

CAMPUS MINISTRY

▶ A spiritual oasis at the university

New residence offers students a place to grow in their faith

Beginning this fall, University of Wisconsin students interested in enriching their spiritual lives will be able to live together in a new seven-story apartment building—part of a longtime Presbyterian ministry on the Madison campus. The “Pres House Residence” has fully furnished apartments that will house up to 280 students.

Maggie Wright, one of the first students moving into the Pres House Residence, says what attracted her was “the new opportunity to live within my faith community, and to have the chance to make a lot of new friends with similar interests.”

Residents need not be Presbyterians. The building is open to any college or graduate students interested in growing spiritually while pursuing their academic careers. A husband-and-wife team, Mark Elsdon and Erica Liu, serve as Pres House co-pastors. Along with a chaplain intern and resident assistants, they will encourage students who live in the new residence to develop personal responsibility,



COURTESY OF PRES HOUSE

experience authentic community and explore their faith.

Liu, who became a Christian while she was in college, is eager to introduce today’s students to the faith, “By the end of my first year at college,” she recalls, “I had enough experiences with my Christian friends to know that I wanted to explore what they had.”

The new residence is “much more than simply a place to sleep,” Elsdon says. “Programs and informal conversations will engage residents of all backgrounds in dialogue about faith and spirituality. Community-building activities will provide space for friendships to develop and flourish. Service opportunities will allow residents to put their faith into practice. And of course students will have the option of stepping next door to join in



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: campus co-pastors Erica Liu and Mark Elsdon, left, breaking ground last year for new student housing at the University of Wisconsin, above

worship if they choose to do so.”

An underground passageway connects the residence to a chapel and student center built in 1935. Pres House is similar in concept to Westminster House, a Presbyterian-sponsored student residence at the University of California at Berkeley.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Presbyterian ministry at the University of Wisconsin. The name “Pres House” dates back to the 1920s, when Presbyterians purchased a large, rambling house for a student center. The ministry’s colorful history includes the establishment of a student-run church in the 1940s, and violent Vietnam War protests in the sixties, when Pres House became a safe haven from flying rocks and tear gas.—*Lizbeth Trotti*

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