



## ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Thinking back on this year and the work we as a Commission have engaged, I'm reminded about a story the late Johnny Cash once told. Cash said that often people would come up to him after a concert and say something along the lines of, "My father was in prison with you." Cash would smile because he knew that he'd never done prison time, but he would just ask, "How's your Daddy doing?" The Cash prison story just felt real and authentic to these people because his lyrics sounded like someone who had been there, on the other side of the law, stuck in Folsom Prison, listening to the sound of faraway trains.

But of course there's a big difference between songs about jail and life within jail, between singing like an outlaw and actually being one. As Baptists, though, our faith is a jailhouse religion, carried to us by heroes who were often outlaws—Paul of Tarsus, Thomas Helwys, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Martin Luther King. Many of them went straight from the baptistery to the jail cell to the great Cloud of Witnesses in the sky.

We are their sons, and we are their daughters. And we stand here again on the wrong side of history, right where we started. Your Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission has been working hard this year with a two-pronged strategy. We want to speak up with a word of witness in the public square, and we want to equip churches to have a word to witness about. In short, I want to keep our people out of jail—and to help make them willing to go.

That's what has led us over the last year to file dozens of briefs on issues of biblical ethics in courts around the country. That's why, when one of the most ignorant and willfully deceitful PR campaigns was waged against religious freedom legislation in Indiana, we fought back. That's why we refused to cower when one mayor had the audacity to subpoena sermons. Religious liberty was purchased with the blood and toil of our Baptists forefathers, and we will not see it bartered away at the hands of corporate bullies or government bureaucrats.

Over this last year, we have met with presidential candidates, fought for legislation that promotes life and family and the common good, stood for marriage, launched an office for international religious freedom in the Middle East, hosted thousands of Christians at ERLC conferences and events, provided resources to protect and equip Christians and churches to engage as faithful gospel people in this ever-changing culture and numerous other things on which this following report will elaborate.

We must work to preserve religious liberty. As Baptists, we bear a responsibility for the rest of the Body of Christ. We're those who are the conservators of freedom of conscience, of a free church in a free state. There's too much at stake for the advancement of the gospel for it to go, and for it there was too much paid in blood. But there's one thing worse than going to jail for your faith. That's having a faith that is too safe to jail. That's why we stand, and that's why we speak. As a Commission, we are here for you, and we count it a privilege to serve you.

For the Kingdom,

Russell Moore