

## Moving the Welcome Mat Outside

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**National  
Benevolent  
Association**  
CALLED TOGETHER | CALLED TO CARE

Picture it: Conroe, Texas, 2014. A tiny, strong-willed, liberal, female minister steps into an ultra-conservative, Caucasian, male-dominated religious community. Change was inevitable, and change we did. We were exposed to a new way of “doing” church and loved it. She inspired us to actually put our beliefs into actions.

A small group began to study, and we learned not all of our loving congregation were willing to, let’s say, move the welcome mat outside. This very small group began to feel as though the welcome mat was cemented on the wrong side of the door, and that if we wanted to make a difference, we would have to step out into the Wilderness. None of us actually believed we were headed to a new church plant, but God seemed to have other plans for us.

Our first gathering brought about 40 people sharing dinner at the Golden Corral and discussing what the Wilderness had to offer. By the end of the meal, we knew it was filled with a bunch of questions, a little bit of fear, and a lot of uncertainties. The next few gatherings were at a member’s home, where the goal was to maintain fellowship and continue the studies we started. We encouraged each other while we continued to search for new church homes, but soon realized that where two or more are gathered, we were becoming a church without a preacher. We continued as Disciples in the Wilderness and were meeting at the local community center until scheduling conflicts caused us to search for a new venue.



In March 2015, God placed us in a 96-year-old house on a street with three other ministries and blessed us with all we needed before we knew we needed it. We have renovated the home and taken it back to its original beauty, with the full support of the owner and unbelievable support from strangers and our local Home Depot.

The blessings from God continued when two of us, for the first time, attended the 2015 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Columbus, OH. An angel named Shernell Edney wrapped her wings of comfort and guidance around two lost sheep. She listened to our struggles from inside the

Wilderness and went out of her way to make us believe in ourselves and God’s plan for us. She introduced us to another blessing in the form of Ayanna Johnson Watkins with the NBA. These two beautiful women combined their resources and provided two scholarships to attend the Hope Partnership Leadership Academy; one went through New Church, and the other participated in the NBA Social Entrepreneur Cohort. The tools and insights we took from this opportunity have improved our focus and provided much needed information on how to accomplish our goals.

I am very proud to say that we are moving forward and are ready to grow our church by being the hands and feet of God outside of our beautiful building. We’ve been feeding the hungry in a park in Conroe, and providing safe space and volunteer opportunities for our LGBTQ neighbors. Now, if we could just get some musicians or singers! We are a group of friends on a spiritual journey, and what a ride it has been. “Take a walk on the wild side—caution, that first step is a doozy!”

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*This blog is part of a series of reflections highlighting the ministries of the **NBA Incubate Initiative**. 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](http://nbacares.org/incubate) or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at [awatkins@nbacares.org](mailto:awatkins@nbacares.org).*