

## Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever DVD Discussion Guide for Catholics

### **Introduction**

Since 2002, the United States government has engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. These practices are illegal under U.S. law and considered immoral within most, if not all, faith traditions. However, a Pew Research Poll in April 2009 (see <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=156>) indicates that only 25 percent of Americans believe that the use of torture is never justified. Among white non-Hispanic Catholics the survey shows that only 20% believe that the use of torture is never justified.

This discussion guide was prepared by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) to facilitate discussion of the video “Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever.” **You can view and download the video, order a copy of it on DVD for \$5.00, register to participate in this project and access all the resources and links mentioned in this discussion guide at: [www.nrcat.org/300](http://www.nrcat.org/300).**

The video describes the torture practices of the U.S. government since 9/11, portrays the lasting effects on the survivors of torture around the world, and offers perspectives from a variety of faiths. Most faiths affirm that torture is a moral issue and that torture is always wrong. The video makes the case that torture is always immoral – without exceptions. It is designed to increase understanding as to why torture is always wrong.

Six different versions of this discussion guide have been prepared to address the needs of different faith groups: Catholics, evangelical Christians, Jews, mainline Protestants, Muslims, and Unitarian Universalists. To download any of these versions, go to: [www.nrcat.org/DVDguide](http://www.nrcat.org/DVDguide).

### **Suggestions for Using this DVD**

This video best lends itself to an adult Catholic education or small prayer group setting. Many parishes have adult formation groups that meet to address a variety of issues. We have provided a one-session and a two-session option for video screening and discussion. Each session is designed for an hour or less. We have provided a time breakdown for each session, but it is just a suggestion.

This resource could also be used with:

- Small faith sharing groups;
- Older youth or college groups;
- Women’s or men’s organizations;
- Special adult education programs;
- Social ministry committee or meeting; and
- Ecumenical or interfaith meeting/group.

### **Preparing for the Discussion**

We suggest that facilitators preview the video and read through the discussion guide to decide which resources to use and in what order you would like to present the material. Think through your own feelings and responses, so you are not surprised during the discussion. Feel free to add your own thoughts, questions, and prayers! The video includes many religious voices – all agreeing that torture is wrong. However, there may be a variety of opinions expressed during your discussion, and openness and honesty should be encouraged.

Here is a quick preparation checklist:

- **Register your participation in the project at [www.nrcat.org/300](http://www.nrcat.org/300).**
- Advertise early and often within and outside the parish. Announce it at Masses and in church bulletins and diocesan newspapers.
- Decide on the number of sessions.
- Determine the tasks you will accomplish during each session.
- Determine who will participate in leadership and reading of questions/prayers.
- Test the DVD with the equipment (DVD player and TV) you will be using for the session.
- Make copies of any questions, prayers, or Bible verses you may wish to hand out.
- Review USCCB's "Torture is a Moral Issue: A Catholic Study Guide" which is available on <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/stoptorture/> and consider holding follow-up sessions.

### **Additional Resources**

As a facilitator you may want to visit or encourage participants to visit [www.nrcat.org](http://www.nrcat.org) where we have a list of our member organizations, statements on torture from many faith traditions, further worship and prayer resources, and ways that your parish can become involved to end U.S.-sponsored torture. A link to a definition of torture used by the UN Convention Against Torture, which is U.S. law, can be found at [www.nrcat.org/definition](http://www.nrcat.org/definition). Many of these resources could be helpful both in your preparation for the class and in your community's discernment about its response.

## Session Outlines

### *Single Session Study*

#### **Welcome and introductions** (5 minutes)

Ask participants to introduce themselves. Then introduce the session and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “We come to this discussion session on torture with many thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, some of which we may not even be aware. We may have conflicting views. The purpose of this session is for us to begin to discuss U.S. practices and to look at that policy through the eyes of faith. We will specifically be exploring the contrast between the reality that many people believe torture is justifiable in some situations and the perspective of Bible verses and our Catholic teaching that has led many Americans to conclude that torture is always wrong. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart to the Holy Spirit during this session.”

#### **Video Screening** (20 minutes)

Insert DVD and select “For a single session” from the main menu. The video will begin screening immediately.

#### **Discussion** (25 minutes total)

Now we’ll discuss some of what our faith traditions say on the issue of torture.

1. In the video, Dr. David Gushee, President of Evangelicals for Human Rights, sums up the reasons why he thinks people of faith should care about torture. He says, “Issues can simultaneously be policy issues, security issues, military issues and moral issues. And I join the many others in this country that believe that it’s all of that, that torture is a moral issue. And it violates principles of basic justice and humanity. From a deeper religious perspective, or Christian perspective, it’s the most unloving thing you can do to a person. It’s hateful and contemptuous and therefore contemptible.” We often hear that this is more a security issue, but Dr. Gushee argues that it can also be a moral issue on which our faith should be brought to bear. What do you think about his statement? (5 minutes)
2. In the video, Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, says torture is “an intrinsic evil”—something that cannot be morally justified under any circumstances. The U.S. bishops have taught that abortion, euthanasia, genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war are “intrinsically evil” (Faithful Citizenship, 2007). Why do you think the Church teaches that torture merits that designation? What about this teaching do you find hard and why? (5 minutes)
3. Dr. Colecchi also said that “the human person is sacred because they are created in the image and likeness of God.” This idea comes from Genesis 1:27, which says, “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” As Catholics, we believe this means that each person has a divine quality and has a value in the eyes of God. How should we view both our friends and our enemies? How does this concept inform our understanding of torture policy? (5 minutes)
4. Read through Romans 12:17-21. Allow participants the opportunity to share reactions or feelings. Then move to discussion questions below (10 minutes):
  - a. In order to live in peace and feel secure, Paul suggests “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.” How have we treated those we consider to be our enemies since 9/11? What emotions have motivated those policies? How do the teachings of our faith challenge us to overcome fear and achieve true and lasting security?

- b. Some people of faith believe our country's torture policies and practices indicate that we have "become overcome by evil?" How so? How can we "overcome evil with good?"

**Closing Remarks and Prayer** (prayed by facilitator or a participant) (2 minutes)

Encourage participants to more closely examine Catholic social teaching on torture. Here are sample closing comments: "We've had a brief time to look at torture in light of our faith. I encourage you to learn more about Catholic social teaching on this issue by reading through 'Torture is a Moral Issue--A Catholic Study Guide,' a resource available on <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/stoptorture/>. In that guide you'll find a section dedicated to actions that you can take. You're invited to raise awareness about torture, work to ensure that it is banned permanently, and address the underlying problems of poverty and injustice that can be fertile grounds for recruiting extremists. Torture debases the human dignity of the victim, the perpetrator and any society that tolerates its practice. As children of God, we should embrace a culture of love and hope. Let us close with a prayer."

Father, all powerful and ever-living God,  
we praise and thank you through  
Jesus Christ our Lord  
for your presence and action in the world.  
in the midst of conflict and division,  
we know it is you who turn our minds  
to thoughts of peace.  
Your Spirit changes our hearts:  
Enemies begin to speak to one another,  
those who were estranged join hands  
in friendship,  
and nations seek the way of peace together.  
Your spirit is at work when  
understanding puts an end to strife,  
when hatred is quenched by mercy  
and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.  
For this we should never cease to  
thank and praise you. Amen.

Prayer from Preface, Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II

## *Two Session Study*

### *Session 1*

#### **Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)**

Ask each participant to introduce themselves. Then introduce the class and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “We come to this discussion session on torture with many thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, some of which we may not even be aware. We may have conflicting views. The purpose of this session is for us to begin to discuss U.S. practices and to look at that policy through the eyes of faith. We will specifically be exploring the contrast between the reality that many people believe torture is justifiable in some situations and the perspective of Bible verses and our Catholic teaching that has led many Americans to conclude that torture is always wrong. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart to the Holy Spirit during this session.”

#### **Video Screening (10 minutes)**

Insert the DVD and select “For two sessions” from the main menu. Then select “Session 1.” The video should begin screening immediately and is 10 minutes long.

#### **Discussion (35 minutes)**

1. In the video, we heard a great deal about the American identity and issues of torture. We heard Linda Gustitis, president of National Religious Campaign Against Torture, say, “I have always been a patriotic and proud American...and that’s where my passion on this issue comes from.” How do we as Americans feel about what we have just seen and heard in the video? How does it shift our understanding of patriotism? (9 minutes)
2. We heard from Brigadier General (Ret.) Stephen Xenakis that American military policy from the time of George Washington, and later American law, has banned the use of torture. Why did this policy change? Why do you think the public let it happen? (9 minutes)
3. How did you feel on 9/11? Afraid? Angry? (Allow the participants to respond) We wanted to make sure that an attack in which more than 3000 people died will never happen again. Our government came to the same conclusion, but one of the paths they chose had moral and legal problems. (9 minutes)
4. We heard from Matthew Alexander, military interrogator, that the use of torture is actually counter-productive in gaining useful information for intelligence because the use of torture incites anger in others and inspires them to fight against the United States. How do you feel about the fact that we have used torture practices despite their proven liabilities? (8 minutes)

In the next session, we will think about the use of the torture in light of our faith. We will hear resources from many faith traditions and reflect on our own. In the next [week] (whatever time will be between sessions), we invite you to think about how you feel about torture as a moral issue. How do you feel as a Catholic? What do you feel called to do in light of your faith?

**Closing Prayer** (you can pray or ask a participant to pray) (1 minute)

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
you have given the world its true light,  
Jesus, your Son—the Son of God.  
You abandoned yourself completely  
to God’s call  
and thus became a wellspring  
of the goodness that flows forth from him.  
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.  
Teach us to know and love him,  
so that we too can become  
capable of true love  
and be fountains of living water  
in the midst of a thirsting world.

(From “Deus Caritas Est,” Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical)

## ***Session 2***

### **Welcome and introductions** (5 minutes)

Depending on the size of the group and their familiarity with each other, ask each participant to reintroduce themselves or simply ask any new participants who did not attend the first session to introduce themselves. Then introduce the session and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “In the first session we looked at part of the video and focused on American identity and the issue of torture, reactions after 9/11, and comments from military officers about the efficacy of torture. The purpose of this discussion is for us to look at U.S. practices and policy through the eyes of faith. How do we deal with the fact that many Catholics believe torture is justifiable in some situations while Catholic social teaching and tradition that has led many others to conclude that torture is always wrong. Again, we ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart to the Holy Spirit during this session.”

### **Video Screening** (10 minutes)

Insert the DVD and select “For two sessions” from the main menu. Then select “Session 2.” The video should begin screening immediately and will take about 10 minutes.

### **Discussion** (30 minutes)

Ask participants to discuss these questions:

1. In the video, Dr. David Gushee, President of Evangelicals for Human Rights, sums up the reasons why he thinks people of faith should care about torture. He says, “Issues can simultaneously be policy issues, security issues, military issues and moral issues. And I join the many others in this country that believe that it’s all of that, that torture is a moral issue. And it violates principles of basic justice and humanity. From a deeper religious perspective, or Christian perspective, it’s the most unloving thing you can do to a person. It’s hateful and contemptuous and therefore contemptible.” We often hear that this is more a security issue, but Dr. Gushee argues that it can also be a moral issue on which our faith should be brought to bear. What do you think about his statement? (5 minutes)
2. In the video, Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, says torture is “an intrinsic evil”—something that cannot morally be justified under any circumstances. The U.S. bishops have taught that abortion, euthanasia, genocide, torture, racism and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of

terror or war are “intrinsically evil” (Faithful Citizenship, 2007). Why do you think the Church teaches that torture merits that designation? What about this teaching do you find hard and why? (5 minutes)

3. Dr. Colecchi also said that “the human person is sacred because they are created in the image and likeness of God.” This idea comes from Genesis 1:27, which says, “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” As Catholics, we believe this means that each person has a divine quality and has a value in the eyes of God. How should we view both our friends and our enemies? How does this concept inform our understanding of torture policy? (5 minutes)
4. Read through Romans 12:17-21. Allow participants the opportunity to share reactions or feelings. Then move to discussion questions below (15 minutes).
  - a. In order to live in peace and feel secure, Paul suggests “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.” How have we treated those we consider to be our enemies since 9/11? What emotions have motivated those policies? How do the teachings of our faith challenge us to overcome fear and achieve true and lasting security?
  - b. In a world where there is so much violence and injustice, Pope Benedict XVI said the only way to counter this situation is “with more love, with more goodness.” By loving our enemies, the Holy Fathers says we are “responding to evil with good and thereby breaking the chain of injustice.” In looking at our country’s torture policies and practices, how can we, “overcome evil with good?”
  - c. Pope Benedict, in his encyclical on hope, said, “Our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world’s future either tire us or turn into fanaticism unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance.” Torture represents a breakdown in the moral fiber of the individual and of the society which tolerates its practice. How can we live differently and become people of hope?

**Closing Remarks and Prayer** (you can pray or ask a participant to pray) (2 minutes)

Encourage participants to more closely examine Catholic social teaching on torture. Here are sample closing comments: “We’ve had a brief time to look at torture in light of our faith. I encourage you to learn more about Catholic social teaching on this issue by reading through ‘Torture is a Moral Issue--A Catholic Study Guide,’ a resource available on <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/stoptorture/>. In that guide you’ll find a section dedicated to actions that you can take. You’re invited to raise awareness about torture, work to ensure that it is banned permanently, and address the underlying problems of poverty and injustice that can be fertile grounds for recruiting extremists. Torture debases the human dignity of the victim, the perpetrator and any society that tolerates its practice. As children of God, we should embrace a culture of love and hope. Let us close with a prayer.”

Father, all powerful and ever-living God,  
we praise and thank you through  
Jesus Christ our Lord  
for your presence and action in the world.  
in the midst of conflict and division,  
we know it is you who turn our minds  
to thoughts of peace.  
Your Spirit changes our hearts:  
Enemies begin to speak to one another,  
those who were estranged join hands

in friendship,  
and nations seek the way of peace together.  
Your spirit is at work when  
understanding puts an end to strife,  
when hatred is quenched by mercy  
and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.  
For this we should never cease to  
thank and praise you. Amen.

Prayer from Preface, Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation