

800-plus profess Christ at Sturgis motorcycle rally

By Keith Collier

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STURGIS, S.D. (BP)--As motorcycle engines roared, more than 4,200 leather-clad motorcyclists and their friends at the 69th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally heard a three-minute testimony of how Christ could radically change their lives. Just for listening, they also were given a chance to win a brand new, black Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

For the fourth year in a row, the Sturgis Motorcycle Giveaway sponsored by the Dakota Baptist Convention and North American Mission Board used volunteers from across the nation to give personal testimonies Aug. 3-8 about how they met Christ and to invite rally-goers to invite Him into their lives. By the end of the week, 835 people made professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

For one week in August each year, the small, quiet towns of the South Dakota Black Hills transform as approximately 500,000 motorcyclists and wannabes descend on the region for the bike rally. The atmosphere promotes raucous parties and sinful living, but it is into such darkness that God calls Christians to shine the light of Christ.

In 2006, the DBC decided to do something about the sea of lostness.

"We talked about wanting to put together some kind of intentional evangelism event at Sturgis," Garvon Golden, the convention's associate executive director, said. "We felt that if our two states are drawing such a large crowd of people from all over the world, we have the responsibility to try to share Christ with these folks and have some type of evangelistic presence."

Partnering with evangelist Ronnie Hill of Texas, the DBC staff decided to use the motorcycle giveaway to draw people to the booth so the staff and volunteers from the Dakotas and across the nation would have the opportunity to share the Gospel.

"You have to start with relevance," Golden said. "You have to start with something that's going to get their attention, something that's going to make them stop and say, 'Yeah, I'll listen to you for three minutes.'"

Regardless of his or her response to the testimony, each individual was allowed to fill out a raffle ticket for the Harley.

"Our main focus is to share with people the Gospel," Golden said. "We have no



Thousands of motorcycles, their riders and onlookers fill the streets for the 69th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota, attended by an estimated 400,000 bikers and wannabes from across the nation. The Dakota Baptist Convention's evangelism tent was on Main Street, directly across from the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum. The tent was fronted by a new shiny black Harley-Davidson motorcycle to be given away at week's end to someone who had listened to a three-minute testimony of one of more than 200 volunteers who also had come from across the nation to participate in the Dakota convention's evangelism initiative. *Photo by Randy Hughes*



Hellfighter and Southwestern Seminary alumnus Adam Covington shares the Gospel with teenagers during the 69th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.



problem with Christians signing up for the motorcycle. We just want to be able to share with people who have never heard the Gospel and we try to make sure we have an opportunity to do that."

Jim Pratt, area missionary for the Siouxland Association of Southern Baptists in eastern South Dakota, said each witnessing opportunity was a chance to plant a seed.

"I was hellbound and was going to bust hell wide open, and God used some people in a similar fashion to love me, and their love allowed me to hear the message," Pratt said. "Up to that point, I wouldn't listen to the message because I didn't feel that it was genuine. So, I'm hoping that people will see that we're genuine.

"Sometimes people are hurting, and they don't realize it," Pratt said. "They're trying to find satisfaction in everything but Christ -- whether it's motorcycles, alcohol, drugs or relationships -- but the only satisfying relationship is with Christ."

David Badger, a member of the F.A.I.T.H. Riders Motorcycle Ministry, saw Sturgis with new eyes this year as he shared Christ with people who came to the booth. Although he had been to the rally many times before, this was the first year he came as a Christian.

"This is the first year I've come with Christ in my heart," Badger said. "The other years I came, I should have been one of the ones walking into this tent. I've been on both sides of the fence. I've done alcohol. I've chased women.... I didn't care about people. Now I care about them."

Follow-up for those who prayed to receive Christ is a high priority for Golden and his team. Names are sent to the Evangelism Response Center at NAMB, which in turn sends the names to churches in the areas where the people live. Golden also sends names to state evangelism directors.

This year, Calvary Baptist Church in Rapid City, S.D., hosted three evening events during Sturgis designed to encourage and disciple new believers. Sponsored by several Set Free churches in the Dakotas, Montana and Colorado, these events provided a Christian environment with free food, music and a discipleship-based message.

The DBC enlisted nearly 200 volunteers to help with this year's rally. Several state conventions, including the Georgia Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, and the Conservative Baptists of Virginia, offered financial support, and the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma sent trained chaplains to minister to and pray with vendors throughout the week.

Golden said he is thankful for the support of Southern Baptists from across the country and is excited about the growing number of churches and individuals from the Dakotas who volunteered.



LifeWay Christian Resources for the first time sent a mission team to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. The 15 LifeWay volunteers distributed 3,000 Biker New Testaments paid for by contributions over the year from LifeWay employees. The LifeWay volunteer in the photo shows one of the Biker New Testaments to two young men. *Photo by Randy Hughes*



"Give me three minutes, just three minutes, to tell you my story," a volunteer in the Dakota Baptist Convention's evangelism tent at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally seems to be saying to a young woman whose body language says, "Yeah? Why should I?" *Photo by Randy Hughes*



Southwestern Seminary student Michael Martin shares the Gospel with a biker as Blane Jeffords, a Hellfighter from Jacksonville, Fla., pumps gas during a free gas giveaway during the 69th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota. *Photo by Keith Collier*

"One of the things that we're hoping to see happen over the next few years is that more of the people from our own churches in the Dakotas will become involved in the ministry," Golden said. "I'm looking for the day when we can devote two full days of just Dakota people working the booth and sharing Christ. We've already been talking about that among our regional and area missionaries to try to pull people from our own churches to be a part."

David Kirchoff, a 23-year-old college student from Gillette, Wyo., won the motorcycle.

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Keith Collier writes for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. To learn more about the motorcycle ministry, visit sturgisbikegiveaway.com.

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