



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

When God Calls You Home

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Throughout my life, home has never represented a physical location, but rather exists as an emotional and spiritual feeling of wholeness. My childhood home, filled with love and compassion, built the foundation for me to explore other places to call home. Along the way through life, this foundation gave me the confidence to not limit home to a physical location or specific set of relationships and individuals. Instead, my foundation of love encouraged me to construct my own little homes wherever God led me, in an attempt to fully experience the beauty and authenticity of community.

Immediately after arriving in St. Louis for NBA XPLOR, I could see the construction of my new little home being built, and I was so eager to experience life and love with my housemates, my church congregation, and site placement. As we all settled into our new home and new routines, our house decided to spend Sunday nights, together around our kitchen table, in deep discussion and intentional conversation about how we were all adjusting to this new, ongoing experience. With candles lit and tissues in hand, we started the conversation with one simple question.

How is your soul?

Soul Sundays, as we called them, personally gave me the opportunity to discern what was actually going on with me physically, emotionally, and spiritually, especially when emotions were plenty and words were hard. This safe space gave me the confidence to share experiences from my past and present that helped explain to my housemates, and myself, who I was and why I was.

One night in particular, with no prying, but only the prompt of how is your soul, I immediately answered “holey.” Holey as if something, some part of me, was missing. I was so excited to be building up my new home, yet I could not find that point of emotional and spiritual wholeness that my heart longed for. My answer was followed with another question from my housemate, that shook me to my core: “What do you need?” As my tears ran and my hands were graciously held, a soft “Her” was spoken from my mouth. It was at this moment I began to understand this aching void in my soul. I needed my grandma.

It was last December that my grandma was placed in hospice care. Since then her physical and mental health have been rapidly declining. Though dementia and illness have taken away the grandma I knew, the love that we have for each other has preserved the spirit of my grandma that I feel. Words do not do her justice, but to put it simply, my grandma is my loving, gracious angel. The first few years of my life were spent in her arms and in her constant presence. If I wasn’t at her house for Saturday night sleepovers before church, I was there playing games, laughing, and fully embracing the pure joy she shined like a bright light. She helped raise me, and she saved me. She loved me with a love so powerful I can still physically feel it with a glance at her bright blue eyes or a squeeze of her hand.

How is my soul?

After answering God's call to be a granddaughter, for the little time I have left, my soul is well.

Leaving the XPLORE program was not an easy decision for me to make, but the simple fact that I left is pure proof that programs like XPLORE work and are extremely important in helping young people discern God's call. The love and support I received from my host team gave me the confidence to speak up and assert myself, something that I would have never done six months ago. The lifelong friendships I developed by living in intentional community showed me a different side of unconditional love I have never allowed myself to experience before. Hearing my housemates tell me that they would rather see me leave than stay completely changed the way I view true friendship. Lastly, being in an environment that encouraged me to share my full spectrum of emotions with myself restored my faith in a God of love and grace.

As I write this now, my soul is well. I feel physically and spiritually whole. I have my grandmother right beside me. And I am home. All thanks to an incredible God and intentional programs like NBA XPLORE.

*NBA XPLORE is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a "heart for care" as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.***