

CLAUDE EDWARDS

Pathfinders Help Inmates Celebrate Christmas Behind Bars

BY HUBERT SWEARINE

'Twas not necessarily a silent night as the halls of the Florida Conference office were decked with warm smiles, cheerful singing, and busy hands of Pathfinders from Central Florida. It was indeed the season of giving as club members poured love into each care package for inmates in cold cells at Orange County Correctional Facility in Orlando, Fla. This infectious outpouring of love and warmth would help many experience Christmas Behind Bars.

On December 17, 50 Pathfinders and staff met to assemble 2,825 care packages of socks, cookies, stamps, envelopes, Bibles, and copies of *Steps to Christ*. These parcels of love were distributed to inmates on December 23 — just in time for Christmas.

This benevolent act impressed the prison's chaplain who was very appreciative that young people were so involved, as this was a first-time event for the jail. Residents, many of whom have no loved ones to show affection, expressed their gratitude. For others, it was a simple joy to know that while they were unable to enjoy some of the freedoms that others have, they were still able to experience Christmas Behind Bars.

One Pathfinder, Nathalie Gutierrez, said she was blessed to have participated in the Christmas Behind Bars ministry. "It was an experience I will never forget," said Nathalie, "as I was able to give back at least a little of all the blessings God has given me. I never thought I would be able to work in a ministry like this, but our God is a great God. We can take a very important lesson from Jesus who spent most of His life helping those who society called outcast. I felt a great satisfaction."



MARTIN BUTLER

Fifty Pathfinders and staff assembled 2,825 Christmas care packages for prison inmates.



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Rachel Santiago (left) and Elisabeth Batista of the Buenaventura Lakes Spanish Pathfinder club prepare Bibles and study request cards for the care packages.



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Daniel Melendez and Lurlet Ashley-Gordon created the Christmas behind Bars event.

God impressed this project on the hearts of Lurlet Ashley-Gordon, Cluster 3 Pathfinder Coordinator for Central Florida, and Daniel Melendez, Orlando Central Church Pathfinder Director. These two individuals, along with team members, searched for a way to make someone's Christmas much brighter. The result was the start of a ministry which garnered the support of Pathfinders, Florida Conference Youth Director Pedro Perez, and business entities across Central Florida, along with families and well-wishers from the community at large. Initial support was so overwhelming, plans are now underway to make this an annual event.

It is always a joy to know that Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and young people in particular, can find creative ways to share the love of Christ to men and women in need — even Christmas Behind Bars.