Finding Aid to the United Church of Christ, Northern California Conference Records, 1961-1986

Finding aid prepared by Glenn Humphreys, revised by Labor Archives and Research Center staff.
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Descriptive Summary

Title: United Church of Christ, Northern California Conference records
Date (inclusive): 1961-1986
Creator: United Church of Christ. Northern California Conference.
Extent: 2.0 cubic feet (1 carton, 1 box)
Collection number: larc.ms.0055
Accession number: 1990/050
Repository: Labor Archives and Research Center
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San Francisco State University
1630 Holloway Ave
San Francisco, CA 94132-1722
(415) 405-5571
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Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English.
Abstract: Minutes, correspondence, resolutions, reports, and newsletters, demonstrating the role of the United Church of Christ, Northern California Conference and affiliated religious organizations in the farm labor movement, California farming communities, and the Conference's strong support for farm workers and small growers, from 1964 to 1986. The collection contains minutes from the California Migrant Ministry (CMM), which co-sponsored programs with the Conference, such as the Tulare County Community Development Project, which focused on economic and political issues. The bulk of the material from the CMM consists of resource materials about farm workers compiled by Chris Hartmire and mailed to the Conference, and reflects the debates about the worker-priest program proposed by the CMM. Resource material from the CMM and the United Board for Homeland Ministries demonstrates the information available to the leaders of the Conference. The files include material such as the statements of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Labor; the resolutions in support of the grape boycott sponsored by the United Farm Workers in 1968; and the records of the Goshen Project, a small community development program.
Location: Collection is available onsite.
Access
Collection is open for research.
Preferred Citation
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John R. Deckenback, Associate Conference Minister of the Northern California Conference of the United Church of Christ, donated selected records of the Conference to the Labor Archives and Research Center in August 1990, accession number 1990/050.
Processing Information
Processed by Glenn Humphreys in October 1990. Collection folders renumbered in 2014 by Tanya Hollis.
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Huerta, Dolores, 1930-
Agricultural laborers--California--History.
Agricultural laborers--Labor unions--United States--History.
Church records and registers--California--Tulare County.
The Northern California Conference of the United Church of Christ played a significant role in the agricultural communities in the Central Valley of California, most notably in the 1960s. In 1962, after ministering for decades to members of the small valley towns, the Conference began a dramatic new program in Goshen, a small town in Tulare County. The Goshen Project specifically sought to minister to farm workers, whose needs moved the Conference into nontraditional programs. Working with other organizations throughout the decade, the Conference struggled to serve farm workers as well as other members of Northern California’s agricultural communities.

The leaders of the Conference recognized the plight of the farm workers was one of the most divisive issues in California as they sought to minister to groups on all sides of the situation: growers, shippers, laborers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers. The position of the Conference became more difficult as it developed new programs to serve the farm workers. The programs attacked problems such as wages, housing, and lack of county services. Staff members participated in demonstrations, strikes, and voter registration drives. Staff members also developed close ties with leaders of other groups such as Chris Hartmire, the dynamic leader of the California Migrant Ministry, and Cesar Chavez, who organized and guided the United Farm Workers. Some members of the churches in the valley towns complained that the Conference had overstepped its boundaries. In response Richard Norberg, the Conference Minister, and Walter Press, the Assistant Conference Minister, wrote letters and spoke publicly about the position of the Conference. In 1966 the Board of Directors issued a position paper explaining once again the theological base for its new programs: “To say God should have a voice in our prayer life and our Scripture reading but not in the way we earn our living or treat other people is to depart from the declaration of the Christian faith that God reigns.” Throughout the 1960s and the next two decades the Church has developed programs that addressed the needs of farm workers.

During this time the Conference was acutely aware, too, of the needs of small growers and participated in programs to help them as well as farm workers; for example, Norberg served on the Committee on Economic Justice in the Agricultural Community, an ad hoc advisory group to the California Church Council. The Committee reviewed the rising number of corporate farmers, mechanization, and the 160 acre limitation on water rights, among other issues. It sponsored seminars, reports, and open discussions. In 1968 when the California Church Council voted to support the grape boycott sponsored by the United Farm Workers committee members agonized over the problems of small growers.

At times the Conference worked so closely with other organizations that it is difficult to examine the activities of the Conference alone. Not only did the staff of the Conference work cooperatively, but they frequently served on the boards of other institutions; for example, Walter Press served as the Chair of the Commission of the California Migrant Ministry, which was active in the Tulare County projects of the Conference. Richard Norberg, in addition to serving on the Committee for Economic Justice, was elected President of the Northern California-Nevada Council of Churches in 1964 and again in 1965. After he completed his terms as president, he maintained close contact with the Council.

Together these organizations and the Northern California Conference worked together to find solutions to the problems of farm workers, growers, and other members of the agricultural communities in the Central Valley. The programs of the Conference at times caused conflict among the other religious organizations as well as among members of the Church. Much of the work of the staff of the Conference was to resolve these conflicts while actively developing programs to serve its constituencies. Above all the Conference sought to serve all members of the communities in Northern California.

The social activism of the staff of the Northern California Conference was not out of step with the views of executives in the national bodies of the United Church of Christ. National staff members such as John Morse, the secretary of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, supported the work of the Conference and regularly sent packets of information about farm workers. The Church’s liberal position on agricultural labor was consistent with other positions taken in the 1960s, such as advocating economic sanctions against organizations that discriminated on the basis of race, national background, or ethnic origin (1963). The Church’s social activism can be traced to the progressive work of Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), Washington Gladden (1836-1918), and William J. Tucker (1839-1926) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Church also participated in the work of Jane Addams (1860-1935) at Hull House in Chicago.

The Northern California Conference is one of thirty-nine UCC conferences in the United States and Puerto Rico. The geographical area of a UCC conference is usually determined by the boundaries of the state; California, however, has two conferences. The territory of the Northern California Conference ranges from Fort Bidwell in northeastern California to Porterville in the Central Valley and includes 120 churches with 360 clergy and seminarians and 27,000 members. A Board
of Directors, consisting of thirty persons serving four-year terms, manages the Conference between annual meetings. In addition, there is a system of committees, commissions, and associations. The staff of the Conference is comprised of four Conference ministers, three secretaries, a part-time bookkeeper, and a part-time clerk. The charges given to the Conference from the UCC and the member churches of the Conference include ministering and placing pastors; offering counseling and consulting services, resources, and outreach efforts to member churches; and working with affiliated organizations, among other duties. The Northern California Conference can trace its roots to the nineteenth century but it has existed in its present form since the merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches in 1957. The merger produced the current United Church of Christ.

Information for this descriptive guide is from records in the collection and the following works:

*Northern California Conference. The United Church of Christ.* San Francisco: Northern California Conference, undated


**Scope and Content**

Minutes, correspondence, resolutions, reports, and newsletters, demonstrating the role of the United Church of Christ, Northern California Conference and affiliated religious organizations in the farm labor movement, California farming communities, and the Conference's strong support for farm workers and small growers, from 1964 to 1986. The collection contains minutes from the California Migrant Ministry (CMM), which co-sponsored programs with the Conference, such as the Tulare County Community Development Project, which focused on economic and political issues. The bulk of the material from the CMM consists of resource materials about farm workers compiled by Chris Hartmire and mailed to the Conference, and reflects the debates about the worker-priest program proposed by the CMM. Resource material from the CMM and the United Board for Homeland Ministries demonstrates the information available to the leaders of the Conference. The files include material such as the statements of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Labor; the resolutions in support of the grape boycott sponsored by the United Farm Workers in 1968; and the records of the Goshen Project, a small community development program.

The records in the collection have been organized by institution to reflect the activities of each group as it worked independently and in association with the Northern California Conference; the records of the Northern California Ecumenical Council contain the correspondence and resolution files from Norberg's presidency as well as minutes and financial records from later years, and the records of the Committee on Economic Justice in the Agricultural Community reflect Norberg's membership on that Committee.

**Series I: Northern California Conference Office, 1965-1976**

**Extent:** 14 folders

**Scope and Content**

The bulk of the collection is in this series, which includes correspondence about the Conference, farm laborers, and small growers as well as letters between the Conference Minister and leaders of affiliated organizations. Also included are the files from the Goshen Project and the Tulare County Community Development Project.

**Board of Directors**

Box 1, Folder 1
- Resolutions, 1966

Box 1, Folder 2
- Correspondence, 1965-1970

Box 1, Folder 3
- Financial Records, 1966

Box 1, Folder 4
- Report, 1965

**Conference Minister**

**Correspondence**

Box 1, Folder 5
- 1965-1967

Box 1, Folder 6
- 1968-1969

Box 1, Folder 7
- 1970-1976

**Assistant Conference Minister**

**Correspondence, 1965-1972**

**Tulare County Community Development Project**

**Administrative Committee**

Box 1, Folder 9
- Minutes, 1965

Box 1, Folder 10
- Recommendations, 1965
### Series I: Northern California Conference Office, 1965-1976

#### Pastor

- Box 1, Folder 11: Field Reports, 1965
- Box 1, Folder 12: Proposals, circa 1965
- Box 1, Folder 13: Newsletter, 1964-1965

#### Commission on Social Concern

- Box 1, Folder 14: Newsletter, 1965

### Series II: United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries, 1965-1985

**Extent:** 5 folders

**Scope and Content**

This series consists of information packets sent from Board for Homeland Ministries to the Conference and publications of the Board.

#### Resource Material

- Box 1, Folder 15: 1965 November-1973 April
- Box 1, Folder 16: 1973 August-1974 July
- Box 1, Folder 17: 1974 June-1976 August
- Box 1, Folder 18: 1976 December-1985 March

#### Publications

### Series III: Affiliated Organizations, 1965-1985

**Extent:** 131 folders

**Scope and Content**

This series is comprised of the records of the California Church Council, the Committee for Economic Justice in the Agricultural Community, National Farm Workers' Ministry, Northern California Ecumenical Council, California Rural Legal Assistance, and the United Farm Workers. Included in these records is information about the selective-buying grapes in 1968. In addition, the information packets from the National Farm Workers' Ministry, known as the California Migrant Ministry before 1972, contain information about the worker-priest program as do the correspondence files.

#### California Church Council

- Box 1, Folder 20: Correspondence, 1968-1972
- Box 1, Folder 21: Proposal, 1966
- Box 1, Folder 22: News Release, 1966

#### Committee for Economic Justice in the Agricultural Community

- Box 1, Folder 23: Minutes, 1966-1968
- Box 1, Folder 24: Correspondence, 1966-1968
- Box 1, Folder 25: Report and Proposals, 1966-1972
- Box 1, Folder 26: EJAC Diary, 1967-1969
- Box 1, Folder 27: Resource Material, 1966-1970

#### National Farm Workers' Ministry

- Box 1, Folder 28: Commission on the California Migrant Ministry
  - Minutes, 1965-1968
  - Executive Committee
  - Minutes, 1965-1966
- Box 1, Folder 29: Ad Hoc Group for the California Migrant Ministry
  - Minutes, 1973
- Box 1, Folder 30: Chairman
  - Report, undated
- Box 1, Folder 31: Director
  - Reports and Proposals, 1965-1969
- Box 1, Folder 32: Resource Material
  - 1966-1968
  - 1969-1972
  - 1973-1985
- Box 1, Folder 33: Newsletter, 1963-1969
- Box 1, Folder 34: 1970-1985

#### Northern California Ecumenical Council
Series III: Affiliated Organizations, 1965-1985

Board of Directors
Box 1, Folder 38  Minutes, 1976
Box 1, Folder 39  Financial Records, 1976
Box 1, Folder 40  Resolutions, 1965
Box 1, Folder 41  Farm Labor Resolution, 1968
President
Box 1, Folder 42  Correspondence, 1965-1966
Commission on the Church and Economic Life
Box 1, Folder 43  Report, 1966
Box 1, Folder 44  Study Papers, 1973
Box 1, Folder 45  Annual Report, 1964, 1968
Box 1, Folder 46  Newsletter, 1961, 1965
California Rural Legal Assistance
Box 1, Folder 47  Activities Summaries, 1967-1971
United Farm Workers
Box 1, Folder 48  Resource Material, 1965-1985
Box 1, Folder 49  Newsletter, 1972
Box 1, Folder 50  Grape Boycott 1984-1985

Series IV: Northern California Conference Information Files, 1964-1986
Extent: 8 folders
Scope and Content
In this series are the articles, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, papers, and reports that the Conference collected about the agricultural communities in California.

Papers and Reports
Box 2, Folder 1  1964
Box 2, Folder 2  1965-1966
Box 2, Folder 3  1964-1985
Box 2, Folder 4  Publications, 1966-1973
Box 2, Folder 5  Newsletters, 1965-1985
Box 2, Folder 6-8  Newspaper Clippings (3 folders)