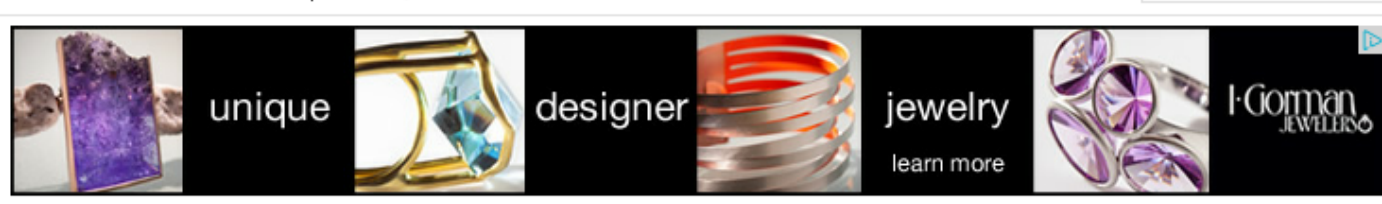


THE ROOT DC

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Motorcycle ministry thrives on the fellowship of the road



CAPTION

By Jeannine Hunter, Published: September 20 E-mail the writer

Under a brilliant blue sky, Tyrone "T-Bone" Taylor moved his motorcycle swiftly yet carefully Saturday around a bank of orange cones on a course created in a corner of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church's parking lot.

His wife, Lashan "L.A." Taylor, watched as a cluster of fellow motorcycle enthusiasts walked by sports bikes, cruisers and trikes, sharing stories and admiring how owners personalized their rides.



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"I'm not a rider, not yet anyway — my husband is getting ready to get a seat put on the back for me — but on trips, I bring my car as support, the chase car," she said before clapping as her husband finished the timed course.

The Taylors were on hand to participate in a Christian bikers conference hosted by the Fort Washington church last weekend, a gathering that attracted members of motorcycle ministries and other biking enthusiasts from around the region.

The three days of events drew members of church motorcycle ministries from as far away as Woodbridge and Southern Maryland and gave bikers a chance to meet, share stories, compete on obstacle courses and shoot the breeze about riding for Christ.

In another part of the parking lot, groups explored tents where vendors sold food, safety accessories and motorcycle parts.

Conference attendees, in leather vests and jeans or leather pants, called one another by their bike names such as "Jet" and "Moose." Patches signified their affiliations and their affinity for Christ, with references to their churches.

The three-year-old ministry is open to all motorcycle enthusiasts — riders, passengers and supporters.

"It's in your blood," said Jacques "Moose" Wilson of Waldorf, a member of Kingdom Knights Motorcycle Ministry in Capitol Heights. "It's a feeling you get that I can't really explain."

Motorcycle ministries have existed for decades, especially in areas of the country where racing and motorsports are popular, with many congregations or individuals affiliated for decades with regional and national groups, including the Christian Motorcyclists Association and Bikers for Christ. In the Washington region, such groups are gaining ground among both predominantly white and black congregations, with Ebenezer's ministry being one of the youngest.

Ebenezer's senior pastor, the Rev. Grainger Browning Jr., felt compelled to start a motorcycle ministry three years ago when he found out that there was an enthusiastic riding community in the church. He thought it would be a good way to build fellowship among the members. And so the Anointed Horsemen Motorcycle Ministry was born.

Browning recalled the funeral of Jacob Chestnut, one of two U.S. Capitol Police officers killed in the line of duty in 1998. He was moved by the outpouring of love and support from law enforcement officers across the nation — as evidenced by the hundreds of motorcycles parked outside the church where Chestnut's funeral took place.

Later, Browning marveled at the motorcycle club culture — the loyalty and the appeal to a wide swath of people — and envisioned a day when he would see many bikes outside his church. Bike blessings at Ebenezer started to attract members and nonmembers alike before the Anointed Horsemen group was established in June 2010.

"I thank God for this creative ministry," said Browning, who has been on a motorcycle only once.

As the ministry grew, members reached out to groups such as Kingdom Knights, the Christian Motorcyclists Association and organizations affiliated with Godspeed Christian Ryderz Network.

"It is through that association that the idea for a Christian bikers conference was born," said Don Norwood, president and co-founder of the Anointed Horsemen ministry, adding that older ministries "served as mentors to our ministry early on and assisted in the planning of this conference."

Norwood said Browning tasked a few motorcyclists at Ebenezer with creating a group that glorified God through a cherished activity and extending the church to the motorcycle community locally and abroad.

"I got saved in a basketball league," Norwood recalled. "God is everywhere, and he can be found in anything that you're doing."

Dean Clutts, a representative of Christian Motorcyclists Association in Southern Maryland, attended the event to bond with other bikers and to learn about their activities. About the appeal of motorcycle groups, he also said he appreciates the opportunity to serve others — whether it's handing out water to participants and onlookers at a busy speedway or praying with someone awaiting medical attention after an accident.

"It is about being authentic," said Gregg "Jet" Harris of Baltimore's Kingdom Ryderz Motorcycle Organization. "Meeting people where they are and appreciating God's beautiful earth together and being open to how God leads you."

Jeannine Hunter, a former editor of The Washington Post's On Faith Web site, is a D.C.-based freelance writer.

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