

**Resolution of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference on
Solitary Confinement in Louisiana Prisons and Jails
LIC Annual Assembly, March 2019**

Resolution passed March 12, 2019

As religious leaders of the state of Louisiana, we are compelled to call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and recommend laws and policies that uphold the God-given dignity and rights of every person, each of whom is made in the image and likeness of God. It is for this reason we must speak out about the drastic overuse of solitary confinement in Louisiana prisons, where experts estimate that prolonged isolation of prisoners/solitary confinement is used by Louisiana penal authorities at FOUR times the national rate. Solitary confinement is the practice of isolating people in closed cells from 22-24 hours a day, virtually free of human contact, for periods of time ranging from days to decades. Studies have found that solitary confinement can have traumatic effects on the brain, including memory loss, cognitive decline, hallucinations, panic attacks, obsessive thinking, paranoia, depression and a litany of other physical and psychological problems. It not only damages prisoners' capacity to reform behavior, in many cases solitary confinement can lead to irreversible psychological damage. Furthermore, its use has never been shown to reduce violence in prison.ⁱ

In October 2011, Juan Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment, called for a world-wide ban on nearly all uses of solitary confinement in prisons, warning that it causes serious mental and physical harm and often amounts to torture. He recommended an end to "prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement," which he defined as anything beyond fifteen days, as well as a completed ban on any use of solitary on children or people with mental illness.ⁱⁱ

In recent years our state has begun important reforms of Louisiana's bloated, unfair, and costly criminal justice system. Through this process Louisianans have come to realize that the common good is not served when men and women are separated for decades from loved ones and that prison should only be used as a last resort for the most serious of crimes, with reform and rehabilitation of offenders as its major focus.ⁱⁱⁱ So, too, we must realize that prolonged social isolation is inhumane and undermines the common good by harming prisoners' mental and physical health, making rehabilitation less likely and successful reintegration after release more difficult.

We urge our state legislators and the Department of Corrections to invest in humane and effective alternatives to solitary confinement that address the mental health needs of prisoners in ways that contribute to their rehabilitation and for our state to continue to take action to end prolonged solitary confinement in our prisons and jails.

ⁱ See Solitary Watch website at <https://solitarywatch.org/facts/faq/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ See LIC Resolution on Criminal Justice Reform, November 2015, at <http://www.lainterchurch.org/PublicPolicyAndAdvocacy.htm>