



## **Creating Room at the Table for All**

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Looking back at 2015, it has been a whirlwind. It's been a year of starts, endings, new beginnings, and an abiding presence of hope and partnership.

This past February, our new church start was just gearing up for a weekly launch when we were [kicked out of our denomination over our commitment to full inclusion of our LGBTQ sisters and brothers](#). This was a heartbreaking experience, to be sure, but it opened up a whole new possibility for partnership and new life.

As we continued to lean into our calling to be an inclusive church, we were humbled at the invitation of Portland's historic First Christian Church to nest in their wonderful, hospitable facilities. For me, matters of inclusion aren't just a matter of so-perceived "hot button" issues – inclusion is always about people: who's in, who's out, and who are we missing? Because inclusion is always also about gathering Christ-centered community for social change and the common good.

Affiliating with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been one of those inclusion moments for us. To think that in our time of heartbreak and need, another community would come alongside us to offer their support and encouragement. For me, the Disciples' commitment to welcoming everyone to the Table of God in our week-in-and-week-out communion practice has undergirded my hopes and prayers for inclusion.

Attending Leadership Academy and participating in the social entrepreneurship track this past autumn in Indianapolis was one of the highlights of the past year. Brainstorming and wrestling with colleagues across the country, imagining anew churches for the common good, went a long way in helping me discern how we might maximize our potential in Portland for the same.

Portland has recently declared a homelessness emergency. These past months we've become engaged in what will be a multi-year effort to address this crisis and turn it into an opportunity for housing solutions and our neighbor's flourishing. To that end, we've partnered with First Christian Church and First Congregational UCC of Portland in an effort with the Do Good Multnomah overnight shelter for veterans. The mayor of Portland has encouraged each of us to do even more, and we're in discernment about opening another similar space for more in need.

But ultimately, what I'd like to see happen is creating a "third space" called "Table." This would be a place where people could get a great cup of coffee and come in from the rain. This would be a place where college students could come in to study for their finals and hear some great tunes on vinyl. This would be a place where business associates could duck in to finalize their plans over a chai tea latte. This would be a place where our once-homeless friends would be able to get the job training and experience they need to not only get back on their feet, but also help us get back on the right page for community.

My friend Steve Chalke, in his work with Oasis in the UK, always says, “God never stops counting us in.” So, how do we create Christ-centered community beyond the traditional Sunday service? How might we church beyond Sundays? For me, our work at Table will be one small part of achieving that call.

We’re just getting started, and I can’t wait to see what 2016 has in store—for God’s glory and neighbor’s good.

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*This blog is part of a series of reflections highlighting the ministries of the **NBA Incubate Initiative**. The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at [nbacares.org/incubate](http://nbacares.org/incubate) or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at [awatkins@nbacares.org](mailto:awatkins@nbacares.org).*