

## FAITH SPOTLIGHT: Pastor Bill Lytell

### Gospel Riders bike for faith

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Wednesday, May 13, 2009  
Bonita Banner



**Pastor Bill Lytell, of Gospel Baptist Church in Bonita, sits on his Harley Ultra Classic 2008 motorcycle. Lytell founded a Christian biker group called Gospel Bikers.**

Senior Pastor William Lytell of Gospel Baptist Church in Bonita is very busy these days tending to the flock. In addition to meeting the needs of congregants, the multi-ministry gospel church pastor and its members open their hands wide and far to reach those looking for answers with numerous community outreach programs.

One of these outreach efforts is an offbeat ministry called Gospel Riders. It's designed to provide enjoyment and relaxation while pastors, congregants and others share a common interest. The motorcycle-riding group was an idea borne out of a love for biking and founded by Lytell.

A few bike enthusiasts started riding together and soon the word spread. The following is an interview with Lytell about his ministry.

**The Banner:** What is your ministerial training and background?

**Bill Lytell:** I attended Bob Jones University from 1970 to 1977 and received my Bachelor of Arts degree. Afterwards, in 1981, I received my Master of Arts degree in Bible Exposition from Pensacola Christian College. I was then ordained into the Gospel Ministry through Community Baptist Church in Fort Myers, in 1976. I served as a dean of men, with a small Bible institute and as an assistant pastor for over 13 years under two godly men. I have been the senior pastor at Gospel Baptist since 1992.

**TB:** What is your mission at Gospel Bikers?

**BL:** We want to get together with those who love the open air and love to ride. We like to say that we look to the sky with our eyes on the road. It is great time to share how we came to know Jesus and why we live for Him and not ourselves now. No alcohol, bars or babes on the Gospel Riders menu. We realize what is valuable now. We don't live to ride. We live to serve our Lord who bought us with his precious blood on Calvary.

We wear T-shirts and many people ask us questions when we make stops. Folks learn that we have a club and want to join us - bikers want any excuse to ride. We ask non-members to come along and see that it is an opportunity to break down walls. We often times get the chance to talk about our faith and invite riders to attend our church services.

**TB:** Is the riding group limited to church members only?

**BL:** No, anyone who loves to ride is welcome.

**TB:** Do you ride all year long and where do you go?

**BL:** We usually ride during the cooler months of the year. Our longest trip is about eight hours and we ride to destinations such as Okeechobee, Chokoloskee and Venice.

**TB: Where do you meet and how does a typical day ride go?**

**BL:** Sometimes we meet at The Waffle House on Daniels Road, other times at Perkins to start off with breakfast and fellowship. During a typical ride, we stop every hour for a water or pop break. We don't consume any alcohol, as is typical with so many other secular bike clubs. According to a State of Florida statistic, 65 percent of motorcycle fatalities occur due to riders imbibing while riding. So ours is an enjoyable, relaxing, alcohol and drug free ride.

**TB: Do the bikers ever gather as a group?**

**BL:** We have a yearly rally in the first part of March. It's been growing rapidly and we already have inquiries for next year's event. There is also an organized rally held in Michigan each year with over 1,000 bikers in attendance - that is how popular this sport is. We are starting small but see our numbers increasing each year. Bikers talk to each other and the word spreads.

**TB: What are the most popular bikes?**

**BL:** Harley controls about 65 percent of the market and so is the most popular bike. I drive a Harley Ultra Classic 2008, but any bike is welcome. We love people – that's what counts.

**TB: Are the riders expected to dress a certain way when they visit?**

**BL:** Our church members like to dress for God as one would dress up if they were going to see the President. But folks can come any way they wish; we will never turn anyone away.

**TB: Any other future plans for men's groups?**

**BL:** We are planning on a prayer "advance," as opposed to the traditional term, prayer "retreat." We would like to get men together to hear good preaching, for prayer, to partake meals and to generally fellowship. We recently returned from a meeting of 275 Independent Baptist men in north Virginia.

**TB: What are some of the other church ministries?**

**BL:** We have many, both those that minister to our congregation and to the community: widows, single adults, single mothers, Vacation Bible school, youth, summer camp, children's church, Awana, Christian school, troubled teens help, troubled marriages help, home bible study, Reformers Unanimous Addiction Recovery, Spanish church, prison, nursing homes, missions, flea market evangelism, youth detention, Ladies Outreach, food supplies, house-to-house evangelism and tracts.