



# VOICE

FALL 2021

A Home at the Heart of the University of Wisconsin–Madison since 1907



## THE IMPORTANCE OF FRESHMAN CONNECTION

BY EVAN DIGMAN

Hello! My name is Evan Digman. I use he/him pronouns and am a junior studying pharmacology and toxicology.

From my background, I attended church every Sunday. As a kid, I went because my parents brought me. This changed as I got older and chose to be a part of our church's youth group. My relationship to church shifted most dramatically as I headed to college. When I told members of my home congregation in Minneapolis that I would be attending UW-Madison, I recall being encouraged by multiple people: "Check out Pres House!" I knew I intended to be connected with a spiritual community on campus but I did not know what that would look like in this new environment.

What was this place called Pres House? I knew it was a campus ministry affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, but in my perception, that doesn't capture the essence of what Pres House is. When I arrived at my first Sunday worship, I was greeted by students beckoning me in with their smiles through the doors of the chapel. I was then welcomed by Erica, and when I mentioned I was a first-year student, she enthusiastically encouraged me to come to Freshman Connection, the small group for first-year students.

I debated going that first week. General Chemistry homework had already started to pile up and doubts about my time management skills seeped into my mind. Let's just say I made the right choice

showing up that Tuesday evening. Our freshman small group was undoubtedly one of the most impactful community experiences I have had to date. We came together as strangers more or less those first couple of weeks, but we were all bonded by our shared decision to accept the invitation and come through the open door. What evolved during the following months was a space of friendship, trust, and care. It was safe to express our ideas, questions, and doubts knowing we were heard and appreciated for all of who we are. Not to mention the many moments of laughter, dancing, and silliness that stick with me almost two years later. Reflecting on my experiences from my first time here until now, I feel that Pres House is an open door with possibilities for connection to be discovered inside.

I will always remember our last small group dinner in March 2020, right before they sent us home due to the pandemic. Though we had no idea what was coming, what we did know was that we were confronting many unknowns ... together. We had committed to show up for one another. We learned what it was like to be a neighbor to one another. And we also learned what it was like to have a neighbor to support us. The legacy of that year's Freshman Connection lives on within the individuals but also in Pres House as a whole. Many who were a part of that first-year group are student leaders in this community today. We have experienced the power of being and having a neighbor, and now find ourselves called to invite others through the open door we once entered for the first time as strangers.



## FALL KICKOFF: WELCOMED AND WELCOMING

Jacob Larget is a junior majoring in Computer Sciences and Data Science; he started attending Pres House in late August 2021. He spoke with Pastor Erica Liu about his experience first coming to campus as a transfer student.

### **As a new student to UW-Madison, what were you looking for?**

As a new student, I was looking forward to the recognition that comes with attending an international powerhouse of a university like UW-Madison. With a bustling urban campus, I was sure I could find great opportunities that suited my interests. That said, I was also nervous about getting lost in the noise and was looking for a tight-knit community that could serve as a home base. I'm very thankful to say I've found that in Pres House.

### **What did you find at Pres House?**

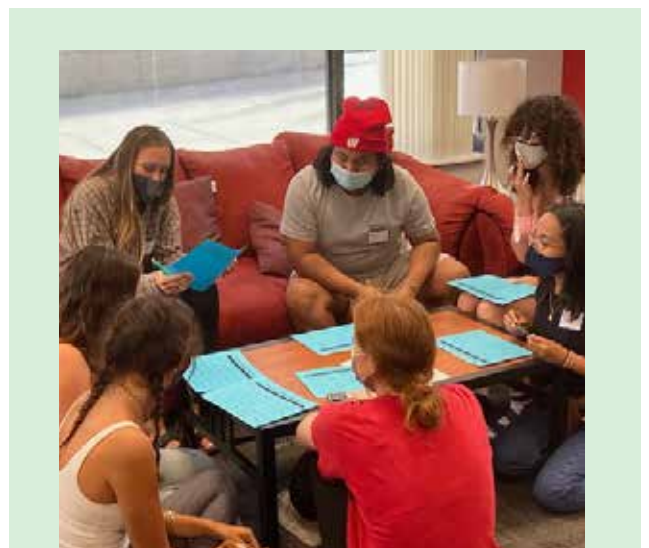
I remember first coming to Pres House for worship one of the Sundays leading up to the start of classes. Intrigued, I scheduled a quick chat with the associate director for later that week to learn more. That chat naturally went long, and an hour later, I found myself walking back from the Insomnia Cookies store on State Street to help Council members prepare for Cookie Break, one of Pres House's welcome week events. It was an amazing afternoon, and we ran out of 300 cookies! After seeing the community around that first event, I was hooked on helping out whenever I could for the rest of the week's activities.

### **Tell us about transforming from the one being welcomed to the one welcoming?**

The transformation from being welcomed to being a welcomer was so smooth I could barely tell, which I think is a great testament to the strength of the Pres House community. My fellow Council members didn't have to change their behavior to fit the role. Joining the Council is really about Pres House trusting in its students to do great things with the proper support, and I've really enjoyed attending weekly gatherings led by fellow students as well as starting up a handbell choir myself.

### **What are your hopes for the Pres House community in the coming year?**

I hope that it continues to grow and flourish. Coming out of a pandemic, I think there are a lot of great new directions for Pres House, like participating in the UW Frozen Meal program, that have been waiting for the right opportunity to manifest. I also feel confident that Pres House can thrive in the coming year because of the youth of the current community. Many of us aren't graduating in the coming spring, so there is an opportunity for the good things that happen this year to snowball into even greater things next year.



## EXCITING FALL KICKOFF AT PH APARTMENTS

Leasing turnover at Pres House Apartments was smooth and COVID-safe again this year, leading into a vibrant fall season so far. Residents are exceptionally eager for chances to connect: event attendance and energy levels have been high. At the annual Welcome (Back) Party, an unprecedented 140 residents attended (in staggered shifts by floor) to meet neighbors and staff, play Resident Bingo, win prizes, and pick up donated Milio's sandwiches and Insomnia Cookies. Our first Community Dinner offered 91 attendees the choice of takeout, dining outdoors, or in Lower Hall. Scholarship programs are well underway for the year, and our "Arts & the Environment" resident Micro-Community hosted a well-attended painting night for the building. Students love living at Pres House Apartments - we are already full for the 2022-23 school year.





## PRES HOUSE APARTMENT STORIES



### Serenity and Inclusion by Annabelle Zhang

Annabelle is a junior studying graphic design and philosophy, with a certificate in computer science. She has lived at Pres House Apartments since August 2020.

As a returning resident in Pres House Apartments, I have had the honor to join the FACETS scholarship program this year. I have always found my time living at Pres House memorable and heartwarming. To me, Pres House is more than just an apartment: It is a second home that will always welcome me with open arms.

My first-year experience was inseparable from the ongoing global pandemic. As an international student, I was not able to travel back home for almost one and a half years. However, the feeling of homesickness had never gotten into me, for I knew I would always be supported by Pres House and its amazing communities. Dinners were hand-delivered to each apartment door, midweek snacks were prepared at the lobby, and gym sign-up sheets were always at the ready for everyone to exercise safely with social distancing. My roommates and I would spend hours inside the lounge when no one else was around, playing the piano and chatting about our days. When the weather was nice, we would step outside on the patio, lay out the picnic blanket while enjoying the beautiful night sky. I even got to celebrate the Diwali Festival hosted by the Pres House community with my Indian friends for the first time. Life during the pandemic was never easy, but I found moments of serenity easy to find when living in such an inclusive and caring community. That is why I had no doubts but to stay in Pres House for another year.

I was first introduced to the FACETS scholarship through the Pres House weekly email and decided to apply for my second year here. I could still remember the excitement I felt when receiving the acceptance email—I immediately jumped up and hugged everyone in my apartment! For me, FACETS is such an amazing opportunity to meet with new friends who are also interested in topics related to gender, race, and sexuality. Our amazing coordinators Ginger and Becca were so kind to offer all of us an outdoor meal to connect before the fall semester started. We met on a lovely Sunday morning on the Pres House Church patio, sat down with our delicious brunch, and began to connect right away. After a brief round of name and pronoun introductions, we started to talk about our summer and share funny stories like old friends who hadn't seen each other for a long time. I couldn't help but fall in love with the group's inclusive dynamic instantly.

Two weeks later, we gathered again for our first regular meeting. The leaders created such an amazing environment to make sure everyone's voices are respected and heard. We had a speed-friending conversation, pairing with one another and asking funny questions for three minutes. Everyone felt the time flew away too soon as we all laughed hysterically at each other's jokes. We later began to pitch ideas and potential topics for the following meetings. That first meeting went so well that we all got attached to the flowing conversation and decided to take a stroll on State Street, sharing our favorite restaurants and getting cookies and milk tea while walking under the stars.

I absolutely love my experience in Pres House, and the FACETS scholarship so far. The Fall '21 semester began only a few weeks ago, yet I cannot wait to meet with the FACETS group and engage in inspiring discussions again. I will always be grateful for the sense of belonging Pres House strives to offer all its residents. I would like to send all my love to everyone who has made this community what it is today: A place like home and a place where I belong.



## PRES HOUSE APARTMENT STORIES (CONT.)



### Friendship Lasts Longer

by Bianca Yue

Bianca is a senior studying economics and math, with a certificate in gender and women’s studies. She lived in Pres House Apartments from 2019-2020 and has been a Queerly Beloved member at Pres House Church since February 2020.

My sophomore year living at PH Apartments overlapped with a difficult year of my life, but Pres House was always there for me and still is. That year, I came out as queer, and experienced the most homophobia, biphobia, and heteronormativity from my then close friends. For a long time, that feeling of rejection has been traumatic. But I also found incredible support in the Pres House community, and I met lifelong friends in the Queerly Beloved group. It turns out that friendship lasts much longer than hurt.

Queerly Beloved is the first and only queer group I have been in. It is the first one because of the close affinity between the Apartments and the Pres House Church. It is the only one as of now because, as a queer Chinese woman with a limited social life, I don’t necessarily feel safe to join other groups. My background as an atheist international student seemingly has little in common with the Pres House Church community, but I connect with Queerly Beloved most intimately in my heart. When I joined the group, I did not realize how much I needed a space to listen and talk about queer experiences. Some of the topics are unfamiliar to me: references to American novels and films, celebrities, and Christian traditions. But I never feel excluded. Being comfortable in a queer space and listening to people chatting is enough soothing power for me to keep moving on. In short, Pres House and Queerly Beloved were present when I was dealing with my most intense emotions, and while I became comfortable with my solitude and started to rebuild personal relationships through love and care.

I would like to quote my favorite queer movie, *Pride* (2014), to contextualize my relationship with Pres House and Queerly Beloved:



When you’re in a battle against an enemy so much bigger, so much stronger than you, to find out you have a friend you never knew existed.

Well. That’s the best feeling in the world.  
Thank you.



# CANDID WELLNESS

LIFE DOESN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE HARD

## MADI G. MICHELS

Senior Psychology major with certificates in  
Criminal Justice and Global Health

My journey with Candid Circles at Pres House has been great. I joined last spring not really knowing what I was getting myself into. Throughout the semester I focused on my physical and mental health. I saw that once I started to improve my physical health, my mental health also improved. I gained many valuable tools during my few months of coaching: learning to set small goals that lead toward a bigger one; how to break big projects into smaller tasks to get the project done more efficiently; and most importantly learning to reflect on previous weeks and how to learn from them.

I joined Candid Circles again this fall because I gained a lot of tools that I still use every day and would love to gain more. Even though now I am feeling great mentally and physically there are always things to be learned. At some point last semester during one of our coaching sessions, Ginger said, "Life doesn't always have to be hard to be worth it or for you to feel accomplished." This stuck with me because it is a reminder to celebrate my accomplishments each week no matter how small or big. I feel as if that has made a huge difference in my life and turns my mindset into looking toward the positives each day instead of dwelling on the negatives.



# CANDID WELLNESS

PRODUCTIVITY, SELF-COMPASSION,  
PEACE AND WELL-BEING



## ERIN HASTELEY

PhD student in Educational Leadership and  
Policy Analysis

Wellness coaching can be incredibly valuable, which is often reflected in its price. When I learned that the Candid Circles program made weekly coaching available to students at no financial cost, I knew I'd be foolish not to take advantage of it. Through the program, I sought to clarify my sense of purpose and improve my time management. Through the amazing coaching and the engagement with other participants, I was able to make small, incremental changes that improved my productivity. Even more important, the coaching environment and the strategies I learned in my Candid Circle helped me feel greater self-compassion through the last year's challenges.

One of my favorite aspects of the Candid Circles program is that it is inclusive and welcoming of my faith identity. While many at UW-Madison are working to become more inclusive and welcoming of different aspects of identity (which is wonderful!), faith identity still feels out-of-bounds in most campus contexts. In my Candid Circle, my coach connected my faith to strategies I could use to find a greater sense of peace and well-being. This felt so awesome! I hope other students can find this welcoming space, whatever their faith or spiritual tradition. I'm thrilled to be back with Candid Circles for another semester, and I look forward to building on last spring's progress.

STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US THEY HAVE THE FOLLOWING TOP CONCERNS  
THAT CANDID HELPS THEM ADDRESS: MENTAL HEALTH, PHYSICAL HEALTH,  
RELATIONSHIPS, CAREER/PURPOSE, AND MONEY/FINANCES.

In just our second year running Candid Wellness Coaching there are now  
**24** students in regular, active coaching. This is **6 times** as many as fall 2020!



# PRES HOUSE RESTORE THE TOWER HIGHLIGHTS

The Restore the Tower project at Pres House is now complete!

Thanks to our amazing donors, fundraising took just three months. The restoration took less than two months.



## Restoration completed:

- Removal, restoration, and re-installation of stone pediments
- Tuck pointing of chimney and walls, caulking joints and windows
- Application of a waterproof coating on decks and roof ledges
- Patching of concrete columns
- Cleaning and pressure washing of tower and chapel building



105 donors gave more than \$120,000 to make this project possible. Thank you!



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



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Each Wednesday, an average of 30-40 PH Apartments residents come and go for Afternoon Tea in the main lounge. Fully in person for the first semester in over a year, this time lets students relax over beverages, snacks, board games, and inviting conversation.

Afternoon Tea remains a beloved institution at Pres House.



**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).