

Queerly Beloved in Every Way

Corina Sosa, 2019-20 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis, MO

About ten months ago, I graduated from college without much of a plan. I kind of knew what I wanted to do, I just didn't have much sense of direction and was going through a lot mentally.

About nine months ago, I realized I was non-binary and started using they/them pronouns amongst my family of choice, but not with my family of origin.

At my home church, Galileo Christian Church, if you come up to the front to do the welcome speech, a reading, or communion, we had made it a common practice to introduce ourselves to the congregation and include our pronouns. I had been using she/they for the past few months before January 2019, but realized "they" fit best for me. The first time I introduced myself with they/them pronouns on a Sunday at Galileo, I felt a sense of renewed wholeness and authenticity about myself (definitely not for the first time since I started going there three and a half years prior).

About seven or eight months ago, I looked into applying for XPLOR. I had heard so many great things about it from friends who had done it in years past, but the deadline had already passed for the 2019-2020 year. I was disappointed I missed the cut-off date, but I figured I could start the application process for the 2020-2021 year when it opened in November.

About four months ago, my pastor, Katie, posted in our church's Facebook group about how there was an open XPLOR slot for this current year in St. Louis. Figuring I could give it a shot, I opened an application, answered some of the questions, got overwhelmed by the intensiveness of it, and promptly exited out and moved on to something else. A couple of weeks later after some emails from Ben, a brief talk with Katie, and then a zoom call with Ben, I pushed past my anxiety and finished the application in the second week of July. A couple of days later on a Friday I had my interview with Bonnie over the phone and was told a decision would be made the following Monday. Meer hours later, I got a call from Ben offering me the spot. He asked if I would accept it and I immediately said yes. Thus, started a whirlwind of sending in documents and making travel arrangements to start a new life in St. Louis for the next ten months.

About seven weeks ago, I arrived in Kansas City, Missouri with fellow XPLOR resident Leah and Deb, one of the spiritual companions and we traveled to Leavenworth, Kansas for our Laboratory week. Going into XPLOR, I was a good mixture of excitement and anxiousness. I was excited to experience living in a new place and checking out all the cool things to do in St. Louis. However, I was anxious because I was unsure of how my gender identity would be received by my two future roommates, Alex and William, who, after reading their bios and creeping on their Facebook pages, seemed to be straight and cisgender guys. While there is nothing inherently wrong with those identities, I was apprehensive about how much we would be able to relate to each other, which is probably one of the most important parts of living together in Intentional Community. I was gladly proven wrong over Lab week;



The 2019-20 St. Louis XPLOR house posing in front of a mural in St. Louis, Mo.



we immediately clicked with each other and they were open and accepting about my gender identity and pronouns. Every once in a while, there is a slip, they will either quickly correct themselves or accept correction from me, if needed. I feel we were also super lucky to have both Mady and Marissa there as well since they had been in St. Louis the previous year and are doing XPLORmore this year. It helped us get a better idea of what to expect and get out of living in our future home for the next ten months.

About six weeks ago, we officially moved into St. Louis and were immediately received by our host congregation with warmth and love. The first few Sundays it seemed a new person would give us an Aldi's gift card, which made

grocery shopping a lot less stressful. We were treated to meals, museum outings, and taken down the Delmar Divide to see the immediate difference between the north and south sides of St. Louis both structurally and economically. Since then, we've gone to multiple festivals, a Cardinals game, and The Grove multiple weekends. We have even gone to our spiritual companion Madeline's church, Compton Heights Christian Church, for a Sunday service, and have been meeting there for our weekly meetings.

About five weeks ago, I started my internship at Prison Performing Arts, which I was very excited to begin. Prison Performing Arts does a lot of theatre work with offenders, so I knew my theatre degree would be put to great use. Of course, like putting on any show, a lot of behind the scenes work has to

get done in order for it to succeed. The first “show” I helped with was the big fundraising gala that happened two days after I started at PPA. Talk about hit the ground running! For the most part, I’ve been doing more administrative work than actual creative work, but even that has given me insight into some of the people who participate in these programs. Sometimes I’ll be given written works to transcribe that are done by the women from the Women’s Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia, Missouri during their spoken word class. I’ll tell you, I can go from laughing at a humorous short story to being almost in tears by the pain and intensity of a poem within a minute. Talent can come from any environment when it has the chance to flourish in a mostly unforgiving setting.

I’ve also been able to help put together costumes for Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which is being performed for the public this month at the women’s prison. I completed my Volunteer in Corrections training, so I’ll be able to work closely with those who participate in the programs PPA offers in the future. I’ll also be working with the Alumni Company, made up of formally incarcerated individuals, during their rehearsals as well. I count myself very lucky that my predecessor [Jaclyn](#) decided to stay in St. Louis because she has been a tremendous help so far, and I’m sure I’ll be looking to her for advice as my time at PPA continues.

Needless to say, a lot can happen in less than a year. This has been the first time I’ve gotten to use my pronouns in social-life, work-life, and home-life all at the same time. Prior to leaving Texas, I hadn’t been living in the most affirming of homes when it came to gender and sexuality. Being part of XPLOR has given me the opportunity to truly experience what it can be like to be affirmed in every aspect of living as a queer young adult that I couldn’t quite get living with conservative parents.

With National Coming Out Day being last week (October 11), I affirm myself as a non-binary, bisexual, Latinx Christian to anyone that hasn’t been aware of it before. As I continue in the XPLOR program, I know I have my family of choice that has my back in faith, and that I am truly beloved by God the Mother-Father.

About two months from now, it will be Thanksgiving. Four weeks after, Christmas. I may not know what exactly the future holds going forward after the publishing of this blog post, but I have the faith

that I won't be alone on those holidays, one way or another. XPLOR has given me the opportunity to live in full affirmation, and there ain't no going back for me.

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**.