NELSON (C. ELLIS) PAPERS, 1907-2011

Descriptive Summary

Title: C. Ellis Nelson papers
Dates: 1907-2011
Extent: 15 feet, 10 inches
Language: Materials are written in English.

Biographical Note:
Carl Ellis Nelson (1916-2011) was a leader in Christian education with particular focus on religious education’s role in the socialization and moral education of young people. Nelson was born on March 7, 1916 in Galveston, TX and was raised in nearby Beaumont, TX where his family joined the Westminster Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Reverend T.M. Hunter.

While studying engineering at Texas A&M College, Nelson reconsidered his vocational future and chose to follow his calling to the ministry. He transferred to Austin College in Sherman, TX and graduated in 1937 with an A.B. degree. Nelson received a B.D. from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1940. While a student at APTS, Nelson coordinated the University Presbyterian Church’s youth and student ministry programs. On May 7, 1940 he was ordained by the Central Texas Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. Following his ordination and while teaching religious education at APTS; Nelson simultaneously served as the University Presbyterian Church’s associate minister, the minister to the students at the University of Texas, and the chaplain to the Austin’s State School for the Blind.

In 1944, Nelson was awarded an M.A. in education from the University of Texas. Nelson left Texas in 1945 and took up the post of the director of Youth Work for the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. in Richmond, VA. From 1948-1957 Nelson again served as a professor at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, contributing to the expansion of the religious education curriculum and the development of courses on conscience and moral development. In the summer of 1950, Nelson was named the Director of Research for the Texas Legislative Council’s Study of Higher Education in the State of Texas.
Nelson received a Ph.D. from Columbia University in New York in 1955. From 1957-1974, Nelson filled the position of Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. From 1969-1970 he also served as the dean of the seminary. From 1974 until his retirement in 1981, Nelson served as the President and professor of Christian education at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kentucky. From 1984-1985 he was the interim President of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where he served as Research Professor of Christian Education.

Throughout his career, Nelson served as a consultant in various faculties including: the review of accreditation standards by the Association of Theological Schools (1992-1993), the plan for federation of Union Theological Seminary and the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (1997), and as chair of the General Assembly Committee on Education of Lay Workers of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (1955-1957).


**Scope and Contents:**
190 inches of correspondence, photographs, scrapbooks, printed materials, sermons, awards, minutes, and reports (1907-2011) are arranged in two groups to document Carl Ellis Nelson and Nancy Gribble Nelson’s personal and professional lives.

Sub-group one is arranged in two series that include Carl Ellis Nelson’s personal and professional papers, artifacts and other items.

The personal series 61.5 inches) is arranged into nine sub-series: correspondence, scrapbooks, photographs, clippings, biographies, writing, schoolwork, accolades and thesis. Twenty eight inches of correspondence make up the bulk of this series, beginning when Nelson was a student at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and continuing through his retirement (1938-2005). Included is correspondence with Henry Van Dusen, Edward Grant, and David L. Stitt.
Also of interest are three scrapbooks; the first includes documents from the 1920s and 1930s detailing Nelson’s youth in Beaumont, TX, another documents the 1937 “Youth Convention on World Missions” in Atlanta, GA, and the last documents Nelson’s time as the director of the Department of Youth Work in Richmond, VA. There are two bound publications of Nelson’s thesis titled “A Diagnostic Survey of Certain Attitudes and Values Related to the Development of Day Schools in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.” which was submitted in 1955 for his completion of a Doctorate of Philosophy for Columbia University.

The accolades sub-series includes a variety of honors Nelson received throughout his life, including educational diplomas. There are many artifacts, including plaques, hood and gown graduation regalia, a medal and a chalice, included in this sub-series.

The professional series is arranged in four sub-series: minister, educator, consultant, and organizations and conferences. The first, the minister sub-series, includes 17.5 inches of addresses and sermons (1949-2000), undated prayer cards, and reports and minutes from Texas Synod sessions, Presbytery of Central Texas meetings, and the PCUS General Assemblies. Items of interest include the sermons given for his daughter Martha Karin’s ordination and wedding.

The educator sub-series makes up the bulk of the collection (79.5 inches) and primarily contains articles, books, book reviews and other printed materials from Nelson’s prolific career as a Christian educator and writer (1938-2004) and his presidency of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1973-1976). Documents in this sub-series include correspondence, drafts, advertisements and reviews relating to many of his major publications, including: Growing Up Christian (2008), Don’t Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide (1978), Love and the Law (1963), and Where Faith Begins (1967). This sub-series also includes Nelson’s class and lecture notes spanning from 1958-2004. These notes cover many topics including, faith, Christian education and children’s development. Other items of interest include correspondence regarding Nelson’s acceptance of the position of seminary president and documentation of his inauguration.

The third sub-series, consultant, includes eighteen and a half inches of documentation and is arranged by the eighteen institutions or projects for which Nelson served as a consultant or chair (1948-2005). Notable projects include the evaluation of the Association of Theological School standards, the federation of the Presbyterian School for Christian Education and Union Theological Seminary, and the study of public education in the state of Texas.

The fourth sub-series, organizations and conferences, includes twelve inches of materials related to Christian youth and education organization and conferences Nelson attended (1935-2006). Included are regional conferences, (“Texas Synodical
Young People’s Conference”) and international conferences, (“World Conference of Christian Youth” and the “World Council of Christian Educators.”) These materials include Nelson’s diaries, correspondence, notes and printed materials dating primarily to the 1930s and 1940s and document the search for Christian unity and understanding before and after World War II.

Sub-group two includes Nancy Gribble Nelson’s artifacts and one inch of papers. These materials include her written memories of her childhood at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, photographs, and one of her Bibles. This sub-group also includes a pocket-sized bible in Gaelic which belonged to Dr. James Campbell, an ancestor of Nancy Gribble Nelson’s, who was a Confederate army doctor during the Civil War.

Processing Information:
Processed by Whitney Hughes, Archives Assistant, June 2010.
Updated by Mandy Sutton, Archives Assistant, January 2013.
Additions processed and updated by Nikole Koehlert, Archives Assistant, April 2017.

Restrictions:
Materials are available by appointment only. Contact the archivist for details.

Index Terms:
Nelson, Carl Ellis, 1916-
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.--Education.
Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.
Christian education.
Sermons, American -- Texas.

Preferred Citation: C. Ellis Nelson papers, 1907-2011, Austin Seminary Archives, Stitt Library, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

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