



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

Lift Every Voice

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*"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."
~Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963, Strength to Love*



On the weekend of April 15-17, the NBA XPLOR program made a wonderful opportunity happen for me. I had the privilege of attending the EAD Conference in Washington, D.C. If you do not know what EAD stands for, I will tell you it stands for a lot more than just its title of Ecumenical Advocacy Days. This year's theme was "Lift EVERY Voice," and the weekend really focused on the issues of racism, class and power.

This was really a first-time experience for me. I have never really been a big protestor, or been real fond of conflict. This weekend really opened my eyes to what advocacy means. The book definition of advocacy reads: it is the public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. The EAD weekend gave the word "advocacy" a brand new meaning to me. It is more than just public support. There are people starting movements, and have been for years. There have been people fighting for causes and policies long before I was even born. Hundreds of Christian and other faith-based advocates raised their voices for justice in this weekend. Especially in the midst of a critical election year, there were plenty of reasons why we should be raising our voices.

We had the privilege of hearing some wonderful speakers and pastors of the word, including Rev. Dr. William Barber, the president of the North Carolina NAACP and convener of the Forward Together Moral Movement; Rev. Amy Gopp, vice president of external relations for IMA World Health; and last but not least, Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of Children's Defense Fund. Each with different passions and different causes to bring justice to.

In addition to all of the inspiring speakers, more than 60 issue workshops reflecting on global issues of justice related to the EAD theme, as well as advocacy skills training, were held over the weekend gathering. The workshop that spoke to me in the strongest way was called "One Human Family: Bridging the Racial Divide." This workshop made us do a personal inventory of our lives and the people in it, discuss different dialogue that is used inappropriately, and look at the different characteristics of a stereotype. Something I found so interesting was the racism in the English language. Surprisingly to me, we use "black" and "white" words. Here are some examples of the negative connotations involving the word "black": a black eye (being a mark of shame); black list; black sheep of the family; and blackballed. It seems that there are more positive connotations involving the word "white," such as purity and innocence. We need to work to be better about our intentions. Times are changing, and that means we need to change some things as well. Race is such a modern idea. A quote that was shared by an author that is unknown stuck with me. The quote reads:

"Our first task to approaching another person, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on another's dream. More serious still, we may forget...that God was there before our arrival."

We cannot truly understand one another until we take off our shoes and try walking in someone else's for a day. It is time for the leaders to rise. And by leaders, I mean all people. We all have something worth fighting for. We have to find the fight in us. You might be like me, and think I can never fight like that, or storm Capitol Hill. But there is YOUR way of fighting for the truth and the light.

“As Christians, we believe that leaders and policy-makers are called to act and to govern in fairness and with justice for all.” Like the persistent widow of the Gospel who demands that the judge hear her plea (Luke 18:1-8). We are all leaders. And we all have the same source of power and love from the mighty GIVER. Let the strength come from HIM.

The EAD event concluded Monday, April 18, as the advocates moved from their conference location to Capitol Hill to join in prayer at a vigil held on the lawn of the Capitol to various meetings with senators and members of Congress throughout the day. They were supported in their visits with a coordinated call-in to congressional offices from remote advocates who joined their voices in the calls for justice. I did not get to participate on this day, and at first I was unsure of even being a part of this day. But the weekend changed so much in my heart. I am not scared anymore. My hope is strong because I know I am not alone. We are all fighting together, and we all must lift EVERY voice!!

*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.***