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Harley Riders Represent a Movement of Men Back Into the Church

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How do you get hundreds of middle-aged men into the church and out participating in community service? One motorcycle biker found a way through Fellowship Riders – a motorcycle ministry, whose members delivered gifts to prisoners' kids this past weekend.

On Saturday, roughly 100 bikers delivered 750 presents on motorcycles and in cars to nearly 450 children in Irvine, Texas. The initiative marks the start of a national partnership with Angel Tree Ministries, with which the motorcycle ministry has set the goal of bringing the love of parents and of Jesus – by way of Christmas presents – to over 550,000 children this year.

The absence of men from the pews has frequently been cited as a top problem affecting the Church. Only 29 percent of men attend church regularly, compared with 45 percent of women, according to The Barna Group.

But ministries specially tailored for men are growing exponentially, experts say, and the motorcycle crowd is one great cross-section.

"I didn't know that there was a real niche out there," said Founder Jeff Means, but "Motorcycle sales have been in double digit growth for over 12 years. Today's motorcycle rider is down the street, the lawyer, the landscaper... There are over 8 million of them registered to ride a motorcycle."

Fellowship Riders, a recognized non-profit based in Dallas, was founded in 2001 a year after Means became a Christian, who said he wanted to find others who shared both his joy in riding and his love for Christ.

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On Dec. 17, some 100 Fellowship Riders will deliver Angel Tree Christmas gifts to 500 inmates' children in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. 11:00 a.m. press conference and delivery open to media (Photo: DeMoss Group)

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All his old motorcycle buddies weren't in the same place spiritually, he said. He had a dilemma. So he founded Fellowship Riders.

Only four years later, the ministry has grown 600 percent, and now boasts 30 branches in nine different denominations from New Jersey to Arizona, and even as far away as the Philippines.

Means said that riders are easy to evangelize because they're usually alone but they have a desire to find others to ride with.

"When you go out to buy a motorcycle – and it's usually a man – they don't have anyone to ride with," he said, because it's not as if groups of friends buy motorcycles together the way groups might go golfing.

"It's a personal decision," he said.

"The great thing about motorcyclists is that they're pretty much all type-A personalities," Means continued. "They love to take a risk, or else they wouldn't get involved in riding."

The ministry provides an opportunity for the men to ride with a passion, and serve in community service at the same time.

"They come out in droves to enjoy a good ride, and we let the church disciple them, and then get them involved in ministry opportunities such as Angel Tree."

Means credits God with the ministry's great success.

"I'll tell you, in my wildest dreams I never thought that I would be heading up a motorcycle ministry, which is growing so fast. It's just like God to use a lot of my God-given abilities to change lives," he said. "His hands are all over this ministry, and there are so many lives being touched!"

The formula for each ministry is to plan a quality ride on a Saturday, and hold weekly small group Bible studies. The only requirement is that each ministry must be attached to a local church, said Mean because the local church is "the greatest thing going."

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