

# **Florence Iversen Kraft**

## **216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

### **2004 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.)

**The Hillsboro Presbyterian Church of Nashville, Tennessee has been chosen by the Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network (PSMIN) to receive the Florence Iversen Kraft Award for 2004 in recognition of their exemplary work in ministry with persons having a mental illness and their families.** Hillsboro Church is a suburban congregation of around 750 members with a reputation of being a place where diversity is embraced and inclusiveness is valued. "This honor reflects our congregation's serious commitment to the diversity of God's kingdom," says Dr. David Kidd, Senior Minister. "I'm proud that our members with mental illness experience the unreserved love that comes from being a part of this congregation. And I'm also proud that these valiant people who struggle daily with mental illness have chosen to share their important gifts with the rest of the congregation. The kingdom of God invites everyone into citizenship, and it's enriched by everyone who comes. It's been our experience that among the most gifted, are people who struggle everyday with mental illness; people who provide an example of the courageous strength to be found in Jesus Christ."

This special ministry began about ten years ago with a request for prayer for someone who was hospitalized with a serious mental illness. (That person is now an Elder and serves on the Session.) Pastoral visits followed and a Sunday morning service was set aside to lift up those suffering and a

sermon on "Christ and Mental Illness" was preached. Out of this developed the Mental Illness Awareness Committee which planned a strategy to make a deliberate attempt to integrate individuals and families affected by serious and persistent mental illnesses into the total life and work of the church. Today, it is OK to talk about mental illness just as we do about other illnesses. **This openness became a means of evangelism, reaching and drawing in persons who were previously not attracted to the church.** Support is offered through counseling, visitation by clergy and laity, transportation for appointments and worship services, education through Wednesday night programs, Stephen Ministry training, and church school classes. Other psycho-educational programs such as Bridges and Journey of Hope classes have been held at Hillsboro. Scholarships have also been provided for those who attended special courses at Ghost Ranch Conference Center and local retreats at Penuel Ridge.

Each May, a worship service emphasizes mental illness and mental health through liturgies, adult and children's sermons, a minute for mission, and a bulletin insert. Members of the church also participate in planning community events for October's Mental Illness Awareness Week and Hillsboro hosts a citywide Interfaith Service sponsored by a coalition of mental health providers, professionals and consumers.

The church works cooperatively with other agencies such as the Mental Health Association (MHA), National Association for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), and the Tennessee Coalition for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to advocate for mental health issues on the state and national levels. The church participates in the "Room at the Inn" program for those who are homeless and has provided a place for Emotions Anonymous to meet.

"How blessed this congregation is," states Dr. Nancy McCurley, Associate Minister, "by the individuals and families of those affected by mental illness. We have been ministered to, by their presence, as much or more than we have ministered to them."

John Lewis, Nominator