



PROTECTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONFERENCE

November 12, 2026 | Virtual Only

Institutions of biblical higher education operate in an increasingly complex legal and cultural environment. Changes in legislation, regulation, litigation, and public expectations can directly affect an institution's ability to remain faithful to its religious mission. Effective leadership requires both an understanding of these challenges and thoughtful preparation before they arise.

This conference equips institutional leaders to better understand the legal landscape affecting biblical higher education and take practical steps to safeguard their institutions. Through guidance from experienced legal professionals, participants will explore current religious liberty threats, legislative and regulatory advocacy, institutional policies and practices, litigation, and crisis communication while considering how to lead with wisdom, clarity, and conviction.

This one-day virtual-only conference begins at 9:00 AM EST on Thursday, November 12.

Who Should Attend?

Designed for presidents, senior administrators, board members, legal counsel, student development leaders, human resources professionals, and others responsible for institutional policy, compliance, governance, or religious mission. This conference is especially valuable for leaders responsible for anticipating legal risk, developing institutional policies, and helping their institutions respond faithfully and effectively when legal or cultural challenges arise.

What You'll Gain

- Greater understanding of current religious liberty challenges
- Practical strategies for strengthening institutional safeguards
- Guidance for legislative, regulatory, and legal engagement
- Principles for communicating effectively during controversy or crisis

Conference Experience

This one-day virtual conference brings institutional leaders together with experienced legal professionals for focused presentations and interactive Q&A. Participants will examine current legal challenges, consider practical steps to reduce institutional risk, and strengthen their ability to protect and advance their institution's religious mission.

Pricing

Virtual Registration

ABHE Members: \$150

Non-Members: \$250

Virtual registration includes full engagement in the conference program, Q&A participation, access to video recordings after the conference, and access to conference resources. There is no deadline for registration.

Location

Virtual participants will join via Zoom. A link will be sent to registered attendees prior to the conference.

Cancellation Policy

In the event of a personal registration cancellation, fees paid in advance are refundable, less a \$50 cancellation fee, provided written notice is received by ABHE no later than three weeks prior to the event. No refunds will be granted after that date. No refunds are provided for no-shows.

Conference at a Glance

- One-day virtual conference
- Legal experts with experience serving religious institutions
- Practical presentations with interactive Q&A
- Current legal, regulatory, policy, and communication issues
- Focused specifically on protecting religious mission

THURSDAY | NOVEMBER 12

9:00 – 9:15 WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Philip Dearborn, President | ABHE

9:15 – 10:00 SESSION 1: THREATS TO THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY OF BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Greg Baylor, Senior Counsel, Director of Center for Religious Schools | ADF (VA)

In a fallen world, distinctly Christian educational institutions inevitably encounter hostility to their biblical missions. Governments at all levels—federal, state, and local—are the source of many of these threats.

- ▶ Identifying challenges posed by Congress, state legislatures, and local legislative bodies
- ▶ Understanding obstacles created by regulatory bodies
- ▶ Knowing the problems city and county councils generate

10:00 – 10:15 Q&A DISCUSSION

10:15 – 10:30 MORNING BREAK

10:30 – 11:15 SESSION 2: LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY AND BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Greg Baylor; Rachel N. Morrison, Fellow and Director, Administrative State Accountability Project (VA); Tonya Shellnut, Senior State Government Relations Director (SC) | ADF

In a representative democracy, we have the right and obligation to participate in the lawmaking process. Governments can be a source of protections or of threats to your institution's religious exercise and religious mission.

- ▶ Learning what it takes to make a difference in Congress
- ▶ Comprehending the complex system for influencing federal regulatory actions
- ▶ Understanding how to participate effectively in state legislative advocacy

11:15 – 11:30 Q&A DISCUSSION

11:30 – 12:15 SESSION 3: LEGALLY PROTECTING YOUR INSTITUTION

Patrick Piccolo, Senior Counsel, Deputy Director of Church & Ministry Alliance | ADF (VA)

Institutions of biblical higher education can take steps to minimize the legal and public relations risks generated by their distinctive religious character. And they can position themselves to best withstand any attacks that may come.

- ▶ Understanding the importance of written policies and procedures—and of communicating them to applicants, students, staff, and faculty
- ▶ Linking the substance of policies and practices to your institution's religious convictions
- ▶ Consistently applying relevant policies and procedures

12:15 – 12:30 Q&A DISCUSSION

12:30 – 1:15 LUNCH/BRUNCH BREAK

CONTINUED

1:15 – 2:00

SESSION 4: BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE COURTS

Ryan Tucker, Senior Counsel, Director of Center for Christian Ministries | ADF (TX)

Protecting religious freedom in higher education is not just about preserving institutional identity—it's about ensuring that institutions can operate consistently with their mission, beliefs, and educational purpose in the face of increasing legal and societal pressure. Religious freedom cases often arise when government policies, standards, or funding conditions conflict with an institution's faith-based commitments.

- ▶ Understanding the legal landscape impacting faith-based institutions
- ▶ Navigating conflicts between religious mission and government regulation or funding conditions
- ▶ Evaluating when to defend, when to challenge, and how to steward a case with broader impact

2:00 – 2:15

Q&A DISCUSSION

2:15 – 2:30

AFTERNOON BREAK

2:30 – 3:15

SESSION 5: CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS: MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS TRAINING

Lathan Watts, VP of Public Affairs (TX); Ryan Tucker; Greg Baylor | ADF

Disputes involving hot-button legal and cultural issues present challenging public relations issues for Christian institutions of higher education.

- ▶ Knowing when and how to communicate with both friendly and hostile audiences
- ▶ Understanding how much to say, how to say it, and when to say it
- ▶ Coordinating among various internal constituencies to deliver consistent strategic messaging

3:15 – 3:45

Q&A DISCUSSION & WRAP-UP

Questions?

For registration or conference questions, email conferences@abhe.org or call us at (407) 207-0808.

REGISTRATION OPEN

abhe.org/conferences