

Faith Digest: Faith leaders ask Congress to close Gitmo

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More than 40 leaders of major faith groups sent a letter to Congress urging the closing of the prison at Guantanamo Bay, calling it “the symbol of our country’s violation of our deepest values.” President Obama signed an executive order last January to close the prison, which houses suspected terrorists and prisoners of war. His initial campaign promise was to close the facility within a year, but Congress has been raising impediments such as cutting the funds to move prisoners to U.S. soil, and asking Obama for a detailed plan before agreeing to move prisoners. The religious leaders’ letter was drafted by the [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#).

Court pulls over Christian plate. A federal district court has ruled a Christian license plate in South Carolina as unconstitutional. The license plate showed a cross, stained-glass window and the words “I Believe.” The ruling overturned the state law known as the “I Believe” Act which gave the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles authority to issue the license plate. U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie held that “such a law amounts to state endorsement not only of religion in general, but of a specific sect in particular.” The South Carolina DMV offers more than 100 specialty plates, including one that says “In God We Trust,” but the “I Believe” plate is different because it “authorizes a single plate with a uniquely Christian message” and was approved through government action, suggesting the government favors a specific religion, Currie said.

Holocaust survivors at risk for cancer. A study in the [Journal of the National Cancer Institute](#) has found Holocaust survivors may have an increased risk of cancer. The report found a higher percentage of cancer in Jews who immigrated to Israel from Europe after World War II than Jews

who came to the country before or during the war. Those who came to the country after the war—and therefore likely survived the Holocaust—had significantly higher rates of all-site, breast, prostate and colorectal cancers. The authors, from the University of Haifa in Israel, suggest a correlation between severe stress and cancer, as well as exposure to various infections and cold temperatures. The survey of more than 300,000 Israelis found the largest difference in the cancer rates of those born between 1940 and 1945, suggesting those who experienced the stress of the Holocaust as young children received the greatest impact.

Ecumenical council installs new president. The [National Council of Churches](#) has installed a new president, Peg Chamberlin, and president-elect, Kathryn Lohre. They will assume their offices in January and serve two years. Chamberlin is the executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches and will be the first leader of a state church council to act as president of the NCC. Lohre is the assistant director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University and an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America representative to the World Council of Churches Central Committee.