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Liberty University

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## Midnight Lightning sports bike ministry rides strong

September 01, 2008 | Teresa Dunham

*Photo caption: Members of Liberty University's Midnight Lightning sports bike ministry are, from left: Tony Dunham, John Purdy, Debbie Webb, and Paula and Jay Burnett.*

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Debbie Webb's pink manicured nails peek out of her black biker gloves as she steers her Kawasaki Ninja 650R sports bike around Lynchburg, Va.

By day, 40-year-old Webb is the petite blonde woman who works in International Student Services at Liberty University — but when she's not in the office, her Christian testimony is fueled on passion and adrenaline.

And she's not alone.

Webb is the president of Midnight Lightning, the sports bike ministry that is forming on campus. The group is striving for chapter status in Fast Lane, the sports bike segment of the Christian Motorcycle Association (CMA), an international ministry with more than 800 chapters formed since the mid-1970s.

Far more than a club, the new group of students and community members has a heart for evangelism. They get together for destination rides, making stops along the way to meet other bikers and tell them about Christ.

“We can sometimes be too timid as Christians, but there's always one of us who's got some energy that we can feed off each other,” she said.

Many Midnight Lightning members have joined CMA and studied the association's evangelism materials, including "The Ride Plan," which outlines steps to salvation much like a biker would plan his trip route.

They wear CMA patches on their jackets and stickers on their bikes, and they keep plenty of CMA tracts handy.

"It starts a natural conversation when people look at your bike and see the CMA stickers," said Tony Dunham, 23, student leader and chaplain for the group.

If the opportunity is right, he said, the group will do a "bike blessing" for someone they've met.

"Sometimes we call them bike blessings, but it's the person that we're blessing, not the bike," said group vice president John Purdy. "You sit on the bike, and they lay hands on you and pray for you."

Purdy, a local resident, is easy to spot because of his big SG1300 Honda sport touring bike.

"I've had it described by the sport bike guys as a party barge, insinuating that it's a little bigger than theirs," Purdy said. "It's just sporty enough to hang with these guys, and it's comfortable enough for an old man like me."

Besides sharing their testimony, seasoned riders like Webb and Purdy are also there to mentor young riders.

"We want to reach out for the Lord, but we also want to give the students more skills," Webb said. "A lot of them are just first-time bikers, believe it or not. They're 19 or 20 years old or freshmen. They get these bikes, and they don't really have the training that they need."

Teaching students how to handle their bikes is a great opportunity for discipleship, she said.

"You have to really be disciplined in a lot of areas to be able to ride a sport bike," she said.

Ever since their first meeting in January, the group has welcomed both novice and seasoned sports motorcycle enthusiasts.

"I wanted to get into a group that I could ride with," said Tim Wamsley, 20, a kinesiology major who rides a 2007 Suzuki GSXR 600.

Wamsley has been around bike racing his whole life, but he was drawn to the Christian fellowship that Midnight Lightning offered — and the enthusiasm is contagious.

"I just love riding. It's probably the closest thing to flying," said Martin Lin, a 40-year-old Taiwan native who works in Grounds Maintenance at LU. "I even ride at 18 degrees in the winter. It's so much fun that people have the same hobby or passion, and you can use it to share the gospel."

The group has about 15 members, but criminal justice student Joe Justice hopes more people will join.

“The main reason I joined was for Christian service, but when I got into it, I saw how much fun it is,” said Justice, 21.

Sometimes they even take the ministry beyond easy-going rides, opting instead for some heart-pumping intensity at the Virginia International Raceway (VIR).

“It’s legal. It’s safer conditions, letting these guys get that testosterone out on the track [instead of on the road],” said member Paula Burnett, adding that rescue workers are on site.

Her husband, Jay Burnett, who has raced for years, tells the younger riders how to compete safely when they’re ready.

“It’s a great experience to really feel what the bike can do without the fear of the tickets and the infractions of the law and the dangers,” said Jay, 49.

Most tracks aren’t a traditionally Christian setting, but the bikers at VIR are getting to know Jay and the others.

“[Midnight Lightning] is a way to reach motorcyclists that are pretty much lost,” said Enrico Zumbo, a 59-year-old native of Australia who is taking pastoral leadership classes at LU.

Whether they’re hitting the track or gearing up for some servant-style evangelism, the group remembers to cloak itself in prayer.

“We’re in an inherently dangerous sport ministry. It’s sobering to think that any one of us can ride out of here, and tomorrow we might not be here,” Purdy said. “It’s important to pray for us.”

*Community members and LU students are welcome to join Midnight Lightning or go along on rides. It’s free to join, but members must go through CMA ministry training if they want to wear the CMA patches. E-mail Tony Dunham at [tpdunham@liberty.edu](mailto:tpdunham@liberty.edu).*

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## **BIKE BLESSINGS: TRBC MOTORCYCLE MINISTRY RIDES STRONG**

Marlene Diaz shows up for worship in leather and jeans, and a patch on her vest declares “These are my church clothes.” She’s a founder of Thomas Road Baptist Church’s motorcycle group, Liberty Riders. About 30 members come each Sunday in their bike gear, attending a morning Biker Bible Study along with the traditional service. “The motorcycle community is just about as un-conservative as you can get,” said current leader Carl Paulson. Yet the church and its motorcycle ministry are finding synergy.

**Fast facts about Liberty Riders:**

- Some churches hesitate to welcome bikers, but TRBC gives them preferred parking.
- Iron Horse Ministries, a nonprofit that plants bike ministries in churches nationwide, came to TRBC a few years ago to start a group.
- Liberty Riders grew strong enough to start operating independently about a year ago.
- Liberty Riders has a community outreach motorcycle class on Wednesdays.
- They're the organizing force behind several major events, such as a June "Bike Blessing" that Senior Pastor Jonathan Falwell participated in this year, the patriotic Thunder on the Mountain bike ride held in conjunction with TRBC's annual Celebrate America festivities, and the "Doc" Falwell Memorial Toy Run for needy children in December.
- All bikers are invited to join or just come for a ride.

*For more information, visit [www.trbc.org](http://www.trbc.org) and click on [Motorcycle Ministry](#) under the ministries tab at the top of the page or call (434) 239-9281.*