



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Prison Initiative Commencement

Columbia, S.C. (Dec. 6, 2019) The S.C. Department of Corrections will host commencement ceremonies for another class of student inmates in the Columbia International University Prison Initiative program on Friday, Dec. 13, 2019, at 1:30 p.m. at Kirkland Reception and Evaluation Center in Columbia, S.C. CIU President Dr. Mark Smith will confer Associate of Arts degrees on 12 graduates. Two former Associate of Arts degree recipients also will receive their bachelor's degrees. Since its inception, 157 men and women have graduated from the program serving in more than 20 institutions.

The Prison Initiative between CIU and SCDC is based on a similar program at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola provided by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The local program started in 2007 and includes two years of courses designed to prepare inmates for ministry within the prison system. The graduates are enrolled in courses in the Old and New Testament, History and English, among other subjects. It is hoped that, in their roles as counselors and chaplain's assistants, the graduates can help improve the culture of the prison population. 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.

The commencement speaker will be Dr. Thad James Jr., vice president of Birmingham Theological Seminary, where he has served for 16 years. He is also the director of the BTS Prison Initiative, providing a Certificate in Biblical Studies and/or a Master of Biblical Studies Degree at the Bibb County Correctional Facility in Brent, Ala. James is also a ruling elder at Household of Faith Church in Birmingham. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, a Masters of Arts degree in Pastoral Leadership from Birmingham Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Theology from Trinity Theological Seminary.

"Our CIU graduates help improve life inside our prisons every day," SCDC Director Bryan Stirling said. "About 85 percent of our inmates serve fewer than five years in prison, and we are fortunate to have inmates who recognize that education is part of their successful reentry back into society. This program is a crucial part of our efforts to reduce recidivism and make our prisons safer."

Members of the media wishing to attend the Prison Initiative commencement at Kirkland R&E should contact Bob Holmes, (803) 807-5071 or SCDC Director of Communications Chrysti Shain, (803) 413-8206. Note: When you come into the prison, only bring your drivers' license with you, writing materials and camera equipment. You may not bring cell phones, smart watches or any kind of currency or credit cards. You will go through a security screening similar to that at airports.

