



# *A Story from the National Benevolent Association*

## **XPLOR Is More Than Ten Months**

**Rev. Dr. Ben Bohren**

**Mission Specialist, NBA XPLOR**

Mary is gone; by that I mean Mary Cormican Martin Kramer died. I knew she was sick and in the hospital, but that had happened many times over the years since as she had been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in her early twenties. I first met Mary in 1960 at a Southern District Youth Convention in Miami, Florida. I was 14 and she was 15. Throughout high school and junior college, we became dearest of friends, serving on youth commissions and as officers of the Florida Timothy Association. We planned retreats and “lock-ins” and worship services. We were part of a wonderful group of teenage South Florida Disciples who loved the church and loved God and loved each other.

Mary and I went to different colleges and seminaries but stayed in regular contact. When she was ordained in rural Washington State, I flew there to preach her ordination. When she moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area and I would fly through that airport, we would always meet up to catch up. When I had moved to southern California and one of her sons was considering a job there, he stayed with me. At General Assemblies, we always found time for a special “catch up” time. Just a year ago, Mary and her husband, Paul, made a visit close to Palm Springs, and we both drove miles in order to have lunch together.

So, the news of Mary’s death hit me hard. We had been colleagues and spiritual friends for more than 55 years. She was a “soul sister” to me. I was unable to attend her memorial, but my faith celebrated her life and our long journey of following Jesus together. One of the greatest gifts of our Disciples community is that Mary is not the only significant friend like this. There are so many with whom I have walked the Christian path of service and mission. Mary was the longest.



Reflecting on this recent life event and my work with NBA XPLOR, I began to understand that this XPLOR program is far more than a 10-month experience. Yes, our Residents are living together in Christian community for 10 months, but the relationships they are building with each other, with their local congregations, and with God will put down some of the deepest roots of their faith journey.

Truly, we see in many of them major life-changing, faith-changing moments in these 10 months, but some of the friendships they are developing will last a lifetime. They are “falling in love” with God and the church and each other in ways they cannot fully comprehend right now, but as the years pass by, they will return again and again to these relationships that continue to nurture their hearts and souls. They will seek out each other in times of great celebration and times of deep crisis. They may not see each other for years, but they will exchange Christmas letters to keep in touch, and each time they read those letters, their hearts will be touched with memories that stir and renew their faith.

Some people may think that NBA XPLOR is only a 10-month program. I believe that XPLOR is a lifetime experience when the meaning of community and justice work and spiritual deepening and developing compassionate spirits is written on the hearts and minds of XPLOR young adults. May it be so.



**National  
Benevolent  
Association**

### MISSION

Following God’s call, the National Benevolent Association exists to inspire and connect the people and ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to accompany one another in the creation of communities of compassion and care, and to advocate for the well-being of humanity.

### CONTACT

(314) 993-9000 | [www.nbacares.org](http://www.nbacares.org)