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## MILDRED MOODY EAKIN: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

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Photograph courtesy of the Drew University Archives.

A Pamphlet by Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge and Dr. Janet Stafford

March 26, 2007

# MILDRED MOODY EAKIN

## *Who Was She?*

Mildred Moody Eakin taught religious education at Drew University (Madison, N.J.) from 1932-1955. She was the first full-time female faculty member at the Drew Theological School, preceding Nelle Morton, who arrived in 1955.

Eakin was a pioneer in the field of multi-culturalism and the ministry of reconciliation at a time when anti-Semitism and racism were peaking. She authored such curriculum materials as *Getting Acquainted with Jewish Neighbors* and the *Junior Teacher's Guide on Negro Americans*. With her husband, Frank Eakin, she co-authored the book, *The Sunday School Fights Prejudice*. The Eakins' study concluded that the Christian Sunday school could be a primary agent in the fight against racism and anti-Semitism.

In addition, Mildred Moody Eakin served on a committee that studied the presence of racial and interfaith references in Protestant Sunday school curriculum. Sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the first study began in 1933. It is significant to note that this was a year before Hitler rose to power in

Germany. A second study was completed shortly after World War II. Several other curriculum studies followed in the late 1940s and 1950s.

At the center of Eakin's work are the questions: "Who is my neighbor?" and "What does it mean to be a neighbor?" With these as her focus, she struggled to move theology out of abstraction and into practice – that is, into the community – through the use of drama, study, and practical activities designed to foster communication and understanding among people.

Now, fifty years later, the issues to which she was so dedicated are still with us. The current rise in anti-Semitism and racism, as well as the events of and response to 9/11 make this observation all too painful. Mildred Moody Eakin and her models of pedagogy are still challenging us to help positively reconfigure the American landscape.

## *Biography*

### VITAL INFORMATION

Born – March 28, 1890 in Wilson, NY

Married Dr. Frank Eakin, Ph.D., on March 28, 1931

Died – October 23, 1986

### EDUCATION

1910 – AB, Syracuse University

1930-1931 – University of Chicago

1934 – M.A., New York University

### EXPERIENCE

1910-1916 – school teacher in Wilson, NY

1916-1919 – Assistant National Secretary of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, oversaw the Loyal Temperance Legion for children and youth

1919-1921 –Regional Staff of Board of Education of the MEC (Kansas City) [Kansas City Divisional Office], responsible for children's work in 7 states

1921-1932 – Director of Elementary Education, Department of Children's Work of the Sunday School Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Chicago)

1932-1937 –Director of Religious Education at Wyoming Presbyterian Church in Millburn, NJ

1937-1941 – Director of Religious Education at Hillside Presbyterian Church in Orange, NJ

1932-1935 – Teaching fellow, Drew University

1935-1948 – Instructor, Drew University

1948-1954 –Assistant Professor of Religious Education at Drew University