



# VOICE

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

SPRING 2020

## PRES HOUSE LAUNCHES CANDID A STUDENT WELLNESS INITIATIVE



During the 2016-17 academic year, the staff and board of Pres House undertook a strategic planning process to identify ways that Pres House could continue to extend and deepen its missional charge to promote the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth of UW-Madison students. Several major initiatives emerged and took shape from that process, including strengthening partnerships with UW and community stakeholders and groups; supporting the launch of an outreach project serving adults/professionals in the Madison area (now known as GatherX); and developing and implementing more robust programming and support for student wellness that might serve a broader population of university students than can currently be reached through Pres House church and Pres House Apartment programs.

A small working group on wellness was formed and spent time discerning the needs on campus and the particular shape of what Pres House was in the best position to offer. Conversations with student leaders and UW staff pointed to the need for additional support helping students develop and build resilience in the face of personal, cultural, and circumstantial challenges. Psychological and sociological studies have tied human flourishing to the number and quality of connections

that any given person or community has. Since Pres House has always excelled at welcoming people into community and connecting students to each other, we decided to leverage that strength to help support student wellness. With a guiding principle of supporting the idea of wellness in community, Candid was born. Ginger Morgan, who has served as the Director of Residential Communities, assumed a new position blending work in Pres House Apartments with leadership for the new wellness initiative.

Officially launched in February 2020, Candid invites students on a wellness journey that is “self directed, but not alone.” Under Ginger’s direction, Candid will take a multi-pronged approach to supporting student wellness. Candid will publish and share regular online blogs/vlogs addressing wellness topics relevant to the life of university students. In upcoming months Candid will offer workshops and activities that help students learn and

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## PRES HOUSE LAUNCHES CANDID (CONTINUED)

develop life skills, including topics like eating healthy on a budget, the role of mindfulness and gratitude in well-being, how to develop a personal budget, and how to become resilient in the face of stress. Beginning in fall 2020, Candid will begin to offer Club Candid, through which small groups of students can offer and receive support for their personal wellness goals. Candid hopes to offer an additional level of professional health and life coaching to further encourage the success of students on this journey.

During this challenging time, we cannot imagine more timely work or a better way to continue to be faithful to our mission. We look forward to letting you know how this journey is unfolding.



### CURIOUS?

Look up the blogs currently posted at:  
[candiduw.org/blog](https://candiduw.org/blog)

### INTERESTED?

UW-Madison students are invited to join the journey by filling out the Candid contact form, which can be found at:  
[candiduw.org/contact](https://candiduw.org/contact)

### WANT TO HELP?

We invite you to contribute what you can at:  
[candiduw.org/donate](https://candiduw.org/donate)

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# REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHRISTIAN LIVING MICROCOMMUNITY

## A HOME BASE FOR FAITH

by Rachel Fu, with Lauren Lui, Jenny Ma, Julia Wang, Cristine Jiang, and Christine Cheung

Six roommates at PH Apartments received scholarships this year to form an intentional Christian Living microcommunity. While microcommunities can propose any topic of focus, this group dedicated their time to deep conversations and inquiry into their faith and a successful community service event with the help of fellow residents. Discussion topics ranged from sharing testimonies to women in the Bible, dating relationships, and faith during the pandemic.



“ It's so easy to get lost in the craziness of school work and organizations. This year, the Christian microcommunity was the one thing we could always go back to and center ourselves on. It was a reminder of the importance of faith in our lives.

For me, knowing my roommates had shared beliefs and values was always a comfort. There weren't many people outside our apartment whom we would be comfortable sharing our deeper struggles about life and faith with, and that brought us so much closer together. I knew my roommates would always encourage me, support me, and even rebuke me when needed (especially when some of us took on spiritual leadership roles this year).

Although on the surface we have similar backgrounds, we discovered our experiences and perspectives differ a lot. When we shared our testimonies, it was a blessing to see each person's journey to finding their faith. At every meeting, we made sure to catch up on life and how we were doing physically, mentally, and spiritually. There was always something someone said that encouraged me, inspired me, motivated me, or even convicted me. There were constant opportunities to think about my own faith in a new light. When I forgot about my priorities, microcommunity was always the place to ground myself.

Moreover, several of our discussions were on "touchy" topics that didn't get addressed much in the churches we each grew up in (especially the week we talked about women in the church). Sitting down and asking those tough questions challenged us to actually think about subjects we tend to ignore to avoid conflict. But these questions are so necessary to ask, and they allow us to dig deeper and potentially find answers to topics that many people (even outside of the faith) are curious about.

Our most successful event was the one that engaged the wider community: distributing food to the homeless on November 10. It was truly a day full of blessings! We got together, packing bags of food and supplies. At first it was just us in the PH Apartments lounge, then gradually ten other residents joined in. Some brought extra food, toothbrushes, scarves, socks, gloves, and t-shirts. With the help of their loving hearts and hands, we were able to distribute 22 bags!

It was just before Thanksgiving and starting to become chilly; we didn't expect so many people to be out on the streets. I remember the minute one of our groups turned the corner from Pres House and was met with three people in need of food and supplies. Their reactions set the mood for the rest of the day: hearts inclined to joy and thanksgiving.

One man, after thanking us many times, told us that what he wants the most is for people to really SEE him. I think this experience is really easy to make into a "feel-good" kind of thing, but for many of us it was so much more. While incredibly

heartwarming, it was an opportunity for us to spread a little bit of light and love onto our community. As a Christian Living microcommunity, our goal is to live as an example of Jesus, and this event allowed us to do that.

Living together was also really fun. Having the time set aside to discuss Christian topics was so nice. Our apartment became our home base and the center of our faith. As Christians, we were respectful of each other's things and space and were good influences on one another. We would drag each other out of bed every Sunday morning, go to fellowship and Bible study together, and even be reminded to do our daily devotions when we saw each other doing them.

Aside from our official microcommunity meetings, the crazy moments we shared are memories I will never forget. Cooking together before our morning meetings was always an adventure. We had impromptu jam nights, movie nights, self-care nights, nights spent lying on the ground laughing, and decorating our apartment for Christmas.

With every discussion we had, we delved deeper and learned more about one another. Our topics were always challenging to think about, but we were able to be vulnerable and share things that we don't normally share. We also learned how everyone had different experiences that influenced their lives of faith, and how these experiences affected their perspective of God. Most importantly, we were able to simply share life together and cherish these friendships centered around a shared faith. Ultimately, my roommates were people I knew would always understand me, support me, and love me. ”



Left to right: Christine Cheung, Cristine Jiang, Lauren Lui, Rachel Fu, Julia Wang. Missing: Jenny Ma

# COMMUNITY CONTINUES IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19

## WORSHIP AND SMALL GROUPS GO ON

Just before spring break on March 11, UW-Madison announced the suspension of face-to-face instruction. Pres House staff worked quickly to move all programming online, and the first Zoom worship gathering was held on March 15 with Pastor Erica sharing reflections on COVID-19. See her video at: “Wilderness Lessons for COVID-19”.

When classes resumed after break, weekly gatherings that normally happen in person at Pres House connected virtually instead. Students grabbed knitting needles and hung out via video, showing their projects and sharing how they were doing; group online gaming was figured out so the community could still play together; Bible studies continued as people discussed and prayed about concerns. Each week Sunday worship happened via Zoom and sermons from those gatherings were posted on the Pres House Facebook page. In some ways, it has been more intimate as community members get a glimpse into each other’s homes, meeting other family members and even their pets.

While we have missed being physically together, the Pres House community has remained active in keeping people socially connected.



## CONNECTING WITH PRES HOUSE ALUM VIRTUALLY

As COVID-19 spread around the world, we began to worry about how our beloved Pres House alumni were doing. The isolation of staying at home and social distancing from others is particularly hard for young adults who live alone or have recently moved to new cities for graduate school or work. So by the end of March, when we realized that just about everyone, everywhere, was interacting primarily online, we decided to invite our recent alumni to join virtual alumni reunions on Zoom. We held three reunions for three broad cohorts of alumni – those who graduated 2005-10, 2010-15, and 2015-19. The gatherings were great fun! A fantastic group of alumni showed up for each of the virtual reunions and had a chance to catch up with each other. Social distancing has been difficult, but interrupted schedules and online technology opened up an opportunity for relationship-building we hadn’t expected.



Pres House gathers online via Zoom meetings

## APARTMENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS CONTINUE REMOTELY

While quarantining in family homes or apartments, scholarship participants have gotten creative to finish the year. Scholars and CEO program volunteers are using FaceTime to tutor neighbors' kids or keep isolated elders company. One is enjoying online transcription of historical documents for the National Archives; one is moving her food sustainability work to online fundraising and a webinar.

Microcommunities have turned to video chat to stay connected. The Cultural Acceptance group had a needed opportunity to reflect on the pandemic's effects on Desi (South Asian) and Asian-American populations and to join a virtual town hall with university leaders about bias and hate incidents on campus. Asian Dance microcommunity participants watched videos of K-Tigers, a taekwondo dance group. The Christian microcommunity discussed doubt and faith in these times, and decided to keep up weekly group calls regardless of program requirements coming to a close.



## MILLOT EMERGENCY STUDENT LOAN FUND

A generous donor and alumna of Pres House, Elizabeth Millot, left money in her will in 1971 to create the Millot Loan Fund at Pres House in order to provide emergency, interest-free loans to UW-Madison students. Thanks to this generous gift, Pres House is able to provide financial assistance for students during the current COVID-19 crisis. UW-Madison students can apply to the fund and receive up to \$2000 as a zero-interest loan to assist with rent, food, tuition, or other financial needs. We are grateful for thoughtful donors like Elizabeth Millot who could never have imagined the current crisis but whose legacy gift is helping students fifty years after her death.

## DONOR INFO

Recent legislation coming out of the COVID-19 crisis includes a provision to encourage the support of charitable organizations such as Pres House. Individuals will now be able to claim a \$300 above-the-line deduction for cash contributions made, generally, to public charities in 2020. This rule effectively allows a limited charitable deduction even to taxpayers claiming the standard deduction. Individuals can also now contribute 100% of their adjusted gross income (AGI) in 2020 to public charities if they want (previous limit was 60% of AGI). Charities, including Pres House, need faithful and generous donor support more than ever during these difficult financial times.

**You can give to Pres House online at:**  
[preshouse.org/donate](https://preshouse.org/donate)

Or by mailing a donation in the enclosed envelope. One of the best ways to support us is by setting up a recurring monthly donation. Every gift of any amount helps!

## RECOVERY RESIDENCE HUDDLE UP 2020



**Sober Housing operators and community stakeholders from across Wisconsin met in Lower Hall at Pres House in January of 2020 for a Recovery Residence half-day conference. This is an extension of our efforts to support recovery housing in Pres House Apartments and on campus.**

# LETTING GO, FINDING GRACE

## STORY FROM A GRADUATE

by Taya Briggs, class of 2020

“While I was determined to get rid of my “good kid” image as I entered college, the one thing I really wanted to maintain from my lifestyle was my faith. Pres House was only the second church I tried out, but I really loved a few key things that set it apart — mainly how welcoming everyone was. When I attended Freshman Small Group for the first time, I was looking for something. At the time I didn’t know what, but I made the conscious effort to put myself out there and show up for a night. And... at first it was awkward. I didn’t know anyone, I hadn’t told anyone I’d be going. But there, I met my best friends from college, and they have helped me more than I can ever articulate to them.

It’s not what you study or what you major in that changes the person you are — it’s what you choose to do with your time outside of the classroom and how you react to what life throws your way.

Another life-changing experience was when I studied abroad in Granada. It was both the best and hardest time of my life; on one hand, I had the most amazing experiences that I can never again replicate, like backpacking through countries and living with a host family in a foreign culture. But it was also hard being away from my family, my boyfriend, and my faith community. When I was in Europe, I learned I was rejected from nursing school. In high school, I was a three-sport valedictorian, so getting rejected was a punch to the stomach. For the first time in college, I felt completely out of control; suddenly it wasn’t up to me when or from where I graduated, and how was it possible that a total stranger could control such an important life event for me? How was it possible that they saw a Dean’s List, active-in-the-community Badger and not find me good enough? For maybe my



Taya Briggs

entire life, the biggest part of my self-esteem relied on school. When I was bullied in primary school, dealt with crippling anxiety in middle school, and had a skin disease in high school, my educational prowess convinced me that I was worth acceptance by my peers. So being declined from a nursing program meant that my self-worth came crashing down. Putting yourself back together teaches you more than staying together in the first place. And even if you take a break or feel

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‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’

JEREMIAH 29:11

yourself a literal (or figurative) ocean away from your religious community, God won’t take a break on you.

After finally curating my new plans in the wake of a school rejection, my plan B was also suddenly ruined. I was supposed to get my Spanish major and a “Teaching English as a Second Language” certificate, but the last class for the certificate wasn’t offered this spring, and so I had to abandon the certificate entirely. As spring semester began and I registered for courses, I had finally put together my plan C. I would graduate this semester as a Spanish major, and reapply to nursing school. I would prepare for my plan D over the summer, which entailed signing up for a CNA course and applying to one-year nursing programs.

But suddenly, another unexpected event hit: COVID-19 quarantine. The fate of my summer CNA class, summer job, and my fall nursing program suddenly became unknown; could I really have to move on to plan E?! What even could that be? How was I meant to change my entire plan a third time?

Even though it’s scary not to know where I will end up, I am exactly where I need to be right now. And all of these previous experiences prepared me to face that fact. The only thing we can know for sure is what is happening now, and it takes practice to appreciate the present moment. However, I have realized something that took me a really long time to learn, and I still have to work on it each day. Amidst all of the crazy uncertainty, my life is coming together. And the life that I have lived is better than my original plan — it’s more rich and also more difficult, but the difficult part makes it more beautiful.

So, when you feel uncertainty, struggle, fall apart, or change your plans, it is okay. You aren’t alone, and even God has something to say about the ever-changing plans we try to create. In the book of Jeremiah, God addresses the uncertainty and shifting livelihoods of the Israelites who were living in exile. God didn’t forget them during that time, and God doesn’t forget you now.

”

# REMEMBERING FORGOTTEN STORIES

## BREAK WITH A PURPOSE 2020

by Evan Digman

“ A story’s powerful ability to convey meaning and emotion and experience and sometimes even a sense of a call to action is just incredible. Our January 2020 Break With A Purpose (BWAP) trip was planned with the intention of doing hurricane relief work in Puerto Rico, but earthquakes right before we were scheduled to leave kept us away. Somehow Mark and Erica turned around the trip in one day so that we could go do relief work in Florida to help with Hurricane Michael recovery instead. Wait, Hurricane Michael?

When I first heard this, I scanned my memory for the faintest recollection of when this even happened. I just vaguely recalled that Hurricane Michael, a Category 5 hurricane, had hit the United States. As we would later learn, Michael was the fourth most intense hurricane to hit the continental US based on wind speeds. How could I have not been more aware of this? Surely the disaster and recovery involved with this violent of a storm was substantial in magnitude. What happened to the story of Michael? How many other stories end up lost like this?

The reality of whose story gets told and how, is harsh and vastly inequitable in our world. When we arrived on the first day at our worksite, the leaders from Hope Panhandle, which was the local nonprofit we were working with, told us how the story of Hurricane Michael was quickly lost, and how the people of the Florida Panhandle were quickly forgotten. We continued throughout the week listening to the stories of the homeowners, witnessing the overwhelming destruction that remained even after a year and a half of recovery efforts, and learning from those who are experiencing it how their stories have been forgotten. This overwhelming sense of guilt for the immense privilege I have come over me. These people didn’t deserve any of this. And who am I to be in

the position that I’m in anyway? I took a breath. As a child of God, I remember that everything I have is a gift from God. These gifts include two crucial spiritual currencies: our time and our attention. The Good Samaritan, as Jesus shared, knows the proper use of these currencies as exemplified by his selfless actions. Employing his attention and time to the man beaten by robbers, he loves him in that moment, acknowledging his story and through that becoming a part of it. We as individuals and as God’s children are living out our own stories, and whether we are conscious of it or not, our stories are constantly interweaving with one another’s.

As the 2020 Break With A Purpose trip to Panama City demonstrated, the world is full of forgotten stories, including those of the people of the Florida Panhandle devastated by Michael. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. To do so is a task of a lifetime, and there is no cutting corners. It requires continual reminders to oneself, a loving intention carried from moment to moment in what we say and in what we do. Each day, with the gifts of time and attention that each of us has, we need to seek out and listen to the stories of those who have been forgotten. It doesn’t require one to look very far. Each one of us contains lost stories. We are called to look deeper into who we already are, not taking our roles as student, teacher, or researcher too seriously, but rather bringing into a loving awareness, and then into action, our nature as human co-creators. Through the intention to listen, acknowledge, and allow, we can dive deeper into the relationships that we already have while also actively seeking new ones to be made. By undertaking this we interweave our stories tighter and tighter so that we are never the same, transforming ourselves into servants of God and God’s creation, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. ”



Evan Digman at a house damaged by Hurricane Michael



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## FRESHMAN CONNECTION

Pastor Erica Liu has led an active group of freshmen this year. They met weekly to share common experiences being first-year students, discuss the Bible, cook together, pray, and form lasting friendships.



### 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](http://www.preshouse.org/donate).