# Inspired by King's Letters from Jail

## Books to Prisoners promotes literacy

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A converted garage off a ated around the world. northeast Portland side street clearinghouse to send imprisoned people nationwide thousands of books each year.

King Jr. from a jail cell in Birmingham reflect some of the motivation behind the dozens of hours each week that volunteers log in an effort to promote literacy among the country's most disadvantaged populations.

"The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust," King wrote in response to fellow clergymen who questioned the radicalism of his civil-rights actions that landed him in prison.

Book-sending volunteers can cite reams of data to show that the criminal-justice system re- ately charged in federal court mains unequal.

Even though violent crime and property crime have been declining since the 1990s, accord- ship Conference on Civil Rights for books." "I wish we were ing to the Bureau of Justice report titled Bush Administra- obsolete and that everyone had Statistics, the U.S. has the tion Takes Aim. world's largest inmate population at 2.5 million. With less than oners program, it hasn't gotten

Civil-rights groups have ralcent of all U.S. black males white males.

tion, America houses over 25 answer ever-larger boxes of percent of the people incarcer- handwritten requests from prisoners for books.

After moving several times in makes for an unsuspecting lied against resurfacing dispari- the last few years, the ties, seeing that about 10.4 per- organization's new location at Northeast Morton Street is less between the ages of 25 and 29 than a month away from reach-The words of Martin Luther are sentenced and in prison, ing its first anniversary. The compared to 2.4 percent of His-cramped garage houses two panic males and 1.2 percent of desks, thousands of books and often more than a half dozen

### Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

"Letter from Birmingham Jail" April, 1963

ately arrested ..., disproportion- than 300 square feet. and then sentenced under espe- job done," says Kim Garrison, cially harsh statutes and guide- who donates her time out of lines," according to the Leader- social-justice values and a "love

5 percent of the world's popula- any easier over the years to

"Minorities are disproportion-volunteers in a space of no more

"It's not huge, but it gets the access to a complete library." For Portland's Books to Pris- At most prisons, pulp fiction like

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PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jamie Bolwyn finds literature requests sent through Portland Books to Prisoners, an organization that strives to increase literacy among incarcerated populations and raise awareness about criminal-justice disparities.

## Martin Luther King, Jr.

#### **Annual City-Wide Worship Service**



Theme:

Where Do We Go From Here:

"Chaos or Community?"

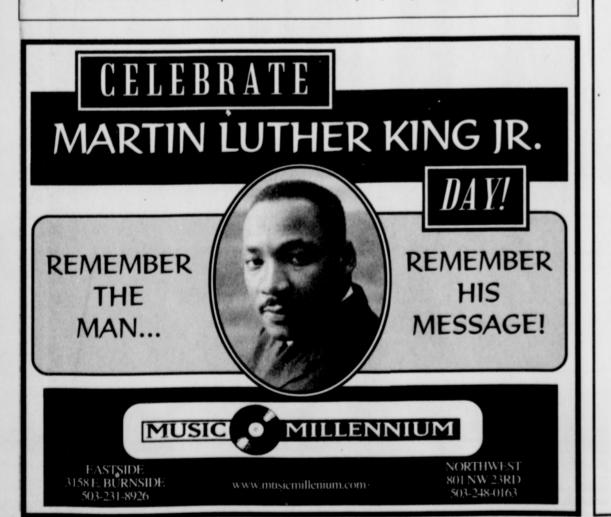
Keynote Speaker: Bishop A.A. Wells When: Sunday, January 13, 2008—6:00pm

Where: Bethel AME Church

5828 NE 8th Avenue (8th and Jarrett)

Sponsored by: Albina Ministerial Alliance (AMA)

For further information, please contact Dr. LeRoy Haynes, Jr. (503) 287-0261



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