**A place for the irreligious at Colorado church plant**

By Jim Burton

TIMNATH, Colo. – Two months after settling about 900 miles north of their native Texas, Kelly and Brandi Parrish were sitting on the living room floor on Christmas Eve 2013 with their four children lighting Advent Candles.

They had come to plant a church.

That night, the family asked God not to let them ever be alone again on Christmas Eve. Then they prayed that God would work in their lives over the next year.

For Christmas Eve 2014, the Parrishes hosted a gathering that was standing room only.

By Christmas Eve 2015, Living Rock Church was meeting in a lawnmower factory where they conducted two services attended by about 300 people who had come to worship a living, dynamic God. Most attendees were recent converts or seekers who found their worlds altered by the gospel. Meagan Barash was one of those.

Barash is unusual for Living Rock Church as she had grown up in an evangelical home and had good knowledge of the Bible. But the knowledge had not penetrated her heart.

Through women’s Bible studies led by Brandi, Barash soon had more questions than answers. Finally, she expressed her feelings about having spent her life serving a plastic God.

“I had a knowledgeable relationship, but not on an intimate level,” Barash concluded.

Living Rock Church now has scores of families who have dramatic salvation experiences, many hearing the gospel for the first time. They had made sacrifices to follow Jesus.

Barash’s husband is a police officer, and she feared that their sacrifice would mean him dying in the line of duty. That wasn’t a sacrifice she was willing to make, so she had pulled back from her faith practice.

While stuck on a delayed flight home, she pulled out her Bible study materials. That’s when a sentence “popped out to me,” and she finally understood that God didn’t particularly want some dramatic sacrifice. Instead, God wants our hearts.

**Church planting novices say, “Yes, Lord”**

Parrish was enjoying a successful sales career in the oil and gas industry after 10 years of teaching school and coaching. He had met Brandi when they were students at Howard Payne University where he played basketball and she was a cheerleader. The college was halfway between their hometowns.

He is from Crosbyton, Texas, which is east of Lubbock.

Brandi grew up in Katy, Texas, where she was surrounded by many great teachers and mentors at First Baptist Church, Houston.

Both families were active in their local Southern Baptist churches and grounded in their faith while active in lay ministries.

In the fall of 2009, Parrish was mowing his lawn and praying.

“I very clearly heard God calling me to full-time ministry,” Parrish said. “I surrendered to that call.”

The Parrishes had been praying for a “Yes, Lord” moment, based on the obedience of Ananias in Acts 9, when they each understood God’s assignment for their family. God wanted them to plant a church.

“We were challenged by the fact that God had something more for us,” Parrish said. “If you had asked me about church planting, I could not have told you coherently what church planting is.”

With clarity about what they were to do, the next step was discerning where they would plant. After studying several western cities, they felt drawn to Timnath, which Parrish says is akin to the fictitious Pleasantville from a 1998 film.

“If you are not incredibly in tune, you may think that everything is fantastic and everyone is okay,” Parrish said of Timnath.

On a visit, Brandi found herself weeping uncontrollably. While driving around, she had seen a mother walking the sidewalk with three small children.

“That’s me,” Brandi said. “I’m just a little bit further down the road than her. I know how difficult it is, and I did it with Jesus.

“They are my people, these are my mamas living life like me without Jesus.”

Statistics showed them that less than 10 percent of residents in the Fort Collins area have any connection to an evangelical church. Seventy-five percent are completely irreligious. Though most are highly educated, they don’t own Bibles.

Yet, most Coloradans claim a spirituality that centers on nature and the mountains. The state also has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, and that rate is growing.

**Living Rock Church launches**

From their arrival in 2013, the Parrishes and their children focused on relationships. They sponsored events to meet more people and eventually conducted Bible studies in their homes. The kids joined sports teams and made new friends.

Since Living Rock Church launched in February 2015, they make a big deal about baptisms. Parrish dedicates entire services to baptism as each candidate tells their story of redemption and a new faith in Christ. Afterward, the entire church celebrates with a “Fatted Calf” party much like the prodigal son experienced.

“We can teach our people this is something worthy of a party,” Brandi said. “It’s not just that you got dunked this morning.”

Sometimes, the guests of honor are spontaneous. At the close of one baptismal service, Parrish felt a tap on his shoulder during the invitation. He turned to see Justin Owenby who had become a regular attendee at Living Rock and had made a profession of faith.

Sitting through a baptism service, Owenby recalls getting “real emotional.” His family was equally surprised when he handed his keys and phone to his wife. This was something he needed to do now.

“Do you have time for one more?” Owenby asked.

Yes, there was plenty of time.

Their meeting place is a quarter-mile long lawnmower manufacturing plant. Each week, Living Rock converts space there to become a sanctuary and educational space. With about 150 chairs set up, attendees can look one way and see outdoors. They can look the other way through windows into the plant. The ceiling is so low that they don’t have a stage, but attendees don’t seem to mind.

“Most people have never been in church before so they don’t know what to expect,” Parrish said.

The Parrishes are thankful for partner churches that have supported them financially, and for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® from the North American Mission Board (NAMB). Parrish continued in his sales job until five years of funding began with NAMB. Now the offering helps support ministry expenses, Parrish’s salary, rent and other obligations.

Nearly three years after arriving unannounced in Timnath, more than 400 people call Living Rock Church home. The Parrish family call it home, too.

“We knew that our role was to love our neighbors well, plant the gospel and make disciples,” Parrish said. “God would build his church.”

*Kelly and Brandi Parrish are AAEO Week of Prayer Missionaries for NAMB. Half of the funding NAMB receives to support, train and resource North American missionaries comes through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Learn more about the Parrish’s and other missionaries at AnnieArmstrong.com.*

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