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**THE SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY PRISON PROGRAM:
AN ANCIENT MISSION, A NEW BEGINNING**

KENNETH L. PARKER*

INTRODUCTION: WHY THE SLU PRISON PROGRAM IS “CATHOLIC” AND
“JESUIT”

At Christianity’s core is the narrative of Jesus’s arrest, incarceration, trial, and execution. The faith’s most recognizable symbol is the cross—Rome’s favored method of public execution¹—which iconically reinforces the Christian calling to identify with those who are social outcasts, objectified, and marked for destruction. In Matthew 25:31–46, the gospel writer makes this direct connection as he presents Jesus’s parable of Judgment Day, when the “king” separates the people into those who will enter his kingdom and those who will be turned away.² The king told those granted eternal life that they merited that reward because, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”³ The “righteous” asked when they had done this.⁴ The king replied, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”⁵ The gospel writer leaves no doubt about his point because the next chapter begins the narrative of Jesus’ suffering and death through the Roman judicial system.⁶ When followers of Jesus are present to those at the margins of society, it is an opportunity to encounter Jesus in the world.

Fifteen hundred years later, Ignatius of Loyola instilled this profound identification with “the prisoner” through his *Spiritual Exercises*.⁷ Members of

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1. Mark T. Finney, *Servile Supplicium: Shame and the Deuteronomic Curse—Crucifixion in Its Cultural Context*, 43 *BIBLICAL THEOLOGY BULL.* 124, 125 (2013).

2. *Matthew* 25:31–46 (New Revised Standard).

3. *Id.* at 34–36.

4. *Id.* at 37–39.

5. *Id.* at 40.

6. *Matthew* 26:1–5.

7. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), youngest of sixteen children in a noble Basque family, began his adult life as a Spanish courtier and soldier. After a serious wound in battle, and in the

the Society of Jesus became steeped in this mystery because they annually followed Loyola's practice in the *Spiritual Exercises* of vividly re-imagining Jesus' human experience of arrest, incarceration, trial, and execution.⁸ Internalizing the experience of "the prisoner" and identifying with those incarcerated and destined for execution marked the Jesuit mission in the world.⁹ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jesuits became noted not only for their educational enterprises and missionary outreach, but also their particular focus on service to those in prisons and at executions.¹⁰

In the mid-twentieth century, a Saint Louis Jesuit, Fr. "Dismas" Clark—named after one of the thieves crucified with Jesus¹¹—sought to live out this special Jesuit calling by working with men coming out of prison. He founded a halfway house for formerly incarcerated men in 1959.¹² Dismas House of Saint Louis was a radical concept at the time and had little support in the community or in correctional systems across the nation.¹³ Yet Fr. Clark's success was notable, for fewer than 5 percent of the two thousand men who entered Dismas House¹⁴ before the Jesuit's untimely death in 1963 returned to prison.¹⁵ His work made headlines because of the film, *Hoodlum Priest*,¹⁶ which premiered in 1961 and brought Fr. Clark's Catholic Jesuit mission-driven project to public notice. The movement has grown in size and impact over the last fifty years. It has multiplied from a few dozen programs in 1965 into a network of more than 250 private agencies that operate over 1,500 residential and

midst of a precarious recuperation, he had a conversion experience that dramatically altered his life. Loyola took up theological studies, and over time gathered a band of like-minded men to form a new Catholic order, the Society of Jesus. The "Jesuits" became known for their distinctive spirituality shaped by practices Loyola prescribed in a handbook entitled *Spiritual Exercises*. Within the first decades, their collective calling came to include missionary outreach, education, and ministry to those at the margins of society, especially persons incarcerated and sentenced to death. JOHN. W. O'MALLEY, *THE FIRST JESUITS* 23–32, 167–68, 173–74 (1993).

8. THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA 95–109 (Father Elder Mullan, S.J., trans., 1914).

9. O'MALLEY, *supra* note 7, at 173–74, 177–78.

10. Paul J. Shore, 'In carcere; ad dupplicum': Jesuit Encounters in Prison and in Places of Execution. *Reflections on the Early-Modern Period*, 19 EUR. REV. HIST. 183, 183 (2012) (discussing the history of the Jesuits' involvement in prisons and executions).

11. Dennis Brown, *Repudiated Upon its 1961 Release by the Tough-Talking Clergyman who Inspired It*, *The Hoodlum Priest Remains as Obscure and Intriguing as Ever*, RIVERFRONT TIMES (Mar. 10, 2011), <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/2011-03-10/news/hoodlum-priest-dismas-house-father-charles-clark-don-murray/>.

12. DISMAS HOUSE OF SAINT LOUIS, <http://www.dismashouse.net/> (last visited May 22, 2014).

13. *Id.*

14. Brown, *supra* note 11.

15. *Id.*

16. See HOODLUM PRIEST (Murray-Wood Productions 1961).

community alternative programs throughout the United States and Canada.¹⁷ Fr. Dismas Clark's deeply rooted Jesuit spiritual calling grew in impact and influence long after his death and has expanded to attract people from many different backgrounds and diverse religious and philosophical commitments.

This Catholic Jesuit heritage is essential background for understanding what happened six years ago when Saint Louis University (SLU) took up the project of developing a college-in-prison program at a maximum security prison: the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Correctional Center (ERDCC), in Bonne Terre, Missouri.¹⁸ The Catholic Jesuit mission of the university is at the heart of why this major research university started by offering a Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies,¹⁹ then designed an Associate of Arts degree program for incarcerated men and prison staff, and continues to develop programming to meet the needs of those who live and work at the ERDCC.²⁰

This article traces how the Saint Louis University Prison Program came to be, why it is part of the solution to reducing recidivism rates in Missouri, and how it has grown in impact and outreach. In telling this story, broader issues and historical factors must be introduced to explain why higher education in U.S. prisons is now a rare opportunity.²¹ The article will demonstrate why higher education in U.S. prisons is an essential component for any larger strategy to address the widely unacknowledged crisis of our time—the mass incarceration of adult Americans.

HOW THE WORK BEGAN

On a Sunday evening in April 2007, I stretched out on my couch to watch *60 Minutes*. While relaxation before another busy week was my intent, the first segment, on the Bard Prison Initiative,²² started a series of reflections that changed my life and altered my work at Saint Louis University. Bob Simon reported on a college-in-prison program founded by a former Bard College undergraduate, Max Kenner, which functioned in four New York state maximum-security prisons and educated over 120 men in a liberal arts program

17. *History*, INT'L CMTY. CORR. ASS'N, http://iccalive.org/icca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=475 (last visited May 22, 2014). See also OHIO DEP'T OF REHAB. AND CORR., REQUIREMENTS AND MINIMUM LICENSING STANDARDS FOR HALFWAY HOUSES 2 (2012).

18. *Prison Program: Degree Program*, ST. LOUIS UNIV. COLL. OF ARTS & SCI., <http://www.slu.edu/prison-program/degree-program> (last visited May 22, 2014).

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.*

21. Kevin Kiley, *Increasing Inmate Accessibility to Higher Ed Could Help States*, USA TODAY (May 4, 2011), http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2011-05-04-inmate-higher-education_n.htm.

22. BARD PRISON INITIATIVE, <http://bpi.bard.edu/> (last visited May 22, 2014).

that led to a Bachelor's degree.²³ The scenes of dynamic prison classrooms, animated student interaction in the prison yard, and professors transformed by their incarcerated students' passion for learning inspired and challenged me.

As a historical theologian who had been at SLU for fourteen years, the connection with our Catholic Jesuit mission was immediate and compelling.²⁴ Why was an elite, secular college like Bard involved in this work and Saint Louis University was not? Yet I looked at the pressures of my academic work and family obligations, and I absolved myself of any responsibility to consider the matter further.

The next day I discovered in conversation that my tenant had seen the same program. She had been in and out of prison eleven times earlier in her life, and she came recommended as a tenant from a halfway house program in Saint Louis. She had been a model renter and had become a good friend. I described my enthusiasm for the idea of a college-in-prison program, observed that it was a perfect fit for the university's Catholic Jesuit mission, but concluded by observing that I was too busy to get involved. She responded, "You know, you're never too busy to do the right thing, once you see that it needs to be done." Her offhanded comment chastened me. I decided to make a few calls.

That was the beginning of a journey that led me to work in prisons. This had never been on my list of things to do in life. Like most Americans, I thought little about prisons and did not know that we are in the midst of an incarceration crisis.²⁵ I only learned later that the United States has 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the earth's prison population.²⁶ I did not realize that we had 2.3 million people in prison (one in every one hundred

23. *60 Minutes: Maximum Security Education* (CBS television broadcast Sept. 19, 2007), available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/inmates-graduate-bard/>.

24. "The Mission of Saint Louis University is the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity. The University seeks excellence in the fulfillment of its corporate purposes of teaching, research, health care and service to the community. It is dedicated to leadership in the continuing quest for understanding of God's creation and for the discovery, dissemination and integration of the values, knowledge and skills required to transform society in the spirit of the Gospels. As a Catholic, Jesuit university, this pursuit is motivated by the inspiration and values of the Judeo-Christian tradition and is guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus." *Mission Statement*, ST. LOUIS UNIV., <http://www.slu.edu/x5021.xml> (last visited May 22, 2014).

25. Kenneth L. Parker, *What I Learned About Learning in Prison*, ST. LOUIS UNIV. PRISON PROGRAM, available at http://www.slu.edu/Documents/arts_sciences/theology/Parker_WhatILearnedaboutLearninginPrison.pdf (last visited May 22, 2014).

26. *The Prison Crisis*, ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/safe-communities-fair-sentences/prison-crisis> (last visited May 22, 2014).

adult Americans), or that we had 7.3 million persons in prison, on probation, or parole (one in every thirty-one adult Americans).²⁷

A religious sister, Elaine AuBuchon, School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), founding director of Alternatives with Education (AWE),²⁸ who was already facilitating programming inside Missouri prisons,²⁹ made enquiries on my behalf and found that administrators at two prisons were open to receiving a proposal to run a pilot program that would bring undergraduate courses to their facilities. When I visited one of her enrichment classes at the ERDCC, I learned that men at that prison were enthusiastic about the concept as well.

Armed with this knowledge, I approached my department chair and proposed a five-course Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies program that would run for two and a half years. Fr. Wayne Hellmann, a Conventual Franciscan, was deeply moved by the idea and promised to find a way to make this happen if I could get inside a prison.³⁰ He agreed to let me seek the support of colleagues in the Department of Theological Studies. I presented the concept at our May 2007 faculty retreat and received a unanimous endorsement of this work as a departmental project. At that point, Fr. Hellmann and I developed a budget that would cover faculty stipends, books and supplies, and travel costs. I went to work looking for grants.

Seeking grant money at a major research university can be a complex process, fraught with political complications and bureaucratic delays. Because of past experiences of this and my desire to move swiftly on this project, I looked for foundations that did not typically support academic projects. By late June 2007, I came to focus on the Incarnate Word Foundation (IWF),³¹ established through resources from the Incarnate Word Sisters, which has a mission to serve women, children, the elderly, and to address issues of incarceration in the Saint Louis community. To my surprise, when I sought advice on writing a proposal, the executive director of IWF, Bridget Flood,

27. Jessica Riordan & Andrew McDonald, *One in 31 U.S. Adults are Behind Bars, on Parole or Probation*, PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS (Mar. 2, 2009), available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/news_room_detail.aspx?id=49696. It is encouraging to report that those figures have improved. The latest available data (2011) indicates that 1 in 107 adults are in prison, and 1 in 50 are incarcerated, on probation, or parole. See LAUREN GLAZE & ERIKA PARKS, BUREAU JUST. STATS., NCJ 239972, CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2011, at 1 (2012), available at <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4537>.

28. *About AWE*, ALTERNATIVES WITH EDUC., <http://www.awe-stl.org/HTML/AboutUs2011.html> (last visited May 22, 2014).

29. Meditation, yoga, and art programming are provided, as well as reentry services. *Our Programs*, ALTERNATIVES WITH EDUC., <http://www.awe-stl.org/HTML/Programs2011.html> (last visited May 22, 2014).

30. Fr. Hellmann's formation in the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, which emphasizes service to those most marginalized in society, was reflected in his receptivity to the proposed project.

31. See INCARNATE WORD FOUND., <http://www.iwfdn.org/> (last visited May 22, 2014).

responded positively to a brief overview of the project and sent me away with the promise of half the funds needed.

With this important piece of the puzzle in place, Fr. Hellmann and I met with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Donald Brennan. After a brief presentation, he too responded with enthusiasm and promised his support if I could get into a prison classroom. Dean Brennan immediately made the connection with our university's Catholic Jesuit mission and seemed inspired by the prospect. I later learned from his administrative assistant, Carol Murphy, that he personally created the file in which the proposal was placed—a rare act for that busy Dean.

The final hurdle was to present a proposal to officials in the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC). I started with the deputy warden at the ERDCC who oversaw rehabilitative services. The plan presented was simple and relatively uncomplicated: a five course certificate in theological studies (one per semester, over two and a half years), taught by five professors from the Saint Louis University Department of Theological Studies, with all expenses paid through foundation support, and tuition remission for all students admitted to the pilot program.

With understandable reluctance—no doubt earned from years of observing naïve enthusiasts whose commitment quickly wanes—the deputy warden pressed me to explain what was in this for me. He wanted to know my “angle.” I explained that my South Saint Louis neighborhood was a prime location for placing recently paroled persons because the housing stock was cheap. I noted that violence was common and re-incarceration frequent, and I explained that being part of the solution to my community's problems was my goal.³² He nodded and then spoke very frankly. The deputy warden explained that he understood the value of education in reducing recidivism rates and knew that it could be an important rehabilitative tool. But he admitted that when he read that the program would be offered with full tuition remission, he immediately thought about the monthly checks he continued to write for his own student loans. While he promised to be supportive because of the evidence in my proposal, he wanted me to know that offering “free” undergraduate courses to criminals made him angry.

He is not alone. In recent decades this view has become prevalent in American society—but this was not always the case. Higher education in American prisons first appeared in 1953 when the University of Southern

32. Tim Barker, *SLU Degree Program Pairs Guards and Inmates*, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, Aug. 18, 2010, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/article_716d8b34-0ce7-5a21-9eba-8dfca0b3d45b.html.

Illinois began what was then a radical experiment.³³ While early efforts proved effective, by 1965 no more than a dozen programs existed nationwide.³⁴ The reason was lack of funding.³⁵ That began to change in 1965 when Congress passed Title IV of the Higher Education Act which established the Pell Grant program.³⁶ This federal initiative assisted economically challenged Americans to work toward postsecondary educational goals and provided incarcerated students with access to Pell Grant funding.³⁷ An amended version of this act passed in June 1972 and expanded the ability of incarcerated persons to apply for Pell Grants to finance their college education.³⁸ By 1982, 350 college-in-prison programs in forty-five states served 27,000 prisoners (9 percent of the prison population of 300,000 nationwide).³⁹ Ninety percent of these were funded by Pell Grants; yet this amounted to 1.3 percent of Pell Grants awarded.⁴⁰ It was a small public investment with significant social impact.

In his 1991 Erickson Lectures at Harvard University, James Gilligan, professor of psychiatry, presented data demonstrating that “of all the programs available to prisoners in Massachusetts, the one that was most effective in preventing violence (i.e. recidivism, or (re)offending after they had left prison) was the obtaining of a college degree.”⁴¹ He went on to note that,

Over a thirty-year period, several hundred prisoners received a college degree while in prison; for the first 25 years, not one had been returned to prison for a new offense, and at the end of 30 years only two [had returned to prison]—for a recidivism rate of less than one percent over that period of time (as compared

33. Kenneth Mentor, *College Courses in Prison*, in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PRISONS & CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES 142, 142 (Mary Boworth ed., 2005), available at <http://www.sagepub.com/hanserintro/study/materials/reference/ref15.2.pdf>.

34. Marlene Martin, *What Happened to Prison Education Programs?*, SOCIALISTWORKER.ORG (June 2, 2009), <http://socialistworker.org/2009/06/02/what-happened-to-prison-education>.

35. Jon Marc Taylor, *Pell Grants for Prisoners*, NATION, Jan. 25, 1993, at 88.

36. Higher Education Act of 1965 § 401, 20 U.S.C. § 1070(a) (2012).

37. H.R. 9567, 89th Cong. (1965) (enacted).

38. H.R. 92-318, 92nd Cong. (1972) (enacted).

39. Kenneth L. Parker, *Access to Pell Grants for Incarcerated People*, ST. LOUIS UNIV. PRISON PROGRAM, http://www.slu.edu/Documents/arts_sciences/theology/Parker_AccesstoPellGrantsforIncarceratedPersons.pdf (last visited May 22, 2014).

40. Taylor, *supra* note 35, at 88, 90; Bruce Wolford & John Littleford, *Correctional Post-Secondary Education: The Expanding Role of Community Colleges*, 9 COMMUNITY/JUNIOR C. RES. Q. RES. & PRAC. 257 (1985) (on file with the author).

41. See JAMES GILLIGAN, *VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA PRISONS: A PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH INTO PATTERNS AND CURES* (2000), available at <http://www.ebookdb.org/reading/3FG3G44B705C332138G71269/Violence-In-California-Prisons-A-Proposal-For-Research-Into-Patterns-And-Cures>.

with a national recidivism rate of 65 per cent during the first three years after leaving prison).⁴²

Numerous studies verified that college-in-prison programs radically reduced recidivism.⁴³ The Texas Department of Criminal Justice reported in 1993 that while Texas's average rate of re-incarceration was 60 percent within three years of release, college-in-prison graduates recidivated at the following rates: associate degrees, 13.7 percent; bachelor's degrees, 5.6 percent; MA and PhD degrees, 0 percent.⁴⁴ Findings from this and other studies leave one in no doubt: the more education completed in prison, the less recidivism once released.⁴⁵

However, during the 1980s, a "tough-on-crime" ethos began to move American attitudes away from a range of rehabilitative practices in state and federal correctional facilities toward a more retributive ethos.⁴⁶ In 1991, a friend of Professor Gilligan gave the newly elected governor of Massachusetts, William Weld, a copy of Gilligan's Erickson Lectures. The governor's response, two days after reading the lectures, was to call for an end to higher education in Massachusetts prisons.⁴⁷ As a "tough-on-crime" politician, he only realized after reading the lectures that college programs existed in Massachusetts's prisons. Governor Weld's rejection of the evidence-based success of these programs signaled a significant shift in American attitudes toward prisons and their purpose.⁴⁸

By the early 1990s, political rhetoric and public opinion came to treat education in correctional systems as a privilege that incarcerated Americans did not deserve.⁴⁹ In 1991, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina began a campaign to end Pell Grants for incarcerated students.⁵⁰ In 1994, Senator Helms and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas succeeded in adding an

42. *Id.*

43. ROGER PRZYBYISKI, WHAT WORKS: EFFECTIVE RECIDIVISM REDUCTION AND RISK-FOCUSED PREVENTION PROGRAMS 2 (2008).

44. DANIEL KARPOWITZ & MAX KENNER, EDUCATION AS CRIME PREVENTION: THE CASE FOR REINSTATING PELL GRANT ELIGIBILITY FOR THE INCARCERATED 5.

45. CAROLINE W. HARLOW, BUREAU OF JUST. STAT., EDUCATION AND CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS 10 (2003), available at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>; JURG GERBER & ERIC J. FRITSCH, SAM HOUS. STATE UNIV., PRISON EDUCATION AND OFFENDER BEHAVIOR: A REVIEW OF THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE 7 (1993); GILLIGAN, *supra* note 41; Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, & Jeremy Robbi, *The Benefits of Correctional Education*, 53 J. CORRECTIONAL EDUC. 96, 96 (2002).

46. David Schichor, *Penal Policies at the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, 25 CRIM. JUST. REV. 1, 7 (2000).

47. Joshua Page, *Eliminating the Enemy: The Import of Denying Prisoners Access to Higher Education in Clinton's America*, 6 PUNISHMENT & SOC'Y 357, 357-58 (2004).

48. GILLIGAN, *supra* note 41.

49. *See* Page, *supra* note 47, at 358-59.

50. Mentor, *supra* note 33, at 142.

amendment to Senator Joe Biden's "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act," which was signed into law that same year.⁵¹

With the withdrawal of funding through Pell Grants, undergraduate education in U.S. prisons rapidly disappeared. Within one year, 40 percent of the undergraduate programs in prisons ceased to exist, and a corresponding 44 percent drop in student enrollment was reported.⁵² By 1997, few college-in-prison programs remained.⁵³ During the first decades of the twenty-first century, a few dozen isolated programs began to emerge with support from foundations, individual donors, and much volunteer labor.⁵⁴ Federal and state funding all but disappeared. During the summer of 2007, I came to realize that SLU was becoming part of a patchwork of programs struggling to reintroduce undergraduate education in American prisons.

While the weeks stretched into months, the SLU proposal made the rounds of officials at the ERDCC and then the central offices of MODOC in Jefferson City, Missouri. SLU's bureaucratic ethos had prepared me well for this part of the process. Patience and perseverance proved an effective strategy. Unexpectedly, on December 21, 2007, the director of education at the ERDCC called and cheerfully announced that the proposal had been approved and he was ready to schedule the first course in January 2008. He wanted a date for the first class. I swallowed hard and agreed to start on Friday, January 25, 2008.

LEARNING ON THE INSIDE

Earlier in life, I had spent five years as a Benedictine monk in the Mojave Desert of California. That experience had taught me that there are times when it is better to seek forgiveness than wait for permission. Yet the challenge of starting a pilot certificate program in a prison within four weeks only sank in as I stumbled through the process of making it happen. My chair was away for Christmas and New Year visiting a Franciscan friary in Denmark, and the dean was home with his family. The immediate hurdle was organizing TB tests at a halfway house near downtown Saint Louis and getting myself scheduled for a Volunteers-in-Corrections (VIC) training workshop more than an hour away in

51. Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 § 20411, 20 U.S.C. § 1070a(b)(6) (2012); JESSE HELMS, *HERE'S WHERE I STAND: A MEMOIR* 71 (2005); Page, *supra* note 47, at 358–59.

52. Alexandra Marks, *One Inmate's Push to Restore Education Funds for Prisoners*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR (Mar. 27, 1997), <http://www.csmonitor.com/1997/0320/032097.us.us.4.html>.

53. *See id.*

54. *See* DONNA C. BAUST ET AL., COLLEGE FOR THE INCARCERATED: FUNDING ALTERNATIVES FOR MARYLAND POST-SECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION (2006), available at <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/continuingstudies/distance/documents/CollegefortheIncarceratedFundingAlternativesforMarylandPost-SecomndaryCorrectionalEducationK.pdf>.

Farmington, Missouri.⁵⁵ I crafted an announcement inviting applications, and the education director posted it on the prison's internal television network.

The ERDCC is the largest and newest prison managed by MODOC. It opened in February 2003 and cost \$168 million dollars to construct.⁵⁶ The total population fluctuates between 2,500 and 3,000, depending on the number of men residing on the reception and diagnostic side of the prison.⁵⁷ As Missouri's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Center, approximately 500 men per month are received for administrative processing and testing before being moved to other prisons appropriate for their security level and specific needs or safety requirements.⁵⁸ Approximately 1,200 men live on the corrections side of the prison, which houses men who are in the two highest security levels (C4 and C5).⁵⁹ The SLU Prison Initiative (as we called ourselves at that time) was limited to the maximum-security correctional side of the facility because the students in the "camp" would most likely remain for the duration of the education program.

The notice for the Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies had to be taken down after just five days because the education office was overwhelmed with more than 300 requests for applications—twenty-five percent of the maximum-security corrections population sought to enter our pilot program.⁶⁰ Prison administrators set a high bar when screening requests, and only those who had been violation free for eighteen months were permitted to proceed. After other basic qualifications were considered (including high school diploma or a GED), I was left with forty-nine applications to consider. The pilot program was limited to fifteen places.

The university's application form was modified to include two one-page essays that aided in assessing basic writing skills and analytical abilities. One

55. These are MODOC run six hour seminars designed to prepare volunteers to understand the culture of prison life, understand the procedures and policies of the DOC, and prepare for problems and challenges that may arise from engaging those who are incarcerated in Missouri prisons. OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL PROGRAMMING, MO. DEP'T OF CORR., PRISON MINISTRY AND AFTERCARE INFORMATION GUIDE (2010).

56. Teresa Ressel, *Bonne Terre's Prison Has Grown*, DAILY J. ONLINE (Feb. 14 2008), available at http://dailyjournalonline.com/news/local/bonne-terre-s-prison-has-grown/article_f3d9fa09-9167-5d2a-aa8c-a25f29c47132.html.

57. *See id.*

58. *See Ministry Calendar: Eastern Reception Diagnostic Correctional Center*, SOARING SPIRIT MINISTRIES, <http://www.soaringspiritministries.org/apps/calendar/?scheduleid=148348> (last visited May 22, 2014).

59. *See* GEORGE A. LOMBARDI, MO. DEP'T OF CORR., A PROFILE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL AND SUPERVISED OFFENDER POPULATION ON JUNE 30, 2012, at 16 (2013).

60. Jesse Bogan, *St. Louis University Program in Mo. Prison Helps Set Minds Free*, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, Dec. 28, 2011, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/st-louis-university-program-in-mo-prison-helps-set-minds/article_a06b052a-064f-5ef4-bce9-d60036f1ac59.html.

essay invited the applicant to explain why, given the limited places available, he should be selected. Applicants were also asked how they would use the experience to give back to others. Efforts to sort by academic skills proved more difficult than imagined. Fewer than ten applications were eliminated for that reason. The next stage of the selection process focused on characteristics in applicant responses that reflected Saint Louis University's mission. In this phase of selection we looked for candidates who sought to serve others, specifically to care for those inside or outside the prison who had been marginalized or harmed by injustice. Only after this stage had been completed did questions of racial and religious diversity enter the process.⁶¹ When the selection process was complete, the class had seven African-Americans, seven Caucasians, and one Native American. The cohort included two Muslims, a Buddhist, a Wiccan, and three self-described agnostics or atheists. The remainder came from a variety of Christian Protestant denominations or independent churches. Though I did not know and have never sought to learn the offenses of our students, it is worth noting that their sentences ranged from five years remaining to life without parole.

In early January 2008, Fr. Hellmann returned from Denmark. He and I had agreed before he left the country that a longer view must be taken of the prison initiative, and we had concluded that nothing would happen until fall 2008 at the earliest. Practical questions immediately came to his mind: would I drop one of my courses on the main campus? Had the dean been informed? How would registration for the course be handled? And most importantly, could we get approval for tuition remission from the university administration?

The answer to the first question was easy: I would teach an overload that semester. My chairman and Dean Brennan needed to help resolve the other three. At another institution, this might have ended the project before it got started. But both Fr. Hellmann and Dean Brennan had promised to help make the project happen if I could gain access to a prison classroom. They kept their word and went to work.

The administrative process remains a mystery to me, but one factor was evident in every report I received: at each step of the way the mission-driven character of the initiative proved the winning argument for its approval. The president, Fr. Lawrence Biondi, S.J., personally approved the \$250,000 in tuition remission needed for the pilot certificate. Only then did I learn that he had spent his first six years of priesthood as a chaplain in Chicago's Cook County Jail. He has since spoken movingly of his time there and the

61. *Id.* Over recent decades, academic institutions have come to recognize the importance of cultivating diverse learning populations. While academic abilities must always be the first consideration and a candidate's orientation to the basic goals of a program must be a factor, efforts to ensure demographic diversity (race, religion, gender, social-economic background, etc.) has been recognized as a valid dimension of selection processes. *See, e.g., id.*

importance of being present to “the prisoner.” That key element of the Jesuit mission, evident since the earliest years of Ignatius of Loyola’s Society of Jesus, merged with the educational mission of our Jesuit university in Saint Louis. By March 2008, all the administrative hurdles had been jumped, the program was formally approved, and the students were officially registered and enrolled for the course I had been teaching for two months.

In the meantime, I focused on what professors do best: prepared a syllabus, ordered books, and collected basic supplies, paper, pens, and folders, which would pass security standards at the prison.⁶² Fr. Hellmann and I had decided that the Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies should start with our department’s introductory course, Theological Foundations. My approach to this course had always been “skills” driven, using the content of the subject to hone students’ ability to write basic essays, read texts critically, learn how to make formal presentations, and improve social interaction by working in groups. I acted on reports about students in prison and revised the syllabus to make it much more demanding than the course taught on the main campus. Among those who teach in prisons, it is a commonplace that students who are incarcerated invest more time and energy in their studies.⁶³ They expect to work hard and demand much more of professors than traditional students. Students in the prison class read books (rather than extracts from them) and wrote their essays with more exacting standards applied. In addition, I took information from VIC training and created a code of conduct for the prison classroom to ensure that all prison regulations were honored and implemented.⁶⁴ By Friday, January 25, 2008, everything was ready for class, and I arrived at the reception office of the ERDCC at 7:15 a.m., fifteen minutes before the 7:30 a.m. class.

The education director’s assistant met me at the entrance and helped me through the process of entering the prison. Like the prison staff, I entered a side door to collect a “body alarm” that attached to my belt and had a pin that could be pulled to set off a high pitched distress signal. We entered an “air lock” with two heavy metal doors, one that led to the outside world, the other door was the gateway to the prison. In the airlock were a metal detector one walked through and a flatbed x-ray scanner used to examine everything brought into the prison. An officer assigned to the airlock signed me in, and another officer, secured behind bulletproof glass, examined my VIC identification card and unlocked the metal door on the prison side of the airlock. Beyond that door were four tall chain-link gates, each unlocked by officers in the security room as we approached and locked again once we

62. Prohibited items included notebooks bound with metal spirals, pens with metal springs, and anything made of rigid plastic. Mechanical pencils were also forbidden.

63. Bogan, *supra* note 60.

64. *Id.*

passed through them. As we moved from one gate to the next, we passed beyond the two rows of chain-link fences topped with razor wire.

Inside that perimeter to the right were buildings that housed a range of services and the visitors' center, and on the left was a large housing unit with thick concrete walls and narrow windows. When the last gate clinked shut, we were on a large prison yard, surrounded on three sides by housing units and the education wing, and on one side by chain-linked fencing that separated the correctional camp from the reception and diagnostic side of the facility. The yard was filled with custody officers performing their duties and men in grey uniforms engaged in a variety of activities. Some distance away, through the chain-linked fence, I saw men in orange uniforms, some in shackles, with custody officers escorting them from building to building on the reception and diagnostic side of the camp.

The education building was on the far side of the yard, and as we walked past clusters of men, a few greeted the education director's assistant. One or two men stopped us to ask questions. She used a large key to unlock a substantial metal door that opened onto a long wide hallway separating the education classrooms from the prison's well-ordered library, visible through glass widows that stretched the length of the passage. Another key opened the door to another hallway lined with classrooms that could accommodate fifteen to twenty students. The education director's assistant placed me in the first classroom on the left side of the hallway. I had arrived.

FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Eight months after watching the *60 Minutes* segment on the Bard Prison Initiative, I was in a prison classroom. The reality of it hit me as the custody officer finished her count and closed the door behind her. I looked around the room and saw fifteen faces filled with eagerness and apprehension. More than one seemed to be struggling to control emotions. Student ages ranged from early twenties to early fifties. They were all dressed in the same grey pants and shirt, but their faces registered very different life stories, which I later learned about through papers and class discussion. These men had killed, committed physical or sexual acts of violence, or engaged in drug trafficking. But that day, they became my students . . . and that was all that mattered.

I decided to use my standard "icebreaker," and asked them to tell me their names, where they were from, and why they were taking the class. On the main campus, the third query is intended as a joke; for as students introduce themselves the mantra becomes, "I am taking this class because it is a requirement." I usually conclude the icebreaker by introducing myself and finishing with, "I am teaching this class because I am required to teach it." It gets a predictable laugh. Few students on the main campus enter Theological

Foundations because they want to study theology. It is part of Saint Louis University's general education requirements.⁶⁵ While I had enjoyed the challenge for many years, by 2007 or 2008 my motivation was lagging, and student apathy had taken a toll on my performance in the classroom.

The experience on that first day of class at the ERDCC was quite different. Many students expressed disbelief that they were actually in a college course and that a university professor would teach them. A few voiced fears that they were not prepared to study at this level; others wondered whether this opportunity would last. The effusive words of gratitude for my presence in the classroom embarrassed me . . . but also thrilled me. These were students filled with anticipation and passionate about a chance to learn and be mentored. We got to work.

I made it clear from that first day that we were partners in a worthy cause—to bring higher education degree programs to Missouri prisons. I promised to do my part on the outside. Their challenge would be to use the opportunity to the fullest and apply what they learned in order to serve others in the prison community and beyond. They had to prove that this effort was worthwhile. Their job was to become what the Jesuit Superior General, Pedro Arrupe, called for Jesuits, and those formed by them, to become: “men [and women] for others.”⁶⁶ They took up the challenge enthusiastically, and the weeks that followed became a time of renewal and transformation . . . for me.

Teaching in a prison classroom is a university professor's fantasy: faculty long for the experience of students who walk into their classrooms with eager smiles and open minds. Imagine assigning texts that baffle the brightest undergraduates on the main campus and find a room filled with students who have read the text three and four times, outlined the argument, and struggled until they have conquered the riddle of words and syntax. Try to picture fifteen students sitting for three hours engaging in intense discussion and debate on topics that you have posed, who are eager for your instructional guidance, and disappointed when the class has ended. Conjure up the image of a student returning his (or her) paper to you . . . because he or she wants more correction and guidance as a writer. Consider what it feels like to have a group of students in the final assessment tell you that the experience in your classroom has given them hope—a sense that life has purpose. What I have described is just a pale

65. *Bachelor of Arts Core Curriculum Requirements*, ST. LOUIS UNIV., <http://www.slu.edu/x12584.xml> (last visited May 22, 2014) (stating that at Saint Louis University, students typically are required to take three courses (nine hours) of theology and three courses (nine hours) of philosophy).

66. Jim Campbell, *Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907–1991)*, IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY, <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/20th-century-ignatian-voices/pedro-arrupe-sj/> (last visited May 22, 2014).

reflection of my experience of teaching that first semester in a prison classroom.

Yet as exciting and stimulating as this experience was, the context heightened my awareness of the tragedy and brokenness of their lives, the trauma experienced by their families and local communities, and the loss to our nation of their potential to do much good in our world. Some of my students never had anyone care about their education, while others neglected opportunities that had been provided. In extreme circumstances of poverty or abuse, some had used their native intelligence to cultivate skills that ensured their survival. Choices made in that context had resulted in arrest and prison time. They all had lived for years with an absence of intellectual stimulation and challenge, and that deficit had created something that resembled intellectual starvation. Their hunger for knowledge and mentoring had an edge of desperation that almost frightened. Yet in the midst of that brokenness, our studies together laid the groundwork for hope and the opening of possibilities that could not have been imagined before SLU became involved in their lives.

As the pilot certificate program progressed from semester to semester, four other theologians took up the opportunity to teach at the ERDCC. Their experience mirrored my own. While the students continued to grow and improve their skills, their impact on faculty was inspiring to observe. My colleagues came back changed people, more deeply committed to teaching on the main campus, and profoundly troubled by the alternative world that existed inside prison fences. In a speech one colleague delivered to our students at their certificate graduation ceremony in May 2010, Grant Kaplan observed:

The prophet Habakkuk writes, “For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.” (Hab 2:3) . . . We normally use such words as “volunteering” and “service” when we describe our contact with those at the margins. But as good as these activities are, the vocabulary still indicates a distance between me and the other person. The gospel describes a scene of social work at the foot of the cross: John’s gospel reads, “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Behold, this is your son.’ And he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26-27). “Volunteering” does not describe this situation. Instead I suggest that we follow the language of the Jesuit social worker Greg Boyle, [founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles], who eschews volunteering and service in favor of “kinship.” . . . So when I tell people that I taught a college course in prison, I won’t say that I “volunteered,” or even that you taught me more than I taught you, even though that’s true. I’ll tell them I learned here more than anywhere that we belong to one another, that the words of Jesus are indeed true: “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21). Any division that separates me from my brothers and sisters comes from the sin in my own heart, and not from God’s intended order. “For the

vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late” (Hab 2:3).⁶⁷

While Kaplan’s words summarized the experience of faculty who taught in the program, Raymond Scott, who spoke on behalf of our certificate students at that ceremony, described their experience in this way:

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, verse 35, there is a passage that highlights my experience [of the program]. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . .” Personally, I was hungry for achievement, and thirsty for knowledge. Matthew 25 goes on to say, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me.” Before [this program] . . . I was a stranger to myself, to my spiritual self—but not anymore. The professors helped me find my dignity again. I am no longer naked. Indeed they helped clothe me—not only with dignity, but with the sense of self-worth that we all hunger and thirst for . . . The last passage from Matthew 25 reads, “I was in prison and you came to visit me.” What you have done here for us—we who have long considered ourselves “the least of these”—has had an incredible impact on us.⁶⁸

While the first three years of the Saint Louis University Prison Program⁶⁹ had been life changing for all involved, it was a threshold, a starting point. The “vision” Professor Kaplan referred to through the words of the prophet Habakkuk had moved toward its next stage of fulfillment. Despite delays, and periods of waiting, what was needed came in the time required. It was never late.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

After the first year and a half of the pilot certificate program, in April 2009, the new education director of the ERDCC urged me to take up a new challenge: to create and implement an associate of arts degree program. Like creating the Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies, I hardly knew where to begin, but I knew that a great deal of money would be needed. Two successful grant writers in my department told me about a new person in Saint Louis University’s Corporate and Foundation Relations Office, Heather Rich. I went to see her, described what was being done at the ERDCC, and explained that an official in MODOC wanted SLU to start an associate of arts degree program as a successor to the pilot certificate program. Ms. Rich, like those before her,

67. Grant Kaplan, Bonne Terre Graduation Speech, *available at* <https://sites.google.com/a/slu.edu/kenneth-l-parker/bonne-terre-graduation-speech> (last visited May 22, 2014).

68. KENNETH L. PARKER, *YOUR GROWN-UP FAITH: BLENDING THE THREE ELEMENTS OF BELIEF* 69 (2012).

69. The program was officially renamed the Saint Louis University Prison Program in July 2012.

immediately made the connection with our university's Catholic Jesuit mission and explained that this was the kind of project that had drawn her into development work at SLU. When she realized that we had a year of lead-time to find funding, Ms. Rich stressed that work needed to begin immediately to find the right foundation(s). She also advised me that people who met with her frequently got the best performance from her. The semester was almost over and the summer was about to begin. I took out my calendar and we scheduled biweekly meeting through August.

I had never attempted to develop a full-fledged program at the university, and Heather Rich became my mentor. With her help we identified several potential foundations for the St. Louis University Associate of Arts degree and applied successfully for further funding for the certificate program from the Lutheran Foundation of Saint Louis. Ms. Rich walked me through the process of creating a steering committee to assist with community engagement, academic program development, and fund-raising. She also introduced me to a new colleague who had just finished her first year in the Communication Department, Mary Gould. Dr. Gould had written her dissertation on issues related to incarceration, and she became an active collaborator. Through the coming year, Dr. Gould became an integral part of the planning process and helped build connections with other programs around the country.

The summer of 2009 and the 2009–2010 academic year became a blur of activity, as grant proposals were written, a steering committee was formed and began to meet, and serious discussions developed around curriculum planning and the shape of the program. We became aware of new possibilities, and through discussions with Dr. Gould and others around the country, new priorities emerged.

One important insight reshaped the focus of our work dramatically: the educational needs of the prison staff. Less than 15 percent of Saint Francois County's adult population has undergraduate degrees.⁷⁰ Many staff members have a wealth of experience, but cannot advance in their MODOC careers because they do not have the requisite academic degrees. Over the previous two years we had also grown to appreciate that staff felt deeply that "society" did not understand the challenges they faced or care about their needs. It became evident that if we wanted to be present to "the prisoner," we must not neglect being present to those who supervised them.

My colleague, Professor Tobias Winright, grew up in the home of a homicide detective and worked as a prison custody officer and police officer while attending classes at a Florida community college. When he finished his undergraduate degree, Dr. Winright pursued graduate studies under renowned ethicists at Duke University and Notre Dame University. He helped me

70. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, STATE & COUNTY QUICKFACTS: ST. FRANCOIS COUNTY, available at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/29/29187.html> (last visited May 22, 2014).

understand better the experience of prison from a staff member's perspective. Our incarcerated students had expressed often that the three hours in class each week were the only time they felt "fully human." Dr. Winright immediately identified with that feeling. He described vivid memories of sitting in evening classes after his day job in the prison, and the profound sense that intellectual pursuits restored his "humanity" after the grinding challenges of his day in prison. In a poignant expression of this reality, James Logan has reported that a custody officer once observed to him, "We're all doing time, some of us are just doin' it in eight-hour shifts."⁷¹ Prison staff struggle with their life experience in prison as well. It became an imperative to respond to their needs too.

I did not realize until later that this dual emphasis would set our work apart from other programs around the country and garner enthusiastic support from the director of MODOC, George Lombardi. We decided that the pilot Associate of Arts degree would be run on a dual track, with a cohort of incarcerated students who would take courses during the morning inside of the prison fences, and a cohort of staff who would take classes in the evening at the training center just outside the prison perimeter.

Another important issue emerged as we looked for the proper administrative "home" for the Saint Louis University College-in-Prison Program, as it was called in 2009–2010. Dean Brennan of the College of Arts and Science was enthusiastic about continuing to grow the program; however, creating and administering an Associate of Arts degree ran counter to the more traditional bachelor degree programming of that college. Indeed SLU had not offered an Associate of Arts degree for several decades. Colleagues urged me to start a conversation with Dr. Mary Rose Grant, who oversaw curriculum development in the School for Professional Studies (SPS). That school focuses on the recruitment and education of adult students who need programs tailored to lives pressed by the responsibilities of work and family.

Dr. Grant proved a willing and enthusiastic collaborator. Like so many others, she warmed to the project because it reflected SLU's Catholic Jesuit mission. She spoke passionately about our institutional obligation to be present to educationally and socially marginalized people. Within less than a week she had created an Associate of Arts degree curriculum that met accreditation standards and was tailored to the needs of our incarcerated and staff students. This pilot degree program would take four years to complete. To ensure that students finished each year with a recognized achievement, the courses were grouped in thematic concentrations, English and Communication, History and Social Sciences, Moral and Ethical Formation, and Mathematics and Science.

71. JAMES SAMUEL LOGAN, *GOOD PUNISHMENT?: CHRISTIAN MORAL PRACTICE AND U.S. IMPRISONMENT* 216 (2008).

Dr. Grant, like Heather Rich, became a valued mentor as the proposal for a pilot Associate of Arts degree took shape and became fully formed.

When Dr. Grant left SLU to work at the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, Dean Jennifer Giancola⁷² became a persuasive advocate for this work. She spoke movingly of its connection to the mission of the university and to the work of the School for Professional Studies.⁷³ As this work advanced she showed leadership and administrative skill in guiding the project, and she proved a valued mentor as I have directed the program over the last three years. Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Steven Sanchez worked tirelessly to ensure that the Associate of Arts degree program proposal received proper recognition from the Higher Learning Commission. He too saw the powerful mission-driven statement being made by this work and has always spoken with passion and commitment about “our students” on the Bonne Terre prison campus.

In early December 2009, a proposal was sent to the Randolph Hearst Foundation with a decision anticipated by June 2010. In January 2010, MODOC asked us to invite a delegation of administrators to meet with our Steering Committee. It was a major step in our collaboration, and it marked a deepening level of the respect and trust between MODOC and SLU. We waited with hope and anticipation as the pilot certificate entered its last semester and the Hearst Foundation made its decision.

As March 2010 approached and I left for two weeks of archival research in England and to deliver a lecture at Oxford University, there was time to take stock of what had happened over the previous three years and contemplate the future. While I had feared that engaging in prison work would take me away from family responsibilities and academic goals, the opposite had been the case. My incarcerated students had inspired me to be more intentional about both. My sons were growing into kind and compassionate boys and exhibited a concern for justice that reflected conversations we had had about the prison program. Work in my academic department also flourished. During those three years, I had published two volumes and four articles, and delivered eleven academic lectures or addresses. This had become the most active and creative period of my academic career. A growing number of PhD students sought me out as their dissertation mentor, and undergraduate leaders on the main campus invited me to speak about education in prisons and the problems of mass incarceration in the United States. While in Oxford, I received news that SLU students had selected me to deliver my “Last Lecture.” This series of lectures

72. Dr. Giancola was then dean of the School for Professional Studies.

73. *About the School for Professional Studies*, ST. LOUIS UNIV., <http://www.slu.edu/school-for-professional-studies-home/about-professional-studies> (last visited May 22, 2014). The School for Professional Studies serves adult/non-traditional learners, and its mission statement and further information are available on St. Louis University’s website.

at SLU had been inspired by Professor Randy Pausch's moving lecture delivered in December 2007, when he spoke to his students at Carnegie Mellon University just months before he died of cancer.⁷⁴ I was the third SLU faculty member to receive this distinction. It was both a thrilling and a daunting challenge.

A day or two later—as I contemplated this prospect—Ms. Rich received a call from our program officer at the Randolph Hearst Foundation. She requested a site visit. She proposed to arrive the same evening I had been asked to deliver my “Last Lecture.” That coincidence proved to be the launching point for a successful site visit.

The morning after my “Last Lecture,”⁷⁵ the Hearst program officer attended a breakfast hosted by President Lawrence Biondi, S.J., who spoke movingly of his experience as a jail chaplain and his deep desire to see the Saint Louis University College-in-Prison Program grow into a vital part of our university community. Later that morning she met with others connected to the program who were expecting to talk about the proposed budget and curricular structures of the pilot Associate of Arts degree program. She wanted to talk instead about the university's Catholic Jesuit mission, which was so evidently the bedrock on which the project had been conceived and developed. Around midday we traveled to Bonne Terre and met with our students at the ERDCC.

The meeting at the ERDCC proved to be a powerful hour and a half. Our students articulated in profoundly moving ways the impact of undergraduate education on their lives and spoke of the altered discourse they engaged in the dining hall and prison yard. They explained that in their current course they were studying the writings of Saint Augustine and recounted passionate debates over their lives and thoughts. Some had become deeply attached to their way of viewing the world and Augustine's understanding of human nature, while others rejected what Augustine taught and had reasoned arguments for their critique. As they recounted these experiences, they explained that other men in the dining hall and on the yard often listened in, asked who Augustine was, and wanted to know more. In this and other ways they spoke of the ripple effect of their studies, and how it was changing them and their community. They spoke of themselves as a fraternity of the mind, and took great pride in what they had accomplished. In emotional moments they spoke of changed relationships with family members on the outside. One white student, in prison for life without parole, spoke of his parents' pride in his grades. As tears welled up and his voice cracked, one of his African-American classmates put his arm around his shoulder and nodded with silent understanding.

74. Randy Pausch, *Last Lecture: Achieving Your Childhood Dreams*, YOUTUBE (Sept. 18, 2007), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo.

75. Kenneth Parker, *Last Lecture*, VIMEO (Spring 2010), <http://vimeo.com/59756369>.

We returned from the ERDCC in the late afternoon, and the program officer had to be taken straight to the airport to catch a plane. As she got into the car, she turned to me and in a measured way stated that in her twenty-three years at the foundation this had been among the most inspiring sight visits she had experienced. Two months later, in June 2010, we received word that the Hearst Foundation had provided a grant for \$150,000. The pilot Associate of Arts degree started in March 2011.

CONCLUSION

A great deal has happened since the Hearst Foundation grant was received in the summer of 2010. During the gap between the completion of the Pilot Certificate in Theological Studies and the beginning of the pilot Associate of Arts degree program in March 2011, Professors Mary Gould and Devin Johnston spearheaded a series of lectures by noted poets and writers, dramatic and musical performances, and not-for-credit workshops. This outstanding collection of opportunities, designed for and open to the whole ERDCC community (incarcerated men and staff), has become our Prison Arts and Education Program (PAEP). Professor Karen Barney, recently retired chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy, has been working to develop ways for occupational therapists and social workers to assist caseworkers at the ERDCC in teaching and facilitating state-mandated reentry courses incarcerated men must complete as they approach release.⁷⁶ Cultivation of this work is opening new doors and presenting exciting opportunities for service and research.

My colleagues and I now regularly speak to groups on the main campus and out in the broader community about the challenges we face, as society over-incarcerates its most under-resourced citizens but does little to rehabilitate them so that they can return to live balanced and productive lives. We tell our students about the evidence-based effectiveness of what we do. While leaders in correctional systems know these best practices, more often than not government policymakers and politicians stand in the way of their best efforts.⁷⁷

Director George Lombard stated in a speech delivered at the Saint Louis Alliance for Reentry (STAR) Summit, on March 23, 2010, that the three key ingredients for successful reentry are education, drug rehabilitation, and mental health care.⁷⁸ He singled out education as the lynchpin of any successful

76. *Prison Program Moves to College of Arts and Sciences*, ST. LOUIS UNIV., <http://www.slu.edu/x89861.xml> (last visited May 22, 2014). The courses include Anger Management, Life Skills, and Restorative Justice.

77. See Page, *supra* note 47, at 357–58.

78. Agenda, St. Louis Alliance for Reentry, STAR Summit (Mar. 23, 2010), <http://www.stlreentry.org/images/docs/starbook.pdf>.

reentry strategy.⁷⁹ However, the financial pressures of a rapidly growing prison population over the past thirty years have forced dramatic reductions in all of these services.⁸⁰ When Director Lombardi began his career in MODOC, Missouri had 3,000 people in prison and 7,000 on probation or parole. Today Missouri has 31,000 people in prison and 67,000 on probation or parole.⁸¹ Yet in recent consecutive years the state legislature has annually reduced the funding needed by MODOC.⁸² Custody and safety have had to take priority over effective rehabilitative services.⁸³ Many schools have closed, drug rehabilitation programs have contracted, and mental healthcare availability has declined. Missouri's experience is mirrored across the nation.⁸⁴

In our small way, SLU and its community partners have sought to begin to address the need for higher education as a rehabilitative tool in Missouri's prisons. The seed money provided by the Incarnate Word Foundation in 2007 has been multiplied many times over. The Hearst Foundation was our first major funder, but by no means the last. Inspired by this mission-driven work, a major Catholic foundation (that wishes to remain anonymous) has recently contributed \$150,000, after providing an earlier grant of \$36,000. The Raskob Foundation, whose charitable giving is grounded in Catholic principles, has granted \$63,000 in two separate awards. The Lutheran Foundation of Saint Louis, which identifies with the Christian character of this work, has provided \$25,000 to date. Animated by their identification with the humanistic and aesthetic character of the PAEP, The Missouri Humanities Council has awarded \$10,000 for programming. Numerous individuals and parishes have also become regular contributors to this work, as well as major corporations like Mercy Healthcare and the Keefe Group. SLU, with Fr. Lawrence Biondi's blessing, has matched all of this foundation, corporate, and community giving by granting more than \$425,000 in tuition remission for our incarcerated and staff students. Apart from the grant received from the Missouri Humanities Council, no state or federal dollars have been used to build and grow the Saint Louis University Prison Program.

79. *Id.*

80. CHRISTINE S. SCOTT-HAYWARD, CTR. ON SENT'G & CORR., *THE FISCAL CRISIS OF CORRECTIONS: RETHINKING POLICIES AND PRACTICES* 6 (July 2009), available at http://www.vera.org/files/The-fiscal-crisis-in-corrections_July-2009.pdf.

81. See MO. DEP'T OF CORR., ANNUAL REPORT 2013, at 5, 7 (2014), available at <http://doc.mo.gov/Documents/publications/AR2013.pdf>.

82. The budget for the department of corrections decreased from FY 2010 to FY 2012, but has thankfully increased in FY 2013 by \$7 million and again in FY 2014 by \$10 million. See the "Informational Resources" tab on the Missouri Department of Corrections website to access the Annual Reports from FY 2008 through FY 2013. *Informational Services*, MO. DEP'T OF CORR., http://doc.mo.gov/Informational_Resources.php (last visited May 22, 2014).

83. See SCOTT-HAYWARD, *supra* note 80, at 5 tbl.1.

84. *Id.*

I state this last point with sadness because we continue to live in a political ethos that neglects the evidence-based effectiveness of higher education in prisons as a tool to reduce recidivism dramatically and create a safer society. Like Governor Weld of Massachusetts in 1991, many politicians willfully ignore a rehabilitative practice that could—over a period of time—dramatically reduce the prison population and save taxpayers billions of dollars.⁸⁵ This is not a hypothesis, but a well-established fact.⁸⁶

Yet there are signs of hope. Small fledgling programs scattered across the nation have begun to talk to one another and gather annually to discuss how to change the retributive ethos of American prisons and promote the value of higher education as part of the solution to our incarceration crisis. The Saint Louis University Prison Program was privileged in 2013 to host the third annual gathering, with a focus on building and sustaining programs.⁸⁷ The collection of essays in this issue of the *Saint Louis University Public Law Review* is a testament to this promising development. Though the Saint Louis University Prison Program is young—only six years old—it has grown rapidly within a university community that recognizes this work as central to its Catholic Jesuit mission. Our hope is that like the experience of Fr. Dismas Clark, S.J., whose work in the late 1950s seemed small and insignificant, undergraduate educational programs in prisons will someday look like the halfway house movement today, with programs in every state and in most prisons. We look forward to the day when politicians will wonder why such an obvious solution should have taken so long to take root and gain public support. When I am tempted to despair or impatient for the full realization of this important work, I reflect on the words of the prophet Habakkuk: “For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.”⁸⁸

85. Page, *supra* note 47, at 358.

86. *See supra* text and accompanying notes 48–50.

87. *Prison Program: 2013 Conference*, ST. LOUIS UNIV., <http://www.slu.edu/prison-program/2013-conference> (last visited May 22, 2014).

88. *Habakkuk* 2:3.

