

Geared up for bicycle ministry

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By Brenda Eggert Brader | FLUMC.org

When you don't have access to any transportation, there is nothing like a set of wheels.

Whether bicycles are donated for transportation to and from work, as a gift for a child, to help a homeless individual or shipped to fulfill needs in another country, the bicycle ministries of four Florida United Methodist Churches have far reaching benefits to people of all ages.

Some of the many bike ministries in Florida include the Bicycle Blessings Ministry of [First United Methodist Church of Winter Park](#), the bike ministries of [Edgewater United Methodist Church](#) in Port Charlotte, [East Lake United Methodist Church](#) in Palm Harbor and [Orange Park United Methodist Church](#) south of Jacksonville.

The bikes, the funds for parts and the workers' hours are all donated, and the ministries have grown tremendously through their work and the joy of giving.

"It is a great inspiration (to see) a child who never had a bike to get a bike, it is such a joy, you are hooked on the program," Jack Hays, leader of Winter Park's Blessings Ministry, said.

Each bike that is given away is accompanied by a bike helmet and bike lock.

"It started on Pentecost Sunday in 2009 when the pastor and staff devised this unique way to support others," Hays said. "They gave envelopes filled with \$25 to any person or family wanting to take one to use as seed money to help others. My wife Janet and I took one, prayed about it."

The dream of the ministry began when Janet Hays decided to discard their grandchildren's bikes because they would be too small when the youngsters returned for their next visit from New Jersey.



Elaine Ballard and Gary Jones work on tasks for First Winter Park's Bicycle Blessings Ministry.



Donations to Edgewater UMC's ministry are repaired in the shop in Port Charlotte.

"Then it dawned on us," Hays said. "We could take these and other bikes and help a lot of kids. The idea was first thought of as primarily for kids, and then we went around to garage sales and bought the first two or three dozen bikes to get the effort going. The program took off with 10 to 12 volunteers meeting weekly for a work day.

we have repaired and donated over 2,400 bikes. We got so many people involved in it.

"After the first work session in October 2009 until last month,

"I say to people, go with them to deliver one of these bikes and see the joy and relief in the people who get them," Hays said. "The two thousandth bike was awarded not long ago to a person who had just gotten a job through a program at the church."

The ministry collaborates with a local group called Job's Partnership that offers training on how to get a job, the Coalition for the Homeless and the Methodist Children's Home, Hays said.

The ministry of the Edgewater Church in Port Charlotte has been re-purposing bikes since 2007, team leader Tom Ballard said.

"There are eight volunteers who now work on bikes, and we give away 10 to 12 bikes a week. From 2007 to 2015 we have given away 10,243 bikes.

"We started a repair function in 2009, repairing 3,645 bikes," Ballard said. "Roughly every year we do 900-some bikes, either repairing or giving a bike."

Gently used bikes, once repaired, are sold at the church's thrift store, and the proceeds are invested in the ministry.

At East Lake UMC in Palm Harbor, "our bike ministry provides refurbished and gently used bikes to the needy of Pasco and Pinellas counties," team leader Trevor Charlton explained.



Bike donations to East Lake UMC in Palm Harbor overflow from the back of a pickup. Photo by Trevor Charlton.

“We started in 2008 and started small,” he said. The East Lake group is always on the lookout for three-wheeled bikes that are needed by the physically challenged.

The church annex houses both the bike ministry and a [wooden toys](#) manufacturing ministry, and eight to 10 volunteers work weekly on bikes.

Their beneficiaries are varied in demographics and geography.

The ministry reaches the New Port Richey Veterans of Foreign Wars and Prisoners of Hope, which supports for ex-offenders needing transport to new jobs. Bicycles are given to children at Christmas, with about 60-80 bikes distributed to a number of schools and orphanages, as well as the church’s angel tree, Charlton said.

After the earthquake in Haiti, the ministry shipped bicycles to support people in Port au Prince, and bikes were also recently sent to Cuba.



At Orange Park UMC, 260 bicycles repaired by the James Boys are taken to the JP Hall Charities Christmas party for the needy.

The Orange Park United Methodist Church bike ministry focuses on bike repairs. Ken Plummer, age 88, is the leader, inheriting the job last year after working as a volunteer.

The more than 10-year-old group called the James Boys based their name on 1 James, verse 22, Plummer said.

Not only do they repair bicycles to donate to charities, they also encourage those who stop by their shop searching for a bike to repair their set of wheels themselves.

“Those needing bikes for transportation come in and pick out a bike and help refurbish the bike,” Plummer said. “Most of the time the person who gets the bike has sweat equity in it and gets their hands greasy. We show them what needs to be done and they do it.”

Although he is not sure how many bikes the group has given away or repaired, Plummer said they took 260 bikes last year to the annual Christmas event for the JP Hall Charity that serves youngsters in Clay County.

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