



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

2023

Annual Report



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The Mission of the ERLC

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission exists to assist Southern Baptist churches by helping them understand the moral demands of the gospel, apply Christian principles to moral and social problems and questions of public policy, and to promote religious liberty in cooperation with churches and other Southern Baptist entities.



Brent Leatherwood

PRESIDENT

Brent Leatherwood was elected as president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in 2022, after a year of leading the organization as acting president. Previously, he served as chief of staff at the ERLC, as well as the entity's director of strategic partnerships. He brings an expertise in public policy to his work, having been the executive director of the Tennessee Republican Party, the director of communications and policy strategy in the Tennessee General Assembly, and working for several years on Capitol Hill.

"The ERLC will always take care to listen to our churches and help them, which will ensure that this Commission continues to bring a deep, abiding, consistent, and thoroughly Baptist voice to the public square. And that is our foremost aim: Render assistance to our churches and, from that service, speak to a watching world."

- BRENT LEATHERWOOD

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION *represents* Southern Baptist interests in public policy matters through advocacy and provides *resources* to help Southern Baptists think biblically about cultural issues. From our offices in Nashville, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., our work is rooted in the truths of Scripture and can be categorized in four main areas: life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity.



Life

Since the 1980s, the Southern Baptist Convention has maintained a pro-life voice in the public square, and the ERLC has become an unapologetic advocate for the life of every person, from the moment of conception to the time of natural death. After decades of advocacy, the pro-life movement celebrated the *Dobbs* decision in 2022 which overturned the disastrous *Roe v. Wade* ruling, sending the issue of abortion back to the states and saving innumerable lives. This decision opened up new challenges, such as the proliferation of chemical abortions by mail and opportunities for the cause of life at the state level. The ERLC will support the dignity of all people at every turn, working toward the day when abortion is illegal and unthinkable and our nation represents a true culture of life.

Religious Liberty

Religious liberty is a Baptist principle dating back to the 17th century and rooted in the belief that a “free church in a free state” allows for the greatest gospel proclamation. As a first freedom in our country, religious liberty has been upheld by numerous Supreme Court decisions, many of which were supported by an ERLC amicus brief. The ERLC was also a leader in the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, the hallmark legislation that protects religious liberty for all Americans, and has worked tirelessly against attempts to undermine this legislation for three decades. Additional challenges remain, both overseas and in the rights of Americans to live according to their deeply held beliefs in the public square. The ERLC is committed to religious liberty for all because the strength of this freedom serves our churches, provides for the common good, and allows believers to share the gospel freely.





Marriage and Family

The God-ordained institutions of marriage and family bring about flourishing and are critical to a healthy society. The ERLC will always champion God's design and advocate for policies that maintain and protect these essential aspects of life together, whether or not our culture recognizes this to be true. Recent initiatives have included our advocacy for the Adoptee Citizenship Act in support of adoptive families and our opposition to both the Equal Rights Amendment and the Respect for Marriage Act, which are out of step with God's vision for sexuality and the family. We desire to see policies enacted that allow men, women, and children to flourish according to God's design and enable the vulnerable to thrive.

Human Dignity

True human dignity is rooted in the *imago Dei*, the image of God in which all people are made, as described in the book of Genesis. This conviction that all people hold immeasurable value and worth has led the ERLC to advocate for criminal justice reform, call for the care of immigrants, and propose penalties for predatory payday lenders. A chief priority for the ERLC will always be the pursuit of racial unity in our churches and our nation, believing that the gospel breaks down barriers. Scripture also calls for the people of God to advocate and care for the most vulnerable and those in need, leading the Commission to engage in multiple international issues. These truths motivate the ERLC to stand for the displaced, the trafficked, the preyed-upon, and the persecuted—wherever they might be. ★



*Letter
from*



*the
President*

Dear Southern Baptists,

At the ERLC, we will speak to a chaotic public square with the unchanging truth of the gospel into four distinct areas:

- Life,
- Human Dignity,
- Religious Liberty, and
- Marriage and Family.

Here are just a few examples that stand out for me personally from this past year:

Life: This year we helped our churches understand the ramifications of the historic *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that struck down the hideous *Roe* precedent. As they did so, the justices opened up a new chapter of the pro-life movement for which we have long prayed.

Religious Liberty: We were a leading voice at the federal level, filing multiple written comments in opposition to the Biden administration's efforts to curtail religious liberty and conscience protections through the consequential federal rule-making process.

Marriage and Family: We came alongside the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention and the Baptist Convention of Iowa to file amicus briefs at the state level relating to issues of parental rights, transgenderism, and radical gender ideology in schools.

Human Dignity: We urged Congress to pursue immigration reform while working alongside SEND Relief to prepare for the ending of Title 42.

As we go forward, I know the Lord wants this Commission to be a voice for the voiceless, to speak up for the marginalized, and to serve the widow, the orphan, and the vulnerable. As we do so, all of us have a role to play in carrying out this vital work.

Joyfully in Christ,



F. BRENT LEATHERWOOD

PRESIDENT, THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION



Representing Southern Baptists

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION EXISTS TO ASSIST CHURCHES BY
RESOURCING SOUTHERN BAPTISTS TO THINK BIBLICALLY ABOUT CULTURAL ISSUES
AND BY **REPRESENTING THEIR INTERESTS IN PUBLIC POLICY.**

Representing Southern Baptists' interests in public policy is a privilege our Commission takes seriously. Over the past year, our team at the Leland House in Washington, D.C., has been hard at work speaking into issues of life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity. We've seen exciting victories and new challenges emerge in these key areas of advocacy.

Life

A top priority for our advocacy in the lame-duck session was protecting life and religious liberty in Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations (i.e., government funding bills).

Appropriations

The FY2023 appropriations bills were troubling because they removed several longstanding pro-life and conscience protection riders from the budget such as the Hyde Amendment and “Hyde family” of riders.

At the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers unanimously approved a resolution condemning efforts to strip Hyde from any federal appropriations bills and called upon Congress to uphold all pro-life riders. The ERLC did a thorough review of all of the originally proposed appropriations bills and extensively communicated our concerns to lawmakers. After significant advocacy alongside like-minded organizations, these pro-life and

conscience protection riders were ultimately included in the final FY2023 omnibus appropriations package.

Post-*Dobbs* legislation

In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, the Biden administration has utilized all levers of its power to promote abortion access. Federal agencies have pushed forward pro-abortion policies that:

- expanded access to the abortion pill,
- paid for abortion travel,
- and used taxpayer resources to fund “education” efforts around how to access abortion.

For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced an Interim Final Rule expanding access to abortion by amending current regulations and removing an exclusion on abortion counseling and abortions in the medical benefits package for veterans and eligible family members. This change in rules creates taxpayer-funded abortions by the VA. Similarly, the Department of Defense changed its policies to cover time off and travel expenses for service members seeking abortions.

Most recently, the Department of Health and Human Services has adapted HIPAA to limit sharing of personal “reproductive health” information. This new rule establishes that healthcare providers and other related entities may violate HIPAA if they comply with investigations into illegal abortion and gender-transition procedures. The rule, created to expand abortion access, compromises important protections for those who have been abused. The ERLC has pushed back through public comments in the federal rulemaking process to each of these changes, expressing our firm





The ERLC will always seek to work with our state conventions to protect life, from the earliest moment of conception until natural death.

ABOVE: The ERLC has carried out its SBC assignment since 1994 from its permanent office in Washington, D.C., the Leland House. LEFT: The ERLC's D.C. interns delivered a copy of Jason Thacker's book "The Digital Public Square" and other resources on AI to all congressional offices.

opposition to these moves that will lead to more lives lost and more consciences compromised.

Additional moves from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) over the last year have also made the chemical abortion drug, mifepristone, more accessible than ever before. Despite the fact that 1 in 5 women who take this drug experiences a complication requiring further medical treatment, the FDA loosened a number of regulations to allow the abortion pill to be obtained through the mail or at local pharmacies.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit ruled to rescind those changed regulations in August 2023 in *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA*, and reinstate important safety precautions. This case is likely soon headed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and we pray that the court will uphold this ruling, which would save more preborn lives and protect women from the dangers intrinsic to chemical abortions.

State-level advocacy

Though there is certainly a role for the federal government to play in our nation's laws protecting life, much of this conversation is currently centered at the state level. It has been a priority of the ERLC to come along our state conventions, when requested, to push forward pro-life laws. This year we were able to partner with the North Carolina Baptist Convention in urging the North Carolina legislature to override the governor's veto and adopt a 12-week limit on abortions in the state. Relatedly, we partnered with the Nevada Baptist Convention in urging the Nevada governor to veto legislation that would have made Nevada a destination for those seeking assisted suicide. The ERLC will

always seek to work with our state conventions to protect life, from the earliest moment of conception until natural death.

Religious Liberty

A recent priority has been responding to two decisions from the Supreme Court with important implications for religious liberty—*Groff v. Dejoy* and *303 Creative v. Elenis*.

At the Supreme Court

In *Groff*, the court ruled unanimously that its previous standard for religious accommodations in the workplace set by the 1977 decision in *Trans World Airlines v. Hardison* had been wrongly interpreted. The court used this case as an opportunity to provide clarification that employers must meet a higher burden than previously thought before denying religious accommodations in the workplace. Southern Baptists believe that we cannot separate our deeply

speech as the court recognized creative expression as constitutionally protected speech and affirmed our nation's robust history of protecting speech, even when it is culturally unpopular. Though this case focused on freedom of speech, it has significant implications for people of faith who wish to express their beliefs in the public square.

At the federal level

At a federal level, much of our work has centered on pushing back against harmful attempts by Congress and the Biden administration to restrict religious liberty protections. In Congress, we advocated tirelessly against the misnamed Respect for Marriage Act and have continued our advocacy efforts against the incredibly harmful Equality Act. The administration has ruthlessly utilized the federal rulemaking process to push forward regulations expanding sexual orientation and gender identity protections and

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held beliefs from our vocation, and the ERLC filed an amicus brief urging the court to recognize that reality and rule in favor of expanding accommodations.

In *303 Creative*, the court ruled in favor of Lorie Smith, a web designer who did not wish to use her creative talents to design websites celebrating same-sex marriages, and against a Colorado public accommodation law that had also been used to target cake creator, Jack Phillips. The decision was an important victory for free

abortion access, often at the expense of religious liberty. The ERLC has recently pushed back through public comments against such changes at the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, Justice, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, as well as United States Agency for International Development.

At the state level

At the state level, we partnered with Arkansas Baptists in urging

voters to adopt a state-level Religious Freedom Restoration Act in the November election. We also joined Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptists in an amicus brief at the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in a religious liberty case involving a Catholic charity organization and its tax-exemption status.



Through this brief, we advocated for the protection of a local diocese's right to carry out their religious convictions without pressure from governing authorities.

Marriage and Family

A significant win in the area of marriage and family came with the final defeat of the "transgender mandate."

The transgender mandate

The mandate implemented under the Affordable Care Act through HHS would have required medical professionals to provide gender-transition care to patients against the medical providers' deeply held religious convictions and medical expertise. Advocating against this policy has been a top priority for the ERLC since the mandate's inception. The ERLC submitted public comments to HHS in early 2022, once again condemning

the mandate and advocating for its rescission. Two cases were litigated in federal courts challenging the mandate, and both struck it down as unconstitutional.

The Biden administration could have appealed the decisions but declined to do so, ending the challenge and leaving religious liberty and conscience protections intact. This harmful gender ideology goes directly against God's design for family and human flourishing. We will continue our advocacy against any future policies that threaten that flourishing and steamroll religious and conscience protections.

Supporting parents

As a part of our work to push back harmful gender ideology and affirm God's design of the family, we partnered with Iowa Baptists and Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptists in filing amicus briefs in two state-level cases. Each brief affirmed the important role of parents and opposed any attempts for schools to come between a child and his or her parents, particularly on such sensitive and important issues as gender and sexuality.

Family-strengthening policies

In Congress, we have continued to advocate for policies that would bolster family formation and lead to flourishing. Particularly in the post-*Dobbs* environment, there has been renewed energy on Capitol Hill to do more in support of vulnerable women and families. There is much to be debated regarding which of these policies are best and which can find the necessary bipartisan support to become law, but it is encouraging that many members of Congress are beginning to recognize the needs of families and are

ABOVE: *Hannah Daniel speaks at a press conference at the U.S. Senate against the Equal Rights Amendment.*



Hannah Daniel joined members of Congress for a press conference on the one-year anniversary of the Dobbs decision.

thinking creatively about solutions. As we consider these proposals, the ERLC will advocate for policy changes that strengthen families and marriages, promote the well-being of children, recognize the dignity of work, and wisely steward financial resources.

Human Dignity

Some of the ERLC's work in the area of human dignity was affected by a divided Congress, which made it difficult to find bipartisan support and spur on needed congressional action. In the lame-duck session, we had hoped to see Congress address immigration and criminal justice reforms, but no meaningful legislation was passed.

Immigration

Though we advocated for the inclusion of both needed border security improvements as well as a permanent solution for "Dreamers," negotiators ran out of time for a compromise to be included.

We also advocated for a secure pathway to legal status for Afghan and Ukrainian evacuees who were brought to the United States using "humanitarian parole." Though these vulnerable individuals are essentially refugees, they lack the pathway to permanent status given to those formally designated as refugees. Unfortunately, despite broad bipartisan support for the Afghan Adjustment Act, it was ultimately excluded from the final FY23 appropriations bill.

As part of our advocacy on immigration issues, members of our team joined other Southern Baptists in an educational trip to the border, which has greatly informed our work in preparation for the ending of Title 42. Alongside that massive policy change, we worked with SEND Relief to prepare border states in responding and urging congressional leaders to take necessary action.

Criminal justice reform

We also had hoped to see the inclusion of the Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law (EQUAL) Act in the fiscal year 2023 appropriations package. This bill, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives with a vote of 361-66 and had significant bipartisan support in the U.S. Senate, would eliminate a sentencing disparity that remains especially harmful for Black Americans, in line with the SBC's call to "reduce high incarceration rates without jeopardizing public safety."

Though progress is often slow, the ERLC will continue to engage on these issues alongside efforts to regulate the increasingly predatory gambling and lending industries, support human rights and religious freedom abroad, and combat human trafficking.

Looking Ahead

The end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 are likely to be a busy season as Congress enters its last legislative push before the election cycle more fully gets underway. Similarly, the Biden administration will be working to accomplish as much as possible before the end of his term. Though the realities of a divided Congress make progress difficult, there are

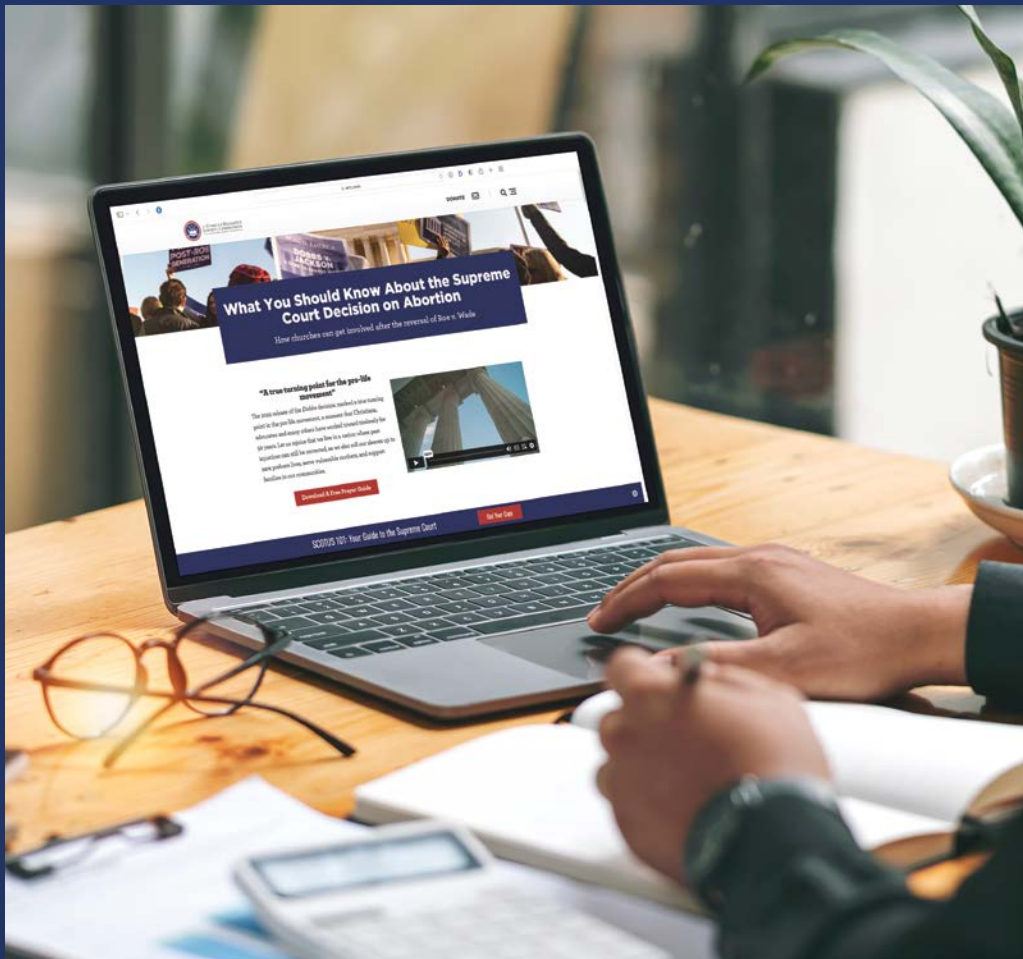
areas where we believe agreement can be reached and steps forward can be taken.

After successfully defending all Hyde-family riders under a fully Democratically controlled government, we are hopeful that some marginal gains can be made this year for the causes of life and religious liberty in the appropriations process. Additionally, we are pleased

Though the realities of a divided Congress make progress difficult, there are areas where we believe agreement can be reached and steps forward can be taken.

that proposals around supporting families, protecting children, and regulating new technologies are slowly gaining momentum.

Lastly, we are excited to welcome a new member to our team at the Leland House. Allison Cantrell joins us from the Office of Policy and Budget in the Executive Office of the Governor of Florida. She holds an M.S. (Demography) and both a B.S. (Economics) and B.A. (International Affairs) from Florida State University, where she was an honors student. She is a great fit for the ERLC, understanding our mission to assist and represent churches as we engage important political and cultural issues and will be an excellent addition to our team with valuable policy and state government experience. ★



Resourcing Southern Baptists

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION EXISTS TO ASSIST CHURCHES BY
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AND BY REPRESENTING THEIR INTERESTS IN PUBLIC POLICY.

In addition to speaking *for* Southern Baptists in the public square, we are committed to speaking *to* Southern Baptists on matters of moral importance. It has been our goal over the past year to bring awareness to the ERLC's desire to assist individuals, families, and churches through a variety of resources. By dividing our content focus into the four major areas—life, marriage and family, human dignity, and religious liberty—we have been able to guide Southern Baptists toward a biblical framework that will help them process our world's ever-changing landscape.

Written Resources

Online articles, our biannual issues of *Light* magazine, and other forms of written content are pivotal to equipping Southern Baptist churches with the resources they need to address complex cultural issues with biblical wisdom. Each year, we provide over 100 new pieces covering our key topics. This content can be distributed in a variety of mediums and formats, catering to an audience who accesses and digests content differently.

Life

While every month gives us an opportunity to celebrate life, June marked the one-year anniversary of the remarkable *Dobbs* decision. We honored the occasion by exploring how ministry at pregnancy resource centers has changed since *Roe* was overturned, the ruling's positive impact on abortion rates, and a look at what happened on the federal level. Furthermore, we dedicated our December 2022 issue of *Light* magazine to life. Pursuing a Culture of Life: The Pro-Life Movement After the Demise of *Roe v. Wade* is a beautiful issue that features timely articles by Richard Land, Bart Barber, Ben Mitchell, and Dana Hall McCain that will help Christians uphold the value of all of life.

Religious Liberty

Defending religious liberty is at the heart of our mission at the ERLC. In addition to our advocacy, we want to help every generation of Southern Baptists understand what religious liberty is and why it's a Baptist distinctive. To that end, we produced a one-page resource outlining the theological foundations of religious liberty. We also produced explainers to help our audience understand the significance of this year's two major

Supreme Court victories regarding religious liberty and free speech. Our June 2023 issue of *Light* magazine, *Your ERLC: Assisting Churches. Speaking to the Public Square*, focused on the work of the ERLC and featured articles about our past, current, and future religious liberty advocacy and its challenges.

Marriage and Family

It's likely that few things are as misunderstood in today's society than God's design for marriage, family, and sexuality. We created articles to help clarify myths about marriage and language surrounding gender identity confusion. We also explained the three-parent IVF technique that poses serious ethical questions Christians should consider. In order to better equip leaders, we put together a one-page biblical resource for pastors on gender and sexuality that can be shared widely. Moreover, we called attention to the work SEND Relief is doing to strengthen families by helping churches care for orphans and get involved with foster care. Furthermore, our latest pro-life issue of *Light* magazine contained an article exploring how we can foster a more pro-family world through legislation.

Human Dignity

The dignity of every individual undergirds the work we do and resources we provide. This year, we've covered topics like race relations and the theology undergirding a church committed to racial reconciliation, why Christians should care about predatory payday lending, and the insidious nature of pornography addiction. In addition, we focused on prison ministry by highlighting the inspiring work of one of our seminaries, wrote about how Christians should prevent the



The latest issues of the ERLC's biannual magazine cover pro-life work after Dobbs and the mission of the ERLC.

exploitation of migrant children, and covered the launching of a private refugee sponsorship program in the U.S.

Video Resources

With the rise of the digital age, our organization has recognized the power and reach of video as a medium for engaging with our audience. We strategically employ video as a way to effectively communicate and distill information to a broader audience who may not have time to read an article but can take a few minutes to watch a video explainer from their phones. Through video, we go beyond the limitations of traditional print resources and connect with Southern Baptists in dynamic ways. We utilize two different types of videos:

Video resources for churches

- In order to familiarize members of

the SBC with the work of the ERLC, we put together a brand awareness video that we showed at our booth at the annual meeting and during the pastors' wives luncheon.

- January 22 marked the 39th annual Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. We created a short video to remind Southern Baptist churches to pray for the future of the pro-life movement as we seek to cultivate a culture of life.
- As part of our preparation for our SBC annual meeting event, Simple Steps to Unity, we released A Conversation with Jon Nelson, past president of the Missouri Baptist Convention. In the video, Jon and Brent discuss racial unity in the SBC.
- We produced a video for churches to show on July 2 in commemoration of Religious Liberty Sunday, reminding members that

defending religious liberty is part of Baptist DNA.

Videos that explain our advocacy work

- During a visit to the nation's capital, Brent Leatherwood recorded a video covering topics of particular concern to the convention, including the Respect for Marriage Act, budgeting for efforts that protect life, and solutions for Dreamers.
- Leading up to the Senate's April vote on the Equal Rights Amendment, we shared a clip of ERLC Policy Manager Hannah Daniel explaining the harms of the ERA at a press conference with the Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee.
- We released videos on the Supreme Court cases, *Groff* and *303 Creative*, after the decisions were announced. Each one explains what the case

involved, why it matters to Southern Baptists, and why they are wins for defenders of religious liberty.

By leveraging the visual and auditory elements of video, we are able to effectively communicate complex concepts, provide practical applications of biblical principles, and give our audience a more personal look at our work. This approach allows us to present information in a visually compelling and accessible manner, often capturing the attention and interest of a younger audience.

Resource Pages

We often create individual pages on our website that provide our audience a one-stop shop for multiple resources on a specific topic, event, or issue. We've used these pages to display how we both resource and represent Southern Baptists.



ABOVE: Pastor Jon Nelson spoke with Brent Leatherwood about the challenges Nelson has faced as a minority pastor and the pursuit of racial unity in the SBC. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: A brand awareness video featuring ERLC staff highlights the work of the Commission and our areas of emphasis. OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Leatherwood shares about the importance of religious liberty in a video specifically designed for churches to use in their services or online.

Here are the pages we've created over the last year:

- **erlc.com/dobbs**: Features articles on how to continue pro-life work, answers to common post-*Dobbs* questions, and a prayer guide that centers on life issues. We have continued to update this page after the June 2022 *Dobbs* decision.
- **erlc.com/scotus**: Houses all of the relevant information on the cases we were watching this term, as well as a new guide we created to help our audience understand the workings of the Supreme Court.
- **erlc.com/equalityact**: Highlights key human dignity resources and gives a concise guide to help Christians understand why they should oppose the Equality Act.
- **erlc.com/policy**: Provides a breakdown of the ERLC's 2023 Public Policy Agenda and directs to resources that discuss the issues surrounding each of these policy items.
- **erlc.com/racialunity**: Showcases the video interview with Jon Nelson (see photo on opposite page) and brings awareness to the work of our friends at The Unify Project.
- **erlc.com/churchresources**: A page created for this year's SBC annual meeting where attendees could download 10 free resources to use in their churches.
- **erlc.com/ai**: A landing page created for use by members of Congress where they are able to see our AI Statement of Principles and the SBC Resolution on Artificial Intelligence.

These quick-reference pages allow us to communicate with precision the ERLC's stance on crucial issues and how we advocate for matters important to Southern Baptists. ★



By dividing our content focus into the four major areas—life, marriage and family, human dignity, and religious liberty—we have been able to guide Southern Baptists toward a biblical framework that will help them process our world's ever-changing landscape.



Research

Research undergirds all that we do at the ERLC.

The Research team works to assist the churches of the SBC in two ways. First, the team operates at a deep level to make certain that solid biblical, theological, and ethical foundations are the basis of all our work in the public square. Second, in concert with that work, and collaborating closely with the Communications team, the Research team provides our churches with a variety of resources that help equip them to engage their community with the gospel.

Our Research team's recent work has been focused on the themes of fortifying relationships with our academic and institutional partners and planning for the future. We have done this through continued investment in academic endeavors, practitioners who make up our Research Institute Fellows, and the students in our summer intern program. As we look ahead, we are committed to a renewed focus on how to best resource our churches.

In addition to renewing our focus, the team is expanding. We welcomed Miles Mullin as the new director of Research and saw the transition of Jason Thacker from his role as chair of research in technology ethics to the role of research fellow in Christian ethics and director of the Research Institute. Additionally, Alex Ward joined the team in a full-time capacity as a research associate and project manager.

Organizationally, the team is developing a network of experts who are able to participate in its important work. That network will include four fellows whose expertise and responsibilities align with the ERLC's four areas of emphasis: life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity. They will lead various endeavors and provide expert guidance on both long-term projects and short-term responses.

Lecture Series

In order to foster robust theological discussion, the Research Institute lecture series continued this spring with a wide range of topics meant to prompt discussion among the fellows. Recent lectures included:

- ERLC Research Fellow Paul Miller spoke about his recent book, "The Religion of American Greatness,"

the cultural discussion of Christian nationalism, and the relationship of faith and the public square.

- Bonnie Kristian discussed her book, "Untrustworthy: The Knowledge Crisis Breaking Our Brains, Polluting Our Politics, and Corrupting Christian Community," and how digital platforms shape how we receive and respond to information as a church.
- ERLC Research Fellow Mark Lieberbach lectured on metaethics, drawing on his recent book, "Ethics as Worship."

We are in the process of planning the fall lecture series with anticipated topics including gender and sexuality issues, natural law, and political philosophy.

Fostering Cooperation

In keeping with our president's renewed emphasis on cooperation, we have also worked to engage our fellows and state convention partners through in-person programming. We

gatherings focused on the unique nature of Baptist social ethics. These meetings help encourage cooperation across all levels of Baptist life and thus strengthen all aspects of our work together, including our public witness.

Over the next several years, there will be an increasing emphasis on facilitating cooperation across the SBC on important projects related to equipping churches on the timeliest issues. In this way, the ERLC will be able to draw upon the best Baptist minds to catalyze cooperation that will serve our churches. Long-term projects, such as academic and trade volumes, will help Baptists think deeply about long-term challenges confronting our society, while shorter efforts will provide more immediate help to churches and their members.

Practically, this approach will mean regular gatherings of experts committed to Baptist polity and theology with national, state, and local leaders. Such convenings will aid cooperation and comprehension regarding how

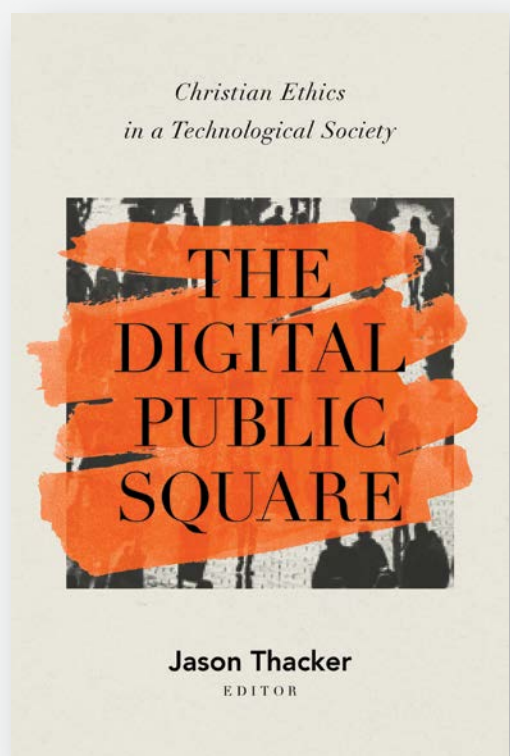
Our work has been focused on the themes of fortifying relationships with our academic and institutional partners and planning for the future.

hosted our research fellows at the SBC Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, providing time for those who are normally dispersed around the country to connect with one another. We are also in the process of planning for our third annual convening of the state ethics leaders in December of this year as well as some future

the Research team and the ERLC as a whole can best give guidance to our churches regarding the serious ethical and moral issues they are facing in their communities.

Internship Program

The ERLC welcomed five interns to our summer program. The internship



Jason Thacker's book from B&H Publishing is an important and timely resource to be used by pastors and believers as they navigate the new digital landscape.

program is built around the core areas of ethics training, spiritual formation, and professional development. This year's interns participated in a staff-led Bible study of Daniel and James, an introduction to ethics course and readings based on the model of our SBC seminaries, and meetings with staff and external partners to learn how to carry their faith into the public square. Our interns were instrumental in the ERLC's Supreme Court response, data analysis of survey results of the ERLC's core

constituency, and the development of a forthcoming resource on gender identity for church leaders.

Publications and Resources

The ERLC's research initiatives produced a number of publications and resources aimed at equipping churches for complex matters they may encounter, including:

- **"The Digital Public Square" (B&H Academic, 2023):** The most recent book-length publication brought together contributors addressing

a wide range of topics—religious liberty, pornography, hate speech, digital authoritarianism—for the purpose of helping Christians think critically about the digital landscape.

- **Essentials in Christian Ethics series, Edited by C. Ben Mitchell and Jason Thacker:** The first volume, David VanDrunen's contribution on natural law and Christian ethics, will be released this fall. Additional volumes in this series include "Biblical Ethics: A Short Companion" by Research Fellow Jacob Shatzer and "Christian Ethics: A Short Companion" by Gilbert Meilaender, both of which will be released in spring 2024.

Staff members have also published pieces at *World Opinions*, *The Gospel Coalition*, *Liberty Magazine*, and several academic journals including *9Marks Journal* and *The Journal of Christian Legal Thought*.

Members of our senior Research team have appeared on numerous podcasts, radio shows, and offered quotes to print media such as *Baptist Press*, *Christianity Today*, *The Biblical Mind* podcast, *Mere Fidelity* podcast, *World Radio*, *Faith and Politics TV*, *Moody Radio*, *KET's Kentucky Tonight*, and *News Channel 5 Nashville*.

The team has also delivered lectures and spoken at events across the nation including the Spartan Lectures at Missouri Baptist University, Think23 conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, and numerous churches throughout our convention.

In all its endeavors, the Research team will remain focused on assisting Southern Baptist churches in accordance with the mission and ministry assignment of the ERLC. ★



The Psalm 139 Project

Psalms 139:13 tells us that the Lord knits together children in the womb. The wonder of God's design, which Scripture revealed, was hidden from our view until the advent of the ultrasound machine. Ultrasounds allow a window into the womb, moving more women to choose life after seeing their babies on screen than those who don't have the same opportunity.



The Psalm 139 Project, a pro-life ministry of the ERLC, exists to place ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers (PRCs) around the country. Each placement allows abortion-vulnerable and abortion-determined women to get a glimpse of the life inside them. One hundred percent of all donations given to the Psalm 139 Project go toward the purchase of life-saving machines and the training of the clinic staff who will utilize them.

The June 2022 *Dobbs* ruling, overturning a federal right to abortion, has only reinforced the importance of the Psalm 139 Project's mission. While abortion is illegal or limited in many states, other states like Illinois

- McKenzie, Tenn.
- Warrenton, VA
- Raleigh, N.C.
- Roxboro, N.C.
- Greeneville, Tenn.
- Lanett, Ala.
- Shelbyville, Ill.
- Brevard, N.C.
- Hammond, La.
- Big Spring, Texas
- Freeport, Ill.
- Spring City, Tenn.

Baptist state conventions in Alabama, Texas (SBTC), Tennessee, Virginia (SBCV), North Carolina, and Louisiana all partnered financially with the Psalm 139 Project to make many of these placements a reality.

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saving machines and the training of the clinic staff
who will utilize them.*

have become abortion destinations, making them strategic spots for ultrasound placements. Since September 2022, the Psalm 139 Project has placed 26 ultrasound machines in 10 states:

- Mobile, Ala.
- Lancaster, Calif.
- Pasadena, Texas
- Troy/Latham, N.Y.
- Claremore, Okla.
- Maryville, Tenn. (3 machines)
- Dyersburg, Tenn.
- Knoxville, Tenn.
- Athens, Tenn.
- Jackson, Tenn.
- Paris, Tenn.
- Tiptonville, Tenn.

As the abortion landscape in the U.S. continues to change after the *Dobbs* ruling, the ERLC, through the Psalm 139 Project, will continue to pray for and work toward opportunities to place life-saving ultrasound machines in abortion-destination states. The rise of abortion tourism—travel for the purpose of obtaining an abortion where it's legal—and the abortion pill mean that pro-life advocates have much work that still needs to be done. The Psalm 139 Project stands ready to enable PRCs to shine a light on the precious life of every person, serve vulnerable women, and change families for generations. ★







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