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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS

Secretary Gary Westcott



Date: October 1, 2025

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Department Recognizes October as Clergy Appreciation Month *Chaplains working in correctional facilities are emotionally resilient*

Baton Rouge, LA – The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections will present its chaplains with certificates of recognition as a gesture of gratitude for their spiritual guidance and service within the correctional community during Clergy Appreciation Month, which is observed nationally every October.

“Chaplains serve people of all religious faiths and beliefs along with those who may lack it,” said Secretary Gary Westcott, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. “Day in and day out, they bring light into some of the darkest places, helping to restore dignity, purpose, and faith.”

The mission of the Chaplaincy Department is to provide inmates of all faith groups with spiritual care, moral rehabilitation, along with reasonable and equitable opportunities to pursue religious beliefs and practices. This is achieved by adhering to the orderly operation of the facility that can result in changed lives, reduced recidivism, and a positive impact on society.

“Clergy Appreciation Month is a perfect time to recognize the unwavering dedication of our chaplains who serve in the correctional facilities,” said, Assistant Secretary Renee DeLouche. “These compassionate individuals who serve on the front lines often deliver messages of hope, offer guidance, comfort, and spiritual care to those often forgotten by society.”

Clergy is typically defined as person or body of people ordained for religious duties or a lay representative of a religious tradition, which is attached to a secular institution (such as a hospital, prison, military unit, intelligence agency, embassy, school, labor union, business, police department, fire department, university, sports club), or a private chapel.

The Department employs 17 full-time chaplains and six part-time chaplains in the Short-Term Expanded Program (STEP) facilities with oversight from a state chaplain. These individuals work to increase public safety and reduce recidivism by offering pastoral care and programming to facilitate spiritual transformation. This includes classes, worship services, activities, special events, and community partnerships that provide opportunities for inmates to pursue their faith, reconcile relationships, and strengthen families.

“Our chaplains display character traits of being quiet, faithful and non-judgmental listeners, which are necessary to perform the powerful responsibilities that they do within the correctional setting,” said Chaplain and Director of Chaplaincy Services Debra Sharkey. “Chaplains provide steady spiritual and emotional support, not just for those incarcerated, but often for staff as well.”

In addition to helping incarcerated individuals and staff to cope with stress, loss and other life challenges, they also work closely with a wide-array of volunteer groups. Currently, the Departmental chaplains interact with approximately 183 different volunteer groups ranging from those that are faith-based affiliated, non-profits to support organizations. These groups come into the eight state-run correctional facilities to provide a variety of offerings, such as classes in life skills, spiritual growth and accountability.

It is the policy of the Department to allow as much freedom and opportunity as possible to pursue faith-based practices while maintaining the security and operation of the facility.

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