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▲ Pastor Dennis Page from Village Church provides instruction to volunteers for Christmas Behind Bars.

Former inmates orchestrate spiritual prison break

Restrained behind bars, with contact rarely initiated by those in the free world, how do inmates find encouragement and hope? Christmas Behind Bars is one solution to share hope with those locked away. Started by former inmate Lemuel Vega, this ministry uses goody-packed Christmas bags to introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The prisoners who receive these bags may remain behind bars of iron for years. Nevertheless, this program is designed to release those prisoners from the invisible bars of guilt and shame.

The bag packing event involved hundreds of participants at the sixth Change Day event at Andrews University. Pastor Dennis Page from Village Church, a former federal inmate, orchestrated the stuffing of 8,600 bags to send to prisoners behind bars. The bags were sent to four state prisons and one county jail.

Andrews University students, faculty, staff, Village Church staff, and Village Elementary School fifth and sixth grades all teamed up on five production lines and filled thousands of bags in only a few hours. The bags included sweet treats,

nutritious delights and sweet words of courage. Literature placed in the bags included spiritual books and pamphlets, free book offers and encouraging “thinking of you” cards written by children.

Christ told his disciples: *Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me* (Matthew 25:34–36).

Years ago, one small church reached out to Lemuel when he was in prison and introduced the gospel that changed his life. He now actively works to free others who need light shown in the darkness. Please pray that these packages work to bring hope to the minds of those who are physically restrained but still have the opportunity to become spiritually unshackled.

To find out more about Christmas Behind Bars, you can visit its website at christmasbehindbars.org. There is a section on the website where you can request a free information packet be sent to a loved one who is in prison. ■

Robert Rice, Ph.D., Bible worker at Village Church

Illinois holds 34th constituency session

FAMILIAR FACE ADDED TO ILLINOIS LEADERSHIP TEAM

Delegates of the Illinois Conference elected executive officers and departmental directors during its 34th quadrennial constituency session on Oct. 23, 2022. John Gryss who had been serving as the executive secretary for the past five years was voted as the new conference president. “My wife and I are humbled and thankful for the vote of confidence to serve His people in the Illinois Conference. It is my prayer that God will grant us the wisdom to lead this conference, side-by-side with my fellow officers, with a spirit of humility, compassion and Christian love,” says Gryss.

After the election of the president, delegates voted Michael Campos to serve as the executive secretary. No stranger to the Illinois Conference, he previously served as director of Youth, Young Adult, Pathfinders, Adventurers and Camp Ministries. “My family and I will miss the Youth Department greatly, but we trust in God’s leading in our lives. We are committed to continue to support the Youth Department from my new area of responsibility and look forward to serving the rest of my Illinois Conference family,” says Campos.

The third executive officer elected was Douglas Reeves. The only officer returning to his administrative role, he has been serving as Conference treasurer since May 2020. “I thank God for the opportunity to continue serving the Illinois Conference in my current role. My commitment to the Adventist Church is to continue to serve with integrity and focus our resources and energy to the proclamation of the gospel,” says Reeves.

After election of executive officers, delegates proceeded to elect the following departmental directors: Katrina