

The Struggle Is Real: Time

2016-17 Hiram-Mantua NBA XPLOR House

In the previous entry to “The Struggle is Real” series, we heard from the North Hollywood NBA XPLOR House on how they collectively handle chores. This next installment will shed light into how the Hiram-Mantua NBA XPLOR Residents deal with not enough time. Don’t forget to join in the conversation and keep looking for more from “The Struggle is Real” series!



When joining NBA XPLOR, 10 months can seem like a strange amount of time: too short to get to know so many new people in the existing community, but too long to fill in all of your spare time with work and church. Becoming so ingrained in that community that it becomes a problem seemed like an impossibility. Nevertheless, it has been the biggest struggle for the Hiram-Mantua XPLOR house.

During our weekly meetings, our house has two sections on the agenda that seem to fill up fastest: House News and House Activities. The first category is for events that we have committed to go to as a house, and the second is events that we want to do together. As we moved into the second half of our XPLOR term, the items in the first category started to dwarf the items in the second, and our calendar started to look like a daily to-do list with every day having something to go to that would fill up our time.

We are uniquely blessed to have the opportunity to work in three different churches, with each of those churches having an active and different community life. Unfortunately for us, that meant that on top of each of our own four schedules, we needed to integrate events from three others. Merging seven schedules when there are so many opportunities to grow and learn at every event made it hard to turn down anything, so we ended up saying yes to everything!

The burnout rate was quick. There were multiple times that we would show up to work on Monday wishing that it was already the weekend because our actual weekend had been filled with events. We started to get more and more closed off in our spare time, trying to savor the moment because we knew that we wouldn’t have another moment to ourselves for a while. The small intentional community between the four of us started to dissipate as we encountered group exhaustion from the amount of ourselves we were putting into each interaction each week.

One of the pastors we work with, Dr. Irvin Green, talks quite a bit about blessing management. We had been given so many blessings: people who invited us into their lives and homes, free or cheap activities to give us a chance to branch out, and opportunities to hear others speak about lives and backgrounds that were much different from our own. All of these events were things to be thankful for, but we were utilizing poor blessing management. It was time to learn from what we were experiencing and make a change.

What we learned about ourselves was that, as a house filled primarily with introverts, we cannot be “on” socially all the time. The down time is where we flourish, and, for many reasons up to and including mental health, the time we spend by ourselves and in small groups in solitude are necessary for us to be our best selves when we spend time with others.

In a selection from Henri Nouwen’s writing included in the book “Called to Community: The Life Jesus Wants for His People,” our house found the following: *“Solitude is essential to community life because there we begin to discover a unity that is prior to all unifying actions. In solitude we become aware that we were together before we came together and that community life is not a creation of our own will but an obedient response to the reality of our being united. Whenever we enter into solitude, we witness to a love that transcends our interpersonal communications and proclaims that we love each other because we have been loved first (1 John 4:19). Solitude keeps us in touch with the sustaining love from which the community draws its strength. It sets us free from the compulsions of fear and anger and allows us to be in the midst of an anxious and violent world as a sign of hope and a source of courage. In short, solitude creates that free community that makes bystanders say, ‘See how they love each other.’”*

Essentially, our house learned that it was necessary to find a balance: that it was okay to say no without guilt to some events so that we could say yes enthusiastically to the ones we truly cared about and wanted to be a part of. It meant that we needed to make intentional time for solitude: not only to rest and recharge, but to center ourselves around the core of community life that we find through conversation with God and independent study. Being a part of community is so important to us, and we have learned that by using discretion and moderation with how our time is spent, we can be even better members of that community.

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.**