

Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

2013 Essay Scholarship Contest

The entry deadline for the 2013 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest was March 1, 2013. Winners will be announced this summer.

Return to this page in the future to read about the winning essays.

The topic for the 2014 contest is scheduled to be released sometime in late October. For more information, contact Cherilyn Crowe at ccrowe@BJCOnline.org.

Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty announces winners of 2012 Religious Liberty Essay Contest

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON — An essay exploring the history of religion in presidential campaigns and calling for a courteous discussion of religion from candidates is the winner of the 2012 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee.

This year's essay topic asked students to examine the role religion should play during a presidential campaign. More than 735 high school juniors and seniors from 47 states — as well as students from Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam — submitted entries.

The grand prize winner is Scott Remer from Beachwood, Ohio. His essay, titled "Deities and Dialogue: The Proper Role of Religion in Presidential Elections," argued for a cautious and courteous discussion of religion from the candidates, using examples from history to illustrate conflicts that can arise in the political process. Remer pointed out the U.S. Constitution created what Baptist preacher Isaac Backus called a clear-cut distinction between the "civil" and the "ecclesiastical." Providing illustrations from present-day campaigns and the campaigns of 1800, 1928 and 1960, Remer wrote, "Since religion is such a deeply personal and profoundly

important part of people's lives, vilipending others' faiths is extremely hurtful and divisive." Remer concluded, "An inclusive, respectful dialogue about religion can elevate our national civic discourse and create more well-informed voters," and said that "as long as candidates refrain from using their religion as a means of obtaining votes or belittling their opponents or potential constituents, initiating a candid conversation with clear limits can enlighten our politics."

As the grand prize winner, Remer receives a \$1,000 scholarship and a trip to Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Baptist Joint Committee board meeting in October. The son of Drs. Erica and Erick Remer, he worships at Temple Tifereth-Israel in Cleveland, Ohio. Remer is a 2012 graduate of Beachwood High School and will attend Yale University this fall.

Michael Aitchison of Iowa City, Iowa, earned the second place prize of a \$500 scholarship. The son of Sue and Randall Aitchison, he is a 2012 graduate of Iowa City West High School and will attend Western Illinois University. In his essay, Aitchison suggested the campaign could be treated as a "job interview." He wrote that employers must utilize a "merit-based analysis of applicants" and "not hire or fire employees based on religious views." Therefore, people of all religions or no religion have "equal access to this prestigious public office," provided their beliefs "would not impair their ability to perform their duties as commander-in-chief." He concluded, "Religion has proved itself to be a valid political discussion point when used properly, and as such it should not be ignored, but neither can it be allowed to dominate the election."

The third place winner is Katelyn Harrop of McMinnville, Oregon, who received a \$100 scholarship. A 2012 graduate of McMinnville High School, she is entering Hofstra University this fall. She is the daughter of Kent and Tricia Harrop and a member of First Baptist Church in McMinnville. In her essay, Harrop wrote, "In politics, especially competitive and brutal presidential campaigns, the key is to allow religion to fuel the moral reasoning behind political actions without presenting them in a way that excludes or degrades those of other or no religious preference." She concluded that the "great American tradition of personal faith informing one's public life" has been "the backdrop for presidential campaigns from the founding of our nation to the present day."

The Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest was established in 2006 to engage high school juniors and seniors in church-state issues. A panel of judges issued scores based on the content of each essay and the author's writing skills.

For more information on the Baptist Joint Committee, visit www.BJConline.org.

[Click here to download the grand prize essay \(in Microsoft Word\).](#)

[Click here to download the 2nd place essay \(in Microsoft Word\).](#)

[Click here to download the 3rd place essay \(in Microsoft Word\).](#)

The Baptist Joint Committee is a 76-year-old, Washington, D.C.-based religious liberty organization that works to defend and extend God-given religious liberty for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that religion must be freely exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government.