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***VAN BUREN OUTREACH PROGRAM
AWARDED CARGO VAN***

Hunger Alliance Selects Agency to Receive Top Grant Award

FORT SMITH, AR: (May 17, 2006) – The Van Buren First Assembly of God (VBFAOG) Outreach Program announced today that they were selected by the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (AHRA) as a Hearts Helping Hunger grant recipient of a 2006 Chevrolet Express cargo van. The van was awarded to the food pantry in February of this year as part of the Alliance’s first-time grant process that helped build the capacity of local hunger relief organizations in their efforts to provide food for the hungry. Other items that were awarded to agencies across the state included freezers, refrigerators, fuel cards, shelving, and computers.

“Having the ability to provide grant funds to benefit our members and their local agencies, such as Van Buren First Assembly, has been a tremendous blessing,” said Deb Alich, Executive Director of AHRA. “One of the biggest challenges in hunger relief is increasing the capacity to

meet the demand of those we serve and then sustaining that capacity. Funds for fighting hunger and food insecurity are rare in our state, yet our network is called upon more and more to be the answer to meeting the needs of low-income, struggling Arkansans. Van Buren answers that call in a big way in the River Valley and we are grateful for their commitment.”

Serving over 40,000 different people each year, the Van Buren First Assembly of God Outreach Program was chosen by the Alliance for its programs directed at helping those in need in the River Valley Area. After going through a review and selection process, the Outreach Program was selected to receive the cargo van valued at over \$21,000.

“The van is an answer to our prayers,” said Rev. Clarence Smith, Outreach Pastor at Van Buren First Assembly. “With the difficult choices that families have to make these days and the growing demand for food assistance, the van will allow us to feed more hungry kids, seniors, and others in our community that need help feeding their families.”

The Outreach Program had begun measures to purchase a used van to expand their feeding capacity, but the gift from the Alliance will allow the ministry to focus those resources on putting more food on the table for those in need. Smith noted that the van is already making a difference in their community, “Because of the van, we’ve added three new routes which enables us to serve 70 more households. That’s 180 more people who won’t have to go to bed hungry and who’ll be able to put enough food on the table for their families. The van has also allowed us to advertise more about the help that is available in the form of free meals and grocery assistance.”

The Van Buren First Assembly of God Outreach Program is a member agency of the River Valley Regional Food Bank (RVRFB) located in Fort Smith. Part of the Alliance network of Arkansas hunger relief organizations, the RVRFB is composed of 183 area food pantries and soup kitchens serving seven counties in the River Valley area. In 2005, the organization

distributed more than 3.4 million pounds of food and grocery products to individuals seeking emergency food assistance.

“With programs like Papa’s Search & Rescue and school back packs, Van Buren First Assembly has been very active in hunger relief in our area,” said Stephen Dye, Executive Director of the River Valley Regional Food Bank. “Hunger in the River Valley region is very real and its effects can be profound - whether it’s the child who is unable to concentrate on studies or a senior whose immune system is weakened, hunger erodes the quality of life for many of our neighbors. This van will enable Van Buren First Assembly to make further inroads in support of hunger relief and improving the lives of those in need.”

AHRA serves as the central resource for its members across Arkansas to facilitate partnerships and sharing of donations, provide a better transportation system and coordination for more efficiently moving food across the state, and conduct research, awareness, education, and advocacy on the issue of hunger. The Alliance recently announced the results of one of the largest, most-comprehensive studies conducted on domestic hunger – *Hunger in America 2006*. This study identified that an estimated 51,700 different people were served by the River Valley Regional Food Bank in 2005, with 58% of those served being children and the elderly.

“We’re so proud of the work of local hunger relief agencies like the Outreach Program at Van Buren First Assembly; it exemplifies dedication to ending hunger in our state,” Alich said. “It’s through collaborative partnerships, like the ones with our members and others on the front lines, that we will be able to truly make a positive impact on hunger in Arkansas.”