



## Call and Response

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Starting a new church is exciting and challenging. UrbanMission’s approach to church planting has had a lasting impact on our community—and especially on the pastoral team. Despite the many challenges, each of the UrbanMission pastors has been able to discern God’s still-speaking voice through the encouragement from mentors, friends, and seminary professors.

Yet, we’ve heard God speaking “loudest” through our neighbors.

Intentionally listening for God’s voice guided us to arrive at the question that would shape UrbanMission and eventually UrbanMission Community Partners: “What is God doing here, and how can we join in?”

This question re-framed our approach to community-building and reminds me of the powerful truth that we’ve learned from our friend and colleague, Rev. Sandhya Jha: God has been present in our communities long before we got there and will remain present long after we’ve left. It’s merely our job to learn how we fit into God’s plans and act accordingly.

UrbanMission lives into this truth by seeking to partner with our community; this partnership led us to create UrbanMission Community Partners (UMCP), an independent nonprofit working with families and individuals at risk from poverty, hunger, homelessness, incarceration, and/or inadequate education and health care.

The realization that God is already at work in our neighborhood has freed us from the temptation to micromanage every aspect of our work and, more importantly, to be open to the possibility that God may call us in such a way that requires us to refocus our efforts and pivot towards a new reality.

Our UMCP leadership team initially felt a strong desire to provide transitional housing for people returning from prison, providing a safe and stable living environment to maximize their chances of reintegrating back into society successfully. Within our first year as an organization, we had explored different models of transitional housing, met potential local partners, and connected with fellow NBA ministries addressing similar challenges in their communities.

Still, God and our community were guiding us down a different path.

The healthcare challenges facing our community propelled us to seek partnership with organizations sharing similar values and passions to continue God’s healing work in our community. In partnership with Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona’s Health Promoters, and UrbanMission, UMCP now is establishing a Community Health and Wellness Resource Center—providing classes in Healthy Eating, Active Living; Kids’ Wellness Days; community health fairs; and other healthcare services.



While this Spirit-led pivot could have been deeply disconcerting for such a young organization, our Board of Directors responded with a resounding affirmation of the work being done with our community in making wellness opportunities easily accessible and affordable. This pivot also encouraged a general contractor in our community to explore renovating and/or building housing for people reentering society after incarceration—we are now providing support for his efforts as co-laborers.

God is constantly speaking to all of us through our communities and partners, inviting us to be agents of wholeness in a fragmented world. How do we respond to this exciting and challenging call?



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*The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at [nbacares.org/incubate](https://nbacares.org/incubate) or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at [awatkins@nbacares.org](mailto:awatkins@nbacares.org).*