

**ROBERT H. MENEILLY, Sr. PAPERS (2017.2.16)**  
**Date Span: 1947-1994**

Dr. Robert Meneilly was the founding pastor of the Village Church in Prairie Village, KS, retiring in 1994 after 47 years of service. He delivered sermons that were rather progressive for the times, speaking on topics such as race relations, sexuality, religion, and war. This small archival collection has six series consisting of a correspondence related to the early years of Village Presbyterian, newspaper editorial, "The Dangers of Religion," church and ministry related correspondence, and newspaper clippings.

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Source:** Robert Meneilly, Sr.

**Size:** less than one linear foot

**Access:** Open

**Processed by:** Jessica Smith-Doyle

**Supervising Archivists:** Anne Jones

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

- 1925 Born in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania (March 5)
- 1947 Ordained to the Christian Ministry by the Presbyterian Church USA
- 1947 Graduated from Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, earning a Masters of Divinity
- 1947 Married Shirley Ann Dunlap (June 21)
- 1949 Founded the Village Church in Prairie Village<sup>1</sup>
- 1961 Traveled to the Philippines and India for a project of a National Mission Board
- 1964 Phyllis Matchette became the first female elder at Village Church
- 1965 Delivered the controversial sermon, "I Trouble – Segregating God" (Feb 14)<sup>2</sup>
- 1966 Spoke out against anti-Semitic prejudice as part of a fair housing campaign<sup>3</sup>  
Served as president of the Council of Churches of Greater Kansas City<sup>4</sup>  
Acknowledged receipt of many letters criticizing his activism<sup>5</sup>
- 1969 Elected president of Johnson County Health, Welfare and Recreation Council<sup>6</sup>
- 1972 Attended the Paris Peace Talks regarding the Vietnam War<sup>7</sup>
- 1973 Named "Citizen of the Year" by United Community Services of Johnson County<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Lynn. "Always practicing what he preaches." *The Best Times*, March 2005, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Meneilly Asks Equal Housing: Integration of Northeast Johnson County Urged by Minister" *Kansas City Times* February 15, 1965

<sup>3</sup> "Say Christians Ask for Forgiveness for Prejudice" *Kansas City Times* February 26, 1966

<sup>4</sup> "Criticizes Lack of Duty to the Poor" *Kansas City Times* March 21, 1966

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Dr. Meneilly to Head County Planning Council" *Johnson County Herald* December 10, 1969

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Katz, Judy. "Meneilly named 'Man of the Year'." *The Johnson County Sun*, April 17, 1974.

- 1984 Named a Distinguished Pastor in Residence at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary<sup>9</sup>
- 1987 Named Johnson County Citizen of the Year<sup>10</sup>
- 1993 Helped found the Mainstream Coalition
- 1993 Delivered the highly controversial sermon, “The Dangers of Religion” (Aug 15)
- 1993 Sermon, “The Dangers of Religion” published in the Sunday Op section of the New York Times (Aug 29)<sup>11</sup>
- 1994 Named “Kansas City Hero” by Ingram’s Magazine
- 1994 Announced retirement (Aug. 22)<sup>12</sup> Last sermon as pastor of Village Church given (Dec 4)<sup>13</sup>
- 1995 Awarded the Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Award
- 1995 Awarded the Kansas City Spirit Award
- 1996 Awarded the Eddie Jacobson Award by Kansas City B’nai B’rith Lodge 184
- 1999 Named the World Citizen of the Year by the Kansas City United Nations
- 2001 Awarded the Stand Up and Speak Out Award by Mainstream Coalition
- 2003 Awarded the William Yates Medallion by William Jewell College

### **Collection Description**

#### **SERIES DESCRIPTION**

Box No.

- 1        CORRESPONDENCE, 1993-1994  
Correspondence in the form of response letters relating to a sermon “The Dangers of Religion” delivered Aug. 15, 1993.

CORRESPONDENCE, NO DATE

Letter commending Dr. Meneilly on his attitude towards Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Hate mail for Dr. Meneilly’s support of Angela Davis, university professor charged with being a party to kidnapping and murder in California in the early 1970’s. The United Presbyterian Church helped to pay for her legal defense.

CORRESPONDENCE, 1947-1953, 1955

Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly regarding building new church, civic engagement, ministries, and content of sermons.

NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, 1993

Newspaper articles on Dr. Meneilly.

CORRESPONDENCE, 1992-1994

---

<sup>9</sup> He is also an emeritus director, having served actively on the board from 1981-1990; [http://www.pts.edu/faculty\\_chair\\_histories/](http://www.pts.edu/faculty_chair_histories/)

<sup>10</sup> “Bob Meneilly” *The Squire* March 1989

<sup>11</sup> “MainStreet event honors 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of historic Rev. Meneilly sermon” *Prairie Village Post* October 1, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Bessier, Elaine. “A Vision for the Future” *The Sun* September 16, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Worgul, Doug. “Good Cheer.” *Kansas City Magazine*, December 1994, page 6.

Letters, Pamphlets, etc. on Dr. Meneilly's social and political views, literature on groups opposing the Christian Right.

## **FOLDER INVENTORY**

### Series 1:

#### CORRESPONDENCE, 1947-1955

Folder 1: Meneilly Correspondence, Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly regarding building of new church, 1947

Folder 2: Meneilly Correspondence, Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly regarding building of new church, and developing ministries, birth of first child, and hospitalization, 1948

Folder 3: Meneilly Correspondence, Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly from Evert L. Haney, Richard Johnson, regarding visiting seminaries, Brotherhood Programs, letters offering congratulations on the new church, and to other pastors, 1949

Folder 4: Meneilly Correspondence, "Report of the state of the Church" May 14-June 11. Letter sent to Dr. Meneilly from Mrs. Jack Bjorseth, 1950

Folder 5: Meneilly Correspondence, Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly, regarding work in suburbs and speaking at Monmouth College, his alma mater, 1951

Folder 6: Meneilly Correspondence, Letter sent to Dr. Meneilly, regarding Religious Emphasis Week from Virginia Hughlett, 1952

Folder 7: Meneilly Correspondence, Letters sent to Dr. Meneilly congratulating him on appearing in Kansas City Star and United Presbyterian Magazine as a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, 1953

Folder 8: Meneilly Correspondence, Notice of Jury Duty for Dr. Meneilly, Letters of appreciation for sermons on depression and alcoholism, 1955

### Series 2:

#### CORRESPONDENCE, no date

Folder 1: Hate Mail; Letter against Dr. Meneilly's support of Angela Davis, no date.

### Series 3:

#### CORRESPONDENCE, RELIGIOUS RIGHT SERMON, 1993-1994

Letters responding to "The Dangers of Religion" sermon critical of the Christian Right, sometimes called the Religious Right, August 15, 1993.

Folder 1: Sermon, Aug. 15, 1993, New York Times Article, Aug. 29, 1993; Response letters, no date

Folder 2: Response letters, Aug. 16-Aug. 31, 1993

Folder 3: Response letters, Sept. 1-9, 1993

Folder 4: Response letters, Sept. 10-31, 1993

Folder 5: Response letters, Nov. 1993-Jan. 1994

Folder 6: Response letters, Feb. 1994-Mar. 1994

### Series 4:

#### CORRESPONDENCE, no date

Folder 1: Letters to Dr.Meneilly regarding donations, passing of loved ones, invitation to commission meeting, Christmas card from Meneilly family, end of church year report, no date

Series 5

NEWSPAPER

Folder 1: Newspaper Articles on Dr. Meneilly, 1993

Series 6

CORRESPONDENCE, 1992-1993

Folder 1: Letters and Pamphlets regarding The Interfaith Alliance, a group opposed to the Christian Right. One of the letters is from Walter Cronkite, 1993

Folder 2: Responses sent to Dr. Meneilly on his social and political views, 1992-1994