Register of the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles Records, 1938-1981

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Collection number: MSS 004

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Descriptive Summary
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History
The First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles is located at 2936 W. 8th Street, Los Angeles, California 90005. The church defines itself as a liberal church that is interested in social issues such as human rights, civil liberties and the attainment of a rational society. Its tradition extends over four centuries beginning in 1558 in Transylvania. Exponents have included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Priestly. The First Unitarian Church in Los Angeles was founded in 1877 by Madam Caroline Severance.
The Ministers of the Los Angeles church have, in recent years, often been social activists in their own right. Stephen Hole Fritchman, who served as First Church’s minister from 1948 to 1970, reflected on the relationship between the church and social activism in his 1977 autobiography Heretic. Following his retirement, Peter H. Christiansen became minister, serving until 1976. Since 1978, Reverend Phillip Zwerling has carried on the church’s activist ministry.

Scope and Content
The collection is arranged in four series: GENERAL FILE, COMMITTEE EVENTS, FELLOWSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE and DAVID SEIDMAN. A majority of the collection was donated by David Seidman, including his correspondence, the Drama Workshop notes (1954-1955), (he functioned as their publicity director), a scrapbook of the Fifth Annual Festival of Arts (May 1956), the Writers’ file (1954-1955) and much of the material for the Fellowship for Social Justice file.

The collection is by no means complete. For a more detailed study of the activities of the First Unitarian Church in Los Angeles the researcher may consult the church’s archives. Extensive files of the sermons, order of service and the church’s newsletters are available in the library’s periodical section.

The GENERAL FILE (folders 1-15) contain flyers and leaflets announcing conferences, meetings, bazaars, forums and plays. There are also resolutions on the church’s position on civil rights, nuclear testing, spying by the military in churches, the loyalty oath and other social issues. There is a mimeographed protest letter (November 14, 1970) criticizing the church’s proposition on the Gay Liberation Front. The files contain Minutes of The Special Membership Meeting (October 25, 1953) in addition to other church function minutes, attendance figures for 1972, the Centennial Celebration Program, 1877-1977, calendar of events, newspaper clippings, mimeographed collection of poetry for the Fourth Annual Festival of Arts (1955) as well as for the Second Annual Festival of Arts (1953). There is a statement (1971) by the Board in response to the written attacks against the Church Board and Reverend Christiansen. There is also the financial statements, proposed budgets, fundraising letters, the by laws of the church, and the church directory for 1971.

Included in the material on Stephen Fritchman (folder #15) is an index of his tape recorded addresses, articles written by Reverend Fritchman, and a memorial to him by the Lincoln Brigade in Los Angeles (1981).

The COMMITTEE EVENTS series (folders 16-18) contain minutes, flyers, correspondence, notes from the Drama Workshop of 1954-1955, the Writers’ Groups 1954-1955 and the Scrapbook for The Fifth Annual Festival of Arts.

The Drama Workshop produced the play Cyanamide by Burt Marnik. The folder (16) contains the flyers announcing the play, audition call, correspondence between the author and David Seidman, notes by Seidman, newspaper articles and by laws of the workshop.

Folder 17 contains the Constitution of the Writers’ Group, the premise of purpose, some correspondence, the minutes and the program of the October 30, 1955 poetry reading.

The scrapbook for the Fifth Annual Festival of Arts (1956) was given to David Seidman. It is divided into six sections: Arts Festival (flyers, announcements and a catalogue of the exhibits), Newspaper and Magazine (articles referring to the exhibits), Reviews, Programs, Mailings and Intra-Church Communications.

THE FELLOWSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (folders 19-23) was formed in 1908 as a committee through which the more social active members could operate. As an organization, they demonstrated and protested nuclear testing, the loyalty oath, civil liberty abuses, and the Vietnam War in addition to other social issues. The majority of the material retained in this series are flyers furnishing information about the Vietnam War, announcing demonstrations such as the Fellowship for Social Justice's weekly vigil at the Federal Building in Los Angeles from 1966-1973. There are also announcements of forums and talks. There is a list of the Executive Committee of the Fellowship for Social Justice for 1970, 1971 and 1973, some press releases announcing events, letters to the editors, minutes and notes of meetings. Some of the material also deal with the issues of farm labor and the Chile coup of 1972. The by laws of the committee are included in the collection and newsletters as well as bulletins from the San Fernando Valley Chapter.

The final series DAVID SEIDMAN (folder 24) contain some of his correspondence, notes, criticisms and press releases in connection with church business. There are also responses to his correspondence from the Reverends Stephen Fritchman and Peter H. Christiansen.

Bibliography
Souvenir Book and Program Seventy Fifth Anniversary 1877-1952
The First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles. Los Angeles: First Unitarian Church. 1952.
GENERAL FILE

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| Box 1, Folder 4   | Flyers, Pamphlets, Reports, Leaflets. 1954-1957. |
| Box 1, Folder 5-6 | Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets. 1958-1965. |
| Box 1, Folder 7   | Flyers and Leaflets. 1966-1968. |
| Box 1, Folder 8-9 | General Literature. 1970-1971. |
| Box 1, Folder 10  | Financial Statements, General Literature. 1972-1974. |
| Box 1, Folder 11  | Flyers, Programs, General Literature. 1975-1977. |
| Box 1, Folder 13  | Flyers, Reports. Financial Statements. 1981. |
| Box 1, Folder 14  | Correspondence. 1955, 1960-1961. |

COMMITTEE EVENTS

| Box 2, Folder 16  | Administrative Details Drama Workshop. 1954-1955. |
| Box 2, Folder 17  | Writers' Group. Minutes, Correspondence, Notes, Flyers. 1954-1955. |
| Box 2, Folder 18  | Fifth Annual Festival of Arts. May, 1956. |

FELLOWSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE


DAVID SEIDMAN