



Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) Records

1956-1976

22 boxes (11.5 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS20

Collection overview

An oecumenical ministry based in Amherst, Massachusetts, that sought to inspire local citizens to act upon their religious faith in their daily lives and occupations, and to reinvigorate religious dialogue between denominations. Includes by-laws, minutes, membership records, news clippings, press releases, treasurer's reports, letters to and from David S. King, correspondence between religious leaders and local administrators, and printed materials documenting programs and organizations in which the Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) participated or initiated, especially Faith and Life Meetings. Also contains questionnaires, announcements, bulletins, and photographs.

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[Massachusetts \(West\)](#)[Social change](#)[Social justice](#)[Spiritual change](#)

Background on Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) (Amherst, Mass.)

In 1961, the Reverend David S. King, then Chaplain of Amherst College and later Associate Minister of the First Congregational Church in Amherst, founded the Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.). King proposed that a "new oecumenical ministry" be begun in Western Massachusetts, based in Amherst, that would appeal to local citizens and draw from local religious leadership. Its mission was to inspire people to act upon their religious faith in their daily lives and occupations, and develop programs aimed at reinvigorating religious dialogue and cooperation between denominations. Based on King's belief that "laymen are the missionaries of the future", members were encouraged and trained to lead many L.A.O.S. efforts, particularly "Faith and Life" meetings.

L.A.O.S. was governed by a board of directors, which met monthly in different regional locales. An executive committee met weekly. Annual meetings were held to which all members were invited. In its beginnings, more than 60 laymen and ordained ministers representing 6 denominations (Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, and United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, and Society of Friends) and 24 western Massachusetts towns and cities, comprised its membership. In the 1960s, faculty from universities and colleges in the region were active in L.A.O.S. administration.

An independent charitable corporation, L.A.O.S. sought money from state and national denominational bodies,

individuals and private foundations, rather than from parish churches and councils, to carry out its activities. They were active within the Massachusetts Council of Churches and campus ministry at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In 1967 and 1968, L.A.O.S. was involved in the development of the Amherst United Ministry, a group of clergy and laity representing seven denominational churches in Amherst that held interfaith worship services in an attempt to bring the people of the different faiths closer together.

L.A.O.S. also held meetings for local lawyers, school teachers and various other professions exploring their relationship between the careers and their faith. In 1964, L.A.O.S. received an award from the Adult Education Association of Massachusetts for "breaking new ground in adult education". In that year Associate Director Paul Sanders, a Methodist minister and professor at The University of Massachusetts, established four lay schools of theology in Amherst, Holyoke, Orange, and Westfield. A continuing education program for clergy in western Massachusetts was also formed.

In weekly "Faith and Life Meetings" held in churches and conference centers in Western Massachusetts, L.A.O.S. members tackled issues of religious and social relevance to individuals and families in the local community, such as the role of women in the church, the role of religion on a college campus, civil rights (The March on Boston), ending the Vietnam War (Negotiation Now!), mixed denomination marriages, drug addiction, and civil disorder.

In 1969, David King resigned as Executive Director. Two years later, under the direction of President Mrs. Charles E. Morgan, it was decided that the mission of L.A.O.S. had been fulfilled and that it was time to either disband the organization or find a new mission. Reverend Richard E. Koenig of the Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Amherst) proposed that L.A.O.S. open and sponsor a bookstore in the five college area that would provide theological literature to area religious communities and the general public. Staffed by volunteers, it was felt that the bookstore should have the atmosphere of a library or community center, rather than a retail space, where browsing and spontaneous religious conversation would be encouraged. The L.A.O.S. bookstore opened in 1972 in the Parish House of Grace Episcopal Church in Amherst town center.

Scope of collection

The Laymen's Academy of Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) records document the activities, programming and administration of the organization from its founding in 1961 through a period of dynamic growth in the mid and late 1960s, to its change in mission and scope, and eventual decline in activity in the early 1970s. Records are organized into six series: Administration (1960-1976); Financial (1961-1974); Correspondence (1961-1970); Programs (1956-1971); Subject files (1963-1968) and Photographs (1965, N.D.).

Administration records include by-laws, Board of Directors' minutes, personnel committee minutes, annual meeting minutes, membership records, news clippings and press releases. Financial records consist of treasurer's reports, budgets, check registries, and ledgers. Correspondence consists primarily of letters by David King to and from members of L.A.O.S. expressing acknowledgement and thanks for work done. Program records make up the bulk of the collection and contain correspondence (primarily between religious leaders,

local administrators and David King or, occasionally, Paul Sanders), handwritten notes, and printed materials that document programs and organizations initiated by L.A.O.S. or in which L.A.O.S. participated. Issues of political interest to the membership and their affiliated churches, and to faith workers nationally, throughout the 1960s are evident in these materials and include McCarthyism, racial unity, school desegregation, pacifism and anti-war activism.

Faith and Life Meeting records are a subseries within the Programs series that contain resource materials and questionnaires used to solicit potential meeting topics from members. Subject files contain announcements, letters, news clippings, bulletins and other reference materials pertaining to current events and issues such as role of women in the church, war relief in Vietnam, civil rights and desegregation (March on Boston, led by Martin Luther King in 1965), and regional ministries. Photographs include few snapshots of L.A.O.S.'s 1965 meeting and several prints and negatives of children (1970s) engaged in what is presumed to be a L.A.O.S.-sponsored program.

Arrangement

This collection is organized into six series:

- **Series 1. Administration, 1960-1976**
- **Series 2. Financial, 1961-1974**
- **Series 3. Correspondence, 1961-1970**
- **Series 4. Programs, 1956-1971**
- **Series 5. Subject Files, 1963-1968**
- **Series 6. Photographs, 1965**

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Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Processing Information

Processed by Jason Burns, Tim Letteney, and Melissa Watterworth, October 2001.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

Encoding funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Cite as: Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) Records (MS 20). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Christian union--Massachusetts--History--Sources
- Interdenominational cooperation--Massachusetts--History--Sources
- King, David S., 1927-
- King, David S., 1927-
- Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (Amherst, Mass.)--Archives

Contributors

- Laymen's Academy for Oecumenical Studies (L.A.O.S.) (Amherst, Mass.)**[main entry]**

Genres and formats

- Photographs

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