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Alison Cheek papers15265772

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on February 26, 2025.
Description is written in: English.

Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary

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New York, NY 10027

Telephone: (212) 851-5606

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URL: <https://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke.html>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary
Creator:	Cheek, Alison M.
Title:	Alison Cheek papers
ID:	15265772
Date [inclusive]:	circa 1927-- 2019
Physical Description:	11.25 linear feet 10 record cartons, 1 document box, 1 oversized box
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	This collection contains professional and personal materials of Reverend Alison Cheek (1927 - 2019), an Australian-born American religious leader. One of the first women ordained into the Episcopal priesthood on July 29, 1974 beside ten other women, Cheek and her collaborators became known as The Philadelphia Eleven. Materials contained in this collection detail women's roles in the priesthood during Cheek's lifetime and document Cheek's involvement in feminist and liberation theology.

Preferred Citation

Item description, AWTS: Alison Cheek papers, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Biographical / Historical

Alison Cheek (born Alison Mary Western) was a feminist theologian, priest, and professor at Episcopal Divinity School. Born in Adelaide, Australia in 1927, Cheek completed her undergraduate degree in Australia before enrolling in Virginia Theological Seminary as one of the first two women admitted into the Masters of Divinity program in 1963. Cheek then sought ordination into the priesthood when she reported receiving instructions from God telling her, "I want you to be my priest." Subsequently, Cheek was one of the first 11 women to be ordained into the Episocapal priesthood in 1974 beside a group of women who came to be known as

the Philadelphia Eleven. Cheek's dedication to feminist theology presided over her religious service and academic scholarship, as she designed Feminist Liberation Theology courses with foundational roots in Black Liberation Theology. Cheek spent her lifetime as an educator and religious mentor, both within academia, and through external learning centers she co-designed, including The Well Woman Project and Greenfire.

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Scope and Contents

Correspondence and personal documents contain letters (including between Carter Heyward and Gale Yee), diaries, photos, awards and honorifics, degrees (including D.Min and M.Div), paintings, birthday invitations, and other memoirs and reminiscences. Writing materials including sermons, addresses, essays, reflections, collaborative statements, student materials, and; teaching materials from Cheek's tenure at Episocopal Divinity School (such as syllabi on Feminist Liberation Theology courses Cheek designed, hermeneutical models; and course evaluations). Newspaper clippings and publications on Cheek's ordination span across several decades. Materials from Cheek's religious outreach include planning records, sermons, and newsletters from Greenfire and the Well Woman Project. Audio visual materials include audiotapes and VHS recordings of Cheek's sermons and interviews.

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 6 series: 1. Correspondences; 2. Ordination; 3. Writings; 4. Projects and Organizations; 5. Personal Documents; 6. Audio Visual Materials. Ordination materials from Cheek's ordination into the Episcopal diaconate in 1972 and priesthood in 1974 are arranged as follows. Sermons, public statements, releases, and publications are arranged in Series 2: Ordination. Correspondences pertaining to the ordination are arranged in Series 1: Correspondences, including correspondences specifically from institutions during the period surrounding Cheek's ordination. Religious and spiritual projects in which Cheek provided direction and leadership, including The Well Woman Project and Greenfire are arranged in Series 4: Projects and Organizations.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

Finding aid updated by Catherine C. Ricciardi. Finding aid updated by Leah Edelman.

2024-08-21 2025-02-26

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Onsite storage.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

15 record cartons were donated in 2013 by Alison Cheek, 1 envelope was donated by Reverend Monica Styron in 2015, and 1 oversized box was donated by Reverend Carter Hayward in 2022.

Processing Information

Approximately 2 record cartons of newspapers that are in circulation and have already been digitized were removed from the collection. Original folders and titles were kept when possible; nearly all materials were re-housed in acid-free folders, and all folders were placed into acid-free boxes. Sensitive materials, including financial and legal records, were weeded from the collection. The finding aid, including box and folder-level inventories and series-level descriptions, was created by Lennox Németh in 2024 with the supervisory support of Leah Edelman and Matthew Baker.

Conditions Governing Use

Some material in this collection may be protected by copyright and other rights. Information concerning copyright, fair use, and reproduction requests can be consulted at Columbia's Copyright Advisory Office.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Women theologians
- Theologians
- Cheek, Alison M. -- : Archives

Burke Library record group

Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship (AWTS)

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Collection Inventory

Series 1: Correspondence, 1964 -- 2016

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically.

Scope and Contents

This series contains handwritten personal letters and cards, as well as printed email correspondences, including exchanges between Gale Yee, Carter Heyward, Reverend Thomas Shaw, and Bishop Wendt. Topics of correspondence between institutions and organizations (churches, universities, hospitals, publishing houses) and affiliates include Cheek's ordination into the Episcopal diaconate (1972) and priesthood (1974).

Title/Description	Instances	
Correspondence; Institutions, Affiliates, circa 1964 -- 2012	box 1	folder 1
Correspondence; Institutions, Affiliates, circa 1969 -- 2012	box 1	folder 2
Correspondence; Institutions, Affiliates, circa 1969 -- 2012	box 1	folder 3

Correspondence; Personal, 1972	box 1	folder 4
Correspondence; Institutions; Affiliates, 1972	box 1	folder 5
Correspondence; Episcopal Divinity School, circa 1972 -- 2006	box 1	folder 6-7
Correspondence; Personal, 1974	box 1	folder 8-10
Correspondence; Institutions; Affiliates, 1974	box 1	folder 11-14
Correspondence; Regarding Lectures, Workshops, circa 1974 -- 1977	box 1	folder 15
Correspondence; Personal, 1975	box 1	folder 16
Correspondence; Institutions; Affiliates, 1975	box 1	folder 17-18
Correspondence; Personal, 1976	box 1	folder 19
Correspondence; Institutions; Affiliates, 1976	box 1	folder 20
Correspondence; Personal, 1977	box 2	folder 1-3
Correspondence; Institutions; Affiliates, 1977	box 2	folder 4
Correspondence; A.C. Letters to Parents, 1977	box 2	folder 5
Correspondence, circa 1978 -- 1989	box 2	folder 6
Correspondence, circa 1992 -- 1999	box 2	folder 7
Correspondences; Date Unknown, circa 1993 -- 2016	box 2	folder 8
Correspondence; Email, 1997	box 2	folder 9
Correspondence; Email, circa 1997 -- 2016	box 2	folder 10-19
Correspondence; Email, 1998	box 2	folder 20-22
Correspondence; Email, 1999	box 2	folder 23-24
Correspondence; Email, 2000	box 2	folder 25
Correspondence; Gale Yee, 2000	box 2	folder 26
Correspondence; Carter Heyward, 2000 -- 2003	box 2	folder 27
Correspondence; Email, 2001 -- 2004	box 3	folder 1-5
Correspondence; Rev. Thomas Shaw, circa 2004	box 3	folder 6
2005 - 2011, 2005 -- 2011	box 3	folder 7-8
Misc. correspondence, letters, postcards, circa 1964 -- 2016	box 12	

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Series 2: Ordination, 1972 -- 2019

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically.

Scope and Contents

This series contains religious bulletins and programs; press releases; statements; publications pertaining to Cheek's ordination into the Episcopal diaconate (1972) and priesthood (1974); and the Appellate's Tribunal Decision regarding women's ordination into Diaconate (1987).

Title/Description	Instances	
Ordination to Diaconate, 1972	box 3	folder 9
Programs, Releases, Responses, circa 1972 -- 1978	box 3	folder 10-13
Ordination to Priesthood, 1974	box 3	folder 14
Bishop Wendt; Trial, Statement, circa 1974 -- 2006	box 3	folder 15
Publications; Newspaper Clippings, 1974	box 3	folder 16-17
Newsletters; Commit, Bread, circa 1974 -- 1976	box 3	folder 18
Movement for the Ordination of Women (M.O.W.), circa 1974 -- 1986	box 3	folder 19
Publications; Newspaper Clippings, 1975	box 3	folder 20
Publications; Newspaper Clippings, 1976	box 3	folder 21
Publications; Newspaper Clippings, circa 1977 -- 1989	box 3	folder 22
Appellate's Tribunal Decision; Women's Ordination into Diaconate; 1987, 1987	box 3	folder 23
Publications; Newspaper Clippings; 25th Anniversary, circa 1990 -- 2019	box 3	folder 24-25

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Series 3: Writings, 1963 -- 2006Conditions Governing Access:**Conditions Governing Access**

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically by project: Sermons; Reflections, Addresses, Other Writings; Course Files; EDS Teaching Files.

Scope and Contents

This series contains sermons (handwritten and church bulletins); addresses and speeches; Cheek's work as a student at Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) including: course notes and files; Hebrew and Greek language practice; thesis drafts and final (1988 - 1990). EDS materials include: Cheek's teaching materials; course evaluations; EDS newsletters; faculty anti-racism initiatives; reports.

Title/Description	Instances	
Sermons; A.C., 1963 -- 1970	box 4	folder 1
Sermons; A.C., circa 1963 -- 2006	box 4	folder 2-14
Sermons; Bulletins, Services, circa 1963 -- 2006	box 4	folder 15
Sermons; Marriage, Certificates, circa 1963 -- 2006	box 4	folder 16-17
Sermons; Unidentified; Other, circa 1967 -- 1989	box 4	folder 18-22
Sermons; A.C., 1972	box 4	folder 23
Sermons; A.C., 1974	box 4	folder 24-25
Sermons; A.C., 1975 -- 1976	box 4	folder 26
Sermons; A.C., 1977 -- 1979	box 4	folder 27
Sermons; A.C., 1980 -- 1981	box 5	folder 1
Sermons; A.C., 1982 -- 1983	box 5	folder 2
Sermons; St. John's Memorial Chapel, circa 1982 -- 1994	box 5	folder 3-5
Sermons; A.C., 1984	box 5	folder 6
Sermons; A.C., 1985	box 5	folder 7-9
Sermons; A.C., 1986	box 5	folder 10
Sermons; A.C., 1988	box 5	folder 11
Sermons; A.C., 1989	box 5	folder 12-15
Sermons; A.C., 1990 -- 1999	box 5	folder 16-17
Sermons; A.C., 2000 -- 2006	box 5	folder 18
Publications by A.C., circa 1972 -- 2006	box 6	folder 1
Reflections, Addresses, Other Writings, circa 1972 -- 2006	box 6	folder 2-5
Symposiums, Addresses, 1975 -- 1979	box 6	folder 6-7
Reflections, Addresses, Other Writings, 1985 -- 1997	box 6	folder 8-9
Course Files, circa 1965 -- 1989	box 6	folder 10-21
Course Files, circa 1965 -- 1989	box 7	folder 1-6
Thesis; Draft Notes, 1988	box 7	folder 7

Thesis Draft; Introduction; First, Second, Third Chapters, circa 1988 -- 1989	box 7	folder 8
Thesis Draft; Sixth Chapter, Evaluation, circa 1988 -- 1989	box 7	folder 9
Thesis; Annotated, circa 1988 -- 1989	box 7	folder 10
Thesis; Final, 1990	box 7	folder 11
EDS; Addresses, 1991 -- 1993	box 7	folder 12
EDS; Course Evaluations, 1991 -- 1995	box 7	folder 13
EDS; Teaching Materials; NT/ PT 205, 1991 -- 1994	box 7	folder 14-16
EDS; Feminist Liberation Theology, 1991 -- 1994	box 7	folder 17-20
EDS; Newsletters; Anti-Racist Initiative, circa 1991 -- 1996	box 7	folder 21
EDS; Teaching Materials; NT/ PT 205, circa 1995 -- 1996	box 7	folder 22
EDS; Teaching Materials, circa 1996 -- 1997	box 7	folder 23

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Series 4: Projects and Organizations, 1974 -- 2007

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically by project: conferences, reports, proposals; the Well Woman Project; Greenfire.

Scope and Contents

This series contains joint projects between Cheek and affiliates including: conferences, reports, proposals; the Well Woman Project; Greenfire. The Well Woman project contains: planning and financial documents; board letters; sermons. The Greenfire project contains: planning and financial documents; board letters; Greenfire newsletters; Greenfire logos and brochures; publications about the project.

Title/Description	Instances	
Projects; Conferences, circa 1974 -- 1994	box 8	folder 1-4
Projects; Reports, Proposals, circa 1980 - 1993	box 8	folder 5-7
Projects; Well Women; Planning, Financial Documents, circa 1979 -- 1982	box 8	folder 8-9
Projects; Well Women; Documents, circa 1979 -- 1982	box 8	folder 10-12
Projects; Well Women; Sermons, circa 1979 -- 1982	box 8	folder 13-14
Projects; Greenfire; Planning, Financial Documents, circa 1994 -- 2004	box 8	folder 16-16

Projects; Greenfire; Logo, Brochures, Publications, circa 1994 -- 2007	box 8	folder 17-18
Projects; Greenfire; Newsletters, 1994 -- 2000	box 8	folder 19
Projects; Greenfire; Newsletters, 2001 -- 2007	box 8	folder 20
Projects; Greenfire; A.C. Materials, circa 2006 -- 2007	box 8	folder 21-22

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Series 5: Personal Documents, circa 1927 -- 2019

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged by format.

Scope and Contents

This series contains personal records and documents including: images; memorabilia; journals; photography and film negatives; childhood records; university records; and various ephemera. Included in this series are: Cheek's baptism record (1928); Cheek's certification as a godmother; diplomas (including: D. Min and M. Div); diaries and journals; handmade books; watercolor paintings; birthday invitations; and a celebration of life invitation.

Title/Description	Instances	
Images, Memorabilia, Journals, circa 1927 -- 2019	box 9	folder 1-3
Photographs, Film Negatives, circa 1927 -- 2019	box 9	folder 4-6
Childhood; University Records; Applications, circa 1937 -- 1976	box 9	folder 7-8
Degrees, Awards, Honors, Remembrances, circa 1965 -- 2019	box 9	folder 9-10
Degrees, Awards, Honors, Remembrances, circa 1965 -- 2019	box 10	

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Series 6: Audio Visual, circa 1976 -- 1996

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged by format.

Scope and Contents

This series contains audio visual materials including: audiocassettes of Cheek's sermons and interviews of her; VHS recordings of Episcopal women's conferences; and a DVD entitled "The Ordination of Women: Benevolent Subversion."

Title/Description	Instances
Audiocassettes; Interviews, circa 1976 -- 1987	box 11
Audiocassettes; Sermons, circa 1976 -- 1996	box 11
VHS; Episcopal Church Women, circa 1976 -- 1996	box 11

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