

Lillian Krager – A Minister of Reconciliation

More than 87 years ago, Lillian Krager planted a seed that continues to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. A young German woman, Lillian was a member of a Pentecostal church located in the heart of Manhattan. When she heard that two young African American women had received Jesus Christ but were denied church membership because of their ethnicity, she volunteered to go to their homes and lead a Bible study.

In January 1916 Mother Krager, as she later came to be known, held the first of many Monday night Bible studies in the home of Sister C. Glover. Lillian's desire to share God's Word cost her dearly.

She was ostracized by her family, and her fiancé broke off their engagement. But eventually her efforts gave birth to one of the most dynamic churches in Harlem today.

Bethel Gospel Assembly held its first service on November 18, 1917, with a total of 12 people. Lillian was appointed overseer of the independent Pentecostal church, which now has nearly 1,300 members.

Mother Mae Allison, one of the African American women denied membership at the midtown church, also is recognized as a founding member. The name of the other woman is unknown.

Bethel's first home was a \$10-a-month rented room. From there, the congregation moved to a storefront location.

As the group's numbers grew, opposition arose. Church members were harassed by police, and the church's windows were broken. God told Mother Krager that it was time for them to move into their own building.

Initially, their building fund totaled \$. But in 85 years, the church grew from that one rented room to its current location in Harlem, which is an 80-room former junior high school that serves as a model for other urban ministries.

Currently, Bethel has missionaries serving in more than 20 foreign fields. The church holds evangelistic outreaches called “community invasions” within its neighboring community and throughout New York City.

In 1923, Mother Krager stepped down from her role as overseer yet remained active for several years. She later married Alfred Blakeney and moved to upstate New York. The time of her death is not known.

Although she was alienated from her earthly family, Mother Lillian Krager became the spiritual mother of untold numbers of sons and daughters. The fruit of her simple act—conducting a weekly Bible study—can be seen in the many men and women from Bethel Gospel Assembly who have become ministers of reconciliation themselves, establishing works for the Lord at home and abroad.

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