

**A Call to End Solitary Confinement**  
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When I was practicing law in Lexington, Kentucky, many years ago, my law partners and I agreed to represent John Caldwell. I was lead counsel. John was a young black man who had been convicted of receiving stolen property and was being held in the Woodford County Jail. While in a general population jail cell, John got into an altercation, was removed from the cell, and placed in an isolation cell. This occurred in the middle of July. The cell in which John was placed was small, windowless, and without air conditioning. It was solitary confinement.

After being contained there for several days, John asked the jailer if he could be let out to walk up and down the narrow hallway outside his cell so he could get some fresh air. His request was denied. He continued to make these requests, and they were continually denied. In frustration and anger, John would shout for a few minutes and kick his cell door. He did this for the remainder of the day. After seven hours of making this request, five police officers arrived at the jail. One officer spoke with John through the cell door, telling him that if he did not quiet down, the police were there to quiet him down. John continued to shout, kick the door, and demand to be released from his isolation cell. The police officers—who were all white—entered the cell, shot John with an electric stun, and placed him in a straitjacket. They then left John alone on the floor of the cell. These facts are undisputed. Caldwell v. Moore, 968 F2d (1992).

We claimed on John's behalf that, among other things, his treatment violated the provisions of the Eighth Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. We argued that other reasonable alternatives had not been exhausted and that this treatment violated John's constitutional rights. We never made it to trial. The Court of Appeals, acknowledging these facts, concluded that such treatment was reasonable and acceptable. The case was dismissed. I still can't believe it.

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The use of solitary confinement as a tool to discipline, alienate, punish, and discriminate continues across the country. The effects of such confinement are being exposed as detrimental and damaging to the mental health of those so confined. That was why I was so pleased that our Church, at its General Assembly this past July, voted to study this matter and to explore ways to exact change so that people like John Caldwell don't have to experience the humiliation, pain, and suffering that he did ever again. We can do better.



What can you do? I invite you to join the [Together23](#) nationwide actions to end solitary confinement, sponsored by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. For 23 hours a day—for months, years, even decades—more than 80,000 adults and youth are held in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers. **On the 23rd of every month**, join people across the United States in monthly actions to call for an end to the torture of solitary, at the recommendation of people incarcerated in Pelican Bay prison who led the momentous hunger strikes in California prisons.

### **Ways to Take Action on the 23rd of Each Month:**

- Host a screening of NRCAT's new documentary, [\*Breaking Down The Box\*](#). A DVD order form, interfaith viewing guide, and sample poster are available at [www.nrcat.org/breakingdownthebox](http://www.nrcat.org/breakingdownthebox)
- Organize a vigil to speak out against solitary confinement and stand with survivors.
- Host a letter writing campaign to your legislators to call for an end to solitary.
- Host a chalk-in: draw a 6'x9' box with chalk and sit in it, symbolizing the average dimensions of a cell people spend 23 hours a day for months, years, and decades in solitary.
- Share photos and updates about your action with [@NBADisciples](#) on Twitter and [National Benevolent Association](#) on Facebook. We invite you to use the hashtags #STOPsolitary, #together23, and #calledtocare.

No one should experience the callous treatment that John Caldwell did. And his lasted for just a few days. Until we demand that individuals who are incarcerated be treated humanely, cases like John's will continue, especially in light of the overcrowded prison system in the United States. As people of faith, we understand the power of compassion. Jesus endured humiliation and indignity. He did it out of love, and I believe out of the hope that from his gruesome torture and death, we would see to it that no child of God would be treated so inhumanely. May it be so.

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