

Ruth Ward Heflin, Revivalist and Prayer Minister, Dies of Cancer at 60

Known for her revival meetings marked by gold dust, Heflin underwent surgery April 25 but refused further treatment

Ruth Ward Heflin, considered by many to be a matriarch of Pentecostal faith, died at age 60 on Sept. 15, just a few months after she discovered she had cancer.

During her nearly 40 years of ministry, Heflin's burden for Israel and for evangelism and discipleship took her around the world. Heflin also was the founder and director of Mount Zion Fellowship, an international prayer ministry in Jerusalem, where she lived for more than 25 years before returning to the United States.

Her brother Wallace Heflin Jr.'s death in 1997 prompted her return to the states to assume his job as director of Calvary Pentecostal Tabernacle (CPT), a church and campground in Ashland, Va., some 25 miles north of Richmond.

The camp, founded by parents Wallace Heflin Sr. and Edith Heflin in the 1950s, continues to draw thousands of people to church services and conferences. Jane Lowder, who has served in Heflin's ministry for 25 years, has been named the new director at CPT.

Heflin suffered a broken ankle in an automobile accident last year. In April doctors diagnosed her with breast cancer that already had spread into her bones. Heflin underwent a mastectomy on April 25, but refused chemotherapy or further

cancer treatment because she said the Lord told her to refuse, according to Connie Wilson, her personal assistant.

Rumors that Heflin's beliefs influenced her decision not to seek treatment, and rumors that she refused treatment under pressure from critics within her ministry who allegedly oppose medical treatment, are completely unfounded, Lowder said.

"If she received criticism for her treatment, I have never heard it," Lowder said. "We were all standing in faith, believing for her healing, but we were all happy that she went to the doctor. I have never heard Sister Ruth discourage anyone from going to the doctor."

A descendant of 18th-century revivalist Jonathan Edwards, Heflin recently has been a central figure in the so-called gold dust revival. People who attended her camp meetings said they saw gold dust appear on their faces and hands, and some reported that God put gold fillings in their teeth. Some said they even saw diamonds, rubies or feathers appear.

Although she had expressed wishes that people not be informed about her cancer, many of her supporters had heard the news and were praying for her healing. Last July—just a little more than two months after her mastectomy—Heflin preached at the opening service of the annual camp meeting.

"I wanted to preach on opening night to give the old devil a black eye," she said.

The following day as she sat in a chair next to a hospital bed that had been set up in the den of her home, her face glowed

with peace as she quietly talked about God's glory.

"In the realm of glory, with miracles of healing or other signs and wonders, God is giving us an edge so that we don't have to convince people—the signs and wonders are convincing them. And they are turning to the Lord," she said.

She went on to explain how the odd manifestation of gold dust began to occur during her meetings after Brazilian evangelist Silvania Machado ministered at the camp in 1998.

Heflin said these unusual signs are indications of God's presence—and of a coming revival. "People in the body of Christ will be on fire, and of course, will want to be used," she said.

During the next few months she continued to preach from a wheelchair at the camp on Sunday mornings, and attendees began to report that they saw new kinds of manifestations including gemstones falling from the ceiling of the camp's open-air pavilion or appearing on the floor.

Just a week before she died, she was taken to the hospital where she was surrounded by family, friends and some of the countless people who for many years called her "Mom." The day before she died, Heflin said, "Do you hear the angels singing?"

Approximately 1,500 people, many from other parts of the country and world, attended Heflin's funeral held at the camp. She was buried in Richmond.

The same flag that had flown over the Capitol complex in Washington, D.C., in Heflin's honor on the day of her death was also displayed during the services. In 1994 she had served as visiting chaplain and opened the House of Representatives in prayer.