

# **First Freedoms Project introduced to work for religious liberty\_71204**

July 1, 2004

Posted: 7/01/04

## **First Freedoms Project introduced to work for religious liberty**

**By John Pierce**

*Baptists Today*

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP)—Celebrating and supporting the "founding freedoms" guaranteed in the First Amendment is the emphasis of a new project launched by three Baptist organizations, organizers say.

The First Freedoms Project is an educational and fund-raising collaboration between Associated Baptist Press, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and Baptists Today news journal.

The three groups will provide churches with resource materials to promote religious liberty and freedom of the press, while encouraging churches to fund the three organizations with an annual offering or budget gift. Contributions will be divided evenly between the three organizations.

The project, which will kick off with a national conference in April 2005, was announced during a press conference and two auxiliary meetings held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly in

Birmingham, Ala.

The joint project, with a theme of "Free to Worship, Free to Know," was developed in consultation with local church ministers by the leaders of the three independent, national ministries, each with a historic link to the First Amendment.

Jimmy Allen, retired denominational leader and Baptists Today board member, said the project shows how Baptist groups can work together and addresses an urgent need.

"We're in a great crisis in this country," Allen said during the project's unveiling at an ABP dinner. "We're seeing an erosion of freedom. ... I never thought I'd see the day when some Baptists would say, 'There's no such thing as separation of church and state.' But some are."

"We're needing to recover our voices," said Allen. "How do you do that? The people who talk about championing religious freedom are joining together."

Greg Warner, executive editor of ABP, Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, and John Pierce, editor of Baptists Today, announced a website for the First Freedoms Project ([www.firstfreedoms.com](http://www.firstfreedoms.com)), a board of advisors and a group of endorsing pastors.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which provides annual funding for all three sponsoring organizations, also endorsed the new venture.

"CBF is proud to be a part of the supporting base of the First Freedoms Project," said Bo Prosser, coordinator for congregational life. "We are excited about sharing with three of our strategic partners in taking this resource to our congregations. We look forward to seeing our churches engaged in the First Freedoms Project."

James Dunn, former BJC executive director and current professor at the Divinity School of Wake Forest University, urged support for the project during a Baptist Joint Committee luncheon.

Dunn said John Milton, who was "almost Baptist," was correct in noting that the relationship between freedom of the press and religious liberty is "indissoluble."

"If either freedom of the press or freedom of religion is lost, we go with it," Dunn said.

Dunn commended the cooperative effort of the three groups launching the First Freedoms Project. "We are moving to cooperation instead of competition ... and a new level of concern," he said.

"If we're going to survive with the message of religious freedom, then it's going to be you in this room and the lives of the people you touch," he added.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.