

## **The Family Life Center Its History and Program**

The Family Life Center (FLC) is beginning its seventh year as an official program of The Wallingford Congregational Church. In reality, however, it had evolved from an ad-hoc Design Team which had been formed in 1997. The team was to envision ways the church might enhance the spiritual, social, emotional and physical well being of individuals and families in our church as well as in the community at large.

First, we needed to evaluate what were the needs and how we might make a difference by either augmenting existing programs or by starting new ones. We invited representatives from a wide range of community services to meet with us. They included youth and senior services, hospital programs, the Visiting Nurses, the Connecticut Parish Nurse Programs and the UCC Minister for Education in the Family (UCBHM). Surveys, input from church members with applicable expertise, and visits to existing centers provided additional background information.

As programs were developed, they began to fall into four categories, albeit overlapping at times:

- 1) A major program is the **HEALTH MINISTRY** program. We provide resources and programs for church members and have Blood Pressure screening clinics once a quarter.
- 2) Another goal is to provide family life **EDUCATION AND RESOURCES**. Programs on parenting, marriage enrichment, elder safety, and several six-week series on coping as Christians, have been held. The establishment of a library of helpful books, brochures, and directories, has been started in the FLC office. A directory of local human services, prepared by our former outreach committee, is being updated and computerized. A website with church information and resources is maintained by the Family Life Center. (*[www.firstchurchwlfld.org](http://www.firstchurchwlfld.org)*)
- 3) The third area of concern is providing **SUPPORT**. To this end we have had support groups for the bereaved and for those coping with divorce, including two groups for children and one for women alone. So far, facilitators have been church members with backgrounds in social services and counseling. Our church provides the facility and some help for Community Holiday Dinners as well as for community organizations and self-help groups (AA and ALANON).
- 4) Last, but not least, we try to provide **ENRICHMENT AND FELLOWSHIP** for individuals and families - good wholesome, inexpensive programs such as family retreats, women's retreats, family fun nights, regular barn dances, trips and celebrations of cultural diversity (300 attended our Scottish event). The church has a men's breakfast twice a month.

Fortunately, the church was able to purchase a building next door which now houses the FLC office and most of its programs. In addition to using this facility for some meetings and church school classes, we have been able to create a separate large community room.

We have a permanent Director of the FLC aided by a board of nine members. It represents a cross section of our church membership but leans heavily on those with backgrounds in medicine, social services, education and long life experiences. We serve a congregation of over 1,000 members and a town population of well over forty thousand.