



Illustration by Tommy Stokes

HOLY ROLLERS

By Annette Bender

Out of the pulpit and onto the pavement, a group of preachers are taking their bikes out to help raise money for Retired Ministers Sunday. But this isn't a leisurely bike ride, and these guys aren't exactly middle-aged couch potatoes.

The Chain Gang

Bike-ride participants to date:

- Bill Akers
- Martha Chamberlain
- Ray Chamberlain
- Dave Culbertson
- Stephen DeFur
- Leonard Fant
- Mark Flynn
- Bruce Galyon
- Jim Green
- Barbara Hammond
- Ron Hammond
- Stewart Havey
- Enoch Hendry
- Dennis Milligan
- Rae Mullins
- Randy Pasqua
- Larry Ramey
- Tom Reed
- Brad Scott
- Tom Seay
- Andy Sneed
- John Steiner
- Wesley Foundations: ETSU, UT & Radford

Some preachers are anxious about sermons or building campaigns. This week, the Rev. Rae Mullins is anxious about route 61 out of Narrows, Va.

Mullins – a 53-year-old minister and vice president for specialized ministries at Holston United Methodist Home for Children – is going to ride his bike over that route. For 44 miles, he'll climb up hill after swelling hill, at one point ascending 2,200 feet, until the road finally plateaus and he can rest his quivering muscles in Tazewell.

That's just the first day.

Meanwhile in Radford, Va., the Rev. Jim Green will have his own highway to conquer. At 7:30 a.m. on April 3 – the same time that Mullins departs from the parking lot of Narrows United Methodist Church – Green will stretch and check his water supply one last time. He'll mount his aluminum Cannondale T-2000, adjust the rearview mirror attached to his helmet, and spin off on route 626 toward Draper.

By nightfall, the 67-year-old retired pastor will have traveled 41 miles, arriving in Wytheville to down a bowl of pasta (carbs) and sack out at a reasonably priced hotel. The next morning, he'll get up and do it all again.

For nine days, from the northern end of the Holston Conference in Virginia to the finish line at Brainerd United Methodist Church in Chattanooga, that's the way it will go. Green and Mullins will ride 480 miles through Holston's rolling hills and corridors, meeting up with other bikers and church groups along the way.

Some, like 53-year-old Rev. Andy Ferguson, who plans to join the group when they reach Bean Station, Tenn., will ride for several days. Others, like Bishop Ray Chamberlain and Martha Chamberlain, will ride a few miles – in their case on a two-seater, which they'll maneuver through Chattanooga on the final day.

Of course, this is no leisurely bike ride, and with a few exceptions, these ministers are not exactly middle-aged couch potatoes. The carbo-loading elders who signed on for this mission are serious about their sport, and they're serious about The Legacy of Commitment pensions campaign.

"The whole idea is to raise money and call attention to Retired Ministers Sunday on April 28," says Green, Holston's steward of clergy concerns and the mastermind behind "The Ride." For weeks, church groups have been invited to honor or memorialize

THE Ride

- **What:** 480-mile bike tour through all 12 districts of the Holston Conference
- **When:** April 3-11, 2002
- **Who:** A group of clergy and lay members
- **Why:** To raise money and awareness for The Legacy of Commitment pensions campaign
- **Legacy of what?** The goal is raise \$7.8 million to fund the conference's liability for pre-1982 pensions. As of March 19, we still had \$2 million to go, with a target goal date of June 2002.
- **What's in it for us?** Fifteen to 20 percent of each church's apportionment ("Fair Share") covers unfunded pensions. When our pension program is fully funded, it can be eliminated from Fair Share askings. What's more, our retired pastors can be assured of a conference pension for life.

- **How to participate:** Honor or memorialize a pastor or church leader who's made a difference in your life. For \$480 (\$1 for each bike mile), his or her name will be listed in a special supplement to *The Call*, along with your name as the gift-giver. An entry form is provided on this page.
- **Or...** Give to The Legacy of Commitment on April 28, 2002, when every church in the Holston Conference will collect offerings on behalf of Retired Ministers Sunday. ■

THE Route

When is The Ride coming to your town? For a complete list with route numbers, visit www.holston.org.

- **April 3:** (N) Narrows, Tazewell (S) Radford, Draper, Max Meadows, Wytheville
- **April 4:** (N) Tazewell, Waddell, Lebanon, Dickenson, St. Paul (S) Wytheville, Meadowview, Abingdon
- **April 5:** (N) St. Paul, Coeburn, Norton, Big Stone Gap, Pennington Gap (S) Abingdon, Bristol, Kingsport
- **April 6:** (N) Pennington Gap, Harrogate, New Tazewell (S) Kingsport, Bean Station
- **April 7:** Off Day
- **April 8:** (N) New Tazewell, Rose Hill, Clinton (S) Bean Station, Jefferson City
- **April 9:** (N) Clinton, Oak Ridge, Lenoir City (S) Jefferson City, Lenoir City
- **April 10:** Lenoir City, Cleveland
- **April 11:** Cleveland, Chattanooga

N = northern route, S = southern route

YES! I (we) want to sponsor The Ride by making a \$480 donation or pledge in (select one)

- ☐ honor of _____
- ☐ memory of _____

Sponsor Name (group, class or individual): _____

Church _____

Address _____

Make checks payable (by April 28) to:
Holston Conference
P.O. Box 32939
Knoxville, TN 37930

➤ Persons honored and memorialized will be listed in a special supplement to *The Call* later this year.

a church leader with a \$480 gift (\$1 per mile) for the pensions campaign. The names of those honored will be listed in a special supplement to "The Call" later this year.

On April 28, Holston churches will also take an offering in honor of retired ministers. These gifts will help the conference meet its \$7.8 million goal to fund a liability for pre-1982 pastors' pensions. The campaign is directed by the Rev. Ron Hammond.

The bicyclists hope that Holston members will use The Ride as an opportunity to show how much they care.

"I'm riding to honor all the pastors and wives who've made an imprint on me," says Mullins. He cites Barney and Pauline Pitsinger, Henry and Eileen Horton, Morgan and Louise Phillips – couples who ministered to him during his formative years in Grundy, Va. "Everybody owes something to somebody, and it's time we remember that."

Some church groups have offered to host the bicyclists for meals or quick visits along the route. For months, Green has meticulously planned the tour through each of the conference's 12 districts. Mullins and Green will begin at different northern locations, converging in Lenoir City, Tenn., before heading off together toward Cleveland and Chattanooga.

The bikers have a lot riding on the tour's success because they're spending their own money for hotels and meals and burning up vacation days to do it. On top of that, the routes are challenging ("If I can just make it through the first

two days, I'll be OK," Mullins says nervously). In heavy traffic, the routes may even be dangerous ("I hate four-lane highways with small shoulders!" says Ferguson).

Each morning of the tour they'll wheel off from their starting points at 7:30 a.m., riding as much as 60 miles a day, about 12 miles per hour. A "sag wagon" – a vehicle loaded with overnight bags, first-aid kits, bike-repair tools, food and drink – will trail the bikers on both routes.

And if they even think about complaining or quitting the "tour de Holston," the riders have each other to help keep the faith.

"How can I complain? Jim is 67 and still going strong," says Ferguson, who's been riding with Green since they co-pastored First Maryville UMC in the early 1990s. "I just clam up and move on." ■

Sponsors Wanted: *Martha and Ray Chamberlain will ride a two-person bike on the last day of The Ride. Use the entry form above to honor the Chamberlains with a gift for the pensions campaign.*



Photo by Kevin Slimp