

Close Guantanamo

SERMON TALKING POINTS

(Updated Jan. 2024)

Below are sermon talking points regarding the detention center at Guantanamo Bay. You are welcome to adapt these for your own use. A Fact Sheet that might also be helpful to you is available at www.nrcat.org/CloseGitmo.

Opening of the Guantanamo Detention Center and Its Continued Operation

- One of the decisions made in the wake of 9/11 was to open a prison at the U.S. Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The prison, which was opened on Jan. 11, 2002, was designed to be outside the reach of U.S. law. It was filled with people the U.S. had captured around the world, as well as those who were sold for bounty. Though some of these prisoners almost certainly engaged in terrorist activities, many of them were innocent - victims of mistaken identity, or local enemies who sold them to us to get rid of them.
- As a place designed to hold people outside the reach of the law, few of the men held at Guantanamo were ever charged with any crime. Worse, our government tortured many of the prisoners at Guantanamo, and many others were sent there after spending time in CIA black sites where they were also tortured.
- Now, 22 years after the first detainees were sent to Guantanamo, 30 people remain imprisoned there. 16 of them have been cleared for release by the U.S. government – yet remain imprisoned because the U.S. has not yet negotiated the details of where to send them.
- It is expensive to run a prison on Cuba because everything has to be shipped there. The U.S. is spending over \$15 million per year per prisoner to keep the prison in Guantanamo open.
- The majority of the men held at Guantanamo are being held indefinitely, without charge or trial for well over a decade. The right to a trial is not only an American value, but a basic moral principle. Indefinite detention is not only harmful to the detainees themselves, it also diminishes the moral leadership of our nation, compromises our commitment to the rule of law, and undermines our struggle against terrorism.

On the Moral Need to Close Guantanamo

- As people of faith, it is not our responsibility to judge the guilt or innocence of anyone at Guantanamo - and we don't have any of the information we would need to do so anyway. Our responsibility is to say, in one loud voice, torture and detention without trial are wrong. The prisoners at Guantanamo who suffered torture should receive psychological and medical treatment. Those who have committed crimes should be fairly tried for those crimes. The others should be released.
- Guantanamo is an international symbol of torture. It endures as a legacy of a period in which our government put its fears ahead of our values. Guantanamo must be closed and indefinite detention must end.
- We must not allow our government to send more people to Guantanamo to be imprisoned without trial.

On How We Respond in the Face of Fear and Violence

- In the face of hatred and violence, how we respond says a lot about who we are. In the face of violence, oppression, and fear it can be difficult to remember that we are not called to just care for those who treat us well, but we also have a responsibility toward those who are violent to us, those who oppress us, and those we are afraid of.
- The 9/11 attacks, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that came after them, were a difficult time for many. Our leaders, motivated by a desire to protect U.S. security, made many difficult decisions, some of which haunt us still today. As people of faith, we raise questions about sources of true security – about sources of true hope. Torturing and indefinitely detaining people is no solution to very real questions of how the human family should live together. Strong leadership on the part of the U.S. would mean affirming human rights, what we in faith communities may call upholding the dignity of the individual or affirming that each person is made in the image of God.

Please go to [Resources for the Faith Shared Initiative](#) for readings from the three Abrahamic traditions that present the religious foundation for each faith group's efforts to end the use of torture.

The following are a few of the possible scriptures/readings that could be used in speaking about the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.

Jewish Readings:

- From *Genesis Rabbah 24* – “Rabbi Tanhuma taught, ‘If you do thus, know that the person you have dishonored was created in the image of God.’”
- *Genesis 1:27-28* – “God created the human in God's image. In the image of God, God created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them.”
- *Exodus 23:9* – “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Christian Readings:

- *Matthew 25:40* - “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.”
- *Hebrews 13:3* - “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured
- “No matter how we understand that image, we believe that everyone, everyone has a spark inside them which is created in the image of God, even criminals, even terrorists, and especially even those defined as our enemies. Even when violent behavior has to be restrained or punished, that image of God requires that we respect the basic human rights of all persons, including the right not to be tortured.” (From: [Done to the Least of These Sermon](#) on Matthew 25:31-46, by Rev. Barbara G. Green)
- “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen (I John 4:20). This verse might be glossed to read: Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and torture their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who torture a brother or sister whom they have



seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen -- and the same holds true for those who turn a blind eye to torture or otherwise condone it.” (From [“Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?”](#), by George Hunsinger)

Muslim Readings:

- Both the Qur’an and the Hadeeth (collection of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) declare that God has invested the children of Adam with dignity, thus prohibiting any treatment that strips another person of that dignity. Treating with respect the human body of all persons – whether dead or alive and regardless of religion or race – is a sacred trust. Torture clearly violates that trust.
- *Qur’an (17:70)* – “Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of Our creation.”
- *Qur’an (5:8)* – “O you who believe, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do.”

INTERFAITH PRAYER FOR THE CLOSING OF GUANTANAMO

Leader: Our God and Sustainer, you have created all people – each one of us with dignity and worth, sacred in your sight.

People: Help us this day and every day to hold that truth in our hearts and to honor it in all we do, treating every person as your unique creation.

Leader: We pray for wisdom for our leaders to close the detention center at Guantánamo Bay. 22 years after the arrival of the first prisoner, Guantánamo remains a prominent symbol of our nation's violation of our deepest values. We pray for the spiritual healing that our nation can experience from closing Guantánamo and putting an end to this dark and errant chapter in our nation's history.

People: We pray for the courage, as individuals and as a nation, to do what is right even when we experience fear and uncertainty.

Leader: We pray that, as a nation, we will work to ensure that the abuses authorized and committed in our name never happen again. These abuses included the use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

People: We grieve, knowing that inflicting injustice and cruelty on even one person scars and diminishes all of us.

Leader: Our nation's use of torture has degraded victims, perpetrators, and policy makers, and has damaged the integrity of our nation.

People: We pray for strength and steadfastness in the work of repairing the world. In all things may we honor the dignity of each person.

All: Amen.