

Ministry to bikers conveys Gospel message

By Staff

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STURGIS, S.D. (BP)--Groups from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and LifeWay Christian Resources were among those ministering in Christ's name at the 69th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota.

SOUTHWESTERN

Students and faculty from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary joined the Hellfighters Motorcycle Ministry in street evangelism, bike parking and a free gas giveaway July 31-Aug. 8 in order to share Christ with bikers from around the world who attended the rally.

"It was awesome to see so many groups, from different walks of life, partnering together to share the Gospel for the week," Adam Covington, a recent Southwestern graduate and president of the Hellfighters chapter in Fort Worth Texas, said.

"We had bikers, seminary students and church members on their first mission trip ever, all here with the same mission: to seek out the lost and introduce them to Jesus Christ. It doesn't get more exciting than that."

Hellfighters, founded by Richard and Gina Headrick in Laurel, Miss., runs The Mission at the Cross, a facility used to meet the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the underprivileged. Located only blocks from downtown Sturgis, the mission served as a base for ministry for 130 volunteers during the week.

Teams traveled on motorcycles and in cars to various stops in the Black Hills to engage people in personal evangelism. The region boasts many popular, scenic rides and towns, including Mount Rushmore, Devil's Tower, the Badlands and Deadwood. At stops along each of the routes, teams passed out Gospel tracts and Bibles as they shared Christ.

Hellfighters also operated a parking lot in downtown Sturgis, where bikers could park for a donation. As people parked their motorcycles, students and volunteers shared Christ with them. Donations were given to the Mission at the Cross and local churches to use in ministry to children and the homeless throughout the year.

On Aug. 7, Hellfighters sponsored a gas giveaway at a station in downtown Sturgis. After purchasing \$1,000 worth of gas, they filled up people's bikes as they shared the Gospel with them.

When people asked why they would give away free gas, teams responded, "We want to show you God's love. Just like we are freely paying for your gas, Jesus Christ freely gave His life to pay the debt of your sins." More than 20 people prayed to receive Christ during the gas giveaway.

OKLAHOMA

Keith Burkhart of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma said God moved among more than 50 chaplains from Oklahoma who volunteered at the bike rally.

For the fourth year in a row, the Sturgis Motorcycle Giveaway used volunteers from across the nation to give personal testimonies about how they met Christ and to ask rally-goers to invite Him into their lives. By the end of the week, 835 people made professions of faith in Jesus Christ. Just for listening to a testimony, everyone was given a chance to win a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

"The decisions in the evangelism tent weren't quite as high as they have been, but we had more than 800 for the week and more than 4,300 Gospel presentations," Burkhart, a family and men's ministries specialist, said. "Out of that, our Oklahoma folks led 149 people to the Lord."

Burkhart was among a large group of F.A.I.T.H. Riders who received training as chaplains and then worked in Sturgis, Custer, Keystone and Hill City during the week ministering to vendors, rally attendees and local residents.

"Our chaplain work made me a believer," Burkhart said. "I was a bit unsure of the difference we would make, let's say, at the beginning, but in the end, I was blown away by the impact it made. People's lives were touched, and it really showed me how valuable chaplaincy is."

"We went into Custer, Keystone and Hill City and of course worked the streets of Sturgis as well. We ministered to a lot of local people and we won those little communities over. It was so special. We were so well received in the stores and out in the street."

The ministry expanded into a local hospital when a vendor in Custer had a need.

"One of the vendors in Custer had an emergency situation, so we spent some time with her," Burkhart said. "She said, 'We do the circuit, travel all around and do all the motorcycle shows and we've been around various motorcycle ministries, but you guys are just different and so much better.' We got a lot of great compliments like that."

Burkhart said as exciting as it was to see how the ministry changed the lives of those in South Dakota, it was just as exciting to see how it changed the lives of the Oklahomans who went.

"The most exciting thing was seeing people lead someone to Christ for the very first time and what it did to change their life," he said. "We had several who had never led anyone to the Lord before who led up to 15 to the Lord that week, and they're changed forever."

Don Hunter, pastor of Grand Boulevard Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, led the Oklahoma chaplaincy ministry to Sturgis for the third straight year.

"God was awesome to us," he said. "The numbers were down as far as decisions go, but the vendors were happy. People were busier this year. And we were up in the number of people we were able to contact."

Hunter said the number of overall contacts made by the chaplains increased by at least 200 over last year, although he was still compiling his report.

He said the chaplains' impact was immediate this year as they talked with vendors and other people.

"We had a lot of requests to pray with folks on the spot, not just to take a prayer request to do later. They asked us, 'Will you pray with me right now?'"

"Also, a good third of them wanted to talk about the Lord as we went about our daily encouraging with them," Hunter said. "Our work went beyond the usual seed planting that we usually do and moved into the actual harvesting stage this year. We had some folks who really got on fire for the Lord during the week."

Hunter said the door is opening wider every year.

"I had calls from at least a half dozen vendors before the rally even started wanting to know if we were going to be there this year. They wanted to see us again. It's encouraging to know they want us there every year."

LIFEWAY

Ron Chandler and Mark King of LifeWay Christian Resources led a team of 16 employees on a mission trip to Sturgis for the motorcycle rally. Six of them rode their motorcycles up to South Dakota, and three of the team members loaded their motorcycles on a trailer for the trip.

The LifeWay group worked in the Sturgis Motorcycle Giveaway tent sponsored by the Dakota Baptist Convention and the North American Mission Board. The team also prayerwalked the streets of Sturgis for a couple of hours each day and gave away 3,000 Biker New Testaments paid for by contributions from LifeWay employees.

Chandler, manager of the direct sales section at LifeWay, first heard about the ministry a couple of years ago and attended by himself. Last year, he took King, director of LifeWay's direct marketing department.

"We came back and talked it up, and several other people started getting excited about going, and it just kind of mushroomed from there," Chandler said.

The two men tried to prepare the team for what to expect, but Chandler said the other members still were surprised by how warmly the crowd embraced their efforts.

"I think they were surprised at the number of people who came into the tent and the positive responses they got from the people," he said. "Everybody since they've come back has expressed the feeling that they had a really good experience, and I'd say most of them want to go back next year."

LifeWay, marking the first time it had sent a team to minister at the rally, paid half the cost of the trip and allowed the employees time off work.

"It was a really good trip. We had a good experience," Chandler said. "The one thing I think we didn't prepare them well for was the intensity of the three-hour shifts."

"When you're in the tent, it's one person after another coming in and you're sharing with them," guiding them in

prayer or getting them signed up for the giveaway," he said, "and as soon as you're finished with one, there's somebody else there waiting for you. Three hours sounds like a short shift, but it's very intense."

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Based on reports from Keith Collier of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bob Nigh of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger and Erin Roach of Baptist Press.

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