



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **LIFE UNIVERSITY TO HOLD HISTORIC COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY AT LEE ARRENDALE STATE PRISON FOR ASSOCIATE OF ARTS IN POSITIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE CANDIDATES**

**Marietta, Georgia, January 24, 2018** – On January 28, 2019, 11 students who are incarcerated at Lee Arrendale State Prison, a maximum security women’s prison in Alto, Georgia, will graduate with an Associate of Arts degree in Positive Human Development and Social Change (PHDSC) from Life University (LIFE), based in Marietta, Georgia. The students have earned an average, cumulative GPA of 3.9, and all will go on to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. They have also become dedicated teachers and mentors, supporting one another and sharing what they have learned with their incarcerated peers, as well as their own families.

This event represents a shift in the landscape of higher education and prison reform in Georgia. This will be the first class of students in a Georgia State Women’s Prison to graduate from an accredited college degree program since 1994 when Pell Grants were banned for incarcerated people as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. They will also be the first to graduate from an accredited degree program offered by a college or university based in Georgia in any prison in the state since that time – only New Orleans Baptist Seminary has provided accredited college degree programs to people in men’s prisons in Georgia since 1994.

#### **The Chillon Project at Life University**

On any given day in the United States, approximately 2.2 million people are incarcerated in prisons or jails. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Even while crime rates have declined, the number of people in prison has increased by 500% in the last 40 years. The direct cost of incarceration totaled more than \$80 billion in 2013. These costs cannot be measured in financial terms alone: rising rates of incarceration have meant lost productivity, fractured families, long-term post-incarceration expenses and the unfulfillment of human potential. They have also deepened social division and inequality, with the greatest impact on communities that already experience social and economic barriers to flourishing.

The Chillon Project is an undertaking of LIFE to address this crisis by expanding access to higher education for the people whom it affects the most – incarcerated people, correctional staff and returning citizens – in the state of Georgia. The initiative takes its name from the poem by Lord Byron entitled “The Prisoner of Chillon.” LIFE’s founder and first president, Dr. Sid Williams, recited passages of this poem to draw attention to how environments influence our lives. He noted Byron’s key message of “So much a long communion tends to make us what we are.” The

question before us at LIFE became, “Could we address the crisis of mass incarceration by transforming the ‘communion’ of those at the center of it all?”

### **Life University’s Degree Programs at Arrendale State Prison**

Chillon provides an Associate of Arts degree in Positive Human Development and Social Change at Arrendale. The curriculum of this program merges the best practices of business and psychology and focuses on developing social entrepreneurs and transformative leaders. It is built on an understanding that leaders need tools of critical social analysis, social skills and the practice of cultivating inner values. Extensive research has shown that ethical and emotional values can be taught as skills and can enhance other aspects of leadership, including conflict resolution and communication, that we emphasize in the program.

### **Additional Facts about the Chillon Project**

- Arrendale State Prison is designated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) as a site of LIFE. The A.A. in PHDSC and B.S. in Psychology are accredited degrees equal in rigor and content to those offered on LIFE’s main Marietta campus.
- LIFE has enrolled two cohorts of incarcerated students since 2016, with thirty total students enrolled since then.
- More than half of LIFE students at Arrendale State Prison (56%) are mothers, with a total of 46 children.
- Starting in 2019, LIFE will begin offering upper division coursework leading to a B.S. in Psychology at Arrendale State Prison. The students who have completed the A.A. in PHDSC will continue on to their Bachelor’s degree.
- Along with core classes in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, students pursuing the A.A. in PHDSC attend Conflict Transformation; Positive Business; Spirituality, Integrity and Transformational Leadership; and Ethical and Moral Reasoning, among other courses.
- Students at Arrendale State Prison have written business proposals for social enterprises, competed in Lincoln-Douglas style debates, created educational modules in social and emotional learning for K-12 students, written sociological literature reviews and composed grant proposals.
- All students at Arrendale State Prison complete Compassionate Integrity Training, a multi-part training program that cultivates basic human values as skills. Students have the option to go on to be trained as facilitators in this program so that they can share what they have learned with others in their incarcerated setting as well as with their families.
- An ongoing study of Chillon found that students scored higher than a control

- group in measures of personal, social and emotional wellbeing. Results showed a major positive impact on participants' resilience, overall mental health and ability to manage emotions. For example, while participants experienced lower levels of depression, anger and anxiety, students also reported improved relationships with correctional staff and children, better ability to handle conflict and improved outlooks on their future.
- Tuition, books and supply costs are waived for all incarcerated students.
  - In the last two years, Chillon has provided full scholarships and enrolled six correctional officers and other staff people from Arrendale in degree programs at Life University's main campus in Marietta, Georgia.
  - Students at Arrendale who are released before finishing their degree can continue at Life University's main campus. Currently, two students who began the program at Arrendale are finishing their degrees on LIFE's campus.

### **Student Testimonial from the Class of 2019**

"Recently, I learned the literal definition of education. It is derived from the Latin word *educere, which means 'to lead out of.'* This new definition led me to think deeply about the role and importance of education. Furthermore, it helped me to fully appreciate the life-changing gift that I received by being able to obtain my Associate of Arts degree in Positive Human Development and Social Change. In my opinion, the role of education is to awaken the student and teacher to a higher level of consciousness, and my education has liberated me. I am no longer a prisoner to my ignorance or the ideologies taught by culture and society. Though physically incarcerated, I am free. I am freer than I have ever been in my life. My life truly began when I was accepted into Life University, and it has given me a newfound purpose. I now aspire to give my life to things that matter."

### About Life University

Founded in Marietta, Georgia in 1974, Life University is a health sciences institution most known for its chiropractic program, the largest single campus chiropractic program in the world. Life University is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate, master's and Doctor of Chiropractic degrees, and also has programmatic accreditation through the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE), the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) and the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). The mission of Life University is to empower students with the education, skills and values necessary for career success and life fulfillment, based on a vitalistic philosophy.

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