



# VOICE

A HOME AT THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON SINCE 1907 | FALL 2016



## A SPOOKY TIME FOR SCHOLARS

### Inside

- Head Shots
- Backpacks
- Music Team
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PH Apartment Scholars enjoyed the mild fall temperatures during a mid-October trip to Schuster's Farm. Most of the group decided to navigate the Corn Maze, trying to work their way through and out before darkness fell. A smaller group braved the Haunted Forest, facing down chainsaw-wielding zombies and ghouls amidst the trees, keeping close to one another for support. Everyone gathered around the bonfire for s'mores, hot dogs and enjoying the stars in the night sky. Throughout the month of November groups of six Scholars per week are visiting the English Conversation Time program at Christ Presbyterian Church, giving both international and domestic students living at PH Apartments opportunities to explore American idioms, customs and culture together. ✚

## Know Your Neighbor: Zuf Wang, Andrew Ernst

The idea for “Knowing Your Neighbor” was in essence inspired by Mark and Erica’s homeless outreach as undergraduate students at UC Berkeley. During this year’s Pres House Council retreat, Andrew and I brought up the idea of emulating something similar as a way to serve the community at large.

Erica personally reaffirmed this idea during a sermon. She prompted us to ask our neighbors what we always bring with us. I turned to two older gentlemen and mindlessly asked the question, expecting answers like “wallet, keys, or a pen.” I couldn’t have been more wrong. “All of our belongings,” they said. I remember my initial reaction was one of confusion, but soon realized that they were homeless. Awkwardness and speechlessness ensued on my part. I wish I were more mindful when the conversation began. I also wish I knew more about those who are less fortunate. Fortunately, the planning for “Knowing Your Neighbor” was already underway.

With Mark and Erica’s blessing, we have been going to State Street every Tuesday morning since the beginning of this semester.

At its root, “Knowing Your Neighbor” is an effort to get to know the stories of Madison’s homeless population. We don’t have the resources to help change their lives, but we hope to make their day just a notch better by showing empathy and solidarity. We generally approach with an offer of hot chocolate or coffee and then sit down for an hour to share conversation. It has been a very fulfilling and humbling experience thus far.

We hope our effort brings comfort and joy to the homeless. Moreover, we hope to walk away with greater capacity to love people of all kinds.

# STUDENTS EMBRACE COMMUNITY IN NEW WAYS



One of the wonderful things about a campus church like Pres House is that each year we are blessed with new leaders and new ideas. This fall two of our student leaders, Zuf and Andrew, started a new outreach service ministry from Pres House called “Know Your Neighbor.” They realized that they walked by homeless people on State Street all the time but didn’t know anything about their stories. So, each Wednesday morning they and a small group of other students meet at Pres House at 7:30am to walk up State Street and meet our neighbors. They offer to buy folks coffee or something to eat and spend an hour getting to know the stories of the people they meet. It is a simple, yet very profound, ministry of presence and hospitality.

At about the same time that Andrew and Zuf were starting this ministry, another

leader in the community, Sami (who shares some reflections on Pres House on the next page) also came up with a great idea. Sami is a graduate student in Economics. He and his friends in their program are starting the process of applying to further graduate studies or job-seeking “in the real world.” They were working on sprucing up their LinkedIn profiles and other job-seeking material. But they needed headshot photos to include in their materials. Sami realized that many students need good quality headshot photos but most cannot afford the hundreds of dollars that professional photographers typically charge for such photos. He suggested that Pres House host a Headshot Photo Fundraiser.

We worked with Barry Sherbeck, longtime supporter of Pres House and professional photographer. Barry offered to do headshots for just \$20 per person at Pres House. Half of the money would compensate Barry a small amount, and half would go to support the “Know Your Neighbor” ministry. The event was a huge success! Seventeen students filled up all the available slots for headshots and the event raised \$170 to buy coffee and facilitate conversation with our homeless neighbors.

Both of these ideas were excellent. Together they were made even better! ✦



# “WELCOME BACKPACK” PARTY A SUCCESS

Fall is a very busy time at Pres House. As a new school year starts we get to work welcoming new students to campus and inviting them to get involved at Pres House. We also welcome about 240 residents into the Pres House Apartments for another year living with us. This September we connected with at least 450 new students for the first time!

One of the ways we connect with new students is through our Welcome Backpack party on the second Sunday of September. Students came up with the idea for this event a few years ago. They wanted to host an event where people could meet each other but they wanted it to be more than simply a social activity. They wanted to give something to others in the process. The Welcome Backpack event was born.

Pres House provided toothbrushes, combs, washcloths and other supplies to make hygiene kits for people affected by the flooding in Louisiana and other natural disasters. At the Welcome Backpack event students put the supplies together into thirty kits, wrote notes of encouragement for whoever will receive them, and got to know each other in the process. When they were finished, the kits were shipped to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance where they are ready to be deployed to communities in need. ✿



Venturing outside the confines of what was familiar is never a simple task. After spending four years as an undergrad near my home, I was on my own for the first time in my life. Little could have prepared me to deal with the death of my grandfather and the typical stresses that come with the first year of graduate school. Little could have compared to the immense support and Love I received from the Pres House community. When I felt alone, Pres House made me feel like I was just another member of the family. When you're 300 miles away from home, that is all you need. Thank you. ✿

# FAITH GROWS IN MUSIC MINISTRY

By Brad Sheffer



**“From my first time attending service at Pres House my freshman year, I was drawn towards the contemporary music style I knew and loved.”**

Music has always been the way I have most closely connected to worship. This has been true since elementary school (I attended a Christian private school through eighth grade), and has been a primary component in how I choose what church to attend. From my first time attending service at Pres House my freshman year, I was drawn toward the contemporary music style I knew and loved. Since then I have been an active member of the music team almost every Sunday of the past three, going on four years, and I can honestly say it was one of the best decisions I ever made. Joining the music team in those first weeks of my college career gave me that sense of purpose and belonging that many freshmen struggle to find initially. The regular responsibility in an enjoyable activity gave me a firm foundation and consistency while everything around me was different and changing.

Being a part of the music team got me connected to the greater Pres House community, a community that has allowed me to shape my faith in a new way that works for me. Through Pres House my faith has been able to expand and be formed in my own way, as I am presented with such an open and welcoming environment where I can ask questions and not be told I'm wrong, where I can be comfortable in saying what I believe and exploring other answers to life's questions.

In short, what have Pres House and the music team been and meant for me? They're my home, my family, and my foundation on campus. ✿



# FALL RETREAT: ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME

As a first-year transplant from northern Wisconsin, I expected home to feel far away. This would be a perfectly normal assumption, considering that I'm a freshman in college displaced from home by more than 200 miles. However, thanks to Pres House, this has simply not been the case. Pres House has offered me a sense of home and comfort—not something I was anticipating on entering a college campus brimming with 40,000 students.

Pres House has been my antidote for my nagging homesickness and the pains of the high-school-to-college transition. Being raised in a rural Presbyterian church in the northwoods of the state, I found Pres House a sentimental resemblance of home. Accordingly, the highlights of my week take place at Pres House. My Thursday night small group meetings and Sunday worship are the constants in my week. I count down the days until I'm able to enter Pres House for these gatherings. Whether it's the confession-sharing sessions with my fellow small group members, the musical therapy from Natalie that continually strains my iTunes bill, the lovingly prepared family dinners following each worship, or the kind-hearted, wholesome sense of community fostered by Mark and Erica, I've found my substitute for home and family support at Pres House.

The Fall Retreat was yet another form of comfort given to me by Pres House. My weekend at Lake Waubesa certainly did

not disappoint, as it transported me to the beautiful wilderness and lakeside scenery to which I've become so accustomed in my last 19 years. I was initially not keen on the idea of sacrificing a weekend of crucial study time with a group of people I was not wholly familiar with. After Erica's persistent encouragement and my own susceptibility to peer pressure, however, I decided that I could devote a couple days to something other than schoolwork. I could not be more grateful for that decision. My weekend at the fall retreat blessed me with stunning fall weather, the chance to breathe the refreshing air of the wilderness, the making of several like-minded and faith-oriented friends, and a chance to strengthen my faith with the moving lessons delivered by Mihee. That's not to mention the countless bursts of laughter I had all the while! Both Erica's sidesplitting games and the endless humor springing from my fellow fall retreat goers made me laugh and smile more than I have in total the last two months. The Pres House Fall Retreat, for me, was more than a much-needed recess from the college campus. It was an action-packed, humor-laden weekend that gave me the comfort of Christian communion, reaffirmed the basis of my faith, and reminded me of the healing power of laughter. My time at Lake Waubesa was yet another way in which Pres House has graced me with the heartwarming sense of home. ✚

*By Emily Johnson*

**"I've found my substitute for home and family support at Pres House."**



# BEYOND LOCAL CUISINE MICRO-COMMUNITY AT PH APARTMENTS

By Michelle Tong

For our first program we explored Hmong culture by visiting the Madison Farmers Market, specifically the Hmong booths. We bought carrots, green onions, patty squash, red bell peppers, chili peppers, and fennel and talked to vendors about recipes to make a traditional stir-fry. During our dinner, we talked about similarities and differences between Hmong/Asian and American culture.

Here's some of what we discussed and learned:

- Asian culture is often categorized as “collectivist,” or in other words, how individual identity is formed by a person’s place within the group; another term for this is “high context.”
- Generational order and respect for elders is also paramount; this is seen in the way older generations are addressed. Instead of Mr. or Mrs./Miss, the first name is preceded by terms of the relationship. For example, an older sister is *niam laus* and a grandma *nia tais*. The Chinese community also uses a Sudanese (descriptive) kinship system for naming practices. Names differ depending on age, maternal/paternal relations, and personal familial customs.
- Gender inequality seems much more prevalent in Hmong communities. For example, men often eat first while women and children watch. But from talking to Hmong friends, there are certain issues (e.g., domestic violence) that are harder to



address. Gender roles in folk stories seem to perpetuate these stereotypes, so in cases like these, future generations may struggle to preserve culture while simultaneously pushing for gender equality.

- Since two of us are Chinese-American, we also discussed complexities of Chinese-Hmong history. Most Hmong refer to China as the “homeland,” even though the Manchu government massacred the Hmong people (and other Miao) during the Qin Dynasty. As Chinese-Americans of the Han race, we are extremely privileged to be on the East Asian end of the Asian spectrum.

Through this talk, we explored the complexities of these intra-Asian and intercultural relationships. Our conversation also inspired us to understand how East Asians can create dialogue to relieve the Southeast Asian community from its peripheral status. To extend our conversation and understanding, some of us attended the Asian American Media Spotlight screening of *Bap Rap*. It was a good start to learning about different cultures by exploring food, history, and cultural practices while we shared a meal and conversation. ✚



# CONNECTING OLD AND NEW

## Catching Up

As UW–Madison had their week-long Homecoming party, Pres House capped off a great week with a Homecoming worship service to reconnect our alumni with current members and staff. The welcome-back event began with an open house to allow members to share stories of faith and catch up over the years past. A delicious spread of light refreshments was provided by the even more fantastic Pres House Office Manager, Mynda L. Joe.



## Worship Service

This special service was designed to allow current students the chance to hear personal stories from Pres House alumni and the worship songs that made an impact on their lives. Cody (class of 2011) and Kira Hanson (class of 2012) began worship with a wonderful video testimony sent all the way from Colorado. They highlighted two of their favorite songs, “Grace Like Rain” and “In Christ Alone.” We also heard from Helen Chao (class of 2015) and Alex Kuehn (class of 2015), who enlightened us with their meaningful experiences of small groups, music rehearsals, and life after Pres House. Additionally, we had two very special guests, Karen (class of 1957) and Walt Pridham. They each gave the congregation a brief history lesson, along with the amazing story of how they met and married at Pres House decades ago. The service came to an end with a powerful and uplifting rendition of the song “10,000 Reasons” performed by a mixture of past and current music team members, accompanied by our former music director Michael W. Hillestad!



## Dinner

Concluding with our normal tradition of eating together, decades of Presbyterians were able to laugh and enjoy each other’s company while enjoying the feast provided by Westminster Presbyterian Church. The evening was truly beautiful. We thank *all* those who participated. ✝

What an uplifting and encouraging evening of worship and community! It was so fun to have alumni back with us on Homecoming Sunday. We certainly are surrounded by ‘so great a cloud of witnesses.

—Mark Elsdon, Executive Director & Co-Pastor





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## THE “MONSTER MASH” AT PRES HOUSE

This year we decided to have a Halloween party at Pres House as a sober and safe alternative for students and community members. It was a fun-filled night with activities such as Pumpkin carving, a viewing of, “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown”, and ending with a costume contest. We brought back a long-standing tradition of student led events to remind our members that, *all of you help shape Pres House, so make it yours!* ❀

