



National Ministries  
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## REV. MICHELE BRADLEY

### Pastor, Church of Hope

South Dakota State Women's Prison  
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Before going to seminary, the Rev. Michele Bradley worked at a government-funded preschool. "When dealing with troubled families, I often thought that what was needed most was God in the lives of mothers," she says. "Here at the South Dakota Women's Prison the majority of the women are mothers. Through Church of Hope, we see them blossom as they learn to know God and work to reconstruct their lives and relationships."

While she began as a church planter at the prison, Bradley was commissioned as a home missionary three years later. "This ministry is truly home mission work—we are reaching an unreached people group," says Bradley. "Many prisons in this country have a higher population than many of our towns; it is important that there be a church presence in prisons."

Bradley has found myths of "hardened criminals" and prisoners using religion as a false front to be far from the truth. "We are catching these women as they hit bottom," she says. "At this time in their lives, they are very receptive to God."

Most of the women struggle with low self-esteem and have difficulty believing that they can be forgiven for the wrongs they've committed. "My role is to help them experience forgiveness and hope," says Bradley. "In Christ, lives really can change."

The Church of Hope is a congregational model for prison ministry. "The church makes a more positive impact on inmates' lives because they are

full member participants," explains Bradley. "The services are very good. The women take turns reading Scripture lessons, providing special music, and helping serve communion."

As in any church, baptisms are among the most meaningful experiences in the life of Church of Hope. "What a celebration!" says Bradley. "A member of the church is selected to pray aloud for each woman as she is being baptized. It is always a touching and deeply spiritual moment."

Michele Bradley is the mother of two adult children, a son and a daughter.

### EDUCATION

M.Div., North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD; B.S. in elementary education, University of Maine, Portland, ME

### EXPERIENCE

Program director, Child's Play Day Care, Chester, VA

### IMPORTANT DATES:

- Ordained: May 1997
- Began church planting work at South Dakota Women's Prison in July 1997
- Commissioned an American Baptist home missionary: June 2000
- Birthday: July 9

### HOME MISSION HIGHLIGHTS:

- Of the approximately 220 women incarcerated at the South Dakota Women's Prison, one-third are involved in the Church of Hope.
- Studies show that inmates who are involved in a church while in prison are much less likely to re-offend upon their release.