

Biblical Recorder

March 17, 2011

Boys, girls pedal to change other children's lives

The autumn temperatures were nearly perfect as boys and girls on bicycles, and some even on tricycles, whizzed around a quarter-mile track this past October. Jay Westmoreland, longtime member of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, and a team of volunteers clapped and cheered for the children as they completed another lap for the event known as "Bike for Change."

The group of dedicated children collectively rode over 200 miles that morning and later presented a check to Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) for \$25,737.47.

Created in 2003, Bike for Change was conceptualized by Jay Westmoreland as an outreach of First Baptist Church of Charlotte (FBC) to provide a tangible mission opportunity for the children of FBC. Each year, the participating children learn of the needs of Baptist Children's Homes' residents, pray for them, and promote Bike for Change as a way to provide financial assistance.

"Bike for Change is a terrific way to teach our church's children about the importance of missions outreach and helping others in the name of Jesus," Westmoreland explained. "When our church's children learn of the situations Baptist Children's Homes' residents have endured they realize how blessed they really are. They want to roll up their sleeves and help."

www.bikeforchange.org



For FBC's event, the church's children ride their bicycles in a designated area for a predetermined amount of time.

Church members support the children's efforts by participating in a special offering. At the end of morning worship, children stand at the sanctuary exits and collect the offering in their bicycle helmets as members leave.

"It has brought great awareness to our church about the tremendous needs of Baptist Children's Homes' residents," Westmoreland said. "Our children have ignited a passion within our church, and the church members have responded accordingly."

Mark Harris, senior pastor at First Baptist Church, says Bike for Change has increased interaction between the children and other age groups at the church.

"I have known few other events that have created more intergenerational ministry impact than Bike for Change," Harris explains. "First Baptist is making a greater impact because of Bike for Change."

As the successful results of Bike for Change spread, other Baptist churches in North Carolina decided to participate. In 2009, Elizabeth Baptist Church of Shelby joined with First Baptist's event. Children from Corinth Baptist in Ellenboro and Providence Baptist in Charlotte came aboard to help in 2010.

Additionally, other churches were encouraged to create Bike for Change events at their own locations. Mt. Moriah Baptist in Raleigh held its first event on October 2, 2010, and multiple churches from the South Mountain Association in Vale came together in August.

"It has been a blessing to see other churches participate," Westmoreland said. "It's my desire to see more North Carolina Baptist churches duplicate Bike for Change."

In order to help Bike for Change expand, Westmoreland is providing guidance to any church wanting to begin its own event. A new web resource, www.bikeforchange.org, was created last year in partnership with Baptist Children's Homes.

"It's been exciting to witness the growth of Bike for Change and to see churches come on board," says Baptist Children's Homes president Michael C. Blackwell. "When the children in our care see other boys and

girls their age go out of their way to help, it makes an unbelievable impact.”

Blackwell says Bike for Change produces results that go beyond making a difference financially.

“Nearly 70 percent of the children that come into Baptist Children’s Homes’ care have no faith base whatsoever,” he said.

“The children who participate in Bike for Change are Christ’s hands and feet in action. They are a powerful witness to boys and girls who desperately need to know God’s love.”

Since the beginning of Bike for Change in 2003, elementary age bikers have logged an estimated 1,600 miles and have raised more than \$118,000. Those proceeds provide warm beds, hot meals, clothing, and a home where the children are safe. Most importantly, it empowers Christian houseparents to introduce the residents to the love of Christ.

Savanna, age 15, became a believer after moving to BCH and is thankful for Bike for Change.

“Every prayer that you have prayed and every dime that you have given to this ministry makes a difference,” Savanna stated in a “thank you” letter she wrote last year to Bike for Change participants. “I should know. I am a life that has been forever changed because of your actions.”

As spring approaches, Westmoreland hopes even more churches will organize Bike for Change events this year.

“It’s hard to beat the blessing of seeing children reaching out to help other children,” Westmoreland said.

“I believe Bike for Change is the perfect initiative for church leaders who want to involve their children in a heart-changing ministry.”

More information about Bike for Change is available at www.bikeforchange.org or by contacting Jay Westmoreland at bikeforchange@bchfamily.org.