



VOICE

A HOME AT THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON SINCE 1907 | SPRING 2014

“FAITH AND SERVICE: THE GREAT DIVORCE”

“So many of these people were people of faith. Faith is what defined them and kept them in the game.”



by Rev. Erica Liu

On April 3 and 4, Pres House hosted a series of events with Rev. Wayne Meisel, Director of the Center for Faith and Service at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Meisel was the founding President of the Bonner Foundation and served on the Presidential Commission which created the AmeriCorps program. Pres House invited him to speak to student, church, and community leaders about young adults, faith, and service.

During his public lecture, “Faith and Service: The Great Divorce,” Meisel asked audience members to name the historical figures who inspired them to serve their communities. As people identified Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, and Desmond Tutu, Meisel pointed out that, “So many of these people were people of faith. Faith is what defined them and kept them in the game.”

It was one of the common themes in various conversations with Meisel as he met with members at Pres House, staff at the UW-Madison Morgridge Center for Public Service, and nonprofit leaders in the community. Citing the recent Pew Forum survey that traces the growing rise of religious “nones,” he also noted that around 80 percent of people who do not affiliate with a particular religious tradition still consider themselves spiritual. While many churches may be struggling, it does not mean that folks are uninterested in matters of faith; both faith communities and service organizations need to take that seriously, Meisel said.

Following his lecture, Pres House invited leaders from the University, local non-profits, and faith communities to participate in a roundtable discussion focusing on how to engage young adults in the issue of racial disparities in Madison. Participants included Lori Berquam, UW-Madison Dean of Students; Michael Johnson, CEO of Boys and Girls Club Dane County; Mary Rouse, Community Liaison for the UW-Madison Morgridge Center for Public Service; Thomas Devine, Executive Director of Serve Wisconsin (AmeriCorps); Deedra Atkinson, Executive Vice-President of Community Impact and Strategy for United Way Dane County; Everett Mitchell, UW-Madison Director of Community Relations and Pastor of Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church; Andrea Steinberger, Rabbi at UW Hillel Foundation; and Mark Elsdon, Campus Co-Pastor/Executive Director of Pres House. Students and other community leaders were invited to listen in on the conversation and ask questions of the round table as well.

Both events energized Pres House and the larger Madison community as new connections were made and partnerships begun. Meisel encouraged people to think more strategically and creatively about serving the needs of their communities, and to include faith as a critical part of their response. Pres House and Meisel plan to continue explore ways of working together in the future to cultivate young adults in their faith and service commitments. ✝

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JOHN SMITH: A LIFELONG LOVE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

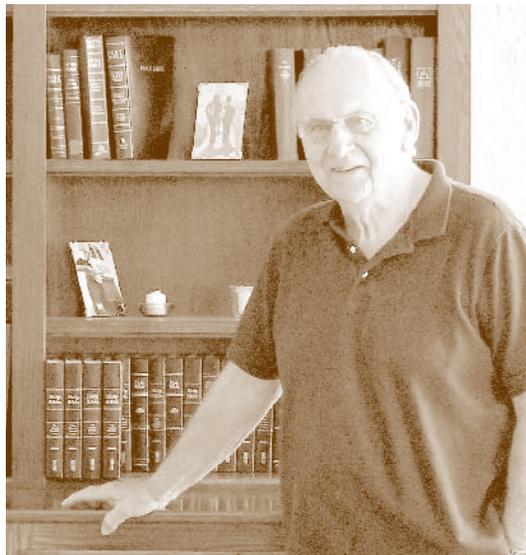
by Hannah
Weinberg-Kinsey



Support Pres House

Throughout this newsletter you have read about the exciting activities happening at Pres House. Ministry at Pres House is only possible 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.

If you have ever admired the woodwork at Pres House, you are probably enjoying the handiwork of John Smith. We can thank him for making and designing the majestic, dark bookcases in Pridham Lounge, the prayer box in the chapel, and the most recently created, wooden table in the entryway going into Pridham Lounge. I probably shouldn't have been surprised that when I called John Smith to interview him about his work, he was in his basement working on a desk for his seventeen year old daughter.



The origins of John Smith's beautiful woodworking skills go back to his childhood. His father was a physicist and an electrical engineer. He would bring home or bequeath as Christmas gifts machinery such as table saws, jigsaws, and scroll saws. His father encouraged him to experiment with the tools. He took a few shop classes but according to John, he went through a dry period during college and seminary where he didn't do much woodworking. As a Presbyterian pastor, Smith lived in Ohio, Washington, D.C., northern New Jersey, and Iowa. During his career, a friend wanted to sell a table saw and John decided to take it off their hands. Starting from there, he started making cabinets and wall hangings. When he retired from a parish in Iowa, he received a monetary gift which he used to buy a brand new table saw. Smith makes

things on request such as a grandfather clock for his daughter's wedding. A friend needed the rack on their piano fixed and Smith happily obliged. He made some clocks that were sold at a fundraiser at Westminster Presbyterian, where his kids attend.

From the way John talked about request upon request coming in, I had to wonder if it was a drain to have so much requested. Also, I haven't even mentioned the other things that make up John's full life. He has worked part time at Prairie Du Sac First Presbyterian for ten years. He also is a standardized patient at the medical school here in Madison. He goes in to let students "poke and prod" and learn to be better doctors. With kids at home, kids grown, and a wife working on her Ph.D. in Psychology and Counseling at UW, it's a wonder that he has the time to make such woodworking masterpieces.

John told me that if people order from him they know they have to be patient. He works when he has time. While you wouldn't know it by the works he has made for Pres House, he was never formally trained but figures it out as he goes along. He called woodworking a spiritual practice. Sometimes he gets stymied by cutting a board wrong, gets angry, but then learns how to correct his mistakes.

Smith calls the bookshelves and cabinets in Pridham Lounge one of his biggest projects. "They are massive pieces of furniture," he said. In order to physically get them inside the building, the bookshelves were actually made as eight or nine separate pieces. After completing one, there was slight snafu during the construction of the second. While away visiting his son, he got a call from his panicked wife. She had heard water and went downstairs to find the water softener had burst and flooded the basement! Over the phone, he pictured the various parts of the cabinet floating around. Luckily once they were dried, the dark staining that gives them so much character fixed any damage you might have been able to see.

If you ever have the pleasure to meet (or chat on the phone with John Smith), be sure to thank him for his work that has surely made Pres House a more pleasant place to be! ✝

EMBRACED BY GOD'S FAMILY

by David Fields and Karen Best

On November 23, 2013, just a few days after his first birthday, we had our son Elias (affectionately known as Mr. Jeeves), baptized at the Pres House. It was not a decision that we took lightly. Since neither of us had grown up in churches that practiced infant baptism, we took time to learn about the practice and to discuss it with co-pastors Mark and Erica.

We came to understand baptism not only as a public profession of faith, as in the tradition we grew up in, but as a practice that emphasizes God's grace, mercy, and call; it conveys the idea that God calls us and works in us long before we choose to accept this grace for ourselves. It also symbolizes that He chooses to work through communities—through family and friends of all ages. Baptizing Elias welcomed him into the Pres House family, but more importantly into a much greater community of worshipers. Although Elias will be at Pres House for only a short period of his life, the communal aspect of baptism serves as a reminder of



the importance of community in our lives and his. It is a reminder to embrace others and to be embraced because it is with others that we journey toward God and it is through others that we most often encounter the grace of God.

We felt the embrace of the Pres House community as we moved through the sanctuary from group to group receiving prayers, blessings, and gifts for Elias after his baptism. He will not remember his baptism, but we will, and so will our dear friends in the Pres House community. Telling Elias about this day will be an opportunity to remind him that God has and will continue to work in his life. ✝



This past fall Pastors Mark and Erica blessed two people from Pres House in a special Baptism Service. Helen Chao, a member of Pres House and a sophomore at UW–Madison, and Elias Fields, son of David Fields and Karen Best, both Pres House members.

TIME AWAY

by Chloe Drummond

The Pres House post-grad/grad community gathered for a weekend of fellowship, relaxation, and vision casting in early February. Nine of us, including new additions to our community, traveled to Mauston, Wisconsin, in order to get our minds off of our daily work and gather with intention. We did the customary packing up the cars with food and supplies, and drove up in groups in a staggered fashion as everyone's work weeks came to a close.

Our key motivations for the weekend were to grow in community with each other and to discuss how to support and sustain the post-grad/grad community in the coming academic year at Pres House. Over the course of the weekend everyone lent a hand in leadership and responsibility. We cooked together, held morning prayer, sang together, held a contemplative workshop on reading Christian icons, made Sabbath boxes, practiced holy listening in pairs, built prayer benches, and thought about the vision for this community. We also took advantage of the scenery surrounding us and relaxed in the evening (and morning) by the fireplace.

By the end of the weekend we had built stronger connections with each other, taking the time to appreciate



the comfort and strength it brings when you can say that someone hears you and knows you. We came away with a sense of what the post-grad/grad group had done well this year, what we thought beloved community feels, tastes, and smells like, and what topics we would like to engage next year. We are excited to continue to share these ideas with the rest of the community, and we are excited to continue to foster these deeper-level connections and interactions with each other in the coming year. ✝

SERVICE: A WAY OF BEING

by Alex Kuehn



This March eleven of us from Pres House flew to New York City for a spring break. We took part in many of the tourist attractions New York City has to offer, like dry-walling a basement, painting ceilings, even tiling floors! We mudded and sanded drywall, primed walls for painting, and sealed concrete floors.

I think I speak for everyone on the trip when I say we had an incredible time. It was amazing how the eleven of us—who didn't know each other very well at the beginning of the trip (or at all)—ended up becoming really close by the end of the week. And what I noticed most about our group was their attitude of service.

So, upon reflecting on our trip, I'm left with a few key questions. What is service? What does it mean to serve someone else?

What comes to mind for me first are acts of service like volunteering at the food pantry, giving blood, or raising money for a charity. When I think of service, I think of myself and the other ten folks who spent a week doing construction work for homeowners who are still trying to recover from a terrible natural disaster. I think of donating clothes, giving canned goods, and writing letters to the homebound.

Yes. These are all examples of service. And these are important things. And we should be doing these things. We are called to do these things.

But, I want to suggest that serving one another can look different. Service isn't just an action. It isn't just a Saturday morning at the food pantry, and it isn't just a week in New York.





No, I think service is a way of being. Service is a mindset. It's a mindset that puts others first. It's a way of being and interacting with others. A way of being that values others' needs before one's own. Paul writes in Philippians that we are to value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests, but to others' interests.

Service is saying "thank you" more often. Service is apologizing sincerely when you've made a mistake. Service is listening to a friend or giving a hug of support. Service is asking more questions than you answer. It's listening to others and being vulnerable with them.

Service is a mindset. It's a way of being and interacting with others. In New York, and in our group, I saw this. I saw people in our group build each other up. I saw people jump in to help cook meals, even if it wasn't their day to cook. I saw people work together and affirm each other's identities. I saw service as a mindset and an attitude.

I asked Emma and Sophie, Mark and Erica's daughters, what they thought about when I said the word "service." Emma said she thought of "worship." Sophie said she thinks of "community." I think they hit the nail right on the head.

Service is—at its core—an act of worship. It's an act of worship that serves the communities around us. And, when we love others, when we serve them in the small ways, when we value others above ourselves, we make the world more like God originally intended it to be. We love, because God first loved us. We serve, because God first served us.

So may you begin to think of service not just as an isolated act, but as a mindset—a mindset that impacts our actions and relationships each and every day. May you find small ways to serve your neighbor and your community. And may you begin to see service as an act of worship that celebrates God's love. ♣





LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD: LIVING INTENTIONALLY AT PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS

by Ginger Morgan

On August 16, 2013 we started the year with open doors, freshly baked cookies, and a sense of anticipation about the year ahead. It is hard to believe we've shared ten community meals, thirty-seven afternoon tea times, five Ted Talk viewings and discussions, three movies, one guest speaker, a visit by Chancellor Rebecca Blank and Vice Provost for Student Life-Dean of Students Lori Berquam, and several lively conversations about the Badgers' chances in the Final Four and whether League of Legends is really better than DOTA II and how American high school education differs from Chinese high school experiences...



Two micro-communities have spent the year visiting, talking, and learning about religions practiced around the world, from Islam, Judaism and Christianity to Baha'i, Wicca and Hinduism. When I asked, "Why do this program? Why not just live with your friends together somewhere? What do you get out of doing these activities and having these conversations?" One student (who is participating in their second micro-community experience) said, "You know, I'd never go to visit these religious groups and have these conversations with people on my own, if it was just me, but



because I have this group to go with me, I've experienced and learned things I wouldn't have otherwise."

Another group of residents, participating in the PH Apartment Scholars program, packed apples at Second Harvest Food Bank and learned about hunger in Dane County; watched a movie on people with autism and discussed how easy it is to have preconceived ideas about other people that you never really question; explored how tapping into their creativity can both help with stress and open up ideas and insights they might not otherwise have had; hosted a student improv show for apartment residents that gave everyone a much-needed opportunity to have fun and laugh together.

As students enter into the end of semester frenzy of preparing papers, finalizing projects and studying for finals, they are looking forward to our newly established custom at finals: the hospitality table, stocked with coffee, tea, and cocoa, granola bars, fruit, trail mix and peppermints (shown in studies to aid in concentration!). Students can grab a snack and an inspirational quote for the road as they head out to face their finals! Students eagerly await the arrival of "Dogs on Call" who will be visiting for some much-needed canine therapy the first Monday evening of finals!

The summer may be upon us, but all too soon August 16th will arrive and Pres House Apartments will be home to new and returning students, as well as new and returning programs. The 2014-2015 micro-community group will focus on developing sustainable practices that reduce PH Apartment's carbon impact. A new group of Scholars will develop relationships as they undertake volunteer service, and do educational and social programs together. The very first group participating in the Vocational Internship Program will live together, undertake an internship in a faith-based nonprofit, and reflect together on those experiences in light of their vocational aspirations. PH Apartments looks forward to welcoming the first group of participants in Next Step: A Student Recovery Community, where student recovering from addiction to alcohol or drugs can live together and support one another a day at a time.

You never know what living intentionally can do until you give it a try. I see it every day at PH Apartments. ✚



Save the Date



Homecoming Weekend Luncheon

Saturday, October 25,
2014



Ten Year Celebration Reunion Event

Saturday, November 1,
2014

THE TIMELESS PRACTICE OF STUDYING WITH FRIENDS AT PRES HOUSE.

For decades student have sought refuge within our walls. Coffee, friends, and exams remain year after year, and Pres House remains a place for students to study, relax, and grow in their faith.



Pres House seeks to be a spiritual home at the heart of the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus. In keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition of hospitality, Pres House is dedicated to providing a religious center and high quality student housing to promote the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth of residents and members of the campus community. Pres House is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and welcomes individuals of every perspective and background.

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