



VOICE

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

SPRING 2019

REFLECTIONS FROM PRES HOUSE GRADUATES

May is a bittersweet time of year around Pres House. Each May we say goodbye to people we have come to know and love over the years as they graduate and move on to new adventures in their lives. On May 5th, five of our graduating students shared reflections about their experiences during worship. You can listen to them at <https://preshouse.org/worship/listening-to-sunday-sermons/> (look for Graduation Sunday). **Two of their reflections are printed here.**

**CLARE
AESCHBACHER**
graduating with a B.S.
in Environmental Sciences
and Community and
Environmental Sociology



“ Early in my sophomore year of college, I decided that it was time for me to find a faith community on campus. I figured I’d try out a bunch of churches and groups and eventually settle on the one I liked the most. However, this plan quickly changed after I visited Pres House for the first time. Though it was only the second of my church visits, I knew right away that I found the right community and that I didn’t need to look any further. Within the first few minutes of my visit, I was greeted by another student who I had met briefly the year before as we lived in the same dorm, though on different floors. Then the music team welcomed me as a new guitarist, and I began to find my place at Pres House.

Spring semester that year I decided to try out student leadership on the Pres House Council. As the overnight Council retreat neared, I realized that I only really knew one person on Council. I immediately panicked, not knowing what the weekend would entail with strangers. After less than 48 hours on this retreat, these strangers quickly turned into friends and people that I knew I could trust and who I knew I wanted to spend more time with. After two more years, I consider them, and many others at Pres House, not my “church friends” but my friends, period.

Pres House, the building and community, is something special, almost magical. My experiences here pushed me so far out of my comfort zone at times, allowing me to learn and grow as a person and in my faith. It is the place where I went when I felt like I had nowhere else to go in Madison. It is the place where I knew I could completely be myself with celebration and no judgment. I want to thank each and every person in the community, whether it’s felt like I’ve known you forever, or we’ve never spoken to each other. Thank you for being a part of Pres House. This community would not be the same without you.

I encourage everyone to take a step out of their comfort zone. Pres House is a safe place to do so and you will be rewarded internally. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that I received here to try new things — whether that be playing guitar on the music team or reaching out to our neighbors experiencing homelessness through Bake, Pray, Love. There is something here for everyone to get involved in. And that is what makes this place so special. Pres House isn’t a house; it’s a home. It’s the people here, you, that make that distinction. Pres House often says to come and find yourself among friends. That’s not true for me. Here, I find myself among family.”

**INSIDE
THIS
ISSUE**

Partnering for Impact • GatherX Gets Going
PH Apartment Wellness Programming Grows
Donor Corner • Volunteer/Appreciation Sunday

REFLECTIONS FROM PRES HOUSE GRADUATES (CONTINUED)

“ In the summer of 2013, I showed up in Madison sight unseen with only the two suitcases I was permitted on the airplane. I did not know anything about Madison, did not know anybody even near the Midwest, and had no clue what to expect as I started graduate school. Madison was a chance for me to start fresh. I had recently gone through a very significant and very traumatic change in which I ended up leaving the religion I was raised in. My once-beautiful world had collapsed. My core philosophy—my fundamental interpretation of the universe—had been shattered. I was left jaded, broken, and cynical of most religion. In the aftermath, I set out to slowly rebuild myself. I escaped a toxic situation, moved far away, and started a process of self-discovery. For the first time in my life, I was deliberately choosing who I wanted to be, what I believed, and what I valued. Most importantly, I chose to be aggressively honest with myself about these decisions, and how I came to know truth.

I did not know who I was, but I had a firm understanding of what I was not. When it came to religion, I was justifiably angry and felt betrayed by God, but in my heart, I was desperate to find some connection to the divine, whatever that means. I needed to understand and know the Truth. I was a rabid reader of any book I could find on spirituality, and in conversations I would push back and ask hard questions about faith to make people really confront their beliefs past a superficial level. I didn't identify with any religion, certainly not Christianity, and ultimately realized a position of agnostic atheism. I was an open book, but a very tough sell.

I started attending all of the various churches within biking distance, attended forums and seminars, participated in Bible studies, joined the campus atheist club, and got into several heated conversations about faith. Studying faith was my biggest, and all-consuming hobby. But my experience in these other churches always ended after I heard something I just could not agree with, or I felt they were too unreasonable, or not accepting of my honest doubts.

I eventually found my way to Pres House. I approached it with my usual skepticism, but Pres House kept surprising me. One of those first few Sundays back in 2013, I remember telling our co-pastor, Mark, “Listen, I'm just here to check out what you are all about. I don't believe in God, and don't try to convert me.” Mark's response was simple: “Sure, okay. ...Do you want to stay for dinner?” Next thing I knew, I had been participating in Pres House activities for over a year. Pres House was just so darn accepting and had no issues at all with my doubts and struggles. In fact, Pastors Mark and Erica encouraged my honest exploration, and gave me a safe environment to ask tough questions.

And then one day, something just clicked. I stopped obsessing over knowing Truth with a capital T, and I just embraced a life worth living. Which, in the end, is what I think it is all about. I didn't have a movie-worthy “come to Jesus” moment. But in many ways, I have come to know and love the message of Jesus through my interaction with all of you in this beautiful community. I have much to learn, but I have experienced more of a connection with the divine through my time at Pres House than anything else on my spiritual journey. As a result, I feel closer to the person I want to be—the person for which I have been searching for many years. And for that I am incredibly grateful for Pres House.

I still identify as an agnostic atheist, but these days I am proud to say that I definitely identify as a member of Pres House and this community. There's an argument to be made that I am a Presbyterian now, too. If you ask me today, “What do you believe?” well, I'm still not exactly sure, but I think the question is rather missing the point. Pres House has helped me experience God, and that is cultivated through my individual experiences with this community, with our music, with our passion for social change, and with our play. I'm confident that if there is a God, I am living a more authentic life that is more aligned with God. I no longer feel this constant hunger to find the divine—I think I found some of it. As it says in Galatians, the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, and goodness.”

I will soon be leaving Madison to start a new adventure in a new city. Thank you all for your help on my journey. For those I leave behind, especially those who may feel uncertain or insecure about their faith and beliefs, I hope you keep at it, embrace feelings of joy and peace, and experience God for yourself. It is worth it. ”

↑
SAMUEL ACUNA

graduating with a Ph.D in
Mechanical Engineering



PARTNERING FOR IMPACT

Pres House has a powerful impact on the lives of students and young adults. But sometimes we can have an even greater impact by partnering with other organizations. One of our strategic initiatives is to intentionally work toward deeper and more impactful partnerships with other organizations in the campus and community. Here are just five examples of meaningful partnerships we've engaged in this year.

INTERSECTIONS OF INTERFAITH (APRIL 2019)

In partnership with UW Madison's Center for Religion and Global Citizenry, Pres House participated in a weekend conference of activities that included an interfaith dinner, panels, keynote speakers, and discussions.



MOVEMENT FOR OUR MOVEMENT (MARCH 2019)

In collaboration with UW Hillel, the Multicultural Student Center, and the Center for Religion and Global Citizenry, Pres House co-sponsored this interactive workshop led by the Carolyn Dorfman Dance exploring diverse identities around race, faith, gender, and more in the Chazen Art Museum.



WISCONSIN SOBER HOUSING ASSOCIATION (WASH)

Pres House—through Next Step Sober Living Program—became a founding member of the newly formed Wisconsin Sober Housing Association. WASH seeks to build a more robust sober housing network across the state to serve people in recovery from substance use disorders. By promoting a shared code of ethics and operational standards, WASH strengthens statewide efforts to respond to the opioid epidemic and effects of long-standing alcohol abuse culture.



FACETS PROGRAM



Supported by the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center and the Department of Gender and Women's Studies, FACETS Micro Community launches at Pres House Apartments in the fall of 2019. FACETS is dedicated to fostering a deeper respect for and understanding of the diverse ways human gender and sexuality can be lived and expressed. FACETS is an open and inclusive residential opportunity for persons of any and every gender identity and sexual orientation and any cultural or racial heritage.

UW CREDIT UNION ON FINANCIAL LITERACY

UWCU partnered with Pres House Apartments to support our intentional living scholarship fund and offer opportunities for residents to build financial competence and confidence. In two workshops in the Spring of 2019, residents learned about Personal Budgeting and Defending Yourself Against Financial Crimes.



GATHERX GETS GOING

GatherX was created to connect young adults to deep relationships and facilitate collaboration in the pursuit of God’s justice, beauty, creation, and reconciliation. It strives to be a community for those yearning to be welcomed, searching for belonging, and desiring a sense of ownership.

Amidst January’s polar vortex, GatherX hosted a launch party at Industrious Madison, a coworking space on the capitol square that GatherX now calls home. Despite the weather, the event had more than 50 attendees ranging from interested young adults to church and community partners. GatherX has partnered with Stone Creek Coffee for education events and Free Bikes 4 Kidz for coordinated volunteer opportunities.

This month, GatherX is launching a monthly series in collaboration with the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, home of Picnic Point. First Thursdays X Picnic Point is a monthly gathering to get outside, connect, and dive into a purposeful topic. This series will be hosted on the first Thursday of every month at Fire Circle 3 at Picnic Point. Topics for the monthly gatherings are purposefully selected and intended to craft community, conversation, and connection.

Later this year, GatherX will be launching a quarterly storytelling series. This series is intended to give members a voice and facilitate meaningful connection with GatherX and young adults in Madison. The format of these events will include storytellers, music, and partnering with Madison community organizations. Everyone is invited to participate in these events by coming and being an active listener in the stories being told. ✦



“
It is because of our pursuit of God’s justice, beauty, creation, and reconciliation that we are called to build this community. We look forward to where GatherX is going and the opportunity for deep relationships and collaboration with young adults in Madison!
”
GATHERX

PH APARTMENT WELLNESS PROGRAMMING GROWS (AND THERE IS STILL MORE NEED!)

GROWING PROGRAMS, ENGAGEMENT, AND WELLNESS AT PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS

This is the time of year of year when we review what we did this year and begin planning for next year. One of the joys of working with college-aged adults is hearing about how they are learning and growing and sharing of themselves to build community inside and outside of Pres House. It's also a time to measure our impact and set our sights on what we can do to make a difference in the lives of UW students.

The programs at Pres House Apartments have been supporting student connection and wellness since we opened our doors. As concerns about increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse among college students make headlines, Pres House continues to respond by expanding the programs that support and encourage wellness, social connection, and intentional living.

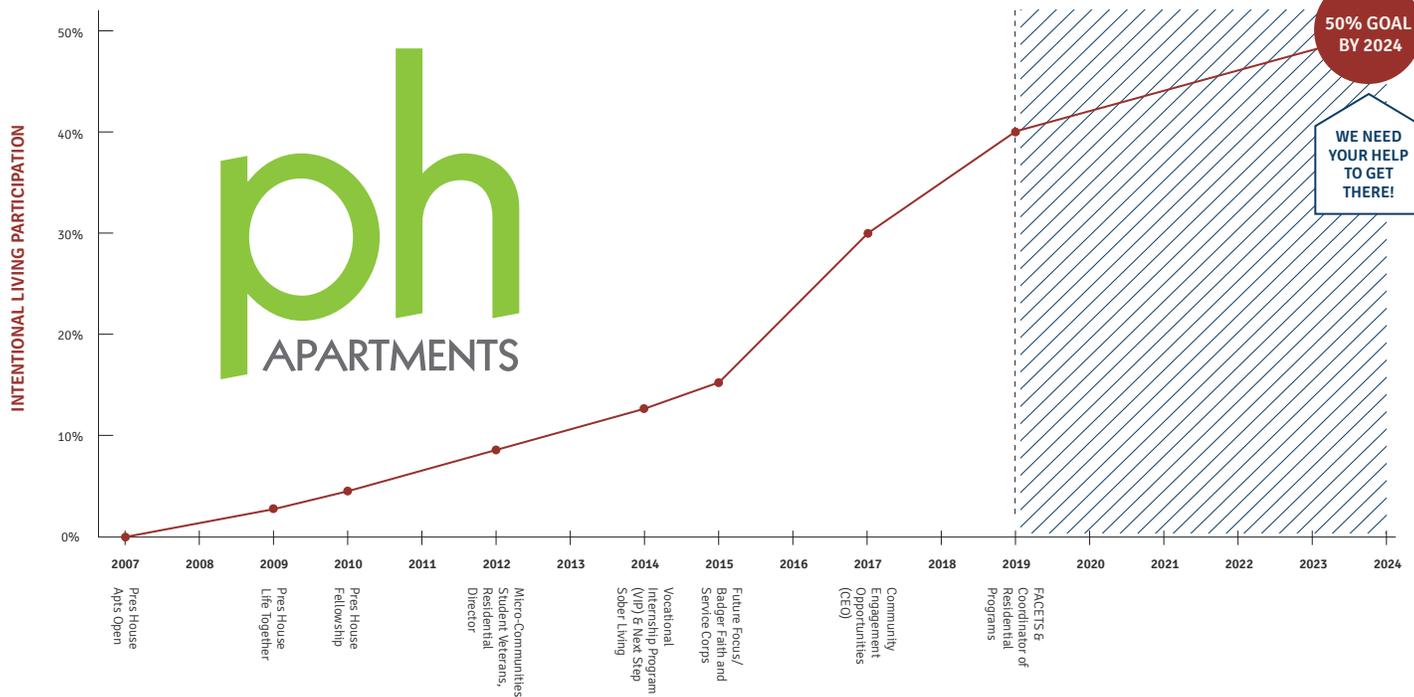
Since 2012, when Pres House hired a full-time Director of Residential Community, participation in our intentional living programs has risen from just 8% (22 residents) to over 36% (84 residents) in 2019-2020. This fall we saw a surge of incoming residents applying for our intentional living programs and scholarships. General scholarship programs were full by the end of

November, micro community applications doubled, and we were left to place many on waitlists for this upcoming fall. This surge in interest also means an increase in scholarship funding needed. Since 2012 we have more than doubled our scholarship budget. In 2019-2020 we are committed to offering over \$80,000 in rent scholarships to our intentional living participants.

Expanding interest and demand also means expanding our response. Pres House has committed to a five-year, \$500,000 initiative to enhance our capacity to support and encourage student wellness. As part of that initiative, Pres House has hired a new staff member, Rebecca Bedell, as the Coordinator of Residential Programs. In a new role as Director of Community Initiatives, Ginger Morgan will continue to build residential programs and will expand her efforts more broadly to build partnerships that can build a more robust set of initiatives that support student wellness.

We are excited about what we've built, the impact we are having, and the response of students. There is more to do and we can't get there without your support. Together, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of students and expand the reach of our impact. Listen to the difference your support can make. ✿

TIMELINE OF PROGRAM GROWTH AT PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS



DONOR CORNER

Were you surprised by the impact that the new tax law had on your income tax return? Has the new law changed the way your charitable donations impact your tax bill?

Depending on your situation you may have noticed that charitable contributions you are used to making were no longer factored into your deduction this year, due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. This new tax legislation, which has been called the most extensive tax legislation in more than 30 years, included a large boost to the standard deduction in 2018 vs. 2017.

This has caused many taxpayers to utilize the standard deduction in 2018 vs. itemizing deductions in 2017. It is estimated that 96% of all taxpayers are now taking the standard deduction vs. 70% in previous years. If you are a taxpayer who uses itemized deductions, you will receive a tax benefit for your charitable contributions, while those who use the standard deduction will not receive a tax benefit for your charitable contributions.

The primary reason for donating to charitable causes is to make a positive impact in the world. But for many donors the tax benefit of charitable giving is also important. If tax deductibility of your donations is important to you, here are a few tips you may want to consider to maximize the tax benefit of charitable giving while you support the organizations you love (like Pres House!):

1. Consider making two years' worth of donations in a single year. For example, by giving donations for both 2019 and 2020 in 2019, you may be able to reach the standard deduction threshold and receive some benefit from itemizing your charitable donations this year. You could consider alternating years by giving two years' worth one year (and itemizing) and then saving the following year and taking the standard deduction.
2. Consider setting up a donor-advised fund with a community foundation (like the Madison Community Foundation). By doing this you can pre-fund future donations and take the tax deduction today. Like the first approach, this may allow you to reach the standard deduction threshold and receive the benefit from itemizing. The advantage to this approach is that you can lump your giving into every other year or every third year for tax purposes but then spread out the distribution of those donations into each year in order to support the ongoing needs of your favorite charities.
3. If you own a traditional IRA, rollover IRA, SEP-IRA or SIMPLE IRA, once you reach the age of 70½, the IRS requires that you take Required Minimum Distributions (RMD's) from these accounts. One strategy to avoid paying taxes on these RMD's is to make a qualified charitable distribution through your IRA directly to your charitable organization of choice. In this instance, your custodian will write a check directly to the charitable organization. The amount of the check counts toward your RMD for the year, but does not count as taxable income.

4. If you own appreciated stocks, you may consider donating the stock certificate directly to the charitable organization. If you bought a stock for \$100 in 2010, it is now worth \$1,500 in 2019. You can donate the stock directly to the charitable organization. You are able to count \$1,500 towards your itemized deductions. If this does not get you over the standard deduction threshold, you will still have the benefit of not paying taxes on the \$1,400 gain in value of the stock.

However you decide to give, and whatever role tax deductions play in your giving decisions, we are grateful for your support here at Pres House. We take our stewardship of your donations very seriously and do everything we can to use your gifts efficiently for the most impact in the lives of students. And because other funding covers our overhead costs, you can be assured that 100% of your donated dollars go directly to support students. Thank you! ✚

Disclaimer: Please consult a tax advisor, financial advisor, or attorney for your own situation. All deductions are limited to amounts allowed by IRS guidelines. If you need assistance, Kollath CPA would be happy to help: (608) 824-3002

BAPTISMS AT PRES HOUSE

On March 3rd, Pres House celebrated the sacrament of baptism with community members Rebecca Bedell and Alexis Terry. It was a joyous day! You can listen to Becca and Alexis share their stories at <https://preshouse.org/worship/listening-to-sunday-sermons/> (look for Baptism).



PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS SCHOLARSHIP REFLECTIONS

“

Scholars events were a big stress buster and they uplifted my mood and made me more positive.

ANGELA ARNHOLT

”



Angela Arnholt (Scholars) & Michela Mosconi (CEO) give boxing a try!

“

CEO was really beneficial because it scheduled positive life experiences into your life for you, as well as helped push you to get out of your comfort zone. I learned how to use movement to express more than words can in times of stress.

”

AMELIA LITYNSKI



“

Learning about Diwali was both educational and fun, as I didn't have a lot of experience/knowledge about Indian culture.

”

LUCY LOESSIN



“

I was able to do more activities that improved my self-esteem and sense of community while also reducing the amount of rent I pay each month, which has been super helpful!

SARAH BEAVERSON

”

“

I have a stronger foundation of what my values are and how I want to live them out in the future.

THERESA SCHINKOWITCH

”



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VOLUNTEER/APPRECIATION SUNDAY

We wanted to say a big thank you once again! We had a wonderful time celebrating Sunday April 28 with all who made it. With nearly 100 attending, the turnout was fantastic. It was great seeing everyone who makes everything we do here at Pres House possible. For those unable to attend, we missed seeing you! You can see photos from the event, watch a “thank you” video, and listen to the sermon and stories from students all at <https://preshouse.org/thank-you/> ✿



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.