

The Ministry of Presence as a Peer Group Convener

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Sometimes the hardest work of ministry is just showing up. Not just arriving at a place, but really showing up – being present with individuals who simply need a safe space to breathe, share their thoughts without judgment and grow as they are nurtured by others who seek to understand them. In my experience, this kind of work has its joys and challenges, but it's often the very thing that God does for us time and time again.

For the past two years, I have spent countless hours convening and sharing in several peer groups with amazing Disciples across the life of the church. I've been blessed to work through case studies with Executive Leaders (CEOs/EDs) of Disciples-related health and social service ministries of how they have navigated times of transition in their organizations, or witnessed them share resources that helped to strengthen their organization's mission and daily operations. I've been blessed to hear the story of someone from another peer group who found her way back to church as a result of being with others doing similar work and learning how their faith helped them to navigate the complexities of their lives. I also think of the Prison and Jail Ministries leaders who courageously embarked upon learning to tell their stories in a new way and sharing those stories through public narrative videos that shed new light on their ministries and the great work Disciples are doing in often very dark places.



There have been countless experiences of rejuvenation after taking time away from the daily grind to play and work collaboratively with others during our face-to-face gatherings. And every peer group has been able to practice mental health wellness and spiritual renewal through self-care practices and devotional reflections. As the convener, oftentimes, my role was just to be present – to create a space, be open, and welcome anyone who showed up.

The NBA is taking seriously the ministry of presence by offering Peer Learning and Wellness Groups for Disciples. Peer Learning and Wellness Groups provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in peer support and encouragement, mutual dialogue, spiritual renewal, and peer-to-peer learning. The vision of NBA Peer Learning and Wellness Groups is to provide an opportunity for likeminded individuals to cultivate a community focused on:

- 1. Education** (peer-to-peer learning, sharing experience and expertise on leadership/ministry related issues, and sharing resources)
- 2. Inspiration** (spiritual renewal, self-care, peer support/encouragement)
- 3. Advocacy** (engaging in a collaborative service or advocacy project). Each cohort gives particular attention to the current issues affecting their work and/or ministries.

The experience includes time for rest and renewal, joyful shared conversation, and group learning with others who truly understand the challenges and gifts of faith-based work in the current environment.

Ministry can be lonely sometimes. As a peer group convener, my greatest joy is bringing people together so they know they are not alone, sharing in their joys and challenges, and watching new relationships form that reflect the very presence of God among us. To God be the glory!

For more information about NBA Peer Learning and Wellness Groups, visit our webpage at <https://www.nbacares.org/connect-ministries>.

In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the ministries of health and social services have been core to our Disciples identity and faith. The National Benevolent Association (NBA) supports a network of Disciples-related care providers and collaborative communities of Disciples working together on particular issues. Learn more at nbacares.org/connect.