

Baptist Joint Committee's Brent Walker sets retirement

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WASHINGTON—Brent Walker, longtime executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), a Washington, D.C.-based organization committed to upholding the historic Baptist principle of religious liberty for all people, will retire at the end of 2016.

Walker, the BJC's executive director since 1999, announced his plans during the Baptist Joint Committee board of directors' meeting Oct. 5. A search committee will be formed to recommend a candidate to lead the religious liberty agency.



Brent Walker “It has been a privilege to serve the cause of religious liberty through an organization as respected as the Baptist Joint Committee,” Walker said. “Just as I discerned an undeniable spiritual calling to perform this ministry, I sense that it is time to turn the reins over to someone else.”

Walker is an ordained minister and a member of the U.S. Supreme Court Bar. He joined the BJC staff in 1989 as associate general counsel. In 1993, he was named general counsel and succeeded previous Executive Director James Dunn in 1999.

Walker has been the agency's fifth executive director. He is the longest-serving staff member in BJC history. When he retires, he will have been with the organization 27 years.

Walker's legacy at the BJC includes working to pass the landmark Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993 and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act in 2000. He stood against efforts to amend the First Amendment in the late 1990s, opposed government-sponsored displays of Ten Commandments monuments in the mid-2000s and spoke out against targeting individuals based on religion during heightened Islamophobia in the early 2010s.

Walker speaks in churches, educational institutions and denominational gatherings, and provides commentary on church-state issues in the national media.

His tenure also includes changing the agency's name from Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs to Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in 2005. Under his tenure, the BJC has emphasized education as well as advocacy in the courts and Congress, and opened the Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill in 2012.

Before joining the BJC staff, Walker was a partner in the law firm of Carlton Fields in Tampa, Fla. He left in 1986 to enter Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he earned a master of divinity degree in 1989 and was named the most outstanding graduate. Walker was pastor of Richland Baptist Church in Falmouth, Ky., while in seminary.

"With a clear mission, strong staff and needed voice in the public square, I am confident the BJC is poised to soar to new heights as it enters its ninth decade," Walker said.