



# VOICE

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

FALL 2020

## NEXT STEP SOBER HOUSING PROGRAM CHANGES LIVES

MICHAEL J.



The Next Step Program has been an invaluable experience to me in many ways. I was living in a cheap motel, running out of resources to pay my expenses and not doing very well in my recovery, when this opportunity became available to me. I am very grateful for such programs that can assist me in ways no one else has ever done.

It has benefited me in my personal life by providing me with a safe environment and allowing me the ability to achieve personal growth within my recovery process. It provides me with avenues in which to be challenged so that I may take personal risks in a safe manner and test my abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Additionally, it is a place of acceptance, an environment in which to achieve success, and yet hold me accountable. The people in the program have offered a sense of guidance and direction.

It is a place where others similar to myself also struggle, maybe for different reasons, but we all share the same path trying to become successful and healthy individuals. It is because of these special and caring individuals — such as Ginger, who is readily available to me, one who cares about my personal welfare — that I have come this far. Without this program I am sure my life and its outcome would certainly be one of demise. I hope one day to be able to give back to others in return, to help the community in which I live and work, and offer a helping hand, as I have been receiving in this Next Step Program this past year.

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# RECOLLECTIONS FROM A ROOJAH

John Miller was a ROOJAH (Royal Order of Janitors and Hosts) during his senior year from September 1960 to June 1961. He lived at home with his parents his first three years – but when his parents moved to Dixon, Illinois his senior year, he applied to be a ROOJAH since he needed a place to live. Mr. Miller grew up in Madison, and went to Christ Presbyterian Church growing up. He felt a very close connection with the church from a very early age. In fact, he knew as early as fifth grade that he wanted to be a minister. Growing up in Madison, he was constantly involved with the church, serving the community in various ways including youth work. He majored in history at the University of Wisconsin, and went to McCormick Seminary after completing his undergraduate work. He never really thought of going to a college other than the University of Wisconsin. He also never really considered any place other than McCormick after completing his degree in Madison.

He started to attend the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 1957. Since he grew up in Madison, he was well aware of Pres House before starting college. He became a very active member of Pres House his freshman year, when he was elected as an elder in the spring of 1958. He was a member of the choir, which had 35-40 members at the time. He looks back on his time in the choir as one of his fondest memories. John was well aware of the ROOJAH position and who the ROOJAHs were during his time at Pres House. According to Miller, “ROOJAHs became part of the fabric of Pres House. They were perceived as more than just caretakers. Everybody knew who they were, and they were known to people who came to Pres House as almost being staff members.” The position was not paid, but it included free board. They slept in bunk beds at Pres House on the second floor.

A ROOJAH position opened up for the fall of 1960. This worked out perfectly since Miller was looking for a place to live. Typically, there were four ROOJAHs during the school year. Most ROOJAHs served until graduating from the university, and the only advertising of open positions was internal. The ROOJAHs alternated responsibilities, which ranged from vacuuming, sweeping, cleaning the kitchen, shoveling snow, and helping prepare meals, which happened at least every Sunday evening. ROOJAHs were always present during Pres House activities on nights and weekends.

ROOJAHs were and still are a very close knit group. They often ate evening meals together. Miller described his time as ROOJAH as the following: “It’s almost like being a junior grade monk in the monastery. It felt like I was part of the community in a unique sense.” Anybody who was a ROOJAH felt a unique kinship with other ROOJAHs. Once somebody became a ROOJAH, it became like a badge of everlasting, special pride. Roy Plekenpol, another Pres House and UW alum, was a ROOJAH some years before Miller. Plekenpol and Miller both live in Hilton Head now. As fate would have it, they just happened to cross paths in South Carolina, and they soon discovered they both served as ROOJAHs at Pres House. This forged an instant bond for the two men.

Miller made a point that Pres House had a profound impact on both undergraduate and graduate students. He was one of these students who felt such a strong effect. Holding his position as a ROOJAH further cemented his bond with Pres House. It is clear that for those who spent time as a ROOJAH – even 5, 10, or 20 years apart – there is an everlasting bond that nothing, not even time, can break. This is truly a “Royal Order” of Janitors and Hosts. A timeless kinship.

Miller epitomizes the essence of Pres House. He stated that “ROOJAHs became part of the fabric of Pres House.” Well, he was part of the fabric even before he became one. He had such a positive experience during his time at Pres House, that he plans to leave a bequest to Pres House. We are incredibly grateful to him and others for including Pres House in their estate planning. Donors who leave a bequest become part of the Cecil Lower Legacy Society at Pres House. For more information about including Pres House in your estate plan, visit <https://preshouse.org/donate/leaving-a-bequest/> or contact Mark Gordon: [mgordon@preshouse.org](mailto:mgordon@preshouse.org).

# MEET NII ADDO ABRAHAMS

## ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF CAMPUS MINISTRY



Nii Addo Abrahams joined the staff at Pres House this past summer as our new Associate Director of Campus Ministry. Nii graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in May, 2020 and moved to Madison in June. We sat down to ask him a few questions about how he's settling into his new role.

### **How are you adjusting to life in Madison?**

Madison is a dream, to be honest. I'm really enjoying being back in the Midwest after spending a few years on the East Coast for seminary. Moving during a pandemic is challenging, especially when it comes to making new friends and finding new things to

do, but I'm really happy here. Madison is super bike-friendly, which I love; I've also been able to get out on the water for a paddle a few times, and that's been an unexpected joy. And despite everyone's best efforts to reassure me, I'm still terrified that I'll freeze to death when winter comes, so please pray for me.

### **What's the most exciting or surprising thing you've experienced at Pres House so far?**

I can tell you the most exciting and most surprising thing because they happened at the same time. I met a lot of students over the summer via Zoom. So when we had our first outdoor worship services, I was really excited because I was finally going to get to spend time with students (and people in general) in person. But as students started showing up, I didn't recognize anyone, not just because everyone was wearing masks, but because everyone was around six inches taller than I thought they would be. It took me a while to realize that Zoom does not accurately represent a person's height. I really thought everyone was about six inches shorter than they actually turned out to be.

### **What are you most looking forward to in the rest of this semester and year?**

This is a tough question. Because of COVID, it's hard to know what next week will look like, let alone the rest of the semester or the year. I don't think we've had a single week so far where everything went as expected, either on campus or at Pres House. So I try to take things in smaller chunks of time. When it's Tuesday, I'm looking forward to our staff meeting on Wednesday morning; on Wednesday, I'm looking forward to spending time with students on Thursday evening for Bible study; on Friday, I'm looking forward to Sunday worship. And no matter what day it is, I'm always looking forward to the next time I can connect with a student one-on-one to get to know them better. Those moments really keep me going.

## JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF SUSTAINERS

More and more of our donors are becoming sustaining partners of Pres House by setting up recurring monthly giving. Thank you! Recurring giving has numerous benefits for you as a donor and for Pres House. You can set it up and not have to worry about keeping track of when you have given, remembering to make a gift, or mailing in an envelope. Pres House benefits by receiving steady, ongoing funding that goes directly to support students on

campus throughout the year. Recurring givers are incredibly helpful in sustaining the mission of Pres House. You can set up a recurring monthly gift of any amount at [preshouse.org/donate](https://preshouse.org/donate) or by contacting Mark Gordon at [mark@preshouse.org](mailto:mark@preshouse.org). Gifts can be processed by credit card or bank account debit. Recurring givers are recognized as part of our Circle of Sustainers. Thank you!





# FALL KICKOFF AT PRES HOUSE IN THE AGE OF COVID-19



## THE SEMESTER BEGAN WITH OUTDOOR WORSHIP AND WELCOME

We hosted a mixture of virtual and in-person events to welcome students to Pres House and UW-Madison. “What I Wish I Knew” panels for freshmen and graduate students were held online; more than 100 students came by on a sunny afternoon during “Cookie Break” to pick up a sweet treat from Pres House; and we held outdoor worship services on the patio and gave individually packaged homemade snacks for people to take and enjoy conversations with one another spread out on Library Mall.

With the campus locking down just a few days after classes started, Pres House quickly pivoted to continue hosting gatherings online in a newly created “Pres House GatherTown.”

## HOW DO WE READ THE BIBLE?

At the beginning of the year, several of our Pres House Council members expressed interest in leading a Bible study as one of our weekly groups. As we began to talk through how the group might work, we decided to create a group that would do more than just read the Bible together, but would also talk about how to read the Bible, reflecting together on what it means to read Scripture as well as be a person of faith.

So we launched “How to Study the Bible!” Nii, our new Associate Director of Campus Ministry, co-leads the group along with Council members each week. For the first half of the semester, the group is focusing on some Bible-related topics selected by students. They’ve done sessions on how to read the Old Testament, how to approach violence in scripture, the differences between the four gospels, and how to interpret Jesus’ parables. In the second half of the semester, they’ll be reading through 1 Corinthians together. It’s been a great opportunity for students to connect with one another and to learn more about the Bible.

## PRES HOUSE MOVES TO GATHERTOWN!

With COVID causing a roller coaster fall season at UW-Madison, the staff at Pres House was excited to discover a new online platform for the community to continue worshipping and connecting with one another amidst the “Zoom fatigue” students were experiencing. In mid-September, we introduced Pres House GatherTown, a virtual space that is modeled off the real-life Pres House.

People move around the space with a customized avatar and interact only with those they come near to, just as one does in-person. They are able to come to the Chapel for Worship on Sunday afternoons, head to the Weekly Gatherings Lounge for Bible study, play games and watch movies with others in the Rec Room, stop by the offices to chat with staff, and more. With the necessity of being online to keep everyone healthy, Pres House GatherTown provides a fun and interactive way for the community to continue gathering together. Pres House GatherTown is open 24/7 and we invite you to stop by for a visit anytime.

(<https://gather.town/app/QczqFoT82NFM6db/PresHouse>)

You never know who you might bump into while you’re there!





## PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS ARE A WELCOMING HOME!

Pres House Apartments are full this fall and a welcoming home base for students who are taking classes online and need a friendly place to live on campus. 95 students are involved in one of 11 intentional living programs (an increase of 16% from last year) receiving more than \$90,000 in scholarships. Staff members Becca and Ginger took turns hosting an outdoor hospitality table during apartment move-in, and move-in times were staggered to reduce crowding in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents are encouraged and rewarded for creating roommate agreements around health and safety behaviors, participating in PH Apartment Zoom orientation, and getting regular COVID testing.

## BOARD MEMBER SEWS AND SHARES MASKS

Laurie Jones, member of the Pres House board of directors, has sewn more than 3,000 masks since March. In addition to giving them to local first responders, health-care workers, and others, she donated a few hundred hand-sewn masks to students at Pres House.



PRES HOUSE APARTMENT RESIDENTS (LEFT TO RIGHT) JASON WANG, LUKE SUTER, DANIA HUSSAIN, AND ALEX BECKMAN DECIDED TO TRY OUT THEIR NEW AIR FRYER FOR HEALTHIER FRIES, ALL WHILE EARNING POINTS FOR THEIR CEO SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.



## WHAT'S THE TEA? A NEW ONLINE DISCUSSION

Downtown Madison, like our country, was rocked by protests for racial justice this summer, many occurring within feet of Pres House. We asked ourselves: What more can we do to be voices of clarity for our students on crucial yet polarizing issues? How could we model listening and dialogue in this time of distrust and division? What's the Tea? was born: a biweekly conversation on relevant topics among Becca, Erica, Ginger, Nii, and occasional student guests. It is live-streamed on Facebook.

We've streamed five episodes so far, reflecting on the first week of a pandemic semester, the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, National Coming Out Day, and more. Viewers can watch and comment live, or watch afterwards, broadening the typical reach of our programs in this age of virtual content. The core of four staff also means that What's the Tea reaches church participants and residents alike. We cap each episode at 30 minutes, which is intentionally challenging, but necessary on such complex topics. Our unscripted conversations are casual and raw, offering a chance to dive briefly but deeply into topics that affect how we each move through the world. Recordings can be viewed on the Pres House YouTube channel.

# CANDID GROWS



When Pres House launched Candid in 2019 we had no idea what was just around the corner – the most serious global health crisis of our lifetime. The idea behind Candid was to support student wellness by providing opportunities for students to get relevant health information and to get and receive support in reaching their wellness goals. There has never been a more important time to support student wellness. Candid continues to build engagement, providing relevant workshops and blogs, and engaging UW students in wellness activities.

## WELLNESS BINGO CHALLENGE

Students in the church and apartment communities were invited to participate in a Wellness Bingo Challenge in September with the chance to receive a \$5 gift card for anyone completing one line of the card and entering everyone who completed the whole card in a monthly drawing. Apartment residents who ordered a community dinner also got a free bingo card with their meal. 26 students participated, many of whom sent emails about how much they enjoyed the activities, and half of the participants completed the whole card. You can check out the Bingo Card included in this edition of the Pres House newsletter for yourself if you want some ideas for wellness activities.

## BLOGS

Ginger Morgan, Director of Candid, continues to post regular blogs on various topics related to wellness. The most recent blog addressed the experience of surge capacity depletion during the pandemic and offered ideas about ways to refuel and replenish. You can read that blog at: <https://candiduw.org/filling-up-the-tank>

## INTRODUCING CANDID CORNER

This fall Pres House staff have taken turns sharing tips for easy activities to do around Madison. This new feature – which we are calling Candid Corner – is sent out through church and apartment weekly emails and then posted under the blog tab of the [candiduw.org](http://candiduw.org) website. Nii wrote a piece about paddling on nearby local lakes (when boat rentals were still open). Mark wrote a piece on cycling (of course). Becca shared ways to enjoy the Lakeshore Preserve.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

This fall we began offering **Candid Circles**, a program that invites participants to set their own wellness goals and get support and coaching to reach them. Candid Circles utilizes prizes and incentives to help students build momentum around developing new habits and practices to reach their goals. Candid will host a personal budgeting Zoom webinar with Renae Sigall from UW Credit Union. In early 2021 Candid will publish a 'zine written by Pres House staff member Becca Bedell for young adults on all things food. Stay tuned: <https://candiduw.org>

## PLAY OUR WELLNESS BINGO GAME!

Students enjoyed completing Candid Wellness Bingo activities in September, earning a gift card for completing a single line and a monthly prize entry for finishing the whole card. If you want to try your hand, check out some of these easy “do-at-home” ideas for self care.

B	I	N	G	O
Eat 4-6 servings of fruits and veggies <input type="checkbox"/>	Do 10 jumping jacks and 20 knee lifts <input type="checkbox"/>	Spend 5 minutes thinking about something that went well <input type="checkbox"/>	Finish your homework on time <input type="checkbox"/>	Discover a new comedian- watch/listen until you laugh <input type="checkbox"/>
Run in place for 10 secs, 5 second break, repeat 3x <input type="checkbox"/>	Take a virtual museum tour <input type="checkbox"/>	Say “hello” to someone you don’t know and smile <input type="checkbox"/>	Spend 10 minutes stretching <input type="checkbox"/>	Stop & breathe between bites of food (3x in 1 meal) <input type="checkbox"/>
Get off electronics an hour before bedtime <input type="checkbox"/>	Eat healthy snacks (0 added sugar) for a day <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>FREE</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	Walk up and down a flight of stairs 5 times <input type="checkbox"/>	Try an exercise or video you haven’t tried before <input type="checkbox"/>
Do something creative (write, paint, knit, collage, music) <input type="checkbox"/>	Catch up with someone you haven’t talked to for a while <input type="checkbox"/>	Notice the beauty of something you see every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Read something for fun (not for school) <input type="checkbox"/>	Turn on your favorite music and dance for 10 minutes <input type="checkbox"/>
Drink 8 glasses of water in a day <input type="checkbox"/>	Post a gratitude on social media <input type="checkbox"/>	Complete a 1 minute plank <input type="checkbox"/>	Write a thank you note to someone <input type="checkbox"/>	Sing in the shower <input type="checkbox"/>





Presbyterian  
Student Center  
Foundation

**Nii Addo Abrahams**

Associate Director of Campus Ministry  
nii@preshouse.org

**Rebecca Bedell**

Coordinator of Residential Programs  
rebecca@preshouse.org

**Mark Elsdon**

Executive Director  
mark@preshouse.org

**Mark Gordon**

Office Manager  
mgordon@preshouse.org

**Natalie Handley**

Music Director  
natalie@preshouse.org

**Erica Liu**

Pastor & Director of Campus Ministry  
erica@preshouse.org

**Ginger Morgan**

Director of Candid & Community Initiatives  
ginger@preshouse.org

---

**Laura Andrews**

Lead Instigator, GatherX  
laura@gatherx.org

**David Clark-Sally**

Operations Manager, GatherX  
david@gatherx.org

---

**Terry Bauer**

Property Manager, PH Apartments  
terryb@rentfmi.com

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## GATHERX FUNDRAISER

GatherX Drive-Thru BBQ raised \$2,375 for the Madison-based Community Immigration Law Center. More than 275 take out meals were distributed! "Offering someone the opportunity to break bread or share a meal is saying: *You are welcome here... just as you are.* We hope that giving people an opportunity to eat together (in person or in spirit) acts as a tool for people to connect with one another and the community."



### 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).