
REFLECTIONS

A pivotal time



by Amanda Tyler | Apr 7, 2020



A version of this column is [available on BJC's Medium channel](#).

I glanced at the online announcement from River Road Church, Baptist, in Richmond, Virginia, and was reminded how it mirrored that of myriad houses of worship over the final weeks of March. It stated that congregants would not gather in person for worship that weekend; instead, each could participate by watching the broadcast of the upcoming service online in the safekeeping of his or her own home.

In his sermon on March 22, the Rev. Dr. Daniel Glaze — the church's senior pastor and a BJC board member — voiced thoughts grounded on the familiar words of Psalm 23. In the context of uncertain times, Rev. Glaze proclaimed, "If there is to be any encouragement, any comfort, any hope, it comes from God, our good and constant shepherd. That alone means we do not have to fear." For me, these words were well received and much needed.

Our daily lives are changing at a rapid pace, only eclipsed by the frightening speed with which the coronavirus is spreading in our country and around the world. Faith surfaces for many as the fundamental framework that gives overwhelming comfort and meaning to life.

In significant ways, this is why BJC exists. For 84 years, we have endeavored to secure faith freedom for all, ensuring that every person has the freedom to believe and to act on those beliefs without unnecessary government interference. As lawyers, educators, communicators and advocates, the team I lead here at BJC is continuing the work of protecting and extending religious liberty for all, even into an uncertain future.

As you will read in this issue, 2020 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for our mission — not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges posed to faith freedom for all in this new environment. The U.S. Supreme Court has taken up four cases with implications for religious freedom in its 2019–2020 term (read about some on p. 4), and it accepted another landmark case for next term. We have seen action from the executive branch with the release of new [guidance on religion in public schools](#) and [new regulations on the ways faith-based organizations relate to government](#). Those latter regulations could harm the religious freedom of people who rely on government-funded social services (p. 5). The Trump administration [expanded its 2017 travel ban](#) to include an

additional six countries, and Congress is taking action on legislation to repeal the ban and prevent future religion-based travel restrictions (p. 15).

We also share much hope for the future, as we highlight the next generation of leadership in this edition. We report on the 15th annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State and the first-ever BJC Fellows reunion, two significant events we hosted this year prior to the directives for social distancing that came from public health experts. I hope you will be inspired as I am by the passion and energy of these young leaders. At a time of great uncertainty, we can draw hope in our future outlook.

Your involvement has been — and continues to be — crucial to our mission. I hope you will stay connected, whether that be reading new articles, listening to podcast episodes, using our resources to share your passion for this work with your social media networks, or advocating for faith freedom for all.

At this moment, though, nothing is more important to me and the BJC team than the health and safety of our BJC family — you, our religious liberty friends, donors, advocates and board members. Currently, I am happy to say that all members of our staff are healthy and are working remotely, embracing technology and other resources that allow them to continue our important mission. My greatest hopes and prayers are that you, too, are well.

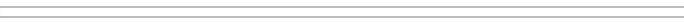
In this turbulent season when it is natural to reflect on what is truly important, I want to thank you again for your partnership with BJC, advocating for faith freedom and **financially supporting** BJC's work for religious liberty. Please take good care, stay in touch with us, and let us know how we can support you. We are grateful to be in community with you.

Amanda Tyler is executive director of BJC.

*This column appeared in the spring 2020 edition of Report from the Capital. You can read the entire magazine as a **PDF** or a **digital flip-through edition**.*



1 / 20



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