking favorites or taking a position on religious truth. Yet those principles are at stake as the U.S. Supreme Court considers arguments about a cross on government land.

As explained in a brief filed by BJC, along with other Christian denominational and Jewish groups, calling a cross a memorial does not solve the constitutional problem. The brief begins this way: "The Latin cross at issue stands in splendid isolation, forty-feet high, in a traffic island in a busy intersection." Whatever one may know about this particular cross and how or why it is where it is, what drivers and passengers see "is the preeminent symbol of Christianity standing all alone in the public right of way."

The brief responds sharply to the systematic efforts of petitioners — a local government entity in Maryland and The American Legion — to secularize the cross and minimize its religious significance. In their zeal to preserve this cross on government land, petitioners – and many of their supporters – would desacralize what to Christians is the most precious symbol of the central promise of their faith: "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The importance of honoring the sacrifice of veterans and their families is not disputed. The government's claim that the "objective meaning" of the cross is to commemorate war dead, however, does not ring true. For Christians who think seriously about the events and message that the cross represents, petitioners' claim is deeply offensive. We should reject it and the short-term perceived gain of preserving a prominent government-sponsored symbol of our faith.

We Christians in America tend to take religious freedom and our majority status for granted. We are fortunate that our constitutional tradition has kept the government largely out of religious matters, leaving ours and other religions free to flourish on the strength of their own merit. We do not need the government to promote our faith nor do we want the government to distort it.

Of course, religious references and imagery are common in many of our country's traditions, and not every religious display on government property presents a constitutional question. Unfortunately, we have seen efforts to conflate this cross with the entirely different context of crosses and other religious symbols on individual grave markers in military cemeteries. Those markers are not part of this case, nor are they impacted by it. Misguided claims to the contrary show an unwillingness to take the constitution's religious liberty protections seriously.

The constitutional requirement of government neutrality between diverse faith traditions is rarely challenged, which makes this case an important one to watch. The Court is being urged to weaken the standards that keep government from preferring one religion over another. Perhaps the Court will find a way to uphold this particular cross that would not open the door to new efforts by government to sponsor religious displays. Our brief, available at *BJConline.org/CrossCase*, explains what is at stake. We hope the Court will recognize that there is no ambiguity about the primary, predominant and objective meaning of a Latin cross.

As Christians, we recognize the distinct nature of the cross as the preeminent symbol of our faith, a faith that is not shared by all veterans, much less all Americans. We should never rely on the government to advance our faith, and we should protect the religious liberty of all Americans by insisting that our government shows no favoritism for the majority religion.

New Congress bri breaks barriers

By Ilana Ostrin

ings new changes,

The 116th Congress made headlines for all the diversity barriers it has broken, especially in terms of religious belief and female representation. The new Congress — whose members were sworn in on January 3 — more accurately reflects the racial and religious makeup of the United States than previous Congresses.

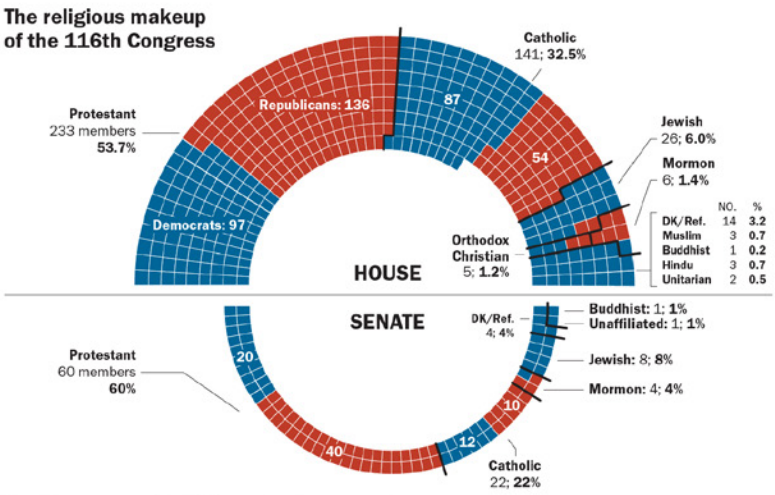
Notable changes

While the members of the 116th Congress remain "overwhelmingly Christian," according to information from Pew Research, 63 members of the new Congress identify as faiths other than Christian. And, for the first time, two Muslim women were elected and sworn in as members of Congress – Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minnesota, and Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Michigan. Both took their oath of office while placing their hand on the Quran, the holy book of the Islamic faith. When swearing into a position of public office, public servants are permitted by law to swear in upon a religious text (or nonreligious text) of their choosing. According to news reports, more than a dozen different documents and books – ranging from copies of the Bible to the U.S. Constitution – were used by various members this year.

Both chambers of Congress – the House and the Senate – have about an equal numerical divide between Christians and non-Christians. But within those splits, there are some nuances. For example, all mem-

President Donald J. Trump delivers his State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol, Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019, in Washington, D.C. (Official White House Photo by Andrea Hanks)

President Trump delivers his State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol, Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019. Also pictured: Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)



bers of Congress who identify as Muslim, Hindu or Unitarian Universalists serve in the House, while no one in the Senate claims those religious beliefs.

By the numbers

Despite 23 percent of the American public claiming no faith tradition or belief, only one member of Congress, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Arizona, openly identifies as having no religious affiliation. (In the House, one member identifies as a Humanist: incumbent Rep. Jared Huffman, D-California.)

Further discrepancies exist between the American population and the religious makeup of Congress. When compared with the 115th session, the new Congress has nearly 3 percent fewer Christians, at around 88 percent. But, this is still 17 percent more than the number of Christians who make up the American population, which hovers around 71 percent.

Also showing numbers of overrepresentation are those who identify as Protestant but don't claim to belong to any specific denomination (i.e., those who simply identify as "Christian"). Americans who identify as Christian without claiming any denomination make up only 5 percent of the U.S. population, but 15 percent of Congress. Alternatively, Pentecostals claim 5 percent of the U.S. public, but only two individual members of Congress identify as Pentecostal.

Special service

On the first day of the new Congress, members came together for a bipartisan prayer service that reflected the diversity of the lawmakers, held at St. Peter's Catholic Church in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

Action in the final months of the 115th Congress

As the previous legislative session came to a close, here's what BJC was watching:

First Step Act

President Trump signed this bipartisan criminal reform measure into law that, in part, allows prisoners to take classes and participate in other activities that will earn them time off of their sentences.

The original bill had problematic church-state language, which attempted to require the government to fund religious classes and programs in prisons. BJC joined 11 other groups in calling for a change in language, noting that the government may fund secular programs performed by faith-based groups, but all social service providers must "adhere to the constitutional protections that prohibit the use of government funds for religious activities. This protects everyone's religious freedom."

Our concerns were heard, and the final legislation included important religious liberty safeguards, including that tax dollars would not fund explicitly religious activities and that secular alternatives for faith-based classes must be offered.

Johnson Amendment

As the 115th Congress came to a close, we saw various efforts and discussions from some lawmakers who want to weaken the Johnson Amendment and its protections for houses of worship from partisan campaigning.

One specific effort to repeal the Johnson Amendment was in the omnibus tax bill, which passed the House. However, the bill died in the Senate when no action was taken on it.

Parking Tax for Churches

We saw debate over an obscure provision of the 2017 tax bill that created a new tax on churches, synagogues and other nonprofits for certain parking and transportation benefits given to employees. For example, if free parking is provided for pastors and church staff, the value of that parking must be declared as unrelated business income and be taxed. The IRS' interim guidance on this area does not provide any guidance on the new tax on some transportation benefits.

Efforts by the 115th Congress to repeal this provision fell short at the end of 2018. At press time, however, efforts were ongoing in the 116th Congress to repeal or add a moratorium on the measure.

BJC staff and volunteers deliver informational packets to new members of the House of Representatives on March 5, 2019

This service – which is tradition at the start of every new Congressional term – featured prayers and hymns in various languages from many of the faiths now represented in Congress. Worship music was led by Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tennessee, and Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minnesota. Sacred texts were read, including a reading from the Hebrew Bible by Rep. Susan Wild, D-Pennsylvania; the Bhagavad Gita by Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Illinois; the book of Psalms by Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyoming; and the New Testament by Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas.

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler attended the prayer service alongside leaders of other faith-based advocacy organizations and members of Congress. "It was religious liberty at its best," she said. "The service reflected the rich pluralism of our elected representatives and their respective faith traditions."

Connecting with BJC

In March, BJC volunteers and staff visited the offices of the new members of the 116th Congress, offering BJC as a resource as lawmakers are presented with questions and legislation impacting religious freedom. The volunteers delivered information on BJC's work and priorities, including a letter from Tyler about our historic approach to religious liberty and the difficulties in today's climate. "We are acutely aware of the challenges that attend religion in American life and the complexities surrounding the interpretation and application of constitutional and statutory protections for religious freedom, as well as the political pressures that make coming together difficult," she wrote.

Faithful impact

As religion in this country continues to change on a societal level, the foundations of religious liberty in this country and church-state separation should stay the same. As this diverse group of legislators continues to adjust to their positions and roles in the halls of power, BJC will remain committed to the principles of the First Amendment and its two religion clauses.

By Ilana Ostrin, BJC Associate Director of Communications

The images and statistics were calculated by researchers at the Pew Research Center, and are reprinted here with permission.

What to watch in the 116th Congress

In addition to monitoring bills that could undermine religious liberty through school vouchers, government funding of religion and other related topics, here are some specific items we are watching:

Johnson Amendment

At the start of the new session, BJC and 130 other groups contacted the chair of the Senate Finance Committee (Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa) and chair of the House Ways and Means Committee (Rep. Richard Neal, D-Massachusetts) to remind them of the overwhelming support for the protections of the Johnson Amendment in the faith and secular communities. Some lawmakers have re-introduced troubling legislation to undermine the Johnson Amendment and its protections through a bill titled "Free Speech Fairness Act" (H.R. 949/S. 330). We are continuing to monitor legislative and regulatory threats to the Johnson Amendment, including attempts to add the undermining bill to H.R. 1 or other legislation. To learn more about this issue and to join more than 4,600 faith leaders on a letter asking to keep the protections, visit our website page *BJConline.org/JohnsonAmendment*.

Freedom of Religion Act

Rep. Don Beyer, D-Virginia, re-introduced the Freedom of Religion Act (H.R. 590) in the 116th Congress. First proposed in 2016, the legislation prohibits religious discrimination in our country's immigration system. BJC is one of more than 50 organizations supporting the bill, and at press time it had 113 congressional co-sponsors.

Blasphemy laws

BJC is working with several religious and secular groups to continue our country's opposition to laws around the world that make "blasphemy" illegal, which often curb religious expression. Legislation on this topic is expected to be re-introduced in the 116th Congress.

Get involved with BJC Advocacy

Take your commitment to religious liberty to a new level: Join the BJC Advocacy Team to receive additional action alerts and engagement opportunities to put your faith in action. Visit our website at *BJConline.org/subscribe* and check the "advocacy efforts" box to sign up. For questions or more information, contact Christine Browder, associate director of mobilization, at **cbrowder@bjconline.org**.

Active on social media?

Use your social networks to promote and protect religious liberty for all. We will equip you with information to ensure your online advocacy efforts are effective, both with elected officials and within your social networks. You can help shape the dialogue around religious liberty.

Action Alerts

Being part of the BJC Advocacy Team means you'll receive targeted real-time email updates on pending legislation as it moves through Congress, along with specific actions you can take to make a difference.

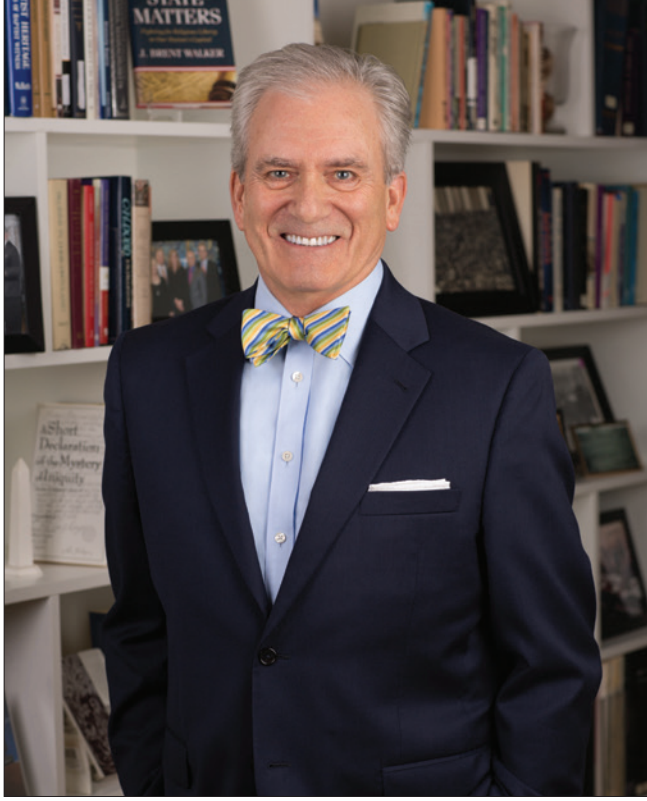
Connect with BJC

Want to do more, but not sure how? Bring our speakers to you. BJC staff want to equip you, your church and your community to feel comfortable and confident as you engage in this important work. Our advocacy training will provide you with tangible how-to guides, as well as tailored issue-based content most relevant to your location and influence.

In February, BJC gathered Washington, D.C.-area advocates to inform our growing mobilization efforts. This year, we plan to bring in-person training to different parts of the country, and we want to see you!

Contact Christine Browder at 202-544-4226 or email her at **cbrowder@bjconline.org** to learn more about these events or to invite us to your community!

Walker portrait added to BJC gallery



When you visit the BJC's Center for Religious Liberty, check out the newest addition to the gallery section, which features portraits of our former executive directors.

J. Brent Walker, who served as executive director from 1999 to 2016, now has his official portrait on display alongside his predecessors: J.M. Dawson, 1946 - 1953; C. Emanuel Carlson, 1953 - 1971; James E. Wood Jr., 1972 - 1980; and James M. Dunn, 1981 - 1999.

We shifted our portraits from paintings to photographic, and Walker's portrait was taken November 19, 2018, by Katarina Price Photography.

The description below Walker's portrait reads: "After serving on the BJC's legal staff for a decade, Walker became executive director at the cusp of the 21st century. An attorney and ordained minister, his tenure included opposing government-sponsored displays of the Ten Commandments and speaking out against the targeting of individuals based on religion during heightened Islamophobia. He emphasized education, overseeing the development of an annual lecture series, essay scholarship contest, the BJC Fellows Program and the Center for Religious Liberty."

HHS foster care waiver a 'dramatic and troubling shift'

BJC sees a "dramatic and troubling shift" in a move by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in issuing a waiver for a government-funded program, focusing more on the needs of organizations instead of the needs of the people being served.

On January 23, HHS issued a waiver to South Carolina's Title IV-E Foster Care Program, allowing government-funded foster care agencies to use religious criteria to reject prospective foster care parents. The request for the waiver came after Miracle Hill Ministries denied a Jewish woman, who had served as a foster parent in another state, the opportunity to participate in its foster care program.

"The BJC opposes government-funded religious discrimination," said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler in a statement released the same day, expressing concern about the shift in priorities demonstrated by the government action. "This waiver shows more concern for the providers than children in need and willing foster parents."

Tyler was clear that this concern stems from the use of taxpayer dollars to choose religious favorites.

"While the government often partners with private religious entities in ways that meet pressing social needs, it must do so with respect for boundaries that separate church and state and protect religious liberty for everyone," she said. "Government-funded placement programs should not be allowed to exclude qualified foster parents based on religion."

BJC Staff Reports

The necessity of independent pulpits

By the Rev. Dr. K. Jason Coker

When I was a pastor in Connecticut, my congregation had one member who happened to be a state representative. It was interesting to notice how his presence made me think about my sermons. Whenever I referenced "politicians" or said something that had political ramifications — which was often — I thought about him. It wasn't so much that I was scared to say anything with him there; it just made me a little more courteous or civil than I may have been in my efforts to speak prophetically.

His presence in the pews probably kept me a little more honest than I would have been otherwise. I liked him and I just didn't feel like I could throw all politicians under the bus with him sitting right there — he was a truly good guy!

Ideally, there should be a healthy tension between the church and the state (or, in other words, the government). The church must speak prophetically in matters of justice that, in turn, call the state to a higher moral law. One of the best examples of the church standing up and speaking out to influence the state can be found in the Civil Rights Movement, as pastors called all of us to recognize the injustice in front of us and stand up for others. The fight and determination to push the United States to become a more just, equal and equitable country – thus extending basic civil rights to all citizens – is what churches do best.

Or perhaps, rather, did best. Our current political environment is so full of vitriol and partisanship that the whole country feels like it's divided between blue and red — as if these two political parties were the antithesis (or even nemesis) of the other. But, that's not the case. Maybe the church can play the role of the prophet and call the state to something better and higher in its politics.

The church could call the state to be moral in how it treats those who live in poverty, how it treats the most vulnerable, how it treats those seeking safety — the Bible is absolutely full of passages that describe how the Christian community is called to care for orphans, widows, foreigners and others in need. And we do! Every day, the church encourages the state to provide for those in need. This is an ancient principle of our faith.

This dynamic relationship is fairly unique in America because we don't have a state church like many European countries. Here, citizens are free from the reign of a national church, such as the Church of England, Church of Scotland or many others.

In the U.S., we have religious freedom written into the governing laws of this country, protecting everyone's right to worship or not worship any way they like.

By separating the institutional relationship between the church and state, we provide a place where the state can't favor any religion over others (or favor religion over nonreligion). This was a motivator for some of the early Baptists who came to America, escaping the religious persecution from state churches in Europe. In fact, America was a pioneering country in this experiment of no national religious affiliation.

As a religious leader, I feel it is vitally important for both the church and the state to remain separate. I would never want a schoolteacher — as much as I admire them — teaching my child how to pray or what to believe about religious conviction. As a parent and pastor, that's my job.

In raising my voice for religious freedom, I can state my opinion for or against a policy, start a letter-writing campaign, participate or take the lead in a non-violent demonstration (like the Poor People's Campaign, which works to challenge systemic racism and poverty). I can even run for office! But, for me, I'd rather vote for good politicians like the one who came to the church were I worked and held me accountable for my own rhetoric and beliefs.

The Rev. Dr. K. Jason Coker is the Field Coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi.

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If you have a religious liberty story you'd like to share in an upcoming issue of Report From the Capital, *email bjc@bjconline.org to discuss your story idea with the RFTC editors.*

BJC in action

Follow us on social media to see more photos of our staff at events across the country.

In December 2018, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler spoke on a panel at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., called "Still Rising: The Increasing Role of Women as Heads of Religious Freedom Organizations." The discussion featured (pictured left to right) Rachel Laser of Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Kim Colby of the Center for Law & Religious Freedom of the Christian Legal Society; and Satjeet Kaur of Sikh Coalition. Melissa Rogers, former executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, moderated.

In January, BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. spoke at chapel services at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He shared about BJC's work and how musical artists — ranging from André 3000 to Tim McGraw — helped define his view of freedom.

Putting feet to her words

By Brent Walker
Former BJC Executive Director

MARYLEE STURGIS was an unlikely fighter for religious liberty and church-state separation. We first met when, from time to time, she would drop by the Baptist Joint Committee booth at various Baptist events — usually meetings of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Elderly, unimposing, walking with some difficulty even with the help of a cane, Marylee packed the punch of an incisive mind and broad knowledge of Baptist history and current church-state issues.

Over time, she would often call or send paper clippings (no email for Marylee!) about church-state controversies — not just in the Virginia Piedmont where she lived, but from around the world. She wanted to make sure BJC was aware of the goings-on and was eager to express her opinion.

Marylee always put feet to her words. A charter member of Broadus Memorial Baptist Church in Charlottesville, she served as Chair of the BGAV's Religious Liberty Committee. By virtue of that office, she was appointed to represent Virginia Baptists on the BJC Board.

I'll always remember her first board meeting. I was a little concerned about how she — then in her late 70s and physically challenged — would travel from Charlottesville to Washington, D.C.

"No problem," Marylee said. "I'll drive."

Alone?

"Yes, of course."

And, she did.

She maneuvered her well-traveled, boat-like car into the teeth of Beltway traffic, finding her way to the hotel and meeting site in the heart of D.C. without a hitch — and, without GPS!

Marylee passed away at age 87 in 2015. Yes, she put feet to her words in life; and, she put money to her words and deeds in death. Turns out, this frugal, simple-living, retired University of Virginia librarian made the largest testamentary gift BJC has ever received.

In so doing, Marylee's passion for religious liberty and her championing of the separation of church and state will live on. Testamentary gifts of more than $5,000 go into the BJC's endowment to provide income to support its important work in perpetuity. Many others — including my wife, Nancy, and myself — are remembering BJC in our estate plans, thereby joining the James Dunn Legacy Circle ourselves. I hope you will, too.

Marylee inspired us by her life; she astonished us in her death. Not many will be able to make a gift the size of hers. But we all can leave a generous gift within our means to underwrite our support for BJC and its work defending and extending religious liberty for all, even long after we are gone.

If you have included BJC in your estate plans or would like more information about naming BJC as beneficiary of a will or retirement plan, please visit our website page at *BJConline.org/planned-giving* and fill out a simple form. You may also contact Taryn Deaton at **tdeaton@bjconline.org** or 202-544-4226.

Honorary and Memorial Gifts
to the Baptist Joint Committee

In honor of Jennifer Hawks, Holly Hollman and Amanda Tyler
By Randi Abramson and Michael Lieberman

In honor of Drs. Walter and Kay Shurden
By Paula Shurden Batts

In honor of Dr. Jim and Mrs. Christy Sommerville
By Paula Shurden Batts

In honor of Amanda Tyler
By Judith Mank

In honor of Rev. Raymond and Mrs. Sharon Vickery
By Stephen and Peggy Gooch

In honor of Brent Walker
By Jeff Day

In memory of David Bartlett
By Carol Bartlett

In memory of Rebecca Day
By Jeff Day

In memory of Rev. H. Wayne Fink
By Beverly Fink

In memory of J. Perry Hannah
By Eunice Hannah

In memory of Rev. John and Mrs. Arlena Hasel
By David Hasel

In memory of Rev. Dr. Vahac Mardirosian
By Gurrola Baptist Foundation

To honor someone with a gift to BJC, send a note with your check or give at *BJConline.org/donate*

BJC welcomes spring semester intern

The Baptist Joint Committee is pleased to have a spring semester intern working alongside our staff in Washington, D.C.

CARLTON GRACE GAY, a native of Memphis, Tennessee, is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English. She also minored in business communications and gained a secondary education licensure. While finishing her studies, Gay taught middle school and high school students.

After completing her internship with BJC, Gay plans to pursue a law degree, with an interest in education law and corporate law. The daughter of the Rev. Drew Gay and Jennifer Gay, she is a member of Crossroads Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

Apply to be a BJC fall semester intern!

Applications due June 30
Info: **BJConline.org/internships**

New magazine schedule

As a reminder, we have a new publishing schedule for *Report from the Capital*. We will be printing four editions this year. You should receive your next issue this summer, around the end of June.

If you enjoy reading the magazine but no longer want a paper copy, you can choose to rely on the email updates that are sent when new magazines are available online. Just send an email to **updates@bjconline.org** or call us at 202-544-4226 to let us know you would rather receive *Report from the Capital* by email only. You will stay on our mailing list and receive other mailings from BJC, and you will remain our email list.

Additionally, if you have a house of worship or place where you would like to have copies of *Report from the Capital* on display, bulk subscriptions are available. Contact us at **bjc@bjconline.org** or call us for additional details.

For the very latest news from the Baptist Joint Committee, be sure you receive our email updates (visit *BJConline.org/subscribe*) and follow us on our social media channels.

Upcoming events

March 26-27:
Shurden Lectures held in Shawnee, Kansas, and Liberty, Missouri, featuring the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins

March 29:
BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler leads a workshop at the CBF of North Carolina Annual Gathering in Greensboro, North Carolina

April 26:
BJC Dinner in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering

April 26:
BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman speaks at the 2019 Representing and Managing Tax-Exempt Organizations conference in Washington, D.C.

May 18:
BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks speaks at Women of Reform Judaism's Social Justice Conference in Washington, D.C.

May 21:
Tyler speaks at the Baptist History and Heritage Society meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina

May 25:
Tyler speaks at the Cleveland Baptist Association's Urban Ministry Conference in Cleveland, Ohio

June 21:
BJC's annual luncheon in Birmingham, Alabama, held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly

June 22:
BJC partners with the Roger Williams Fellowship Dinner at the American Baptist Churches USA Biennial Mission Summit in Virginia Beach, Virginia

June 30:
Hawks preaches at Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill, South Carolina

For additional BJC events, visit BJConline.org/Calendar

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE
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The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty defends religious liberty for all people and protects the institutional separation of church and state in the historic Baptist tradition. Based in Washington, D.C., we work through education, litigation, legislation and mobilization, often combining our efforts with a wide range of groups to provide education about and advocacy for religious liberty.

SUPPORTING BODIES *of the* BJC

Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches USA
Baptist General Association of Virginia
Baptist General Convention of Missouri (Churchnet)
Baptist General Convention of Texas
Converge
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina
National Baptist Convention of America
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North American Baptists Inc.
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Religious Liberty Council

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL
Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe EDITOR
Ilana Ostrin ASSOCIATE EDITOR

MORE FROM THE BJC

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BJC Luncheon

Join us June 21 in Birmingham, Alabama, for our annual luncheon held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly. **BJConline.org/luncheon**

Chinatown, Washington DC, by Elvert Barnes, shared under a CC BY 2.0 license

BJC Dinner

Join us April 26 for a dinner in Washington, D.C., held in conjunction with the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering. See page 2 for details.

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For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee at bjc@BJConline.org.