

NBA Advocacy and Activism Peer Group Launches, Remembers Michael Brown in St. Louis

Rev. Monica Wedlock Kilpatrick
Director of NBA Connect Ministries



National
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The mission of the NBA to “advocate for the well-being of humanity” calls the National Benevolent Association and its partners to deepen engagement in advocacy and activism. As we continue to connect and resource our Disciples health and social service ministries, we have called together eight Disciples activists into our newest **Peer Learning and Wellness Group for Advocacy and Activism**.

Convened by Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker, Program Coordinator for NBA Advocacy and Activism, this peer group will covenant together to share, learn, and grow in their ministries and relationships, with a particular focus on social justice issues; language and the theological foundations of social justice; and direct action and advocacy efforts.

“To kick off the first in-person meeting, we prioritized building relationships, experiencing contextualized activism and advocacy, and clarifying our purpose and journey,” says Baker.

The NBA offers a variety of Peer Learning and Wellness Groups for Disciples, which provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in peer support and encouragement, mutual dialogue, spiritual renewal, and peer-to-peer learning. The vision of NBA Peer Learning and Wellness Groups is to provide an opportunity for likeminded individuals to cultivate a community focused on:

- 1. Education:** Peer-to-peer learning, sharing experience and expertise on leadership/ministry related issues, and sharing resources.
- 2. Inspiration:** Spiritual renewal, self-care, peer support/encouragement.
- 3. Advocacy:** Engaging in a collaborative service or advocacy project. Each cohort gives particular attention to the current issues affecting their work and/or ministries.

The experience includes time for rest and renewal, joyful shared conversation, and group learning with others who truly understand the challenges and gifts of this faith-based work in

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the current environment. Ministry can be lonely sometimes, and NBA Peer Groups bring people together so they know they are not alone, sharing in their joys and challenges, and watching new relationships form that reflect the very presence of God among us.

The members of the 2018-20 NBA Advocacy and Activism Peer Group cohort are:

- Rev. Amber Churchill: Minister of Justice, Witness, and Mission, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Corvallis, OR
- Rev. Whitney Ijanaten: Downey Memorial Christian Church, Downey, CA
- Pastor Angéle Saunders Johnson: Pastor of Congregational Care and Outreach, Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, Memphis, TN
- Rev. Alexis Kassim: Associate Pastor, Little River United Church of Christ, Washington, D.C.
- Rev. Dr. Timothy Murphy: Senior Minister, Plymouth Congregational Church, Fort Wayne, IN
- Shantha Ready Alonso: Executive Director, Creation Justice Ministries, Washington, D.C.
- Rev. Chaim "CJ" Rodriguez: Pastor, Iglesia Cristiana Nacional, Washington, D.C.
- Eric Wilcox-LeSure: Executive Director, Red Elephant AIDS Awareness and Prevention

The Advocacy and Activism Peer Group held its first in-person gathering in St. Louis last week, and will continue to meet virtually on a monthly basis through November 2019. In St. Louis, the group spent time sharing justice case studies; assessing common justice language; and discussing the Disciples justice movement; as well as taking some free time to rest, socialize, and explore St. Louis.

On August 9—the fourth anniversary of Michael Brown’s murder by then Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson—peer group members also visited the Canfield Greens Mike Brown Family Memorial, along with the Brown family.

“I had the opportunity to attend a remembrance service at the place where four years ago, Mike Brown laid shot dead in the middle of the street for more than four hours,” Alonso shares. “His family and friends were unable to cross police lines to go to him and grieve. We heard from family members and friends, and their grief is still so raw. And it is also so powerful to hear how they have transformed their grief into action through their foundation and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Feeling inspired to keep dismantling racism everywhere. In the words of one of the speakers today, ‘We have nothing to lose but our chains.’”

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In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the ministries of health and social services have been core to our Disciples identity and faith. The National Benevolent Association (NBA) supports a network of Disciples-related health and social service providers across the life of the church. Learn more at www.nbacares.org/connect or contact mkilpatrick@nbacares.org.