

Faith Statements on Solitary Confinement

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)

“As people of reason, we accept differences in correctional philosophies, but as people of faith, we reject dehumanization of the incarcerated through brutalizing means whether legal, psychological, sexual, emotional, racial, cultural, or spiritual. While rational people may reasonably disagree about the extent and sources of suffering, this church insists that *some* of its forms simply must stop. These include: widespread and long-term total isolation in solitary confinement”

(A Social Statement on The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries; amended and adopted by an 882-25 vote at the 13th biennial Churchwide Assembly, 2013)

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Criminal_JusticeSS.pdf

Quaker

“Long-term isolation has no rehabilitative benefit, but its destructive psychological effects are well-documented – amounting to torture under international law. Solitary confinement violates the U.N. Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the U.N. International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.”

(American Friends Service Committee [AFSC] statement on solitary confinement)

<https://www.afsc.org/key-issues/issue/solitary-confinement#>

African Methodist Episcopal Church

“We are anxious to preserve the humanity, dignity, health and sanity of the incarcerated... Solitary confinement has been deemed by survivors, psychologists, scholars, and much of the civilized world, as torture and an abuse of human rights...we are greatly concerned with the lack of data collection, transparency and oversight of this practice in our nation’s prisons... we call on federal lawmakers to deem solitary confinement as cruel and unusual punishment and adopt laws that discourage its use.”

(*Hearing on Reassessing Solitary Confinement II: The Human Rights, Fiscal and Public Safety Consequences*; Testimony of the Social Action Commission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; 2014 [Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, Jacquelyn Dupont-Walker, Rev. Charles F. Boyer], 90-93)

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113shrg28394/pdf/CHRG-113shrg28394.pdf>

Catholic Church

“We write in support of the *Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015*... [as it] limits the use of solitary confinement for juveniles... Our Catholic tradition supports the community’s right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. But our faith also teaches us that both victims and offenders have a God-given dignity that calls for justice and restoration, not vengeance.”

(USCCB-CCUSA Letter to Congress on Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-ccusa-letter-congress-sentencing-reform-and-corrections-act-2015-october-19-2015>

“In the words of Pope Francis, extended periods of solitary confinement are ‘cruel... along with other forms of physical and mental torture’... The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church quotes St. John Paul who asserted that human dignity “is as much debased in his torturer as in the torturer’s victim” (No. 404).

(Catholic News Service – Commentary: Solitary Confinement is torture, Stephen Colecchi, 2021).

<https://www.catholicnews.com/commentary-solitary-confinement-is-torture>

Church of the Brethren

“Torture is a blatant violation of the tenets of our faith. It injects into our character the sense that we are better than others and dehumanizes people. We support NRCAT in their work to close Guantanamo Bay, end solitary confinement, and join them in calling on the government to be more transparent and accountable on issues of torture. We join NRCAT in believing that torture is a moral issue.”

<https://www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/peace/>

Jewish

“Whereas the Torah prohibits excessive punishment “lest your brother be degraded before your eyes” (Deuteronomy 25:2); whereas we believe that every human being is created in the divine image, and therefore deserving of dignity...; whereas we believe that the gates of *teshuvah* (repentance) are always open; whereas prolonged solitary confinement is widely recognized around the world as a destructive practice... be it resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly call upon prison authorities to analyze this data supporting ending prolonged solitary confinement and the use of solitary confinement”

(Resolution on Prison Conditions and Prisoner Isolation – The Rabbinical Assembly)

<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/resolution-prison-conditions-and-prisoner-isolation?tp=377>

United Methodists Church

“Prolonged solitary confinement in US prisons constitutes torture and violates the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)... The United Methodist Church affirms the inalienable human rights of all persons.... The United Methodist Church calls on local and national governments to: work to end the use of solitary confinement.”

(The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church – 2016).

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-stop-criminalizing-communities-of-color-in-the-united-states>

The United Church of Christ

“Like other forms of torture, solitary violates basic human rights and dignity... ‘There is nothing faithful about torture!’. As people of faith, we oppose torture as a violation of our intrinsic respect for humanity and the God-given value we see in every person created in the image of God. Seeing God in the other demands that we grant one another basic human rights and dignities. Further, as Christians, we are called by Jesus to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44)... loving your enemies means not torturing them! The measure of Jesus’ ministry doesn’t leave the door open to degrees of cruelty.”

(Statement on ‘U.S. Sponsored Torture’, Connie Larkman, 2015)

https://www.ucc.org/u_s_sponsored_torture/

Unitarian Universalists

“Solitary confinement is an inhumane punishment and form of torture that removes an individual from the interconnected web of life... We therefore resolve to... advocate for elimination of solitary confinement as a means of punishment.”

(Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office [UU-UNO] Spring Seminar, 2015).

<https://www.uua.org/international-justice/un/spring-seminar/past/international-criminal-justice-punitive-restorative>

Presbyterian Church

“Recommendation: Calls upon the fifty states and federal government to follow the example of Maine, Colorado, and Mississippi in significantly limiting the number of prisoners held in solitary confinement... and to instead offer alternatives that address the mental health needs of prisoners... offer skill building opportunities such as anger management, job training, and educational classes that effectively contribute both to prisoners’ rehabilitation and to their successful transition back into society.”

“Rationale: God created human beings, endowed with inherent dignity, to live in fellowship with one another. Hebrews 13:3 states: “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.” (Commissioners’ Resolution on Prolonged Solitary Confinement, 220th Presbyterian General Assembly, 2012)

<https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/4389>

Muslim

“The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) is a founding member of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)... [working] to end the use of torture in U.S. prisons and detention facilities, in particular the prolonged use of solitary confinement.”

(ISNA statement on Torture and Indefinite Detention)

<https://isna.net/torture-and-indefinite-detention/>

Virginia Church of God in Christ (COGIC)

“Solitary confinement is a form of torture. Undeniably the practice of solitary confinement leads to a host of collateral consequences... It is unacceptable to criminalize and imprison people suffering from significant mental illness, addiction, and the impacts of poverty... Hebrews 13:3 admonishes us to, “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated,” and today we urge you to do the same.”

(Statement from all Virginia COGIC Bishops: Marc A. Thomas, Sr., Wilbert L. Daniels, Sr., Levi E. Willis, II., G. Wesley Hardy, Sr., Dwight L. Green, Sr., Phillip X Green, Sr., 2021)

Episcopal Church

“Resolved, that the Episcopal Church recognize prolonged solitary confinement... as a form of torture; and be it further that the Episcopal Church condemn the use of prolonged solitary confinement by the United States and any government in the world... and call on our government to look at alternatives to isolated confinement... recalling the words of Jesus that when we visit those in prison, we are visiting him (Matthew 25:36).”

General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), p. 424.

https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2018-D029

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

“We call the Administrative Committee to explore ways for the church to... (2) explore alternative restorative justice practices which seek rehabilitative outcomes instead of the widespread, punitive use of solitary confinement;”

(2015 General Assembly of the Christian Church, Item 1525 “A Call to End Solitary Confinement”)

<https://ga.disciples.org/resolutions/2015/1525-a-call-to-end-solitary-confinement/>