



June 23, 2025

New chapel dedicated at South Mississippi prison

LEAKESVILLE – A church and its steeple stands tall into the sky welcoming inmates for spiritual growth where, until two years ago, an unused plot of land near an inmate housing unit at a South Mississippi state prison received attention only from security checks and occasional grass cutting crew.

The Mississippi Department of Corrections ushered its third and newest chapel into service during a dedication program Monday at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution.

The facility's inmate band provided multiple praise songs leading up to the guest speaker Pastor Fred Luter Jr., of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, who was the first African American elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention for which he served 2012-2014.

Speaking to a capacity crowd, Luter referenced the turnaround of Louisiana's state prison at Angola through spiritual and morality programs, noting that the inmates' lives were transformed through a revival of their spirits. Luter focused on "dry bones" and spiritual renewal as a central theme of his sermon referencing Chapter 37 in the Book of Ezekiel.

"This chapel is incredible. This chapel will be part of the revival of the South Mississippi correctional center because God will use the inmates to share the word of God here and spread it to others," Luter said. "If He can do it there, he can do it here."

The 6,000 square foot chapel is part of an ongoing project to build worship facilities at all MDOC institutions under the leadership of MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain. Cain told the dedication assembly – including inmates, prison staff, and supporters – that two chapels' construction are underway and two more are planned. Cain describes the chapel-building program as a critical part of MDOC's efforts to encourage moral rehabilitation, provide nurturing spaces for inmates, and steer them away from gang activity.

"I knew when I came here that we needed to build these churches. We had discipline issues and moral rehabilitation is the only true rehabilitation there is," Commissioner Cain told the assembly.

Chapel dedications have already occurred at MDOC's other two main prisons. The first was at the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW), which is on the grounds of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF), on June 15, 2023. The second dedication happened at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman on Dec. 6, 2024. Funding was secured from the Mississippi Prison Chapel Foundation.

Inmate Dusty Callais, a media resident assistant, said the new chapel will provide a central venue for all religious services, programs, and faith-based teachings.

"That once unassuming, uninteresting piece of land is now Holy Ground," Callais said. "The soil will be trod upon by lost souls seeking salvation and the redeemed shouting praises to our Lord. Great things will happen here."



Chapel at South Mississippi Correctional Institution



Pastor Fred Luter Jr.



