

East Harlem Protestant Parish Presentation – 9/25/2015

[SLIDE] Introduction and Starting Page

Hello everyone, my name is Brigette Kamsler and I am an archivist at the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary.

[SLIDE – Pic of Burke/UTS]

To give a brief intro about the Burke Library - The Burke Library is one of the largest theological libraries in North America, with holdings of over 700,000 items, including extensive special collections. Throughout its long history, the Library has maintained its commitment to the needs of both teaching and research, serving not only the faculty, staff, and students of Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, but also a wide spectrum of national and international scholars and researchers. The Library is named in honor of Walter Burke, a generous benefactor to the Library who served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Seminary from 1976 to 1982.

The mission of the Burke Library is to identify, acquire, organize, provide access to, interpret, and preserve for the future information in the field of theology and contextually related areas of study. Furthermore, the Library supports the specific instructional and research needs of Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University and provides resources for the scholarly community in theology and related areas of the humanities and social sciences. The Library reflects in its collections the pluralistic and ecumenical concerns of the Seminary while maintaining its role as a comprehensive resource within the limits of its collecting policies. In carrying out its mission, the Library cooperates with other institutions both regionally and nationwide.

[SLIDE – READING ROOM]

The Burke Library contains six main record groups regarding archives: The Union Theological Seminary Archives; the Auburn Theological Seminary Archives; the Missionary Research Library Archives; the William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Archives; the Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship; and a number of other, general archival collections related to theology, such as the New York Theological Seminary Archives.

The Burke Library is one of twenty-one libraries in the Columbia University Library system.

[SLIDE – Pic of Boxes] EHPP Records

Today I'm going to speak to you about the 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. The collection at the Burke Library, which contains 40 boxes totaling 20 linear feet, contain documents and photographs of the churches, individuals, programs, and committees of the EHPP.

The provenance of how the materials made their way to the Seminary archives is not precisely known. 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.

[SLIDE – hands grasping symbol] History – Large Spread

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.”

[SLIDE – Background – Slumlord Scandal]

[SLIDE – Background – Our Worst Slum]

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.

[SLIDE of the Founders]

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.

[SLIDE – First Anniversary]

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."

[SLIDE – Store Front Churches]

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.

[SLIDE] Church of the Son of Man

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.

[SLIDE] 100th Street Church

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.

[SLIDE] Church of Our Redeemer

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.

[SLIDE] Church of the Ascension

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.

[SLIDE – Community Center] Experiments with Modes of Ministry

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.

[SLIDE – Helping the Needs of the Community]

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.”

[SLIDE] Community 2

[SLIDE – Credit Union]

[SLIDE – Narcotics Committee]

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.

[SLIDE – Education]

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

[SLIDE – Parish Acres]

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."

[SLIDE] – Parish Acres 2

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

[SLIDE – Social Action]

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.

[SLIDES – Other Pictures from the Collection]

To illustrate some of the other activities and people who were involved with the EHPP, the following slides are a number of pictures to illustrate.

[SLIDE – Newspaper Clipping] Original Concept Closes

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 it was originally intended to support. The East Harlem Protestant Parish officially dissolved in 1977.

[SLIDE – What's in the Collection]

Apart from all of the photos!

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.

- **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. 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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **[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. Due to FERPA, the series is **closed for 95 years** from the last date in the box – therefore the series is closed until 2061.

[SLIDE – Thank you]

Thank you everyone for your time and the Burke Library does actively collect and preserve these materials. Last year, Norm and Peg Eddy donated their materials to the Burke Library. This collection is much larger than the EHPP one and is currently unprocessed, but I would gladly talk to you about this if anyone is interested.