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NEW IN MONTANA: PRISON FELLOWSHIP ACADEMY COMING TO BILLINGS

Billings, MT—A new program aimed at helping Montana’s incarcerated population improve their lives and re-enter society will be offered at the state women’s prison in Billings in 2020. The Prison Fellowship Academy™ is the first in Montana and part of Prison Fellowship®’s national campaign to establish academies in at least one men’s and one women’s prison in each of the 50 states by 2026.

According to Northwest Area Director Mark Hubbell of Prison Fellowship, the program provides a “holistic life transformation” to prisoners through classes offered twice weekly over the course of a year. The Prison Fellowship Academy is aimed at improving prisoners’ “thinking, relationships, life skills, addiction recovery, and spiritual outlook.”

Hubbell, who also leads programs in Oregon and Idaho, is currently recruiting interested individuals and churches to support the Billings program, which will be a volunteer-led academy. Volunteer recruitment and training begins in January. Shortly afterward, prisoners will sign up for the Academy program, which Hubbell expects to be fully operational by early spring.

Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers help prisoners re-enter society equipped with the skills and a positive outlook to succeed. Mentoring relationships, life-skills training, marriage and parenting classes, and other programs teach personal responsibility, the value of education and hard work, and care for people and their property, so that prisoners can thrive and be good citizens in their communities after release.

The Academy is one of several programs offered by Prison Fellowship. The Prison Fellowship Angel Tree® program has assisted hundreds of Montana children and families over the past few years by providing gifts to prisoners’ children at Christmas and supporting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of families throughout the year.

Prison Fellowship is a national, faith-based organization started more than 40 years ago by Chuck Colson, aide to former President Richard M. Nixon, who spent seven months in a federal prison camp for a Watergate-related crime. Colson founded the Prison Fellowship in 1976, after reemerging from prison. The organization has since become the nation’s largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading advocate for criminal justice reform.

Nationally, some 2.2 million men and women are imprisoned, with 95 percent of them expected to be released. Historically, two thirds of released prisoners are rearrested. Prison Fellowship seeks to change these statistics.

Montana’s first Prison Fellowship Academy is made possible by a grant from the Gianforte Family Foundation. Prison Fellowship hopes to offer academies in other Montana prisons soon. More information is available at prisonfellowship.org or by contacting Hubbell at 503-385-7055 or mark_hubbell@pfm.org.

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