

ALL SAINTS CHURCH
132 NORTH EUCLID AVENUE
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91101-1796
(626) 796-1172

J. EDWIN BACON, JR., RECTOR

June 7, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for taking such unequivocally strong moral measures against torture in the first months of your presidency. Your decision to release the CIA memos, your plans to close Guantanamo Bay prison, and your executive order banning torture send a message that torture is wrong, illegal, and immoral without exception. These actions, and more, signal that you seek to return the United States to the rule of law and to restore the U.S.'s moral stature in the global community. I am deeply grateful.

Now, we U.S. citizens must join and support you in making sure that torture is ended in deed and that your executive orders cannot be superseded by legislation, particularly were there to be a national emergency some would use to resurrect the politics of fear that characterized the chapter of our post 9-11 national life. We need to work together to establish safeguards to ensure that U.S.-sponsored torture never happens again.

The only way our country can approach the kind of moral reckoning that is required for authentic change of character is for there to be an official documentation of what led to and what was involved in U.S.-sponsored torture. The old adage that "confession is good for the soul," stems from the reality Jesus described when he said, "The truth shall make you free." Ancient wisdom-teachings about the workings of both the individual and the collective soul teach us that until destructive deeds of the past are addressed both in writing and in speech can those deeds indeed be consigned to the past. Otherwise they feed an ongoing spiral of destruction in festering resentments at the least and retaliation and unaltered habits and mindsets at the worst.

Bonhoeffer's counsel that "you cannot have community without accountability" applies to U. S.-sponsored torture and our place as a moral leader in the world. For us to take our part in changing the human race into the human family we must acknowledge the facts about what we did and set into place safeguards for not doing it again. My friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has taught me the unalterable truth that there is "no future without forgiveness." That is the tenor underlying South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience. That constructive motive can undergird the liberation from the shackles of torture in our own national story.

The only avenue to, and guarantee of, a future without torture is a Commission of Inquiry. An investigation of U.S.-sponsored torture will only be credible and thorough if conducted by a Commission comprised of citizens who are well-respected, non-partisan, and independent-minded.

Mr. President, while you continue to lead us effectively in the constructive changes our nation and world so desperately need, there is no doubt in my mind that even more energy and goodwill will be released in the service of those constructive tasks if we effectively put behind us those destructive deeds that have damaged so many lives and families not to mention our own nation's soul.

Please call for an inquiry, sir. This is a turning point of great consequence in the history of our national character.

Yours Sincerely,

J. Edwin Bacon, Jr.