

Prison Ministry Veteran Ray Hall Dies at 87

Raymond E. Hall, creator of the Prison Book project that has delivered millions of books to correctional facilities worldwide, died Feb. 10 at the age of 87.

"My heart is broken, but I know that he is in a much better place," Hall's wife, Joyce said. "With God's help we will keep Ray's vision of flooding every prison and jail in America with Christian books and Bibles."

The Prison Book project began in August of 1994, with a goal of delivering 1,000 books to the Brevard County (Fla.) jail within two years. By August 1997, they had placed 39,886 books into the Brevard facilities. At the time, they stopped counting and began shipping books to every prison and jail in Florida.

In August 1999, they began shipping nationwide. In February 2001, they were serving more than 750 facilities and missionaries in six countries.

The North Brevard Business Directory described Hall as a "deeply religious man."

"Ray had counseled prisoners at the Brevard Correctional Institution and kept thinking of how crime just keeps getting worse," the website said. "Ray believed he heard the voice of the Divine one day while standing outside on his patio. He heard a clear voice that said '*clean westerns*.' This Ray believes was his answer to the state of our society and the criminals and crimes that exist within it. So he took some of his own books to the county jail so they could be distributed through the institution's programs office. They went over so well that Ray made this his mission in life.

"He would find constructive and Christian books and distribute them to as many jails and prisons as possible. Beyond anyone's expectations the ministry has grown to be one of the most successful national prison ministries with nearly three million books mailed to prisoners nationwide in three years. But to Ray the most important part of this project is that he knows that it has turned people around. After visiting the Brevard County jail and seeing what the prisoners were reading, stuff like Harlequin romances, Ray decided that these men and women who were searching for the meaning of life needed literature with a more spiritual nature so he sought Christian books.

"He also realized that they needed to be entertained too so he also supplied them with westerns and other constructive books. Constructive meaning not antisocial behavior, gratuitous violence or cynicism in any form. In a western novel you read a story in which bad has consequences and good has rewards.

"Ray became a well-known figure in 1994. He would be seen at Brevard County flea markets and garage sales looking for books. Three years later in 1997, he had enough books to go statewide. Ray also started calling book publishers and asking them if they would donate books for his project. They started sending by the pallet! One publisher called and asked him if he'd like to have 20,000 books, and another offered him 5,000 books. Ray let the publishers know that this was an excellent marketing opportunity for them also.

"If a prisoner reads one of your books and recommends it to another prisoner ... and they recommend it to their family members. .. you have a lot of people reading your book," he told them.

"Ray also figured that dozens of people will read each one of the 45 books he sends per box. Having prisoners read is a more cost and time efficient method of ministry than just about any other form of activity in the field. 'Every box we send is the

equivalent of about five years of ministry,” he said. “Ray knew that the books were turning lives around because he heard from the prisons and from the prisoners themselves. One inmate on death row wrote: *‘From bringing reading into my life, I have given my life to Jesus Christ.’*” {eo}

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