

**Florence
Iversen
Kraft
215th
General
Assembly
(2003)**

PSMIN Award

In 1999, the Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network (PSMIN) voted to establish an award that would give recognition to congregations in inclusive ministries with individuals and families affected by Serious Mental Illness. The award is named for an active and founding member of the Network, Flo Kraft. (Flo is also an active member of Pathways, and our current newsletter editor.) In 2000, the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association through PSMIN granted the first Florence Iversen Kraft Award to North Presbyterian Church, Kalamazoo, MI. In 2001, the award went to Edgewater Presbyterian Church of Chicago, and Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, VA received the 2002 award.

We're delighted to announce that **Capitol Heights Presbyterian Church of Denver** is selected for the Florence Kraft Award in 2003.

Capitol Heights Presbyterian Church, founded in 1896, has a long history of ministry in the greater Capitol Hill area of Denver. In the pattern of many inner city congregations, Capitol Heights experienced an extensive exodus as members moved to the suburbs during the 1960s and 70s. The economic profile of the neighborhood changed and the congregation took on a different character resulting in dramatic decline in membership. In 1972 a group of parishioners from a nearby Roman Catholic Church withdrew to form a new parish and were invited to share the building. They've been there ever since. Sunday worship for Presbyterians is at 9:30 a.m., Mass is at 11 a.m. and Dignity of Denver, another Catholic Community, holds mass at 5 p.m.

The present pastor, Rev. Mark Meeks, first became involved with Capitol Heights in the fall of 1977 when he and his wife developed the Karis Community, a residential program for persons living with mental illness. This program responded to those coming out of hospitalization and seeking a place to live. Capitol Heights supported this effort and in 1979, Rev. Meeks became the Spiritual Leader for the congregation. Fifteen years later, in 1994, his daughter was diagnosed with bi-polar illness following a suicide attempt in her early teens. Led by the Holy Spirit, a transformative process took place in his congregation.

Mark describes his community as "one with a spirit of acceptance, compassion and hope for persons affected by mental illness. Regularly, in worship and other settings, we pray for people who hear voices, feel panic and despair and act hopeless. We pray for folks whom we remember, personally and corporately, in terms of when they feel different and act with more personal presence as well as when they act strange and seem more distant to reach.

So we journey with them to give a continuity of care, hope and support, however limited it seems at times! A large percentage of our small congregation lives with bi-polar illness, schizophrenia, depression, etc. Together we support one another with dignity and hope."

"Community dialogues offer us conversations with persons who experience mental illness and those close to them, allowing them to teach us from their experience. As we speak of someone's need and share the commitment to pray, we do so with a better "feeling" for what they are living and a better sense of what relief might look like. Thus, open dialogue on the experience of mental illness and communal prayer for all who suffer from its pain is at the heart of what we do."

Models of Ministry

“Perhaps you might drop by on a Saturday as we host a community lunch program, opening our facility to the larger community of marginalized folks with serious mental illness. Several other congregations routinely come to help serve.”

“Or maybe you might have heard of our Circles of Support where individuals who live with mental illness take turns guiding a group process of exploration with the help of a circle facilitator.”

Interchurch cooperation is a hallmark of Capitol Heights. As a member of the Capitol Hill United

Ministries in Denver's urban heart, they join others to raise funds for local human services and have an interchange with agencies that provide services to the mentally ill. On the second floor of the building, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAM1) Colorado has its home office.

The Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network is grateful for Capitol Heights' faithful ministry and is pleased to present them with the Florence Iversen Kraft Award.

- Bob Butziger, PSMIN Leadership Team