



Receiving Unity, Giving Witness

February 24, 2014

U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Consideration of Solitary Confinement

Dear Senators Durbin and Cruz and other Subcommittee Members:

I write to encourage the limitation of the use of solitary confinement and to ban prolonged solitary confinement altogether.

As a faith leader in Florida, I am aware of the overuse of solitary confinement in the detention and incarceration of youth. Tampa/Hillsborough County leads Florida, and Florida leads the nation, in holding youthful offenders in adult state prisons. It is widely reported that youthful offenders are frequently held in solitary confinement as a means to protect them from the at-large prison populations. However, current brain research indicates that during the late teens and early twenties, the human brain reaches maturity through the development of emotional and moral intelligence. This maturation period depends upon healthy interaction with other mature adults. Prolonged solitary confinement interrupts that maturation and can lead to permanent relational incapacities.

When the federal government allows civilian and military services to use prolonged solitary confinement as a means for detaining or incarcerating individuals, it authorizes a form of mental and social pain which can cause long-term, irreparable harm. The morality and ethics of the state intentionally using pain as a form of punishment represents an endorsement of methods of dehumanization. The highest values of the United States as a nation of law dedicated to democracy and liberty are repudiated when it approves using forms of dehumanization.

When untoward methods of detention and incarceration are used at the federal level internationally and nationally, the use of similar practices are normalized on the state and local levels. The effect of using such methods is to erode the ideals that underwrite our democratic institutions. We see this happening in Florida in its treatment of young people. Youth who would benefit from healthy relationships mature adult are instead psychologically harmed and socially handicapped.

In providing for the security of our freedoms and national interest, please protect our values by making certain that law and policy do not normalize methods of dehumanization.

In witness to the Christ who proclaimed liberty to the captives (Luke 4:18),

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Russell L. Meyer".

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