

Becoming a Voice for Social Justice

Mary Taylor, 2017-18 NBA XPLOR Resident in Hiram-Mantua, OH



In NBA's strategic planning for 2018-2021, we have named Advocacy and Activism as a strategic priority, as we work to transform the root causes of social injustice. Efforts include equipping and training partners to address the critical social justice issues most relevant to their work. From April 20 to 23, NBA XPLOR Residents from Tucson-Marana and Hiram-Mantua traveled to Washington, D.C. for Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), an event that aims to strengthen the voice of the ecumenical Christian community and to mobilize for social justice through worship, theological reflection, and opportunities for learning and witness. In this reflection, Mary shares what her first experience in advocacy and lobbying was like, and how it's galvanized her to stand up for those whose voices aren't heard.

Throughout my XPLOR Residency, I have been frustratedly asking Linda, the Hiram-Mantua Spiritual Companion, for more social justice opportunities. As the only house close enough to the East, Linda mentioned an amazing event that she had been able to take Residents to in the past. As soon as she told us about Ecumenical Advocacy Days, my mind was set. I knew somehow, we would find a way there. I am so blessed that Bonnie, the Director of NBA XPLOR, decided this would be an excellent opportunity for more XPLOR Residents, because that made my first year at EAD (the first of what will be many years, mind you), that much easier to manage, along with the EAD Young Scholars Fund.

As we drove closer to D.C., I remember feeling less impressed by the monuments like my fellow passengers were, and more anxious about the coming weekend. I had personally never advocated for anything (I hadn't called my Congressman nor sent letters), and I attended my first march just the month before. I was so worried about not being the right face or voice to represent anything, especially for something as significant as the displaced and silenced voices of migrants and refugees.

During the weekend, I was able to listen to stories and testimonies from many different groups of people - from religious leaders who have created sanctuaries in their churches, to women who have experienced violence in the fields, to those whose very homes are being destroyed due to climate change. This weekend, though heartbreaking in many respects, was eye-opening to what I can do here and now, with my very pale face and Southern

accent. Though I have not experienced what others have, the weekend showed me that I can and will be a voice through which those others can speak and be heard. Though this was my first glimpse of advocacy and lobbying, it will not be the last.

NBA XPLOR 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.**