

THE ANGOLITE

The Prison News Magazine



July / August 2002

Vol. 27, No. 4

religion in prison



THE 2002 NOBTS-ANGOLA EXTENSION CAMPUS GRADUATES

Fishers of Men

By Dale Gaudet

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." The reflection of this statement was etched in the faces of the inmates from the Angola Extension Campus of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), who received degrees during the commencement service at Louisiana State Penitentiary in May.

Thirty-two associate and 27 bachelor degrees in Christian Ministry were awarded. Fifty inmates

have received degrees in Christian Ministry since the school was established in 1995.

Warden Burl Cain congratulated the graduates and their families. "I don't think anyone realized the impact this program would have on the men of Angola and the penal system in Louisiana. I am very proud of each and everyone of you." Cain acknowledged NOBTS president, Dr. Chuck Kelley and T.W. Terrell, director of missions for Judson Baptist Association, who were instrumental in establishing and developing the Angola campus.

Judson Baptist Association plays a major role in prepping prospective students. Ten teams of

volunteers come to Angola each week to teach the Bible-study courses that are prerequisites to admission. To date, over 2,000 Angola prisoners have gone through the "Experiencing God" program.

"It's a life change. These men have become a resource for God," Cain told the audience of about 340 inmates and guests. He also gave the audience a small glimpse of the graduates' future. "Our plans are to use some of them as missionaries in other prisons. We want them to work with their chaplains and help enhance their religious programs."

Dean of the extension center and professor of New Testament Greek, Dr. Jimmy Dukes, addressed the graduates, saying, "It's one of those God things that makes the impossible possible. You are walking examples of what God can do in our lives." Dr. Steve Lemke, NOBTS Provost Of-



CAIN RECOGNIZED TERRELL'S ONGOING CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOOL

ficer and professor of philosophy, extended his feelings of joy and pride in the graduating ministers. "Paul was very effective as a missionary. Even though he was in prison, Paul wrote much of the New Testament from behind his bars."

Inmate Leonard Bastida, representing the graduating class, gave an account of what Angola



NOBTS ANGOLA EXTENSION FACULTY: CLAY CARVIN, DR. THOMAS STRONG III, DR. JOHNNY BLEY, REVEREND PHIL YOHO, REVEREND ARTHUR ACHORD, DR. WAYNE BENNING AND DR. JOHN ROBSON



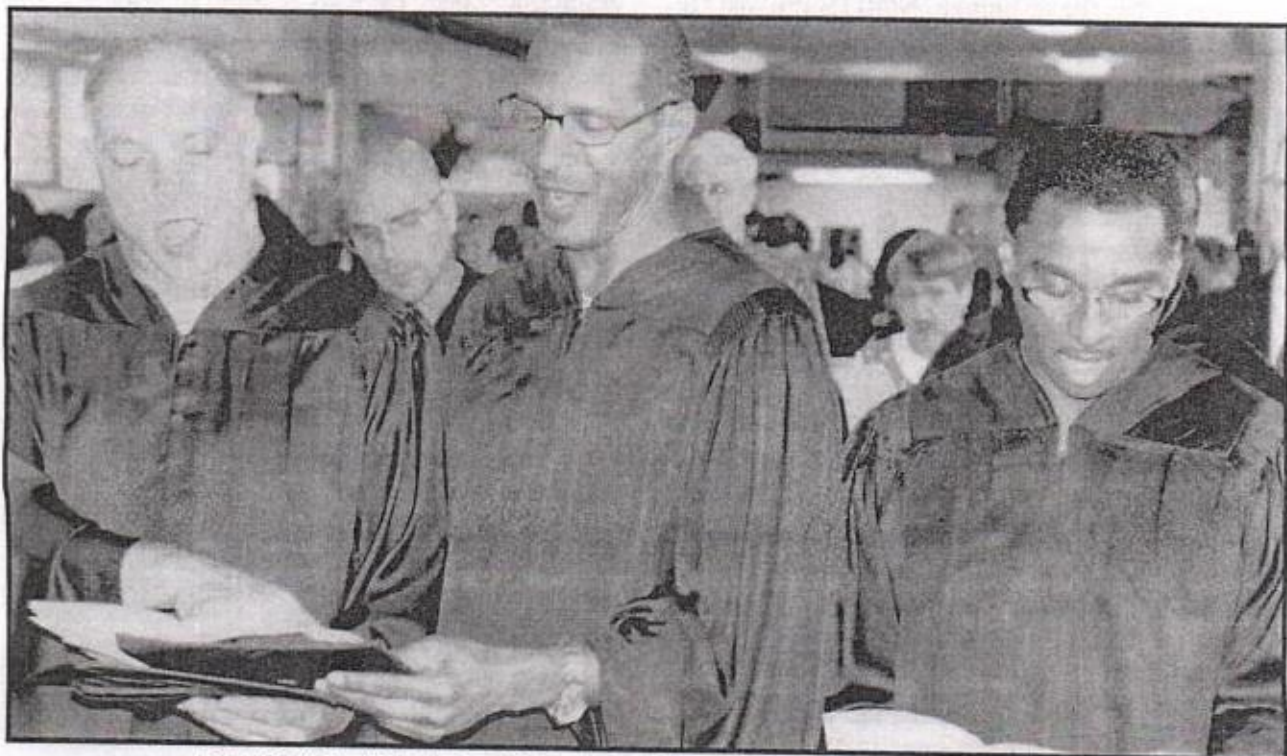
BASTIDA: "GOD ALONE" CAUSED THE CHANGES

was like years ago, of living by the convict code, and his years of spiritual struggle. "The code, or unwritten laws, were the ruling factors in disci-

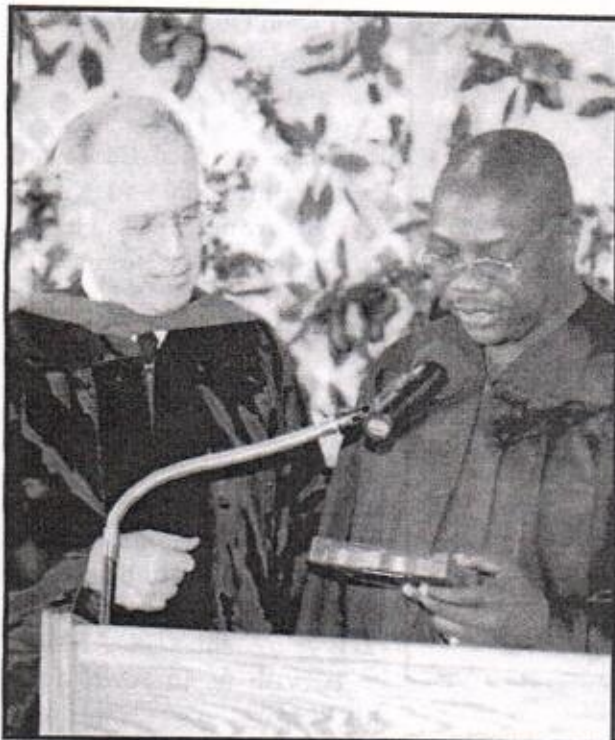
plinary matters," he said. "Back then, the blood-plasma unit was in full swing. The revenue fueled the underground rackets and the blood money tended to excite vampires from all walks of life."

He described protection rackets, how prisoners were bought and sold for sex, labor and financial gain, and the daily violence that earned Angola the title of the "bloodiest prison" in America. In the mid-sixties, Bastida said, vocational training was emerging with welding, carpentry and auto mechanics programs, but "rehabilitation was still just a myth in a place where survival was of the fittest.

"In 1993, I attended a Kairos retreat and felt my calling from God," he continued. "From that point on, the process was laid out for me. I returned to the Catholic Church, took the 'Experiencing God' course and was accepted as an NOBTS student. God alone can be the cause for the dramatic changes in this prison. The plasma building that once fueled chaos became the center of education. Building were changed, people were changed. What was once the bloodiest prison in America became one of the safest prisons in the nation."



CALAIS (right), WAS ALLOWED TO RETURN & GRADUATE WITH HIS CLASS

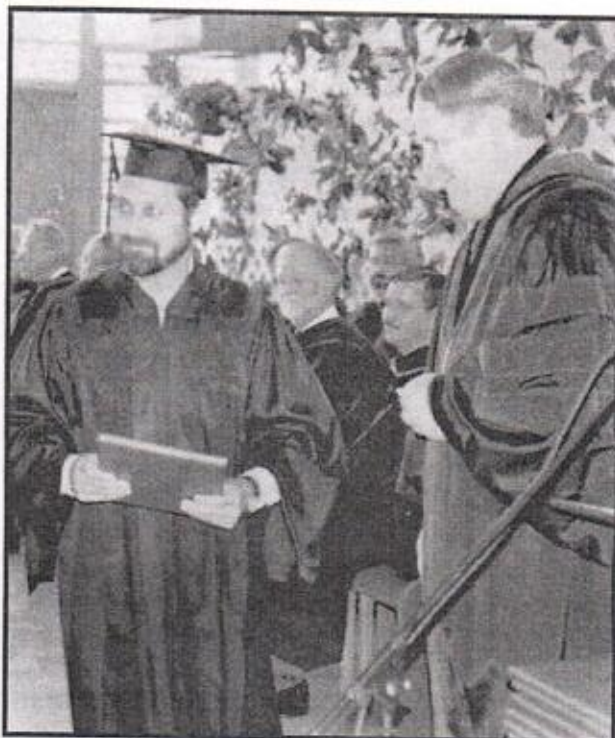


JACKSON GIVES ROBERSON A GIFT

Joseph Calais was released from Angola in March, but returned to graduate with his class. "I appreciate Warden Cain allowing me to come back into the prison to graduate with my brothers. Having a positive attitude and staying focused on my goals has given me an opportunity to advance in society," he said. One of the most difficult challenges Calais faced since leaving prison is old friends with bad habits who still view him as the person he used to be. Determined to make the most of his second chance, Calais works in construction with his father and has opened "Calais' Belt Gallery," a leather shop in Lafayette.

NOBTS student-body President Walter Jackson and inmate Minister Jesse Deters made special presentations to Cain, several assistant wardens, chaplains and professors in recognition of their support. Then Kelley conferred the degrees, also presenting each graduate with a leather-bound copy of the New American Standard translation of the Bible. The ceremony concluded with a benediction by Dr. John Robson, Director of the NOBTS Extension Center.

Graduate James O'Banion called the commencement more than just inmates dressed in caps



LEMOINE RECEIVES DIPLOMA FROM KELLY

and gowns to receive diplomas. "It's a spiritual revolution that has taken place in this prison," he said. "God has revealed Himself to each of us today as individuals and as a community behind bars. God has left His fingerprints all over Angola."

NOBTS-ANGOLA CAMPUS GRADUATES

Associate Degrees

Walter Lee Jackson	Jesse Mills
Jeffery Neal	James O'Banion
Curtis Pratt Jr.	Stephen Proctor
	Larry Sylvester

Associate & Bachelor Degrees

Ronald Ailsworth	Eugene Baker
Leonard Bastida	Vincent Benjamin
Harold Brand Jr.	Leotha Brown
Joseph Calais	Elzey Crossley
Leander Gallet	Ron Hicks Sr.
Darren Hooks	Merio Howard
Donald Issac	William Kirkpatrick
Leverne Lemoine	Juan Peters
Felton Reado	Prentice Robinson Jr.
Harold Savoy Sr.	Phillip Schane
William Silva III	Steve Stewart
Edrek Thierry	Isaiah Vining Jr.

Bachelor Degrees

David Crowell Jr.	Jerome Derricks
	Vernell Richardson Sr.