

Women's Fellowship

Sisterhood, Ladies Meeting, Women's Fellowship. By what name should the proposed weekly meetings for the women of the new Stoneleigh Methodist Church be known? This was a question when the possibilities of such a meeting were discussed at the Leaders' Meeting on 7th March 1938. By one or other such name it was known until 'Women's Fellowship' was officially chosen in July 1938, and so it has remained for 60 years providing a regular meeting for women where Christian fellowship devotion and service to others have been predominant.

With the outbreak of the war in 1939 the Fellowship found its numbers reduced. Many families left the neighbourhood and women were obliged to work away from their homes. The faithful few carried on, amongst other things organising a Knitting Circle to supply knitted goods for the troops. After a while the war conditions made it difficult to meet, so the Fellowship closed for a while but in 1941 was able to start again with increased membership, and so has continued.

Right from its beginning the Women's Fellowship has been concerned to "call women and girls to Christian Womanhood which accepts responsibility in the Home, Church and State", as set out in the Charter which was received when Stoneleigh became affiliated with the official Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church in 1956, and to this end every endeavour has been made to provide speakers, films, discussions etc, which would deepen our understanding of the Christian faith, and widen our interests in the problems of the day both at home and overseas. The Fellowship has welcomed members and clergy of other denominations, and speakers from a wide range of organisations such as the Probation Service, National Children's Home, RNLI, Guide Dogs, etc, and have enjoyed being instructed in the art of embroidery, lamp shade making and many others and also enthralled by first hand accounts of the work of Mother Theresa and the Hospice movement. Always we have enjoyed the special fellowship with the tea and biscuits at the end of the meeting!

Nor has the Fellowship been slow in fund raising. Indeed, a considerable amount of money has been raised in many ways to help the building schemes of the Church, as well as the Missionary Society and causes such as the Leprosy Mission, NCH, Friends of St Ebba's, in addition to personal service to these and other charities. A regular feature has been the monthly coffee morning in a member's home a happy get-together and a means of helping, financially, one of the special interests of the Fellowship.

The Women's Fellowship has its lighter moments too! For many years it had its choir which made a welcome contribution, not only to church affairs but also in the locality. There were concerts and performances of one act plays, all part of fund raising efforts. One custom which faded, but has now been revived, was the annual outing when members and friends visited such places as the Isle of Wight, Eastbourne, Coventry Cathedral, Oxford and many others.

Mention must be made of 'Women's Work' a part of the Methodist Missionary Society which, as its name implies, was principally concerned with maintaining interest in, and raising money for, the support of women missionaries. This was

run jointly with the Fellowship, and has always formed an integral part of the monthly programme speakers from overseas being especially welcomed.

The Women's Fellowship has always been a vital part of the life of Stoneleigh Methodist Church, meeting regularly each Tuesday at 2:30pm in the Link Room. It offers caring friendship to all women who will join us as we endeavour to fulfil the promise of the Women's Fellowship to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and make our homes a place where He is loved, our church a centre where He is worshipped, and our country a realm where He is honoured.

Mary Russell