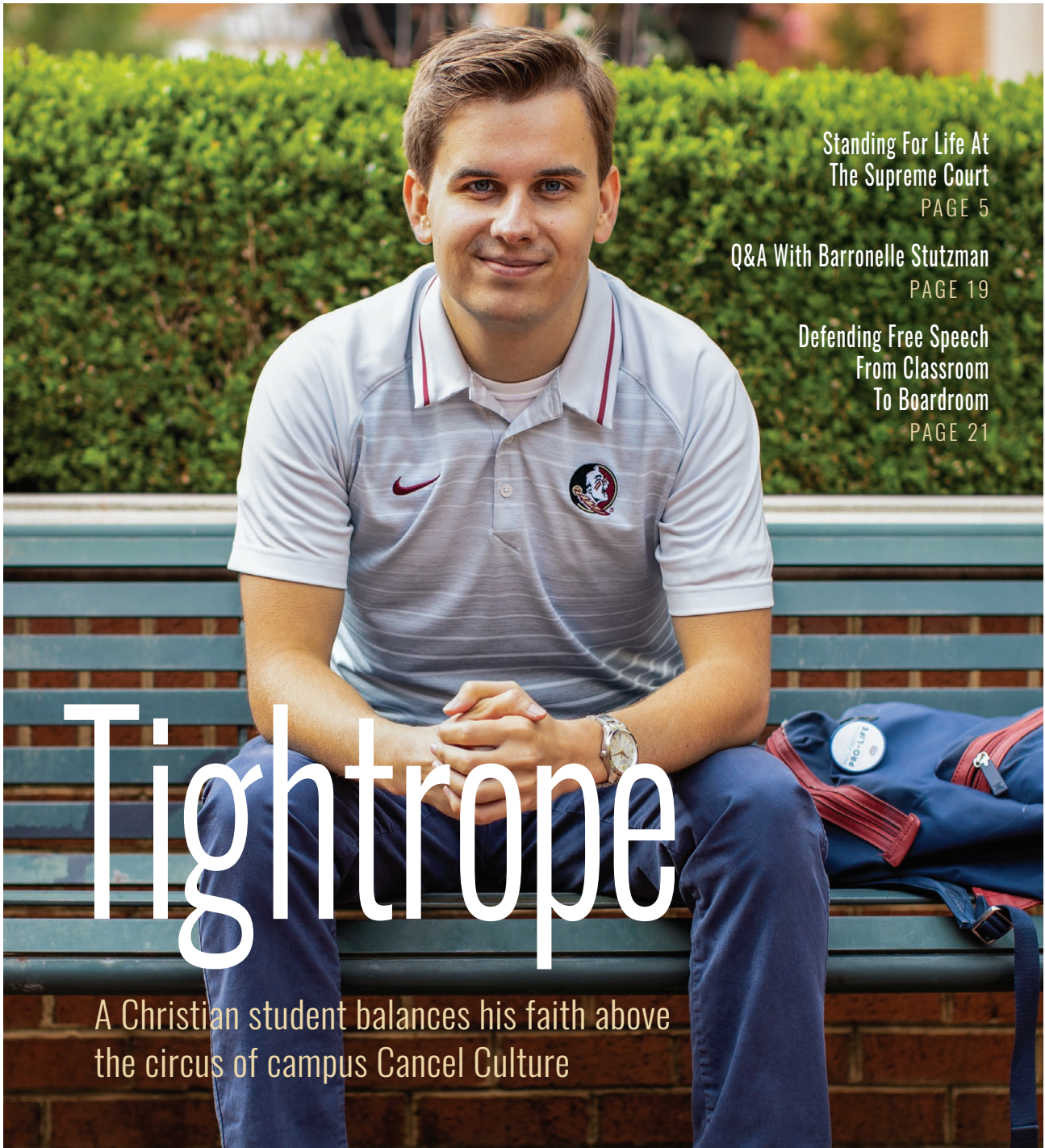


FAITH & JUSTICE

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Tightrope

A Christian student balances his faith above
the circus of campus Cancel Culture

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February 2022
Vol. XV, Issue 1

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Minutes With Michael Breaking Ground

By Michael Farris, President and CEO

I moved into a new office last fall. That may not sound significant. And it's not, if you think about it in terms of simply occupying a different space. Or of packing and then unpacking books, a computer, assorted office supplies, and the family photos scattered around my desk. (I have 10 children and 27 grandchildren, so — granted, it's a *lot* of photos.)

But more than just a physical relocation for me, this change represents a strategic move for Alliance Defending Freedom.

Last spring, ADF was privileged to purchase a new property in Lansdowne, Virginia, built by Prison Fellowship and its late founder, Chuck Colson. Chuck was a strong advocate for freedom of conscience and religion, standing for the very principles that ADF defends today. With the Lansdowne office, we carry on Chuck's great legacy — and carry on we must. Our new property is a solid base for that determined effort.

The threats within our culture are increasing. And so is our work. ADF received over 10,000 requests for legal assistance last year — nearly double the number typically received in years past. To meet the growing demand, we need to grow our team. The Lansdowne property provides much-needed space to house our ever-increasing team of professionals.

You may be wondering why we bought a building at a time when — in the age of COVID-19 — so many

organizations are going remote. The fact is, we need each other. The issues we face are challenging. Our efforts can be exhausting. Working next to each other, rather than communicating over a webcam, means we can be the hands and feet of Christ to each other as well as our clients.

Owning this property also helps protect us from Cancel Culture — and landlords who might bow to pressure from our opponents. And, while ADF also operates an office in D.C., space there is too limited to

accommodate our expanding physical presence in the area.

That presence is crucial.

This new building better positions us to fight for you and the freedoms you hold dear. We're close to Washington, D.C., and as one of the most successful firms to argue before the U.S.

Supreme Court, having a presence nearby is critical to that success.

We're also well-positioned to recruit and retain talent in the area without forcing staff to endure the exorbitant cost of living within D.C.'s ZIP codes. We're even in the center of Loudoun County, where what's happening to children in schools has been at the heart of the national conversation.

In a time when so many crucial issues are being decided that will affect life, families, and our religious freedom, at the heart of national conversation is where we want ADF to be. And that makes our new Lansdowne office a move in the right direction.

**At the heart of national conversation
is where we want ADF to be.**

“
Michael Farris

News & Quick Takes

Case Updates From Around The World

ADF Challenges Vaccine Mandate

Challenging the Biden administration's private employer vaccine mandate, ADF has filed lawsuits on behalf of multiple private employers, including a number of religious organizations.

Issued through OSHA, the mandate requires employers with 100 or more workers to force unvaccinated employees to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, be subject to weekly testing and masking requirements, or lose their job.

The 6th Circuit Court of Appeals was selected to decide all lawsuits challenging the vaccine mandate. This consolidated case includes four lawsuits filed by ADF, representing conservative news outlet The Daily Wire, along with The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and other religious employers.

"The government has no authority to unilaterally treat unvaccinated employees like workplace hazards or to compel employers to become vaccine commissars," says ADF Senior Counsel Ryan Bangert.



Syracuse, New York

New York is again harassing New Hope Family Services, a Christian adoption and foster care agency, because it only places children with couples consisting of a mother and father committed to each other in marriage.

In litigation dating back to 2019 between New Hope and a New York state agency, two federal courts have already found that the state likely violates New Hope's First Amendment rights when it attempts to force it to place children in a manner inconsistent with its religious beliefs.

Now, New York has launched an investigation using a different law to target New Hope's faith-based priorities and practices, based on a complaint from an individual who contacted New Hope but never applied for adoption services. ADF filed a second federal lawsuit to defend the agency against this new attack.

West Virginia

A federal district court issued an order that allows a West Virginia State University female athlete represented by ADF attorneys to intervene to defend the state's Save Women's Sports Act. The law is currently under challenge in a lawsuit demanding the right of males who identify as female to compete in girls' and women's sports.

West Virginia enacted the law in 2021 to recognize the very real biological differences between the sexes and ensure equal opportunities for women in sports. One of those women is Lainey Armistead, a soccer player at WVU.

"Allowing males to compete in girls' sports destroys fair competition, safety on the field, and women's athletic opportunities," says ADF Legal Counsel Christiana Holcomb. "When our laws and policies ignore biological reality, girls and women get hurt."



Why should these innocuous statements and pictures of a happy family, a grieving mother, and a woman holding a pregnancy test be considered intolerant?

“

Adina Portaru,
Senior Counsel,
ADF International

The company had signed a contract to display the ads for several months, but took them down after just over a week. When *Zavod ŽIVIM* sought redress, Slovenia's Advocate of the Principle of Equality found that the bus company had discriminated against the pro-life organization. The Advocate is the country's equality body, responsible for preventing and eliminating discrimination. The bus company is suing the Advocate to challenge the decision.

ADF International is supporting *Zavod ŽIVIM* in the case.

Slovenia

A state-owned bus company in Slovenia removed ads commissioned by pro-life organization *Zavod ŽIVIM*, calling the messages "intolerant."

Appearing on the back of public buses, the ads featured statements including "We love Life!", "You are not alone," and "I mourn my child," accompanied by images of a happy family, a grieving mother, and a woman holding a pregnancy test.



Colombia

The Colombian Constitutional Court ruled that a social media star should not have been ordered to remove an online video in which she expressed her biblical views on marriage.

Responding to a viewer's question in a 2018 YouTube video, Erika "Kika" Nieto shared her beliefs on marriage while expressing tolerance for other views. A lower court ordered her to remove the video after an activist complained.

The Constitutional Court has dismissed the lawsuit, clearing Nieto of any wrongdoing. However, the Court refused to address the wider issue of freedom of expression.

"We welcome the Court's decision to overturn Nieto's censorship ruling," says Tomás Henríquez, director of advocacy in Latin America and the Caribbean for ADF International. "Yet we regret that it did not address the underlying issue of censorship and affirm everyone's right to speak freely. Ultimately, people and democracy suffer when voices are silenced."

ADF International supported the Colombian civil society organization representing Nieto in her case.



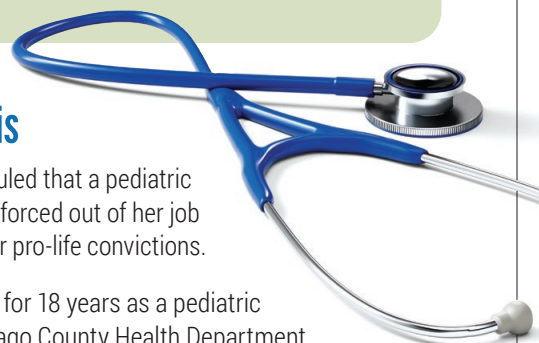
Rockford, Illinois

An Illinois trial court ruled that a pediatric nurse was wrongfully forced out of her job in 2015 because of her pro-life convictions.

Sandra Rojas worked for 18 years as a pediatric nurse for the Winnebago County Health Department before the department enacted a new requirement forcing nurses to refer women for abortion and provide abortion-inducing drugs — actions that violated Rojas' religious beliefs and conscience. Rojas objected to the new requirement.

"I was given two choices: to violate my faith and my oath to do no harm, or to lose my job in the clinic," Rojas says.

The court's ruling protects Rojas' freedom to practice nursing in a manner consistent with her conscience and religious beliefs. ADF attorneys served as co-counsel for Rojas along with lead counsel Noel Sterett, an ADF Allied Attorney.



Seattle, Washington

A Seattle homeless ministry asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse a Washington Supreme Court decision that attempts to punish the Christian nonprofit for declining to hire employees who do not share its religious beliefs.

ADF represents Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, which serves the city's homeless by providing food, shelter, addiction recovery, job placement, and legal

services. The mission requires all its employees to share and live by its Christian beliefs.

In 2017, Matthew Woods applied for a lawyer position, but the ministry declined to hire him because he could not provide a pastor's reference, and because he did not share and wanted to change the Mission's religious beliefs. Woods sued the homeless ministry after another candidate was selected.

The Washington Supreme Court ruled against the ministry, but ADF attorneys and co-counsel are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to defend its religious freedom.



Photo: Seattle's Union Gospel Mission

Special Feature

Standing For Life At The Supreme Court

On December 1, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in what could prove to be the most important abortion case of recent times: *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, based on a challenge to Mississippi's Gestational Age Act.

Kristen Waggoner, ADF general counsel, speaks at the *Dobbs* rally on December 1, as a pro-life crowd looks on.

The case offers the nine justices an opportunity to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 case that legalized abortion in all 50 states and has allowed for the killing of more than 60 million babies over the last half century.

The controversial decision in *Roe* — criticized even by many prominent abortion advocates — has also contributed to untold physical and psychological suffering for the women who opted to end the life of the child in their womb.

ADF worked closely with Mississippi throughout the case, coordinating the filing of more than 80 friend-of-the-court briefs in the Supreme Court supporting Mississippi's law. ADF has also taken a leading role in public advocacy by securing the support of a wide range of allies and promoting the case and its implications.

The *Dobbs* case asks whether the Constitution prevents states from

extending legal protections — both for the health of expectant mothers and for the lives of babies in the womb — before the point of viability. At present, a child can survive outside the womb for around 21 or 22 weeks; the Mississippi law would provide protection after 15 weeks. But such commonsense laws limiting later-term abortions are currently blocked by *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

Medical science offers considerably more evidence now than it did in 1973 that, long before viability, children in the womb have an audible heartbeat and can move, kick, and feel pain — including the often brutal actions involved in late-term abortions.

Mothers who abort their babies after 15 weeks are more likely to need blood transfusions, as well as hysterectomies and other surgeries. They also face an exponentially increased risk of death.

Studies show that Mississippi's law enjoys the support of a majority of Americans. If the Supreme Court rules that the statute is constitutional, the decision will not outlaw abortion — but it could substantially undermine or even overturn *Roe*, restoring to individual states the authority to determine their own abortion laws and protect the lives of their citizens.

A decision is expected in June.

At Alliance Defending Freedom, we know that every human being is made in God's image for a purpose. Two generations have relentlessly prayed and labored to see the day when *Roe* is no more. These truth-tellers will press on with charity and love until that day comes.

“

Kristen Waggoner
ADF General Counsel

VISIT [ADFlegal.org/fj-dobbs](https://adflegal.org/fj-dobbs) to learn more about the *Dobbs* case.

A Rally For Life

Hundreds of people attended the *Dobbs* rally on December 1, many traveling thousands of miles to make their voices heard in support of life as oral arguments were presented at the U.S. Supreme Court. Here, Alliance Defending Freedom team members reflect on the events of that historic day:

"It was humbling to link arms and souls with so many people who have dedicated years and decades of their lives to protect unborn life. Despite the cold weather, the crowd was filled with joyful enthusiasm for the important nature of the arguments happening that day."

Dustin Hobbs, Sr. Digital Copywriter & Editor

"During a time of deep political division in our country, my faith and love for our nation remains strong. Having attended past rallies at the U.S. Supreme Court, *Dobbs* was no different. Two opposing sides gathered peacefully on December 1st, proving once again that our democracy stands strong."

Elizabeth Ray, Director of Media Relations

"When I showed up at the rally, I saw the throngs of pro-life supporters as compared to the small turnout for the pro-choice side. That strong turnout for life encouraged me right away. And my optimism grew as I listened to the *Dobbs* argument. All of us need to redouble our prayers that the court will have the wisdom and fortitude to do the right thing: overturn *Roe*."

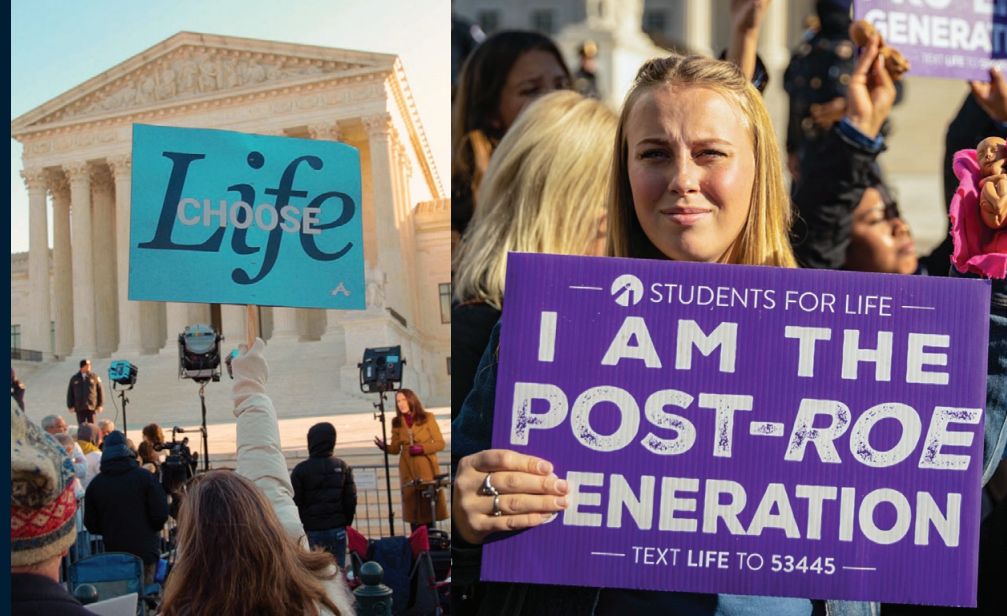
Kevin Theriot, Senior Counsel, Center for Life

PRAY FOR DOBBS

Download the prayer guide at
[ADFlegal.org/fj-DobbsPrayer](https://adflegal.org/fj-DobbsPrayer)

"If we see *Roe* overturned, and we start to see states protecting life and flourishing — and we start to see that women can succeed, families can succeed — that's going to have a domino effect on other states. That, over time, could truly lead to a pro-life epic that is widespread across the nation."

Denise Harle, Director, Center for Life



Alliance Profile

Mike and Jon Whitehead

In 1973, a Christian student group named Cornerstone began meeting on the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus, eventually drawing as many as 125 to its Bible study and prayer meetings. Four years later, the student dean informed Cornerstone it could no longer meet in campus facilities. The group's activities, he said, constituted "religious worship" and thus violated the separation of church and state.

Someone pointed Cornerstone leaders to Mike Whitehead and Jim Smart, young Christian attorneys who had recently formed a law firm after finishing stints in the U.S. Army JAG Corps. Driven by their passion for religious liberty, the pair offered *pro bono* services to the group.

Widmar v. Vincent was heard by the Supreme Court, which ruled 8-1 in favor of the students on December 8, 1981. "Equal access" was born.

Mike's son, Jon, was 3 at the time. He would become accustomed, over the years, to dinner-table conversations that revolved around his dad's courtroom adventures. Much of it landed. Jon went on to graduate from Harvard Law School and complete Alliance Defending Freedom's Blackstone Legal Fellowship, a professional development program for Christian law students.

Those achievements might have seemed unlikely years earlier. Diagnosed with leukemia at age 12, Jon endured three years of intense chemotherapy. Doctors warned that his treatments could cause brain damage.

"God had a better idea," Mike says. Jon was pronounced cured eight years after his diagnosis ("healed, not just cured," Mike clarifies).

Now, Mike and Jon practice together in the Kansas City area. They have volunteered many times as Allied Attorneys for ADF — Mike since 1994, and Jon since 2004. Mike also serves on the ADF Governing Board of Directors and as chairman of the ADF Foundation Board of Directors.

The pair were local counsel for ADF in *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer*, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 in favor of the church. The court held that a government benefit program open to nonprofits generally can't deny equal access to religious organizations simply based on their religious status.

It is hard to put into words the satisfaction and joy of working with my son on a religious liberty case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

“

Mike Whitehead




Mike and Jon Whitehead

"It is hard to put into words the satisfaction and joy of working with my son on a religious liberty case before the U.S. Supreme Court," Mike says. "It was also deeply encouraging to witness a new generation of Christian attorneys fighting for Generational Wins."

The father/son team is now involved in another Supreme Court case, *Carson v. Makin*, serving as co-counsel for two Christian families in Maine who were denied equal access to a tuition program because they wanted to send their children to robustly religious schools.

The court heard oral arguments on December 8, 2021, 40 years to the day since the decision in *Widmar* — "a reminder of the sovereignty and goodness of God," the elder Whitehead says.

"It's also a reminder of the strength of the alliance of religious liberty lawyers and public interest law firms today," the junior Whitehead says. "ADF makes a difference today because of its commitment to the first word in its name: Alliance. And because we honor God and His Word." 

Cover Story

Tightrope

A Christian student balances his faith
above the circus of campus Cancel Culture

By Chris Potts

Jack Denton had no intention of walking the high wire when he first visited Florida State University. He did like the idea of something extracurricular that would let him exercise the enthusiasm for performance he'd discovered doing drama in high school. But being part of a campus circus ... that had never crossed his mind.

On his orientation tour, though, Jack learned FSU, in Tallahassee, was one of only a handful of universities in the country with a student-led big top — a tradition dating back to the school's origin in 1947. Jack began entertaining visions of himself cavorting in the circus ring in oversize shoes and a colorful wig. He auditioned. They called him back. Soon, he found himself trampolining, and doing push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups — a lot of ups, of one kind or another, for a fellow planning to clown around on the ground.

Then they told him he'd made the cut, and would be performing on the tightrope ... doing acrobatic things he'd never done, at heights he'd always strenuously avoided.

"Honestly, I didn't want to do it," Jack admits. "I had a fear of heights that I got over pretty quick, because I had to." And?

"It was awesome! The most unique experience of my collegiate career. I loved it."

That's showbiz. And, as Jack would find out, the "biz" of student politics, too. But the challenges of the FSU big top would prove considerably easier to manage than the tightrope of campus culture.

I was in a very diverse university with people who had a very different experience growing up than I did.

“

Jack Denton





Jack Denton, far right, with other student leaders at the 2019 Florida State University Veterans' Ball, a formal event honoring student veterans at FSU



Jack came to FSU from North Carolina, bringing along a strong interest in politics, honed in the Teenage Republicans (he launched his own chapter) and working for various state candidates: knocking on doors, stuffing envelopes, stamping mailers, manning the phone banks. He signed on as a political science major, and figured serving in the Student Senate might flesh out his studies, give him valuable experience, and even be a chance to do something fun and relevant.

He ran his first semester, won by six votes, and went on to serve three full terms.

"I loved student government," Jack remembers. "Growing up in Catholic school, I was in a bubble. My Boy Scout troop was associated with the church that I went to — again, a bubble. Teenage Republicans: that was all people who thought like me. So, going to Florida State, I really stepped out of my comfort zone. I was in a very diverse university with people who had a very different experience growing up than I did."

Through the Student Senate, he says, "I really learned a lot about working with people of differing viewpoints. How to compromise. How to negotiate. And I

loved it. I enjoyed getting to challenge others' viewpoints while having my own views challenged. It gave me invaluable experience, moving forward in life."

Soon enough, the high-wire man learned the ground rules. The first legislation he sponsored was in support of a bill in the Florida legislature banning speech zones on public university campuses. (Speech zones are typically small, designated areas on campus where students are banished to address topics administrators deem too controversial for public discussion.)

Jack thought students at FSU — where administrators had a reputation for restricting free speech — would benefit from the state bill. He was astonished to learn how vehemently many of his peers disagreed. He saw his legislation pass, but at a price.

"That experience labeled me as a conservative, which made my life a little bit more difficult in the Senate. College students are typically liberal, and that gave me a certain stigma. Some people just instantly disliked me; some were less willing to work with me."

That experience labeled me as a conservative, which made my life a little bit more difficult in the Senate.

“

Jack Denton

That disdain was multiplied when Jack opposed Student Senate funding for a club — ostensibly nonpartisan — that allowed presentations on socialism but not on capitalism. "I rubbed some people the wrong way, doing that," he says.

He won a minor victory (the funding went through, but it was minimal), but "that was another big defining moment in my student government experience," he says. "I learned that I can't just go out there and rail against every single thing I disagree with. No one will trust me or want to work with me on anything."

Jack held several Student Senate offices — chairing the judiciary committee, serving as president pro tempore. By his junior year, he felt he had enough experience to run for president of the Senate. "I wanted to serve my fellow students," he says. "I had gained as much as I could from student government, and I wanted to give back and teach the next class of new, incoming senators."

The president is chosen by the senators each fall semester, to serve for a full year. Jack won the job — seemingly a sign that, whatever his politics, his peers respected his work and leadership. But it soon became apparent that some in the chamber were still angry about stands he had taken, and biding their time for retribution.

Their opportunity arose from a moment Jack never saw coming.

Early on at FSU, Jack found two other happy diversions from his school / Senate / circus routine.

One was the Catholic Student Union, a sizeable campus organization that offered social activities and spiritual support to young people. An only child, Jack particularly cherished "having other men my age and older, whom I could look up to. I got to make those deep bonds with other men and really have people whom I consider brothers."

But it was the young woman he met on a CSU retreat who most changed Jack's life.

"We had a five-minute conversation he doesn't remember," laughs Emily, who became Jack's wife last summer. "But we had a class together. He sat down next to me one day, and we got to talking. I asked him to study, and we studied. And he eventually asked me on a date, and ... here we are."

If I stay silent while my brothers and sisters may be supporting an organization that promotes grave evils, I have sinned through my silence.

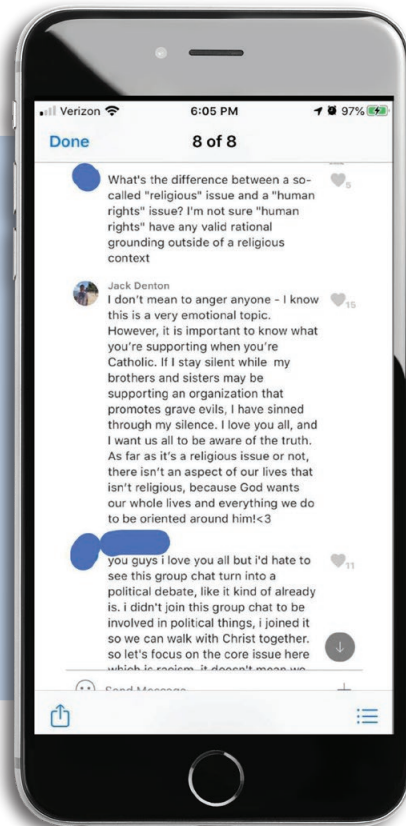
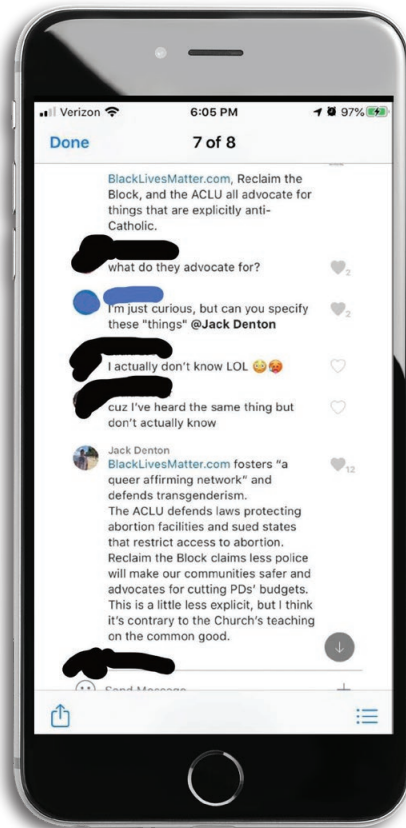
“

Jack Denton



Jack and Emily Denton met at Florida State University and were married in the summer of 2021.

The two were already engaged by the summer before their senior year, and enjoying some downtime at a campus pool when a text came over Jack's phone ... part of a group chat among CSU members. The text related to the social upheavals sweeping the country that month, in the wake of George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer. The texter was urging students to offer financial support for controversial political activist groups like Black Lives Matter and the ACLU.



Jack Denton's texts in a private group chat became public, leading FSU students to call for his removal from the Student Senate.

I wasn't going to stand aside for my religious convictions. I hadn't done anything wrong.

“
Jack Denton

Wary, Jack quickly looked up the groups' websites, finding strong support from all of them for abortion, same-sex marriage, and communism — ideas that clearly contradicted Catholic teaching. Surprised to find CSU students promoting such groups, he sent a text of his own.

“I knew there were some people in the Catholic Student Union who were left-leaning,” he says, “but they were very purposeful Catholics. By and large, they practiced what they preached. They were very intentional about their faith.” So he shared what he had learned:

“I don't mean to anger anyone — I know this is a very emotional topic. However, it is important to know what you're supporting when you're Catholic. If I stay silent while my brothers and sisters may be supporting an organization that promotes grave evils, I have sinned through my silence. I love you all, and I want us all to be aware of the truth.

“As far as it's a religious issue or not, there isn't an aspect of our lives that isn't religious, because God wants our whole lives and everything we do to be oriented around him!”

Sending the text was “instinctive,” Jack says. “I knew it was the right thing to do. Being part of the Catholic Student Union in this community, we believe that life begins at conception ... that marriage is between a man and a woman. These are just things that we cannot bend on.”

With that, he hurried to get ready to preside over that evening's Senate meeting, where initially business proceeded as usual. Then a hand went up — one of the students who'd been irked by Jack's position on some earlier issues. He called on her, and she made a motion demanding a vote of “no confidence” in Jack.

The motion blindsided him — what on earth had he done to spark that? Then she began reading from his texts in the CSU group chat.

Jack had assumed his texts would be kept within the CSU community. In fact, they were now on the Internet, along with a petition calling for his resignation or removal from the Senate. Within 48 hours, the petition would carry thousands of student signatures.

First, though, came this vote to remove him. The motion failed to secure the required two-thirds vote — but Jack saw that a majority of senators had voted against him.

“I realized I was in hot water,” he says.

The water was just beginning to boil. Along with the petition signatures, social media was alive with threats and ardent wishes that something terrible happen to Jack. One person even cast a hex on him. And his fellow senators petitioned him to call a special meeting, two nights later, in which students could weigh in on the petition to have Jack removed as president.

It was an invitation to summon his own firing squad, but he scheduled the meeting. “It was the right thing to do,” he says. “I had the opportunity to say what I wanted to say in my private group chat. Let's let everyone else say what they want to say.”

Many people, friends and foes, urged him to just resign, but “if they wanted to remove me, they were going to have to do it themselves,” Jack decided. “They were going to have to look me in the face. I wasn't going to stand aside for my religious convictions. I hadn't done anything wrong.”

But he was beginning to think he might need help. A friend of a friend knew an attorney with Alliance Defending Freedom. Less than 24 hours after the first no-confidence vote, Jack was talking with that attorney, working out a strategy.

“Now, I think of ADF as the 911 for constitutional rights,” Jack says. “It was God's providence that I would be on the phone with him that quickly.” Almost simultaneously, another friend from his church connected him with an attorney in Governor Ron DeSantis' office — a fellow Catholic who, during law school, had participated in ADF's Blackstone Legal Fellowship program. That lawyer was available to join Jack for the Student Senate Zoom meeting that same evening.

He wasn't the only one, for which Jack was profoundly grateful. Emily joined him, too, and a friend, Jae Williams. Williams was director of the Catholic Student Union and usually supervised the group chat, but he'd been at work when the troubling text string came along. He was as surprised as Jack to find texts from the conversation online, and quickly realized that the same senators now looking to unseat his friend might also choose to delegitimize CSU.

It was made very clear — like in the first half-hour — that ‘anything goes. Here are the rules, but we're not going to enforce them.’

“
Jae Williams

I think of ADF as the 911 for constitutional rights.

“
Jack Denton

The two sat across from each other, with Emily to one side, as the specially called meeting began ... and almost immediately turned into a kangaroo court designed not only to remove Jack from the presidency, but to denigrate his faith and destroy his reputation.

The Friday night meeting lasted seven hours. Hundreds of students were lined up to speak (a normal meeting drew two or three); more than a hundred would get their chance. Of those, only a handful offered support for Jack. The rest hurled all the pent-up venom and frustration that was ravaging the country that summer straight at him:

“Jack Denton should never have been allowed to hold this position in the first place, with his known beliefs.”

“I am disgusted that other Catholics are trying to stand behind him, with his outdated and extreme cult mindset.”

“Do not let this man cower behind his religious views.”

“Jack, I hope you're listening, and you understand why your beliefs are so vile and wrong.”

“Kill you ... kill you ... kill you ...”



Jack Denton's campus ordeal "certainly solidified my faith [and] really made me lean on God."



On and on, the "virtual firing squad," as Williams calls it, continued. Although they were present at the meeting, university officials made no effort to limit the free-flowing hatred.

"It was made very clear — like in the first half-hour — that 'anything goes,'" Williams says. "Here are the rules, but we're not going to enforce them." Through it all, Jack sat, poker-faced, listening without comment.

"To watch this man sit across from me, never criticizing anybody," Williams says, "his composure, the whole time. He didn't flinch. He sat there and took it."

"It's one thing to have someone say horrible things about you," Emily says. "But to say them about the person you love most, and to know those things aren't true.... It's still a very painful time to look back on. But I see a lot of grace and blessings in those moments, now when I look back."

"The number of people praying for me was astronomical," Jack says. "So many reached out — it was incredible. And I credit their prayers for why I was able to get through that second Senate meeting. It was 100% the Holy Spirit. He let me get through it without breaking down."

After the student comments ended, in the wee small hours of the morning, the Student Senate held a second formal hearing. This time, all but three voted for removal. Jack's presidency was over.

Jack's ADF attorneys hoped to get his job back. FSU's policies provided two internal options. The first was to file an appeal with the Student Supreme Court. But Jack's firing happened in early summer. Several student justices had graduated, and now had to be replaced ... by the Student Senate. Who obviously had no great incentive to speed up the process.

The number of people praying for me was astronomical. So many reached out — it was incredible.

“

Jack Denton

Given that the first option was unavailable, ADF employed the second. Jack's attorneys asked FSU administrators to rule on Jack's complaint themselves. They refused. That left a third, external option: a federal lawsuit.

ADF filed the lawsuit, then petitioned the federal court for a preliminary injunction that would force the Student Senate to reinstate Jack as president while his case proceeded. The federal court held that FSU had likely violated Jack's rights. While the court stopped short of immediately reinstating Jack, it did order the university to continue paying Jack's salary while the case continued.

People still embrace Christian values. Though we live in a postmodern society, many Christians around the world share our faith.

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Emily Denton

A short time later, the FSU Supreme Court found its quorum — and to the surprise of Jack and his attorneys, the justices were eager to hear his case.

"They wanted to decide the case quickly," says ADF attorney Logan Spena, "and their questions indicated that they understood the seriousness of the issue." In fact, the court made its decision very quickly ... and in Jack's favor.

"They basically said, 'If we don't do anything here, this sends a message that you can just discriminate against people in student government for their religion,'" Spena says. "And we're not going to let that stand. We're going to order him reinstated.'" The decision was unanimous.

"That was such an ecstatic, happy moment," Jack says. In fact, he only had a month left in his term — time enough to pass a few legislative bills, but not much more. Still, "at least I got to finish what I started," he says. "And I'm thankful for that."

He's thankful for a few other things, too. The fiancée and friend who sat beside him that long Friday night. The countless others who prayed. The attorneys who listened in, too, on short notice, "who cared about me as a person, and not just as a client," he says.

"It's certainly solidified my faith," Jack says. "Really made me lean on God. I'm glad I had the experience — that God gave me another trial. He gives us trials to prepare us for whatever's to come, and now ... I feel more ready."

"We have met so many people who've reached out to us and told us, 'You're not alone,'" Emily says. "It's been really reaffirming. People still embrace Christian values. Though we live in a postmodern society, many Christians around the world share our faith and are praying for us."

Today, Jack and Emily are back in North Carolina, making their home in Raleigh. She teaches school, while he works on the staff of a state legislator and looks toward a career in either law, the military, or both.

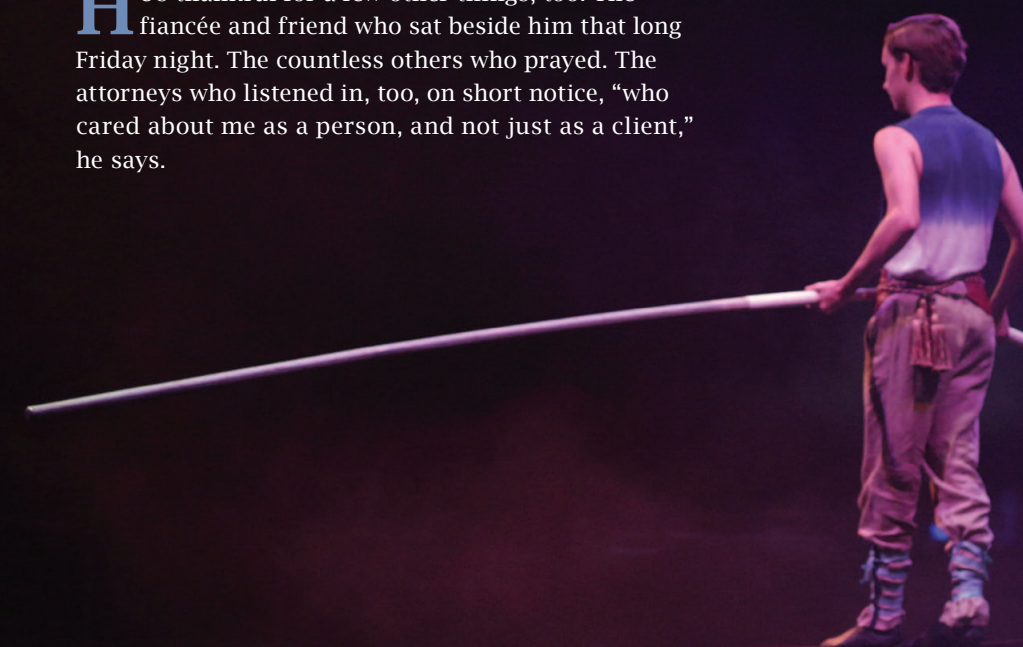
Spena says many college students could learn from Jack's example.

"He did a great job of saying what he thought and not shying away from that at all — while going out of his way to be clear that he loved the people he was talking to. To combine that deep understanding of what you believe with a consistent and gracious way of expressing it — that makes your witness unassailable."

"Jack knows who he is, and he knows what he is living for," Williams says. "He's doing better than ever before, and he's thriving and doing well."

Courage. Confidence. A sense of balance. Determination to go higher.

You learn things, walking the tightrope 🦇



Jack Denton performs on the tightrope at the Florida State University Flying High Circus.

My View

Women Like Me Don't Need Abortion To Be Successful

By Jessica Riojas

In the spring of 2017, I was a sophomore at Fresno State University in California. Like many of my peers, I had personal, educational and professional aspirations. I didn't have much money, but I did have a desire to finish my college education and reach my goals.

While on campus one day, I visited a pro-life information table, where students were handing out 12-week fetal models. The model showed that each child at that stage has arms, legs, fingers, toes, and all the facial features of any human being. At the time, I did not consider myself either pro-life or pro-choice, but I liked the model, so I took one and displayed it on the rearview mirror in my car.

Soon after, I found out I was pregnant. Like most other college-age women in my situation, I felt alone, scared, unsure of my future, and incredibly underprepared. I visited a local Planned Parenthood, where a counselor tried to convince me that I was irresponsible, that I wasn't ready to be a mom, and that abortion was my only option.

When I returned to my car, I found the fetal model hanging from the mirror. Its features, so similar to my own, reminded me that the baby in my womb was a fellow human being. After speaking with my boyfriend, I decided to choose life for my child.

A few months later, I gave birth to my daughter. That same semester, I earned a 4.0 GPA and reconnected with the group that gave me the fetal model, Students for Life at Fresno State, eventually joining their leadership team to help support pregnant and parenting students at the university. I finished my undergraduate degree, completed

The abortion movement doesn't want you to know about stories like mine.

“

Jessica Riojas



My daughter motivates me to do my best in every aspect of my life.

“

Jessica Riojas

a master's in Speech Language Pathology, and now work full time as a speech language pathologist.

The abortion movement doesn't want you to know about stories like mine.

In December, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. The state of Mississippi is asking the court to protect the health of pregnant mothers, the integrity of medical professionals, and the dignity of the unborn by allowing the state to limit abortions at 15 weeks gestation. By 15 weeks, a baby has a heartbeat, all her vital organs, and even starts to develop a sense of taste.

Jackson Women's Health Organization is clear: its No. 1 focus is abortion. In September, the abortion facility filed a brief with the Supreme Court, stating that unrestricted legal abortion up to the point of viability is “the only way...to avoid inflicting profound damage to individual autonomy and women's equal status in society.” It disregards the many social support programs available for single and working moms.

Women are repeatedly told that they can't have a baby and go to school — that motherhood means they won't reach their full potential. But my story, like so many other women's stories, proves that isn't true.

The brief goes on: “In particular, young women (of all socioeconomic backgrounds), women of color, and

women who are poor or living with low incomes ... are more likely to need abortion care.... The most common reasons for ending a pregnancy include concerns about economic security [and] the desire to finish an education.”

I checked all of these boxes. According to this “health” facility, I was the perfect target.

But abortion was not what I needed. What I needed was real information about pregnancy and fetal development, the truth about what I actually *can* do as a pregnant student, and people to offer me moral and practical support. The abortion facility didn't tell me — and never would have told me — about any of that.

Fortunately, all those years ago, my daughter made it out of the California abortion facility alive. Millions of others can't say the same about their own children.

My daughter motivates me to do my best in every aspect of my life. She is the reason I excelled in college and graduate school, and now in my career. Don't listen to businesses like Jackson, which use vulnerable women to sell their best — and *only* — product. Women don't need abortion to be successful. **A**

Jessica Riojas is a mom and a full-time speech language pathologist-certified fellow in Central California. This is adapted from an article that originally appeared in Newsweek on November 26, 2021.

Life Is Worth It

By Neal Hardin

We live in a culture that tells us that because of the immense pain, hardship, or heartache that we may experience, life is not always worth it. In many ways, our society says that life is not always worth protecting, that life is not always worth celebrating, that life is not always worth living.

This is especially true in the conversation surrounding abortion. Children in the womb are portrayed as burdens that will keep women from chasing their dreams and achieving their life goals.

But life *is* worth it.

Life is worth it because all life has immeasurable worth and value, and the value of any human life is not contingent upon the amount of hardship, pain, or heartache one may go through. In fact, some of the most inspiring stories of human life come from those who have persevered through great trials.

Alliance Defending Freedom's short film “Worth It” highlights the value of choosing life. It offers a fictional account of a young woman facing an unplanned pregnancy and the joys, and struggles, she experiences after deciding to keep her baby.



“To every person who watches ‘Worth It,’ our prayer is that you feel hope,” says John-Henry

Keenan, ADF filmmaker/editor, who directed the film. “Yes, the path ahead is difficult and unknown, but none of us will ever regret putting someone else's life ahead of our own. It might be hard today, but it's always worth it.”

The film was produced as part of ADF's advocacy efforts in support of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* abortion case. (Read about the *Dobbs* case on page 5.)

WATCH the film at
[ADFlegal.org/fj-WorthIt](https://adflegal.org/fj-WorthIt)

Q & A

Barronelle Stutzman

Longtime Client Celebrates What She's Learned Of God's Faithfulness

By Chris Potts



"It's not like I'm a big celebrity or anything. I'm just Barronelle, who lives on the farm and happens to meet people."

I don't have any clue why He picked me, but I've learned that if He gives you something to do, He'll make sure that you have the strength and courage to do it.

“

Barronelle Stutzman

In November, a final settlement at last brought an end to floral artist and longtime ADF client Barronelle Stutzman's legal challenges in defending freedom of conscience in America. It was a case that had engaged ADF Ministry Friends and a great part of the country for most of a decade — and one that left many who had cheered and prayed for Barronelle feeling like they were saying goodbye to an old friend.

While glad to be leaving the limelight, Barronelle understands the questions many have about her long legal gauntlet, the emotions with which she puts it behind her, and the plans she and her husband, Darold, are making for the days ahead. She graciously agreed to share a few reflections with our readers.

F&J: How does it feel now that it's over?

BS: We're still processing. Just trying to figure out what comes next, and where does God want us to be. It's pretty scary, I have to say. I remember asking Kelvin [Chief Kelvin Cochran, another longtime ADF client], "Now that it's over, are you back to normal?" He said, "I don't even know what normal is. I don't think it'll ever be normal again." I think that's the way we all feel. It's just a huge chapter in your life that you aren't going to forget. But God's plans are better than ours, and I'm looking forward to retiring and spending more time with Darold and our family.

F&J: Chief Cochran is one of several ADF conscience clients you've forged close friendships with over the years. What have those relationships meant to you?

BS: Oh my — it's just been amazing. The travels with that group, going to different events with each other. You get to know each other very, very well, when you're in the car for two or three days together. We'd talk about our businesses ... the hate mail ... the good news and bad news. What we are going to do when it's all over. I still keep in contact with most all of them. Had them over to the house. Been over to their houses. It has been such a blessing and encouragement to me to be able to be with them and share this experience.

F&J: What kind of memories stand out to you from all of this, looking back over your experience?

BS: There are so many. We were at some type of speaking engagement. [ADF Attorney] Matt Sharp was speaking, and I was speaking. After that, this girl, maybe 9 years old, came up to Matt and said, "I want you to tell me how to be a lawyer, so I can protect people like her." I remember being invited to speak at an LGBT conference — a room full of people who mostly disagreed with my religious beliefs. And it was probably one of the coolest things I ever did, because I knew God's presence was there with me. That was amazing.

And just talking to the legislators. Seeing their eyes, their faces, as they finally click into what all this really means. They hear it all the time, but when they see how these issues really affect people — that makes a big difference.

F&J: Why do you think God chose you for this ... adventure? What would you say to others, struggling with His surprises in their life?

BS: I don't have any clue why He picked me, but I've learned that if He gives you something to do, He'll make sure that you have the strength and courage to do it. He will open the doors that need to be opened, but the most important thing

is that you have to be willing — to be willing, to be obedient. There's always going to be a cost for that.

F&J: You are not someone who seeks out the spotlight. Yet you've spent nine years there. What's that been like?

BS: It's very humbling. When all these people come up and say you're their hero and all that, you can easily get this egotistical, pious attitude. So I prayed every night that God would take a two-by-four and hit me in the head, to take that away from me. And He has done that!

F&J: You've met so many people. Who are some that have especially blessed you?

BS: The Blackstone young people that I got to speak to. [The ADF Blackstone Legal Fellowship is a summer training program for Christian law students.] Their dedication ... wanting to use their time for the Lord. Those young people made the biggest impression on me.

Kristen Waggoner, our attorney through all of this, has been an excellent lawyer — so dedicated. She has also become a very precious friend. And all the ADF Ministry Friends who have been gracious and supported us ... getting to meet some of them was just a highlight. We're so appreciative of people who support ADF.

F&J: How are you different than you were nine years ago?

BS: More humble. A lot more usable. And more at peace, knowing that. What's the old song, "Trust and Obey"? That's all I've got to do, and He takes care of the rest. One of the things I try to remember, when people come up and get so hateful, is that I'm God's child. They have to go through Him to get to me, so ... good luck.

F&J: You were also blessed not to have to go through all of this alone. What has it been like for Darold?

BS: When it started, he said, "Wherever they need you to go, whatever you need to do — we will do it." And he has been very, very faithful in that. And so patient. He's heard my story so many times, he can repeat it in his sleep. He doesn't like to fly, but he's taken every flight with me, because I'm directionally handicapped. When I get smart aleck-y, he puts me in my place real quick. He loves me enough to say what I need to hear. Tenderly. Sometimes.

"If God takes everything we have, it's okay," he says. "We've been obedient. That's what counts."

F&J: What are you most glad about in this experience?

BS: I am thankful and blessed that God put me in ... my place. He has been so faithful. He has taught me to be in total submission and to let Him be in charge. We all try to take things in our own hand, but it's really "Be still and know that I am God." That's probably been the greatest thing that's come out of this, is my relationship with Him.

F&J: What do you want to do that you haven't done yet?

BS: Well, I'm going to practice my piano. I've always wanted to play piano well. And, hopefully, get a dog. **A**

Opinion

From The Classroom To The Boardroom:

What ADF Is Doing To Defend
Free Speech

By Jeremy Tedesco

What are you willing to do to keep the job you love? Work overtime? Take a pay cut?

No matter where any of us would draw the line personally, no one should be forced to violate their conscience or give up their freedom to pursue a God-given vocational passion.

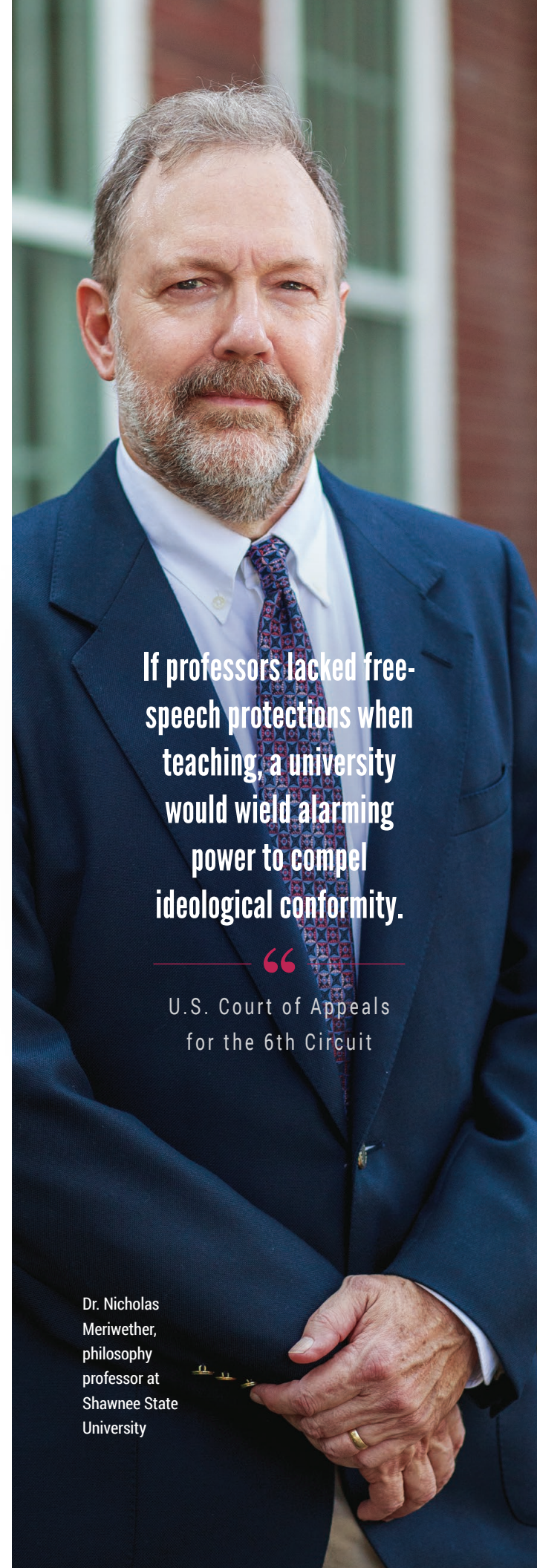
Yet, in too many instances across the nation, that's exactly the choice schoolteachers, professors, and business professionals have had to face.

Consider a school board policy enacted prior to the 2021–22 school year in Loudoun County, Virginia. The policy forces teachers, administrators, staff, and even children as young as kindergarten to call boys “girls” and girls “boys,” based solely on students’ stated gender identity rather than biological reality.

Along with cutting parents out of the equation entirely — school regulations allow school staff and teachers to conceal from parents that their child is identifying as the opposite sex during school hours — the policy poses a severe threat to free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment.

The board jettisoned free speech when it suspended Tanner Cross, an elementary school gym teacher who voiced dissent to the proposed policy at a public meeting last summer. Alliance Defending Freedom successfully secured Tanner’s reinstatement, while two of his fellow teachers, Monica Gill and Kim Wright, joined him in ADF’s ongoing challenge to the coercive policy itself.

Even though the Loudoun County story has garnered national headlines — and very likely contributed to the outcome of the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election — it’s far from an outlier.



If professors lacked free-speech protections when teaching, a university would wield alarming power to compel ideological conformity.

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U.S. Court of Appeals
for the 6th Circuit

Dr. Nicholas Meriwether, philosophy professor at Shawnee State University

Also in Virginia, high school French teacher Peter Vlaming was fired from his job for declining to refer to a female student with male pronouns, even though he consistently accommodated the same student’s request to use the student’s preferred name.

In early September 2021, ADF appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court on Peter’s behalf, asking it to uphold constitutionally protected freedom of speech not just for Peter, but for teachers and all other citizens throughout the state.

One reason we’re hopeful that the court will rule in Peter’s favor is a 2020 decision in another ADF case. ADF attorneys defended Dr. Nicholas Meriwether, a philosophy professor punished by Shawnee State University administrators for declining a male student’s demand to be referred to as a woman, with feminine titles and pronouns.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit delivered a resounding victory for free speech in Dr. Meriwether’s case.

“If professors lacked free-speech protections when teaching,” the court explained, “a university would wield alarming power to compel ideological conformity. A university president could require a pacifist to declare that war is just, a civil rights icon to condemn the Freedom Riders, a believer to deny the existence of God, or a Soviet émigré to address his students as ‘comrades.’ That cannot be.”

As ADF continues, with God’s help, to build upon this significant courtroom win, we still have much work to do — including inside the corporate boardroom. A recent report from *The Wall Street Journal*, “Why Gender Pronouns Are Becoming a Big Deal at Work,” highlights how the attitudes ingrained in students are fast becoming

the reigning ideology at companies both large and small as activism-minded college graduates enter the workforce for the first time.

More and more, the *Journal* points out, employees are adding their preferred pronouns to their email signatures, badges, and LinkedIn profiles — often in response to HR training materials or through the influence of “diversity and inclusion” officers.

Unfortunately, many business leaders are discovering the hard way that by caving to ideologically driven demands that coerce speech from their own employees and board members under the guise of

“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” they are opening the door for their own corporations to become weaponized as tools for Cancel Culture.

CEOs and leaders have positions of considerable power. Rather than using their influence to further divide Americans, they should help bring us back together by respecting the diverse viewpoints of their employees, customers, and other stakeholders.

Corporate Cancel Culture is a threat ADF is taking seriously. Along with our continued work of building alliances in the corporate sphere, we are preparing to launch a long-term initiative aimed at

encouraging individual companies to respect freedom of expression and religion at every level of their organizations, from the shop floor to the boardroom and to the customers they serve.

No one should be forced to surrender their God-given freedoms or a clean conscience for the career they love. **A**

Jeremy Tedesco is senior vice president of Corporate Engagement at Alliance Defending Freedom.



No one should be forced to violate their conscience or give up their freedom to pursue a God-given vocational passion.

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Jeremy Tedesco



TODAY'S
PLAN
is
TOMORROW'S
PROMISE

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