

Inmates Help Build New Prison Chapel

New Facility Receives Donations, Volunteer Labor

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ANGIE, La. -- Inmates at the Rayburn Correctional Center in Washington Parish will open a new chapel on Sunday, thanks to the kindness of others and their own hard work. The Bethel Interfaith Chapel was a project five years in the making and it's the answer to some inmate prayers.

"We've been praying and now you can see the glory of God," said inmate chaplain Arthur Rhodes. "You can see the manifestation of God's power."

"It's a chance at a better life," said Warden Robert Tanner. "It's hope. It's something they can look to every day."

"It has eternal payoff," said volunteer and fundraiser Joey Wilson. "Right now, we're all very happy about today."

North Shore faith-based groups started five years ago to raise money to build the chapel, more than \$500,000. All of the work was done by the inmates themselves, an investment inmate Jeffrey Ashcraft said he hopes will return when he gets out.

"(It's good) just being able to be a part of something that is going to mean something to each and every man that comes through this facility and potentially changes their lives," said Ashcraft.

"It gives them the tools that they can have so that when they get out, they can learn how to use the church and faith-based organizations to be their support to help keep them out," said RCC Chaplain Mark Hollingsworth.

Prison may still be prison, but the chapel can also serve as a bridge to change and rehabilitation.

"We're going to make better men, better citizens," said Tanner. "When they get out, they can do for themselves and their families."

The Louisiana Prison Fund has two other prison chapel projects under way. Both should be complete sometime next year.