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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS
Secretary Gary Westcott



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Incarcerated Women Earn Seminary Degrees *Longstanding partnership offers theology and hope*

Baton Rouge, LA – The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections is pleased to announce that 14 women who are incarcerated at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) graduated with both an Associate of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in Christian Service from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College. LCIW held the commencement ceremony Jan. 12, in its newly constructed chapel located on the correctional facility grounds in St. Gabriel, with officials from both organizations on hand to confer the degrees.

The seminary program is a full-time, four-year course of study and it equips individuals through foundational education for effective ministry, which is focused on Christian faith, biblical studies and spiritual formation. The curriculum helps to prepare graduates for roles like pastors, chaplains, missionaries, nonprofit leaders, or further academic study. These degrees involve deep dives into scripture, theology, church history, language, and practical ministry skills for both church and secular contexts.

“This program requires years of hard work, discipline and perseverance, and these graduates stayed the course,” said Kristen Thomas, warden, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. “The education they received goes far beyond academics, as it shapes their character and equips them to be servant leaders, positive influences both inside the facility and when they return to their communities.”

The Department has partnered with the organizations since 1995, beginning with the Bible College at Louisiana State Penitentiary. The LCIW extension center has been in place since 2010.

“This graduation is particularly meaningful because these women completed their studies through the challenges of the pandemic and with the transition to the new facility,” said Chaplain Debra Sharkey, Director of Chaplaincy Services. “I am so immensely proud of each graduate for finding their purpose and pathway through the call of ministry.”

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