

## Revvng up for bikers in Myrtle Beach

By Mickey Noah

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MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. (BP)--Just like the infamous Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota, a similar gathering of a half-million bikers is held each year in South Carolina: Myrtle Beach Bike Week. And like Sturgis, some bikers arrive in Myrtle Beach rally with their tanks on empty physically and spiritually -- yet they depart with a life changed by Jesus Christ.

Decked out in black leather -- some with ZZ Top-sized beards, tattoos and assorted piercings -- they roar into this beach resort straddling shiny, pricey motorcycles to spend up to 10 days partying hearty. The last thing they expect is to meet Jesus, but nearly 200 did during last year's rally.

While some ministry had been going on during each May's rally, Todd Wood, a North American Mission Board resort missionary based in Myrtle Beach, wanted to have a greater impact and touch more lives.

"It's amazing to serve as a resort missionary here at Myrtle Beach," Wood says. "These bikers come here looking for a good time to party, but it gives us the opportunity as Southern Baptists to step up and share with them the real hope in life, and that's Jesus Christ. The only problem is that the rally is spread 40 miles up and down the coast, from the North Carolina line down to Garden City (S.C.). It's a big area to cover."

Wood -- with support from the local Waccamaw Baptist Association, the South Carolina Baptist Convention and Faith Riders groups in North and South Carolina -- studied Christian outreach at the Sturgis motorcycle rallies each August.

"We saw that in Sturgis, they were touching a lot of lives with three-minute testimonies," Wood said of a motorcycle giveaway that those who listen to one of the testimonies could enter. "So we took that and transitioned it into giving away free gasoline to bikers. We felt like if we could give every person that comes through our line \$10 worth of gas, we'd have three minutes to share our faith story with them. And we would ask them if they knew what it means to have a relationship with Christ."

So with a gasoline budget of \$10,000, Wood and about 100 volunteers representing 12 different Christian motorcycle ministries turned a Citgo gas station on nearby U.S. 17 into a filling station for Jesus.



North American Mission Board missionary Todd Wood visits with a biker during Myrtle Beach Bike Week in South Carolina. Wood and fellow Christians shared Christ with more than 1,500 motorcycle enthusiasts during last year's rally. *Photo courtesy of North American Mission Board*



A Southern Baptist volunteer holds a sign beckoning bikers to stop by for free gas in exchange for hearing a testimony of faith in Jesus Christ during last year's Myrtle Beach Bike Week in South Carolina. *Photo courtesy of North American Mission Board*



Pastor Tony Wright (left) of The Wright Ministry in Christ, based in White Plains, Md., prays with a fellow biker to receive Christ during last year's Myrtle Beach Bike Week in South Carolina. *Photo courtesy of North American Mission Board*

"The first thing bikers would ask is 'What's the deal? Why are you doing this?' Then we told them that the gas had already been paid for, that someone had purchased it on their behalf. Then we translated that into what Christ did -- how He paid for our sins committed in the past, present and future," Wood said.

Many had never heard the Gospel message before, Wood said. And who better to share the Gospel with these tough men and women than Christian bikers, some of whom had escaped lives of despair and hopelessness by accepting Christ.

"I came here to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ with my peers," said one big, middle-aged biker sporting a bandana and a full salt-and-pepper beard. His sleeveless vest identified him as a biker chaplain. "[God] gave me a testimony because of my past life. Today is the day to glorify Him."

Although 200 bikers accepted Christ during those brief three-minute stops for free gasoline, Wood lamented, "It just breaks my heart that we could only share with 1,500 or so who came through for gas."

Wood and his volunteers also handed out 2,500 free gift bags, each filled with a Biker's Bible and a DVD featuring Joe Covino, a Columbia, S.C., pastor and former biker himself.

"Many of our folks, even within our local association here in Waccamaw, don't understand who the bikers are," Wood said. "A lot of times we'll see the big, bushy hair, the beards and we see the rough-cut guys in black leather and we don't understand who they are."

"But this is somebody's dad, somebody's mom, somebody's child. And we begin to understand how Christ pictures every one of these people. They all mean the same to Him. It's a lost soul, another person He desires to have a relationship with," Wood said. "For us, it's so desperately important that we get out there and share the message of Christ with as many bikers as possible."

Wood and his volunteers already are working on this year's Myrtle Beach Bike Week. Instead of free gasoline, his Intracoastal Outreach ministry will be giving away a new \$12,000 Harley-Davidson motorcycle during the May 11-16 rally. They also will serve bikers 1,100 pounds of free barbecue. The attending bikers, of course, also will get a strong dose of the Gospel.

As a NAMB missionary since 2002, Wood, 38, serves as director of Intracoastal Outreach with the Waccamaw Baptist Association. He and wife Amy are the parents of three daughters: Ellyn Kate, Caroline and Abby.

A native of Greenville, S.C., Wood is a graduate of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Mickey Noah is a writer for the North American Mission Board. To view a video on missionary Todd Wood's gas giveaway ministry, visit [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net) and click on the video gallery.