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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Mercer University to Host Baptist Joint Committee's Shurden Lectures
on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State in Atlanta and Macon**

ATLANTA/MACON – Mercer will host the 2018 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State March 20-21 on the University's Atlanta and Macon campuses. All three lectures are free and open to the public.

This year's lecturer is Dr. Charles C. Haynes, founding director of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute in Washington, D.C. Haynes is best known for his work on First Amendment issues in American public life.

Over the past two decades, he has been the principal organizer and drafter of consensus guidelines on religion and values in public schools, endorsed by a broad range of religious, civil liberties and educational organizations.

Haynes' first lecture, titled "Liberty of conscience and the future of American democracy," will be hosted by McAfee School of Theology March 20 at 11 a.m. in Cecil B. Day Hall Auditorium on the Atlanta campus.

His second lecture, "Standing up for justice and freedom in an age of conflict and division," will be hosted by the Roberts Department of Religion in the College of Liberal Arts March 21 at 10 a.m. in the Medical School Auditorium on the Macon campus. The first 125 students to attend will receive a free T-shirt from the Baptist Joint Committee.

Haynes' final lecture, "From background to common ground: A First Amendment vision for religious liberty in public life," will be hosted by Mercer Law School March 21 at 3:30 p.m. in the law school's first-floor courtroom.

Haynes is author or co-author of six books, including *First Freedoms: A Documentary History of First Amendment Rights in America* and *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Schools*. He is widely quoted in news magazines and major newspapers and is a frequent guest on television and radio. He has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal* and on ABC's "Evening News."

His recent honors include the Sanford N. McDonnell Lifetime Achievement Award from Character.org and the Mahatma Gandhi Award for the Advancement of Pluralism from the Hindu American Foundation.

A founding board member of Character.org, Haynes also serves on the Steering Committee of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. He chairs the Committee on Religious Liberty founded by the National Council of Churches.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Emory University, master's degree from Harvard Divinity School and a doctorate from Emory.

In 2004, Dr. Walter B. Shurden and Dr. Kay W. Shurden of Macon made a gift to the Washington, D.C.-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) to establish an annual lectureship on the issues of religious liberty and separation of church and state.

A nationally noted church historian, Dr. Walter B. Shurden is founding executive director of the Center for Baptist Studies and a minister-at-large for Mercer. He served at the University for almost 25 years as Callaway Professor of Christianity in the Roberts Department of Religion in the College of Liberal Arts. During 18 of those years, he served as chair of the department.

Dr. Kay W. Shurden, a retired professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in Mercer's School of Medicine, is a noted author and maintains a practice in counseling and supervision.

Designed to enhance the ministry and programs of the Baptist Joint Committee, the lectures are held at Mercer every three years and at another seminary, college or university the other years. The lecturers, selected by the executive director of the BJC, may be academicians, politicians, ministers, church historians, ethicists or activists.

About the Baptist Joint Committee

The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty is a leading voice in Washington, D.C., working to defend religious freedom and protect the institutional separation of church and state in the historic Baptist tradition. Founded in 1936, the BJC fights for religious liberty for all, knowing that a threat to anyone's religious liberty is a threat to everyone's religious liberty. Learn more at BJCOnline.org.

About Mercer University

Founded in 1833, Mercer University is a dynamic and comprehensive center of undergraduate, graduate and professional education. The University enrolls more than 8,600 students in 12 schools and colleges – liberal arts, law, pharmacy, medicine, business, engineering, education, theology, music, nursing, health professions, and Penfield College of Mercer University – on campuses in Macon, Atlanta and Savannah – and two regional academic centers in the Atlanta metro area. The Mercer Health Sciences Center includes the University's School of Medicine and Colleges of Nursing, Health Professions and Pharmacy. Mercer is affiliated with five teaching hospitals – Memorial University Medical Center in Savannah; The Medical Center, Navicent Health, and Coliseum Medical Centers in Macon; and Midtown Medical Center and St. Francis Hospital in Columbus. The University also has an educational partnership with Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex in Warner Robins. It operates an academic press and a performing arts center in Macon and an engineering research center in Warner Robins. Mercer is one of only 286 institutions nationwide to shelter a chapter of The Phi Beta Kappa Society, the nation's most prestigious academic honor society; one of eight institutions to hold membership in the Georgia Research Alliance; and the only private university in Georgia to field an NCAA Division I athletic program. www.mercer.edu