

Cornelia Jones Robertson – A Friend of the Needy

Cornelia Jones Robertson is one of the forgotten heroines of the faith. Her West Coast-based ministry influenced thousands of people and had a far-reaching impact.

Known as “Mother Jones,” Cornelia was born on February 21, 1881, in Cadiz, Kentucky. She participated in the famed Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles and was ordained an evangelist in 1909.

In 1922 she founded and built Emmanuel Pentecostal Church and House of Prayer on Post Street in downtown San Francisco. She was reportedly a widow at the time she received ministerial credentials from the Assemblies of God in 1923 and was said to have preached an average of 300 sermons per year.

In 1924 Cornelia wrote: “We have a very wonderful work in the notorious Barbary Coast district, with the greatest advantage of any mission on the [West] Coast of reaching all nations. God is surely blessing our work in a very marvelous way.”

Her evangelistic work spread to include other cities in California and the American Northwest. She reported that “people came for 50 miles to hear the Word of God.”

Mother Jones joined the United Holy Church of America in 1935. She led an effective ministry in the black community for the next three decades.

On her 30th anniversary as pastor of Emmanuel Pentecostal Church in San Francisco, three services were held in her honor on Sunday, February 24, 1952. Speakers for the event included the Rev. G.L. Fauntelroy, pastor of First AME Zion Church in Oakland, and her grandson, the Rev. Robert E. “Bob” Harrison,

who later received international fame as an evangelist and associate of Billy Graham's.

Cornelia was actively involved in several associations. She was the secretary of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of San Francisco and an officer of the Women's Christian Temperance League. She was one of few African Americans who were listed in the official predecessor to the San Francisco Social Register.

Cornelia was a friend of those in need. She founded and ran the Barbary Coast Mission in San Francisco for 14 years.

During the Depression years, the mission handed out food and clothing to many and continued in operation throughout the remainder of her ministry. She is credited with helping more than 100,000 men and boys through the cooperation of merchants and various churches in the San Francisco area.

After a long illness, Cornelia passed away at age 86 on August 5, 1967. Her funeral was held in San Francisco on August 10. She was a role model for many women in ministry today.

Glenn Gohr is reference archivist for the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center in Springfield, Missouri.