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COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP)—Giving Rick Warren's best-selling *The Purpose Driven Life* to prisoners is nothing new for church volunteers.

But St. Andrews Baptist Church in Columbia, S.C., is distributing the book on a much broader scale than most groups. Church members gave a copy to every prisoner in the South Carolina Department of Corrections, distributing 24,000 copies in one day.

Pastor Greg Barr came up with the idea after his involvement with a 30-year-old Bible study group at a prison in Columbia. The group had gone through Warren's 40 Days of Purpose program together and wanted to expand it.

As a result, in a single day, prison workers and Baptist volunteers transported thousands of books to the state's 29 prisons.

"It was a surprise for some of our folks because in a lot of the prisons, they were expecting that we'd set up tables at the chapel and let inmates come to us, but it wasn't like that," Barr said. "They just sent us out to the dorms.

It wasn't a real sterile deal. You were out there just interacting with the guys."

Leaders at Warren's congregation, Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., sold the church special prison-tailored versions of the books for \$1 a copy. South Carolina corrections officials, who normally limit the number of books inmates can have at a given time, agreed to waive the limit for 30 days so Warren's book wouldn't count against it.

Volunteers from the two local Baptist associations and the South Carolina Baptist Convention worked with Prison Fellowship and Changing the Way, a group that helps ex-offenders readjust to life outside of prison. The groups have trained their volunteers to teach Bible studies based on the book, with the hope that prisoners will return to their cell blocks and lead additional studies there.

A former inmate who works for Changing the Way Ministries, Chris Batson, said he cared deeply about the book-delivery project because of its impact on him.

"While I was incarcerated, I was given a copy of *The Purpose Driven Life*, and it changed my life by reminding me that God had not given up on me and that he still had a plan for my life," he said.

Walter Andrews, a member at St. Andrews, said the experience even affected his prayer life—now he can "put faces to the needs that are there" on his list, he said.

"I must say I had mixed emotions about visiting the prison, especially after I realized we would actually go into the dorms and interact with the inmates," he said. "It turned out to be a very positive experience for me."

It's a project that will continue, if Barr has anything to do with it. His church has purchased 35,000 books so far, and his next plan is to send

thousands of them to the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and other county jails.

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