

First Things First

Joella Coles

Journey of Faith, Ann Arbor, MI

2018 SENT Seminar Participant

*Last September, the NBA Incubate Initiative welcomed its largest SENT Seminar cohort yet! The annual four-day training opportunity equips Disciples social entrepreneurs of faith for leadership and change as they nurture emerging health and social service ministries. This project, **Journey of Faith**, aims to understand the best entry points for churches to engage social services systems and to collaborate with marginalized community members, in order to address underlying causes of complex social problems.*



We Rebuilt the Altar

First things, first.

Before the exiled Jews started work on the foundation of the Temple ... Before they started to erect the walls of the Temple ... (Ezra 3:8-13)

Reimagining Mission

Journey of Faith began a process of discernment to grow in its mission of connecting with all: What would “the Church” look like if a group of faith communities set aside their personal desires for the sake of the gospel?

Could we effectively work with people we would not have chosen on our own? How do we live out, as Pastor Alex McCauslin notes, the “challenging aspect of the church’s call to connection” and seeing Christ in all?

Reimagining mission involves seeing our community as an extension of a congregation. A mission field can include all the people God calls to serve – even connecting with people who may never set foot in a church building. The effort to strive for unity, one body in Christ in the midst of diversity, is a call of the gospel and it can be scary.

Our Project

Mrs. Taylor, a widow with children living out of state, has not spoken to anyone in 5 weeks. Mr. Jackson still lives in his 1940s boyhood home. He is not a member of the neighborhood church, but a church volunteer stops by every week to visit with him.

This is the new frontier on aging. We hope to be part of a movement aiming to reduce the isolation and loneliness of seniors. Our project builds coalitions to prevent a point of crisis and a move toward solutions that will have a lasting impact. We are connecting with community members, other faith communities and agencies to establish a network of resources to support seniors.

We are recruiting individuals we are calling *Community Champions*, who will be trained to build better links between seniors in their own churches, older neighbors living near the church, and the resources available in the area. Individuals we are calling *Friendly Visitors* will visit with one or more seniors every week to support their physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

Rebuilding Our Foundation

At home, we have leaned into our work with others, to learn about a culture of generosity and collaboration. At SENT seminar, we were moved by the stories from others about God's calling on their ministry. That has shaped our work too. NBA staff talked about the basics of leading and operating care and service nonprofits. More importantly, they approached the process of innovation and transformation – as ministry itself.

Nowadays, people are leaving religion. It is not just the problem of declining churches, but a sadness for the cause of Christ in today's world. On a journey of renewal, the most important question is not: "Are we there yet?"; the question to ask is: "What foundation are we building our new thing on?" The sacrament of the altar is called forth from that question. It is what we think NBA understands and ministers to best.

So, first things, first.

Before they started to build the walls of protection around the city ... They rebuilt the altar so they could worship God ...

We're grateful for the opportunity to participate in the week of exploring, in practical and spiritual ways, the kind of foundation to build any new thing on. NBA's SENT

seminar got things in proper order. They helped us remember “to whom we belong.” Our vision became a little clearer. We were changed.

Journey of Faith Christian Church (DOC): We believe the Church can emerge again as a powerful force for change, be a reconciling voice, build bridges across differences, and find common ground to solve social problems. In a beloved community, everyone can be unafraid of scarcity. We can rejoice in sharing our abundance. And, God’s merciful love is extended to everyone. At its heart, faith can be both a principle of action and a powerful force for good. Our goals are to: 1) Expand the capacity of small churches, operating in the same ministry areas, to share resources, broaden outreach and access to their facilities for community use. 2) Understand the best entry points for churches to engage social services systems to help address the underlying causes of complex social problems. The goal is to move from fighting fires to “fireproofing” to prevent, mitigate or deliver sustainable solutions. 3) Collaborate with marginalized community members, who are closest to the issues, to lead planning, problem-solving and decision-making activities with other stakeholders for sustainable change. This effort can be a helpful component for expanding a community’s capacity.

The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate