

From the Ground Up

Evan Stanfill, 2015-16 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis, MO



One of the ministries I am working with as an NBA XPLOR Resident is the food security ministry at Memorial Boulevard Christian Church. Having seen the impact this service is providing to one of St. Louis' poorest neighborhoods, I believe that food security is one of the most important ministries we can be part of.

Let's start with a little back story. MBCC was your typical city church that peaked a long time ago, and as its parishioners moved to the suburbs and its aging population began to move on, it was in very real danger of closing its doors. Senior Minister Margie Pride and the church board thought the church had, at most, a year before it could no longer operate, so they decided instead to open the doors wider—to invite the

nearby community in for food and fellowship, seeing that need in their neighborhood. This shift in focus drastically changed the fate of this community of faith.

If you have ever taken a psychology class, you have seen Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is a pyramid, and at its base are physiological needs, like food and water, and then comes safety, such as shelter. Maslow's hierarchy represents that, before those basic needs are met, trying to reach the goals of love, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible.

So when someone says "they just need to get their priorities straight so they can get a job to feed themselves and get housing," they are making a very contradictory statement to this well-respected understanding of needs. MBCC and its ministry understand that and act it out in a Christ-like way. This church is not only a food pantry and a place to get a free meal. It is also a safe space for people to gather to find shelter and safety. But this ministry has not stopped there.

Here is a typical Thursday at MBCC. It starts with coffee and signs waving to cars and passersby out in front of the church, then breakfast and a Bible study. Afterwards, meal prep gets started for a lunch that usually feeds 45 to 60 people. Before lunch, there is a grief counselor who meets with a group from the community to help them through the loss of people near to them. During lunch and time afterward, there is a nurse on site to provide free health screenings and medical advice, and a union rep is there offering up job opportunities and discussing with people how to go about the job search and interview process. After lunch, I help provide technology assistance with online applications, job searches, email addresses, and other needs that an increasingly technology-driven world has created. All of this while there is a food pantry and clothing pantry being made available.

This is a community that not only provides the basics that people need to survive, but they are also making the opportunities available to make the next step. To continue to climb that pyramid. To continue to meet those very human needs.

There is truly a community that has been built and is being strengthened here. I have seen it already in the short six weeks I have been working here. People here know that they are safe and welcome and, because of that, they are always willing to help so that they may give the opportunity to others that they have received. The community around MBCC has turned providing food security into a real ministry.

*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 at nbacares.org/xplor.***