

Worcester, MA. Bethany Congregational Church

Records, 1891-1983

RG 4690

2.5 linear feet

Processed October/November 2004 by Alice Dodds

History

The Bethany Congregational Church was organized on November 13, 1891, with forty-four members. At this time of its initial strong progress, a new church building was completed at a cost of \$10,000, and was dedicated at a service on October 23, 1892. Dr. Albert G. Todd was taken on as the first permanent pastor in 1893.

Through the ensuing decades the church grew and flourished. The membership increased to 381 by 1969. The church's auxiliary groups, including the Sunday School, the City Missionary Society, the Young Peoples Christian Endeavor Society, the Drama League, the Boy Scouts and the Camp Fire Girls were vigorous and active. In 1919 Bethany had the first Daily Vacation Bible School in Worcester. The Larger Parish Plan was adopted in 1935 by the Bethany and Hadwen Park churches and continued for fifteen years,

It became clear to Bethany that the church needed more space. The mortgage for the original 1892 church building had been paid as of June 21, 1911, so Bethany could embark on a new building program. The first part of this program began in 1951 and led to a remodeled vestry and a new parish house, which were dedicated in 1953. With this debt paid off in 1957, Bethany undertook a second addition. The ground breaking was held on June 28, 1958, and the addition was finished and dedicated in May 1959.

During World Wars I and II, Bethany participated fully, supporting the Red Cross, hosting First Aid classes, and sponsoring air raid work. In World War I, the church service flag had thirty-one stars. In World War II, the church flag had 110 blue stars and seven gold stars.

During its lifetime, Bethany Church had eleven permanent pastors and six interim, or short-term, pastors. The Rev. Albert G. Todd and The Rev. Dr. Clement Hahn were the longest tenured, serving from 1893-1914 and 1936-1953 respectively. A memorial service was held at the Bethany for Rev. Dr. Hahn following his death in 1969.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, church membership declined and Bethany merged with a Disciples of Christ congregation and an American Baptist congregation to form the Bethany Christian United Parish. In 2003, Bethany sold its church property. The last recorded pastor was The Rev. Mark W. Gustafson, who began his tenure in 1976. The Rev. Gustafson is not recorded as the church pastor following this merger.

Ministers

Mr. Joseph Walther	Acting Pastor	Sept. 1, 1891-Apr. 15, 1892
The Rev. Dr. Henry E. Barnes		June 12, 1892-Feb. 1893
The Rev. Mr. Albert G. Todd		May 10, 1893-1914
The Rev. Mr. Frederick K. Brown		1915-1918
The Rev. George O. Crosby	Interim Pastor	
The Rev. Mr. Ray Evan Butterfield		1919-1928
The Rev. Mr. Guy E Mossman		1929-1935
The Rev. Dr. Clement F. Hahn		1936-1953
The Rev. Mr. Richard W. Bryant		1953-1956
The Rev. Mr. John Buford Parry	Interim Pastor	
The Rev. Mr. Stephen R. Tucker		1957-1969
The Rev. Dr. Frank E. Duddy	Interim Pastor	
The Rev. Mr. Marvin L. Derby	Interim Pastor	
The Rev. Dr. Edwin A. Brooks		1971-1975
The Rev. Mr. James Pirie		Jan. 1975-Oct. 1975
The Rev. Mr. Levone Fairbanks		Oct. 1975-Feb. 1976
The Rev. Mark W. Gustafson		Mar. 1976 -

Scope and Content

- Series I: Found here are church records spottily spanning the years 1891-1957. The earlier ledgers combine several subjects in each volume: membership, treasurers' reports, church meeting minutes, and standing committee minutes. The ledgers of trustee minutes cover, with many gaps, the years 1894-1957. There is also one ledger each for treasurer's reports and standing committee minutes.
- Series II: Included in these materials are the records of the Bethany Church auxiliary groups, ranging in years from 1891 to 1937. These materials record the activities of the missionary society (which may have functioned under more than one name or been more than one group), the Camp Fire Girls, the Drama League, Sunday School, the Young Peoples Society for Christian Endeavor, and women's groups.
- Series III. Documented in this group of materials are church events, correspondence, history, pastors, programs and publications. These span the years 1891-1985 and cover eight church anniversary celebrations, clippings, letters of appreciation, programs of the Drama League and missionary society events, programs of morning church services and special services, pastors and publications.
- Series IV. The photographs in this series are almost entirely unidentified and undated. They show buildings (interiors and exteriors), events, individuals and groups. A large mounted photograph, a particular treasure, shows an Oyster Supper put on by the Ladies Aid Society in 1912. There is also a glass negative depicting the church as it stood originally.

Series V. This series contains only the oversize scrapbook of clippings from the 1950s, in two large folders.

Folder List

Series One Church and Trustee Records

Box 1

1-3 Church Records 1891-1894, 1902-1909, 1909-1919

Box 2

1-3 Church Records 1919-1927, 1927-1934, 1969-1974

4 Financial Records 1964, 1981

5 Larger Parish Council Minutes 1935-1950

Box 3

1 Standing Committee Minutes 1946-1957

2 Treasurer's Reports 1901-1923

3 Trustee Minutes 1894-1901

Box 4

1 Trustee Minutes 1934-1941, 1946-1953

Series Two Auxiliary Group Records

Box 5

1 Auxiliary of the Howe Missionary Society minutes 1904-1910

2 Campfire Girls, Annual Reports 1920, 1933

3 Drama League minutes 1930-1939

4-5 Ladies Aid Association minutes 1894-1896, 1904-1916

6 Ladies Aid Association Treasurer's Reports 1905-1916

Box 6

1 Sunday School Records ledgers and record books 1891, 1896, 1898-1905, 1900

2 Sunday School Annual and Financial Reports 1890s, 1902, 1906, 1907

Box 7

1 Women's Association minutes 1941-1945, 1946-1952

2 Women's Group (unnamed) minutes 1911-1914

Box 8

1 Young Peoples Society for Christian Endeavor (YPSCE) Constitution and By-Laws undated

2 YPSCE minutes, ledgers 1894-1904, 1904-1919

3 YPSCE Annual Reports 1898, 1910s-1920s, gaps

Series Three Events, Correspondence, History, Pastors, Programs, Publications

Box 9

1	Anniversary Celebrations	1891, 1906, 1911, 1916, 1921
2	Anniversary 45 th	1936
3	Anniversary 50 th	1941
4	Anniversary 75 th	1966
5	Clippings	1981-1982 and undated
6	Correspondence, Letters of Appreciation to Bethany	1901,1911
7	Drama Group Programs	1931-1957 and undated
8	History and Letters	1966, 1970, undated
9	History and Profile	1892-1969
10	Missionary Society Programs and Events	1907, 1909
11	Mortgage Deed	February 4, 1892
12	Organ Blueprint	undated
13	Pastors	1892-1983 and undated
14	Programs for Morning Services	1983 and undated
15	Programs for Special Services	1892, 1936, 1959, 1970, 1985
16	Publications	1961-1983

Series Four Photographs

Box 9

1	Buildings, Exteriors and Interiors	
2	Events	
3	Glass Negative of Church	
4	Groups	
5	Individuals	
6	Bethany Ladies Aid Society	
7	Oyster Supper	1912
8	Pastors, eleven individuals identified	1891-1976

Series Five

1	Oversize Scrapbook of Clippings,	1950s
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