



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

Courage, Life, Peace

NBA XPLOR 2018-19 Dallas House



Erin Gresham:

Courage, it is a simple word with such strong meaning. It's what the lion gained in his journey to Oz. It's what David had when conquering Goliath. It is what Jesus had all his life when he shared God's word, even though there were people

who wanted him dead. Courage, that strong and simple word, is what I want to use to define my overall XPLOR experience. I came into this XPLOR experience with an open heart and an open mind, hoping to learn and absorb everything that came in my path. I was ready to meet new people, experience a new city, and make some waves in the changing of this world, to make equality for all. Now looking at 23-year-old Erin, who just graduated college and wanting to dive headfirst into a new adventure, I thought I had a lot of courage. I wanted to come up with new ideas at my work and church site and open the minds of others around me. It turns out that reality slapped me in the face. When I came to Dallas, sure I was excited, but I soon realized that I didn't have as much courage as I thought.

To know a little more about me and my personality, I am a very open-minded, go-with-the-flow person. I am willing to help out anyone with a task that needs to be done. Even though I greatly appreciate this about myself, I was realizing it wasn't helping me grow at my internship sites. After a few months at my internship sites I knew that I had to go to my supervisors and try to figure out how I can grow. The problem was my courage was in short supply and self-doubt was starting to grow inside of me. About halfway through the program, I shared my sermon on standing up for others in need and causing good trouble in today's world against social injustices. I realized after that I needed to practice what I preached, literally. A few weeks after my sermon, I got to go to Washington D.C. with other XPLOR residents and see social justice in action, which helped me gain the courage that I was lacking.

When I came home from Washington D.C. I started to really speak up on things that I believed in and was not scared to share my opinion anymore at my job, my church, my roommates, and talking with family back in Illinois. I started to see the courage in me and use it to speak out and glorify God's kingdom. I still have some growing to do, but I am happy for the courage I have found. Just like the cowardly lion, it turns out I had enough courage all along, I just needed to believe in me.

Jemima Suwa:

The phrase, "called to life", has become very important to me in the last year.

When I find myself grappling with fear or negative thoughts, or even when I am experiencing peaceful moments, the phrase pops in my head and leads me to consider how God may be calling me to life in those moments.



One of the four cornerstones of the XPLOR program is *spiritual deepening and vocational discernment*, and one tool that has been offered to help walk us through that cornerstone is Patrick Reyes' book, *Nobody Cries When We Die: God, Community, and Surviving to Adulthood*. In the book, Reyes emphasizes the idea of vocational discernment through narrative, i.e. discerning one's vocation drawing from the experiences, relationships, context, conversations, surroundings, and community that a person has been a part of. It is about "living into God's call to life, not about arriving in the promised land." It is not just about me; my narrative interacts with the narratives of others [community]. The phrase, "called to life", has become very important to me, as I mentioned earlier, because the idea of God calling me to life and inviting me to call others to life as well, is a reminder of how valued we are and how much potential there is for us to live out lives of compassion, mutual care, and equity for all.

The notion of being "called to life" has been a good reminder that following Jesus is not just about religiously following certain rules, routines, rituals, and dogma, but about stepping into a relationship that feeds and grows me, and empowers me to support and enrich others as well. A relationship is not a dead thing; it is ongoing and involves learning, growing, supporting, challenging, being open and honest, and enjoying one another. In a genuine, intimate relationship, we are able to be vulnerable and we are more likely to ask the tough questions. This year for me has come with a lot of asking, searching, and reevaluating. As I have wrestled with scripture, traditional Christian values, and biblical interpretations, I have acknowledged God continuously breathing life into me and giving me permission to ask the tough questions.

I wonder how you are experiencing God calling you to life today; or who around you may be calling you to life, or who you may be calling to life.



Neomai Uesi:

On May 3, 2019, my roommate Erin and I had the opportunity to attend the Visionary Women Luncheon, a luncheon benefiting Juliette Fowler Communities. At the end of the luncheon, NBA XPLOR Missions Specialist Rev. Virzola Law closed us out with a saying: "Go in Peace and NOT in Pieces".

Now, everyone in the audience was like, "Amen!!" and I was snapping my fingers going "Yaaaaaass!!" but that saying stuck with me. My preachamony (a testimony/preaching) was even on Peace.

When I first came in to the XPLOR program, I tried not to have any expectations because I didn't want to feel the disappointment of not meeting it, but my life became more complicated. I mean, I had a dope internship site where I got to work closely with the residents and the employees were amazing and super awesome. My church wasn't just a host site, they became my church family and I will forever be grateful for the love and support that they have showered me with. But on that day when Rev. Virzola said that, I started to feel a bit emotional because I felt like I was in so many pieces and I didn't know how to put myself back together. Where and how could I find my peace? What did I have to do to get that peace?

When I say my life got more complicated, I don't mean that this program was horrible; things got more complicated because I realized I did have some expectations. I was expecting to know what I wanted to do and who I should be by the end of this program. I lived in the shadows of my great siblings my whole life and I was trying to find my voice and not going off theirs. So, when I came to Texas I thought, "WOW! THIS IS MY CHANCE TO FIND MY VOICE!! I'm in a place where I won't be compared to the older Uesi siblings". I came thinking that's how it's going to go, but it didn't happen that way because I kept comparing myself to my siblings with everything...that was just some pieces. Thinking that I was going to at least find out what I wanted to do or who I wanted to be didn't happen at all. I kept telling myself so many things- that if I do this or that, then maybe I can finally get that peace! But what I didn't realize is that I was breaking myself in so many pieces looking at what I thought XPLOR was going to give me instead of seeing what XPLOR actually gave me. I got to learn how to maneuver in a different kind of environment without my family and without someone watching my every move telling me that it was or wasn't okay. Instead of knowing what I wanted to do I found what I don't want to do, which is also very important. I faced some personal demons instead of tucking them away and waiting for them to come out again, with the help of some

awesome people at Juliette Fowler. And like Bonnie, the Director of NBA XPLOR told me in the beginning, "Just like how you study a specific major in school, this program is kind of like that; but what you are majoring and studying is life."

For the past 10 months that's what it has felt like, but the thing is I didn't get sick of it. Yes, I got homesick... A LOT! But I was willing to continue my "studies". And like what my older brother, Sifa, would say to my siblings and me, "look at the bigger picture". I finally stepped back from looking just at a stroke of paint and started to admire the beautiful painting. I finally found my peace.



2018-19 NBA XPLOR Dallas Residents: Jemima, Neomai, and Erin

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.**