

## Walking My Faith

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NBA Incubate SENT Seminar Participant

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*In September 2017, the NBA Incubate Initiative hosted the 2017 SENT Seminar: Equipping Social ENTrepreneurs for Leadership and Change, in Leavenworth, Kansas. Designed for Disciples and their leadership teams who are starting new health and social services ministries, the SENT Seminar covers the basics of nonprofit ministry startups, as well as skills for leadership and change in our global and faith communities. Tiffany Curtis, Sante Fe Faith Network for Immigrant Justice, attended as a 2017 SENT Seminar Participant and shares this reflection.*



Last week, Joao\*, a community organizer from Brazil, won his political asylum case and was released from Cibola County Detention Center. We immediately got him picked up from the facility by a volunteer, and he was transported to a welcoming home in Santa Fe, where we were able to buy him clothing, shoes, and a cell phone. Otherwise, Joao would have been left at a dusty, rural Greyhound bus station with no money, no possessions, and no social connections in the United States.

I am a founder of the Santa Fe Faith Network for Immigrant Justice, and also one of five core organizers of the network. We meet monthly as a whole network, with an average attendance of 25 leaders of faith communities represented. We have been in existence for six months, and in addition to educating U.S. citizens about immigration justice issues, our two main areas of organizing at this time are building a Sanctuary network among faith communities in Santa Fe, and supporting those detained at Cibola County Detention Center, a private prison detaining migrants near Grants, NM.

We have set up a Google Voice number, which we forward daily to one of our phones (we also have volunteers lined up to sub in for one of our core group as needed). The phone number has been shared with the wardens and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at Cibola, as well as directly with people who are detained, letting them know to call us when someone is scheduled to be released. We currently have 40 volunteers poised to do pick-ups/transportation when people are released from Cibola, and 32 have signed up to offer short-term housing in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, as we help folks get to where they want to eventually end up.

In October 2016, the month I moved to New Mexico to begin my new ministry, CoreCivic - formerly known as the Corrections Corporation of America - landed a new contract with ICE in New Mexico by repurposing a former federal prison (Cibola County Corrections Center), that had recently been shut down due to inmate deaths involving medical neglect, (also under CoreCivic's management.)

Across the country, the federal Bureau of Prisons has reduced its private prison contracts, and ICE has often snapped them up to detain migrants. Starting in 2014, with a surge in Central American asylum seekers arriving at the U.S. border, usually fleeing violence in their home countries, CoreCivic's contracts with ICE skyrocketed. Stock prices in CoreCivic also shot up after the election of Donald Trump.

As a Disciples of Christ minister and community organizer, raised in an immigrant church in Los Angeles, migrants are integral members of my family in Christ. I am walking my faith by resisting the dehumanizing systems that continue to intimidate and incarcerate migrants in our communities. I am thankful to the NBA Incubate initiative, as well as to the NBA's Prison Ministry Peer Group, for their support of my emerging ministry here in New Mexico.

*\*name has been changed*

*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](https://nbacares.org/incubate)** or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at **[awatkins@nbacares.org](mailto:awatkins@nbacares.org)**.*