

Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Pat Gleich

There are many ways to contribute to the well-being of a religious community. One can give time. One can give money. One can be a quiet role model for the rewards of living a life of devotion. Elise Woodward Stutzer contributed in all of those ways and never sought recognition.

“She worked behind the scenes and did what needed to be done. She took care of things. She was a quiet worker,” said Elise Stutzer’s great-niece Sandra Pait.

Though she died in 1976, the projects Elise worked on and the money she donated still impact others. Her spirit is seen in a diversity mural that graces the balcony of her home church, Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York, in a fragrance garden for the blind at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and in myriad ways throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), thanks to a large bequest to the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations and the Board of National Missions of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. In a last act of giving, she donated her body to Cornell Medical School for scientific research.

### Privilege and Responsibility

Elise Woodward Stutzer was born into wealth generated by her family’s watchmaking company. When her will was probated in 1978, it dispersed the largest estate on record in Brooklyn. Elise had a great sense of responsibility to use that wealth wisely. “It was family

money,” her great-niece said. “She felt she was a steward of the money and lived very frugally.”

Elise enjoyed a quiet life, living in a hotel in Brooklyn and walking or taking the subway to her volunteer work. She had no biological children, but served as a mentor to her nieces and nephews and other young people. She spent time caring for her ailing parents, and when they died she turned her attention to her community. Her days were marked by volunteer activities at her church and at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which her father and uncle helped found as prominent members of the garden’s umbrella organization, The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.

Elizabeth “Betty” Scholtz, director emeritus of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, described Elise Stutzer as a “faithful member of the women’s auxiliary committee.” Betty said Elise worked on the service committee alongside other women stuffing envelopes and collecting newspaper clippings. She also helped raise money for a gate at the entrance of a large floral garden and for the creation of a fragrance garden for the blind. The fragrance garden contains four oval raised beds at hand height, planted with fragrant flowers, foliage and culinary herbs denoted with Braille markers.

“She had a tremendous commitment to service for the things she cared about, like her church and the Botanic Garden,” Betty remarked.

## An Immeasurable Impact

Elise was immersed in church life as a deacon of Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, and as president of its Women's Society. "She had a very deep devotion for her church. It was a great part of her life," said niece Barbara Easley.

Her dedication to the church was also shown through the gifts she made at the time of her death. Her endowments included a bequest to her own congregation, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, for the painting of a mural that would capture the increasing diversity of the church neighborhood, and a large financial gift to the PC(USA).

"Her impact has been immeasurable. At a time when privilege and entitlement are often assumed synonymous, it is important to highlight a woman who understood stewardship and lived as though obliged to help others," said Patricia K. Gleich, associate for National Health Ministries, PC(USA).

Elise's financial gift to the denomination has been used for international and national health ministry in a



**A braille plaque allows sight impaired visitors the opportunity to enjoy the fragrance garden at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.**

variety of programs that have expanded the reach of the PC(USA) throughout the world, including these:

- ✓ developing the National Health Ministries Web site
- ✓ beginning the "Encircling Care"/Congregational Health Ministries Campaign, which urges congregation members to reach out to those within their church membership who need support and assistance
- ✓ designing the Congregation Care Team Model, which organizes and trains volunteers to work with people who are no longer living independently
- ✓ beginning the Congregational Health Liaison Network, which identifies an individual in each

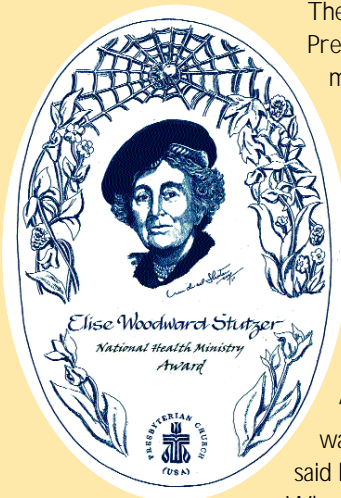
congregation as the point person for health ministry and provides her or him with resources, health information and other materials to pass along to members of the congregation

- ✓ funding conferences on topics including eating disorders, Alzheimer's disease and the training of parish nurses
- ✓ providing grants to congregations beginning parish nurse programs, in order to train regional parish nurse coordinators and develop regional training for congregational care teams

Elise Woodward Stutzer was a remarkable woman, but in many ways her life mirrors what the denomination and the world has come to expect from a Presbyterian woman. "She had such compassion for people," remembers her great-niece, Sandra. "She really believed that you give what you can, and do what you can, and hope that others learn to be the same way." 🍓

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## The Elise Woodward Stutzer National Health Ministry Award



The Elise Woodward Stutzer National Health Ministry Award will be granted biannually to a Presbyterian woman who "unselfishly gives of her time (as a volunteer) and/or resources to minister to the health needs of her congregation or to the denomination through the national church." The commencement of the award will be announced during the 2004 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Richmond, Virginia.

Nominations will be solicited and an award recipient chosen by a group composed of the following persons: a representative from the National Ministries Division (NMD), a Stutzer family member, the previous year's recipient, an associate for National Health Ministries and others deemed appropriate by the NMD committee.

Louisville Stoneware has designed a plaque (left), using the pattern of the Wildflower Garden Gate from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. A replica of the plaque will be given to the award recipient chosen each year. Elise Stutzer's family is pleased about the award.

"Aunt Elise lived by the words 'Tis better to give than to receive.' She had so much, and it was her great desire to do what she felt God would have wanted by giving back to others," said her niece Barbara Easley.

When asked what this quiet woman would have thought about her moment in the sun, her great-niece Sandra Pait replied, "She would be humbled, honored and pleased that her efforts would be noticed. She'd also be a little embarrassed by the hoopla."