

Why Are We Doing This?

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NBA Incubate Initiative Affiliate Ministry
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“Why are we doing this?” was the question that woke me that night six summers ago. Laying on a cot in a dark Sunday school room, surrounded by youth and other adults who seemed fast asleep, I was awake, frustrated that this mission trip wasn’t what I had wanted for our youth group.

It wasn’t sleeping on a cot that was bothersome—not that it was comfortable. It wasn’t the mediocre food being served, because after all, mission trip food is mediocre. It wasn’t that the July heat was too hot or that the work was too difficult or even too easy. It was the not-so-subtle message that serving others is about us; that our need to feel good is most important; that in our white Christian privilege we know what is best; that our own eternal life is the goal.

These questions played over and over in my head: “Why are we doing this? And why can’t we find a youth mission trip organization working from a progressive theology which takes the biblical story seriously, explores the root causes of poverty, focuses on the needs of others, and asks how, as followers of Jesus, we might partner with others to change living, here and now?”

The next morning, I shared my thoughts with my friend and colleague Tim Tutt. With enthusiasm and vision, and an uncanny gift of persuasion, Tim declared, “We should do this! You should do this!” This was the moment Reach Beyond Mission began.

A few months before our first Reach Beyond Mission weeks, Rebecca Hale, the NBA’s VP of Mission and Ministry, contacted us about becoming an NBA Incubate partner—a

partnership that has been invaluable to Reach Beyond Mission. In five summers, Reach Beyond Mission has hosted over 1200 participants from more than 80 youth groups. Certainly, Reach Beyond Mission benefitted from NBA's early financial support, and NBA has provided us multiple opportunities to learn about organizational best practices and development. NBA has walked alongside us, ready and available to offer encouragement and advice when needed. But the most important gift NBA has given us is affirmation of our vision, and what I now understand to be a call that came on a cot in the middle of the night: "Why are we doing this?"

"Why are we doing this?" is now the fundamental question we ask at Reach Beyond Mission. Why are we allowing folks to remain food insecure? Why are there so many people living on the streets?

The mission of Reach Beyond Mission is to provide life-changing experiences that equip youth with biblical, theological, and social tools to do justice. The answer to the "why" questions can sometimes be difficult to understand or painful to accept. But by learning and recognizing the "why" through experiences and conversations in community, youth are offered a new vision and are capable of responding to the call to discover how to be partners in bringing justice to all of God's people. And that's why we're doing this!

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 or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.