

**Pres House 100-Year Anniversary Celebration**  
Reunion and Choral Concert  
May 12, 2007  
Comments by Campus Pastor, Rev. Mark Elsdon

Praise God for this day! Praise God for 100 years of ministry through Pres House and its spiritual parents on this campus! I am both incredibly grateful and profoundly humbled to be a part of this celebration and to be involved in guiding Pres House into a new era of ministry here in the heart of the campus. I am humbled because the past 100 years hold so much amazing history and faithful service to Jesus Christ and his church. In the almost three years since I have been serving as one of the pastors here at Pres House I have heard so many wonderful stories, many from those of you here today, of the impact this place has had on the lives of students who were involved over the decades. I am also grateful that Pres House is rooted in such a strong history because that legacy makes it possible for us to look forward to God's continued faithful work through this place in the lives of students for many future decades. It is my deepest hope and prayer that by God's grace we can carry on the strong tradition of meaningful worship, study, fellowship, leadership, and service that made this place so important for you and many others who called Pres House home.

I have heard so many stories about this place over the years that I cannot possibly recount them all. There are pictures in our archives of packed worship services, recollections of excellent preaching and of course many memories of the amazing Pres House choir! I've even heard some recordings of the famed choir. On a university campus it is also natural that Christian students, faculty and others engage in serious study of their faith and the issues of the day. It is clear that such discussion was a regular part of the ministry that has taken place here in each era. All this study is of course tempered by some good, clean fun. Sunday night suppers are legendary. You will see in the reception area afterwards pictures of students enjoying themselves at Devil's Lake and Picnic Point. I can't even begin to count the number of people who tell me they, or their parents, or their grandparents met and married at Pres House. A sure sign of vibrant Christian community is one that leads to romantic relationships! One of the most amazing legacies of the Pres House community is an emphasis on student leadership. I have never heard of a church run entirely by student elders and deacons like this place was at one time. And that leadership was also expressed in service within the community – I've heard some horror stories about learning

to make huge pots of coffee – and outside the community. It was through efforts of students involved at Pres House a number of years ago that the UW chapter of Habitat for Humanity was started. All in all, Pres House has been more than just a House it has been a true spiritual home. Yes, I've met many ROOJAHS – the Royal Order of Janitors and Hosts who physically lived in the building, but even for those who did not sleep here – this place was home. A spiritual, social, supportive home during the critical university years. A family, centered around the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And so it is so appropriate to celebrate these 100 years with a musical rendition of the Presbyterian Brief Statement of Faith. Because that is what the statement affirms. That we are a family claimed by God. Or as the first line states – “in life and death we belong to God.” We have just heard these words sung but let me take a moment to read a few lines from the statement that are true of Pres House.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

This is an encouraging reminder as we mark 100 years and look forward to a new era at Pres House. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and the early church guides us today. The same Spirit that was at work in 1907 at the beginning of this venture, in the 1920s during the construction of this building and throughout the subsequent decades is, at work today. The same Spirit that engaged the Pres House community through word and sacrament in worship, ruled the faith of thousands through study and scripture, bound friends and spouses together in fellowship, and called women and men to leadership and service is at work here at Pres House today. The same Spirit that made this place a home for so many is building up a new home in 2007.

I am humbled and grateful to be part of a new era in the ministry at Pres House. As many of you have seen a lot is changing here physically. The building going up next door and the renovation work about to begin in here are important. But the physical space is secondary to the spiritual community that is alive and growing at Pres House. In keeping with the history and

drawing on the emphasis of the Brief Statement of Faith, a centerpiece of the ministry here in 2007 is weekly worship. While we are no longer a formal congregation of the Presbyterian Church we are a worshipping community. We provide an opportunity for students to gather to hear the Word preached and partake of the Lord's Supper each week. The music is a little different from days past, but students remain integral in music leadership during worship. Scripture study and theological reflection take place in small groups that change each semester based on the needs of the current students. We recently took a survey of the students who are part of our Sunday worship and many responded saying that the warm community is the most attractive aspect of Pres House to them. This is facilitated by Sunday night suppers – meals that are provided immediately following worship by nine area congregations which not only feed us but also allow for intergenerational connections to be made. In the past two years we have also visited Picnic Point and Devils Lake for some good, clean fun. The Pres House ministry of 2007 and going forward is committed to student leadership and service – to encouraging God's call of young men and women into all ministries of the church and beyond. A leadership team plans events and shapes the activities of the community. And we reach out beyond these walls by serving at a homeless shelter, taking Spring Break mission trips (a few weeks ago we were in urban Chicago), and getting involved in issues like HIV/AIDS and human trafficking.

All of this will soon be integrated with the new residential community that is going up next door. Up to two hundred and eighty students will live in a beautiful, brand new apartment building in the best location on campus! They will be supported by the pastors, a chaplain intern, and student community assistants as they are encouraged to succeed academically, learn important lessons about personal responsibility, experience authentic community and explore their faith. More than just a place to sleep it will be a place to engage in formal and informal conversations about God, build lasting friendships, and put faith into practice through service and leadership. The students who will live with us will be future leaders in the church and in their communities much like many of you are. In the future we hope to host classes, house visiting scholars, develop new programs and partner with existing organizations on conferences, workshops or other events. I could go on and on. The sky is truly the limit for the potential of ministry at Pres House going forward!

This is an exciting new venture, an experiment, a step of faith. But as new as it is, the Pres House of 2007 is rooted in the same mission as the Presbyterian ministry of 1907. Pres House exists to be a home for students at UW-Madison to know and experience the love of Jesus Christ. A family, of women and men bound together in true community by the grace of God and called into lives of leadership and service of our Lord. The purpose of Pres House has always been, and continues to be, a place that invites the UW community to experience and live out a deep, lasting and meaningful relationship with the triune God. 100 years! 100 years on this campus, reminds us ultimately of the final words of the brief statement of faith, that: “With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.”