

Thank you for finding a good location to put the enclosed No2Torture poster. It is our hope that these posters will be prominently displayed in churches, campuses, offices and homes to provoke discussion about a reality we would rather not see, but a reality that our faith forces us to face.

The poster was produced by members of No2Torture, trying to be as clear as we can be about what our faith says about the realities of torture today. No2Torture is a grassroots, faith-based organization launched from within the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is open to all who wish to bring an end to the policy and practice of torture.

Two other resources, in addition to the poster, are enclosed:

- The one-page, legal-sized sheet is designed to be placed beside the poster, as appropriate. This presents “talking points” -- brief expansions of each claim made on the poster.
- The three-page resource, can be used as a discussion starter or short curriculum. Again, each section relates to one of the claims on the poster and is followed by a brief scriptural reference and a question for reflection. It can be adapted for various audiences and formats.

If you would like additional background, or information about current developments regarding torture, these websites can help you get started:

- No2Torture, www.no2torture.org
- National Religious Coalition Against Torture (NRCAT), www.nrcat.org
- Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office, www.pcusa.org/washington

Again, thank you for helping to get the word out. In the name of the tortured and risen Jesus, we must stop torture. Together we can.

- Your No2Torture Volunteers

Say “No” to Torture: Main Points

1. People are being tortured

Torture is not new. It has been used throughout history by people in power – by the U.S., by our political allies, and by our “enemies,” however they may be defined. What matters to us is that it is happening here and now, on our watch, with our tax dollars. We are the current generation being called to respond, as Christians, as citizens, as humans.

Several organizations, including military and congressional investigative committees, the Red Cross, and various human rights groups, have studied the treatment and fate of people held prisoner by the U.S. in the war on terror. Collectively, these groups have carefully documented the deaths of nearly 100 people between August 2002 and February 2006 alone. Some are classified by the military as suspected or confirmed homicides. Others are the result of prolonged torture. Sometimes, rather than engage in torture ourselves, we send people to prisons in other countries that are known to use torture, countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, to perform the interrogations on our behalf. By February 2006, an estimated 100 to 150 people have been sent to such countries.

Scriptural meditation: When did we see you sick or in prison, Lord? (Matt. 25:39)

Discussion question: Are we afraid to look?

2. Torture is a sin

What is sin? Put most simply, it is the act of disobeying God, of deliberately turning our backs on God and the kind of life God calls us to live. And what kind of life is that? From the prophets of the Old Testament through the Gospels of the New Testament and the writings of the early church, the life God intends for us is described as one of love, compassion, peace, and forgiveness. We are repeatedly told to take care of the poorest and the weakest, the powerless and the most vulnerable. Jesus demonstrated that care in his ministry and laid down his very life for it. We are all made in the image of God and thus are all children of God. Jesus made no exceptions, no exclusions: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; turn the other cheek; love your neighbor; what you do for the least of these you do for me. These teachings may be difficult, but they are not ambiguous.

To shackle one of God’s children, one of our own brothers or sisters who is at our mercy, in a dark prison and inflict great pain and suffering on him or her defies every aspect of God’s law, both in letter and in spirit. It is disobedience, it is sin. What we do to the detainees in prison we do to Jesus himself.

Scriptural meditation: You have heard it said ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt. 5:43-44)

Discussion question: If I truly loved my enemy, what would I do to or for him?

3. Torture does not work

Well-trained interrogators, within the military, the FBI, and the police testify that torture does not work: the “information” gained is unreliable and even false. Furthermore, torturing a prisoner distracts interrogators from gathering accurate information because time and resources are wasted pursuing the unreliable and false information gained through torture. A person will say anything to make the pain stop. Survivors of torture confirm that they confessed to crimes they did not commit, made up false information, or supplied names of innocent friends or colleagues to their torturers, all to make the pain stop.

The notion of using torture to make a person reveal the location of a “ticking time bomb” may be emotionally compelling, but it is purely a fictional device, portrayed repeatedly, but inaccurately, on television and in movies. In reality, the authorities rarely know that in fact the bomb exists at all, that the person being tortured actually has the information needed, or that truthful information will be obtained in the short time it would take to find and defuse the bomb. Grievously, this imaginary case of “moral” torture is used to commit all-too-real cases of immoral torture.

Furthermore, there is a more basic issue for Christians. Even if there were an unlikely scenario in which torture were “effective,” Christian ethics are not based on “the ends justifying the means.” In other words, torture is never okay for Christians because we believe that all people are created in the image of God, even our enemies. Our actions must be motivated out of love; not fear, revenge or even the tempting illusion of efficacy.

Scriptural meditation: Return no man evil for evil. (Rom. 12:17-21)

Discussion question: How do we break the violent cycle of revenge and retaliation?

4. Torture hurts us all

The physical and psychological effects of torture on victims and their families are well-documented and long-lasting, sometimes even passed along from one generation to the next. Survivors of torture often say that, long after their physical torture has stopped, the ongoing psychological suffering is as bad as, or worse than, the torture itself.

That torture permanently scars the victim and his or her loved ones seems self-evident. Less apparent may be the damage done to the torturer and his or her loved ones, but they too suffer from the knowledge of what they did to another human being. Most sobering of all may be the information on who these torturers are. Studies show that step-by-step training can transform even ordinary people into people who can and will torture others. These ordinary people may be our sons and daughters, our husbands and wives, ourselves.

It isn't just the individuals involved in torture who are scarred. Our country is, too. Our use of torture supports the claims of those who wish to harm our soldiers and our citizens and actually aids their cause. By resorting to torture, the U.S. joins the ranks of countries who treat their prisoners unethically and inhumanely, and thus endangers American citizens and soldiers who are being held in custody anywhere in the world.

The loss of soul and humanity for all involved—victims, perpetrators, their families and friends, and our country – cannot be overstated, and the effects of such loss are devastating and far-reaching. They will be our legacy for generations to come.

Scriptural meditation: Lead us not into temptation (Matt. 6:13)

Discussion question: Would I want my child to torture a prisoner?

5. Those complicit must be held accountable

Who is torturing prisoners? Who gave the orders? Who approved the orders? At every single level of command, military and governmental, those who use and those who approve the hideous interrogation techniques forbidden under the Geneva Conventions, the UN Convention Against Torture, and immoral by any Christian standards must be held accountable. Hiding behind the claim that just “a few bad apples” torture the detainees, investigators stop at the lowest levels. But did those low-level soldiers bring the hoods, electrodes, dogs, and handcuffs with them when they deployed? It is not the case of a few isolated instances: systemic torture takes logistical, technical, legal, and financial support at multiple levels.

But the responsibility for torture does not lie solely with the military or its private contractors. Citizens of the countries that perpetrate torture on any single person in their custody also bear responsibility. If we know and say nothing, or equivocate in any way, we contribute to the problem.

Scriptural meditation: When the priest saw the man [beaten, near death, lying on the road], he walked by on the other side. (Luke 10:30-31)

Discussion question: In our representational democracy, who is responsible for the results of our foreign policy and military procedures?

6. As Christians we must stop torture

Drawing on his Jewish faith, Jesus told us what God requires of us. As disciples of Christ, we are called to care for those least cared for in society – not just the poor, the widowed and orphaned, but also the reviled (tax collectors, prostitutes, prisoners) and the “enemy” (Romans, Samaritans, Gentiles, those who do you harm), as well. Inevitably, our service to God at times puts us at odds with powers and principalities. Yet we are chosen by God to this work. People are being tortured, people in the custody of the United States, in the prisons of our allies, and in secret detention centers in many parts of the world. To do nothing is to turn our backs on Jesus and the path he has laid out for us, with his words and his life.

Scriptural meditation: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Discussion question: How might the concept of “biblical justice” differ from justice as understood by our governmental and legal system?

7. Together we can

Go to <http://no2torture.org> for more detailed information and for many suggestions on what you can do. One of the most important things we can do is to continue to shine light on the reality of torture, wherever it happens. We can say “No!” to torture in all places and circumstances, no matter what. We are a growing grass-roots organization that believes together we can end torture. All things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Join us.

Scriptural meditation: Thy will be done (Matt. 6:10)

Discussion question: What step can I take this week to stop torture and heal those who have been harmed?