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It's great we are finally able to meet people in person again, get together, share and talk after over two years of being stuck in our Covid bubble. I feel alive again, not that it's been terrible being stuck with a couple of great cooks, another chaplain, and the dogs and cats. Yet I felt deprived, depressed, and just stuck with little say over where I went and what I did, everything was closed to me. I felt isolated.

I know everyone has dealt with Covid restrictions in different ways, but we still had choices. Imagine the isolation and loss of control when you are being punished by being forcibly locked into a solitary cell for hours, 20, 22, maybe 24 hours, all alone. The United Nations has repeatedly condemned the practice of solitary confinement calling it "torture". Yet it's still used in our penal system in Maine. Although we have modified the use of solitary or segregation here in Maine, due largely to the efforts of religious groups and other advocates it is time for a total ban on solitary confinement. We, Mainers, are torturing people every day. Knowing the brutal effects this practice produces I ask if that is something my G-d, wants me to allow. The answer is no, ban solitary confinement.

Working as a Sergeant many years ago I repeatedly saw prisoners thrown into "the bricks". Often they were suicidal, clearly mentally ill, drunk or drugged, and often delusional. "For their own good" I heard. What could possibly be good about being locked up alone for hours? The deprivation of talking to others, possibly sharing a meal together, just being together results in worse mental health conditions. I have witnessed dire solitary conditions that once resulted in my holding up a man that had attempted to hang himself until someone could help cut him down. This is a scene I have replayed thousands of times in my head, holding up an almost dead man hanging from a bedsheet. That is solitary confinement. If you were not suffering from mental health problems before your confinement in solitary, you will be when you come out.

Is this what we want our Department of Corrections to be known for? For you as a Mainer to be known for? No, it is not. We, especially the religious community, want a total ban on the use of solitary confinement regardless of the circumstances. Now. No more partial measures and excuses, now is the time to totally ban solitary.

Thank you