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Union Theological Seminary, New York**

William Adams Brown Ecumenical Archives Group

Finding Aid for

National Council of Churches Records, 1948 – 1973



Source: National Council of the Churches Website, © 2012.
Accessed 28 January 2013 at <http://www.nccusa.org/>.

Finding Aid prepared by: Tenny Thomas, June 2009.

Reviewed and updated with additions by Kristen Leigh Southworth, February 2013 and Brigette C. Kamsler, 2014 with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Summary Information

Creator: National Council of Churches of Christ USA
Title: National Council of Churches Papers
Inclusive dates: 1948 – 1973
Bulk dates: 1953 – 1969
Abstract: Administrative records, correspondence, newsletters, and reports from the first two decades of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA (NCC), a community of 37 faith traditions that has been a leading force in the Christian ecumenical movement in the United States. \ Bulk of materials in collection are from the Division of Foreign Missions, along with papers from the Faith and Order, International Relations, and Ecumenical Relations divisions.
Size: 31 boxes, 15 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:** The NCC records were originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library (MRL), which moved to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. The records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives in 1976 with the closure of MRL. As Rev. Frank Wilson Price was both Director of MRL and Secretary of the Research Committee of the Division of Foreign Missions of NCC, the existence of the small group of NCC Foreign Missions records in the Missionary Research Library is deduced to result from Price's donation of those papers to MRL. This large group of mixed unidentified papers was the result of unprocessed accessions during the 1930-1976 period to the Missionary Research Library and also to the separate William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library at Union Theological Seminary. NCC records covering a range of departments now form a single accessible collection within the William Adams Brown Ecumenical archives group. An addition was made in 2014.
- 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:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Please note that certain materials are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Archives: National Council of Churches Records, series #, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

History

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) is an ecumenical fellowship of 37 Christian faith groups in the United States. Its member communions include Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, African-American, Evangelical, and historic Peace churches. Driven by the conviction that Christian faith demands social action, the NCC has worked nationally and internationally to promote brotherhood between Christians and non-Christians through cross-cultural understanding, peace, human rights, and anti-poverty measures.

The NCC was founded in 1950 as a cooperative agency of Christian churches in the United States, when the Federal Council of Churches merged with several other existing ecumenical organizations including the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the Home Missions Council of North America, the International Council of Religious Education, the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, the National Protestant Council on Higher Education, the United Council of Church Women, and the United Stewardship Council.

The work of the NCC was originally carried out through four main divisions: the Division of Christian Education, the Division of Life and Work, the Division of Home Missions, and the Division of Foreign Missions. It provided support to its member groups through consultation, conferences, workshops, publications, public lobbies, and service agencies.

NCC's Division of Foreign Missions (DFM) continued the work of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMCNA), and like its predecessor, was organized into "area committees" based on geographic location, "functional committees" that provided services in specialized fields such as literacy, education, audiovisual communication, medical, agricultural work, and "standing committees" that carried out the executive administration of the DFM, including administration of the Missionary Research Library until 1967.

The DFM continued holding annual assemblies until 1965, when it merged with Church World Service (CWS) – an independent overseas relief and development organization – to form the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM). The DOM became the largest unit of the NCC both financially and administratively, continuing the work of the DFM's area committees through regional departments that had both a "mission" director, representing the interests of the DFM, and a "service" director, representing the interests of CWS. The work of the DFM's functional committees was continued under the DOM's Department of Specialized Ministries.

Robert C. Dodds served as General Director of the NCC Planning Committee until 1965, when he spearheaded the Ecumenical Affairs Committee. This committee was established in addition to the already existing "Department of Faith and Order Studies," which began in 1959 to respond to the call for unity and affirm the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ.

During the 1970s, social instability, suspicion of corporatism and authority, and demands for minority rights, along with theological trends including feminist and liberation theologies, the rise of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and an increasing focus among mainline denominations on alleviating oppression and interreligious dialogue, led to a slow but overall decline in the NCC's influence, particularly in the area of foreign missions. The Division of Overseas Ministries published its final triennial report in 1987.

Today, the main work of the NCC is carried out through five main program commissions: Justice and Advocacy, Communication, Interfaith Relations, Education and Leadership Ministries, and Faith and Order.

Sources: From the materials in the collection, as well as:

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, "NCC at a Glance: Who Belongs, What We Do, How We Work Together," *National Council of Churches USA*, Accessed 28 January 2013 at http://www.nccusa.org/about/about_ncc.html.

Norgren, William A. *Faith and Order in the U.S.A.*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011.

Presbyterian Historical Society, "Historical Note," *Guide to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America Division of Overseas Ministries Records 1914-1972*, NCC RG 8, Philadelphia: National Archives of the PC(USA). Accessed 28 January 2013 at <http://www.history.pcusa.org/collections/findingaids/inventory/ncc8.pdf>.

Van Horne, Marion, ed., *Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA 1985-1987 Triennial Report*, New York: Kutztown Publishing Company, 1987.

Collection Scope and Content Note

This series has been organized into five series:

- **Series 1: General Divisions and Departments, 1950-1972 (3 boxes, 1.25 linear ft.)**
This series contains resolutions, policy statements, pronouncements, and reports of the National Council of Churches from its first two decades. Also included are minutes, reports, and correspondence from a number of divisions, departments and committees within the council, most notably the Department of Church and Economic Life, also known as the Department of Social Justice; and the Department of International Affairs, along with its 1966 Advisory Committee on Peace that passed a number of resolutions expressing concern over the situation in Vietnam and church action for world development.
- **Series 2: Faith and Order Commission, 1953-1973 (3 boxes, 1.50 linear ft.)**
The Department of Faith and Order was established within the National Council of Churches to continue the work and concerns of the 1957 North American Conference on Faith and Order held in Oberlin, Ohio. As of 2013 it remains a functioning commission of the National Council of Churches. This series contains correspondence and minutes for the commission's Advisory Committee during its first decade, as well as studies and reports on various topics including the situation in Israel in 1969, the ecumenical significance of the NCC, the Eucharist Ecumenical Movement, black liberation theology, and bilateral conversations.
- **Series 3: Planning Committee, 1961-1970 (2 boxes, 1.00 linear ft.)**
Robert C. Dodds served as the Director of Planning for the NCC from 1961-1965. His involvement in the civil rights movement is highlighted particularly in this series through his personal correspondence and extensive summaries of his consultations with Professor Philip Rieff, an influential American sociology scholar and cultural critic. The series also contains Dodds' correspondence with Aaron Henry, a civil rights leader in Mississippi, and transcribed conversations with Joseph Oldham, a Scottish-Indian missionary who authored a book entitled *Christianity and the Race Problem*, in which Dodds describes the strategic difficulties he faced in trying to overcome racism in the churches through the work of the NCC Planning Committee.
- **Series 4: Committee on Ecumenical Affairs, 1964-1969 (2 boxes, 1.00 linear ft.)**
This series contains reports, speeches, drafts, and correspondence relating to the work of Robert C. Dodds as Director of Ecumenical Affairs from 1965 until 1970, including his proposals for Ecumenical Study Desks and reports on consultations with Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Evangelical churches and leaders. Also included in this series is Dodd's diary from his visit as a delegate to the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

- **Series 5: Division of Foreign Missions, 1950-1973 (21 boxes, 10.25 linear ft.)**

The Division of Foreign Missions (DFM), which became the Department of Overseas Ministries after 1965, is the largest series within this collection. The series is arranged alphabetically in accordance with the original 1950 bylaws that organized the working groups of the DFM into standing, functional, and area committees.

The executive committee documents include original pamphlets describing the scope and work of the DFM, reports from DFM's annual meetings from 1952-1959 and 1961, budget proposals, correspondence, and records from the executive board, staff council, and policy and strategy committee.

Among the standing, functional, and special committees, the bulk of materials are from the Research Committee, which include several studies that were carried out in conjunction with the Missionary Research Library. Study report topics include: A Christian Study of Islam, A Study of Missionary Salary and Allowances, Transportation Costs, Lessons Learned from the Experience of Christian Missions in China, What Constitutes a Fair Basis of Missionary Support, Policy on Furloughs, Theological Education in Younger Churches, Missionaries and Income Taxes, Devolution and Responsibility, and Why Christians Should Study Marx-Leninism. This section also contains a large collection of study papers prepared for the Willingen Conference on the subject of the missionary obligation of the church, written by H. Richard Neibuhr, R. Pierce Beaver, C. Stanley Smith, J. W. Heikkinen, Carl Michaelson, Louise Pettibone Smith, In addition, the standing committee on Christian Missions and the Problem of Communism contains a number of reports and study materials related to the Christian response to communism, as well as teaching documents and course materials for a Study Fellowship on the Christian Approach to Communism.

Area committee materials are arranged into large sections by geographic region, and are arranged at the folder level alphabetically by country, project title, or subject. The African Committee section contains news articles, reports, and correspondence related to the work of the DFM's Africa Department, including planning documents and reports from the 1952 North American Assembly on African Affairs, and extensive materials related to Apartheid in South Africa. This section also contains Directors Reports from the International African Institute.

The Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA) section contains minutes, correspondence and reports from various subcommittees of this committee, along with news articles and reports on the situation in Cuba, fact sheets compiled in 1971 on every Latin American country, British lists of publications on Latin American from 1967-1971, and materials related to the 1972 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The Far Eastern Joint Office comprises the work of the China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, and Southeast Asia committees, and the Taiwan subcommittee, and this section of the series contains primarily minutes and reports from the annual meetings of these committees. The Committee on Southern Asia and the Near East Committee comprised the Southern Asia and Near East Joint Office, and this section contains reports,

correspondence, and minutes related to these committees, as well as copies of reports from the National Christian Council's Committees on Ceylon, India, and Pakistan and the United Christian Mission in Nepal.

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. 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.

Some of the materials in this collection were pulled from a large amount of unprocessed material housed by the Burke Library Archives, which were then integrated with the existing records collection, much of which has been re-processed.

An addition was made in 2014 which added boxes 26-31. The boxes are placed in order within the contents list, but the box numbers were kept in their continuous numbering sequence.

Further Sources

More information can be obtained from www.ncccusa.org/about/about_ncc.htm

The main repository of archival records of the National Council of Churches is The National Archives of the Presbyterian Church (USA) at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, PA. Access the finding aids for these records at http://www.history.pcusa.org/collections/findingaids/ncc_list.cfm.

The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University houses the records of several persons and organizations relating to the National Council of Churches. For more information on these collections, please visit the Burke Library Archives website at <http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/burke/archives.html> or contact archives staff by phone, fax or email burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, as far in advance as possible.

Related collections include:

In William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library:

[Church World Service](#)

[Federal Council of Churches](#)

[American Bilateral Conversations Records](#)

In Missionary Research Library:

[Foreign Missions Conference of North America Records](#)

[Emory W. Ross Papers](#)

[Robert C. Dodds Papers](#)

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