

Florida Baptist Historical Society Biography Collection

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The link you have chosen connects to the specific individual's resource files that provide the basis for information which the Historical Society has used to develop the respective biographical profile. The sources attached may include copies of articles gleaned from back issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness* and other news publications. Other resources include books, historical journal articles and church histories that are cited as documentation for the biography.

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Stolarz, Steve served as pastor of Riverland Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale and Road Racer Church, Fort Lauderdale. He served as staff evangelist for the Gulf Stream Baptist Association (now Broward Association) working with bikers in the community.



ROAD RACER, FORT LAUDERDALE (Gulf Stream)

3110 SW 22nd Court, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312

Phone: (954) 288-9051

Senior Pastor

Steve Stolarz (2007)

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Steve Stolarz is pastor at
Riverland Baptist Church in
southern Fort Lauderdale.

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Living Water, Riverland merger is sailing smoothly

BY STEVE COATE
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Two congregations have united to preach the word of God as one.

Living Water Community Church and Riverland Baptist Church merged in November when Riverland Baptist Pastor **Steve Stolarz** stepped down to expand his evangelism ministry through the Gulfstream Baptist Association. **Living Water** Pastor **Rick Thompson** received a call from the association and was offered the opportunity to merge the two churches at 1501 Riverland Drive in Fort Lauderdale.

"We take a different approach," Thompson said. "We are contemporary instead of traditional. If they're coming to experience the traditional Southern Baptist Church, they're not going to find it here."

The congregation has grown since the merger, Thompson said.

"[Riverland Baptist] had 14 or 15 members left," Thompson said. "We had about 95. Now we get 150 to 175 on Sundays. It's been a win-win situation for everybody."

Thompson said the community response has been tremendous.

"A lot of young families have shown interest," Thompson said. "And we're multicultural. We've got Anglos, Hispanics, Haitians; we're reaching the whole spectrum."

Thompson's wife, **Deborah**, agreed.

"We've stirred up a lot of curiosity," she said. "The church went from not having a lot of traffic, to being constantly full. We've been warmly welcomed by the community. We want to bring people into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ and help them develop their own spiritual walk."

Thompson said the church is very involved with the community.

"We encourage people to get involved in small community life groups," Thompson said. "We want them to participate in Bible study and home fellowships. We're trying to get outside church walls. We've been received well, and met with various local leaders. Our church reflects the community very well."

The church has worked with the Broward Coalition for the Homeless, Women in Distress, and the Hope Pregnancy Center among other



MAKING WAVES: Rick Thompson, pastor of **Living Water** Community Church, and his wife, Deborah.

Photo courtesy of **Living Water** Community Church

community outreach programs, Thompson said.

Carole Jernigan, 53, of Fort Lauderdale, originally a member of Riverland Baptist, said the bumpiness that can occur when two churches

merge into one has not happened at **Living Water**.

"We just sort of blended together real well," Jernigan said. "It has been real comfortable, like coming together with family. [Thompson] is a very caring, genuine person. He has done everything he could to make a smooth transition."

Living Water began in Thompson's home with a congregation of 20. Three months later, Thompson rented space at Plantation Park Elementary School. The church met at the school for more than a year before merging with Riverland Baptist.

The church conducts youth-group meetings on Wednesday nights for middle and high school students.

"It's called H2O: Here to Overcome," Thompson said. "We teach kids how to discover meaning and purpose in their life."

Living Water's services are Sunday mornings at 10:30.

For more information about **Living Water** Community Church, call 954-583-9283.

Riding with God

Religion is a bond among motorcyclists who place high priority on faith.

BY DAVID VOLZ
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The term motorcycle gang may conjure up images of leather jackets, roaring engines and unruly revelers. That's probably why bikers are the last people many would associate with religion.

But **Doug Scofield**, head of the Calvary Chapel's Motorcycle Ministry, and other biker groups deeply rooted in faith, are seeking to change that. Scofield leads a small group of bikers who attend Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale. The group rides on a regular basis, sporting black leather outfits and patches, complete with a skull and cross.

"Our mission statement is that we exist to train and equip those in the body of Calvary Chapel who have a desire to take the gospel to the motorcycle community," Scofield said. "Our gospel verse is Mark 16:15, where Jesus tells his disciples to go out into the world and preach the gospel to everyone."

Scofield said his organization is focused on a single purpose.

"We are a ministry and every Sunday we go and minister to



BIKERS AND BELIEVERS: Jeff Mustard, president of the King David Bikers, and Rabbi Zach Betesh, the group's spiritual leader, cradle Torahs prior to a Sefer Torah Procession before leaving on the "Ride to Remember," part of Holocaust Remembrance Day, or Yom Hashoah. Photo courtesy of Zach Betesh

Scofield said his organization is focused on a single purpose.

"We are a ministry and every Sunday we go and minister to motorcycle clubs," he said. "We hang out at events with men and women who ride in South Florida. A lot of these organizations put on events to support their clubhouses."

But for Scofield and his group to minister to the bikers, they must first of all be bikers. Scofield, 53, has been riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle since he was 20.

"I have always worn black," he said. "When I first became a Christian, I got a haircut and shaved. But then I realized that Jesus accepts you for who you are. I don't have real long hair, but I don't look mainstream."

There is a large biking community in South Florida, but many riders are considered outside the mainstream of American life, Scofield said.

"There are 30 clubs in South Florida which are part of the South Florida President's Council," he said. "These are the men and women who put together the toy runs, usually on the first Sunday of December. Most of the people have huge hearts; the only thing that is missing is Jesus."

To be a part of the Calvary Motorcycle Ministry one must commit one's life to Jesus, Scofield said.

"It takes about six or seven months

BIKERS AND BELIEVERS: Jeff Mustard, president of the King David Bikers, and Rabbi Zach Betesh, the group's spiritual leader, cradle Torahs prior to a Sefer Torah Procession before leaving on the "Ride to Remember," part of Holocaust Remembrance Day, or Yom Hashoah. Photo courtesy of Zach Betesh

for someone to be a patchholder," he said. "We ask prospective members to listen to tapes, read books written by Pastor **Chuck Smith**, who founded Calvary Chapel, and attend classes on leadership and Christian faith at Calvary Chapel in Fort Lauderdale."

And while some bikers might not appreciate the presence of an evangelist in their midst, Scofield has found that if he and his fellow members are honest about who and what they are, acceptance will eventually be granted.

"We are not cramming religion down people's throats, but we want to tell people that Jesus loves them unconditionally and is available for all of us," he said. "I want them to know that Jesus died for bikers. . . . Several have come to Calvary Chapel and given their hearts to the Lord."

For the Rev. **Steve Stolarz**, a staff evangelist with the Gulf Stream Baptist Association in Pompano Beach, church often takes place in a motorcycle racing pit. **Stolarz** has served as a church pastor, but felt a strong calling to the motorcycle community because he had a passion for the faith and motorcycle racing.

Stolarz began as a volunteer with Racers for Christ and now serves as a

chaplain to motorcyclists who compete in Sunday races.

"I minister to people who are competing in the Championship Cup Series, Florida Region. They hold about 11 races a year," he said. "I lead an invocation on Sunday before races and minister to riders who are involved in crashes. I have become a pastor at large to people unattached to churches."

Often during the week **Stolarz** will visit the shops of local race teams and make contact with people involved in motorcycle races.

"I do a lot of counseling and the things that a pastor would do," he said. "But I relate to them as a racer because I like to race motorcycles. I talk to the guys and sometimes they will come over to my house. We service our bikes together."

The Jewish faith is no stranger to motorcycle riders either.

Rabbi **Zach Betesh** serves as spiritual leader to the King David Bikers, which counts about 200 South Florida members among its ranks.

The group meets every Sunday morning for a kosher breakfast at the Marriott Courtyard on Cypress Creek Road in Fort Lauderdale. After

breakfast, the club goes for a motorcycle ride. And on Tuesday evenings, many of the members get together for Hebrew classes or other courses related to Judaism.

"We are all connected by a passion for riding motorcycles and a bond of our faith," said Betesh, also an associate rabbi for Chabad of Fort Lauderdale. "We have members from all walks of life and every aspect of the Jewish faith."

A number of the club members from South Florida participated in the recent "Ride to Remember," part of Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"We had many Jewish motorcycle clubs converge on Washington, D.C., and we had a beautiful reception at the National Holocaust Memorial."

Betesh thinks the independence often associated with motorcycle riders is consistent with many aspects of Judaism.

"Jewish people are a very freewheeling group," Betesh said. "We think independently and try to have a sharp outlook on life. We know God is the ruler of the universe and we take that with us. We have a feeling of freedom and breaking out of limitations."

Holy men ride their bikes religiously

Rabbi, pastor
find spirituality
on the open road

BY R.S. POLLACK
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

It is impossible to pick the rabbi out of the crowd of bikers gathered outside the Boca Raton deli.

After all, he's not the only one with a beard, nor he is the only one whose head is covered. And he's certainly not the only one in black.

Even if he were, Rabbi **Zach Betesh**, or Rabbi Zig Zag as he is called, blends in so well with the other riders of the King David Bikers that it is hard to tell the teacher from the students.

And that may be the point. Wearing a scarf over his head and a dark shirt with the words Harley-Davidson on them, Betesh, one of the founding rabbis of Chabad Lubavitch of **Fort Lauderdale**, is as much a biker as he is a rabbi. And as disparate as the two roles may seem, Betesh sees a common denominator.

"The bikes are common ground," he said.



Photo/R.S. Pollack

THE WHEEL THING:
Above, Rabbi Zach Betesh, or Rabbi Zig Zag as he is

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roles may seem, Betesh sees a common denominator.

"The bikes are common ground," he said.

Throughout South Florida, religious leaders of many faiths are discovering the connection between two wheels and spirituality. They are finding that congregations can be formed on the open road, far from the confines of four walls.

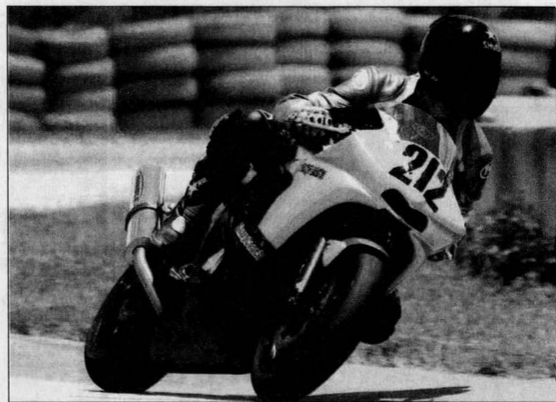
And they are finding that the flicker of faith hidden deep inside the toughest of exteriors has the potential to become a flame, fanned by the breeze of a motorcycle ride down Interstate 95 or the wind surrounding a two-wheel race on a high-speed track.

Whether they are a Baptist pastor, like **Steve Stolarz** of the Gulfstream Baptist Association who ministers to motorcycle racers and their families, or a rabbi like Betesh, clergy members are hoping that the words of God can be heard along with the roars of Harleys and Hondas.

Stolarz, who like Betesh has been around motorcycles for years, was recently accepted by **Racers** for Christ to be one of the group's chaplains and will be working with others throughout the state who minister at regional races.

The former pastor of the Riverland Baptist Church, Stolarz recently set up a children's ministry during an auto race at Moroso Speedway in Palm Beach County in which children had an opportunity to participate in a Bible lesson and perform in a Bible play.

Stolarz also is working with **Racers** for Christ and will become primarily involved in the 11 motorcycle races that form the Championship Cup Series, which takes place in three



Photo/Lisa Theobald

Florida venues.

The chaplains on the circuit, Stolarz said, are there to provide pastoral care and in some cases lead devotional sessions before the races.

"We provide emotional and spiritual support," said Stolarz, who only recently began racing but was sidetracked by a crash that put him in the hospital for 10 days.

Stolarz sees outreach opportunities along the way and a chance to use motorcycles to bring Christians together.

Already, he said, there are Christian motorcycle clubs, like the one at the Flamingo **Road Church** he has been riding with, that ride in fellowship.

In the Jewish community, on the other hand, groups such as the King David Bikers are rare. In fact, the organizer of the group, **Jeff Mustard**, said he doesn't know of any other group like it.

But Mustard sees the role of the organization as connecting Jews from different backgrounds through motorcycle riding.

Still in its beginning stages, the King David Bikers may be an organization that is using the culture of Judaism, more so than the religion aspects, to connect Jews to each other. In fact, the orthodox Betesh is accepting of all in the group regardless of the depth of their religious background.

But the rabbi, who sports a *mezuzah* on the gas tank of his motorcycle and who wears a black hat while riding, is optimistic that the flame of Judaism in each of the 50 or so members will rekindle a quest for knowledge about the faith.

And when questions arise, the rabbi with the *tallis* and the *tzitzit* in his saddlebags and Hebrew words that spell Harley Ben David, or Harley-Davidson, on the front will be there to answer them.

Mustard said the King David Bikers couldn't be happier with the selection of their spiritual leader.

"He's not a weekend motorcycle rider," Mustard says. "He's a real biker."

THE WHEEL THING:
Above, Rabbi Zach Betesh, or Rabbi Zig Zag as he is called, is the spiritual adviser of the King David Bikers, a Jewish motorcycle club. At left, the Rev. Steve Stolarz, of the Gulfstream Baptist Association, races at Moroso Speedway in Palm Beach County. Stolarz was recently accepted by **Racers** for Christ to be one of the group's chaplains.