

# RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMITTEE

The Religious Liberty Committee resumed in-person meetings on April 19, 2022 at the BGAV Resource Center in Richmond and defined two key objectives for the committee: to speak to our constituency in the BGAV and educate them regarding the meaning and importance of religious liberty, and also to bear witness and advocate for religious liberty to the government and the wider world.

The committee hopes to present a 2023 Break-out Session featuring a presentation of a reenactment of George W. Truett's speech on religious liberty as delivered from the steps of the U.S. Capitol on May 16, 1920. We also hope to be able to record this presentation and make it available to our constituency.

The committee continues efforts to develop a curriculum or set of videos for use in helping our BGAV children understand religious liberty and its importance. The committee will join with efforts of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society to update and augment their existing Virginia Baptists Heritage Tours: "FREEDOM TRAILS, SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE BAPTISTS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY" in conjunction with the 200th anniversary of the BGAV in 2023. Committee members have already nominated additional locations and persons to be considered for inclusion in the tour and trail.

We are also working to develop a 2 minute video clip to be made available to our churches for viewing in worship or other formats for Religious Liberty Sunday in January, 2023.

The committee created a Facebook page "BGAV Friends of Religious Liberty" to include articles, weblinks, and other resources about the general climate of religious persecution in the world today. This page will be the contact point for Virginia Baptists who wish to stay informed and participate by contacting their legislators during the upcoming General Assembly session.

The committee is planning for "boots on the ground" at the Capitol in Richmond for Baptist Day on January 16, 2023 as attendees visit legislators highlighting Virginia Baptist perspectives on religious liberty. More information will be shared about this event through the "BGAV Friends of Religious Liberty" Facebook page. We hope that Virginia Baptists from across the Commonwealth will join us.

Finally, committee members reviewed U.S. Senate Bill H. R. 5, March 2021, cited as the Equality Act: An Act "To prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and for other purposes." Lacking the necessary 60 votes to take up debate in the Senate (only 49 votes are currently in support) it appears not to be a viable bill. The Religious Liberty Committee does not normally address federal legislation directly but would recommend that individuals contact our Senators Kaine or Warner to point out specific objections with details about how an unacceptable bill might become acceptable, or at least, less objectionable. The committee normally focuses on Virginia's state legislation as we have other partners (The Baptist Joint Committee & the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) with a Washington presence.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. W. Shelton Miles III (Chair)

Ms. Belinda Barnett

Dr. William (Bill) Bryan

Rev. Mark Davis

Mr. Jason Dugas

Rev. Thomas Harvey

Ms. Kathryn W. Johnson

Dr. J. Robert Pipkin