

A Heart for Care

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As this year's inaugural class of NBA XPLOR Residents gathered last week in St. Louis for XPLOR orientation, we were keenly aware of the events affecting the nearby community of Ferguson. The images of pain, violence and protest were the backdrop to our orientation.

The residents met their new housemates and spiritual companions, they began learning about living together in intentional community, planning a budget, receiving training in anti-oppression analysis, and going deep into the biblical and spiritual bases for transformative justice work. At the end of the week all were co-commissioned and blessed on their XPLOR journey.

At its heart the XPLOR year is about empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” and the Residents already with a sense of what it means to have a heart for care for service and justice. And yet, in the developments in light of the killing of Michael Brown and the ongoing violence and protest and anguish, this XPLOR Orientation community had the opportunity to engage vital questions not as hypothetical, but as real life playing out before our eyes.

What are the systems of injustice that have been in place for years that set off this crisis? When injustice results in violence, what options are available to promote peace? Is peace really possible when injustice remains? How do race and class and privilege affect injustice? As they head to one of the three XPLOR Houses this week, how do they discern the presence of injustice in their new neighborhoods? How do they allow themselves to be transformed by the neighbors and organizations that also seek to transform the world they share?



Written prayer offered by Rev. Virzola Law (from The Boulevard Christian Church, Memphis) at the public memorial in Ferguson, MO. (Photo credit: Bonnie Osei-Frimpong, August 2014)

During the orientation, the residents made a pilgrimage to Ferguson to stand with the community, to bear witness and offer a prayer of presence. It was a hard decision to go into Ferguson. Not because of any ambivalence about the evils of systemic oppression and injustice. Not because of fears for personal safety. It was a hard decision because we wanted to take care that our going would not compound the pain for residents. We wanted to take care that we were going to “stand with” and not to make a commodity out of another community’s pain. After careful conversation with local pastors it became clear that we could go and share in the moment in a way that honors the realities of a community experiencing deep brokenness. And so we went and bowed our heads in prayer. We offered and received words of comfort and grace.

The tragic violence and entrenched injustices that the protests in St. Louis have displayed also served as a *kairos* opportunity for Residents, their spiritual companions and all those working with them, to take seriously the call and commitment to serve God's hurting world with healing hope.

About NBA XPLOR

The NBA XPLOR Project is a ten 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 www.nbacares.org/xplor!