



Two BIG Surprises

by Norman Beckham

What are the two biggest surprises I have received in retirement?

Well, they are not being able to get my sleep out in the mornings or spending more time with my family. Those pleasures are wonderful, but they were no surprise.

My first big surprise was discovering a Spirit-led, God-blessed, and incredibly fruitful ministry that makes a huge difference in thousands of lives. The second surprise is that almost every senior adult can have a part in this ministry. It costs little, but the results are enormous.

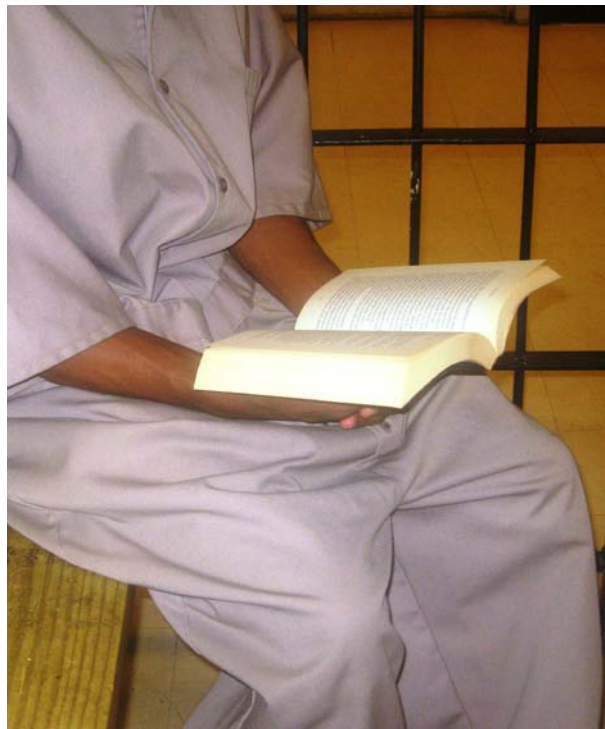
My wife, Donna, and I spent most of our adult lives as missionaries. We served with the SBC Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) until a health problem prevented our return to Venezuela. We received an unexpected blessing when God led me to serve as an associational missionary in New York and Michigan. For more than 20 years we were involved in church planting, enlisting volunteers, working with mission churches, and helping pastors as we served with the Home Mission Board (currently

the North American Mission Board).

Now Donna and I live in Cary, N.C. It is here God led us to Christian Library International (CLI). During the past eight years, CLI has collected and sent over 350,000 gently used Bibles and Christian books to prisoners in more than 1000 prisons in all 50 states.

Kathleen Skaar is the founder and director of CLI. Her office is located in a wing of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. She says prison chaplains are thrilled by the answer to their prayers in the form of Bibles and books.

All the books are stamped with the name and address of CLI and an invitation to write. Last year CLI received more than 5000 letters from men and women inmates, telling exciting stories of people coming to know Christ. Other letters express thanks for Bibles and describe loving Christian fellowship within prison walls. Every inmate who writes CLI receives a personal reply from a CLI volunteer along with



a book. "It is, without a doubt, the most rewarding volunteer work I've ever done," said Carol Weathersbee, a volunteer letter writer.

When prison chaplains told CLI of their need for Bible studies, Skaar responded by writing a series of 15 Bible study lessons for inmates. When CLI receives a lesson from an inmate, it is reviewed and returned along with the next lesson. When the whole series of lessons is completed, the inmate receives a certificate.

I was shocked to learn there are over 2 million adults incarcerated in America and more than 1 million children and youth from age 7 to 17 in youth confinement facilities.

In his book, *Prison Ministry*, author Lennie Spitalale explains why ministry to prisoners results in so many professions of faith and changed lives. He says, "Where else can you enter a place that is filled from top to bottom with people who know they have done wrong and, in most cases, readily admit it? Where else can you find so many who are genuinely sorry for what they have done?" He also stresses that inmates will read Christian books even though they would not have done so outside of prison.

CLI receives most of its books from church book drives, but there is a tremendous opportunity for senior adults to take part in this ministry. Here are three things you can do:

1. Many of us have good Christian books and extra Bibles taking up space on our bookshelves or stored away in boxes. Don't let these valuable volumes go to waste. Ship one or more boxes of books to CLI. The address is:

Opposite Page Bottom Left:

Top Right:

Bottom Right:



Christian Library International
3800A Hillcrest Drive
Raleigh, NC 27610
(919) 212-8122

CLI volunteers pack and ship boxes of books and Bibles to prisons every Tuesday.

2. Check out the information and testimonies on the CLI website, www.cli-nc.org. Encourage your church family to have a book drive and ship the books to CLI. Details are on the website. Our church, Westwood Baptist in Cary, donated 589 books and Bibles.

3. Most of all, pray for this ministry and especially for the inmates who are reading and being touched by God. **m**

Norman Beckham and his wife, Donna, live in Cary, N.C. They served for more than 25 years on the home mission field. He now enjoys traveling, spending time with family, and teaching Sunday School.

