

# RED ROCKS

By Kirk Noonan  
Photos by Kim Koehler

## How an upstart church is changing the spiritual landscape of the Mile High City

**T**here is nothing unusual about Red Rocks Church — except for a few things. First, the church is located in a creepy, semi-abandoned amusement park in Golden, Colo. Second there is no senior pastor, only a team of pastors. Third, this church does not do church the way church has traditionally been done.

Take the leather couches in the auditorium; or the artwork on the walls; or the church-sanctioned videogame nights; or the use of movie clips and secular songs; or the sermons named after box-office hits such as *Signs*, *Christmas Vacation* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

None of it is standard fare found in most churches. But here, it is. And for reasons as mysterious as the church's locale, the formula works.

On any given Sunday atheists, seekers, outdoor enthusiasts, college students, entrepreneurs, couples who live together and even homosexuals join this diverse body of believers. They meet in an auditorium that looks and feels more like a loft with its track lighting, exposed beams, wall sconces and the aforementioned leather couches. The amenities lend a laid-back and welcoming atmosphere to church, which leaders here say appeals to people who have spent little or no time in church.

"We look at who we are trying to reach and figure out what will make them feel comfortable so we can tell them about God," says Shawn Johnson, 34, lead teaching pastor and one of the co-founders of Red Rocks. "We're not afraid to take risks, and there is no science to this; we just try to spend a lot of time accommodating unchurched people."

On a recent Sunday morning, chilling bursts of winter air usher

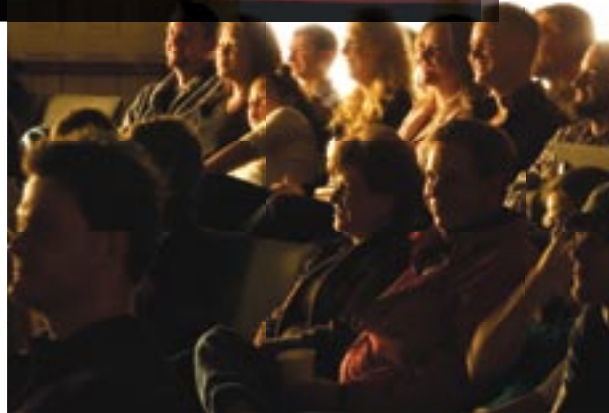
continued on page 16

# REVOLUTION



Leadership team of Red Rocks Church (from left): Bryan Sederwall, Brian Zibell, Shawn Johnson, Chad Bruegman, Todd Ballard and Scott Bruegman

# RED ROCKS REVOLUTION



people into the church's tiny foyer. There, Johnson shakes their hands and chats them up. Fresh coffee, doughnuts and friends also await them.

"The message spoke to me; everyone was so friendly and the music was awesome," says Erin Clark, 26, recalling the first time she came to Red Rocks eight months ago. "I've never been to a church like this. In fact, I never even knew churches like this existed."

Truth is, not many churches like this do exist.

On average more than 300 people attend Sunday morning services at Red Rocks. It is a good start, considering the church held its first service in January 2005. Since then, many people's lives have been transformed by Christ's grace and love.

"I used to say I believed in

God, but I never lived with God first in my life. But now I do," says Sinahy Ruiz, a 30-year-old businessman with a troubled past.

To better understand how a church could appeal to everyone from people like Ruiz to small business owners to Denver Nuggets' cheerleaders, a little backtracking is necessary.

## SOMETHING NEW

Scott Bruegman had never started a church before Red Rocks. When he embarked on the long and sometimes arduous journey, he was sure of only two things: He was called by God to plant a church in the Denver area, and he felt compelled to minister to teens and 20-somethings.

"When we started, we didn't really know how it would all work," admits Bruegman, 35.

Yet from the get-go, Bruegman dreamed of bringing together a group of leaders — each with specialized talents — to help lead the burgeoning church. Like a coaching staff on a professional football team, each leader had a role to fill. Eschewing the top-down leadership style found in most American churches, says Bruegman, sent a message to would-be congregants.

"It showed people the church was led by a team and that leading came from the middle," he says. "That is appealing to the generation we're trying to reach."

It also affords leaders an opportunity to concentrate on things they are good at. Bruegman maintains the vision for future church plants and keeps the books; Johnson is the team's lead teaching pastor and carries out the vision set for Red Rocks; Todd Ballard leads worship; Stephanie Dole is the youth pastor; Chad Bruegman (Scott's younger brother), Brian Zibell, and Bryan Sederwall preach. Most team members are bivocational.

The leadership style prioritizes humility, forces team members to be uncomfortably honest with one another and keeps them focused on their mission to reach unbelievers with the gospel. But it has also solidified the team in ways they never imagined.

"If not for the way we did this plant I would have quit by now," says Johnson. "Church planting is that hard."

Ballard, who has played a significant role in starting and growing the church, agrees. "I truly work with my friends," he says. "This is a team, and God shows all of us what to do."

What the leaders at Red Rocks want to do next is ambitious. Last month they planted another church in downtown Denver. The church meets in a movie theater and is nearly identical to the one in Golden in terms of how it runs and

**"I'VE NEVER BEEN TO A CHURCH LIKE THIS. IN FACT, I NEVER EVEN KNEW CHURCHES LIKE THIS EXISTED."**

what is preached.

The long-term goal is to have at least five Red Rocks churches in the Denver area, which has 4.5 million residents. Bruegman says the churches will be video-linked, use the same resources and basically be clones of one another with the preaching team rotating from one church to the next.

Plans are afoot to plant five additional Red Rocks churches throughout the nation. Currently a leadership team is being assembled for one in Las Vegas.

The idea to start and replicate churches is to avoid becoming a megachurch. Having five small churches rather than one big one, reasons Bruegman, will protect the tight-knit community feel that pervades Red Rocks and it will enable the church to reach a wider demographic. Starting self-replicat-

ing churches, adds Bruegman, will give church planters a hand up as they negotiate the tricky waters of establishing a new church.

"We'll be able to provide support, people and experience," he says. "That's vital to any new church."

## GOOD CHANGE

It is Sunday morning at Red Rocks and Chris Flemming, 21, mixes sugar into his coffee. Worshippers file into the church taking their time as they sip coffee, munch on doughnuts and greet new and old friends.

"I feel accepted," says Flemming, who lives in a homeless shelter. "There is no judgment here."

If appearances are a telltale sign of that, Flemming is correct. Sharply dressed moms with babies on their hips worship next to un-



shaven young men with pierced ears and tattoo-laden arms.

Stocking caps, football jerseys and baggy jeans are the threads of choice for most worshippers.

"A lot of people I know have



**"I had a wonderful experience working with the MAPS department and RV Volunteers. We built a church facility where many said that it would never happen ... all for the glory of God!"**

**PASTOR BILLY THOMAS**  
The Refuge, Perry, Georgia

If you want to help build the church and change lives, then the U.S. MAPS RV Volunteers ministry is for you. Construction and evangelism opportunities are available now. Call our office for more information.

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD U.S. MISSIONS

**BUILDING CHURCHES ► CHANGING LIVES**

1.877.346.6277 USMAPS@AG.ORG USMAPS.AG.ORG

U.S. MAPS  
**RVolunteers**  
A Mission America Placement Service

# RED ROCKS

## REVOLUTION

problems with religious rituals and traditions,” says Ben Trombley, 24. “Here you can come as you are. It’s one of the first churches I have been really comfortable inviting people to.”

Trombley felt so comfortable he practically hounded Sinahy and Melissa Ruiz to come to church.

Two years ago the Ruizes’ lives were falling apart. Sinahy Ruiz says he was visiting strip clubs and hanging out with drug dealers and prostitutes. Melissa was floundering spiritually while she grappled with her grandmother’s death.

“The message we heard here was so relevant to our lives,” says Sinahy. “I’ve had a rough upbringing, but God has done

so much in my life since we started coming here. Now I talk to the same people I used to run with about God and His love.”

Melissa Ruiz says their marriage is stronger than ever and that their faith has been integrated into every phase of their lives.

“I found my way back to God here,” she says. “I asked Him to forgive and help me.”

### LEAVING THE FOUR WALLS

Though the church has grown faster than expected, leaders at Red Rocks are not content to sit and wait for people to come to them. Instead, they take their faith to the masses. Bruegman says much ministry takes place in people’s

homes, at their businesses and even at parties.

“I love going to their parties where I can meet their friends,” says Johnson of the people who attend Red Rocks. “If we don’t go out and meet people, they aren’t just going to come to church.”

That’s particularly true in Denver. The city is known for its well-educated citizens and plethora of outdoor activities that vie for people’s attention — especially on weekends.

Even so, the social networking has worked. So has using elements of culture such as movie clips and

even secular songs to reinforce spiritual truths.

“When people come to our church and see something they are familiar with or can relate to, something goes off in their mind and there is a connection made between them and God,” says Johnson. “Our mission is to make heaven bigger. We know that the tools we use to communicate would probably make us misfits in most churches, but it works here because most of the people in our church have never spent time in church.”

Even so, does this kind of accommodation breed Christians in name only? Zibell says no way. “I look out into the audience every week and see people who have never had a relationship with Christ and now they do,” he says. “That amazes me.”

### A NEW WAY

Bruegman and Johnson did not set out to revolutionize the way church is done. Their main goal, they say, has always been — and will always be — to lead people to a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

But perhaps an incident during one of their first services summed up what Red Rocks was to become. Bruegman and Johnson made their way to the front of the auditorium and settled in for the service.

On stage was the worship team. One of the guitar players sported a Mohawk, at least one piercing and a T-shirt with an anti-porn message in bold print.

Not exactly what Bruegman and Johnson had in mind for their worship band’s attire. But rather than

ask the man to change his shirt they focused instead on worshipping Jesus Christ.

After visiting with the guitar player, Bruegman and Johnson were glad they had not made an issue about his T-shirt.

“He told us that before he accepted Christ as his Savior he had a problem with porn, but was now free from the addiction,” says Johnson, voice cracking with emotion. “The T-shirt is his way of celebrating the victory he found in Christ. Now whenever he wears the T-shirt we can celebrate that victory with him.”

Let the revolution begin. **tpe**  
KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today’s Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).



One race: with wondrous variety!

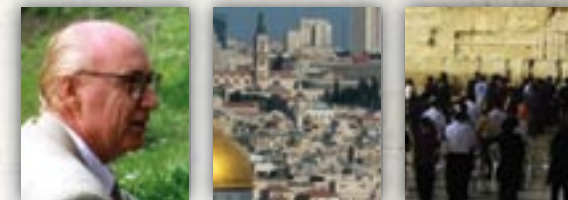
Help us reach out to all shades of God’s people.



## The trip of a lifetime THE HOLY LAND

Let the Bible and the life of Jesus come alive before your eyes as you visit:

- Jerusalem and Bethlehem
- The Galilee and the Golan
- Megiddo and Armageddon
- Masada and the Dead Sea
- Mt. Carmel and Mt. Calvary



Your hosts, Dr. George and Jewel Wood, have led more than 20 tours during the past three decades. They will bring a rich spiritual perspective to help you experience this trip of a lifetime.

TOUR DATES: May 9-20, 2007

TOUR COSTS: \$3,299 from New York City. Based on double occupancy.

PASTOR APPRECIATION. Let your local church invest in the ministry of your pastor and spouse by giving them a Christmas or pastor appreciation gift of a trip to Israel — a trip that will benefit them and the church for a lifetime!

CRUISE POST-TOUR OPTION: Athens, Corinth and a four-day cruise to the Greek islands. May 20-26, 2007. Tour includes Athens, Mykonos, Ephesus, Patmos, Rhodes, Crete, Santorini, Corinth and Epidauros. Post-tour option costs: \$2,279 based on double occupancy.

Call today for complete tour brochure and additional information. Sponsored by Journeys Unlimited, Inc.  
800 Bustleton Pike  
Richboro, PA 18954  
Phone: 800-876-9502, ext. 100  
[www.journeys-unltd.com](http://www.journeys-unltd.com)  
e-mail: [lindam@journeys-unltd.com](mailto:lindam@journeys-unltd.com)