



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE IN OUR NAME



Film and Interfaith Discussion Guide

The Film! *Torture in Our Name*

As a part of NRCAT's work to end torture in U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers, NRCAT has collaborated with filmmaker Matthew Gossage to produce [*Torture in Our Name*](#), a 35-minute documentary released in 2022 which can be used by communities of faith and conscience to expose the torture of solitary confinement and shine a light on the survivors of solitary who are leading state and national campaigns to end it.

The film examines the moral, mental health, racial justice and human rights implications of the systemic use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers. *Torture in Our Name* is a call to action for communities of faith and conscience to engage in the growing nationwide movement for restorative alternatives to isolated confinement that prioritize rehabilitation, therapeutic interventions, and recovery. Interviews include movement leaders with first-hand experience of solitary confinement from state campaigns including the [Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition](#), the [New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement/ #HALTSolitary Campaign](#), and the [New Jersey Prison Justice Watch](#), as well as religious community leaders and allies on the frontlines of campaigns to end the practice.

Suggestions for Using this Film

This documentary film is designed to be shown and discussed in faith communities and in public forums hosted by religious and community organizations. Below is a discussion guide for an approximately one-hour session that is appropriate for a variety of settings (35 minutes for the film and 30 minutes for discussion and education). If your schedule requires a shorter gathering, you may find that abbreviating the discussion or breaking it into multiple, shorter sessions is useful.

We encourage you to adapt it to your context and the religious, spiritual, or cultural tradition of your own community. The NRCAT staff are available to support you in your planning and preparation.

Download the film here!

Ideas for screenings of *Torture in Our Name*:

- An interfaith gathering
- An event about mass incarceration, racial justice, civil and human rights
- A panel discussion featuring returning citizens and experts who are formerly incarcerated, mental health practitioners, religious and community leaders
- A college group or classroom
- An adult education class
- A religious community forum
- A social justice committee gathering
- A prison ministry meeting or re-entry forum
- A prayer group
- A screening at which legislators are invited to attend
- A training for advocates in state or local campaigns on racial injustice or mass incarceration
- A supplement to a study of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander

Preparing for the Discussion

Facilitator(s) should preview the film and read through the discussion guide before hosting a screening to map out how you would like to present the material. Remember to incorporate your experiences, ideas, questions, data on solitary confinement from your state if available, and prayers into the discussion. There may be a variety of opinions expressed during the conversation, and respect, openness and honesty will be key to constructive learning.

Here is a quick preparation checklist:

- Publicize the upcoming film screening and discussion session early and often within your faith community. Announce it in worship. You'll find sample promotion materials at www.nrcat.org/torture-in-our-name-discussion-guide
- Become familiar with the "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)" at the end of this Discussion Guide and consider printing the FAQs for distribution during your group discussion.
- Go to www.unlocktheboxcampaign.org to connect with campaign partners in your state. If there is an active campaign in your state, read about the status of any legislation and other advocacy efforts underway so you can share these opportunities with your group.
- Invite experts who are formerly incarcerated and who have experienced solitary confinement first-hand, and their family members, to speak at the film viewing. It is important to compensate speakers if you have the budget to do so. NRCAT staff may be able to help connect you with a member of the NRCAT National Network of Solitary Survivors to offer their expertise as well.
- Consider using masking tape to mark out a space on the floor that is 6'x9' in size to help participants visualize a typical solitary confinement cell.
- Determine who will participate in leadership and the reading of questions/meditations.
- Test the film with the equipment ahead of time (Computer, Wi-Fi connection and Projector, if applicable) you will be using for the session. We strongly encourage you to download the film to the computer that will play it. More at www.nrcat.org/torture-in-our-name-discussion-guide
- Invite each participant to sign the NRCAT national pledge, "[A Moral Call to End the Torture of Solitary Confinement](#)," (available to sign online or as a [downloadable PDF](#)). You may print off a paper copy of the pledge or have a laptop available for participants to sign electronically.
- Our faith traditions have a lot to say when it comes to solitary confinement, the criminal legal system in the U.S., racial justice, and the moral imperative to end torture without exception. A sampling of the positions of the [organizational religious members of NRCAT are available here](#). Consider sharing from these resources with members of your faith community as a call to action at your event.
- Occasionally, participants will ask for the definition of torture that is being used. The definition from the Convention Against Torture is included in the "Frequently Asked Questions" about solitary confinement included in this discussion guide.

Tell us how it went!

NRCAT is compiling a journal of stories about the screening of *Torture in Our Name* as communities of faith and conscience share it nationwide. Be sure to tag NRCAT on social media:

Twitter: @nrcattweets • **Instagram:** @nrcatphotos • **Facebook:** facebook.com/nrcat

Please let us know the details of your screening and send along some pictures.

Email your update to Laura Markle Downton: ldownton@nrcat.org



TORTURE IN OUR NAME

Session Outline

Welcome, Introductions, and Key Information (10 minutes)

1. Open with prayer, if that is your tradition.
2. Invite participants to introduce themselves.
3. Introduce the film *Torture in Our Name*. The following is introductory background to share before starting the film:

“Each of us comes to this discussion session on torture and our criminal justice system with a variety of beliefs and experiences. Many of us carry heavy burdens unknown to others, and some of us may have direct experience with the pain of incarceration or other histories of trauma. Please join me in committing to a time of mutual respect and listening as we learn together.

The purpose of this discussion is for us to learn about the use of solitary confinement, a form of torture that is widespread in prisons, jails, and detention centers in the United States, yet hidden from public view. Together we will look at the use of solitary confinement and learn about the growing movement to end this devastating practice. We will witness some of the ways people who have survived solitary confinement are leading campaigns to end it and learn about how communities of faith are finding their voice in the struggle. We will consider these realities through the lens of our faith and the work each one of us must take on to end it.”

A few key things to consider before we begin the film:

What is solitary confinement? Solitary or isolated confinement is the practice of confining incarcerated people, alone or with another person, for 22-24 hours a day. Meals are often shoved through a slot in a solid steel door. Deprived of all meaningful human contact, natural sunlight, programming, and education, those who have survived the experience describe it as being “buried alive.” Incarcerated people are held for months, years, even decades, in these conditions. The practice has a variety of labels including isolation, Segregated Housing Units (SHU), segregation (or “seg” for short), “the hole,” “the box,” “the bing,” “restricted housing,” and the list goes on.

The context: On any given day in the United States, an estimated 80,000 incarcerated adults and youth are held in solitary confinement. The U.S. incarcerates proportionately more of its people than any other nation globally as a result of mandatory sentencing, lack of mental health treatment, and racial and religious profiling. U.S. immigration enforcement policies are replicating this model, increasing the detention of migrants. More than 50 percent of people incarcerated in prisons and jails in the U.S. have a diagnosed mental illness. Recent studies have revealed that people of color are even more over-represented in solitary than they are in the prison population in general and receive longer terms in solitary than white people for the same disciplinary infractions.

The pandemic has revealed the deep inadequacies of the criminal legal system in the U.S. to address the physical and mental health needs of incarcerated people. According to a June 2020 special report from the Unlock the Box Campaign, COVID-19 led to an explosion in the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers. At least 300,000 people were reportedly placed in solitary confinement following the advent of the pandemic, marking an increase of close to 500 percent over previous levels. [View the full report here.](#)



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE IN OUR NAME

Why are people sent to solitary? Contrary to popular belief that solitary confinement is only used in response to violent behavior, incarcerated people are far more likely to be placed in solitary for non-violent disciplinary reasons, because of a need for protection, or because corrections staff misinterpret their symptoms of mental disability as an act of defiance or rule breaking. [Here is a useful handout produced by the Vera Institute of Justice on this topic for sharing.](#)

In solitary for more than 15 days? That's torture. Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Juan Méndez (2010-2016), stated in a [2011 report](#) that solitary confinement in excess of 15 days should “be subject to an absolute prohibition” based on scientific evidence of its psychological damage, noting that some of the psychological effects caused by isolation become irreversible after 15 days. Further, the [United Nations’ “Nelson Mandela Rules”](#) prohibit the use of solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days in all circumstances and call for its abolition for women, children and individuals with mental and physical disabilities. Article I of the UN Convention Against Torture prohibits policies and practices that “constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.”

What are Humane Alternatives to Solitary Confinement? When a crisis arises and an intervention is needed, humane alternatives to solitary confinement include short-term separation without isolation that are measured in hours not days, accompanied by rehabilitative and therapeutic programs, therapy, and support to address underlying needs and causes of behavior. [The Norwegian Correctional System](#) has offered an alternative vision implemented by a number of state corrections systems including [North Dakota](#), with an emphasis on the investment of time, resources, and services that nurture human relationships which are considered essential to reducing the risk of conflict, disruption, and violence.

Film Screening (35 minutes)

You are encouraged to download the film in advance so that if the internet drops or slows, your screening is not interrupted. Instructions for downloading the film are at www.nrcat.org/torture-in-our-name-discussion-guide. NRCAT also has a limited number of DVDs available. For more information please contact Laura Markle Downton at downton@nrcat.org.



Discussion (20 minutes total)

Now you can facilitate a discussion about some of the issues raised in this film. You may not have time to cover all the topics below in discussion. If so, decide ahead of time which elements of the conversation are a priority and begin with those.

1. In the film, we heard stories from people who have experienced the horror of solitary confinement first-hand. What reactions did you have while listening to their stories?
2. As people of faith, how might our faith tradition be a resource for our advocacy and efforts to end the torture of solitary confinement? What does our faith have to say about this issue and how we should respond?
3. In the film, several people interviewed talk about the moral cost of allowing the torture of solitary confinement to continue. How do you think solitary confinement impacts the morality of our society?
4. In the film, we heard about the challenges family members of those who are incarcerated face when it comes to sharing openly about their experiences with their faith community. What steps can we take to ensure our faith community is a place where people can find genuine compassion, care, and concern if they have a loved one who is or was incarcerated? For people coming home after incarceration?
5. The film describes some of the ways people of faith are joining in the nationwide movement to end the torture of solitary confinement. What are the next steps you/we can commit to take in our community?

Solitary Confinement Cell Demonstration (5 minutes)

Consider marking off a 6'x9' space on the floor of the room with masking tape. Invite participants to step into the space one at a time or simply observe the size of the space from where they are seated. Ask them to take a few moments to imagine themselves confined to that space for 22-24 hours a day for days, months or years on end. Ask them to consider how they would react to these conditions of sensory deprivation and extreme isolation and what they would miss the most.

Taking Action! and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute [copies of the petition format](#) of NRCAT's national pledge, "A Moral Call to End the Torture of Solitary Confinement," and ask those who wish to sign it to do so. Inform the participants that endorsements are being collected by NRCAT to bolster our federal advocacy efforts with the U.S. Congress and the Biden Administration to end the torture of solitary confinement.

NRCAT is a founding member of the Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce (FAST), and has developed a [Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement](#) by the Federal Government. Print copies of the "Blueprint" and have them available for those who are interested. The "Blueprint" outlines our key asks of federal law makers and spells out the steps needed to end the torture of solitary confinement in the federal Bureau of Prisons.

Through NRCAT, the national interfaith community has pledged to partner with the Biden-Harris Administration to fulfill its campaign promise to end solitary confinement, and the Blueprint lays out the roadmap to end this torture once and for all. In reiterating its call for ending long-term solitary, NRCAT joined 30 national faith bodies and more than 150 organizations overall in sending a letter to the Biden Administration, "Ending the Practice of Solitary Confinement: Recommendations for Federal Reform" which garnered significant national media attention, including this [NBC article](#).

continued on the next page



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE IN OUR NAME

In addition, share information about local and statewide campaigns in your area to confront the use of solitary confinement. NRCAT is a founding member of the [Unlock the Box Campaign \(UTB\)](#), a national advocacy campaign aimed at ending solitary confinement in all U.S. prisons, jails, detention facilities, and juvenile facilities, and bringing the United States into full compliance with the UN's Mandela Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners by 2028.

As of 2022, there are 19 state campaigns to end solitary working with the Unlock the Box Campaign. UTB is working simultaneously on national, state, and local levels with solitary survivors, family members, advocates, community and faith groups, legislators, and others dedicated to ending state-sponsored torture. As of 2022, the 19 state campaigns working with the Unlock the Box Campaign include Arkansas, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington.

Invite participants to go to www.unlocktheboxcampaign.org to connect with campaign partners in your state. If there is an active campaign in your state, read about the status of any legislation and other advocacy efforts underway and share these opportunities with your group.

If using a paper petition version of the national pledge, please send the NRCAT national pledge with the collected names to:

*National Religious Campaign Against Torture
PO Box 91820
Washington, DC 20090*

Spend a few moments in prayer or in silence:

- for those who are enduring conditions of solitary confinement in your state and nationwide,
- for their loved ones,
- for those who work in prisons and jails,
- for their loved ones,
- for our legislators,
- for our religious leaders and communities of faith,
- and for the courage to build community and end the torture of solitary confinement together.



End with a closing prayer or the way that your class or group typically closes its session.



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE IN OUR NAME

Want to learn more? Read on.

[A Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement by the Federal Government:](#) Though this 2021 study written by NRCAT and other allies in campaigns to end solitary is aimed toward federal reform, it offers a comprehensive policy framework for ending solitary confinement in prison or jail systems.

How Solitary Impacts Youth, read [Growing Up Locked Down](#) and learn more about the [Stop Solitary for Kids Campaign](#).

For Stories of People in Solitary, visit [Solitary Watch](#).

How Solitary Impacts LGBT Incarcerated Persons, read [Standing With LGBT Prisoners: An Advocate's Guide to Ending Abuse and Combating Imprisonment](#).

How Solitary Impacts Women, read [Worse Than Second Class](#).



More about the state campaigns featured in the film:

[The Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition:](#) The Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition (LSSC) is a statewide working group composed of solitary survivors, non-profit community groups, and faith-based organizations working together to end solitary confinement in Louisiana jails and prisons by 2028.

[The New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement/#HALTSolitary Campaign:](#) The New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) brings together advocates, formerly incarcerated persons, family members of currently incarcerated people, concerned community members, lawyers, and individuals in the human rights, health, and faith communities throughout New York State. Marking a watershed moment in the national campaign to end solitary confinement, in the spring of 2021, the New York legislature passed, and the governor signed into law, the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, legislation effectively ending the torture of long-term solitary confinement in the state. The eight-year effort to pass the bill, led by the broad-based New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (NY-CAIC) of which NRCAT is a founding member, will impact tens of thousands of people a year who are imprisoned and land in isolation, often for longer than the 15-day limit set by the new law, and sometimes for months, years and even decades.

[The New Jersey Prison Justice Watch:](#) Formerly called the New Jersey Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement, (NJ-CAIC), this is a coalition of survivors and advocates committed to educating, legislating, and organizing to call for an end to all forms of prolonged or unnecessary prisoner isolation. After years of work, in July 2019 Governor Phil Murphy signed the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act into law. The campaign is now engaged in a vigorous campaign to ensure full implementation of the groundbreaking legislation as well as other issues.



Frequently Asked Questions about Solitary Confinement

What is solitary confinement?

Solitary or isolated confinement is the practice of confining incarcerated people in a small cell, alone or with another person, for 22-24 hours a day. Meals are often shoved through a slot in a solid steel door. Deprived of all meaningful human contact, natural sunlight, programming, and education, those who have survived the experience describe it as being “buried alive.” Incarcerated people are held for months, years, even decades, in these conditions. The practice has a variety of labels including isolation, Segregated Housing Units (SHU), segregation (or “seg” for short), “the hole,” “the box,” “the bing,” “restricted housing,” and the list goes on.

Who is impacted by solitary confinement?

In the federal system and state and local jurisdictions across the country, solitary confinement and other forms of restrictive housing are disproportionately inflicted on Black people, Latinx people, Native people, and other people of color, as well as transgender and gender non-conforming people, people with mental health needs, and young people. The U.S. incarcerates more of its people than any other nation globally. Despite making up close to 5% of the global population, the U.S. has more than 20% of the world's prison population. This is driven by the cradle to prison pipeline, mandatory minimum sentencing, lack of mental health treatment, and racial and religious profiling. U.S. immigration enforcement policies are replicating this model, increasing the [detention of migrants](#). More than 50 percent of people incarcerated in prisons and jails in the U.S. today have a diagnosed mental illness. On any given day, more than 80,000 incarcerated adults and youth are held in [solitary confinement](#), at least 25,000 of whom are held in supermax prison facilities made up solely or mostly of solitary cells.

According to the [Drug Policy Alliance](#), the “drug war has produced profoundly unequal outcomes across racial groups, manifested through racial discrimination by law enforcement.” Though “rates of drug use and selling are comparable across racial lines, people of color are far more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, prosecuted, convicted and incarcerated for drug law violations than are whites. Higher arrest and incarceration rates for African Americans and Latinos are not reflective of increased prevalence of drug use or sales in these communities, but rather of a law enforcement focus on urban areas, on lower-income communities and on communities of color as well as inequitable treatment by the criminal justice system.”

What is the history of solitary confinement in the United States?

Dr. Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin and several Quaker leaders first instituted solitary confinement at Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia in the late 18th century, believing that total isolation would lead to penitence (hence, the term ‘penitentiary’ was coined). That led to the opening of the Eastern State Penitentiary in 1829 in Philadelphia, which only had solitary confinement cells. Those confined soon began to lose their sanity. In 1842, Charles Dickens visited the prison and said, “I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body.” The practice was dispensed with as a failure. Bonnie Kerness and Bissonette Lewey explain that, according to an 1890 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, “isolation was so harmful that a person who had murdered and was sentenced to die should be freed and escape his death sentence because the additional burden of one month’s incarceration in solitary confinement was so onerous as to demand redress.” Source: Bonnie Kerness & Jamie Bissonette Lewey (2014) Race and the Politics of Isolation in U.S. Prisons, *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 22:1, 26.

continued on the next page



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE IN OUR NAME

In the 20th century, some U.S. prisons had a limited number of solitary confinement control units within their facilities. However, in 1983 a prison in Illinois instituted a permanent 'lock down' of their entire facility, in which all inmates were confined alone in their cells for 23 hours per day. The use of solitary confinement has increased dramatically since then. In 1989, California built Pelican Bay State Prison to house prisoners exclusively in isolation (the first "supermax" prison). Today, supermax prisons are run by more than 40 states and the federal Bureau of Prisons.

What are the psychological effects of prolonged solitary confinement on people who are locked up?

Isolation fundamentally [alters the brain](#), [creates and exacerbates mental illness](#), and creates toxic environments for incarcerated people and correctional staff. Many studies have documented the severe detrimental effects of solitary confinement on the mental health of people who are incarcerated. Symptoms include hyperresponsivity to external stimuli, hallucinations, panic attacks, difficulty with thinking and memory, paranoia, and increased risk of suicide. Half of all suicides in prisons occur in solitary confinement.

How much does solitary confinement cost compared to other forms of confinement?

Due to increased construction and staffing costs, state data suggests that the cost of solitary confinement is 2-3 times that of housing an incarcerated person in general population. Source: Daniel P. Mears & Jamie Watson, Towards a Fair and Balanced Assessment of Supermax Prisons, 23 JUST. Q. 233, 260 (2006).

Incarceration in a federal supermax facility cost 153% more than incarceration in general population in 2013. Source: Alison Shames, Jessa Wilcox & Ram Subramanian, VERA Institute of Justice, Solitary confinement: Common Misconceptions and Emerging Safe Alternatives 25 (2015).

What does the United Nations have to say about solitary?

Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Juan Méndez (2010-2016), stated in a [2011 report](#) that solitary confinement in excess of 15 days should "be subject to an absolute prohibition" based on scientific evidence of its psychological damage, noting that some of the psychological effects caused by isolation become irreversible after 15 days. Further, the [United Nations' "Nelson Mandela Rules"](#) prohibit the use of solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days in all circumstances and call for its abolition for women, children and individuals with mental and physical disabilities.

What is the definition for torture?

Torture is defined in Article I of the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Convention came into force on June 26, 1987, and was signed by the U.S. in 1988, and ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1994. Here is the definition of torture from Article I of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, which has the weight of U.S. law:

"For the purposes of this Convention, the term 'torture' means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

TORTURE

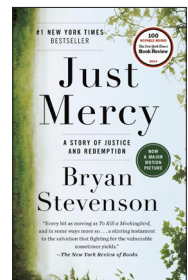
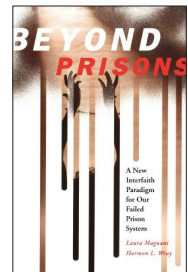
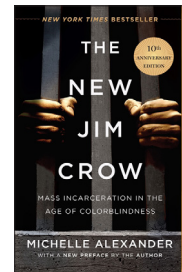
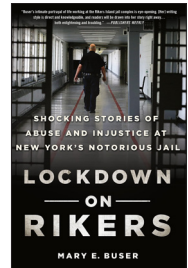
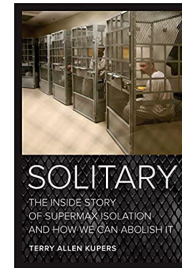
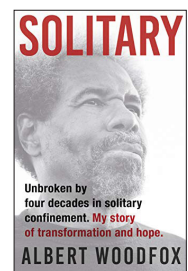
IN OUR NAME



Recommended Supplemental Reading

Along with screening *Torture in Our Name*, we recommend engaging in a group study of one or more of the following books:

- ***Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement***, Edited by Jean Casella, James Ridgeway, the co-founders of Solitary Watch, and Sarah Shourd, includes rare firsthand accounts from people in solitary, supplemented by noted experts.
- ***Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope***, by Albert Woodfox. In his unforgettable memoir, Woodfox chronicles his story of humanity, activism, and hope in the face of 43 years in solitary confinement in Louisiana's notorious Angola Prison.
- ***Solitary The Inside Story of Supermax Isolation and How We Can Abolish It***, by Terry Kupers, offers the perspective of one of the nation's foremost experts on the mental health effects of solitary.
- ***Lockdown on Rikers: Shocking Stories of Abuse and Injustice at New York's Notorious Jail***, by Mary E. Buser, powerfully documents her experiences as a social worker in the solitary confinement units of the Rikers Island jail complex.
- ***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness***, by Michelle Alexander, highly acclaimed civil rights lawyer, advocate, legal scholar. This book helped to transform the national debate on racial and criminal justice in the United States and is a must read for making sense of the U.S. criminal legal system.
- ***Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System***, by Laura Magnani and Harmon L. Wray, traces the history of our criminal legal system and lays out a whole new paradigm of criminal justice based on restorative practices and reconciliation.
- ***Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption***, by Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit law office in Montgomery, Alabama, dedicated to defending the poor, the incarcerated, and the wrongly condemned.





National Religious Campaign Against Torture



Introduction to NRCAT

[The National Religious Campaign Against Torture \(NRCAT\)](#) mobilizes people of faith and survivors of solitary confinement to end torture in U.S. policy, practice, and culture.

NRCAT is a coalition made up of more than 300 religious organizations including representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Buddhist, and Sikh communities. Members include national denominations and religious organizations, regional councils, and local houses of worship.

From the time of NRCAT's founding in 2006, members have worked together for human rights, human dignity and an end to torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment in U.S. policy, practice, and culture.

The NRCAT U.S. Prisons Program

NRCAT's work to end the torture of solitary confinement is led by Johnny Perez, Director of the NRCAT U.S. Prisons Program, who himself survived three years in solitary confinement. [Meet him here.](#) To contact Johnny, email: jperez@nrcat.org.

In addition, NRCAT's U.S. Prisons Program is led by an Advisory Council comprised of eleven distinguished members who inform, amplify, and aid in NRCAT's transforming work to end torture without exception. Each Advisory Council member represents a distinctive voice in the fight to end the torture of solitary confinement in the U.S. criminal legal system while also being a leading voice in the movement to end mass incarceration more broadly. [Learn more about the NRCAT U.S. Prisons Program Advisory Council Members here.](#)

NRCAT convenes a National Network of Solitary Survivors which serves as a landing point for survivors of solitary looking to engage in peer support and collegiality, to undergo advocacy and media trainings, and to share challenges and hopes. The National Network also serves as a hub for solitary survivors to plug into vibrant campaigns working to end solitary through public education and legislative engagement. If you are interested in joining this network and getting involved, contact Program Associate, Naquasia Pollard at: npollard@nrcat.org.

To resource and support NRCAT's network of faith advocates and religious organizational members, Laura Markle Downton serves as NRCAT's Director of Faith and Community Engagement. To explore how your faith community can deepen its involvement in state and national efforts to end solitary, contact Laura at: ldownton@nrcat.org.



Sign the National Pledge:
A Moral Call to End the Torture of Solitary Confinement

On any given day, tens of thousands of adults and children are subjected to solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails and immigrant detention centers, in conditions that constitute torture according to the United Nations, leading medical and mental health experts, and other developed countries. As religious organizations, individual members of faith communities, and people of conscience, we join in *A Moral Call to End the Torture of Solitary Confinement*.

Contrary to popular belief that solitary confinement is only used in response to violent behavior, incarcerated people are far more likely to be placed in solitary for non-violent disciplinary reasons, because of a need for protection, or because corrections staff misinterpret their symptoms of mental disability as an act of defiance or rule breaking. Medical experts have stated that people incarcerated in isolation for extended periods experience symptoms akin to delirium, and the impact on those with mental and physical disabilities is especially damaging. Recent studies have revealed that people of color are even more over-represented in solitary than they are in the prison population in general and receive longer terms in solitary than white people for the same disciplinary infractions.

Our various faith traditions hold in common a belief in the inherent dignity and worth of each human person. Complete isolation violates basic religious values of redemption, compassion, and restorative justice. In solitary, people are often detained in a cell by themselves, or with one other person, for 22 hours per day. Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. Cut off from any normal human interaction, enduring sensory and physical deprivation, many describe the experience as being “buried alive.” The [United Nations’ “Nelson Mandela Rules”](#) prohibit the use of solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days in all circumstances and call for its abolition for women, children and individuals with mental and physical disabilities. Article I of the UN Convention Against Torture prohibits policies and practices that “constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.” Yet in the U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers people can be held in these conditions for months, years, or even decades.

Solitary confinement is torture. As religious leaders and people of faith and goodwill across the United States, we issue this moral call to end the torture of solitary confinement in all 50 states, in the federal prison system, and in immigrant detention centers. We call upon the Biden Administration, the U.S. Congress, state legislators, and departments of corrections to end this destructive practice that violates basic principles of human rights and the inherent God-given and Divine human dignity bestowed on all.

Name — PLEASE PRINT	Address	E-mail*

* Thank you for your support. When you provide your email address, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture will add you to our mailing list to receive regular updates on ways to make your voice heard for a torture-free future. You can unsubscribe at any time.

Mail Petition to:

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

PO Box 91820; Washington, DC 20090

**YES, ADD MY NAME ON THE PETITION
A Moral Call to End the Torture of Solitary Confinement**

Name — PLEASE PRINT	Address	E-mail*

** Thank you for your support. When you provide your email address, we'll add you to our mailing list to receive regular updates on ways to make your voice heard for a torture-free future. You can unsubscribe at any time.*