



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

Fresh Eyes in Discernment

Benton Stull, 2016-17 NBA XPLOR Resident in Hiram-Mantua, OH



Until I got to Hiram in August and started having in-depth conversations with my many new mentors, I had not even realized that I have been thinking about going to seminary for more than eight years. In that time, I've done a lot of other things, but it has always seemed like I would eventually find myself in seminary. Whatever I choose to do now, I can see that on my own I have not done a great job of addressing this question. NBA XPLOR's focus on vocational discernment was what attracted me to the program in the first place. I needed time and space in which to really focus on this question that seems to follow me everywhere I go.

Nothing about my experience with XPLOR has been more surprising than how much opportunity and help I've had in examining myself and discerning my vocation, whatever it may be. Since coming to Hiram and

Mantua, I've been immersed in greater involvement in church life and leadership, and I've spent valuable hours talking with pastors who have given me insight on their own callings into ministry and the discernment processes they went through. It has given me new perspective on my own life and questions, and it has made me take my own past of discernment seriously.

One pastor I spoke to relayed a bit of advice that was given to him: If you feel a call, run away from it, and if it pulls you back, you may consider it to be a sincere call. Another warned of the grief that comes from choosing to follow any specific path. To choose to commit to one path is to cut off many other possibilities. He said, "It's difficult if you want to keep a lot of options open. You gotta let them go."

I know there are a lot of different directions a person can go with a Master of Divinity; it still feels like such a heavy decision to me. But is it even possible to feel worthy of pursuing a religious vocation?

I still haven't decided to go to seminary, or not to go to seminary, but I have, again, decided to do a few other things while I continue to wonder. Even if I haven't been blessed with an affirmative answer to this one nagging question, I have been blessed with this program, and the people I'm surrounded by every day here: the NBA XPLOR program leadership, my housemates, my spiritual companion, three church congregations, and four ministers who have become my mentors and friends. I could never have asked for, or expected, such support and insight from so many loving people. All I have is gratitude.



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.