



# Best in the Business



## *Pastor Makes a Difference in Indiana Corrections*

*By Lisa Harlow*

**W**illiam Babb was a pastor for 19 years before he switched gears to work in the field of corrections in 1985. With mounting medical bills from a thyroid condition, Babb, then 41, needed a new job to get back on his feet. His brother-in-law was a superintendent with the Indiana Department of Correction (DOC) and persuaded him to give the field a try. On April 1, 2011, the 26-year DOC veteran retired as chaplain of Indiana's Miami Correctional Facility.

Babb spent his first five years as a correctional officer, serving at South Bend Juvenile Correctional Facility and Westville Correctional Facility. In 1990, he was promoted to sergeant and worked in the training department. During that same year, he was called to work at the chapel when they needed coverage. "That changed my life. I knew I was going to be a chaplain," Babb said. "I was gripped by the needs of the guys. They had no hope for the future."

Babb soon earned his master's degree and pastoral accreditation. He was promoted to chaplain at Indiana State Prison in 1995, counseling inmates serving extended sentences and dealing with suicides of both offenders and staff. In 2002, Babb was transferred to Miami Correctional Facility, where he served until his retirement. With 3,174 inmates and only four chaplains, he was responsible for up to 1,400 men himself.

Among his many accomplishments, Babb was a founding member of the DOC's Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM), a regional organization whose primary purpose is to help staff minimize stress and to accelerate the recovery of those who have been in stressful situations or

incidents. He was also president of the American Protestant Correctional Chaplain's Association and the central regional manager for the American Correctional Chaplaincy Association.

In 2007, Babb found his true calling when he became lead chaplain on the PLUS unit (Purposeful Living Units Serve), a community environment that gives offenders the opportunity to focus on the core values of respect, responsibility, honesty, tolerance and compassion through the exploration of secular and faith perspectives. "I waited 23 years to see something positive in corrections," Babb said. The 16-month PLUS program — the largest in the state — teaches inmates how to communicate, diffuse anger and accept diversity.

"My ministry is in the dorm with the guys. I want to be behind the walls where I can make a difference and have the satisfaction of giving these guys hope. They're society's rejects. The drug addicts, they think 'once a junkie, always a junkie,'" said Babb. "I get their life stories. It's wrenching. I find that if we get off the future and start focusing on today, that really makes a difference."

The PLUS Unit includes programs such as 24/7 Dads, which helps provide tools for offenders to become responsible fathers and role models to children, and Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) for couples. "It's taken a lifetime to get where they are," said Babb. "To see their growth is really excellent."

PLUS offenders work hard to raise money for books and equipment to keep their program self-sustaining and to make donations to other organizations. Babb came up with the idea to create a food cell to sell pizza and other fast food to inmates to raise



*William Babb*

money. PLUS raised more than \$1,500 for the American Cancer Society and \$2,500 for Logansport Juvenile Correctional Facility to help its employees start their own PLUS program. "We were the first institution whose guys on the PLUS unit gave \$500 to Crime Stoppers," Babb said. "We have given back more than \$20,000 to our community, and that all comes right from the inmates."

"For the past 26 years, Chaplain Babb has been a true asset to the Indiana DOC and the Miami Correctional Facility. He works tirelessly with the offenders providing services and programs through the PLUS Program ... His compassion for his job is evident in his commitment to his work. It is not just a job, it is a calling," said Superintendent Mark Sevier. "Not only is he someone the offenders can count on, he has always been there for staff as well ... While Miami Correctional Facility will go on, it will be difficult to replace such a dedicated employee."

At 68, Babb remains pastor of two small farming community churches, Deedsville and Ebenezer United Methodist, and he will volunteer with the Indiana DOC. While he will no longer be on staff, he will always be known as "chaplain" to the inmates he faithfully serves.

---

*Lisa Harlow is a contributing writer for Corrections Today.*