

HIRAM-MANTUA XPLOR ANNUAL REPORT TO MCCC BOARD

JANUARY 17, 2021

Mantua Center Christian Church, Hilltop Christian Church, and Hiram Christian Church joined together to become a site for the National Benevolent Association's (NBA) initial year of their new Xplor program in 2014. Our last group of Xplor residents returned home in May, 2020, with the program deciding not to place any residents the 2020-2021 year due to the COVID pandemic. Instead the national NBA/Xplor staff decided to use the year to evaluate the program and reimagine Xplor's future.

Prior to the COVID pandemic and Xplor's decision not to place residents this year, it was mutually decided between the national and local Xplor teams, that Hiram-Mantua would participate in the Xplor program for one remaining year. The national team had already closed a couple of Xplor houses to make room for other sites to develop and experience Xplor in their areas. Prior to Christmas, however, Bonnie Osei-Frimpong, Director of NBA Xplor, called both Rev. Chad and me to inform us that it had been decided by the national Xplor team not to continue the Hiram-Mantua site for that one last year. In fact, only two Xplor houses are planned for next year with several closing. There are several other exciting possibilities Xplor is also "exploring," however, with no definite decisions as yet. So, the decision as to whether or not Hiram-Mantua will do one last Xplor year has been gently made. The Hiram-Mantua Xplor house is closed.

Some historical perspective might be helpful and fun. Hiram-Mantua was a site for the Xplor program for six years from 2014 to 2020. In that time 20 residents completed their 10 month placement, one left shortly after Christmas to begin her medical training, and two were requested to leave the program. Our residents came from California and Oregon in the West to Virginia and North Carolina in the East and many states in-between. The first year (2014-15) Rev. Jeff Jackson wore multiple hats to get the program off the ground, including Xplor Team Leader, Work Site Coordinator and Spiritual Companion. The following year Rev. Chad Delaney took over the Work Site Coordinator responsibilities and later became the Team Leader until the end of the program. Rev. Chris McCreight then took on the Work Site Coordinator role. Linda Idoine became the Spiritual Companion in the second year and continued along with Chad and Chris until our last resident left in May, 2020. There were two additional components in the Hiram-Mantua team that contributed to our success. The first was the availability of housing in the center of Hiram village through Pam and Dave Auble. This apartment provided reasonable and very adequate housing with laundry provisions for the last five years of the program and was so very much appreciated. The second strength to be mentioned was the composite team of individuals who came from Hiram, Hilltop and Mantua Center to oversee

and manage Hiram-Mantua Xplor. This was a group of very dedicated individuals, who really “greased” the program with their efforts of everything from finding furniture, cleaning the apartment, ensuring food was in place upon move-in, providing transportation, coordinating the final farewell service in the Spring, and being a mentor and companion, among others.

Each resident was assisted in finding their own special place to shine, grow, and understand more about themselves and their place in God’s world. Most became heavily involved in their church placements, assisting with all parts of the worship service, Sunday School, Life Study, Bible Study, youth group, dinners of all types and varieties along with related activities such as Derthick’s corn maze and maple syrup collecting. The various work sites gave them individual experience with college students, special needs populations, preschoolers, community coordinating, after school programs, feeding those without enough to eat, and social justice here and in Central America. Meeting weekly for two hours with a spiritual companion helped them to explore their own sense of faith and spirituality by looking at social justice, what is community, gratitude, prayer, simple living, discernment, God’s will for their lives and cultural diversity issues among others. The discussion was most usually insightful, self-disclosing and often deep. In addition we were fortunate enough to take various groups to New York City twice, the Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington D.C. three different times, an overnight retreat at Punderson State Park and Amish country among others.

Our Disciple community was really the glue that made the magic of Xplor happen, though. So, whether you helped the residents learn how to make soup and bread, took them to Playhouse Square, invited them over for dinner, took them a plate of cookies, enjoyed a walk together, accompanied them to a park or county fair, or played a game together, each resident benefited from the generosity of spirit that is such a part of this community. But maybe you shared quietly what it is to be a person of faith with a welcoming smile, by sitting next to a resident in church, affirming them as a person or for something special they did that you noticed, by sharing your own faith journey or what your understanding of what being a Christian is. It all mattered and made a difference.

And so Hiram-Mantua ends our time with the Xplor program of the Disciples NBA. There are still a few loose ends to clean up, such as what to do with any remaining monies and whether to have a final time of celebration once it is safe to do so again. But the gains have already been made for both the residents AND our church communities. We are all better for their having been here.

Respectfully,

Linda Idoine

Spiritual Companion, Hiram-Mantua Xplor program