

Wives' Fellowship has always had a twice yearly publication known as The Magazine. In 2005 it gained a name - Grapevine.

Within the framework of the Constitution and our Christian faith, branches have a considerable degree of autonomy and arrange programmes at a time and with a content to suit their members, including organising Regional and Fellowship days. Several charities have been supported since the founding of the Fellowship: first the Josephine Butler Memorial Trust which gave bursaries to 'students training to be moral welfare social workers', before the state took over that role, and, since 1975, St Christopher's Hospice in Sydenham, Kent. This was the first of the modern teaching hospices, founded by Dame Cicely Saunders. Seniors Wives' initially supported St Michel and All Angels, a home for unmarried mothers, but joined with the Wives' Fellowship in 1976 to support St Christopher's. We are not, however, a fund raising organisation and there is no obligation on any branch or individual to contribute.

In an era where doing and business dominate our lives, the Wives Fellowship offers refreshment to body, mind and spirit. We are not a practical society, but a caring Fellowship. We still live in times of turmoil and conflict, Christian marriage and family life are under threat in the modern world and the Wives' Fellowship can provide that rock on which to build an oasis of love and supportive friendship. The Wives' Fellowship gives members an opportunity to relax, to learn, to have fun, to pray and

then to return to our daily lives strengthened and encouraged. The ethos of the Fellowship, namely the support of Christian marriage and family life, still holds good today.

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www.wivesfellowship.org.uk



'Our Fellowship is with Christ and one with another'

The History of **The Wives' Fellowship**

What are 'Wives'? When did it start? These are the questions most frequently asked by people curious about the Fellowship. To answer these questions and to understand the group that we know today as 'Wives', you really have to go back to the origins of the Fellowship.

The Wives' Fellowship was founded in 1916 and involved two large organisations within the Anglican Church-the Mothers' Union and the Girls' Diocesan Association. The Mothers' Union, then as now, was finding it difficult to attract younger married women. As members of the Girls' Diocesan Association married they left that organisation, but were unable to join the Mothers' Union until they had children. In June 1916 a small group of friends, all young married women and former members

of the Girls' Diocesan Association, met in Salisbury and from these talks, the Mothers' Union went on to form a committee called The Young Wives Committee. The Young Wives' Committee grew in strength and the word 'Fellowship' first appeared in 1918. A printed constitution appeared under the title 'The Young Wives' Fellowship'.

At the end of the First World War women began to emerge into public life. Members of The Young Wives' Fellowship found themselves actively involved in the social changes concerning the welfare of women and the social legislation affecting them. This role eventually put the Fellowship at variance with the Mothers' Union and in 1937 The Wives' Fellowship, as it was then known, became an independent body. This important step in our history eventually led The Wives' Fellowship to become an ecumenical body, embracing members from all Christian denominations, which provided a much broader base for the membership. From 1921 we were affiliated to the National Council of Women, with members sitting on a number of its committees. This relationship ended in 1990/1991 as it was felt that NCW was no longer presenting a Christian point of view.

Through the decades there was considerable expansion with branches all over England and in the former colonies. By 1930 the membership had reached 2000. Retired members of Wives' wanted to maintain contact with the Fellowship and this led to the formation, at a specially called conference in 1934, of the Senior Wives' Fellowship. The Senior branches

grew rapidly as more of the younger Wives' joined them and in 1947 the Wives' and Senior Wives' had separate Central Committees for the first time. The age limit for members of Wives' Fellowship to move to Senior Wives' was raised from 40 to 45 and then due to changing social patterns, was raised several times more and eventually stood at 53.

There was a national executive for each part of the Fellowship. Each autumn the two Executive committees held a joint meeting to explore new developments and to discuss the general direction of the future of the Fellowship. The Branch Officers Conferences and the AGM gave the members a chance to voice their ideas. Like many organisations at the end of the twentieth century, membership was declining and some felt that the Fellowship would be stronger if the two groups were amalgamated. All Age branches were formed in some areas and the trend for these increased, but the need to attract younger women was felt to be of paramount importance if the Fellowship was to continue into the 21st Century. In 2000, due to the falling numbers in Wives and the difficulties of sustaining an Executive committee of its own, the decision was taken to gradually amalgamate the Executive Committees of Wives and Senior Wives'. This came into full effect in 2005 with one Central Chairman, elected from the whole Fellowship. At the AGM in 2004, it was agreed to drop the name Senior Wives' Fellowship and for all branches to be known as Wives' Fellowship.

The following year, again at the AGM, members voted to change the Constitution by eliminating the age rule, thus giving greater flexibility to individual branches. In 2015 the Constitution was further amended, following a ballot of the whole membership, to allow unmarried Christian women to be invited to join the Fellowship. The name however remained the same as did the ethos of Wives' Fellowship.

The Wives' Fellowship celebrated its Centenary on 4 May 2016 with a service in St Margaret's Church, Westminster attended by 770 members from almost every branch, followed by lunch in the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre. The 10 decades of Wives were illustrated in a fashion show and Dudley Buchanan, a member of Wimbledon branch and a past Master of the Skinners' Livery Company spoke. 8 further satellite events followed around the country to enable many more members to celebrate the Centenary. 2 original paintings donated by member, Liz Taylor-Webb (and used for note cards and to illustrate the Centenary book, The Spirit of Wives) were found homes with 2 lucky Wives in a raffle which raised over £4000 for St Christophers' Hospice.

From the earliest years Conferences have played an important part in the Fellowship, as an opportunity to meet and worship together and to listen to and be stimulated and challenged by a range of interesting speakers. The Autumn Conference is organised by a branch whilst Founders Day and a two day Fellowship Retreat are organised by the Executive Committee.