

Respond to emerging frontlines, Baptist leader challenges

April 28, 2025

New frontlines affecting Baptists are emerging around the world, Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, asserted during his Pinson Lecture on Baptist distinctives at Hardin-Simmons University, April 23.

Live in the authority of Jesus, Baptist lecturer challenges

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“Will you live as if all authority belongs to Jesus?” asked Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, addressing participants of the Pinson Lectures on Baptist distinctives at Hardin-Simmons University, April 23.

Conservative seminary training

gaining ground outside U.S.

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An effort begun by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to provide theological education around the world is gaining ground.

Pressley nominee for second term as SBC president

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North Carolina pastor Clint Pressley will be nominated for a second term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Rockwall pastor Michael Criner announced April 13.

Volunteers clean homesites, share faith in Oklahoma

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Texans on Mission volunteers spent two weeks responding to needs after wildfires tore through Stillwater, affecting about 200 homes in the area and 74 campers at nearby Lake Carl Blackwell.

Baptists watch five religious liberty cases

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Five cases addressing religious liberty ranging from parental rights to age verification on pornographic sites will be decided when the Supreme Court announces its decisions in the coming months.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has released explainers for all cases and their potential implications for the future. The entity also joined several amicus briefs, including one alongside both Baptist state conventions in Texas.

“The number of high-profile and important cases in this term speaks to the broad scope of the work done by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission,” said ERLC President Brent Leatherwood.

“In our legal strategy, we are continually looking for opportunities to advance the cause of life, advocate for religious freedom, and proclaim the goodness of God’s design for marriage and family.

“This year is no different. Whether it’s defending the ability of states to protect children from radical transgender interventions or supporting online age verification laws that put needed barriers between minors and harmful pornographic material or fighting for the ability of religious ministries to serve others consistent with their deeply held convictions, we consider it a privilege to communicate the principles of our convention of churches before the nation’s highest court.”

Free Speech Coalition, Inc. v. Paxton

Age verification is crucial in protecting minors from sexually explicit material online, argues a Texas state law from June 2023 that requires websites capable of distributing “sexual material harmful to minors” to include such a step.

NetChoice, LLC, a lobbying organization representing more than 35 tech companies, is leading the push against the law. The group’s argument is that such steps violate the companies’ free speech and instead the courts should apply “strict scrutiny” standards typically used by the federal government.

That standard, [explained the ERLC](#), is the same one used to enforce federal laws as they relate to religious liberty. The thread attempting to be drawn is hardly accurate, according to the ERLC and others.

“As originally understood, the First Amendment existed primarily to protect political speech and speech on matters of public concern,” [stated an amicus brief](#) presented by the ERLC, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. “It was not originally understood to protect obscene expression, especially when such expression might be received by minors.”

U.S. v. Skrmetti

A Tennessee bill approved in March 2023 and going into effect that July prohibited all medical procedures intended to “affirm” gender identity for those under 18. [“Necessary protection”](#) came from the bill, said the ERLC Explainer, from procedures like hormone therapy, puberty blockers and surgery.

The Biden Administration’s Department of Justice joined the

plaintiffs—three transgender individuals, their parents and the American Civil Liberties Union—and won an injunction that continued the allowance of hormone therapy and puberty blockers. A Tennessee appeal, though, placed the law back to full effect.

There are 27 states with laws in place prohibiting doctors from performing such surgeries and procedures on minors. Many of those are undergoing litigation, with the outcome of Skrmetti helping determine if they remain in place.

Medina v. Planned Parenthood

A 2018 executive order by South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster disqualified abortion providers from participating in the state's Medicaid program under the position the state should not be forced to support such organizations even if funds didn't go directly to abortions.

In effect, it defunded Planned Parenthood in that state. Several Medicaid beneficiaries objected and filed a lawsuit saying that federal law guaranteed their right to choose any qualified provider. Lower courts agreed with them, setting up the state's appeal that is supported [in a brief](#) by several groups, including the ERLC.

The case could have far-reaching implications, [explained the ERLC](#), on how states administer Medicaid as well as the general discussion of taxpayer-funded abortion.

“As we saw in the aftermath of Dobbs, some states are making laudable efforts to protect preborn children, provide legitimate health care for mothers and foster a culture of life. South Carolina’s efforts to exclude abortion providers from its Medicaid program reflect those efforts,” [said](#) Miles Mullin, ERLC vice president, in comments shortly after the case was argued before the Supreme Court.

Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission

In June 2023 the ERLC joined an [amicus brief that included the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention](#) in support of religious liberty at the state's Supreme Court.

Central is the work of the Catholic Charities Bureau and terminology as to it being "charitable" or "religious."

Wisconsin offers an unemployment insurance program to provide relief for those out of work. Religious organizations can request tax exemptions for paying into the program. The Catholic Charities Bureau did this to provide funds for an alternative program not funded by taxpayers.

The organization was denied its request. An appeal to the Circuit Court of Douglas County, Wisc., ruled against the group, saying their work was not religious in nature since their ministry included non-Catholic and non-church members.

The Bureau argues that their charitable actions are an extension of their religious beliefs.

"By imposing the state's view of what it means to be religious, based on organizational structure and the who and how of charitable service, the Commission and the appeals court are prescribing a single form of religious orthodoxy in the context of the state unemployment law," [said the brief](#). "That violates the U.S. Constitution's Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses, together with the well-recognized 'church autonomy doctrine' that is grounded in both Clauses."

Mahmoud v. Taylor

More than 300 parents across multiple faiths [protested a decision](#) by a Maryland school board. Their case will be heard in front of the Maryland Supreme Court on April 22.

In 2022, the Montgomery County Board of Education introduced a policy that required elementary schoolchildren to participate in instruction on gender and sexuality without parental notice or the ability to opt out over religious objections. After initially indicating such parental objections would be honored, the board reversed its position.

In an [amicus brief](#) filed last October, the ERLC and others highlighted the rights of parents in the upbringing and education of their children without being coerced to go against their religious beliefs.

Furthermore, schools should respect diverse religious beliefs and the Free Exercise Clause in protecting parents from government-compelled ideological indoctrination, the brief argues.

Disaster relief meets needs in tornado-stricken Missouri

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Carla Robinette recalled the March 14 tornado that hit Poplar Bluff, including her home. She said she experienced the event “with a lot of fear.”

SBC ethnic fellowships issue statement on immigration

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Leaders of 13 Southern Baptist ethnic groups approved a joint statement on immigration seeking religious liberty protections, compassion without demonization and enforcement options including fines or other penalties in lieu of deportation.

Judge rules against Johnny Hunt in defamation suit

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A federal judge ruled against former Southern Baptist Convention President Johnny Hunt, rejecting his claims of defamation against Guidepost Solutions and nearly all the former megachurch pastor's claims against the SBC and its Executive Committee.

Churches losing members as humanitarian parole ends

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They are pastors, deacons and other clergy, actively working among the 500 Haitian churches in the Southern Baptist Convention—at least for another four weeks.

‘Divine appointment’ awaits volunteers in Missouri

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Three Texans on Mission disaster relief leaders motored toward a “divine appointment” on a country road in southeast Missouri.

Greenville pastor Mann nominee for SBC 2nd VP

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A Northeast Texas director of missions has announced his plans to nominate Greenville pastor Tommy Mann to serve as SBC second vice

president at the 2025 SBC annual meeting this summer.