



VOICE

FALL 2024

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



CELEBRATING NII ADDO ABRAHAMS' ORDINATION



On October 6, the John Knox Presbytery ordained Nii Addo Abrahams as Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.; he is now the Associate Pastor for Campus Ministry at Pres House. Nii Addo came to Pres House in July 2020 from Princeton Theological Seminary to begin ministry in the middle of a global pandemic. Four years later, friends and family gathered from near and far to celebrate this significant milestone in his vocational journey.

CONGRATULATIONS REV. NII ADDO ABRAHAMS!



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT ROY PLEKENPOL

This summer, alum LeRoy Plekenpol (95 years young) visited Pres House with his daughter, Jayne Plekenpol Schoeller, and niece, Anne Lawrence. He was able to see his late wife in a photo that his sister, Fern Lawrence, spotted on our newly dedicated history timeline at the 20th Anniversary Celebration. It was a special joy to remember together!

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CONNECTING FAITH AND THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CREATION CARE

By Laura Hyde (Neurobiology, 2025) and Emily Johnson (History & Environmental Studies, 2025)

This semester we have been exploring the intersection between environmentalism and Christianity through a variety of activities. Our small group has studied the Bible, shared meals, and created art projects. We've separated our social activities into four categories: art based activities, Bible studies, creation care in the present day, and food and waste sustainability. First, we started by doing an art project about what creation meant to us and what it might look like to care for that creation. We drew some art pieces and displayed them in the lounge. We also cooked a vegetarian meal and had the opportunity to sit and chat about our lives while recognizing this fellowship as another way to care for the environment—by being present with one another. Additionally, we wanted to take action, so we went to the UW Arboretum and volunteered to remove brush in the oak savannah area to pave the way for future prairie maintenance. In all of these activities, we hope to increase our knowledge of what it means to be a Christian and care for the environment and allow ourselves to take action and take steps toward sustainability.

In our past experience we have felt that Christianity and environmentalism are not well connected with one another as much as we think they should be. In Genesis, God creates the Earth and establishes humans as a part of this beautiful creation. As many of

us are aware, Christianity has not always been the kindest when it comes to environmentalism, particularly in the aspect of caring for communities and people that value the natural world. Christians have used God's word to justify the exploitation of lands and bodies as well as the erasure of many cultures and their knowledge. In this group, we wanted to explore what our role as Christians is when it comes to environmentalism, discovering how we can act upon that conviction, and discuss how we can teach others to explore these ideas with us. Environmentalism is not just a hobby, it's a calling for all Christians. It is our responsibility to take steps toward remedying the past mistakes while also looking ahead to a better future that will last for all of God's Creation.





AT PRES HOUSE APARTMENTS

A generous donor gave \$20,000 to the Next Step Sober Housing program.

We are grateful for the support which makes this important work possible!

Last spring, we gratefully celebrated 10 years of Next Step Sober Living at Pres House Apartments. This summer and fall, we welcomed two new residents into the program, joining the two residents who renewed their leases. We also included a resident who lives in the building who reached out to get support for their recovery. So, the program is full and thriving! We currently have two women and two men (and one dog!) living in the Next Step unit, two of whom are UW students working to finish their undergraduate degrees (one in history and one who is pre-med).

In 2023, Pres House began partnering with a local nonprofit that is administering a Recovery Voucher program providing support for housing as a part of the first opioid settlement with the state of Wisconsin. Through this program, people in recovery can receive funds for safe and secure recovery housing while they stabilize employment or pursue education while getting support for their recovery from substance use disorders/addiction.

The Next Step residents meet as a group with Ginger Morgan, Director of Candid, each week to discuss their recovery, how their schoolwork or employment is going, how their

living arrangement is working, and the ongoing process of healing and rebuilding trust in their relationships and with themselves. Living at the heart of campus with such close proximity to the State Street corridor can often pose a challenge to residents remaining abstinent from substances. So, instead of frequenting establishments on State Street, Next Step residents walk along the Lakeshore path, attend local recovery meetings, and keep their focus on living in sobriety and working to build a fulfilling life. A couple of participants have even checked out the Taekwondo practice held in the Pres House Dojo! They all seem to enjoy the presence of Emma, an emotional support dog that shares the apartment with them.

This summer and fall, Pres House has received on average two to three inquiries a week from individuals in recovery seeking sober living options. It is a reminder of the ongoing demand for this kind of program, assisting individuals moving from treatment into sustaining recovery over time. It can be a challenging process, but the rewards are truly life changing. We are so grateful for the ongoing support from donors, who have made this program possible.

<p>Why?</p> <p>College students are 250% more likely to be diagnosed with substance abuse/dependence than the general population.</p> <p>Half of those students also report binge drinking with thoughts of suicide.</p>		<p>\$827,520</p> <p>Net economic benefit over 10 years</p> <p>Studies have shown an annual benefit of \$20,688 per sober housing resident per year</p>		<p>Your residents matter!</p> <p>Donors have helped support Next Step Sober Living Program from the beginning! You can make a difference!</p>
<p>24</p>	<p>24 Young adults served over past ten years</p> <p>75% Of Next Step alumni report continuing in recovery</p> <p>42% Of participants completed educational program while living in Next Step</p>		<p>\$190,000</p> <p>Investment by Pres House</p> <p>\$70,000 residents scholarships</p> <p>\$120,000 program expense</p>	



FINDING BALANCE AND WELLNESS AT PH APARTMENTS

My name is Jakson Amend, and I am a senior studying Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science at UW-Madison. Although I was born and raised in Mountain Top, Pennsylvania, most of my family is from the Midwest, so I have been a Wisconsin sports fan my whole life. This made UW-Madison an easy choice—especially given its highly-ranked Mechanical Engineering program. I lived in a dorm during my freshman year and moved to an apartment on the south end of campus sophomore year. Now, I am in my second year of living at Pres House with five of my closest friends. Next year, I plan to establish residency in Wisconsin and move to the Appleton area to start a career as a design engineer.

Active involvement in Club Baseball has been a significant part of my university experience over the past four years. My roles within the club have evolved, as I have been an active player for all four years and an officer for the past three. Balancing academics and club leadership has been demanding, yet extremely rewarding. Leading a large program and mentoring younger students allows me to reflect on my early college experience while positively impacting the university community.



Given the early renewal window for apartment leasing in Madison, it can be challenging for many students to decide whether renewing a lease is the right choice. However, my roommates and I did not hesitate to renew our lease at Pres House Apartments, thanks to the wonderful community, engaging events, comfortable living and study spaces, scholarship program, and welcoming staff. In addition, Pres House is ideally located close to many campus buildings—including Memorial Union, two major libraries, recreational facilities, and State Street. It is right in the heart of campus. We also knew others who were re-leasing, fostering a strong sense of community heading into our senior year.

As a Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science student involved in club leadership, my schedule can be quite demanding. With such a hectic schedule, it can be difficult to keep track of personal goals. This is where the CEO (Community Engagement

Opportunities) scholarship program at PH Apartments has played a huge role. Completing activities in wellness, learning, community, and service throughout the semester offers relief and an opportunity to step outside my busy world. It also helps me focus on personal growth and community engagement beyond academics and sports.

Being a member of the CEO program during both years at Pres House has been a privilege. This year, I have been able to rework and improve certain goals while maintaining those that have been particularly meaningful. For example, my service goal for both years has been helping to unload UW Frozen Meal shipments at Pres House on Friday mornings. Although it is a relatively simple task, this service allows me to start my Fridays with a fulfilling activity that helps feed fellow students in need. Additionally, it has allowed me to make connections with those outside of my immediate circle, such as the university food delivery drivers.

In terms of wellness, the CEO program allowed me to establish and maintain a strict workout routine and weight-lifting schedule for two consecutive years. This includes working out three to four times a week and incorporating a mix of workouts, such as taking cycling classes. For the community aspect, I expanded my original goal of attending monthly dinners to include cleanup once a semester. Finally, I revamped my learning goal from practicing Spanish with Duolingo to independently researching post-college financial and time-management skills, such as budgeting, saving for retirement, and real estate development. Overall, these four categories have contributed to a well-rounded college lifestyle and experience despite my demanding responsibilities.

Reflecting on the overall experience at Pres House Apartments, I think it is important to note the genuine care each resident receives, demonstrated by the scholarship programs, community events, and dedicated full-time staff who help to piece this living experience together. These experiences have been instrumental in my personal growth and professional development, enhancing my leadership, time management, and community engagement skills. The balance I achieved here will continue to influence my approach to learning, wellness, community, and service for the rest of my life.



FALL RETREAT

The theme for this year's Fall Retreat was **"Called To Community: The Family of God."** Our associate pastor and "cool professor" Nii Addo led a session on Saturday morning on the Presbyterian "family rituals": the sacraments of baptism and communion. Students learned about the history and theology of the sacraments and shared their perspectives on how they help build and sustain Christian communities. We're now looking forward to celebrating a day of baptism and remembrance of baptism later this year!



ONE SMALL STEP

One of our impact objectives at Pres House is to **help students and residents develop healthy relationships with others, especially with people different from themselves.** In a time when our country is experiencing deep division and polarization, we seek to equip our community to build bridges. One of the ways we practice this is through the StoryCorps program "One Small Step" that brings two people with different worldviews together for a conversation to promote understanding.

After successfully hosting One Small Step this past April, we planned another gathering in October so students would have the opportunity for meaningful dialogue. Especially in an election season, it was a hopeful way for our community to get to know each other on a deeper level and to realize that despite all our differences, there is more that we have in common.

INTRODUCING ALLYSON MILLS COORDINATOR OF RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS



My name is Allyson (she/her) and I'm elated to be joining the staff as Coordinator of Residential Programs in Pres House Apartments! Originally from Wauwatosa, WI, I graduated from UW-Madison in 2023 with a B.A. in English and Vocal Performance. I'm currently finishing up my thesis for an M.S. in Environment & Resources on ethics in wildlife rehabilitation centers. From the start of undergrad in 2019, through the pandemic, and through my graduate studies, Pres House Church has been a spiritual and social home for me. During the last three years on campus, I've served students as a course instructor, teaching assistant, and peer mentor. While I loved the subjects I taught, connecting with students and supporting them in their holistic lives in and out of the classroom is what brought me the most joy.

In my new role, I am excited for the opportunity to support students not just in their academic lives, but as whole, complex, incredible people! So far, I am loving planning and co-facilitating building-wide events with Manato and finding creative ways for residents to connect with each other. I am honored to work alongside those who have mentored me throughout my education and give back to Pres House with the knowledge and skills I've developed as a student.



MUSIC MINISTRY AT PRES HOUSE AND FAREWELL FROM NATALIE

Dear Friends,

It is a bittersweet moment for me to say goodbye to Pres House after serving as your Music Director for 9.5 years! I began on staff in July of 2015 and inherited a small and dedicated music team of talented students. From that time forward, it has been such a joy to work and worship with the students, to watch them grow over their college/graduate careers (and as musicians!), and to see them go on to flourish around the world. Over the years, we upgraded our sound system and tech and instrumentation as we saw our diversely talented music team grow and grow! Each year brought new instruments and new surprises, including a bluegrass ensemble, handbell choir, string quartets, organists and oboists and trumpeters and well, you name it, we've probably had it! And a personal favorite: Christmas CHOIR!!

It has been truly magical watching our gifts unite and multiply week after week while doing our most important job: helping the congregation sing and worship! To the music team members, past and current, thank you for serving and sharing your gifts. I'm remembering each of you with gratitude as I write this. I am so glad to have known you and to have made music together. It has been such a great joy and I would do it all over again! **Wherever you go, I pray you will always keep music in your life and share it with others in worship.**

Further, I have greatly appreciated working with the incredible staff at Pres House — such brilliant and kind, servant-hearted people — and I credit much of my new journey as inspired by their outstanding leadership, wisdom, and generous hearts. Thank you



Erica, Mark E., Ginger, Nii Addo, Manato, Mark G. and Allyson from the bottom of my heart - you've taught me so much!

And what is my new journey? Some of you may know that I recently graduated from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary with my Masters of Divinity degree in May of 2024. Since then, I have received and accepted a call as Pastor to the First Presbyterian Church of Marquette, Michigan. My ordination service will be November 16th at 10:30 am at Christ Presbyterian Church in Madison; I will later be installed as pastor in Marquette. I am so excited for this new call where I can incorporate my musical gifts, pastoral skills, and love for eco-justice in one place.

Though it is far away, it is a beautiful church in an area near my extended family, my hometown, and my favorite body of water: Lake Superior! My family is excited to move to an area of natural beauty, hiking, and, yes, even more snow. Pray for us and if you're ever in Marquette, come visit!

With joy,
Natalie Handley



FAREWELL REFLECTIONS FROM OUR OUTGOING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Pres House family,

Serving as pastor and executive director at Pres House for the past 20 years has been a highlight of my professional career and of my life in general. It is impossible to fully articulate what a gift it is to have been a part of something so remarkable, for so long. When I pulled into a parking space behind the chapel (since replaced by the Pres House Apartments) in August 2004, I had no idea how incredible the journey of the next 20 years was going to be. Many dream of the chance to experience the sort of fulfillment, contribution, and support that I've experienced at Pres House during that time.

But even the very best experiences have an end point and there is a season for everything. As many of you know from our announcement in August, I am moving on from Pres House in December 2024.

In recent years, I have increasingly felt God's call, and literally been called on the phone by people throughout Madison and North America, to contribute more to the pressing crisis and opportunity surrounding the future of church ministry, money, and property. I will be doing this by devoting more time to the nonprofit I co-founded in 2020, RootedGood, that helps churches use their buildings and land for new forms of ministry and revenue, and through speaking engagements related to my books. I will also be assisting churches in Wisconsin to develop mission-aligned housing and community facilities on their land through Threshold Sacred Development.

As difficult as stepping away is (and it is difficult!), this feels very much like the right next step in the journey for me and for Pres House. It is my deep hope and prayer that my work in this next chapter will support flourishing in churches and communities throughout the country. Like Pres House has equipped so many students and leaders, you are sending me forth to serve God and the world in new ways.

I am confident great things lie ahead and Pres House will be stronger than ever in the coming years. Rev. Erica Liu has been effectively serving as Pres House executive director (and pastor) since September. She has brought a fantastic new person onto the staff team, Sherri Kelly, as Director of Finance and Operations. We have been working diligently this fall to ensure a smooth transition.

The people and spirit of Pres House are truly extraordinary. Even as I step away knowing this is the right next step, I have a sense that I may never again be a part of something quite so amazing. I will be forever grateful for each staff member, partner, board member, donor, alum, and most importantly, student, that I have met here. I am humbled to have learned so much, given so much, and been a part of so much over the past 20 years. God's spirit is with you. Thank you.

Rev. Mark Elsdon

Mark Elsdon is now focusing on his work with the following two organizations. Feel free to contact him at mark.elsdon@rootedgood.org.



RootedGood helps churches and faith-based leaders throughout the United States use their buildings and land in new ways for social enterprise ministries that generate new forms of revenue and expand their community impact.
www.rootedgood.org



Threshold Sacred Development helps churches, primarily in Wisconsin, develop their property for housing and community center spaces that meet neighborhood needs, generate revenue, and expand their ministry.
www.thresholdsacred.com



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Pres House Apartment
residents in the Scholars
program spend an evening
exploring a Wisconsin
corn maze.



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.