

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMITTEE

OFFICIAL REPORT

Each year, the Religious Liberty Committee of the BGAV is charged with “reporting to the General Association annually on the nature and importance of religious liberty and the separation of church and state, citing violations in principle and practice, and suggestions for correcting same.” It is also instructed to “make available information relating to the subject with the view of safeguarding these cherished principles.” This mission continues to be an essential part of the uniquely Baptist witness of the BGAV. The need to protect and promote our cherished, long-standing principles of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, as well as helping churches wrestle with what this principle looks like in practice in our current context, continues to be vital. As the United States marks the 250th anniversary of its founding this year, churches and Christian leaders face renewed questions about patriotism, religious liberty, public witness, political engagement, and the proper relationship between church and state.

The Religious Liberty Committee is honored to continue to promote the historic Baptist understanding of these core freedoms for all people – freedoms created not by constitution or legal decree, but by the God who creates us all – and the Committee is committed to providing resources for Virginia Baptists to encourage our understanding of these principles and equip our churches to proclaim the Good News that is found in our freedom under God’s loving provision. That freedom includes the liberty to seek God, respond to God, and embrace God, not through coercion, but through the liberty of love that Christ has shown to us. This is the historic Virginia Baptist perspective: that each person is free to worship God in whatever manner they understand best, or not worship God at all; that the State provides no favor to any religious group or privilege to any particular faith over another; that no religious expression or practice be required by the State; and that all persons of faith, or no faith at all, are equally treated by the law.

This Virginia Baptist perspective parallels that of many other Baptist organizations, and we are grateful to not be alone in this important work. The influence of Christian nationalism—which “seeks to merge Christian and American identities” and “demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian”¹—has continued to increase this year. As in previous years, our work is related to raising awareness of this concerning trend and helping Virginia Baptists understand how to stand against such threats to religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

With these principles in mind, the Religious Liberty Committee of the BGAV continues to help churches better understand and safeguard the principles of religious liberty that are part of our Virginia Baptist DNA. This year, activities of the Committee include:

- **Religious Liberty Day:** Each year, on the anniversary of the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the Committee invites interested Virginia Baptists to visit the State Capitol in Richmond to meet with legislators and legislative aides, providing information on religious liberty and advocating for religious freedom. The Committee was unable to participate this year due to various schedule conflicts, but this remains a regular activity of the Committee that we hope to continue in 2027.
- **Educational Videos:** For each of the last three years, the Committee created and published videos that told the story of religious liberty in colonial Virginia: the story of Elder John Weatherford in 2023, the story of the meeting of John Leland and James Madison in 2024, and the story of Thomas Woolsey and the Overmountain Men in 2025. At this year’s annual meeting we are premiering a fourth video which will tell the story of Thomas Jefferson’s connection with Baptists such as John Leland and Roger Williams, and how Baptists supported Jefferson in his stance on church-state separation. We are grateful for the support of EverBless which makes the production of these videos possible.
- **Church Resources and Community Partnerships:** The Committee has ongoing projects related to resource production and promotion in conjunction with the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the BGAV Marketing team. This year we have also partnered with 21Wilberforce, an international religious freedom advocacy organization based in Northern VA, specifically to support their award event in October honoring Baptist leader Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley.

¹ <https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/statement>

- **Learning Labs:** At the 2026 BGAV Annual Meeting, the Committee is offering learning labs related to Baptist history and how Baptist support for the separation of church and state remains critically important in contemporary America as we celebrate 250 years since our country's founding.

The Religious Liberty Committee of the BGAV is grateful for the opportunity to help provide resources and safeguard the religious liberty principles that Virginia Baptists have cherished for generations. We look forward to continuing this work in 2027.

Respectfully submitted,

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