

Longriders Motorcycle Club visit to St Andrews on 11 June

If you happened to be driving through Mirboo North or out for a stroll in Sunday morning, you may have noticed an unusual sight in front of the Uniting Church. Parked there, was a row of impressive looking motorbikes.

Our small but faithful and outward-looking congregation hosted a visit from the Longriders Motorcycle Club members and families, some of whom led our service.

We felt really blessed by their visit as they are a beautiful group of tough-looking, (black leathers and tattoos aplenty), but wonderful Christian people who genuinely strive to live by Christ's values and to share their individual faith stories.

They meet together monthly to go on a ride, then share a meal, to enjoy fellowship amongst people they trust and respect, and importantly, to listen to and learn from the many of Christ's gospel stories.

A bit about the Longriders Motorcycle Club:

It all started in 1989 with 4 or 5 blokes who had been searching for some sort of Faith Community, but had felt out of place in any of the mainstream churches they had tried. They decided to start up their own group/s, one at - Murray Bridge in SA and one in Melbourne. As there were only a few of them at that stage, they decided to meet in the middle at Kaniva and this is where our story and the Longriders' story intersects, because they met at the home of Keith and Coralie Pickett because that is where Keith and Coralie were living at the time. Vic Heywood who is a leader of the Group happens to be to Coralie's nephew by marriage.

Since its small beginning, The Longriders Chapters have multiplied and grown so that there are now 7 chapters around Australia and a potentially new Chapter in Gippsland. There is also now one Chapter in the UK.

Most of the members in attendance today were from



various locations around Gippsland, but one biker had left Drysdale near Geelong at 6 o'clock this morning to join us. He too has a Gippsland connection as he was born in Korumburra.

Shane who is the treasurer of the Longriders spoke about some of the outreach work that they do raising money in support of various social programs such as:- suicide prevention groups, re-hab support for people overcoming substance addictions; Prison advocacy; Namitjira House first nations support; Bali family support; Winter Shelter and Winter Blanket Appeals to name just a few. In all, for those who like seeing numbers, the volunteer hours spent nationally was calculated at 5,609 and the amount of money raised nationally last year was \$26,850.

We also heard from Mark who talked about their motivation to bring a message of hope and faith to people in biker groups who are often marginalised in society and become distrustful of the 'mainstream' and as a consequence bear scars from their experiences in life. He talked about first and foremost their common ground is a shared love of motorbikes. That's where they start and is

the point of connection for all of them, but eventually the gospel message of hope, love and acceptance offered to them, brings each one to a light bulb 'a-ha' moment of clarity and understanding on a path which many choose to walk deeper on.

Vic elaborated on the meaning behind The Parable of the Prodigal Son, identifying with each of the main characters in turn and what each one teaches us about compassion, mercy and grace.

After all this we joined together to share sumptuous morning tea, which elicited the comment, "we have booked in to the Pub for lunch, we will only need to order an entree."

We certainly hope that this connection will remain and that we will meet again as this gathering felt like we were all part of the one big, happy and loving, family of God.

Article by Di Kiddell who is an Elder at St Andrew's Uniting Church

