



## *"Listen, Listen, Love, Love"*

### **Darrington Prison Seminary**

<http://www.darringtonkairos.org/>

#### **About**

The Darrington Seminary Program is unique to all but one other prison in America. This free education comes at no cost to taxpayers but is taken care of by the Heart of Texas Foundation. The men of the Darrington Seminary will change the Texas prison system from the inside out, and from the bottom up.

We are seeing men transformed in a way that is nothing short of miraculous," said Ben Phillips, Ph.D., with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Houston Campus. Phillips is the Director of the Prison Seminary. Inmates are working to earn a Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies in four years from the program. "We're looking for men who can take what they learned and be salt and light inside the prison so that the culture itself begins to change," Phillips added. (<http://www.darringtonkairos.org/about-darrington/seminary-college>)

#### **Vision**

A community spiritually freed from the effects of imprisonment reaching all impacted by incarceration, through the love, hope and faith found in Jesus Christ.

#### **History**

Angola State Prison in Louisiana is the largest maximum-security prison in the U.S. There is no parole in Louisiana. A life sentence means they will die in prison. Angola was run by gangs. There was blood on the floor every day. This was the sad state back in 1994 when a new warden, Burl Caine was hired. Burl asked the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary if they would hold Bible classes at Angola. They started out with Bible classes then decided to form a satellite seminary campus, fully credentialed in the prison just for the prisoners. This was so successful that ALL of the gang leaders dropped their gangs and went through the seminary program and became "Field Ministers". The violence dropped so much that they laid off 400 guards while the prisoner population went from 5,000 to 6,500. They are saving \$10 million a year since the seminary started there. In 1994 Angola

was the most violent prison in the U.S. Today it is the least violent. What was once known as “America’s Bloodiest Prison” is now one of America’s safest prisons.

Heart of Texas founder, Grove Norwood (<https://heartoftexasfoundation.org>) learned about the success at the Angola Seminary and wanted to start one at the Darrington Maximum security prison in Rosharon, TX. Darrington’s seminary is a satellite of Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, TX. (<https://swbts.edu>)

### **Rotary and Darrington**

Grove was taking trips monthly to Angola trying to get support of the Darrington Seminary. There was an unused large gym at Darrington that could be converted into the prison seminary facility, as long as it was paid for by outside sources. The stated need was \$2.5 million. Enter Rotarians. On an initial trip to Angola, Rotarians PDG Steve and Lee Harris ([Sugarland Rotary Club](#)) assessed the need and Lee said, "This would make a great Rotary project because of the remarkable conflict resolution and promotion of peace." Subsequent visits were arranged, and Rotarians John & Rose Moon, DGE Bob Gebhard ([Pasadena Rotary Club](#)), Bill Bowes and PDG John Painter (North Shore Rotary Club), David & Karen Shaw, Ward Pendleton & Greg Pendley ([Sugar Land Rotary Club](#)), all became involved with the project.

DGE Bob Gebhard then took this project on as his banner project when he became District Governor in July 2013. The Sugar Land Rotary Club also took this on as their banner project. DG Gebhard and the Sugar Land club sponsored a request for a Rotary International Foundation grant that was written by Rotarian Vicki Brentin, Houston Club and Greg Pendley, Sugar Land Club. This grant was for funding vocational training through the Alvin Community College at Darrington.

Altogether, through a joint effort of Rotarians and their contacts \$2,228,500 was raised. As it turned out, the seminary didn't need the gym to have two floors, but one floor plus the balcony remodeled. This allowed surplus funds to support the seminary. At DG Gebhard’s district conference, PDG John Painter and PDG Steve Harris made an appeal for contributions. (Now) DG Michelle Bohreer was the lead contributor. Major donor leaders were Steve & Lee Harris, David & Karen Shaw, John & Rose Moon, Dr B J Westbrook, Dan Meehan, and Stewart Morris. The largest donors were the Parks Foundation and the George Foundation. Through their initial generosity, a dream became a reality, and the Darrington Prison Seminary had its own building.

About 35 Texas prisons have a team of 3-4 Field Ministers. Texas has the largest prison system in the world second only to China. A 5-year study being led by Baylor University professor Dr Byron Johnson, is showing a dramatic drop in violence, and a dramatic increase in conflict resolution and peace in the prisons with these Field Ministers.

For more information regarding this project, contact PDG Steve Harris at [saharris8@yahoo.com](mailto:saharris8@yahoo.com).