

## CHAPTER VI

### DEATH AND REBIRTH: THE CHURCH MOTHER IN THE 1950's

We make no excuses for the things we have here, for the things we have here, the Lord hath provided, and we are thankful. Lillian Brooks Coffey.<sup>1</sup>

COGIC in the 1940's had its share of members being shipped off to war around the world. Despite the fact that their leader, Bishop Mason, held a pacifist stance during World War I, World War II found COGIC with different rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> The articles of faith of COGIC had a clause that addressed the matter of fighting for one's country.

We believe that the civil magistrates are ordained for the peace, safety and good of the people. That it is our duty to pray for them and obey them in all things which is not contrary to the word of God, and that does not take authority over, or force the conscience in matters of bearing arms or going to war. That it is our duty to honor them, pay tribute, to respect them in all lawful requirements of the civil government.<sup>3</sup>

The reality of the war saw many of the COGIC men drafted and sent away. Mason's pacifist stance from World War I was tempered, like most black and white Pentecostals, by

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<sup>1</sup>Prayer recited at the Lillian Brooks Coffey rest home, Np, Nd

<sup>2</sup>Mason experienced serious problems with the fledgling FBI for his outspokenness against WWI, which he felt was contrary to scripture. COGIC literature stated that the shedding of blood and the taking of human life is contrary to the teaching of the Savior, and that since 1895 members have been forbidden to take up arms or to share human blood in any form. and the shedding of blood. He was arrested, spied on, and persecuted for the message of non violence. Interestingly, in the FBI account, Elect lady Lizzie Robinson is mentioned as another influential member. See, Sherry Du Pree, Herbert C. Du Pree. *Exposed!! FBI Unclassified Reports on Churches and Church Leaders*. (Washington, D.C.: Middle Atlantic Regional Press, 1993) 46. Also, Theodore Kornwiebel, Jr. "Race and Conscientious Objection in World War I, the Story of the Church of God in Christ", in *Proclaim Peace*, (Urbana , Il. University of Illinois Press 1997)

<sup>3</sup>Articles of Faith, Church of God in Christ, Np. , Nd. 2

participation and avoidance of any duties that might cause human life to be taken. Or perhaps, like so many of the day, they tried to ignore the fact that blood might be shed by their members, putting the war into a larger perspective of apocalyptic vision and an imminent return of Christ. The women of COGIC dealt with the war pro-actively, not reactively. Mallory and Coffey both were members of the Wands, Women's Army for National Defense. The Wands were a group of Black women, organized to support Negro soldiers and WAC's in whatever way possible, providing canteen service, motor corps service, and any other tasks. Mallory's friend Mary Mcleod Bethune was the national president. Organized in the manner of units and ranks, Mallory served as a colonel of the Wands, traveling throughout the country in addition to her duties as President of Saints Industrial School, opening new chapters of the Wands throughout the country for Bethune.

Colonel Arenia C. Mallory of the Women's Army for National Defense was in Detroit Sunday Jan 13, and organized a chapter of the WANDS in this city. The chapter was named after Col Mallory who is one of the outstanding leading Negro women. Col. Mallory is President of the Saint's industrial School in Lexington, Miss. .. All the activities and duties of the organization are voluntary by officers and cadets.<sup>4</sup>

While Mallory organized and served with the Wands units, Coffey traveled to bases and training centers during World War II to speak on behalf of the Women's Department and COGIC. The activity of both Mallory and Coffey during the war was, on one had, was a natural extension of their holiness background and beliefs. Rallying around the cause of those called to war, who were treated with disdain by the armed forces because of their race, was keeping with 'cause based' orientation of holiness beliefs. On the other hand, the activity in war related support of troops placed them in a gray area. Mother Robinson admonished the women to "Stay out of politics, and keep to the Bible." The activities that Mallory and Coffey were engaging in took them in another directions, away from the type of sanctioned activities that the Women's Department was used to. Mother Robinson's advanced age made it difficult for her to monitor

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<sup>4</sup>"Wands Organized in Detroit Unit." *The Michigan Chronicle*, Saturday, February 26, 1944 ,p. 5

all of their actions, and perhaps, judging by her silence, she did not disapprove of them either. The activity, however, was laying the groundwork for the changes to come.

Despite the war, COGIC had started a large building campaign to complete a new meeting place, to be named Mason Temple. A fire in 1937 consumed the previous building. The yearly convocation was growing so rapidly in number of participants that services were scheduled in 24-hour shifts to accommodate all the saints. Bishop Mason wanted a place that would be the centerpiece for the denomination, so, in the midst of the war, a fund-raising and building campaign was begun. The Women's Department dutifully encouraged its mothers and daughters both to raise funds for the temple, and the steel that was needed was arranged through the auspices of a white church member. The building was finally completed before the start of the 1945 Convocation. That meeting would also mark the jubilee anniversary of Bishop Mason's first year in the ministry. The Convocation was, in spite of the war and its casualties, would be a cause for praise and celebration. However, the convocation would prove to be a turning point and a new beginning for the Women's Department.

### The 1945 Convocation

The opening of the convocation in November of 1945 was a festive occasion. The new Temple was practically complete, and the white newspaper in Memphis, The Commercial Appeal, dedicated an article to its opening:

Described by Elder C. Range of Boston, Mass. as "the largest convention hall owned by any Negro church group in America," a massive brick stone, concrete and steel structure at 958 South fifth Street has been dedicated as international headquarters of the Church of God in Christ. Named Mason Temple in honor of the founder, Bishop C.H. Mason, the dedicatory service was a feature of the 38<sup>th</sup> National convocation of the denomination. It coincided with bishop Mason's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the ministry.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Aubrey Ballard. "World Headquarters of Church Opens Here." *Commercial Appeal*, December 12, 1945.

The article perhaps could not do justice enough to the accomplishment of the impressive structure, or that fact that the edifice had been built from the sacrifice of the women and men of COGIC. Built from donations of the members at a cost of \$ 275,679, it covered 29, 672 square feet of space. Gone were the days when Mother Robinson would have to call for bedding and blankets to be brought from home to the convocation. A new dormitory, office, and hospital, as well as a cafeteria for the saints had been built in the temple to accommodate the convocation and other meetings throughout the year. All parts of the building were connected with a public address system, so that at any time, anywhere in the building, a person could hear the convocation proceedings.<sup>6</sup> For Mother Robinson, it was a glimpse into a future that she would not share with the denomination.

Robinson came to Memphis ill. She had battled several ailments through the years, and at 85, it was difficult to get around . Having suffered several strokes, she could move, but spoke slowly. The distance via the train from Omaha, Nebraska to Memphis was long, and had taken its toll. She arrived tired, but satisfied. Out in front of the temple burned a neon sign, Church of God in Christ, National Headquarters. It was a visible sign of her hard work in raising funds, for her daughter had set up a fund specifically for the purchase of a sign for the new temple. The Mothers however, did not raise enough to pay for the \$1600 neon sign, and she finished the remainder out of her own funds.<sup>7</sup> The history of the Women's Department described her arrival at the temple in poignant terms.

She was greatly interested in the building of our National Headquarters, and with her very efficient daughter as her secretary, She kept Her national drives functioning until she knew the building was ready for dedication. She journeyed southward to the 1945 Convocation; she felt that her days were numbered and that she would not return home. After reaching Memphis, she took new strength, walked through the building, looked at the work of her hands, sat in the assembly hall, which bears her name, held conference with her State mothers, revised her constitution, examined every phase of it for soundness, sat by her windows, saw the large electrical sign, allocated the balance of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, col 1

<sup>7</sup>See, Commercial Appeal, December 11, 1945, also, "Women's International Convention, Church of God in Christ." 1956.

funds needed to make possible its purchase. The sign which reads “National headquarters of the church of God in Christ”. Her daughter had solicited funds, but the amount was not sufficient: thus she completed the sum.<sup>8</sup>

The account, written after Mother Robinson’s death, has a breathless quality about it, as though in her advanced age she could still move with the adroitness of her youth. In spite of its reverential, hagiographic tone, it is the last walk for a dying matriarch who wanted to survey the work of her hands one last time. Far from the days of her relentless travel, holding services in a chicken coop with her husband, the temple must have seemed to Mother Robinson a proof of God’s favor upon the sanctified life. At the same time, it was a reminder of a future that she would not share. The history of the Women’s Department recalls her last message to the women at the 1945 convention succinctly:

Mother Robinson ably admonished her daughters on the Women’s Day of the Convocation to continue in the faith, to stay out of lodges, and to not engage in politics. She turned to her daughter, Lillian Brooks Coffey, who she had trained from girlhood and who later became assistant, to courageously lead the women in the fear of the Lord, to stick to the Bible, not to depart from the Law of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

The final corrective was the passing on of the crown of mother as well as the final admonitions to faithful daughters. Robinson’s definition of holiness called for a removal from worldly pursuits such as politics. Sanctified men and women had no place in the temporal affairs of the day, but should keep their minds fixed on the spiritual matters. This accomodationist/survivalist perspective of the post-Reconstruction black church was Mother Robinson’s reality, and she saw it as a means of protecting those in the church from straying away from holiness. Lodges, because of oath taking, were forbidden according to holiness interpretation of Scripture as well. Robinson’s admonitions were consistent with the nineteenth century definition of holiness, and living a sanctified life. Her stance had not changed because of

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<sup>8</sup>"Women's International Convention, Church of God in Christ." 1956.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

the times. She expected her daughters to do the same. Yet the recollections of her words, printed a few years later by the Women's Department, were already tempered by a changing Women's Department. A better gauge of the strength of Mother Robinson's words is a letter she sent out before the Convocation to the women of the Women's Department, in which her ideas are crystal clear.

Jesus did not belong to any secret orders and lodges like the Elks and Masons not any pagan worship like Jezebel. 2 Kings 9:30-36,37. The dogs ate her and she made good dog meat. Read about Jezebel's wicked daughter in 2 Kings II. Daughters, the devil is raging, he does not want peace on earth and food will to all men. He wants war in the church in all mankind, and for all..Pray for all men, kings and rulers that we may lead a quiet and peaceably life in all Godliness and honesty. Read the 9<sup>th</sup> verse. Do we dress like the scriptures say for us to dress?. God help our Mothers to teach their children Deut 6:7. God bless our home for in God we Trust. Love ye one another. What's a home without a mother? That is a motto that was placed upon the wall. <sup>10</sup>

The letter is much more strident than the watered down versions of what Robinson was reported to have said at the final Convocation meeting. Equating being in a lodge with perhaps the most hated biblical character in the Sanctified church, Jezebel, Robinson provides a scathing and motherly corrective. Her mention of dress, obedience, and motherhood combine the central tenets of living a sanctified life. The tone, strong and uncompromising, is a reminder that another viewpoint existed within the Women's Department. The corrective would not need to be so harsh if all the Women Department agreed with Mother Robinson' leadership and beliefs. The newer members being more open to new ideas and not familiar with the trials of the early pioneering mothers, felt restricted in their dress and relationships by all of the admonitions.As long as Mother Robinson was in power, nothing would change. Until she was gone.

After the evening service on December 12, 1945, Mother Robinson went to bed in her suite in the dormitory named after her. On December 13, 1945, at 2:20 a.m., she died of sudden cardiac failure, at the age of 85.<sup>11</sup> Years of service, travel, and sacrifice had finally caught up to

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<sup>10</sup>Albertha Mckenzie, "A Soldier's Exit." *Lifted Banners*, 1946 .

<sup>11</sup>Soundex record ,reel #152, Lizzie Robinson, December 13, 1945

her. Her death, not unexpected due to her ill health, was a blow to her daughter and the convocation. With two days left until its close, it meant that there needed to be a home-going service for mother Robinson, as well as an instillation of the New General Mother, her assistant, Lillian Brooks Coffey. Preparations were made quickly, and on the last day of the convocation, the service was held for Mother Robinson. The Associated Negro Press carried an article about Mother Robinson's passing.

Mother Lizzie Woods Robinson, national supervisor of the Woman's Department, Church of God in Christ Inc., who ranked with Elder Mason, senior bishop in the esteem in which she was held by thousands of followers throughout the country, died Wednesday morning just two days before the official closing of the 1945 Holy Convocation. ... through her ability to organize inspire and direct, Mother Robinson left to the church a rich heritage of 20,000 missionaries, 100,000 laymen, and numerous divisions to the women's department. She remained clear minded throughout her 80 years of service.<sup>12</sup>

Mother Robinson's legacy of service to the Women's Department was evident in her memorial device at the Temple. Her funeral, the ending service of the convocation, was packed, and the mourners included Mary Mcleod Bethune. With Coffey presiding over her service, the eulogy was delivered by Bishop Mason. To close the memorial service, Coffey was installed at the bier of Mother Robinson as the Second General Mother of COGIC. She wore a white habit, a full length pleated gown with a cross around her neck, placed around her neck by two State Mothers and two Bishops standing next to her.<sup>13</sup> The transfer of power complete, mother Robinson's body was shipped via the train back to Omaha, Nebraska for final rites and burial.

The legacy of Mother Robinson's leadership left an indelible imprint upon COGIC. Her

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<sup>12</sup> "Mother Robinson, Church of God Leader, Passes." *Associated Negro Press*, December 26, 1945 .

<sup>13</sup>This dress is described in detail in the Women's Department handbook as well as the COGIC official manual. See Mattie Dr. McGlothen, ed. *Women's Department Revised Edition of Organization and Procedure*. (Memphis TN: Church of God in Christ Publishing House, 1989) Also C.F. Range, ed. *Official Manual with the Doctrines and Discipline of the Church of God in Christ*. (Memphis, TN.: Church of God in Christ Publishing House, 1973).

piety and zealousness in organizing the women of the denomination provided a foundation upon which the entire church could build . By using the principles of motherhood, homemaking and cleanliness, blending them into a doctrine of sanctification, Robinson was able to influence both the temporal and spiritual lives of Black women who were at the margins of both the society and COGIC, organizing them through the office most revered by the black community: Motherhood. By placing a Mother in position of authority, she was able at once to both influence and direct the course of the denomination from merely a sanctified church to a large woman's organization that conveyed and embodied the message of holiness, making clear the identity, mission, and purpose of COGIC. During her 33 years of service, she managed to accomplish an amazing feat of organization with little formal education, funds or assistance. Far from being just a follower, she was a pioneer in every sense of the word. Even if she died trying to hold on to a world that was rapidly passing, she had laid the foundation for those women who had never been enslaved to move the women of COGIC forward. Her death signaled a fundamental change in the post-Reconstruction leadership roles for black women. Now, the future of that role lay with the new General Mother and Supervisor Lillian Coffey. She wasted no time in setting her hand to the task ahead.

#### A "New Mother" redirects her daughters

To say that Coffey took on her new position eagerly was perhaps an understatement. The ease in which she took on her new position was equaled only by her relentless reorganization of the Women's Department. With the favor of Bishop Mason, she could begin to move in ways that Mother Robinson never did. Even before succeeding Robinson, she had set in motion programs that would affect the Women's Department. In 1943, she obtained permission from the Bishops board to find a suitable home to use as a rest home for Christian Missionaries, inside and outside of COGIC.<sup>14</sup> Purchasing a home on 154 Arden Park in Detroit, Michigan, the mortgage

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<sup>14</sup> "Press Release, Lillian Brooks Coffey Home, Inc." , 1944a



was paid off five years later. Coffey's dream for the home was to make it a rest home for "women who have made an outstanding contribution to humanity and religion regardless of race color and creed."<sup>15</sup> Containing three floors of living space, plus a basement housing the kitchen and offices, the home was equipped with every modern convenience of the day. Coffey's realized that the missionaries of COGIC and other churches were not awarded retirement funds as their male counterparts were, many entering public or governmental charitable institutions. Coffey's foresight was indicative of her willingness to form alliances with different people and organization for the betterment of the Women's Department and the condition of women as a whole.

As a result of her connections with Arenia Mallory and Mary McLeod Bethune, Coffey brought to the COGIC Women's Department something different. Under Mother Robinson's leadership, the focus of the Women's Department had been to build up the women who belonged to COGIC. The primary goal was to have a sanctified life and home, and to serve God through missionary endeavor. Coffey's focused not only on the sanctified women of the denomination, but to the betterment of the Christian woman's condition. Setting up new allegiances, Coffey took the Women's Department in another direction: mainstream middle and upper class life of African American women. In order to accomplish her goal, she redefined major areas of COGIC women's lives. Her restructuring had an impact upon COGIC doctrine as well. The changes Coffey launched redefined the Church Mother's role of being the embodiment of holiness doctrines in COGIC. By making changes in clothing, auxiliaries, and even going as far to establish a permanent yearly meeting for COGIC women, Coffey accomplished a restructuring of the definition of holiness and the embodiment of the sanctified life in COGIC. By giving Church Mothers new tasks, new duties, and including younger women, she created new offices for other women that enabled them to become the embodiment of holiness beliefs also. In addition, Coffey managed to form alliances with other groups, creating a framework that could support COGIC teachings of holiness along with concerns of the broader African American community such as education, civil rights, and social justice. In short, though sickly and in ill health for most of her tenure, her nickname of "warhorse" was earned.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid

The first area in which her direction was immediately felt was in dress. The attire of holiness that Mother Robinson espoused, black skirts, white blouses, and simple clothing without adornment, was not exactly de rigueur in the circles that Coffey held membership in. As a member of the National Council of Negro Women with Arenia Mallory and Mary McLeod Bethune, the stylish up-to-date suits, furs and hats with hosiery that members wore were not equated with holiness under the COGIC definition. In order to change that, Coffey had a novel idea. She contracted with a woman's foundation maker to sell bras, girdles and slips to the Women's Department members, hoping to help the women to "smooth" themselves out.<sup>16</sup> In other words, women who had not worn foundation and had borne children lost most of their shapeliness, and the new fashions that a very petite Mother Coffey wore would not look as fashionable on other women. She also took to straightening her hair, another direct violation of Mother Robinson's rulings on unprocessed hair. Simply changing the clothes would not be enough to change the definition and modeling of holiness. She even managed to convince Bishop Mason to allow her to wear a slightly opened toe shoe due to her corn problems.<sup>17</sup> Structural changes helped to change the look and attitudes of holiness in the Women's Department. By adding innovative auxiliaries, Coffey could provide more opportunities for women to serve, change the status and attitudes of the women involved, and take the Women's Department into relationship with like-minded groups of other women outside the confines of COGIC.

#### Expanding and Restructuring the Women's Department.

Mother Coffey's expansion and restructuring of the Women's Department was a direct response to the changing demographics of the Women's Department. The newer generation of women joining and interacting with COGIC were younger, from predominantly urban areas. Many were still engaged in domestic work, but many who worked or served in World War II were in factories and some had been WAC's. Others were educators in local school systems,

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<sup>16</sup>Interview with Sherry Sherrod Du pree, June 1996.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid

making their way into the ranks of the middle class. Women who had previously been field workers and domestics were now domestics, small business owners, educators and the like. The rise in male clergy and their wives presented another challenge for the Women's Department. Women who wanted to serve within the Women's Department were restricted in the areas they could serve because of their husband's appointments. In order to meet these needs, Coffey added an additional number of organizations which were later to be called units. They were:

Young Women's Christian Council	Huldah Club
Volunteer counselors	District Missionaries
Hospitality Group	Ushers Unit
Editor's and Publisher's Unit	Religious Education Club
Minister's Wives Circle	Bishop Wives' Circle
Stewardess Board	Church Mother's Unit
National Evangelists Unit	Secretaries Unit

The new auxiliaries allowed additional women from all age ranges to take part in the work of the Women's Department, without having to wait until an advanced age to do so. The auxiliaries themselves can be classified under four types: Administrative, Leadership, Missions (evangelism) and Service. They also followed the traditional rubric of holiness endeavors that allowed for the leadership of holiness women.<sup>18</sup> Each one provided an opportunity for redefining the embodiment of holiness amongst the women of the Department. Unlike the auxiliaries of Mother Robinson, which were primarily centered on teaching, doctrines, and evangelism, the new auxiliaries allowed women to be involved in social events that were centered in the doctrine of holiness.

#### Administrative

Auxiliaries that were administrative in nature were the secretaries' unit, editor's and

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<sup>18</sup>See chapter one, where I discuss the Dayton-Hardesty-Sider thesis of women in Holiness movements and public ministries.

publishers units, and usher's unit. Each unit was responsible for certain areas of Women's Department duties that had arisen due to the rise in the membership. The Secretaries' unit was designed to keep the minute of the local, state, and national meetings of the women's Department. With the advent of stenography and other secretarial resources, those who could read and write and had been educated either through trade school or high school with secretarial skills proved invaluable to the Women's Department. Judging from the amount of correspondence that Coffey, Mallory and others generated in the Women's Department leadership, it was imperative that someone had to keep up with the amount of material produced. Coffey often complained that the record keeping in the denomination was poor, so the advent of the secretary's unit met her concern for keeping track of numbers and the minutes of every meeting.

The editor's and publisher's unit came about due to an internal problem within COGIC regarding who would run the publishing house and print denominational Newspaper, The Whole Truth. During Mother Robinson's tenure as National Mother, the Women's Department had a newsletter, *The Lifted Banner*, that started publishing in the 1930's. Published in New Orleans by one of the Women's Department members, it contained bible studies, helpful homemaking tips, and messages from the General Mother. In addition, another newspaper started, The Evangelist Speaks, which was to chronicle all the missionary activity at home and abroad of the COGIC women. By the time the paper was established in 1950's, the dilemma with the publishing board had been solved and most of the COGIC newspapers were printed from the publishing board. The editorial board, however, collected stories and made sure that the appropriate ones got printed. In addition, the editor's and publishers unit had oversight over printed teaching materials that were used in the Prayer and Bible Band, Purity class, Sunshine Band and Young Women's Christian Council. The editor was also responsible for selecting material relevant to each particular group. Assisted by a staff of writers, that had some schooling, literature that was supplemental to that already published by the COGIC Publishing board was used in support of Women's Department concerns.<sup>19</sup>

The Usher's board helped on both the local and national level. To keep the flow of the

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<sup>19</sup> Mattie Dr. McGlothen, ed. *Women's Department Revised Edition of Organization and Procedure*. (Memphis TN: Church of God in Christ Publishing House, 1989) 58

congregation going into the Sunday morning services, the usher board was appointed in order to make sure that saints were seated in the proper places. For instance, a visitor would never be seated in the row reserved for the Church Mothers. The women's Department Handbook refers to the Usher's board as:

One of the major units of our women's work, for an usher plays the role of a silent evangelist. She gives an attendant of the service the first impression of the service. No matter how well the choir sings or how inspiring the message, if an attendant has been insulted by an usher, it unfits him for the worship service.<sup>20</sup>

The usher board was considered the front line of service in COGIC . Usually dressed in Black or white, depending on the service, with long skirts, no makeup and the physical neatness of the ushers demonstrated to all visitors' to a COGIC church the proper attire for holiness. Although the dress code for holiness in COGIC was being redefined during this period, the usher board was still the place to observe the old standards of holiness. Like the church mothers, the usher board was an opportunity for holiness to be projected through dress, comportment, and service. Fund raisers were also an important duty of the user board, through dinners and bake sales.

### Service Auxiliaries

Closely related to the administrative auxiliaries Coffey helped to organize were the Service auxiliaries: The Huldah Club, the Volunteer Counselors, Hospitality Group, and the Stewardess board. Each was designed to provide for the material needs of the women's leadership. In the past, women had worked in individual churches to supply assistance. By broadening and standardizing the conduit for resources, Coffey was able to insure that the needs of the leadership, missionaries, and those who genuinely needed assistance were met.

### Huldah Club

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid

The Huldah club was created to act as assistants to the State Mother. In order to accommodate the new duties of the State Mothers, Coffey changed the title from State Mother to State Supervisor. By changing the name, she allowed for an increase in the State Supervisor's administrative purview. With new organizations, the older Mothers found they needed assistance in their administration. The Huldah Club members were only on a state level, to assist the supervisors's personal needs, much in the same manner as the pastor's aide board. Club members were required to be women described in the Women's Department handbook as "Women who are farsighted, who love and understand the supervisor, unbiased in their thinking and a deep concern for those standing at the helm in Kingdom building." Funds that were raised are not only for the state supervisor's personal help, but for her emergencies in the work also.<sup>21</sup> Those who were members of the Huldah club were loyal Women's Department members, many local church mothers, who would support the work of the State Supervisor as well as attend to her needs in any situation.

#### Stewardess Board

The stewardess board was created to supply the Home and Foreign Mission Department with food and clothing to send to the foreign fields where COGIC missionaries were stationed. Many of the missionaries of COGIC were women, and as well as the needs of those they served, they also needed food and clothing and other supplies to assist in their work. The stewardess board was responsible for collecting these items plus printed materials such as Bibles and tracts to supplement the missionary work. They worked hand in hand with the state director of the missions' board, but were separate entities .<sup>22</sup>

#### Hospitality group and volunteer counselors

The hospitality group consisted of members of the Women's department whose duties were to entertain visitors strangers, and special guests on a local state and national level. With the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid, 34

<sup>22</sup>McGlothen, Handbook, 44

many connections that were being made by the Women's Department during Coffey's tenure to other churches and organizations, it was important to have a group whose sole responsibility was to entertain those who came into contact with the Women's Department and the church. The hospitality committee was expected to answer both to the state supervisor and bishop should any request arise.<sup>23</sup> The hospitality group also became an important part of the women's annual meeting when it was established in 1951, providing arrangements for the National Convention of the Women's Department. Volunteer counselors' duties, on the other hand, are unclear from the literature of the Women's Department.

### Missions

Auxiliaries dedicated to the missions endeavor's were District Missionaries, National Evangelists, and the Light burners of Africa. These auxiliaries were designed to supplement the work already being done by another earlier women's auxiliary, the Home and Foreign Missions Board. The office of District Missionary was an important connecting role between the missionary activity and training activities of the Women's Department. The next step up from a local Church Mother, the District Missionary's role was to supervise the training of all the women in her district, and to evangelize. Church mothers, missionaries, auxiliaries and unit leaders were all under her purview.<sup>24</sup> The District Missionary acted also as an assistant supervisor to the state mother, helping to organize the work of the Women's Department. She was also expected to work in harmony with the Bishops, pastors, and overseers of the state. A rigorous position, in terms of navigating the hierarchical structure, the District Missionary answered to many parties, but at the same time was instrumental in many areas of the church for men and women on a local and state level. The National Evangelist, on the other hand, was Coffey's very ingenious way for creating a platform for women who were talented preachers and teachers without acknowledging them as such. The office of National Evangelist was one that was achieved through a rigorous process of going through the ranks of local missionary and evangelist missionaries. The woman

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 32

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 38

who achieved the rank of a National Evangelist had to be recommended by her supervisor and the General Supervisor (National Mother). She was expected to have proved her ability by conducting revivals in seven states throughout the United States.<sup>25</sup> Traditionally in COGIC the requirements for a National Evangelist are much more rigorous than pastors' or bishop's requirements in the church. Perhaps this is due to the teaching structure of the Women's Department, or the fact that Coffey realized that in order to escape the critique of men and other women, the National Evangelists would have to be more thoroughly trained. Whatever the case, the newly created position was one that quickly attained status and recognition for the Women's Department.

The Light Burners of Africa were a small way in which women could contribute to the missionary cause without leaving home. The last auxiliary that Coffey organized before her death in the early 1960's, the light burners raised funds to install electrical lighting into the COGIC missionary stations in Haiti, Jamaica, and Africa.

### Leadership

The new leadership auxiliaries, Young Women's Christian Council, Minister's Wives circle and Bishop's Wives circle, were in a sense, feeder groups to each other. The YWCC was a group designed to support and train the younger women of the denomination for roles within the Women's Department. The Sunshine Band, Prayer and Bible band and Purity class accommodated the very young and teenaged children, but then the ages from 19-40 were missed by the existing auxiliaries. As the Women's Department handbook states, they were "too old for the Purity Class and too young for the Mother's Board".<sup>26</sup> The YWCC was in a sense a training ground for younger women to learn how to be wives, homemakers, and helpmeets. The description of the YWCC from the handbook is this:

The Prime Purpose of the YWCC is to gather together these young women and channel

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 18

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 36



their minds into productive motives of Christian Endeavor. This is the training station for every facet of women's work. Here they are trained to be homemakers, lovers of their husbands, minister's wives, bishop's wives, auxiliary leaders, prayer warriors, and lovers of their God. Fain in and eternal Power is a requisite, for except that our young women are led to God, they will be most miserable.<sup>27</sup>

In keeping with the COGIC rubric of sanctification, a member of the YWCC was expected to be both spiritual and service-oriented. It is interesting that the word power is used, suggesting the previous connections made by Mother Robinson to the idea that sanctification was endowment with power for service.<sup>28</sup> Those who were members of the YWCC were not only expected to be and learn how to be sanctified women; their role as wives was tantamount to keeping the fictive familial structure predicated on Church Mothers intact. Marriage was important to the image of the church family, a sign that as a woman able to keep her family at home, would keep the family of the church just as well. The YWCC also provided the Church Mothers a convenient place in which to observe and train the young women who were suitable to marry up-and-coming pastors within the denomination. Though the expectations for men were never as stringent as the expectation for and by the women, it was expected that a pastor or bishop could not hope to rise in stature unless he had the appropriate wife beside him. By providing the training ground for younger women within the YWCC, Coffey could ensure that she would eventually have a steady stream of women capable of being Church mothers though their time in an auxiliary that would acquaint them with the many tasks and expectations of the Women's Department.

Those women who had successfully made it through YWCC and had married pastors were eligible to joined the ministers and bishop's wives' auxiliaries, depending upon the rank of their husbands. The problems that had existed in the early 1940's with both husbands and wives serving in capacities within COGIC and the Women's department called for a creative way in which to unhook the power structure of married. By starting the minister's wives and bishops

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<sup>27</sup>McGlothen, 37

<sup>28</sup>See chapter four and the discussion of sanctification in the COGIC Women's Department.

wives circles, women who were spouses of male clerics were able to network with each other, organize, and provide another living example of the COGIC definition of sanctification both inside and outside the denomination. The groups also served to redefine the duties of the dual ministerial households and neutralize some of the decision making power they held through another layer of organizational strata. By hinging the group's duties on roles of wives, mothers, and helpmeets, the two groups were able, on one hand, form a sense of camaraderie and on the other, ensure that the hidden power structure would remain intact.

A Ministers's wife should be: A lover of her husband and the people; Able to quickly observe a matter discreetly and yet maintain an even balance; a woman whose apparel is smart but simple as she will most likely set the pace for the women of her congregation.;A source of inspiration and great influence on her husbands life; A right spirit and wisdom in dealing with the people and working in the church... A well-prepared minister's wife can fill speaking engagements for her husband. *Whatever her qualifications are, she is the power behind the throne and should assist wherever she can.*<sup>29</sup>

The tasks of both the ministers and bishops wives' clubs represents a new formulation in who can embody the principles of sanctification. The auxiliaries' creation not only allows the Church Mother to embody holiness through living the sanctified life, but enables other women who are not yet church mothers to participate in the visual embodiment of COGIC doctrine. Additionally, the ministers or bishops' wives can rightfully influence the role of men, since they are the "helpmeets" of their spouses. The blatant statement of the wives being the power behind the throne recognizes that, although the men hold the position, women are able to influence and direct their husbands, as long as they act within the confines of a sanctified woman's role as defined by COGIC. Coffey may not have meant it to be so, but the creation of the ministers and bishops wives' circle provided another way in which the balance of the dual sex structure of the COGIC episcopate could be maintained by the women through an ingenious method of placing the women in a organizational as well as familial connection to the power structure within COGIC. The women would always learn the decisions that men were contemplating by

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<sup>29</sup>McGlothen, 37-38

discussing them with their fellow sisters within the clubs, and allowing that information to trickle throughout the organizational structure of the Women's Department, to be acted upon accordingly.

#### Summary of New Auxiliaries and Theoretical Considerations

Coffey's work of establishing these auxiliaries to the existing Women's Department structure held a dual purpose: It served to involve women at every age range and level of capability throughout the denomination, helped to balance and maintain the power structure of the Women's Department, and insured that the definition of holiness through living the sanctified life would continue to be the role and purpose of the women within the department. Providing a place for all the women of COGIC to feel a part of the purpose of the church was integral to ensure that the gains in the denomination were not lost. It also helped to stave off any concerted efforts by the women to move into the episcopal ranks of the church, which continued to be held by males. By providing visibility and position, both older women and younger women attain status within the organization. Coffey's restructuring also helps to support both the theoretical constructs of structure and habitus in relationship to the Women's Department.<sup>30</sup> The old practices of sanctification were inherent in the new embodiment of dress. The historical understanding of sanctification through holiness was kept in the active experiences of the new auxiliaries. The dispositions towards sanctification habitus were kept present by using the doctrines of the past and restructuring them in an updated form. The addition of the new auxiliaries makes the theory of habitus viable in the Women's Department because the habitus of sanctification (in the theological and social sense) continued to have an infinite capacity to generate products. In this case, the products generated were the new auxiliaries that were additional places where the habitus of sanctification could be internalized and externalized by all COGIC women.<sup>31</sup> In a sense, Coffey's expansion laid a firmer foundation for the connections

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<sup>30</sup> These are the theories of Anthony Giddens' and Pierre Bourdieu discussed at length in chapter four.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Structure, habitus, and practices" in Bryan S. Turner, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, (Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Ltd, 2000.) 98

that she hoped to make outside of denomination through the Women's Departments activities, as well as strengthening the structure of the past COGIC beliefs and rules within the present.

### New Alliances and the Women's International Convention

The intense activity of establishing the auxiliaries in the early years of Mother Coffey's leadership as National Supervisor was partially from internal pressures, but external pressures caused the changes as well. Coffey and Arenia Mallory both continued their positions of leadership outside the denomination during this time, within the NCNW and working with Mary Mcleod Bethune. Mallory's visibility and position, however, had gained even more stature. She was featured in the July 1949 issue of Ebony as one of the top ten Negro women leaders in the United States. Also featured was Mallory's and Coffey's longtime friend, Bethune. Mallory was described as a "teaching pioneer" for her work with Saint's Industrial School. Now president of the school, Mallory's profile had risen as a regional director of the NCNW. The Ebony article, however, was bittersweet as Mallory's mother died the month prior to its publication. In a thank-you letter later to the editor of the Associate Negro Press in November of that year that she wrote, "somehow, my grief is more extended than I thought possible since she had been spared to us so long. Somehow I cannot be consoled it seems."<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the toll of losing her mother kept Mallory busy with both COGIC business and her outside interests. She started attending school in Illinois, commuting back and forth from Mississippi. Her duties with the NCNW grew, and the overseas trips to Finland, India, and other places on behalf of women's causes linked her with both black and white women leaders of the period. Between her duties and Coffey's the connections that they had garnered with political and social leadership outside of COGIC began to place new notoriety for the Women's Department they belonged to. There had to be a medium in which they could bring the women of COGIC into the world that they belonged to. But how?

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<sup>32</sup>Letter, Arenia Mallory to Claude Barnett, Editor of the Associated Negro Press, July 1, 1949.

The alliances that had been forged between groups like the NCNW and the leadership of the women's Department was not simply a social call. An exchange of ideas began to happen, influencing Coffey's and Mallory's governance of the Women's Department, and fundamentally changing the course of COGIC women would take. These exchanges allowed connections to be built between individuals and organizations like the NCNW and the women's Department. The connections resulted in an exchange of ideas, and also participation in like-minded goals and ideologies.<sup>33</sup> By making these connections, Coffey and Mallory fundamentally redefined the embodiment of holiness in the Women's Department. The establishing of the Women's Department Convention in 1951 is an example of how these connections helped to changes to the theological, structural and identity orientation of the COGIC Women's Department.

#### The 1951 Women's Convention

The activities that Coffey and Mallory had engaged in with the NCNW, their service in Eleanor Roosevelt's Kitchen Cabinet, and educational concerns had thrust the sanctified women into a new arena. Although the religious beliefs of the women that they encountered in groups like the NCNW were more of the mainstream black denominations such as the Baptists and AME churches, the goals that the women shared were compatible and sometimes the same. Issues concerning education, children, race relations, women's roles and lives were very much a part of the organizational structure and goals of the various groups that they found themselves in. Yet the sectarian nature of holiness beliefs and their manifestations through dress and worship put barriers between their groups. A forum needed to exist that would on the one hand, allow COGIC women to be recognized for the works that they did throughout the year on behalf of the Women's Department, and on the other, a medium in which COGIC women could reach outside their denomination, to form partnerships with other like minded groups, and obtain some much

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<sup>33</sup>David A. Snow, Rochford, E. Burke, Benford, Robert D., Worden, Steven K. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986).

needed recognition for their efforts. That forum would be the Women's convention.

Coffey's original idea for the Women's Convention came during the year 1950. Each year, she and Mallory had attended the NCNW annual convention, and through these meetings, they had been introduced to a wide variety of society women and politicians. Coffey desired a forum in which she could address the issues that COGIC women shared with these other groups, in their own space outside of the yearly convocation of COGIC. It was in the 1950 convocation during the Women's Leadership Day that the idea for the Convention was born, at least, in the hagiographic sense. "On Monday morning, between 9:30 and 10:30, it was begotten by the Holy Ghost by Mother Lillian Brooks Coffey. It did not go the full nine month period, but came forth 5 months later, a Mighty Baby convention."<sup>34</sup> The real story was a combination of reasons.

Coffey desired a way to have the women meet together to support the missions activities of the denomination, and in order to do that it needed to be away from the Convocation. Additionally, all the outside meetings Coffey and Mallory had attended highlighted the fact that although the denomination was strong from within, its image from without needed attending to. Both women garnered respect among the groups they participated with, but the general public regarded them as little more than a backwoods or storefront church, despite their numbers.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most compelling reason was that Coffey, based on her lifelong relationship with Mason, could ask what she wished and get it from Mason. In order to approve the convention, Mason drew up and signed an agreement authorizing his support at the November 1950 Convocation. Mallory also had an invitation from COGIC bishop Samuel Crouch to hold the convention in Los Angeles, California. Crouch, an avid supporter of missions, felt that Los Angeles would be the perfect setting for the first Women's Convention. Soon after, Coffey began the organizing work that would be crucial to making the convention a success.

Setting up steering committees similar to how the NCNW was organized, Mallory tapped capable women to carry out specific tasks in anticipation of the Convention. In a letter to

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<sup>34</sup>Leadership Conference, Women's International Convention, Silver Anniversary edition, May 1975, 3

<sup>35</sup>In the Ebony article, Coffey comments " We (COGIC) are not a revered church and we rely on our fund-raising to keep up going". 88

one of the COGIC Evangelists, Reatha Herndron, she outlines her goals for the convention.

My dear Sister Reatha:

....Bishop Mason signed the agreement and encouraged me to hold a national Women's convention. As you know, Bishop Crouch invited us to California. There is something special I would like you to do. I would like you to serve as chairman for the committee that will serve as part of the steering committee. .. Someday sometime during the convention we would like to have an international hour or day where would like to get as many missionaries from various foreign fields as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Herndron, a missionary and national evangelist, agreed to work on the committee with Coffey. Modeling her preparations after the fashion of the NCNW yearly conventions, Coffey planned for an elaborate and elegant welcome for the COGIC women. Setting up various committees to handle details and recruit women for the trip to Los Angeles, Coffey came up with the idea to take a train from Chicago to Los Angeles, picking up COGIC women along the way. State mothers were urged to encourage women to take the trip to the first convention if they could financially, and State Mothers attendance was mandatory. Coffey worked continuously until the end of April, and the latter part of April 1951, a train, dubbed the Lillian Brooks Coffey Special set out from Union Station in Chicago to Los Angeles, California. The train that COGIC women boarded from cities along the way to Los Angeles cost them \$100.00. This cost was to cover their room and board, sightseeing, and the registration fee. Those who purchased the packages were called "Red Card Delegates", a term still in use in COGIC Women's Conventions today. During the train ride, Coffey collected money from the delegates for the missions offering, planning to present it to Bishop Crouch, head of the Missions board, in Los Angeles. When they arrived in Union Station at Los Angeles, a large entourage awaited them, and Coffey stepped off the train with a porter holding a large sign behind her which read, The Lillian Brooks Coffey Special. Dressed in a smart suit, hat and fur wrap, she led the women off the train. Lucille J. Cornelius, early COGIC historian, describes the scene.

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<sup>36</sup>Letter to Reatha Herndron from Lillian Brooks Coffey,. January 6, 1951

It was a most exhilarating sight to see the train come in bringing women from various parts of the world as they landed in L.A.. There was a big welcoming committee to greet them . It made history as all the news media and advertisement went into action. The delegates were led by Mother Coffey, , singing, “We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord”. It seemed to me that women would never stop getting off that train, it was such a huge number of them.<sup>37</sup>

The event exceeded Coffey’s expectations. Coverage by the white and black press, the Los Angeles Sentinel, the Associated Negro press, and the radio secured a high profiled for the COGIC women in attendance. The Mayor and his wife in Los Angeles greeted the delegates at the train station, starting a yearly tradition of governmental officials hitching their stars (and pictures) alongside the COGIC Women’s Convention. The convention opened on April 24, 1951, a mere five months after its approval.<sup>38</sup> The meetings were held at the Emmanuel Temple Church of God in Christ, hosted by Bishop Samuel Crouch and his wife. The convention program for the week consisted of discussion of various issues of concern to the Women’s Department, Christian education ad education at large, racial issues, and Missionary activity. The keynote address was given by Dr. Bethune, whose picture together with Coffey’s was featured prominently in the society pages of the LA Sentinel.<sup>39</sup> Coffey had the attending missionaries plus the State Mothers march in with banners unfurled representing the various states and countries that COGIC women’s missionaries served in, to accentuate the focus on missionary activity. And in the midst of all the excitement, Coffey presented to Bishop Crouch \$10,000 in cash, in a paper bag as a donation from the Women’s Department for the missions work of COGIC.

This certainly was not the Women’s Department of Mother Robinson day’s. The severe clothing, the rigorous Bible study, and rejection of the world had metamorphosed into an articulate, fashionable, educated, and civically oriented women. Bishop Mason even attended the Women’s Convention, staying apart from the proceedings but participating in the nightly social

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<sup>37</sup> Lucille J Cornelius. *The Pioneer History of the Church of God in Christ*. Memphis TN: COGIC, 1975., 23-24

<sup>38</sup> Cornelius, p. 23

<sup>39</sup> “Well Merited Praise” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 3, 1951,B2.



events. In short, the week-long convention was a success. The redefinition of what it meant to be a sanctified woman was almost complete with the advent of the Women's Convention. By creating a separate space for their concerns, independent of but connected to the National Convocation, the Women's Department could organize like other women's groups, away from male oversight. The convention enabled them to address their own issues and concerns independently of the denominational constraints and convocation protocol. In addition, proving their fund-raising abilities with the generous donation to the Home and Foreign Missions Board served to show their financial independence from the denomination. Nothing, it seemed, could mar the benefits accorded the Women's Department.

The planning, preparation and relentless traveling, however, took its toll on Coffey. Having already suffered a heart attack eleven years past, her frail health was dealt another blow soon after the convention. She suffered a stroke which left her partially immobilized. In a letter to the state mothers drafted for her, she appealed to the state mothers, now called supervisors:

Attention Supervisors:

I am in much need of rest after a serious illness, and I am turning the work into the hands of Mother Annie Lee Bailey. Any of you who wish help at your state Meetings write to Mother Bailey, immediately. She is sound in faith and doctrine, and she can help you to have an effectual program.

Work in peace with the Brethren. You may not be able to do all you desire to do, but be mother-wise and God-fearing and He will bring you through. If it is His will, it won't be long before I will be back on the fighting front.-Lillian B. Coffey<sup>40</sup>

The letter indicates internal tensions between the women and the male-led episcopate. The "work in peace with the brethren" phase suggests that the men were having some problems with asserting their supposed "authority" over the Church Mothers in leadership. The admonition

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<sup>40</sup>Dr. Cora Berry, Director. "Women's International Convention, Church of God in Christ." A paper delivered at the Leadership Conference, Silver Anniversary Edition, San Francisco, California, 1975.

to be “Mother wise and God-fearing” suggests that Coffey wanted the women not to lose the ground that had been gained by the women through the reorganization and the convention. In directing Anne Bailey to take the reins as her second-in-command, she attempted to recuperate without totally removing herself from the departmental activities. Coffey even attended the Convocation in November of 1951, flying in from Detroit with Arenia Mallory and Birdie Whitehead, leader of the Purity Class. Unable to resume her normal duties as General Supervisor, Mother Anne Bailey took her place in the Women’s Day annual meeting at the convocation, as well as in the parade honoring Bishop Mason. Coffey, unable to walk in the parade as a result of her stroke, watched the parade from the window of her quarters at the Lelia Mason home nearby Mason Temple.<sup>41</sup> It was on the one hand, a moment of pride and of frustration all at once. Her body, used to hard work, had given out on her. The question perhaps that lingered in the back of many women’s minds was her ability to regain the leadership, despite her health. That question would be answered with the subsequent Women’s conventions.

#### The Decade of the 50's and the Women’s Conventions

As Coffey’s health began to improve after her stroke, The Women’s Convention moved forward in the work of uniting, educating and expanding the Women’s Department of COGIC. The conventions took place in various larger cities throughout the country such as New York City, Miami, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, Seattle and Kansas City.<sup>42</sup> The format of the conventions took on a more organized approach than the first and in addition to highlighting missionary activity, topics focused in on leadership conferences preparing women to better both their homes, schools, and communities through Christian service. The phrase “better homes, schools, communities, and world” became a slogan during the 1950s conventions that continues to form the thinking and advocacy of COGIC Church mothers and women’s leadership. The leadership conferences, focusing on both the mission of the saints to the world, as well as maintaining the

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<sup>41</sup>“Noted State Mother Sees Parade” *The Tri-State Defender*, December 8, 1951, pg 2 col. 1

<sup>42</sup>The Convocation handbooks are replete with lists of cities visited. See, Women’s international convention, Church of God in Christ, 1956, p 7.

proper Christian home, emphasized a variety of activities designed to both evangelize and teach COGIC doctrines. Using titles such as Christian Stewardship, Community Relations, Social Welfare, and Financial Development, the message of the sanctified life was transmitted in an updated language that those both within and without COGIC could understand. By focusing in on race relations, civic affairs, law enforcement, church and economic life, COGIC women began to take the teachings of the Bible, and in much of the way of nineteenth century social movements, articulated Biblical ideals for family life and social conduct in more meaningful ways. Each yearly leadership conference focused on issues important to the community, and a published group of resolutions that were presented to the women's convention delegates for their approval. The nine resolutions of the 1953 convention held in Miami, Florida provides an excellent example of the scope of the concerns of the Women's Convention. Covering race relations, economics, education and social action, these resolutions provide an important insight into how much the notion of the church mother had changed.

**Resolutions and Recommendations presented to the Women's International convention of the Churches of God in Christ in session at the Church of God in Christ 1747 N. W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave, Miami, Florida, May 5-10, 1953.**

In order to create, maintain and extend to peoples whom we serve a means by which more amicable relationships in various phases of human life may be brought into being, we purpose and submit the following Recommendations:

I. That we shall persistently deny the horrors of bloody warfare and violence in human relationship while at the same time we shall give moral, spiritual and material assistance to those agencies which are seeking in spite of the present crisis to bring peace.

II. That we shall endeavor to spread through prayer, unity of purpose and sprit, cooperative intellectual, economic and spiritual enterprise, the rich benefits of the Christian religion to peoples in our nation and throughout the world. In this connection we further recommend that training be given to the unmarried whom we serve, to fit them to become responsible partners in daily living

III. We recommend that efforts be made to encourage academic training that is not contradictory to the principles of the Christian faith and to discourage that training that puts the student at conflict with these Christian principles. That we seek to increase through united efforts our educational facilities. That our educational program include

training to strengthen the principles of democracy as against communism.

IV. As Christian women who believe in the word of God as a foundation for democracy, we recommend that our vigilance will never cease until the blight of discrimination be eradicated from our fair land. To this end we will cooperate with any and all organizations within the framework of our American government who are seeking justice, equality and integration of all Americans into the democratic way of life.

V. That we shall see to foster more wholesome culture and inter-cultural relationship by calling upon those persons who are captioned Christian to put into action those principles of the Christian faith which emphasize the brotherhood of man.

VI. That we shall emphasize, by practical example, the prime significance of religious life in the home, and seek to make our world better by making our homes better.<sup>43</sup>

The clarity and scope of the resolutions show some resemblance to past teachings of Mother Robinson's era and significant departures. The anti-war admonitions of WWI are distinctly reminiscent in resolution one. 1953 had not dimmed the memories of the conflict of WWII, nor of the Korean conflict for COGIC members. Despite the fact that the international membership and missionary activities benefitted from the war, The Women's Department continued to agree with Mason's pacifist stance. Resolution I together with III and IV confirm a very democratic and patriotic stance that was a marked change from the previous restrictions on women's involvement in politics. The commentary on democracy as being founded on the "word of God" links COGIC women to larger Christian democratic endeavors. The ideals certainly meshed with COGIC women's struggle for racial equality, but the anti-religious stance of the Communist Party could not mesh with the evangelical ideals of COGIC women. Democracy made the position of the women clear in that their patriotism was inexorably linked to the struggle for civil rights. Far from being political rabble rousers, the women of COGIC, while adamant for their equal rights, were mindful of the partnerships that needed to be created in order to achieve their goals for racial equality. The old ideals of holiness that coupled with social concerns were for not just the saints, but for the world at large. They became a capstone of the resolutions that

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<sup>43</sup> "Women's International Convention 1953." A paper delivered at the Women's International Convention, Church of God in Christ, Chicago, Il, 1953. p. 54.

helped to bring the women into the wider arena of working together with those outside of their church communities.

The resolutions also address the importance of family life in creating a better world. Resolution II specifically addresses training to those who are unmarried to prepare them to become “responsible partners in family living”. Following in clear line from the creation of the Young Women’s Christian Council and the Purity Class, the preparation of both young men and women for family life was a primary goal of the Women’s Department. The foundation of the Christian home, instilled from the early days’ of Mother Robinson’s reading of Hope continued, albeit in a modern format. The resolution helped to make clear both to the women of COGIC and to outsiders that despite the forward gains made by women in the workplace, the Christian home was the foundation for making the world better . No matter how many new televisions or Amana refrigerators streamlined the homemaker’s duties, the practical examples of COGIC women making religious life the center of the home was the best example of “Sainthood” that a young woman or Mother in COGIC could aspire to.

Education, already an important emphasis in COGIC life, remained a focused perspective in the resolutions. Academic training that was not contradictory to scripture was encouraged. Although training that is at conflict with Christian principles is not made explicit, perhaps teaching such as evolution, communism, and anti-religious sentiments could be construed in the COGIC context as being in conflict with Christian principles. The desire to increase the current educational facilities are also a focus of the resolutions. The Saints Industrial School, the training school for young people, had by this period become a junior college as well, continuing the education of those who had come for their high school education. The work of Arenia Mallory in pushing educational endeavors had begun to reap the benefits in educated COGIC members who were able to rise from lower-class status to a middle-class African American lifestyle in the 1950's. The focus on the education as a means of advancement, both within and without the denomination could only help to enhance the causes for which COGIC women stood for.

The resolutions, along with the leadership conferences, gave new visibility to the redefined role that Coffey had created for the Church Mother. No longer the staid saint with unprocessed hair and plain clothes, the COGIC Women’s Convention with its educational

programs, leadership conferences, and published resolutions, made them a women's group as important as the National Baptist Women's Convention and the NCNW. The week-long conventions held in the nations' metropolitan areas included coverage by both the society and church columns of Black newspapers. This visibility gave the Church Mothers and their charges a social and political platform in which to carry forth their religious agenda. Democratic politicians from aldermen, to mayors, to governor's made sure that their letters of welcome graced the pages of the convention programs. Pictures of politicians with Mallory and Coffey were prominent annual events of the Women's Convention. By all outward estimations, the conventions were a success. The greatest challenge, however, lay ahead for the Women's Department, and it would be up to Coffey to "hold the denomination in harness" until the upcoming storm of the early 1960's had passed them by.

### Summary

The death of Mother Robinson was the turning point for not only the Women's Department leadership, but in how holiness and sanctification were understood and embodied in COGIC. With Coffey's appointment as National Mother/National Supervisor over the Women's Department, rapid changes began to occur. By reorganizing and expanding the Women's Department work through additional auxiliaries, Coffey was able to expand the visible and material theological definitions of holiness to be embodied by all women, not only the Church Mothers. By updating the dress, responsibilities, and public persona of the Women's Department, she changed the denomination's traditional image of illiteracy and sectarianism through connections to political action groups, social activists, and race work. The advent of the Women's International Convention as a forum for women's concerns in COGIC and missionary activities took the message of the sanctified life into the public realm. The private sphere, a focus of women's role and responsibilities in COGIC, became the public realm with the concerns of the home, family, community and world as the focus. The new focus helped to gain recognition for the Women's Department and its leadership in the 1950's and updated the rubric of holiness and

sanctification to a level of articulation that was easily interpreted by the public, even if the public did not always agree with its tenets.