

Henrietta Mears

Pioneer in Christian Education

During a period just prior to his highly successful Los Angeles crusade in 1949, Billy Graham was being challenged by one of his closest friends to accept a liberal view of the Bible. Graham desperately cried out to God under an August moon at a mountain retreat. Help came in the person of Henrietta Mears, a pioneer in Christian education at Hollywood First Presbyterian Church.

“She had faith in the integrity of the Scriptures and an understanding of Bible truth as well as modern scholarship,” Graham recalled recently in his autobiography.

Who was this woman who never sought ordination but whose influence was felt around the world? One homiletics professor called her the best preacher in Southern California; others said she influenced some 500 people to enter the ministry.

She co-founded Gospel Light Publications and numbered scores of leaders as her protégés, including Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ; Richard Halverson, chaplain of the U.S. Senate; and Louis H. Evans Jr., pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

In 1934, Dean Osterberg was drawn to the Hollywood church where Miss Mears ministered to college-age young people. “Soon I was to discover that no person had greater influence voluntarily upon my life than Henrietta Mears,” this former college football player and retired Presbyterian minister said.

Henrietta Cornella Mears was born in Fargo, North Dakota, in 1890. After receiving her college education at the University of Nova Scotia, she taught high school in Minneapolis during the week and a class of 18-year-old girls at First Baptist

Church on Sundays. After her class of five girls grew to 500, her reputation became widespread and caught the attention of pastor Stewart MacLennan of the Hollywood church.

MacLennon's offer to Miss Mears in 1928 to become the Christian Education Director opened new doors in Hollywood. Not only did the Sunday school grow from 450 to more than 4,000, but it also became the launching pad for graded Sunday school lessons, the Hollywood Christian Group and Forest Home—a Christian retreat center.

To this day Billy Graham credits Henrietta Mears as the one who was “so instrumental in my spiritual growth in Los Angeles.” Her impact on Graham's ministry—and many others'—has left a lasting legacy for the kingdom of God.

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