



MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



# PRESS RELEASE

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## Twenty-Eight Inmate Graduates Receive Degrees at Parchman

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**Parchman** – The state's first class of inmates to earn Christian Ministry Bachelor Degrees donned caps and gowns on Wednesday, May 20, as they participated in a conventional graduation ceremony at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman. Twenty-eight inmates received their degrees from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the commencement service.

"Working towards a bachelor's degree while incarcerated provides higher education for our inmates and rehabilitation," said MDOC Commissioner Chris Epps. "This noteworthy achievement will give these inmates an opportunity to improve their lives as spiritual leaders and will give the tools needed to successfully re-enter society. This program not only benefits the incarcerated graduates, it also benefits our prison population, who will be the recipients of their ministry."

Friends, families, faculty, staff, and MDOC administrators were on hand to celebrate the hard work and academic achievement of the incarcerated students.

Commencement guest speaker Warden Burl Cain, Louisiana State Penitentiary, commended the graduates and challenged them to continue to make a positive change in their lives and, in turn, help others. "We have seen God give great results in our prison system through Louisiana's faith-based program. You leave here today as leaders; go out there and help others turn their lives around."

Initiated in 2004, the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) Extension Center is an arm of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is supported in partnership with Christians in Mississippi through the cooperation of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. Candidates for the Bachelor of Arts degree must satisfactorily complete the five-year faith-based program which is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The MSP faith-based center's mission is to train church leaders and other inmate ministers for prison ministry. The goal is to provide leaders who will have an influence on their culture and who will help to improve the lives of those who live around them. Eligibility requirements include membership of local church, high school graduate or GED, letter of recommendation from pastor, written statement of religious experience, and eligibility according to MSP guidelines.

The program began with thirty-five students in August 2004 and currently has fifty-six students enrolled with six students in an extension at Unit 32.

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*Media Note: For photos of the event, please contact Kent Crocker at 601.359.5689 or [kcrocker@mdoc.state.ms.us](mailto:kcrocker@mdoc.state.ms.us).*