



MDOC Dedicates New Chapel at Women's Prison

PEARL – A place for spiritual transformation in one of Mississippi's state prisons was dedicated Thursday with the help of Ruth Graham, daughter of famed evangelist Billy Graham and a minister in her own right.

Graham, who has taught MDOC webinar classes for inmates as part of their rehabilitation, joined Gov. Tate Reeves and Commissioner Burl Cain Thursday, June 15, to cut the ribbon officially putting the 6,600 square foot non-denominational chapel into service. The chapel sits in one corner of the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women which is on the grounds of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County. It includes a vast main sanctuary for services with a stage and pulpit, sound system, classroom, library, and other amenities. A church bell tower adorns the entrance to the building which is topped with a steeple visible from the highway in front of the facility grounds.

Graham said the new chapel can be a place where positive change can happen through prayer and faith. "This is transformation. This is not reformation. And that is what we're all about. It's a testimony to the whole prison, the whole state that God is here and God is at work," Graham said.

The chapel, which was constructed entirely without taxpayer dollars, is the result of a partnership between the Mississippi Department of Corrections and the Mississippi Prison Chapel Foundation, Inc. among other donors. Plans include eight additional churches among the state prison system's facilities with the Mississippi State Penitentiary and South Mississippi Correctional Institution being next in line.

Commissioner Cain said the chapel is a vital part of efforts of encouraging moral rehabilitation and providing a nurturing place for inmates while steering them away from gang activities. The presence of seminary programs in the prison system and the opportunity to expand the impact to more inmates was a major reason Cain said he was attracted to becoming the state's corrections commissioner.

"As you build these churches, and they become groups, then the gangs have to go away because the people belong to the church. Be moral, and then we have less recidivism because they're not coming back to prison," Commissioner Cain said. "If we change people morally, then we really do rehabilitate them. We want morality. That's what we're getting here. That's what the church symbolizes."

Gov. Reeves noted that inmates have a choice to align with the chapel's activities to give them a chance for a better life. The chapel is "giving these individuals that are incarcerated here an opportunity that none of this mandatory. This is something that they get to choose to do, and it gives them hope," Gov. Reeves said. "Commissioner Cain is doing a tremendous job. I want to

thank him and everyone at MDOC for the work they do every single day to rehabilitate those in their care and to improve their lives."

Graham, who began communicating with the female inmates through a webinar in 2021, shared her story during the dedication program using the Bible's Prodigal Son parable as an illustration of her own life's challenges. Graham said her story helps the inmates open up and expose their own vulnerabilities.

Media note:

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Gov. Tate Reeves, left, slices the ribbon officially opening a new chapel at the women's state prison in Rankin County. Joining the governor are Ruth Graham, daughter of famed evangelist Billy Graham and a minister in her own right, and MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain.

The following pictures include the women's choir, ringing of the bell, and the reception. Commissioner Cain and Ruth Graham also visited with the inmates in the facility.



