

# sojourn.

By Marci Sisk

## The Planters:

Daniel and Mandy Montgomery have been married for three years. They both graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in December of 2000. Prior to planting Sojourn, they laid the groundwork for Grace Community Church in downtown Louisville.

Daniel's major theological influences include John Piper, who inspired his love for theology, Brennan Manning, who made him more aware of his need to pursue and respond to the love of God, and Os Guinness, who gave him a desire for a different kind of church. Many of the writings of these authors have been influential, but Piper's *Desiring God*, Manning's *Ragamuffin Gospel* and Guinness's *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* have been some of the most influential.

At the beginning of the planting process, Daniel felt that his love of culture and a desire to genuinely connect with cultural creatives and a strategy for reaching these people were some of his greatest strengths. He considers himself a visionary, a good vision caster and a strategist, able to see the big picture. His gifts of leadership, teaching and evangelism were crucial as well. Mandy is a detail person. Her attentiveness to the details that can make or break a plan and her organizational skills brought structure to the plant. She focused on hospitality, not letting people fall through the cracks, and she provided leadership to the women in the group.

Now that the church has launched and is moving forward, Daniel has seen a tremendous need to cultivate some new skills. He is opposed to the rancher mindset that he was taught to practice in his ministry. He is working to cultivate shepherding and desires this as his model, not thinking that in any way this will hinder or limit the church's growth. He has experienced two

major shifts in this process. The first, a shift from the idea of an entrepreneurial, manager type leader of a church has been transformed to a farming model. He wants to stay and farm the land, realizing there will be great harvests at times and there will be small harvests at other times. The second shift has been from a view of people as prospects to viewing people as people.

### **The area and its people:**

The Highlands of Louisville is an eclectic neighborhood filled with cultural creatives. In fact, cultural creatives make up 44% of the American population, representing approximately 44 million people. The Highlands, Louisville's cultural creative neighborhood, consists of about a three-mile stretch of Bardstown Road and the immediate areas of its side roads. This three-mile stretch runs from I-264 to Broadway.

The average age of the population in the Highlands is approximately 44, but the median age of Sojourn is about 23. There is a full range of ages represented, however, from newborn to 65.

An abundance of coffee shops in the area shows the affinity for coffee among these people. Every fellowship event of Sojourn is accompanied by coffee and hot tea. There is also a widespread use of candles at each event, which is in line with the community interests. Several candle stands are a vital part of weekly set up.

There is not a stereotypical resident of the Highlands or of Sojourn. There are many who are college age, but only about half of those are actually in college. The Highlands is home to Bellarmine University.

The Scene is a major influence in the Highlands, and about 30% of Sojourn is made up of people who are part of this subculture. They produce independent music that is totally secular.

Some of the lead musicians are regularly attend Sojourn. In fact, discussing this type of music is a great way to connect with these people. Discussing the Christian subculture, even Christian music, e.g. Michael W. Smith, will be ineffective.

Sojourn feels it is a part of the culture of the Highlands and does not have to learn how to reach it. Rather, they have to learn how to reach out to it. A well respected leader in the art community offered to help in the area of the gallery. The gallery is well known in the community to be owned by a church. This does not necessarily give it a negative stigma, but it causes it to stand apart. He has offered to give advice to help it to be a more effective tool, and he is not a Christian. Daniel and Mandy were very encouraged by this.

### **Core Development Strategy:**

In June of 1999 Daniel and Mandy and Jason and Heather Grenari (Jason graduated from Southern in December as well and has now moved Philadelphia to plant a similar church) had a vision to reach this area of Louisville. While Daniel was looking for a mother church, they were encouraged to meet Nathan Quillo, who had just started a Bible Study in the Highlands. This Bible Study started with 12 people and had grown to about 30 by the time Daniel and Mandy visited. The highest attendance it reached at this point of its development was 40 people. The Bible Study was more of a worship and prayer time for young people who attended youth group on Wednesday night and attended the Bible Study that started at 8:30 afterward.

The Bible Study was held in Nathan's home until it outgrew it. They then moved to Forest Park Baptist Church. A remodeling project of the basement where the Bible Study met forced another move. They began meeting at Deer Park Baptist.

Six months of talking led to starting Sojourn. Daniel and Mandy describe the Bible Study as one big fishing pool event. Out of this group they took about 15 people who became the core of Sojourn. About 10 of these are still active today, each involved in a community group. This core grew to about 40 people, not all of who had any affiliation with the Bible Study. Many became involved through relationships with people in the Bible Study.

In January of 2000, Nathan, Jason and Daniel composed the leadership of the group. However, by the end of January, marital problems had become evident for Nathan. He was asked to step down from leadership. Daniel took over the Bible Study and went through chronological storying of the Bible.

In June of 2000, they opened an art gallery on Bardstown Road, Aslan's How Art Gallery. The summer was consumed with this project. It turned out to be a good thing, but things could have easily turned out differently. The gallery gave people a common task but it kept people from focusing on relationships.

During this time the Bible Study was discontinued. At the time this seemed a difficult decision that received much criticism, but it was definitely the right decision. This allowed them to see that the core was not as strong as they thought. It also helped to make a distinction between the Bible Study and church. Many people thought they would continue doing things as they were, and the only difference would be that they started to call themselves a church. They lost tons of people when they made this decision to discontinue the Bible Study. The next two to three months were spent meeting in more informal ways until the formal launch.

**Launch Mechanism:**

Sojourn launched on September 17, 2000 with about 125 people in the sanctuary of Highland Baptist Church at the corner of Grinstead Drive and Bardstown Road. With the exception of a few meetings in December at Aslan's How Art Gallery, all Vespers Services have been held at Highland Baptist. During the first few months of the meetings it was uncertain how long they would be able to continue meeting at Highland. Just this April, however, Sojourn has obtained long term use of the building for a modest rent of \$40 per week.

They did not use mass mailings or any other typical form of inviting people. For the three months prior to the launch, each person was encouraged to pray for 10 people who they could invite to the launch. This number was lowered to 7. In retrospect, Daniel would change that number to three. About 90 personal invitations were distributed, signed by the person who gave the invitation.

**Membership Requirements:**

Sojourn has not constituted yet so there are no official members. They are in the process of developing a membership paradigm similar in principle to Saddleback's model. This class is entitled Sojourn Essentials. The first session has been held twice thus far, and the meetings are held at the art gallery. They have not yet held the second session. It is a four-hour meeting with the following sessions:

- Session 1: Our Salvation Story  
Creation/Fall/Rescue and Community Acts of Commitment (Communion and Baptism)
- Session 2: Our Statements (Why we exist as a church)

Our Purpose Statement, Vision Statement, Faith Statement and our Passion Statement

- Session 3: Our Strategy

Our Target, Circles of Commitment, The sojourn strategy

- Session 4: Our Structure

Structure of the church, affiliation and what it means to be a member

### **Worship:**

Worship at Sojourn is unique. It is emphasized that it is a safe place and there is freedom, freedom to stand or to sit, freedom to sing or to be silent. The goal is for people to experience true worship in the way they are the most comfortable. This is consistent with Brock's fourth "self" in an indigenous church; Sojourn is self-expressing.<sup>1</sup>

There is a sense of liturgy in the worship. Singing and prayer and scripture reading are intermingled. New musical sounds and variety in instrumentation is encouraged and experimented with. In all there is a quest for excellence. Each person involved in leading worship has musical talent and the ability to help lead in worship. The words to the songs are printed on a screen, not in a program. In order to make guests feel more comfortable during the worship time someone usually mentions that there is no need to feel uncomfortable about not knowing the songs because they were new to all of us at one time. Traditional hymns with a new sound are combined with variations of traditional hymns along with a variety of new works.

This Vespers Service is the main entry portal to Sojourn. Only about 3 or 4 people have entered through the community groups.

Daniel preaches expository messages. He does preach topical messages and apologetic messages for the seeker services that are held once a month. He began with a six-week series in

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 93.

Ecclesiastes and moved into a four series study of Philippians that lasted four months. He is currently in the middle of a four-week apologetic study. In May, Daniel will preach on the spiritual disciplines. He will then begin the study of another book broken down into shorter series, probably Mark.

### **Assimilation Strategy:**

The ministry of Sojourn takes place in community groups. There are currently five community groups in place, with two more leaders set to begin this summer or shortly thereafter. The goal is for each group to multiply every six to eight months. Approximately half of the sojourners are involved in community groups. Most have either been recruited by the leader to join that particular group or have come because they have a choice of which one to attend because of the variety of times and nights they are offered. One community group meets on Monday night, two on Tuesday night, and two on Thursday night.

These community groups are Sojourn. They are times to discuss application of the previous week's sermon, cultivate relationships and minister to each other. Daniel believes healthy community groups can handle at least 90% of ministry needs.

The relational aspect of the groups is what many sojourners are seeking. Many come from broken homes. They have been hurt by their families, and they have been hurt by the church. Because of tattoos and body piercings, many have been rejected by the traditional church. At Sojourn, "those who were banished...received consideration instead of the expected condemnation."<sup>2</sup> In community groups they find community and help in times of emotional and physical need. People have been helped in a variety of ways, from developing monthly budgets to dealing with family crises and surviving emotional turmoil. Sojourn ministers to those

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 30.

struggling with homosexual tendencies, suicidal thoughts and mental disorders, homelessness and welfare.

Daniel and Mandy describe many of the people of Sojourn as previous spiritual wanderers. Lee Strobel might label them “unchurched Christians.”<sup>3</sup> Very few were actively involved in any kind of church even though they were Christians because they had pretty much been isolated from the church. Only about twenty of the people could be considered churched. Since the launch, four have been baptized, and two more are waiting. Many others need to be baptized, but Daniel has not emphasized it. Several of those who have been baptized have done so because of the baptisms they have recently witnessed. Baptism is more experiential at Sojourn than many Southern Baptist churches. The written testimony of the one being baptized is read to the congregation by a close friend. The baptism then takes place by the whole church. Only Daniel and the one being baptized are in the baptismal, but when it is time to proclaim that it is in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the whole church says this aloud with Daniel.

Even though they have not yet gone through all of the membership classes and finalized membership requirements, many people have taken an active role in the ministry. A large group is involved in leading worship. People are involved in set up and take down. People greet guests as they arrive. People work with the children during the service. People are involved in spiritual retreats designed to encourage growth in the spiritual disciplines. Sojourn is involved in social justice ministries, feeding the homeless, providing coats to the needy, and working to restore interracial relations by having lunches with Grace Community Church. About ten women were involved in a short-term women’s Bible study during February and March.

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<sup>3</sup> Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 163.

A typical week at Sojourn contains the following:

- Sunday morning inductive Bible study (currently studying Hebrews) at 11:00 am
- Sunday evening Vespers Service at 6:00 pm
- Monday evening – one community group meets
- Tuesday evening – two community groups meet and Daniel leads a seeker study for non-believers
- Wednesday evening worship team practices
- Thursday evening – two community groups meet and a philosophy study group meets facilitated by Dr. Parker
- Friday mornings 7:00am-9:00am – community prayer (meet at the gallery for intercessory prayer)
- Approximately twice a month a film discussion group meets on various days

### **Art Gallery:**

Aslan's How Art Gallery is located on Bardstown Road. They rent the facility, and they completely gutted it over the summer. The owner of the building reduced the rent because of the substantial work they have done to improve the location. The gallery is open from 3:00 – 6:00pm on weekdays and from 10:00am to 2:00pm on Saturdays. The gallery houses a new exhibit about every other month. Flyers for the exhibits are posted all around the Highlands, and this has been a great way to make contacts. There has also been at least one concert there, and about half of those in attendance had no connection with Sojourn.

Sojourn exists to create community by participating in the seven biblical purposes: Prayer, Worship, Fellowship, Evangelism, Discipleship, Ministry, and Communion/Baptism.

**Sojourn's vision statement:**

To challenge people who are saying "No!" to God to say "Yes!" to God in every stage and facet of their lives...in essence, moving people toward fully devoted followership of Christ in community.

**Sojourn's beliefs:**

"In essential beliefs, we have unity. In non-essential beliefs, we have liberty. In all our beliefs, we promote love."

1. We believe in one God who exists in Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Through Adam's sin, the race fell, and humankind inherited a sinful nature, became alienated from God, and is unable to remedy his lost condition.
3. We believe salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace alone and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal God who became a man, lived a sinless life, died on a cross, was buried, and physically rose from the grave to redeem sinful man.
5. We believe Jesus ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father.
6. We believe the Holy Spirit is the supernatural agent in salvation baptizing all Christians into the universal church at conversion, indwelling and sealing them until the day of redemption.

7. We believe that a true Christian will be kept by God's power forever.
8. We believe that the Church is a spiritual organism made up of all believers.
9. We believe in the autonomy of local churches and recognize believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper.
10. We believe God wrote the Bible through men without error.
11. We believe Jesus is returning to earth, with His saints, to rule and reign forever.

**Sojourn's core passions:**

“Naturally, because we are a collection of diverse individuals, we all have slightly different values with regard to why we do what we do as a Christian community. Yet the following core passions will unify our efforts, define our distinctives, and drive this church.”

**Community:** God exists in the perfect community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and created us also to live in community. Therefore we seek to be His community by modeling His love through healthy and real relationships that permeate every aspect of our lives together.

**Christian Hedonism:** God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. There is no necessary conflict between our happiness and God's holiness. Being satisfied with all God is for us in Jesus magnifies Him as a great treasure.

**Biblical Faithfulness:** We believe the Bible is the final authority rather than church tradition or human experience. We strive to have everything we believe and do in this Christian community come from or be in agreement with the Bible.

**Authentic-Safe Relationships:** We will be real with ourselves, our community, our culture and our God. Yet, we will recognize that God has provided safe boundaries for our relationships.

Therefore, we will take new practical steps to develop an atmosphere where personal healing, deepening, and supportive faith building relationships of love are highly valued as expressions of our passion for the supremacy of God's love.

**True Spirituality:** True meaning in life comes from God who is eternal and gives meaning to it. For this reason we emphasize in-depth study of the Bible and theology to learn of this meaning and apply it to our lives for transformation and continual growth.

**Artistic Expression:** Expression is valued and celebrated because art can be a reflection of the beauty of creation and the creator. God made us in His image to make and celebrate works of beauty. His presence can be experienced in the arts and culture, and they should be used to glorify Him and draw others to Christ.

**Sharing:** Sharing with people the good news of Jesus and making disciples for Him locally through church planting and around the world through support of and sending of missionaries.

**Serving:** Serving our church, local community, and world by sharing God's love and using the gifts He gave us in practical ways, as well as, seeking justice for those oppressed, marginalized, and in need.

**Reaching:** Reaching out to unchurched seekers and skeptics in a loving spirit as they learn about Christ in a safe place and consider the truth of the Bible at their own pace, without requiring them to adopt the traditional religious culture. People who don't know Jesus matter to God, and therefore, should matter to us.

**Bold Love:** Bold love through biblical reconciliation. Because conflict is constantly before us we will seek reconciliation in our community and culture. We will practice bold love, through inclusion, by visibly trying to welcome into this community.

**Core Values:**

1. People matter to God
2. People are spiritually lost
3. People need Christ
4. People need answers
5. People need community
6. People need communication in the language of their time and culture
7. People need time

**Leadership:**

The leadership has undergone two significant changes and is still evolving. At the beginning, Daniel, Jason Grenari, and Nathan Quillo were working toward an elder style of leadership for the three of them. When Nathan's marriage was failing, Daniel and Jason asked him to step down from leadership.

The next phase of leadership was then with Daniel and Jason as co-pastors. A difference in their philosophies of ministry surfaced. Jason stepped down in title but not in role. He remained active in the leadership and ministries of Sojourn but he left decision-making and authority in the hands of Daniel so there would be a smooth transition when he left to plant a church in Pennsylvania. In fact, Sojourn is planning to take a team this summer to help do some legwork and ground work for Jason in Pennsylvania.

The next stage of leadership is still under development. Les Groce, another Southern Seminary student, has been raised up as a teaching pastor. He leads the Sunday morning inductive Bible study and preaches occasionally when Daniel is out of town. Les and his wife

lead one of the community groups. Two other young men are currently being mentored and trained for leadership. These are Mike Cospers, the music leader, and Lachlan Coffey. Lachlan is very involved in many detail aspects of the ministry and took care of the finances until this February when I took over this aspect of the ministry. Lachlan is also very involved with the worship team, both leading singing and working the sound. The four of these men are working toward an elder led model of leadership, but it is definitely a work in progress. All four are community group leaders as well. The ages of these leaders are worthy of note, Daniel is 26, Les is 27, and Mike and Lachlan are both 21. The ages of the leaders are significant to Daniel in that he realizes Sojourn has limitations in their resources, but he feels confident that they are doing what they can with the resources they have.

### **The Future:**

Sojourn is hoping to become financially self-supporting by January of 2001. They have been well supported by Little Flock, their mother church, but they are anxious to be out from under their umbrella. This seems a realistic goal. The tithe is currently being taken in a box set in the back of the sanctuary, but there is talk of taking up on offering as part of the worship service. Weekly receipts average about \$750, with significant fluctuations. But a bad week always seems to be followed by a good week and vice versa. They are in the process of purchasing their own music equipment. They received a sum of money, part of which they are hoping to use for this purchase along with their first drive for money. The plan is to ask the church to match the amount given to purchase the equipment. This goal seems to be attainable and yet also challenging, a mark of effective pastoral leadership, according to Robert Logan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Logan. *Beyond Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1989), 41.

They have been renting this equipment on a monthly basis and are hoping this will be the last month of paying this expense. This will free up a significant amount of money for ministry.

Mike Cospers, the music leader, is in the process of raising funding so he can come on full-time with Sojourn. Two more community groups will be starting this summer. An evangelism-training program is being established that will begin this summer. It will be a combination of many different tools/programs that are currently in use. It will not be a presentation to be memorized because this will not be effective in this community. Evangelism must be done through relationships. The key questions utilized in the different resources are being compiled and organized in such a way to be a tool for the people of Sojourn so that they feel equipped to begin spiritual conversations with skeptics and seekers and to move conversations into spiritual matters.