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Prison Initiative Celebrates Special Graduation

(Columbia, S.C.) – The South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) will host a special graduation ceremony for the first class of female inmates in the Columbia International University's (CIU) Prison Initiative program. The ceremony will be held at 1:00PM on Friday, August 8, 2014 in the gym at Camille Griffin Graham Correctional Institution located at 4450 Broad River Road in Columbia, S.C.

The Prison Initiative is a faith based, two-year, Associate of Arts degree program designed to prepare inmates for ministry within the state's prison system. SCDC and CIU first joined forces in 2007 and started the Prison Initiative in SCDC's male institutions. Since the program began, 63 inmate/students have graduated, been assigned to dorms and are serving as chaplain's assistants in many of the Department of Correction's 22 male institutions across the state.

"This is an important collaboration with CIU, and the results have made a tremendous impact on offenders," says SCDC Director Bryan Stirling. "The Prison Initiative has made a tangible difference with an overriding objective of safer prisons and lower recidivism."

With the proven success of the Prison Initiative for male inmates, the Department of Corrections and CIU implemented an expansion of the program to SCDC's female population in 2012. Of the Department of Corrections some 21,500 inmates, about 1400 are females housed in three different institutions. The first cohort of twelve female inmate/students will graduate in this class and be assigned to those institutions.

The commencement speaker for the graduation ceremony is Columbia attorney Jon Ozmint who served as the director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections when the CIU Prison Initiative was first started.

Students take courses in the Old and New Testament, History and English, among other subjects as they complete 70 undergraduate hours to earn their Associate of Arts degree. The goal is for the inmates to play a meaningful role in changing the culture of the overall prison population in South Carolina.

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The Prison Initiative is supported by churches, businesses and interested individuals. By law, incarcerated inmates are not eligible for state or federal aid therefore their programs are entirely donor funded.