



National Benevolent Association

**XPLOR**  
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

## My Experience on NBA's 2019 Immigration Detention Immersion Trip

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One of my roles as a [Prison and Jail Ministries](#) Advocacy Intern was to prepare for the Immigration Detention Immersion Trip. About two years, Dean Bucalos came up with the idea during the first Prison and Jail Ministries peer group. The group believed that in order to address the issue and encourage others to address the issues, then they needed to be intentional about learning from first-hand accounts and being present with those directly affected.



In November 2019, we spent three days in San Diego, California and one day in Tijuana to see how the issue has manifested itself on both sides. There were several different groups that came together for this trip. Participants included NBA Staff, Regional Ministers, The Advocacy and Activism Peer Group, and the General Ministry Staff. Many of the participants are at the front of various justice issues and came on the trip to understand how the issue of immigration is affecting their communities back home.

On the first day of the trip, we went to Casa de Oracion. This is an [Obra Hispana](#) congregation in downtown San Diego that served as our headquarters during the trip. Pastor Escamilla presides over the congregation and the church provided a wonderful space for us. That following night we traveled to [Centro Romero](#) in San Ysidro, CA. We were met by Carlos Correia and Dan Romero who were able to answer a great deal of the group's questions. This church is located very close to the border and deals with various immigration issues. They talked about the environmental issues that are occurring because of the maquiladoras and explained to us the ways in which asylum seekers deal with the immigration system. We learned a great deal during this time and were able to have a better understanding of what is going on at the border.

The second day, we traveled back to Casa De Oracion and met with Matthew 25 Ministries. They gave a presentation about the vast history of immigration primarily from Central America. They explained to the participants that much of the foreign policy conducted in the past, has been a major cause of mass migration and unrest in the region. The presentation was another opportunity to learn about the factors involved. Following the presentation, we traveled to Chicano Park and met with the Puentes (Bridge builders) who told us the history of the area. They explained to us how the Mexican community in San Diego reclaimed this area. The space is decorated with many murals depicting Mexican history as well as prominent historical figures.

On the third day we traveled to Tijuana, Mexico. We crossed the border through the walkway entrance and met with members of Iglesia Todos Los Naciones. This is a Mexican Disciples of Christ church located not far from the border. There we saw Pastor Lupita and the church provided a fantastic authentic Mexican lunch for us. The church has opened its doors to many in need and we heard stories from people who the church had given refuge to. Some of the stories included women who had been kidnapped and others who had seen great violence. This was an emotional time and many of the participants were captivated by the stories. The ministers

in the group put on their stoles and prayed over the church. We then had communion using pan dulce and headed over to [Al Otro Lado](#).

While at Al Otro Lado, we learned about the truly fascinating organization. This organization provides legal services for deportees, migrants, and refugees. They talked to us about the challenges they face as well as the stories of their clients. They gave a passionate presentation that really captivated trip participants.

Following Al Otro Lado, we traveled to Las Playas de Tijuana. As we got closer to the beach, the border wall emerged. The wall is about 30 feet high and there is another wall being built behind it. We arrived at the beach during sunset and saw the wall continue into the ocean. The wall on the Mexican side was covered in murals and people gathered around to watch the sunset. The image of the wall had a profound impact on the participants, many were taken back.

As the trip ended, we gathered around in groups and came up with ways the church could help. It was interesting to see how far everyone had come from not entirely understanding the issue, to finding ways they could help in their communities. The trip ultimately achieved the original goal and left deep impression on the participants.



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**NBA XPLORE** 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](http://nbacares.org/xplor).**