

Bishop T.D. Jakes Offers Second Chance to Former Offenders—DALLAS, Feb. 23, 2012

120 GRADUATES FROM TEXAS OFFENDERS RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE GET A FRESH START

The Potter's House of Dallas, Inc., will celebrate the graduation of 120 ex-offenders from the Texas Offenders Re-entry Initiative (T.O.R.I.), a year-long program that helps former inmates transition to life outside the penal system, thereby dramatically increasing their chances for success, while reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

The ceremony will begin at 4 p.m. CT on Saturday, Feb. 25, at The Potter's House, located at 6777 W. Kiest Blvd. in Dallas. Bishop T.D. Jakes will deliver the keynote address, with Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings and an array of other Dallas dignitaries, judges and special guests in attendance, including the friends and families of the graduating class.

Founded in December 2004 by Bishop Jakes, the T.O.R.I. is an intensive 12-month case management program that offers six core services: employment, housing, education, family reunification, health care and spiritual guidance. Since its inception, the T.O.R.I. has served more than 9,000 formerly incarcerated individuals returning to Texas.

"I began attending classes at T.O.R.I. while living in a shelter," said LaTonya Bobo, age 39, who was incarcerated twice and served a total of seven years. "Thanks to the T.O.R.I., for the first time, I feel like a person and not a criminal. I am reunited with my children, I have my own apartment, I am in school working toward my high school diploma and look forward to going to college."

Bishop T.D. Jakes will deliver the commencement address to inspire students to let go of the past and choose a positive path for the life ahead of them. Bishop Jakes will present each of the graduates with an advance copy of his upcoming book, *Let It Go: Forgive so You can be Forgiven*, which will be released on Feb. 28.

"The T.O.R.I. graduation gives former offenders the feeling of accomplishment that they don't often feel anywhere else in their lives," said Bishop Jakes. "By giving them the tools to cope with a society that has changed since they went in and reintegrate the elements in their lives that ensure their long-term progress, the T.O.R.I. offers them a sense of success that overrides the desire to return to prison life for lack of 'making it work' outside that system."

In addition, the program will incorporate special recognition of several graduates including:

- CeCe Ward, who will receive a Volunteer Award
- Tiwangi Kyle, Jessica Vasquez and Denise Wesley, who will receive a scholarship from First Lady Serita Jakes to participate in God's Leading Ladies, a nine-week life enrichment program through the women's ministries
- Tiwangi Kyle, LaTonya Bobo, David Taylor and Terrence Rutherford, who will be presented laptops, sponsored by Plano-based Rent-A-Center.

Texas has one of the largest prison populations in the United States with the number of inmates increasing 61.5 percent between 1995 and 2000, costing tax payers \$60 billion per year. In Texas the cost to incarcerate offenders is \$49.40 per inmate per day, versus only \$.98 per day to rehabilitate ex-offenders through the

T.O.R.I.

The U.S. recidivism rate is 67 percent of former prisoners re-arrested and 52 percent re-incarcerated within three years of their release, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In Texas, some 70,000 prisoners are released each year and more than half of them return to prison within three years - but The Potter's House is working to decrease that number. The T.O.R.I. program recidivism rate is at a low eight percent. Due to the program's success rate and high need for the program's services, the T.O.R.I. is working to expand to include even more ex-offenders.

"With the more than 70,000 prisoners released each year, the demand for our services is greater than our current resources," said Tina Naidoo, a licensed social worker and executive director of T.O.R.I. "The best way to get ahead of the demand is for individuals, corporations and foundations to rally around T.O.R.I.'s mission and support it so we can expand our services, serve more people and end the cycle of incarceration indefinitely."

INTERVIEW/B-ROLL OPPORTUNITIES:

- Bishop T.D. Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter's House of Dallas; founder of the T.O.R.I.
- Tina Naidoo, executive director of the T.O.R.I.
- T.O.R.I. graduate
- Dignitaries in attendance
- B-roll/photos available upon request

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About The Potter's House

Located in Dallas, The Potter's House is a 30,000-member nondenominational, multicultural church and humanitarian organization led by Bishop T. D. Jakes, twice featured on the cover of Time magazine. as "America's Best Preacher" and as one of the nation's "25 most influential evangelicals." The Potter's House has four locations: The Potter's House of Dallas, The Potter's House of Fort Worth, The Potter's House of North Dallas, and The Potter's House of Denver; and a Spanish language church, Casa de Fe. www.thepottershouse.org

About Texas Offenders Re-entry Initiative (T.O.R.I.)

Founded in December 2004 by Bishop T.D. Jakes, under the umbrella of the Metroplex Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization that bridges economic voids in urban America, T.O.R.I. is an intensive 12-month case management program that offers six core services that the majority of formerly incarcerated clients need, including: employment, housing, education, family reunification, health care and spiritual guidance. Since its inception, T.O.R.I. has served more than 9,000 formerly incarcerated individuals who have returned home to Texas. www.medc-TORI.org.