

NBA XPLOR Announces Hiatus for 2020-21 Program Year

NBA Staff, June 25, 2020



After considerable discernment, the National Benevolent Association (NBA) has made the difficult decision to place our young adult residential program, NBA XPLOR, on hiatus for the 2020-21 program year.

In light of the impact of COVID-19 and the realities of addressing this infectious disease, the NBA had to address the real question of “can we safely bring people together?” As an organization, NBA devoted several weeks of staff time and hundreds of hours of internal and external conversations into reaching this decision. As part of the decision-making process, XPLOR staff held four virtual forums to gather the experiences and insights of XPLOR Alumni and Residents, XPLOR Host Teams, members of the NBA Board of Trustees, and ecumenical campus ministry partners. Through these wisdom gathering sessions, we heard insights from over 90 unique voices on potential scenarios that could account for the capacity and safety of Residents, congregational partners, and community organizations for the 2020-21 program year.

Through analysis, consultation, and prayer, NBA understands there are many unpredictable variables in hosting a residential program in these uncertain times. Considering NBA’s vision of creating communities of compassion and care, we believe that our Residents, Host Teams, and the NBA staff are best served by placing the program on hiatus for the 2020-21 program year. While we lament this decision, we hope this time provides us the freedom and flexibility to adapt to the changing situations of living in a pandemic and dismantling systems of injustice.

Since 2014, NBA XPLOR has brought together young adults from across the world, who want to explore the connection between the life of faith and the work of justice. Through six cohorts, the program has graduated more than 100 Residents who have gone on to answer calls to leadership in a wide array of health and social service settings, including community organizing, education, social work, law, seminary, and social entrepreneurship ventures. XPLOR alumni serve in settings across the life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), ecumenically, and beyond.

The program has had houses in 10 US cities and supported the missional presence of local congregations through almost 120,000 XPLOR Resident service hours. XPLOR Residents have



participated in Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC; have been trained in faith-based community organizing with Gamaliel Network, and served as a delegate on NBA's 2019 Immigration Detention Immersion Trip. The NBA remains committed to young adult vocational discernment and spiritual deepening. We envision for this time of hiatus to intentionally plan for methods and ways to live more fully into these commitments.

What Does Hiatus Mean for NBA XPLOR Staff?

Although NBA will not be placing Residents within host communities this year, NBA's XPLOR team is approaching this pause with intentionality. The hiatus of the XPLOR program invites our team the time to engage in deep program evaluation and re-envisioning to design and implement adjustments that ensure our staff, program, partners, and Residents have a program experience that truly reflects and builds leadership for the church and the world in a dynamic context.

The Director of NBA's XPLOR program, Rev. Bonnie Osei-Frimpong had this to share about the hiatus, "Our XPLOR team laments that our Program and partners will not host Residents this year; yet we are also grateful for this opportunity to dream a bigger dream for what impact XPLOR could live into going forward. The novel Coronavirus is compelling people and institutions to look at their commitments and practices in innovative ways. NBA XPLOR is stretched and is growing through this "gap year," much in the same ways that our Residents and host teams have been transformed through this program."

The NBA understands and recognizes the challenges of this change. Even though there is a hiatus, we know there are still efforts we can make to assist and nurture young adults in vocational and spiritual discernment. We are committed to continuing that work. We will be using this time to connect deeply with over 100 XPLOR alumni, Host Teams and other communities connected to NBA XPLOR. As NBA we value collaboration, and these conversations will help to inform new models and mission priorities of NBA XPLOR. This group of people has always been a vital community of discourse and we know they will continue to be during this time of transition.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.

