



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Fighting for What Matters Most

FIRST LIBERTY



# FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE

## Fighting for What Matters Most

First Liberty Institute is the largest legal organization in the nation exclusively dedicated to defending religious freedom for all Americans. Every American has a fundamental right to follow their conscience and live according to their beliefs.

Our nation's Founders established religious freedom as the First Freedom nearly two-and-a-half centuries ago...and together as one team, we intend to keep it that way.

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# MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, CEO & CHIEF COUNSEL

**2023 has been a remarkable year for religious liberty in America. Virtually everywhere we look, God is at work and opening new doors. Religious liberty is on a winning streak in the courtroom, and this is translating to a huge revival for faith and freedom across the country.**

This year, we secured and celebrated two more victories at the U.S. Supreme Court, which makes for a total of four wins at the nation's highest court in the span of just over 12 months. That makes for a total of nine victories at the Supreme Court since 2018. What's more, we are undefeated at the nation's highest court in all of the cases we've brought over the past few years.

Our landmark Supreme Court triumph for Faithful Carrier Gerald Groff didn't only vindicate our client. The ruling set a precedent that fortified legal protections for millions of religious employees across America.

What we've achieved is truly incredible and astonishing. But we could not have orchestrated this success by ourselves. It's with God's favor and the support of Americans all across the country that we've been able to reach such great heights.

Today, First Liberty is the tip of the spear in defending religious liberty in America. We're having a seismic impact on the law and every American is being blessed with more protections to freely live according to their beliefs. Our children and our grandchildren are going to enjoy more religious liberty than ever before.

But there's still a lot of work ahead. The battle for our First Freedom is far from over. Because we're winning at such a historic rate, the enemies of freedom are increasing their attacks.

This year's momentum shouldn't be a reason to sit back. On the contrary, it's a call to remain committed and faithful to the cause.

We have tremendous opportunities laid out before us. By working together, we can seize these opportunities and continue restoring religious freedom back where it rightfully and legally belongs.

I am grateful for everyone who's come alongside First Liberty in yet another historic year. Thank you for standing strong with us through some of the most difficult legal battles. Without you, we simply could not continue fighting for what matters most: our most sacred and foundational freedom.

The cases we won and the multiple, major initiatives launched this year have put us in a unique position to impact our country in ways we only imagined. I'm filled with hope and optimism that about the future of religious freedom. Looking back on this bountiful year, I fully trust and remain hopeful that God will continue to work through First Liberty in mighty ways.

For liberty,



**Kelly Shackelford, Esq.**

*President, CEO and Chief Counsel*





# FIGHTING FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST

## Gerald Groff: The Faithful Carrier

**In June 2023, First Liberty won at the U.S. Supreme Court for Faithful Carrier Gerald Groff. Not only was this a win for our client, but it was a landmark ruling that set a new standard for religious accommodation in the workplace.**

Most people know Gerald as the postal carrier who lost his job because he asked for a religious accommodation to observe the Lord's Day. But there's so much more to his story.

Gerald's Christian faith plays an integral part of his decision to have a day of rest and worship on the Lord's Day. His faith journey reveals why this is something he takes very seriously.

Gerald has devoted great portions of his time throughout his life serving as a missionary overseas. His first mission trip was right after his high school graduation, when he traveled to Africa for the first time to share about his faith.

His devotion to God compelled him to continue mission trips around the globe. After his first trip, he served in Africa two more times and also in several parts of Asia.

Gerald explains that he's always wanted to go "where God wanted to put me" and "serve the Lord overseas in that way."

"I'm passionate about people hearing the word of God," Gerald says. "I'm not afraid of jumping on a plane and going overseas. I'm passionate about living out my faith, being tested in difficult situations, and allowing the Lord to use me to glorify Himself."

When Gerald returned home from one of his trips, he took a job at the post office. At first, he simply saw it as a job. But his heart and passion for ministry continued to shine through, even when he was not serving abroad.

He realized that being at the post office was more than "just a job," seeing it as an opportunity to be a "witness and shine the light of Christ." He says: "Anywhere you go can be a mission field."

Working for the postal service seemed like the perfect fit. The position allowed him to observe the Lord's Day and stay true to his sincerely held beliefs. That is, until the USPS began making Sunday deliveries for Amazon. He sought a religious accommodation and offered to work extra shifts during the week to make up for the time he took off. He even transferred to a rural post office that did not yet require Sunday delivery. Despite his efforts to find a solution, the USPS ultimately refused to accommodate his religious beliefs. He was put in the difficult position of choosing between his faith and his job.

Gerald chose his faith, even though it came at a cost. He is an example to us all of what it means to be fully committed to one's religious beliefs.

We commend and applaud Gerald for a life of faithful service. We celebrate his Supreme Court victory. His perseverance is inspiring. This Faithful Carrier led by example, showing us that we must always stand strong in our commitment to God.

# AMERICA'S EVERYDAY HEROES

First Liberty represents Americans who boldly stand for faith and freedom. Our clients are everyday heroes from all walks of life, diverse backgrounds and beliefs.



## Kenny Vaughan

Kenny Vaughan's company, Shields of Strength, has produced millions of dog tags with Scripture and donated them to soldiers who need a reminder of divine protection. Thousands of service members have found comfort and peace in their faith via Shields of Strength but the U.S. government, at the urging of a radical group, is seeking to ban these inspirational tags—simply because they have a religious message. We're defending Shields so that they can continue to offer hope to our nation's warriors.



## Rabbi Eli Goodman

Rabbi Eli Goodman founded Chabad of the Beaches to serve the Jewish community of Long Barrier Island, New York. The congregation purchased a building that was vacant for several years. But when village officials heard about a religious group purchasing the property, the village sought to seize the property through eminent domain. First Liberty is defending the congregation, because houses of worship in America should not be subject to this type of religious hostility.



## Robyn Strader

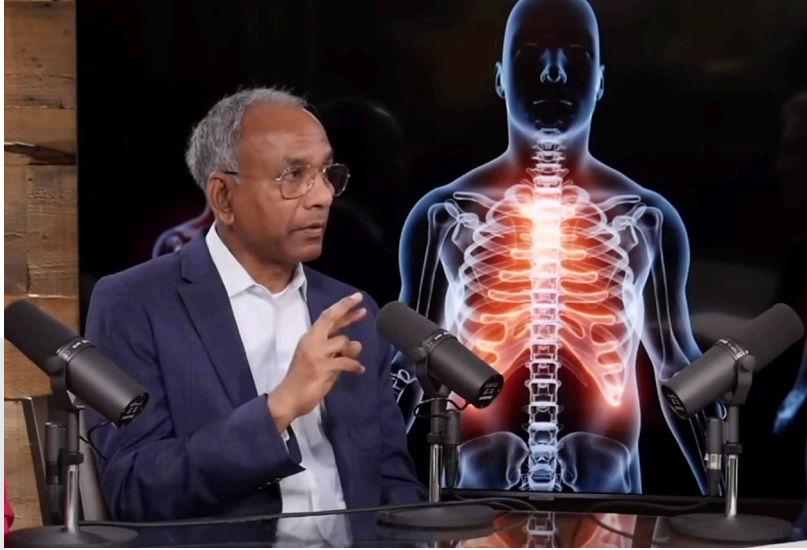
Robyn Strader—a nurse practitioner with multiple, advanced degrees—requested a religious accommodation so she wouldn't have to violate her religious beliefs and prescribe abortion-inducing drugs. CVS accommodated her for over six years. But CVS reversed course and fired her, joining the ranks of a hostile corporate culture that targets religious employees. First Liberty filed a federal lawsuit to protect Robyn and other medical professionals from having to choose between their faith and livelihood.



## Prof. Johnson Varkey

Dr. Varkey was a professor at St. Philips College, who taught biology under school approved and science-based curriculum. He taught over 1,500 students during his 20-year tenure and received impeccable student reviews. But the college fired him after a small group of students disagreed with his teachings, which are consistent with his study of human biology and his religious beliefs. First Liberty is defending him because firing Americans for their religious beliefs is unlawful.





# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

From the U.S. Supreme Court to local schoolboards, houses of worship and your neighborhood, First Liberty's legal team is leading the charge on the frontlines, litigating the most important cases and securing historic victories. By God's grace, 2023 was another landmark year that changed the landscape of religious freedom law in America.

It is my privilege and honor to lead our amazing legal team. The biggest question this year was how can we come close to topping the success of 2022. Through God's grace, we did! In 2023, First Liberty again secured two major U.S. Supreme Court victories.

In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court granted victory to Faithful Carrier Gerald Groff, who lost his job at the U.S. Postal Service for observing the Sunday Sabbath. This landmark decision strengthens legal protections for all employees seeking religious accommodations. The Court overturned a 1977 decision that curtailed religious freedom in the workplace and held that federal law requires employers to accommodate religious employees unless doing so would cause significant difficulty or expense.

We won our second Supreme Court victory on behalf of Christian bakers Aaron and Melissa Klein. The Court once again vacated a lower court's decision that ratified the State of Oregon's decade-long effort to force the Kleins out of business by penalizing them for refusing to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding. The Supreme Court returned the case to the Oregon courts to reconsider in light of the Court's recent decision in *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*.

We also secured many significant victories at all court levels that advanced religious liberty in our schools, houses of worship and faith-based organizations, the military, and throughout the marketplace and public arena.

After First Liberty obtained the first court victories for military services members with religious objections to the military vaccine mandate, including on behalf of our Navy SEAL clients, congressional legislation mandated repeal of the mandate.

Our lawsuit against U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of nurse practitioner Stephanie Carter resulted in a nationwide religious accommodation process for all VA employees. In New York, we obtained injunctive relief upholding the First and Second Amendment rights of houses of worship.

These victories and our continued fight in dozens of cases are advancing religious freedom for all Americans. We give God the glory and celebrate these wins. But we have many battles ahead and our mission continues until we see religious liberty fully protected in law, respected and flourishing in America.

Soli Deo Gloria,



**Jeff Mateer**

*Executive Vice President  
& Chief Legal Officer*





# MAJOR VICTORIES AT THE U.S. SUPREME COURT

In 2023, First Liberty successfully fought two cases at the nation's highest court. These were not just wins for our clients, but also helped protect countless Americans across the nation.

With these victories, we now have four Supreme Court wins in the span of one year, and nine wins in total at the nation's highest court since 2018.



## Faithful Carrier Gerald Groff Wins Supreme Court Case

*Groff v. DeJoy*

On June 29, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of our client Gerald Groff, a postal worker who wrongfully lost his job because of his religious beliefs. In a landmark 9-0 decision, the Court held that federal law requires workplaces to accommodate their religious employees unless doing so would cause substantial increased costs on the business. It set a new legal standard for religious accommodation in the workplace. This will have a positive, far-reaching impact for countless religious employees across the country.



## A Fresh Start in Sweet Cakes by Melissa

*Klein v. Bureau of Labor and Industries*

On June 30, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a favorable order in our Sweet Cakes by Melissa case. The Court threw out a lower court decision that penalized and bankrupted Oregon bakers Aaron and Melissa Klein because they declined to create a message in conflict with their religious beliefs. The case was sent back to be reexamined by the lower courts in light of a recent Supreme Court ruling stating that government may not force Americans to speak messages that violate their beliefs. Aaron and Melissa have another opportunity to fight their case—and we'll continue fighting until sweet justice is delivered.

# AMERICA'S BEST LAWYERS

## Meet Lea Patterson

At First Liberty, we have America's best lawyers defending your First Freedom. Among this group of elite legal minds is Lea Patterson, who serves our team as Senior Counsel.

Patterson joined First Liberty as a judicial fellow after clerking for Judge Raymond Gruender of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. She began her legal career at First Liberty, rising through the ranks while contributing to a variety of religious liberty cases.

She worked on landmark case *Carson v. Makin* from initial client intake to Supreme Court victory. In her early days at First Liberty, she successfully advocated for senior citizens' equal access to community spaces for Bible study. She also spent years defending the Arkansas capitol's Ten Commandments monument.

She currently leads First Liberty's Public Arena practice group and co-authored *The Religious Liberty Solution to Section 230*, a law review article proposing an innovative legal theory to protect religious expression on social media.

Patterson earned her law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Texas Christian University. At UVA, she served as an executive editor for the Virginia Law Review and as president of the UVA chapter of Advocates for Life, a national association of pro-life law students. A semifinalist in UVA's moot court competition, she also received class awards for her legal writing and oral advocacy. During law school, she interned for the Texas Solicitor General's Office and Senator Ted Cruz.

A first generation lawyer, Patterson pursued a legal career because she felt God calling her to use her talents to protect the spread of the Gospel.

Reflecting on her time at First Liberty, she said, "I'm grateful to be one of the few lawyers who can say that they never wonder whether they've made a difference."



## Meet Andrew Gould

**Andrew Gould is an attorney with decades of experience as a lawyer, prosecutor and judge. Gould joined First Liberty in 2022 and now practices law at Holtzman Vogel PLLC. He is serving as co-counsel with First Liberty and as one of our volunteer attorneys.**

Gould served as a Justice on the Arizona Supreme Court from 2016 to 2021. He wrote the majority opinion in *Brush and Nib v. City of Phoenix*, an important religious freedom and free speech case. That ruling held that the city could not enforce an ordinance forcing a Christian art studio to create wedding invitations expressing messages that conflict with their religious beliefs.

Gould also served as a judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals from 2011 to 2016 and on the Yuma County Superior Court from 2001 to 2011.

Former Arizona Governor Ducey described him as someone who's been "committed to law and order throughout his career, working to ensure justice for victims and upholding the Constitution."

He was also a prosecutor for several years, litigating major criminal cases and putting cartel members behind bars:

- **1999 to 2001**  
Chief Civil Deputy for the Yuma County Attorney's Office
- **1998 to 1999**  
Prosecutor for the Maricopa County Attorney's Office
- **1994 to 1998**  
Prosecutor for the Yuma County Attorney's Office

Gould also worked for the law firms of Gallagher & Kennedy and Snell & Wilmer in Phoenix. He earned his law degree from Northwestern University School of Law and his undergraduate degree from the University of Montana.

He credits his upbringing as a big reason why he decided to become a lawyer. His mother was a legal secretary for 30 years and recalls that his family made incredible sacrifices, one of the things that most impacted his career.

"You always have to remember your roots. You can't forget where you came from," said Gould.

Gould said that the purpose of going into law was always to help people and to be a public servant.



# FIGHTING TOGETHER

At First Liberty, every member of our team is united in one purpose and one mission: to protect and restore religious liberty for all Americans. We are all in this together.



**Holly Randall**

*"I've spent a lot of time with our Navy SEAL clients who have been attacked and mistreated for their religious beliefs. It's really inspiring to know I trained in law school for this legal fight. It's a tremendous honor to help some of our nation's toughest warriors!"*

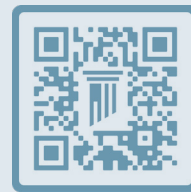


Meet Holly



**Danielle Runyan**

*"What a blessing to work for First Liberty, knowing we are the linchpin helping all Americans freely live out their faith. I joined the fight because if you truly want to be free, you need religious liberty. Protecting our First Freedom is more important now than ever."*



Meet Danielle



**Mike Berry**

*"During law school, my eyes were opened to the religious hostility that exists in our country. I have a calling in life, and a big part of my calling is to stand up to bullies. When it comes to religious freedom, my calling is to stand up and fight the bullies who oppose religious freedom."*



Meet Mike



**Hiram Sasser**

*"Every oppressive government wants to squash this fundamental right. That's why protecting religious liberty is the most important thing we can do. We're not just defending religious liberty, but expanding it to fulfill the vision of this nation's Founders."*



Meet Hiram





# A COMMUNITY THAT SPREADS ALL ACROSS AMERICA

Our family of patriots and faithful supporters grows each and every year. More and more Americans are joining First Liberty in the most important battle of our lifetime: the fight for religious freedom.



**Dottie** | New Braunfels, TX

*"In childhood we all had superheroes who charged to the rescue, saving us from sudden destruction. As ordinary God-fearing adults who want only to live out our faith in every aspect of our lives, First Liberty Institute is our grown-up champion. Supporting this organization is a joy. I may never need to call on their expertise, but I want to make sure First Liberty endures for those who someday will need to call for rescue by this superhero."*



**Jeff** | McMinnville, OR

*"I was introduced to First Liberty about 7 years ago. I met a community of people who had found what appeared to be their mission in life. It didn't take long for me to understand the great things that First Liberty is doing to protect, preserve, and defend religious liberty, the main foundation upon which a civilization is built. Without it, that civilization crumbles. My mission in life now is to help First Liberty by sharing this message with others and support its noble cause."*



**Joe** | Houston, TX

*"First Liberty is one of our family's favorite partner organizations to stand for truth and righteousness. Religious freedom is indeed essential for our democracy to survive. Our quality of life and ability to worship are better as a result of Kelly and the talented First Liberty team. This impressive organization continues to deliver year after year. We love that the team is so dedicated and efficient in their God ordained ministry. They are indeed worthy of our prayer and financial support."*



**Carla** | Carlsbad, CA

*"I am a staunch supporter of First Liberty. I am grateful to have been introduced to First Liberty and am so encouraged by their many recent victories. Finally, I can do something to help move the needle in the right direction. I will continue to do everything in my power to support their efforts—one victory at a time. First Liberty's important work has allowed me to feel a part of a cause that is near and dear to my heart."*

\* The testimonials above are from actual First Liberty donors. Names and photos have been changed to protect donor anonymity.





[LEARN MORE]

## THE CASE FOR LIBERTY

### New Podcast!

In 2023, we were excited to announce the launch of The Case for Liberty, a podcast that guides listeners through meaningful legal conversations. Whether you're an attorney, legal professional or an everyday American, this podcast is perfect for anyone seeking an in-depth look at religious freedom in the law.

Episodes feature a specific line up of attorneys who dive deeper into the details of our cases. Led by our host, Chris Freund, these dynamic discussions help Americans better understand the facts of each case, who the client is and the legal nuances that make each one of our cases unique and different. The Case for Liberty is available for streaming on three major digital platforms, including Spotify, Apple and Google Podcasts.

### Meet Our Podcast Host

*"The depth of knowledge among the legal team at First Liberty is simply incredible. They truly are some of the brightest minds in the field of constitutional law. The podcast gives listeners the opportunity to hear much more about our cases, the law, and how First Liberty is changing the religious liberty legal landscape.*

*We get to explore the law in a deeper way. For me, it's the chance to ask deeper questions about what the cases or issues really mean and help the listener connect more intrinsically with the people behind all that we do."*



**Chris Freund**  
Director of Media Relations  
Podcast Host





[LEARN MORE]

## TODAY'S ESSENTIAL STORIES. STRAIGHT FROM THE FRONTLINES.

*"Every week, First Liberty Live! brings you expert insight directly from the frontlines of the fight for religious freedom. We took you live to the U.S. Supreme Court to hear our Faithful Carrier case, live to the 5th Circuit in New Orleans to watch our Navy SEALs case, and live to Washington state to hear from Coach Joe Kennedy on the day of his first game back.*

*Featured guests included Mike Pompeo, Kirk Cameron, Robert Wilkie, Charlie Kirk, Carrie Severino, Kevin Sorbo and Amity Shlaes. We had our first episode go viral! More than 435,000 people watched Dr. Johnson Varkey share how he was fired for teaching basic biology. Across all channels, our videos collected more than 4 million views.*

*Episodes are available on FirstLibertyLive.com and YouTube, and as an audio podcast on every major platform."*



**Stuart Shepard**  
Host & Multimedia Director

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*"I am honored and humbled to be on the First Liberty Live! team as producer – and now co-host! I feel like my passions and education have collided into a perfect fit through my role at First Liberty.*

*I have a bachelor's degree in Convergence Journalism, and I am currently pursuing a Master of Jurisprudence from A&M School of Law. To be able to work in both media and law every day is a rare combination.*

*I feel abundantly blessed in the opportunities I have through First Liberty Live! It is an incredible privilege to share our cases and stories with our audience – and I look forward to the continued adventures ahead!"*



**Peyton Luke**  
Media Specialist  
Co-Host & Producer



# RECLAIMING THE CULTURE

The Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy is the educational arm of First Liberty. The CRCD provides educational programming, publishes an academic journal, and issues an annual religious freedom index that are focused on the essential role that faith plays in promoting and sustaining liberty.



[LEARN MORE]

The CRCD has been on a steep growth trajectory since the initiative was launched three years ago. In that time more than 200 students have benefited from our programs, our staff and affiliated scholars have published more than 300 essays and academic articles, and the first-of-its-kind Religious Liberty in the States index has impacted the work of dozens of policy makers, academics and legislators across the country. The CRCD's most notable achievements include:

- Senior Fellows James M. Patterson and Catherine R. Pakaluk were among the first recipients of the Heritage Foundation's Freedom and Opportunity Academic Prizes
- The RLS index directly impacted the passage of legislation securing greater religious freedom protections in four states with more bills pending in others
- CRCD staff and senior fellows have six new books set for release in 2023 and 2024
- 50+ students from nearly 40 different institutions graduated from CRCD fellowships and programs in 2023
- More than 150 academics representing more than 100 universities, think tanks and other organizations are now actively engaged in CRCD programs for scholars

2023 has been an extraordinarily fruitful year for the CRCD—and the best is yet to come! As we prepare for 2024, we are enthusiastic for the expansion of the Religious Liberty in the States project, refining our student programs, and engaging with an even larger group of scholars and partners. We are fortunate to work with such a talented team that makes all of this civilization-affirming work possible.



**Trey Dimsdale**  
CRCD Executive Director



Religious Liberty in the States is an annual data project and index that measures free-exercise protections in state law. After being enthusiastically received and widely endorsed in its inaugural year, 2023 marks the second year this report is published. Mark David Hall and Paul Mueller have joined the CRCD team as the new director and associate director of the project.



[LEARN MORE]



# NEXT GEN LEADERS

The CRCD is shaping emerging leaders to advance the cause of freedom as they enter into careers as academics and educators, lawyers and public servants.

## What Our Fellows Are Saying...



*"The Shaftesbury program has given me an opportunity that I didn't think I'd have again: the chance to pursue a burning question about what it means to be a Christian, and how better to understand Christianity in the context of modern skepticism and doubt."*

**Gabriella Hsu**



*"The investment that you have made in the Fellowship has encouraged me to pursue my career as an academic, lawyer and Christian prepared to engage with the world in the best way that I can."*

**Dylan Mayne**



*"Scintillating! All of the different Fellowship lectures have come at religious liberty from different perspectives—economic, strategic and theory of law. Definitely do the Fellowship. You'll learn a lot about the importance of religious freedom as the foundation of all liberties in our country."*

**Margaret McDonough**



*"This fellowship has changed my life in so many ways. The friendships, ideas and opportunities that I have gained from this opportunity are precious, and I'm extremely grateful to be a CRCD Alum."*

**Joshua Janniere**



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[LEARN MORE]



[LEARN MORE]

# ADVANCING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM INTO AMERICA'S FUTURE



# NATIONAL LEADERS SUMMIT

After 12 intense months of planning in 2022, First Liberty hosted the second annual National Leader Summit in July 2023. Our organization spearheads this one-of-a-kind event in order to bring together a dynamic group of leaders who will cast a vision and pave the path to advance religious freedom for all Americans.

Our inaugural National Leaders Summit was one of the most critical endeavors in First Liberty's history. Now in its second year, the event continues to be a resounding success, with more than 150 national leaders in attendance who facilitated a fruitful exchange of ideas. The summit is bringing to life an incredible vision to create a gathering unlike any other in the country, one that exclusively focuses on bringing together the top minds and creating a plan to advance the future of religious liberty in our nation.

## 2023 Keynote Speakers



**ROBERT WILKIE**  
FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS



**BETSY DEVOS**  
FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF  
EDUCATION



**SETH DILLON**  
CEO  
THE BABYLON BEE



**KEVIN ROBERTS**  
PRESIDENT  
THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

## 2023 Panelists and Experts



**LT. GEN. (RET.) WILLIAM G.  
"JERRY" BOYKIN**  
EXEC. VICE PRESIDENT  
FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL



**AARON STREETT**  
PARTNER, BAKER BOTTS  
SUPREME COURT LITIGATOR



**ALLYSON HO**  
PARTNER, GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER  
SUPREME COURT LITIGATOR



**TERESA COLLETT**  
LAW PROFESSOR  
ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY

# DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

Building a sustainable, impactful organization is complex. Enterprises that stagnate are lethargic and do not remain relevant for long. Here at First Liberty, we spend considerable time creating a culture of innovation - in fact, it is one of our core values.

Ideas are commonplace, but fewer people can create something truly novel, with buzz, that provokes action in newer and bolder ways. That is what disruptive innovation is all about. It's not just something new at the margin, like changing the color of a cereal box. The iPhone was disruptive. The high-speed microprocessor or statin drugs, or the Model T, are further examples. How long since you shopped at Woolworth's, Montgomery Ward or Blockbusters? They were huge organizations that forgot the importance of disruptive innovation.

Disruption occurs when no one is "doing it that way", and then someone tries it. Like venture capital initiatives, most disruptive innovations will fail. But, what about that one-out-of-ten "rocket ship of an idea" that really flies? So, a question for us is: how to apply disruption to the fight for religious liberty?

Business strategists have tried for years to define disruptive innovation. For us, it means delivering our value proposition in overpowering ways - to leverage our competitive advantage over adversary groups. Like special forces operators, we must be flexible, proactive, and forceful at the point of impact. Therefore, it is essential that we disrupt the religious liberty battlefield with creative uses of technology, surprise and the powerful use of the human mind.

Our volunteer attorney model was certainly disruptive when we introduced it over a decade ago. Currently we are using "free-braining" techniques to evince newer perspectives and approaches. Such as, how do we convene millions and millions more Americans around the idea of religious liberty, and educate them

in gripping, motivating ways to stymie those who would deny religious rights?

Artificial intelligence has enormous potential, for good and for bad. We are exploring ways to harness these algorithms to aid in case discovery, educational outreach, and in the use of social and other media.

Disruptive innovation must be integral to the way we do business. In sum, we must employ disruptive innovation in our efforts to be First in the Fight, and win.



**David K. Holmes**  
*Executive Vice President  
Chief Operating & Financial Officer*

## Why We Win: Our Volunteer Network Attorneys



**Paul Clement**

Paul Clement is one of America's top litigators. In addition to decades in private practice, Clement served as U.S. Solicitor General. He's among a handful of lawyers with 100+ arguments at the U.S. Supreme Court.



**Allyson Ho**

Allyson Ho is a partner at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher. She has argued multiple times before the U.S. Supreme Court and presented over 90 oral arguments in federal and state courts nationwide.



**Aaron Streett**

Aaron Streett is a partner at Baker Botts. He is an experienced U.S. Supreme Court and appellate court litigator, with nearly 40 arguments between the 5th and D.C. Circuits alone.

# NO BETTER LETTER

First Liberty released No Better Letter, one of the most creative and unique projects in our organization's history. It was written by our Senior Director of Creative Strategy, Howard Goldthwaite.

This educational venture began because millions of Americans have been wrongly told the "separation of Church and State" means that religion and the government can never mix. Most people also think this phrase is in the Constitution. But it's not. It's from a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 to a group of worshippers in Danbury, Connecticut.

Jefferson understood that the right to worship as we choose doesn't come from the government, so the government has no right to interfere. Religious freedom comes directly from God, so it's a right that will always be well worth protecting—which aligns perfectly with the mission of First Liberty.

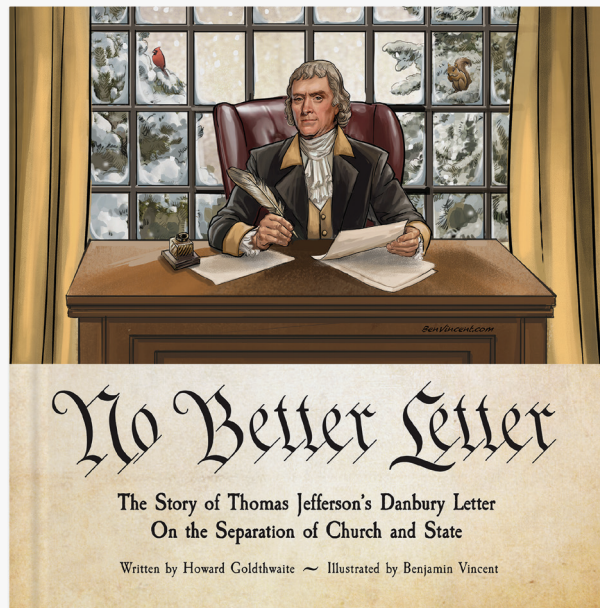
To inform Americans about the true meaning of this phrase, we created an engaging resource for all audiences, from children to adults.

Our team produced an animated video telling the story of this historic letter, and how it enshrined religious liberty for all Americans. The concept, design and the initial sketches for No Better Letter are all crafted in-house. The rhythmic and poetic words that accompany the imagery are all native to First Liberty.

The narration and audible storytelling you hear in the video are all done by our staff, making the most of the talents and experience within our team.

But the vision for No Better Letter expanded beyond video. We also produced a hard-cover book.

No Better Letter embodies our spirit and core value of innovation. It is different from anything we've done in the past and we are tremendously excited for the impact it will have in educating supporters and any American who wants to be well informed about the history and origins of religious liberty.



WATCH THE VIDEO

**No Better Letter was recognized with two awards for its exceptional quality:**



**INTERNET ADVERTISING  
COMPETITION**

**2023 Best of Show Online Video**

**AVA DIGITAL  
AWARDS**

**2023 Best Nonprofit Long Form Video**

# EXCITING PROJECTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

At First Liberty, we don't just celebrate legal victories. Through education and many important initiatives and projects, we're impacting the future and winning the fight for religious freedom beyond the courtroom.



[LEARN MORE]

## First Liberty Receives Distinguished Service Medal Award

We received The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal, the highest award given by the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization. The award is given as a tribute to individuals and organizations who make great contributions for America's veterans. We are incredibly honored to be recognized with this accolade. Our military service members and veterans make tremendous sacrifices for our freedoms, and that's why we continue fighting to ensure they can freely live out their faith.



[LEARN MORE]

## Inspiring Future Leaders

Religious liberty can only advance as far as those who carry it. We're equipping and inspiring the next generation. This year, Kelly Shackelford and several of our attorneys traveled around the country speaking to students at several colleges and universities about how they can join the fight for religious liberty. "I'm filled with hope and optimism," says Kelly. "I see a passion for freedom, the rule of law and the Constitution living and breathing in each of these young leaders."



[LEARN MORE]

## Attorney Appointed State Judge

Governor Ron DeSantis appointed First Liberty attorney Jordan Pratt to the Florida Fifth District Court of Appeal. Jordan is precisely who you want as a judge. He worked on behalf of clients of all faiths and knows what it means to give all Americans equal treatment before the law. His record and experience show he is committed to the rule of law and believes in applying the Constitution according to its original meaning and intent.



[LEARN MORE]

## Testifying Before Congress

Attorney Jeremy Dys testified before the U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government. He brought attention to the alarming rise in violence against faith-based pregnancy resource centers. Hundreds of these facilities have been attacked and vandalized in the past year, including our client Heartbeat of Miami. Dys explained that vigilante justice has no place in America and those who target life-affirming reproductive health facilities must be held accountable for their crimes.



[LEARN MORE]

### CRCD Scholars Receive Academic Prize

Fellows at the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy, Dr. James Patterson and Dr. Catherine Pakaluk, received the Heritage Foundation’s Freedom and Opportunity Academic Prize. They were among the first recipients alongside a list of highly respected academics from the nation’s top universities. This prestigious award recognizes distinguished thinkers and scholars whose research is advancing truth, freedom and foundational American values like religious liberty.



[LEARN MORE]

### Testifying at Texas Legislature

First Liberty Of Counsel Matt Krause testified before the Texas Senate Committee on Education in support of a bill to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom. He explained it is constitutional because of the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*. Bills like this are evidence of our Supreme Court victories bearing fruit. Every American now has the legal foundation to place religious freedom back where it rightfully and legally belongs.



[LEARN MORE]

### Bringing “In God We Trust” Back to Schools

Our staff had the unique opportunity to come alongside and support several citizens in Plano, Texas who wanted to bring “In God We Trust” signs to their local schools. State law allows public schools to display plaques with our nation’s motto when they are donated by private citizens. This is just one of many examples of everyday people having the confidence and the legal foundation to go and restore faith in America.



[LEARN MORE]

### First Liberty Video Goes Viral

We published a special First Liberty Live! episode in July featuring our client, Dr. Johnson Varkey. He was fired by St. Philips College for teaching in an anatomy and physiology class that sex is determined by X and Y chromosomes, consistent with his study of human biology and religious beliefs. The video went viral and garnered more than 430,000 views on YouTube, making it the most watched episode on our page all year.



## GRAND OPENING: WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE

**This year, we had the privilege of opening a dedicated Washington, D.C. office.**

Located on Pennsylvania Avenue, this brand new First Liberty location is within close distance of the U.S. Supreme Court, the White House and the U.S. Capitol. It is a central hub of operations for our volunteer and staff attorneys—as well as our clients—whenever we present oral argument at the Supreme Court. It’s also a perfect stopping point for our attorneys when they are called as expert witnesses at Congressional hearings.

We’re excited about the tremendous team of attorneys and support staff who are leading the fight for religious liberty “inside the Beltway.” In addition to their primary focus on our legal work and cases, they provide key national decision makers with education, resources and information

about religious liberty. Our D.C. personnel carry out analysis on public policy, regulations and legislation that impact religious freedom.

Our work also includes expert analysis on federal court nominees. We analyze their records and provide members of the U.S. Senate and the Senate Judiciary Committee with relevant information about how these potential judges would treat and handle religious liberty if confirmed to the bench.

Opening an office in our nation’s capital will allow us to continue fulfilling our mission to advance religious freedom for all Americans—and across all of America. It is critical to the educational arm of our organization. Having a presence in Washington, D.C. will allow us to support and inform America’s leaders on why religious freedom—our First Freedom—should be a priority.





## MEET OUR D.C. STAFF



**MIKE BERRY**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



**KASSIE DULIN**  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT  
AFFAIRS & COUNSEL



**KELLEY MCLEAN**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS



**MAYA NORONHA**  
SPECIAL COUNSEL FOR  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



**BECKY DUMMERMUTH**  
COUNSEL



**TABITHA HARRINGTON**  
COUNSEL



**KAYLA TONEY**  
ASSOCIATE COUNSEL



**CAMILLE VARONE**  
ASSOCIATE COUNSEL



**NICK SPENCER**  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



**GINGER GRIFFIN**  
FRONT DESK

# RESTORING FAITH IN AMERICA



[LEARN MORE]

## RESTORING FAITH IN AMERICA

In 2023, First Liberty launched Restoring Faith in America, a comprehensive, multi-faceted digital campaign to educate millions of Americans about the impact of multiple Supreme Court victories for religious freedom.

Unlike any time in the past 50 years, religious freedom is on a huge winning streak. We are now witnessing the freedom to publicly express religious faith making an unprecedented comeback across our country. After decades of hostility to religion, the tide is finally turning.

But almost no one knew about this seismic and positive change.

We created Restoring Faith in America to inform people about the incredible restoration of their rights, as well as to spur them into action. This major initiative communicates and clarifies that Americans now have a legal foundation to live out their faith, restore religious expression and put faith and religious freedom where they rightfully and legally belong. The path is now clear for powerful expression of faith, and Restoring Faith in America encourages every person of faith to seize this opportunity.

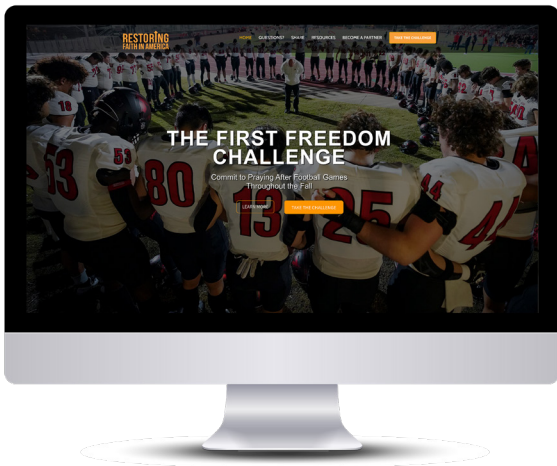
We built a dedicated microsite ([www.RFIA.org](http://www.RFIA.org)) complete with practical resources and helpful information, including legal kits, sharable social media content, news and commentary, and FREE access to a pocket Constitution. We sought to make sure Americans are equipped with reliable and credible tools so they can restore faith in their communities. To spread the word, we combined our central website with a targeted social media advertising campaign, targeting our existing supporters and new audiences.

For many years, religious people grew accustomed to playing defense. But for the first time in a very long time, they are in a position to go on offense. This campaign is helping us reach countless people with this important message: "Now You Can!" We're speaking directly to everyday Americans, presenting them with the many ways they can bring back religious expression.

High school football players and coaches can pray together before their games. Police stations can proudly display our national motto, "In God We Trust," and schools can also display it on their campuses. Chaplains of all faiths can open courtroom sessions with a prayer. Crosses and Ten Commandments monuments can be restored and displayed on public land. VA facilities can include the Bible and Scriptural references in POW/MIA remembrance displays. Cities can put up a menorah for Hanukkah and a nativity scene for Christmas.

From our children's schools, houses of worship, charities, businesses and the marketplace, our local veterans memorials and our neighborhoods, every American is experiencing more religious freedom now than in more than a half century. Our goal is to set in motion a movement that reaches communities and people all throughout America.

God is opening new doors for religious expression and through Restoring Faith in America, we are encouraging all Americans to walk through them.



# MORE FREEDOM PER DOLLAR

**America the Beautiful remains the finest nation the world has known.**

Blessed by God with unalienable rights, our forebearers fought with great sacrifice to build a republic rich with liberties and immeasurable resources.

There are landmark religious liberty victories to cheer about this past year, and more cases on the horizon. Yet, the challenge before us all is to become the greatest generation for religious liberty in our history. Now, is the moment to stand boldly to defend our country's faith traditions. There is hope, and it is from Above.

As forecast in last year's report, 2022 and 2023 would prove to be watershed years. The faithful have responded and are making a statement that religion is at the core of our country and is essential for our economic and national security well-being. Since we charge our clients no fees-for-service, it is because of your faithful donations, that I am pleased to report that the financial state of First Liberty Institute remains very sound.

Our fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, ended with a remarkable record. Once our independent audit firm completes its work, FY22/23 will prove to be the second highest revenue period in our history. Expenses remain manageable. The drop in legal matters this past year (as shown on the graph to the right) normalizes the pandemic-inflated numbers witnessed during the previous two years. Additionally, the quality of the cases remained extraordinarily high. Our balance sheet expanded, and our liquidity reflects our positive net margin and stewardship.

As an ex-Wall Street banker, it is my belief that the return on every donated dollar at First Liberty is a return on invested capital worth noting. Our ability to use digital technology, advanced educational and learning techniques, novel legal strategies, and disruptive innovation throughout our firm are fundamentally altering the way we defend your rights.

Telling our clients' stories and defending them are critical to liberty. I am excited about the future and for what we can accomplish together to make a difference for them and for future generations.

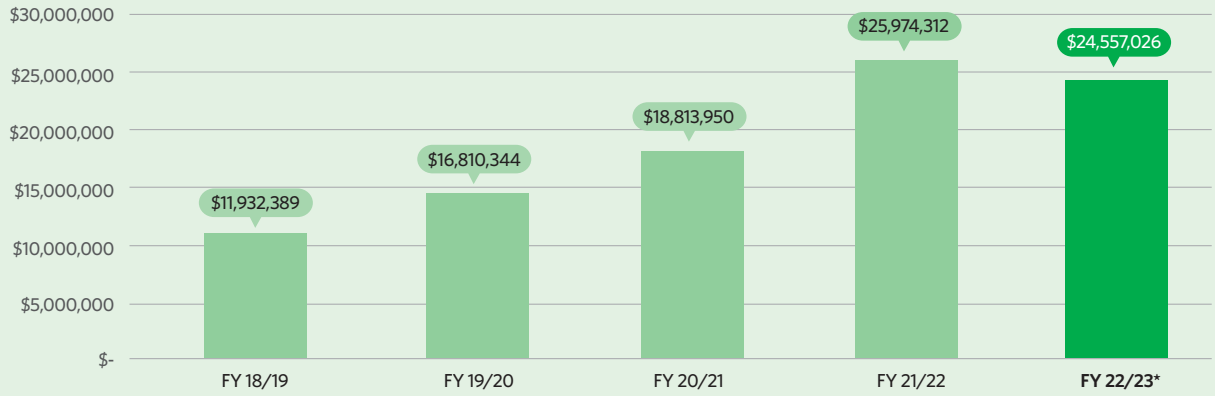
Thank you again for the trust you place with us, and your gracious contributions. They make an enormous difference. We will need your continuing, prayerful support in the coming year.

Gratefully,

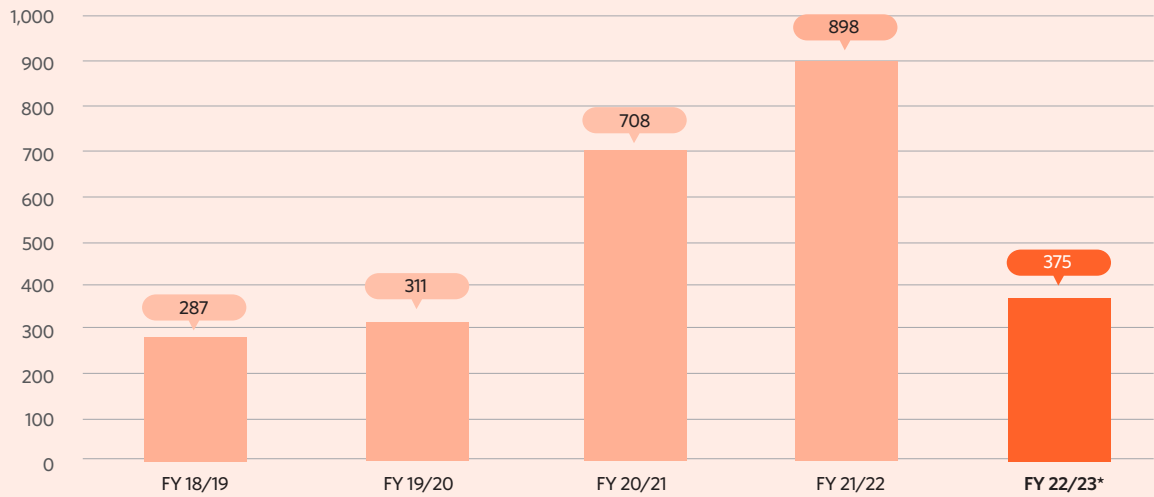


**David K. Holmes**  
*Executive Vice President  
Chief Operating & Financial Officer*

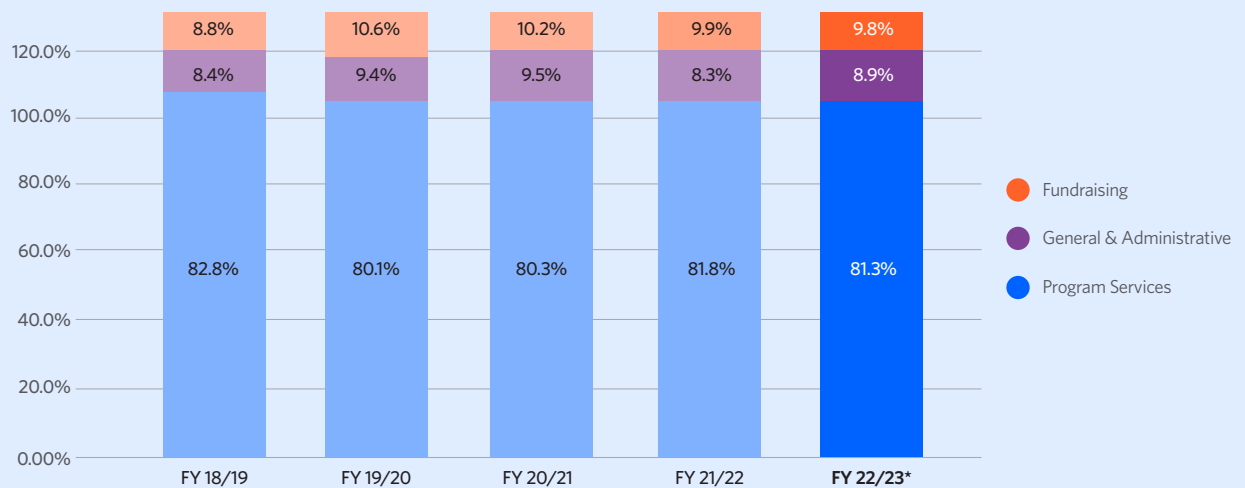
## REVENUES



## LEGAL MATTERS



## HOW WE ALLOCATE RESOURCES



\*The financial information included in this presentation is preliminary, unaudited and subject to revision upon completion of the organization's reconciliation and audit processes.



Visit [www.FirstLiberty.org/2023Financials](http://www.FirstLiberty.org/2023Financials) for more information ▶



# SUPPORT FIRST LIBERTY

Fighting for What Matters Most



# Fighting for What Matters Most

*Protecting and restoring religious liberty is the most important battle of our lifetime.*

*Want to be a part of this historic and growing movement?*

*Here's how you can join First Liberty's growing army:*



## GIVE TODAY

Supporting First Liberty with a gift helps us stay on the frontlines of the battle, defending religious Americans across the country free of charge.



## BECOME AN FLI INSIDER

Subscribe to our weekly e-newsletter that's sent straight to your inbox, complete with news, analysis and encouraging stories of the everyday American heroes we defend.



## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Like and follow First Liberty on our social media platforms to get the latest updates on our cases and other exclusive content.



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