



# *Pathways to Promise*

*Putting faith in mental health recovery*

*February 2016*

## **Mental Health Education for Seminarians**



Many people living with a mental illness have been blamed and shamed by a misinformed minister or congregation. They or their family members often ask, "Why don't seminaries offer mental health/illness education? Then, perhaps my church might not be so judgmental."

It does seem that few, if any, theological schools offer, let alone require, mental health/illness courses within their M.Div. program. Two reasons seem to be at the core. In order to meet accreditation standards, the curriculum is already very demanding and full. Secondly, few seminaries have faculty members who have time to develop curricula encompassing the multiple and complex issues related to mental illness.

The irony of this dilemma is that because many clergy are respected in their community as gatekeepers, role models and social justice leaders, their attitudes and beliefs about mental illness, correct or mistaken, can bring either healing inclusion or devastating exclusion to individuals and families experiencing the trauma of major mental illnesses. With the seemingly increased threat of violence in daily life through crime, domestic violence, suicides, natural disasters and poverty, religious leaders are expected to minister to, counsel, support and refer families and individuals with chronic, serious psychological and psychiatric disorders - often without the educational training necessary. Even more ironical is the fact that due to the high degree of stress and long hours inherent in the ministry, a surprising percentage of clergy themselves are depressed, anxious, exhausted or dealing secretly with some other serious mental or emotional disorder.

Obviously, there are no simple solutions to this dilemma. However, to provide at least minimal mental health education for clergy and seminarians since 2003, NAMI FaithNet and Christian Theological Seminary (Indianapolis) have co-sponsored yearly full-day conferences on various topics. Student attendance has been low due to the heavy course load they carry. However, post-conference evaluations by local clergy and student attendees reveal high praise and appreciation for the quality, value and relevance of the learning experience

Though mental health issues often intermingle, the major focus topics of these conferences have included Stress and Mood Disorders; Psychotic Disorders; Addictive Behaviors; Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Response; Clergy Self-Care; Trauma-Informed Care; Mental Illness in Children and Youth; Churches that Heal-Keys to Creating a Healing Environment; The Role of Faith and Community in

Recovery. As appropriate, bio-psycho-social-spiritual factors; best-practice treatment methods; the peer-led recovery model; hopeful stories of recovery, community services, partner organizations and resources are included in the conference presentation.

Currently, Christian Theological School (Indianapolis) is restructuring their Master of Divinity program to offer courses more relevant to what pastors face after graduation. On request, NAMI FaithNet submitted a mental health education proposal to the curriculum development leadership team. We proposed they require a series of at least six mental health modules or courses, one each semester during the three-year curriculum. Each module would receive credit and include, at minimum, 6-8 hours of instruction per semester, accumulating to about 36 hours of mental health instruction by graduation. Some courses would be offered on-line and others in class settings or as full day conferences. So far, the proposal has received positive consideration.

Our vision, though yet unfulfilled, is to continue to engage interested administration and faculty with research, resources and partnerships to build a core foundation of mental health/illness education. We envision seminary graduates and clergy equipped with a reservoir of tools, perspectives, empathy and compassion for a life-time of fruitful and transformative ministry. What a difference this would make in their own lives and to individuals and families impacted by serious mental illness - to find a wel-

coming, inclusive community that offers a place to belong, to serve and experience acceptance and unconditional love no matter the level of each person's gifts and challenges. Perhaps then we would hear seminaries saying, "Why didn't we offer mental health education sooner?"

*Carole Wills, NAMI FaithNet Advisory Group, NAMI Indiana FaithNet Coordinator, Wellspring Mental Health Ministries*

## Bob Dell Award to Sarah Griffith Lund

The Bob and Joyce Dell Award for Mental Health Education is presented at the United Church of Christ General Synod to a person, organization, or congregation in regard to ministry with and on behalf of those experiencing a mental illness and their families. During

this 30<sup>th</sup> General Synod, on Monday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network is proud to present this Award to the Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund.

The Rev. Sarah Griffith Lund is Vice President for Seminary Advancement at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. She majored in religious studies in college at Trinity University, graduated with a Master of Divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary, and also received a Master of Social Work degree at Rutgers University. Ministry and Social Work blend together her two passions of loving God and loving our neighbors. Sarah was ordained into Christian ministry by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 2002 and began serving as a local church pastor in 2003.

Sarah is part of the Young Clergy Women Project which features writings from young adult clergy women on topics that give meaning to their lives and ministries. Her book, "Blessed are the Crazy: breaking the silence about mental illness, family and church" is illuminating, refreshing and challenging as so many people who are affected by mental health conditions are living in the shadows of these illnesses. Sarah boldly, yet gently, tells of her personal experiences and invites us to lift our voices and share our stories with others and in places where healing and hope can arise. There are too few books that set the storytelling about mental illness in the context of faith and faith communities.

We laud Sarah's step into breaking that silence. Sarah writes, "I continue to be amazed at the resilience and strength of family bonds, as I give thanks for my own family nearly every day."

### New address for Pathways:

**Pathways to Promise**

**PO Box 75**

**Greenville, IL 62246**

## Mental Health Guide for Faith Leaders

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) is now offering a 20-page booklet, "Mental Health: a Guide for Faith Leaders," and a companion two-page "Quick Reference on Mental Health for Faith Leaders."

The resources were produced by the American Psychiatric Foundation (APF) in cooperation with such groups as the [Interfaith Disability Advocacy Committee](#). The aim of the resources is to help faith leaders better understand mental illness and treatment, and better help individuals and families in their congregations facing mental health challenges.

Many people facing a mental health challenge, personally or on behalf of a family member, turn first to a faith leader. And for many receiving psychiatric care, religion and spirituality are an important part of healing, according to a press release from the APA.

In their role as "first responders," faith leaders can help dispel misunderstandings, reduce stigma associated with mental illness and treatment, and facilitate access to treatment for those in need. This guide is intended to provide faith leaders with the knowledge, tools and resources to sup-

port that role.

According to the press release, the Guide and Quick Reference is the culmination of months of work the Mental Health and Faith Partnership, made up of psychiatrists and faith leaders representing diverse faith traditions.

"We are pleased to participate in this important collaboration and to be able to share these resources aimed at furthering the common interests of faith leaders and mental health professionals in promoting health, healing and wholeness," said APF Executive Director Paul Burke.

The Guide includes a general overview of mental health and mental illness, as well as information on how faith leaders can support people with mental health challenges. For example, it discusses how to create a more inclusive and welcoming community, when and how to make a referral to professional mental health services, and ways to deal with resistance to accepting mental health treatment.

Both resources are available for download from the APA at [www.psychiatry.org/faith](http://www.psychiatry.org/faith):

- American Psychiatric Association

# Save the date(s) for September 2016 conference

The Pathways to Promise biennial conference will be held on Wednesday September 28, 2016 in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago near O'Hare Airport. It will be co-sponsored and planned with its Chicago area local affiliate, the Interfaith Mental Health Coalition.

The conference, titled "Celebrating Hope: Promoting Mental Wellness & Resiliency," will focus on providing practical skills, and feature faith leaders, governmental leaders, providers, families and consumers/PEERS known for their inspirational work. Topics will include mental health ministry and companionship team development, Wellness Recovery Action Planning, mental health first aid, spiritual support group formation, suicide preven-

tion, cultural competence with different racial, ethnic, and religious traditions, and the work of different denominations and faith traditions in this area. Sponsors and exhibitors are being sought to keep the costs of the conference low. For further information, please contact Robert Skrocki at [bpskrocki@comcast.net](mailto:bpskrocki@comcast.net) or phone 630.802.0769.

The conference will be followed by a two day Regional Consultant Training Institute on Thursday and Friday September 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> at the same location. The Regional Consultant Training will be geared to those interested in sending at least two people from their community or organization to deepen their skills as organizers, trainers, and consultants in pro-

moting mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and faith based efforts to address mental health concerns in their own communities.

It will include Pathways National Training Initiative core elements and other resources including Companionship as "an essential ministry", organizing a mental health team in your faith community, forming and developing Faith & Mental Health Training Collaboratives, showcasing models of mental health programming/ministries. It is anticipated that for a team of two sent to the Institute, Pathways will receive a grant to cover the costs for one of the registrants.

## Remembering Flo Kraft

In October, Pathways received word of the passing of Flo Kraft. Of the giants in the early days of ministry and mental illness, none stands taller than Florence Iversen Kraft.

The Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network (PSMIN) honored Flo in the year 2000 by instituting their Florence Iversen Kraft Award for exemplary congregational ministry in serious mental illness. Her own illness and treatment was a part of her passion for helping others.

She was instrumental in developing the policy statement adopted by the 1988 General Assembly (PCUSA), the first ever statement on serious mental illness for that denomination. That was the same period which saw the beginnings of Pathways to Promise (Ministry and Mental Illness). Founding Executive Director, Jennifer Shifrin recalls how Flo (then working on the staff of New York City Presbytery) knew who to contact to get things started and saw to it that it happened. "She was a founding force, and yet with an engaging personality," noted Jennifer Shifrin. Those who had the privilege of working with her enjoyed her irreverent wit and, as Susan Stack, PHEWA/PC(USA) relates, "Spending time with her was a lot of fun."

Former Treasurer of Pathways, Jan Burggrabe, remembers that Flo was a

founding member of PSMIN in 1991, and as it got started, Flo helped develop those first materials for congregations to use and which then found their way into the materials that Jenny Shifrin was writing for Pathways. Flo was the editor of the Pathways newsletter for quite some time. As the work of PSMIN and Pathways expanded, Flo often responded helpfully to calls from family members and clergy who needed help in coping with the mental illnesses of loved ones and parishioners, and she consulted with colleagues seeking to start mental illness ministries in their local churches.

From her record of work and service one can see what gifts Flo exercised. She became an early childhood teacher in Maryland, a missionary educator for the Presbyterian Church in Cairo, Egypt, and upon her return worked in Health Ministries for the Presbyterian Church.

To quote Susan Stack: "Through her long service with PSMIN and with Pathways to Promise, Flo continued to offer her gifts, her time, her passion and her pastoral care in helping the faith community learn the roles they could play/need to play in the lives of people living with serious mental illness and their families."

## Farewell to Vicki Eichhorn

*Vicki Eichhorn, who served Pathways in many different ways, will be retiring from her position at the end of December. Vicki shared her story of working at Pathways.*

Pathways and the Missouri Institute of Mental Health, a department of the University of Missouri (my full time employer, 1979-2014) were located on the grounds of the St. Louis State Hospital psychiatric facility. Our faculty and staff worked closely with Pathways on mental health awareness collaborative projects; this is how I became familiar with Pathways and became friends with Bob Dell.

With the retirement of Jennifer Shifrin (former director), Bob took on the executive director responsibilities and Pathways office was downsized to one staff member and that person had given notice. One day Jan Burggrabe (former Pathways Board member and Treasurer) was meeting with my boss, asking for a recommendation for administrative support for Pathways. I overheard the conversation, asked what was involved, and volunteered to help out on a tempo-

rary basis, just long enough for Bob to find permanent office staff. Bob is a great sales person – I was familiar with the work of Pathways, it would be convenient with the office being located down the hall. It was flexible. I could work during lunch or come in early. My duties involved providing administrative support for the board, bookkeeping, resource sales and responding to phone calls and correspondence. I've been in my *temporary* position since 2002.

In 2014 the Institute moved to the University campus and due to budget cuts I was laid off. Pathways, now using an office provided by MIMH, would have to move as well. With the Board's approval, I packed up and brought Pathways to my home office.

My husband Keith and I have

been working on our retirement home at Tablerock Lake (southwest Missouri) for the last 10 years. It was my intent to retire and just take care of Pathways. However, within a year I was offered a full-time job with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, an offer I could not turn down. Between the new job and travelling, I felt I could not provide the support Pathways deserved.

We are blessed to have found Dawn Pennington, who is enthusiastically taking over my duties. We are working closely through this transition and I will continue to work for Pathways until I'm confident everything is running smoothly.

Pathways has been very good to me and I appreciate the Board's support over the years. I will miss everyone, especially Bob and Joyce Dell and Jim Zahniser.

*Bob Dell, former Acting Executive Director of Pathways and board chair, shared his thoughts on Vicki's leaving:*

Vicki became the focal point of all that was happening; she kept track of it and gently reminded me (later Craig, Robert and Jim) of what we needed to be doing. Notable was the invaluable help she gave, along with Jim Zahniser, on our successful Poster Packet distribution, and, then, the National Summit meeting. After the late Flo Kraft retired, she took on editing and publishing the Pathways newsletter. Vicki's years of administrative experience when combined with her effective, yet calming way of dealing with people, made the work of the rest of us part-timers possible.