

So You Want To Be A Lawyer?

Advice for the Christian considering law school



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Introduction

As Christian lawyers, we believe we are called to pursue truth, justice, and reconciliation in a world that often opposes these values. We seek to bring truth to injustice; to shine light in a dark world. We don't accept the world as we find it. We question it. We scrutinize, navigate, and advocate. We seek company for the journey, and we hope the pages that follow will help you discover whether and how you share our calling.

We are graduates of Oak Brook College of Law (OBCL) and believe it provides an excellent education, but this book is for the Christian considering any path in the study of law. In the pages that follow, we explore several of those paths, provide advice for the way, and examine opportunities a Christian might pursue with a law degree.

If you have questions and would like to talk with one of us about our experience in law school or the practice of law, please feel free to contact us through the [OBCL Alumni Association Facebook page](#).

We look forward to continuing our dialogue with you.

- Lawyers from the Oak Brook College of Law Alumni Association



WHY GET A JURIS DOCTOR DEGREE?

"...it is incumbent upon every man to be acquainted with those [laws]...with which he is immediately concerned." - Sir William Blackstone

Practicing Law

Every attorney brings different talents and a unique perspective to the practice of law, so do not assume you have to be a Perry Mason or Ben Matlock to succeed. Individuals who become great litigators tend to thrive in conflict situations. Litigators enjoy the challenge of persuading a judge or jury to see the facts the way their clients do. They will also spend much of their time dealing with paperwork, deadlines, and pre-trial discovery.

By contrast, the estate-planning attorney must develop a keen eye for future probabilities, drafting documents that will accomplish the estate goals of the client. An individual who thrives on mathematical calculations and is a good listener will likely do well as an estate planning attorney.

Attorneys who become good prosecutors or criminal defense attorneys will have a strong sense of justice, but the most successful ones must also be prepared to withstand the constant exposure to the worst of human nature. While criminal defense attorneys are perceived as villains, they fulfill a vital role, preserving justice by protecting an individual's rights.



During law school, Peter Fear worked in a corporate legal department, in the political arena (including on staff of the Finance & Taxation Committee of the Florida House of Representatives), and in the litigation department of Home School Legal Defense Association. He now maintains a successful bankruptcy practice and is a certified specialist in his field.

Christopher Schweickert went to law school with constitutional law in mind but now enjoys helping small-business owners solve everyday legal issues.



Legal Knowledge

While the practice of law is the most common career path followed by those acquiring a Juris Doctor (JD), the study of law is also useful—and perhaps essential—in fields such as business management, law enforcement, mediation, and politics.

“[a]s, therefore, every [citizen] is interested in the preservation of the laws, it is incumbent upon every man to be acquainted with those at least, with which he is immediately concerned; lest he incur the censure, as well as inconvenience, of living in society without knowing the obligations which it lays him under.”

Book 1, Introduction, Section 1, §6 (William Carey Jones, editor, 1915).

In his Commentaries on the Laws of England, Sir William Blackstone points out that every one of us deals with some part of the law on a daily basis: traffic law, employment law, inheritance law, tax law. The extent of the legal knowledge necessary for success in your chosen career may take a different form. You may, for instance, find the overview of law in a paralegal course sufficient to gain the knowledge and skills you need.

Through the study of law, you gain not only legal knowledge but also problem-solving skills— asking the right questions, identifying the underlying problems, reaching creative solutions. These skills can help you in every area of your life.

Learning the Law

Volunteer with an attorney or law firm in a field you think might interest you, or visit your local district attorney to find out whether they have a volunteer program that would allow you to observe the less-televised aspects of the criminal justice system. Think through your options, and ask people in other career fields about the career value of a JD degree.

Whether or not you practice law, it is up to you to convince potential employers that your education is an asset to their organizations.

Some of you may never end up in full-time practice. That is okay. The skills you learn through the study of law will shape and enrich your life no matter what career path you follow.

WHY WORLDVIEW MATTERS

How a society answers the tough moral questions will be determined by whether the human being or God is the recognized source of law.

Worldview is the frame of reference through which all of life is understood; it provides our definition of values and our moral compass for making decisions.

The predominant worldview in many law schools proposes that law and justice are progressive and evolving concepts; it recognizes no higher authority than the human. This human-centered worldview denies any external foundation for law or government. Thus, the rule of law becomes nothing more than the changing opinions of those in power.

This humanistic perspective is apparent in the American Bar Association's position on the issue of marriage, which contemplates marriage not as a relationship created and defined by God but as a legal benefit defined as society dictates.

"My favorite part about my job is that I can stay home and still be involved with the legal issue closest to my heart." Kristi advises students interested in public policy or public interest law, "Don't give up the passion God has put on your heart for the sake of making money in more lucrative areas of the legal world. Don't be afraid to step out there and change the world. Be bold, be humble, and pursue justice."

Kristi Brown



"While all Christians should have an understanding of law, some are called to do 'good works' in law and government as attorneys. With a renewed mind about law, a Christian attorney can fulfill the roles of being an advocate, counselor, and minister."

– Robert Barth, Associate Dean, Oak Brook College of Law.

In the Practice of Law

Those of us who follow Christ must be prepared with a thorough understanding of Scripture to stand for truth in every decision we make. Christians trained in the law are uniquely qualified to advocate for truth in the culture, in public policy, and in the law.

As advocates, Christian attorneys have a unique opportunity to follow Christ's example to bear another's burden; defend the innocent, helpless, and vulnerable; and help set prisoners free.

As counselors, Christian attorneys have the unique opportunity to engage in the ministry of reconciliation; seeing people reconciled, relationships healed, and fruitfulness restored.

As ministers of justice, Christian attorneys obtain a unique view of God as the just, holy, and righteous Judge, and can become part of seeing that justice administered in the systems of government God has ordained. (See Romans 13.)

While many view their legal education as a profession, for the Christian, the opportunities provided by a career in the law can be much more. When you recognize God's ultimate authority in each legal issue you face, a call to the law becomes not just a call to a noble profession but a call to fulfill your ultimate purpose to glorify God.

In Legal Education

A professor's moral values and underlying belief system will influence law school courses that deal, directly or indirectly, with society's answers to moral questions. These questions include: How is a "person" defined? Where do individual rights come from? How is marriage defined? What is required to dissolve a marriage? What is taught as an academic theory in one generation often becomes law in the next.

For a student who desires to live according to the teachings of Scripture, an education rooted in a Biblical worldview, taught by individuals committed to Jesus Christ, will build both a solid academic foundation and impart a worldview consistent with Scripture

Oak Brook College of Law brings a God-centered worldview to bear upon the study of law, and the professors seek to prepare students to answer the difficult moral questions they will face.



COUNTING THE COST:

Financial considerations for Law School

“The credit-driven higher education bubble of the past several decades has left legions of students deep in debt without improving their job prospects.” - “Degrees of Value: Making College Pay Off,” The Wall Street Journal

Overwhelming Debt

According to [Educationdata.org](https://educationdata.org), the price of law school is on the rise, with the average total tuition increasing by over \$1,000/year. Current tuition for traditional law school is approximately \$45,000 per year. Once the cost of living expenses are added, many students find themselves with a price tag of \$200,000 for their law degree.

Another article posted by Educationdata in 2021 says that 74% of law school students graduated with debt with the average amount borrow coming to just under \$120,000. The monthly payment on a debt of this magnitude can cost around \$1,200 per month. Sadly, fewer than 1-in-4 new law school graduates say their legal education was worth the financial cost.

Alternative to Debt

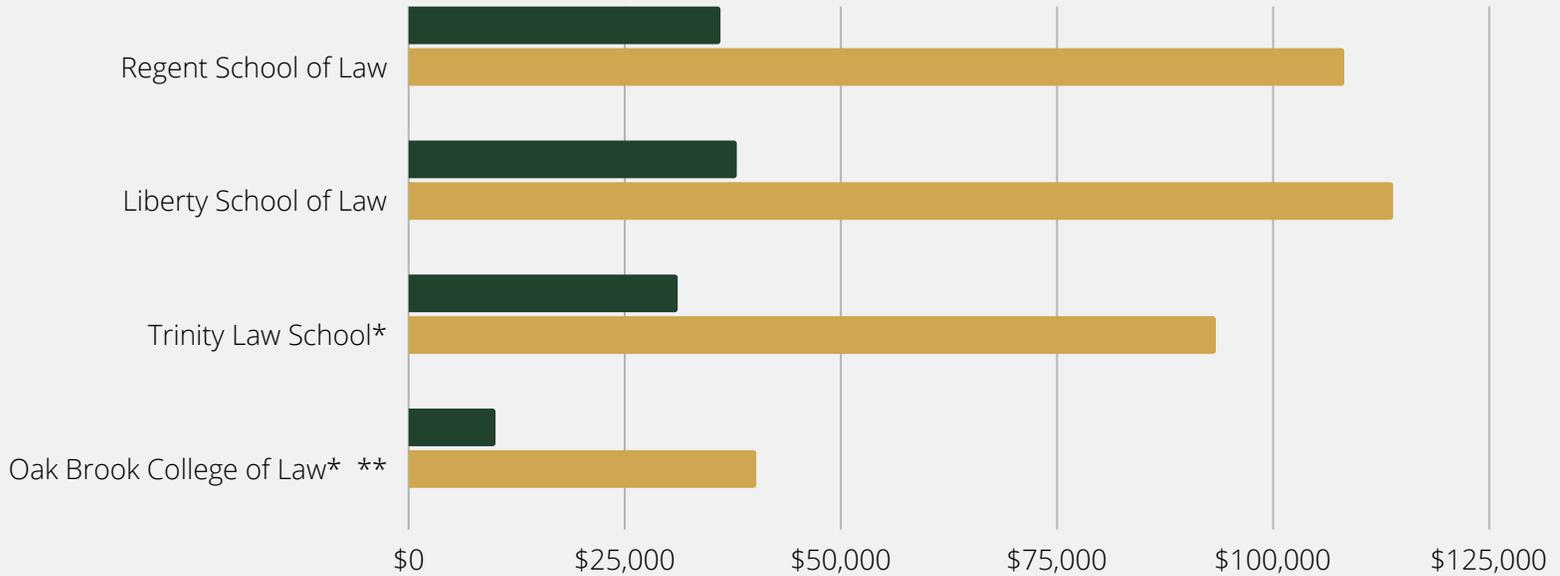
Oak Brook College of Law is the first Christian, online law school. Because of the online structure, OBCL is able to eliminate many of the operating costs of traditional brick-and-mortar schools. This arrangement enables lower operating costs resulting in a reasonable, yearly tuition of \$10,000. This is a quarter of traditional law school tuition.

In a survey done in 2020, less than 5% of OBCL graduates incurred debt to finish their law degree. By utilizing the payment plan, many students are able to pay as they go through law school. Without the burden of school debt, an OBCL graduate is free to explore non-traditional career paths, taking business risks that would otherwise be impossible. Many graduates take advantage of their freedom from debt to serve low-income communities, explore public interest work, or start their own businesses.

A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words

The chart below compares the cost of tuition for OBCL with that of several other "Brick-and-mortar" Christian law schools. (costs current as of September 2021).

Green represents 1 year's tuition. Gold represents entire tuition for Juris Doctor degree.



Unless otherwise indicated, tuition is based on 30 credit hours per year for 3 years.

*Not accredited through the American Bar Association.

**Based on 90 credit hours over 4 years.



"My law degree from OBCL has been a tremendous asset to me in my work in a nonprofit working on school choice and education freedom issues. OBCL enabled me to receive a quality legal education at a reasonable cost, while also gaining real-world legal experience at HSLDA. Not only has it benefited me in my work at HSLDA, but I now serve as a pro bono attorney in a Christian pro bono legal clinic just outside Washington, DC, counseling low-income clients on immigration matters."

-Will Estrada



Matthew McReynolds graduated from OBCL in 2004 and joined the Pacific Justice Institute as a staff attorney in 2005. Working with a broad range of constitutional litigation, including free speech, free exercise of religion, the Establishment Clause, and privacy rights, Matt credits the affordability of OBCL with his ability to graduate from law school debt-free and pursue work with a non-profit ministry in a way that would not have been possible had he been saddled by the debt many law students accumulate.



IS DISTANCE EDUCATION BETTER?

The distance education approach to law school will give you a “real world” experience that will better prepare you for maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

Law School Life

Long before online college became more widely accepted in 2020, Oak Brook College of Law was already utilizing online learning platforms to streamline legal education.

The difference between traditional and online options is in the structure not in the academics (both are rigorous). Attending a traditional law school requires a different allotment of time. By and large, law school is a full-time job. Class lectures and activity times are set by the school without consideration of the student’s schedule. A student’s day is filled with classes, study sessions, and commuting to, from, and around campus.

OBCL’s online JD program allows for a student-scheduled approach. Students have the flexibility to fulfill the lesson requirements (reading, lectures, quizzes, etc.) at a time that suits them best but within a structured timeline established by the college. Personal flexibility does not mean there is no class camaraderie. Quite the contrary! At the yearly conferences, life-long friendships develop between classmates, graduates, and professors. Because of the the ability to connect in person, students develop a sense of community as they start their studies. There are weekly video calls and lots of messaging back and forth.

“My experience with Oak Brook wasn’t the distance-learning environment you’d think of. My classmates became best friends. It was an iron-sharpens-iron thing, and the relationships we built that first year really lasted through law school and beyond. When I look at my legal practice and the people who influenced me and made it possible, it was my friends and professors from Oak Brook.”- Mark

A "Real World" Experience

In 2013 the State Bar of California formed a task force to explore how to bridge the gap between law school and the “real world.” While recognizing that legal education has made progress in recent years, the task force still noted a serious need and recommended additional pre-admission requirements involving practice-based competency training. [See “State Bar of California Task Force On Admissions Regulation Reform: Phase I Final Report,” June 24, 2013.](#)

Opportunities for practical experience come in many shapes and sizes: apprenticeships, paying jobs, or volunteer work; part-time, full-time, or temporary. The value of any experience is in turning your theoretical knowledge into practical interaction with real people and real problems—whether or not you end up practicing in that particular area of law.

Because distance education does not have the same physical location requirements as a traditional law school, a student can live and study almost anywhere. This allows many students to work while going to school, provide care for family members, or be involved in ministry or other activities.

Distance education provides flexibility for professors as well, allowing attorneys in the practice of law to give students the benefit of their experience.

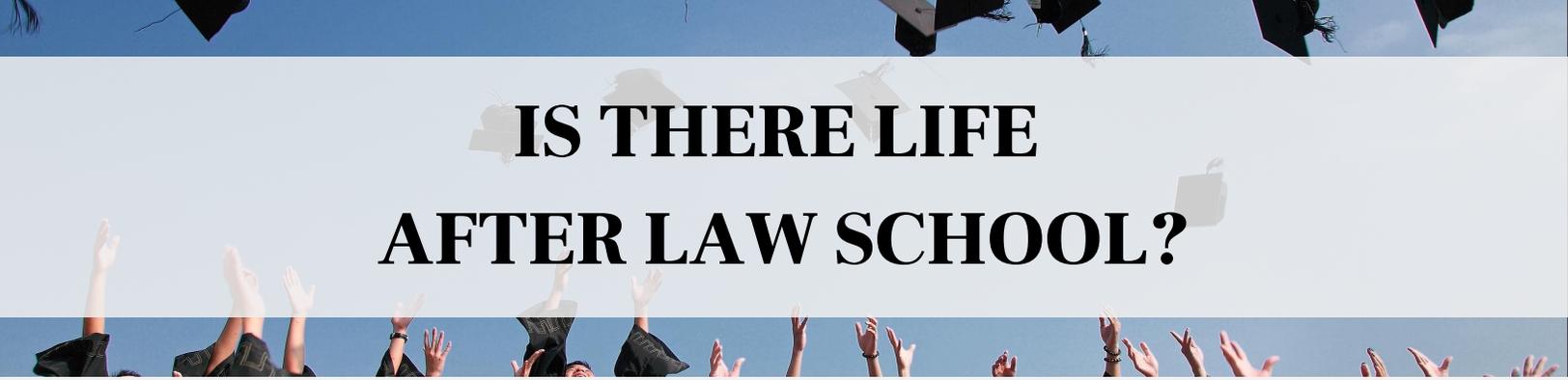
By allowing you to study where you need to be and giving you access to experienced professionals, the distance education approach allows you to maintain the community and family relationships you already have and better prepares you for maintaining a healthy work/life balance after graduation.



Over the course of his four years in law school, Gabriel Waddell worked as director of an international humanitarian organization, with an experienced litigator, and for the Home School Legal Defense Association. “My legal experience during law school taught me that there is more to being a good lawyer than the knowledge you learn from law school.” Gabe noted that advising people who are in the midst of difficult situations, crafting acceptable agreements, and clearly communicating complex ideas are a few of the practical skills that come through experience.

In his third and fourth years of law school, Jonathon worked for a California attorney as a Certified Law Student, allowing him the opportunity to engage in the limited representation of clients, which included taking depositions and arguing cases in court. His studies came alive through this experience as he applied many topics he studied in law school to real-life situations.





IS THERE LIFE AFTER LAW SCHOOL?

What might your law practice look like?

Landing your first job after law school can be one of the most thrilling experiences of your life, the moment you've anticipated through countless hours of study!

The legal field is competitive, especially in a tough economy. Be patient; do not give up. If you are called to the practice of law, God will open doors and direct your steps. Seek His guidance. As you do, He will send opportunities you could not have imagined.

What follows is a brief overview of jobs you might consider as you enter the practice of law:

- Public Service
- Private Practice
- Sole Practitioner
- General Counsel
- Judicial Clerkship
- Public Policy

Job Searching Tips

ATTITUDE COUNTS!

Be willing to work hard to gain experience. Starting with an internship is a great way to meet the right people, find your strengths, and enhance your resume.

THINK LONG-TERM

Finding the perfect job may be a lifelong endeavor. You may need to put in years of practice before you can land that "dream" job. Many OBCL graduates have spent 3-5 years practicing in California before taking the bar exam in another state to pursue other career options.

ASK!

Your professors, classmates, fellow law school graduates, associates, friends, and acquaintances are great sources for your job search. Ask them for their ideas and input!

Public Service

Many attorneys begin their legal careers as prosecutors or public defenders. While prosecutors and public defenders may debate the relative merits of “protecting the public” or “protecting individual liberties,” each is a necessary component of our justice system.

As a prosecutor or public defender, you can gain valuable courtroom experience. These attorneys spend a lot of time in the courtroom arguing motions, negotiating plea agreements, and trying cases. They must learn how to pick a jury, present an opening statement, examine and cross-examine witnesses, make objections, and persuade a jury with closing arguments.

Many attorneys seek public service jobs to gain courtroom experience before transitioning into private practice. Others spend their entire careers in this exciting area of practice.



“As a prosecutor, I represent ‘the People’ of my state and am charged with seeking truth and pursuing justice. I find great personal satisfaction from knowing that my work as a prosecutor has tremendous value keeping my community safe. Prosecuting criminal cases also provides many opportunities to litigate in court, and I frequently conduct jury trials. It is good to know after a long trial that truth was sought, justice was meted out and my community is a better place.”

-Brian Hutchins, Prosecutor

Clayton spent the first four years of his legal career working for two Bakersfield law firms, handling various civil and administrative matters. In 2007, he opened his own law practice, the Campbell Law Firm, and practiced primarily criminal defense law in Kern County before forming Campbell Whitten, PC, with his long-time friend and fellow OBCL graduate, Jesse Whitten, in December of 2012. Clayton has developed a rapport with local prosecutors and a reputation among judges, defense attorneys, and prosecutors as a skilled trial lawyer.



Private Practice

More frequently, attorneys will begin their careers as associates in an established law firm where they will spend much of their time researching and drafting memoranda, motions, briefs, and client letters. As an associate, you can gain useful experience and knowledge from the more experienced attorneys in the firm.

Many law school graduates aspire to gain a position in a large prestigious firm. While large law firms often have higher associate salaries and the opportunity to work on high-profile cases, you should also consider other frequent characteristics of an associate position with a large firm: (1) a 60-80 hour work week is not uncommon; (2) some firms develop a very competitive, often cutthroat, environment for assignments and promotions; (3) it is not uncommon to be required to log at least 2,200 billable hours per year; (4) the process to become a partner can be long and complicated; and (5) the new associates receive very limited opportunities to develop their courtroom skills. When you finally achieve partnership in a large firm, your pay will become dependent on the law firm's profits. The large firm life can be profitable and appealing to some attorneys, but you should carefully consider the trade-offs before making that career decision.

Small firms have their own issues and challenges, but most attorneys choose to practice in a small firm environment. In small firms, associate attorneys have more opportunities to gain experience in different areas and the workload is usually more reasonable than large firms. The pay is less than in a large firm, but it can also be a more relaxed environment.



Jonathan Huber has been practicing law in northern California since 2003 and is certified as an Estate Planning, Trust and Probate law specialist by The State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization. *"In the 18+ years of practice so far, I have been privileged to serve many wonderful people, including many WWII vets whose service to our country is unrivaled. Recently, I was privileged to assist a vet who served at Normandy on D-Day. I'd say getting to meet and serve these men and women is the thing I enjoy most about the practice."*

-Jonathan Huber, HuberFox Group, Sacramento, CA

Sole Practitioner

A risky, but often rewarding, career path is that of sole practitioner. A young sole practitioner is faced with the difficult task of attracting clients, navigating a client's case without the aid of a more experienced attorney, and managing a business. While such challenges are not for everyone, many young attorneys have successfully started their legal career as a sole practitioner or transitioned into solo practice after a very short time at another firm. It can be very rewarding to have the freedom and responsibility of owning your own firm.



As a young attorney, Mark made the decision to open his own practice in criminal defense and traffic law. Now, 15 years later, his firm has grown to defend clients throughout Central California. *“One of the main reasons that I chose starting my own private practice is autonomy to do the other things that I feel called to do. Because I have my own practice, it allows me to prioritize service to ministries, public policy issues of importance, and other things that I believe are important. Certainly my law office helps me make a great income. But more importantly to me, it frees me up to take care of the things that I believe are important in a professional manner with the intent of glorifying God in my daily work life. I think that it is sometimes more difficult to have that autonomy to serve God through law if you are in a traditional legal workplace.”*

-Mark J. Bigger, Bigger and Harman, Bakersfield, CA

Corporate Counsel

A corporate counsel position can involve a wide range of legal issues, including contracts, employment, collections, corporate governance, regulation, insurance, and intellectual property. These positions also tend to involve more consistent hours, frequently consisting of an 8-hour work day, with no pressure to fulfill a billable-hour requirement.

Business education or experience can be very helpful for corporate counsel as they work every day with the business people they represent. You must develop the ability to balance legal advice with business realities.

Judicial Clerkships

A judicial clerk's duties may vary significantly between jurisdictions but will usually involve a large amount of legal research and writing. The clerk for a trial court judge will often conduct research on the motions before the judge and draft the ruling once the judge has decided the issue. An appellate-level clerk will similarly assist a judge by conducting legal research and drafting opinions for the judge.

There are many advantages to working as a clerk. First, it will sharpen your research and writing skills. Second, it will expose you to many different areas of law. Third, and perhaps most importantly, you will learn the procedural pitfalls that entrap many inexperienced attorneys.

Because of that experience and exposure to the practice of law, a clerkship is a great way to begin a legal career. Also, prospective employers often place great value on experience as a judicial clerk.



"My duties as staff attorney included drafting opinions and internal memoranda regarding direct appeals, petitions for writs of mandamus, and petitions for writs of certiorari. I had the opportunity to work on a variety of cases involving complex substantive and procedural issues. Reading countless briefs and drafting numerous opinions has sharpened my ability to effectively and efficiently address the legal questions presented to the Court."

*Paul Harman
staff attorney for Justice Parker - Alabama Supreme Court*

"Clerking was my first job after law school and it was fantastic. Clerking at a state supreme court, I saw a wide variety of cases, ranging from criminal law to tort to contract. In the mountain west, the docket also naturally included water law issues, which I found particularly fascinating. I got to work for a judge who I deeply respected, making it a rich learning opportunity. I was constantly learning new legal issues and engaged in lots of research and writing. It really was a dream job and an excellent way to start a career in the legal profession."

*Lael Weinberger
clerked for Chief Justice Eismann - Idaho Supreme Court*



Public Policy or Public Interest Practice

Attorneys can also use their legal degrees in the public policy arena by serving in a political office or working as a legislative aide or lobbyist. Public interest law firms provide other attorneys with the opportunity to litigate precedent-setting cases that can impact public policy for many years.



"As a member of the Church Project, I have the privilege of protecting the religious freedom of churches and Christian ministries through direct litigation and public advocacy. My work centers on protecting church autonomy and the right of pastors to preach freely from the pulpit; ensuring that religious organizations have access to government facilities, programs, and benefits on the same terms as secular organizations; and advocating for the right of Christian organizations to operate according to their faith."

Christiana Holcomb, Alliance Defending Freedom.



Michael J. Reitz is executive vice president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, where he oversees execution of the Center's strategic plan. The Mackinac Center is an independent, nonprofit research and educational institute based in Midland, Michigan, with the mission of improving the quality of life for all Michigan citizens by promoting sound solutions to state and local policy questions.

Michael Reitz, Executive VP, Mackinac Center for Public Policy



"I love working for the Foundation for Government Accountability because it allows me to directly apply my legal training to solving some of the biggest problems in America today. In the span of one day I can be working with state lawmakers to transform foster care programs, brainstorming with health care experts to stop the government take-over of medicine, and defending my organization from legal attacks by the Left. Working to apply the law is good, working to defend and restore the rule of law is even more meaningful."

-Jonathan Bechtle

Talk To Us

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Email: alumni@obcl.edu

