

Where Are They Now?

Matthew Capestro, 2014-15 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis, MO



In 2014, the National Benevolent Association (NBA) launched the NBA XPLOR Residency, a 10-month internship program for young adults. Centered upon spiritual and vocational discernment, the Residency offers 21- to 30-year-olds time and space to live in simple community and address social injustice. Residents serve with host congregations and community engagement sites,

developing their leadership skills as Disciples.

Now in its fourth year, NBA XPLOR alumni are dedicating themselves to systemic justice work, as well as direct care and action, across the life of the church. We look forward to seeing where the call takes them!

In this story, XPLOR alum Matthew Capestro shares how his experience with the XPLOR Residency led him to do another internship within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

1. When was your NBA XPLOR Residency?

I did the XPLOR Residency during the Fall of 2014 through 2015.

2. Where did you serve?

My host congregation was Union Avenue Christian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. My community engagement site was St. Peters UCC in Ferguson, Missouri.

3. Where did you intern after NBA XPLORE?

My post-XPLORE internship was with Disciples Peace Fellowship in the Summer of 2016.

4. Why did you decide to apply for another internship within the CC (DoC)?

Disciples Peace Fellowship is a justice-oriented fellowship where interns construct workshops for youth and young adults. Creating these workshops allows the intern a great deal of freedom to develop a learning experience around the issues of social justice that they are most passionate about. I felt DPF would provide an opportunity to carry forward some of the things I have learned from programs like XPLORE, as well as experiences from my own involvement in justice-oriented organizations. My hope was to inspire even just one camper to consider a justice topic in a new way, or else to have cultivated an environment that fosters a curiosity in social justice projects.

5. What experiences, if any, did you have as an XPLORE Resident which helped you as a Peace intern?

Many of the workshops I put together discussed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. This movement emerged in Ferguson the year that I did XPLORE. XPLORE helped prepare me to facilitate workshops which addressed some of the misconceptions about the BLM movement. My experience helped provide a foundation for having discussions around race and systemic injustice.

6. How was your internship at Disciples Peace Fellowship different from your one at the NBA? How were they similar?

They are very different inasmuch as XPLORE was primarily a learning experience and DPF was primarily a teaching experience. That isn't to say they were mutually exclusive - I also learned while doing DPF and taught while doing XPLORE. However, I think DPF logically follows XPLORE since that which was learned during the experience can then be distilled and shared with a wider audience.

7. How has your faith developed from before your internships, to your time at XPLORE and Disciples Peace Fellowship, to your life now?

Since finishing XPLOR, I have been working on majors in religious studies, philosophy, and sociology at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. My interest in these subjects was partially inspired by my experience with XPLOR. My understanding of God and Jesus have become more justice-centric since my time with the residency.

8. How has your approach to addressing social injustice changed in this time?

During my time with XPLOR, I was asked to attend a Diversity Awareness Partnership seminar that was designed to talk about racial issues. The seminar gave participants a few key skills - primarily the skill of understanding dialogue vs. debate. This has been essential to how I interact with issues of social justice/injustice. When bring a workshop to a wider audience of varying opinions, it is very important that one understands the nuanced, but distinct difference between engaging in a debate vs. dialogue. Debates are not designed to find common ground or advance mutual understanding. Recognizing this is important when one is talking to a mixed audience about racial, LGBT, gender, or other injustices.

9. Do you have any advice for current and future Residents? If so, please share.

Use the XPLOR program to learn. If you leave filled with new information, consider sharing it via other programs like Disciples Peace Fellowship. DPF provides a wonderful opportunity to share the unique learning experiences that come from internships (like XPLOR) with young people who are willing and eager to engage difficult topics. If there is one thing I learned from DPF that I would want future applicants to know - never underestimate young people's desire to engage difficult topics. The things you're learning and experiencing in XPLOR may one day be the guiding force in a workshop that completely upends someone else's worldview.

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.**