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Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

East Harlem Protestant Parish Records, 1942 – 2007



Credit to: UTS 1: East Harlem Protestant Parish Records, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Brigette C. Kamsler, March 2015 With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: East Harlem Protestant Parish

Title: East Harlem Protestant Parish Records

Inclusive dates: 1942 – 2007 Bulk dates: 1947 – 1975

Abstract: East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP) was an interdenominational ministry

seeking to provide leadership in the development of community life, and was an excellent example of an ecumenical ministry in a local, inner-city setting. Collection contains documents and photographs of the churches,

individuals, programs, and committees of the EHPP.

Size: 40 boxes, 20.25 linear feet

Storage: Onsite storage Repository: The Burke Library

Union Theological Seminary

3041 Broadway New York, NY 10027

Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

Provenance: Exact provenance unknown. The majority of the records were probably

given between 1970-1987 by George W. Webber. In 2001, Letty Russell

donated material from the Holy Cross College Archives.

Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by

appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to

burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library

address on page 1, as far in advance as possible.

Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on

archival or special collections research.

Access Restrictions: Student records and Narcotic Committee Records are [RESTRICTED] for

95 years from the last date in the series. Otherwise, the collection is available to readers. Certain materials are in a fragile condition, and this

may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.

Preferred Citation: Item description, UTS 1: East Harlem Protestant Parish Records, series #,

box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary,

Columbia University in the City of New York.

History

In 1947, a group of students at Union Theological Seminary (UTS) became concerned over the middle-class nature of Protestant Churches in America. These students believed that the Protestant faith was reserved for those who could financially support their religion, and "dismayed...by the inability of Protestant churches as a whole to evangelize the throngs of industrial workers, especially those of the lower income brackets." The East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP) was founded in 1948 through the efforts of Truman B. Douglas and Stanley U. North of the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian churches, and Donald W. Strickler of the New York City Association. Three UTS graduates were also important to EHPP's founding: Donald L. Benedict, George Williams (Bill) Webber and J. Archie Hargraves.

The supporting organizations for the EHPP were: Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational Christian, Baptist, Evangelical and Reformed, Reformed, Evangelical United Brethren, New York City Mission Society, Union Theological Seminary, Protestant Council, and the National Council of Churches.

Two basic ideas were important from the beginning: that to approach an area like East Harlem must be through a group ministry within specific geographical limits; and that the churches and ministers must be more accessible. EHPP was a ministry to an inner-city community which received local, national and international attention. Dr. George Younger in his book *From New Creation to Urban Crisis* stated, "The history of urban mission in the period following World War II begins with the formation of the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York City in 1948."

EHPP chose that, instead of spending money on expensive buildings, the money should go towards personnel. EHPP would rent vacant stores in the areas and use them for worship and youth centers. The store fronts would be more accessible and would bring the Parish closer to the people. The East Harlem churches that were originally involved with the Group Ministry were

Elmendorf Reformed Church; Church of the Resurrection; 100th Street Church; East Harlem Interfaith; Church of Our Redeemer; Church of the Son of Man; and Church of the Ascension.

The parish founders designed and implemented a model for urban congregational witness using experimental modes of ministry. The modes of ministry used by the parish included: the storefront church, the group ministry with its disciplines, the agape meal, social action, community activism, worship as the center of community life, and much more. Struggling urban congregations, aspiring seminarians, and concerned denominational leaders placed great hope in the work of the parish ministers. They mobilized interdenominational resources to evangelize a poor multi-racial community and wrote an important chapter in American urban church history.

EHPP was active in helping with the needs of the community. The heating situation in apartments, finding summer camps for youths, friendly hospitalization for people were afraid of the city hospitals, and relief funding were some of the activities. The attempt by the staff "to relate Christian faith relevant to these problems has been complicated as well as challenging."

Social action was another important activity of EHPP and it was considered part of Christian Action. The parish advised parishioners on Union strikes and activities, marches, protests and other petitions. The EHPP valued taking social action in the East Harlem community because the Parish could move quickly when cases of injustice arose. In the monthly report to the Administrative Board in February 1952, Donald Benedict recounted some of the dramatic actions taken by the EHPP over the past three years:

He told of marches on the police station protesting police brutality, the protest meetings and petitions for better housing, the vacant lot drama showing the evils of narcotics, the relocation of dispossessed and poorly housed families, the use of thermometers to get heat in apartments, and recounted many more stories of work on individual welfare, court, family, health, housing, education, and employment cases. [see series 2, box 2, folder 2]

While the EHPP was taking action to protest these injustices, they were doing their part to help those affected. Many of the programs led by the EHPP came out of their social action work.

In 1962, the organization sent a memorandum to the Board of Directors, requesting that they study the role and structure of the Parish in its Mission to East Harlem, future directions the program could take, and its relationship to the total mission of the church in East Harlem. The Board was asked to review what the Parish was organized to be and do. This memorandum examined what the EHPP had done well, but also its failures – some of those being the limitations of the storefront church and the group ministry model; that the Parish would need to relate to the social work profession rather than be a substitute for it, and other experiments that never got off the ground. The EHPP questioned if it should continue or evolve into a new vehicle for cooperative mission for East Harlem.

The EHPP as originally conceived ended in 1968, and became decentralized units with individual congregations, not linked by the central Parish. The Board of Directors continued into the mid-1970s and would report on the individual units. Original and important members such as Peg Eddy and Bill Webber resigned in their official capacity in the organization, as the EHPP

that continued in name at that time was quite different than what is was originally intended to support. The East Harlem Protestant Parish officially dissolved in 1977.

Sources: From the records themselves and:

Benedict, Donald L. "The East Harlem Protestant Parish," *The Missionary Herald at Home and Abroad*, October 1949 [series 3, box 3, folder 2].

Hammond, Trey. "East of Harlem," *Monday Morning*, May 3, 1999. Available in Series 5, Box 10, Folder 3.

"We Hold These Truths: East Harlem Protestant Parish 10th Anniversary, 1948-1958," available in Series 3, Box 6, Folder 1.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The records of the East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP) consist of administrative information, minutes and reports, photographs, slides, publications, committee and ministry information in order to better the East Harlem community. Many of the records show the long-term planning that EHPP understood was necessary. This included studying the organization of the Parish, the nature of the Church and the work of the ministry, and to look at the financial structure of the Parish, all to be able to recommend plans for the future.

The collection is organized in six series:

Series 1: Administrative Files, 1948-1973 (3 boxes, 1.25 lin. ft.)

This series contains financial records for the organization, including parish budgets, and other general background information. These documents facilitate the operations and management of the EHPP, but which do not relate directly to programs that helped the Parish achieve its mission.

• Series 2: Minutes and Reports, 1947-1975 (8 boxes, 4.00 lin. ft.)

Within this series are records of the board and other staff and steering committee materials. The Board of Directors consisted of members that were elected by the Corporation. The Steering Committee was the local authority of the Parish, while the Administrative Committee carried out the decisions of the Steering Committee. Often there were meetings bi-weekly to think through the future plans and goals of the ministry. Monthly reports were sent to the Administrative Board.

These documents contain information on programs, personnel changes, budgets, speaking engagements and other events. The documents also contain information on the focus of the EHPP's social action, such as the quest for better ambulance service and involvement with political campaigns. The Churches that were part of the EHPP are also featured prominently, including the long-term discussion of building issues which in the case of the Church of the Resurrection were rectified in the 2000s with a new building.

• Series 3: Publicity Materials, 1947-1973 (9 boxes, 5.50 lin. ft.)

Within this series are photographs, slides, magazines, pamphlets, articles and newspaper clippings. Some of the material is historical and informative about the Parish

itself; others were for the EHPP to use internally or at events like a staff retreat. Much of the paper is fragile and brittle, and is noted as such on the individual folder level.

The Newsletters consist of the EHPP Newsletter, which was renamed the Star in 1973. The Parish Perimeter of the EHPP was an informal and internally printed newspaper with information on staff meetings, calendar of events, getting to know the staff, information and updates on parishioners, and other stories. It was usually printed in both English and Spanish.

Many of the articles in this series were written by those who were directly involved with EHPP, including Bill Webber, Helen Archibald, Letty Russell, and Don Benedict.

• Series 4: Parish and Ministry Records, 1950-2007 (7 boxes, 3.50 lin. ft.)
This series contains specific information related to the Churches of the EHPP, as well as Group Ministry which applied to all of the churches.

The parishes were the Church of Our Redeemer; Church of the Resurrection; 100th Street Church; Church of the Son of Man; Church of the Ascension; and the Elmendorf Reformed Church.

Church of the Son of Man at 205 East 102nd Street began at this location in 1950. Projects of Christian Action for this Church included housing, political responsibility, and work among youth gangs. Early Laymen of the Church included Carlos Rios, Carlos Rodriguez, and by the inspirational and creative ministry of Rev. Donald L. Benedict.

100th Street Church began in December 1948 and sought to reach out to the hundreds of children, youths and adults in the neighborhood. Other important EHPP groups that began here were the Credit Union, Christian Economics, and the Conservatives Social Club. Rev. Wendell Elmendorf, Rev. Les and Peg Stansbury, and Peg Eddy were active.

Church of Our Redeemer began in the summer of 1950 with their official church home opening at 324 East 102nd Street in 1951. Sunday School Classes and Bible Study Groups were an integral part of this church. Their important programs were Parish Acres and Friendly activities. Hugh Hostetler was the first pastor.

Church of the Ascension is a Presbyterian Church built in 1908 as a mission church for Italian immigrants. In the early 1950s it became associated with EHPP through the assignment of George Todd, a member of the Group Ministry. Letty Russell later became pastor of this church. The church participated in all Parish-wide activities, and early membership was drawn from the East River Houses.

Church of the Resurrection at 325 East 101st Street was also an original member of the EHPP Ministry. In the mid-2000's it was in the news due to the need for a new building. The church outgrew its structure after thirty years and agreed to an air-rights deal with a building developer, who constructed a multi-story apartment on the site with room for a church and learning center at the base.

Elmendorf Reformed Church was led by Rev. Donald DeYoung, Rev. Allen Sheldon, and Rev. William C. Bennett in the mid-1940s to 1970s. It is located at 171 East 121st Street.

• Series 5: Special Programs and Staff Committees, 1947-1998 (10 boxes, 4.50 lin. ft.) This series contains information on the various committees and special programs run by the EHPP. The Parish Council and Staff Committees ran the following: strategy, Parish Acres, education, school and colleges, Church life, Narcotics, Christian economics, Friendly Town, and Personnel. The Special Programs were Parish Acres, Narcotics Clinic, Legal Aid, Credit Union, Medical Clinic, Casework Referral, Conservatives, and Dominoes.

In 1951, the fear of heroin addiction was rampant in the East Harlem Community. Maryat Lee wrote and directed an outdoor play, "DOPE," for the parish and it was after that play that the EHPP began to help addicted individuals and their families. The EHPP Narcotics Committee began in 1956 as a program for treatment, referral, aftercare, and social action on behalf of the addicted population in the community. The Narcotics Committee, and specifically Norman Eddy, were instrumental in advocating for addicts and their families to create major change the New York State law, and shifted narcotics use from being a crime to being treated as a medical condition, known as the Metcalf-Volker bill of 1961. At various times, progress reports were issued. The collection contains reports, correspondence and other writings about the Narcotics Committee. There is also information on specific individuals being treated by this committee; therefore this box is **[RESTRICTED]** for 95 years from the last date in the box. Consequently it is closed until 2060.

The Metro North Citizens' Committee was a pioneer organization which helped local residents take control of their lives, from improving apartment living conditions to the planning of new types of public housing.

Church Life Committee was charged with the details of many Parish wide events such as the anniversary service, Pancake Festival and Easter Sunday Service.

Education Committee looked to unify the Parish Sunday School curriculum and assist all of the churches with teacher training.

Parish Acres was responsible for the program at the retreat center, including all regulations and traditions. In the early 1950s the Parish purchased 130 wooded acres located sixty miles outside of the city. This property was designated as a retreat center for adults and families and was also known as the "Parish Farm."

Friendly Towns was responsible for registering, examining, and delivering hundreds of children to Friendly Town Homes during the summer months.

• **FERPA RESTRICTIONS** Series 6: Student and Staff Papers, 1942-1966 (3 boxes, 1.50 lin. ft.)

Within this series are papers from students as well as faculty records. All of the material is intermixed within the collection. Due to FERPA, the series is **closed for 95 years** from the last date in the box – therefore the series is closed until 2061.

Processing

Union students as a class project in [1987?] reorganized the original EHPP files into alphabetical subject order. An inventory from spring 1987 is credited to Benjamin Alicea. As no record remains of the original order, the original inter-relational provenance information cannot be discerned.

In 2015, the collection was grouped into series. The original box listing is located on the next page along with the box's new series and number. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Any items in an advanced state of deterioration were placed in Mylar envelopes.

Further Sources

The Burke Library offers a number of other collections with related topics, including other faculty and staff papers in the Union Seminary Archives, as well as organizational records. Donald Benedict and Norm and Peg Eddy are three individuals whose papers are available at the Burke. Burke Library also offers the papers of Letty Russell in the Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship.

For these and more collections, please see the Burke Library Archives website.

Change in Box Numbering

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Box 3	Series 2, Box 3
Box 4	Series 4, Box 1
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