

Young adult ministry set to launch in Madison

Ministry hopes to deepen relationships among young adults, young professionals

By Pres House Campus Ministry
Special to Presbyterian News Service

Pres House, a student-oriented campus ministry in Madison, Wisconsin, will launch in mid-2018 an experimental young-adult community, thanks to a three-year, \$310,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. as well as financial support from local, regional and national Presbyterian organizations.

“We are excited and grateful to be the launching pad for this ministry,” said the Rev. Erica Liu, co-pastor at Pres House. “While our focus remains on students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, we think we are in a good position to be an incubator for a new model of ministry that we envision as an independent community.”

Pres House, officially the Presbyterian Student Center Foundation, is working to design the young adult/young professionals ministry for 23-to-29 year olds, many of whom live in the downtown area near the university’s campus. The hope is to bring young adults together in an effort to deepen relationships and spirituality, building on the young professionals group that young adult leaders have formed at Pres House over the past few years.

“Downtown Madison is a perfect area for such a venture,” Liu noted. Both UW alumni and young adults moving to Madison often choose to live downtown, where 86 percent of the residents are between the ages of 15 and 34. Yet the majority of these residents are not connected to any churches, Liu pointed out.

People in campus ministry are used to working with transient populations, and the young adult population downtown has a high degree of transience, Liu said. “Pres House is uniquely equipped to understand the dynamic of change and frequent mobility,” she said.

The vision for the ministry includes building community through pot-luck meals in community members’ homes, a monthly dinner with a program, weekly small groups that focus on study, faith sharing and prayer, and “Brews and Banter,” a weekly gathering in a downtown bar. It would also include space several times a year for an evening of

storytelling, art and music, providing ways for young adults to respond to the community around them.

Support from local congregations is a critical piece in making this work, Liu said. “The larger church will use its resources and connections to support this community,” Liu said, “while the wider church will also learn from the community.” The gathering of young adults and young professionals will be separate from the local congregations and Pres House, but will build relationships with them, she said.

The plan calls for three part-time staff people to work on the development of the project. The chief instigator/networker will be the lead person in the effort. The Martha-in-chief will function as the event coordinator. The Chief Storyteller will be the communications specialist. There is also the possibility of hiring a local pastor as a part-time chaplain, she said. An advisory board of young adults and local church leaders will work with the staff members.

In addition to the grant from Lilly Endowment, funding is coming from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s New Worshiping Communities program, the John Knox Presbytery, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and congregations. Three congregations in Madison are local partners: Christ Presbyterian, Covenant Presbyterian, Westminster Presbyterian. Grace Presbyterian in Winona, Minnesota, is also supporting the project.

“This is an experiment, not a church plant,” Liu said. “Think of it like a flash mob. We want to be open to God’s spirit doing new things that are outside the traditional church structure. This effort is not about creating a pipeline to local churches. It is about facilitating spaces that nurture young adults in their spiritual journey and empowering them to serve God in transformative ways.”

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Story submitted by Pres House, formally the Presbyterian Student Center Foundation, a student-oriented campus ministry in Madison, Wisconsin.

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