



VOICE

A HOME AT THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON SINCE 1907 | FALL 2017



GREAT REASONS TO STAY

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There are several reasons I first chose Pres House Apartments and have continued to stay there for two more years. One of the best parts about PH Apartments is its central location. It's at the mid-point of awesome restaurants on State Street, campus buildings, and several libraries (one of which stays open 24 hours on weekdays). PH Apartments has several common study areas which make it convenient when I want to have group study sessions or simply want to study outside my room but am too lazy to walk to the libraries.

Another key reason why I stay at PH Apartments is its community programs, which I have been involved in all of my three years at Pres house. I feel it is a great way to get to know other residents from diverse backgrounds and also a good excuse to take a break from school work. Last year I participated in the Scholars Program and this year I am trying the Community Engagement Opportunities Program. One of my favorite programs was "Future Focus." In this program a group of residents get together five or six times each semester and have discussions on various topics that are aimed to help them better understand themselves and be more intentional about the choices they make in life. I got to know a couple of amazing people through this group and it was wonderful to have deep insightful discussions with them. ♣

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2017 Fall Retreat



GROWING CLOSER TO GOD AND EACH OTHER

On the weekend of November 3-5, 25 people escaped to Lake Waubesa Bible Camp for a time of rest, renewal, and fun. Rev. Winton Boyd led the retreat on the topic, "A Hidden Wholeness," which was rooted in the work of well-known leader Parker Palmer. In various sessions, participants reflected on how to live undivided lives that are congruent with their innermost truth and life of faith. Through sharing stories, listening deeply, enjoying water colors and poetry, people grew closer to each other and to God. And of course there was lots of fun playing games, jumping in the (freezing!) lake, roasting marshmallows over an open fire, and more. As one person said, "I have learned to be more trustful in God in my life journey."



How did this retreat impact your faith journey? Is there anything you are taking back with you into your daily life?



"I definitely have a greater desire for quiet time/ space to let myself listen to the Lord. I also formed a lot of closer relationships, growing a community that I know will continue to support both me and my faith journey."



"It made me even more grateful for the Pres House community as my family and house of worship, and I plan to take back the lessons on listening deeper to myself, by evaluating how to better live my inner life authentically and open myself up to true storytelling, both to God and other people around me."

What was your most significant experience at the retreat?

"The thoughtful conversations with others in the community. Having the opportunity to be vulnerable and be listened to."

"I really loved being outside and being active, playing ultimate Frisbee and jumping in the freezing lake. But overall the most significant was the general trend of listening actively to each other tell stories that are often deeply personal."



TELLING OUR STORIES

It is a common cliché to say that a church is not a physical building but the people who make up the community. But clichés are sometimes right. This is certainly the case here at Pres House. The Pres House campus church is housed in our beautiful neo-Gothic historic landmark. But it is formed by the ever-changing community of people that make their spiritual home here each year. Pres House is a group of freshmen making dinner together on Wednesday evening. It is a collection of graduate students meeting for coffee at different locations in Madison each Thursday morning. It is young professionals grabbing a drink at a local pub after a small group discussion. Pres House is international students experiencing snow for the first time, LGBTQ students experiencing God's welcome for the first time, and first-year students failing an exam for the first time. And it is all of us together experiencing the grace of Jesus Christ, exploring

God's desire for our lives, and going out by the power of the Holy Spirit to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly in the world.

This semester members of Pres House have been invited to share personal stories with the community as a way of encouraging and challenging each other. In speaking, and listening, to each other's stories we become "church" together. Stories have the power to break down barriers across differences, overcome assumptions, generate deep connection, and inspire healthier living. These stories were shared in worship and have been posted on the Pres House blog at <http://preshouse.org/blog/>. This edition of the *Pres House Voice* is focused on some of these stories. You will find more posted on the blog. We invite you to be challenged and inspired by them and to visit the blog for future additions. ✝

Home Away From Home



Jessica Prom is a sophomore studying Biology, with plans to pursue Pharmacy School.

The week prior to Thanksgiving last year, I received an email from Pastor Erica asking if I'd like to meet her for coffee. Little did I know that one little email could change my life entirely. Obviously, I agreed to get coffee because I was intrigued by Erica's kindness and by what Pres House had to offer! After our chat, Erica brought up Freshmen Small Group. She told me that they met once a week and that that year they decided to discuss different worldly topics and how they connected to the Bible and to faith in general. At first, I was slightly hesitant because I wasn't sure if I wanted to have another weekly commitment. After all, I was a first-year college student, so keeping up with school, friends, and adjusting to the college lifestyle was a large enough task in and of itself. However, I told her I'd definitely consider it, and as Thursday night rolled around the next week, I found myself walking out of my dorm and into Pres House, immediately greeted by friendly faces eager and willing to let me join a group that had already been established.

From that point on, I knew I was going to enjoy my time here at Pres House. Freshmen Small Group became a part of my weekly routine, and I looked forward to it each and every time. It was such a safe place to voice my opinions, concerns, and feelings, whether it was regarding current events, Bible passages, or even my daily life. Each member of the group brought all of who they were, which was the sole reason why our group had as much success as it did. Not only was I able to grow in my faith, but I also made some of the best friends I'll ever have.

Participating in a small group is a great way to meet new people, learn new things, and have a new outlet to express yourself. Knowing that you have a group of people looking out for you, caring about you, and praying for you is sometimes all the reassurance you need. It was a very uplifting journey that I'm so grateful to have been a part of. Besides, you never know when you might find your home away from home.

I know I sure did.

When I arrived on campus last fall as a freshman, I began searching for a community in Madison that would allow me simultaneously to branch out and fit in. I come from a suburb of Milwaukee that is not too far away from here, so I was seeking a place that would allow me to grow away, and to some degree detach myself from the many fellow students from my high school who had also decided to come to UW–Madison. I also wanted to find a solid faith community to make a part of my life, since my small and tight-knit home church in Waukesha had been integral to my youth. This seemed like a tall and even hypocritical order at the time, and I was not particularly hopeful. However, I had always noticed Pres House as a child walking around campus with my older sister and when I saw the booth at the org fair last year, I was intrigued. After my first worship experience, I remember being blown away by how unique church was here. The seating arrangements, Two+, and focus on social justice and activism were things I was not used to in church, and due to my background and identity, I was surprised

My most recent faith journey began during a conversation with my parents after my freshman year of college. Somehow in that conversation they told me they both believed in God. I don't know why I was so surprised.

We had grown up in Catholic church, gone to church camps, but because I wasn't sure what to make of God I interpreted their silence on outright statements of faith as them not being sure as well. Growing up I took Bible stories as stories—lessons to make you a good person. But that conversation with my parents started me thinking about

yet thrilled to find a dynamic worship experience like this.

I figured that I might as well get as involved as I could, so I signed up immediately for the freshmen and new student small group. I have not regretted that decision once. Due to Erica's leadership and the awesome personalities present in my fellow group members, this weekly meeting became the anchor to my week, and quite possibly to my life. Last year was fairly tumultuous for me personally, and I honestly think Pres House and this group specifically was the key to maintaining my happiness despite challenges. We learned to trust in one another and in God, all while studying Biblical and modern issues facing the church. We did not always agree on every topic, and we all come from very different backgrounds, but that didn't mean anything to our personal development with one another. We became such good friends that even now when our time as freshmen officially involved in small group is over, we still take the time to meet, grab a bite to eat, hang out, and catch up with one another weekly.

what it meant to actually believe in God and why that part was important.

Sophomore year of college school really amped up. Aside from the insecurity that came with being a female in engineering I also had ADD, and it was a fairly recent diagnosis. So basically I hadn't fully dealt with the label yet.

Being the only girl around, and needing special accommodations on tests seeded a deep sense of unworthiness of my position in my classes. Everyone's sense of surprise at me being in engineering, or their belief that I had gotten in because I was a girl

Growing Away, Growing Home



Erik Franze is a sophomore with plans to study Political Science, Spanish, American Indian Studies, and Environmental Studies.

What if I Fail?



Savannah Kenny graduated from UW–Madison this past spring and is now a young professional working in Middleton.



started to get to me. “Maybe I didn’t belong in engineering.” “Maybe I was “high school level” smart but not “college level.” Any time I failed or struggled with something I thought to myself, “You’re just not smart enough for this.” Because a lot of my self-confidence was linked with being “smart” I was feeling very insecure.

On top of this my parents had been fairly overbearing growing up. So with the newfound freedom of college I was doing a load of things that were just not options to me at home, things they would not have approved of. While I am not ashamed of everything, I recognize that many of the things were not things that a centered person with confidence does. What affected me more so was that my moral code was in the air.

I was trying to get into Biomedical Engineering at the time and the struggle of not getting in and reapplying was really

validating my lack of confidence. Comfort and guidance from Christians during this time made me start to dispel the reasons I had not taken God seriously. I started reading the Bible in an effort to get an unbiased opinion and started to analyze the lives of believers around me. I started to see the push back against believing in popular media, in friends’ conversation, and had the very real realization that I could have been enculturated into not believing. And this was powerful for me.

During this time, especially early in my sophomore year, I started seeking places where God was without really realizing it. I came to Pres House a few times and thought about joining the music team. I put my name on the email list but didn’t commit. Once my junior year came around, I was more open to the idea. I had just broken up with my boyfriend whom I had blamed a lot of my self-confidence issues on and it was time to deal with myself and my decisions on my own. Face my questions and concerns.

During this time I talked to Erica over coffee about some of the things I could not get on board with in my parents’ church. Having that conversation and getting to know her and Mark presented a side to Christianity that I needed to see, a side that led to possibility for me.

Dispelling my confidence and trust in myself and my own logic was a painful yet amazing life step. I ended up not getting into Biomedical Engineering but life went on. I found computer classes that I really loved and was good at and ended up graduating in Electrical Engineering. Once I was more believing than not, which I can pinpoint to right around the Pres House fall retreat my junior year, I felt extreme peace—that literally whatever God threw at me I would be ok. It was very freeing—a peek into everlasting and abundant joy and love. ✝

PRES HOUSE SERVES AS SPARKPLUG FOR NEW YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY IN DOWNTOWN MADISON

We are very pleased to announce that Pres House will be launching a new, experimental young adult community in 2018. The project has been made possible by a three-year, \$310,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. as well as significant financial support from local, regional, and national Presbyterian organizations.

While our focus remains on students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, we think we are in a good position to be an incubator for a new model of ministry that we envision as an independent community.

We are working to design this ministry for 23-29-year-olds, many of whom live in the downtown area near the campus. It will bring young adults together in an effort to deepen relationships and spirituality. This builds upon the Young Professionals group that young adult leaders have formed at Pres House over the past few years.

Downtown Madison is a perfect area for such a venture. Both UW alumni and young adults moving to Madison often choose to live downtown, where 86 per cent of the residents are between the ages of 15 and 34. Yet the majority of these residents are not connected to any church.

As a campus ministry we are used to working with transient populations. The young adult population downtown also has a high degree of transience so Pres House is uniquely equipped to understand the dynamic of change and frequent mobility.

The vision for the ministry includes building community through potluck meals in community members' homes, a monthly dinner with a program, weekly small groups that focus on study, sharing and prayer, and "Brews and Banter," a weekly gathering in a downtown bar. It will also include space several times a year for an evening of storytelling, art and music. It will provide ways for young adults to respond to the community around them.

Support from local congregations is a critical piece in making this work. The larger church will use its resources

and connections to support this community while the wider church will also learn from the community. The gathering of young adults and young professionals will be separate from the local congregations and Pres House, but will build relationships with them.

The plan currently calls for three part-time staff people to work on the development of the project. The Chief Instigator/Networker will be the lead person in the effort. The Martha-in-Chief will function as the event coordinator. The Chief Storyteller will be the communications specialist. There is also the possibility of hiring a local pastor as a part-time chaplain. An advisory board of young adults and local church leaders will work with the staff members.

In addition to the grant from Lilly Endowment, funding is coming from the PCUSA New Worshipping Communities program, the John Knox Presbytery, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and congregations. Three congregations in Madison are local partners: Christ Presbyterian, Covenant Presbyterian, Westminster Presbyterian. Grace Presbyterian in Winona, MN is also supporting the project. Congregations interested in participating are welcome to contact us.

This is an experiment, not a church plant. We think of it like a flash mob. We want to be open to God's Spirit doing new things that are outside the traditional church structure. This effort is not about creating a pipeline to local churches. It is about facilitating spaces that nurture young adults in their spiritual journey and empowering them to serve God in transformative ways.

Stay in touch for more as this exciting new project develops! ✚



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Support Pres House

Throughout this newsletter you have read about the exciting activities happening at Pres House. Ministry at Pres House is possible only through generous donations from alumni, friends, and churches.

Please give today by using the enclosed envelope or send your contributions to Pres House at 731 State Street, Madison, WI 53703. You can also give online at www.preshouse.org/donate.

TALK BY CHANCELLOR BLANK

On November 15, 2017, Pres House and Upper House hosted UW–Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank. She spoke to hundreds of students and community members on the topic, “Is the Market Moral?: Reflections on Religion, Economics, and Justice.” ✚

