

# *Mae Eleanor Frey*

## *Early 20th-century Pentecostal Matriarch*

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**T**he annals of history highlight people who challenge status-quo thinking—for better or worse—and who confront injustice with conviction. Over one hundred years ago, inspired women rose up to confront the inequalities they faced in society and the home. From its inception and advancement, the women’s rights movement has inspired countless women: inventions designed, cures discovered, vocations pursued, and new ideas entered the public domain. In the early 1900s, one woman within the Pentecostal tradition blazed a trail for these “new” ideas, and her contributions stand the test of time. Mae Eleanor Frey helped establish a place for women in leadership within Pentecostal and Baptist circles. She gained the trust of both men and women across denominations and faiths, leaving a legacy all can emulate.

This chapter will highlight the contributions of Mae Eleanor Frey, an early twentieth-century Pentecostal matriarch, to American religion. Her life and ministry demonstrate the value of a woman serving in whatever capacity that God calls her and the importance of her calling being supported by men and women.

## *Shaping a Legacy 365 Days a Year*

Mae Eleanor Frey was ordained as a Baptist pastor at the age of forty in 1905. She found her calling as a Pentecostal traveling evangelist and pastor sixteen years later and received ordination with the Assemblies of God (AG) denomination. Much like her contemporary, Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Foursquare Church, Frey also faced the challenges of a woman in ministry with tenacity. Her correspondence with AG denominational leadership revealed her loyalty to the burgeoning fellowship but also her frustrations with consistent gender biases among her fellow ministers. The biases did not prevail, and she marched onward. Invitations to preach and minister never ceased, and she felt as if she was “on the job 365 days in the year” (Blumhöfer 1995, 82). Traveling from coast to coast and abroad, she actively preached, pastored, traveled, and authored religious novels until she passed away at 89 years old (77).

Known for her fearlessness and transparency, Frey’s work and words reveal disparities between doctrine and practice for Pentecostal women in vocational ministry. Pentecostal historian Edith Blumhöfer (1995, 77) compiled Frey’s work and letters to the General Council leadership of the Assemblies of God. These historical documents continue to shape the dialogue about the challenges modern women face. Frey’s life story and words inspired generations of men and women to put aside gender biases and diligently to do the divine work of God’s calling. Her contributions to the American religious landscape were many, and the legacy she helped shape for women in religious leadership roles continues today.

## *Rising Star*

Born on August 5, 1865, to Erastus and Catherine S. Edick in Deposit, NY, Mae Eleanor Frey (née Mae Edick) overcame obstacles early on with tenacity and unbridled fortitude (King 2009, 59). Although Catherine had eight children, four of Mae’s siblings died at an early age. She was sickly for most of her young life. Rugged determinism passed on by her mother helped her survive (Frey 1926, 21).

Her father was a bricklayer by day. He blocked out his grief by playing his banjo at local bars and social gatherings at night, to the neglect of his wife and surviving children. According to Frey, “My father drank and would spend his money around the corner where there was a gay crowd. He was not the kind that rolled in the gutter; he was a gentleman that drank, had talent and ability, made lots of money, but spent it freely, while mother turned our dresses and coats and made them over.” Though a drunk and non-religious man, Frey led her father into faith toward the end of his life. He regretted the way he neglected his family and spoke candidly

about it on his death bed. “I am sorry for the way I neglected my children. It wasn’t me, but the whisky and that awful appetite that was born in me. But thank God I lived to see the day He took the appetite away” (Frey 1926, 20).

Her mother, though inactive in church, firmly believed in predestination. Part of the suffragist movement in New York and a member of the temperance society, Catherine Edick resolved to become a writer for the sake of her children (“The Band of Hope,” *Tunkhannock Republican*, June 4, 1880). She loved the theater, was an aspiring playwright, and pushed little Mae Edick into her first theatrical role at the age of 5 (Frey 1926, 21).

This upbringing made Frey fearless and gifted her with an ability to tell an attention-grabbing story (“Large Audience Hears Evangelist,” *Napa Valley Register*, July 6, 1927). These two motifs of audaciousness and storytelling imprinted themselves on her life and ministry and informed her work until she passed away. Because of her mother’s influence, in her teenage years, she took interest in the fine arts and studied “for the stage.” In her studies, she despaired of the out-of-touch language of Shakespeare. She longed to share and hear stories of people in her lifetime. Against the advice of her mother, she decided instead to become a reporter. Upon hearing a newsworthy story, she secretly wrote it and sent it to the newspaper for possible publication. As a result, the newspaper offered her a job as a reporter where she quickly became a “rising star” (Frey 1926, 21).

### *Love at First Sight*

While a cub reporter, she was assigned to cover a revival where she gave an account of stories, both funny and miraculous. There, a man named Peter Isaiah (P. I.) Frey stood up and gave a testimony of his salvation and deliverance from alcohol. She felt attracted to him and recounted it as “love at first sight.” The next night, she experienced an encounter with God to which she attributed her conversion. In the middle of writing notes for her story, she experienced an “old-fashioned conversion” in which she “saw the love of Christ.” She tried to leave without making a firm decision but felt God’s thundering voice telling her that if she left, she would “go out a lost soul forever” (Frey 1926, 22). She ran to the altar in obedience and never turned back.

### *What Woman?*

Soon after her conversion, she accepted P. I. Frey’s marriage proposal against her mother’s wishes. She saw it as a way to live out the Christian faith she lacked at

home with her irreligious parents. As a result of her conversion experience, she gave up her job with the newspaper. She went right up to the editor and, though he called her a fool, she forthrightly stated the reason for quitting: "God will not let me continue." She immediately left her mainline church and went to work in the City Mission, where she "played the organ and helped to lead souls to the altar" (Frey 1926, 22).

Contrary to the times, the Freys functioned much outside of traditional gender roles. God called both Mae and her husband into ministry. They started with "cottage meetings" and received a letter asking them both to "come and hold a campaign." Both of them lacked experience holding revivals, but they went: he shared his testimony, and she worked the altars. On their earliest trip together, she purchased her first Bible for 20 cents and faithfully "work[ed] the altars" (Frey 1926, 22).

Wherever they went, both she and P. I. attracted large crowds, which always initiated "revivals" in various denominations. In one of their early tent revivals, over 2000 people made decisions to accept Christ, professing a new-found faith. In later years, Frey frequently wrote articles for the *Pentecostal Evangel*, the flagship periodical for the Assemblies of God (AG) in the United States. She shared about this and other revivals they led in an article reminiscing about her early ministry experiences. "People in all the walks of life were saved. Society women, club men, rich and poor knelt together at the same altar and gave themselves to Jesus. Hundreds of children were saved, and crowds poured into the Sunday Schools" (Frey, "When We Prayed Through for Revival," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 23, 1940). The effects of this one particular revival were felt for decades.

Initially, she doubted the validity of female preachers simply because she never experienced seeing a woman preacher. People, however, continued to ask her to "take a night" of the campaign. Her first preaching experience occurred in Pennsylvania in 1901, when the minister requesting the campaign came to her and mentioned that the dean and students of the Baptist school were coming to "hear a woman preach." She reacted by asking, "What woman?" Her self-doubting declarations of "I cannot preach" failed to sway the minister. That night, with much trembling, she preached her first sermon. Forty to fifty students came forward and made decisions for the Lord (Frey, "When We Prayed Through for Revival," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 23, 1940). She continued to preach revivals until a few weeks before she passed away at age 89.

Together, the couple pursued ministry. P. I. was ordained with the Baptist association, and Mae declared to "never be ordained." However, her God-given gifts, talents, and pastoral heart resulted in full ordination by her faith community. A group of local pastors and ministers within the Baptist denomination of the Northern states (now American Baptist) urged her to become fully ordained. After

two and a half hours in the ordination interview, they voted unanimously and said, “Mrs. Frye [Frey], we want to confer this honor on you” (Frey 1926, 23). Speechless and humbled, she wholeheartedly accepted. Her actions set a precedent for others to follow. In 1905, she became the first ordained woman in the Northern Baptist Convention (King 2009, 59).

### *With My Very Last Strength*

At the time of her ordination, she was gravely ill with tuberculosis (King 2009, 59). She described the days of preaching with this illness in sobering terms. “With my very last strength I preached the Gospel. Sometimes I would fill my handkerchief with blood as I stood in the pulpit and I preached until my voice and strength gave out. My body wasted to skin and bones” (Frey, “An Evangelist’s Story,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, May 22 1926, 8). For over ten years, doctors put her on various health fads, including different climates with hopes of redeeming her health. As a last resort, she sought out a German specialist. He sent her home saying “There was nothing he could do.” A short time later, she hemorrhaged and sensed her life “slipping away.” A friend called in a Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor, George Davis, to come and pray for her. Reading from James 5, he anointed her with oil and prayed. Instantaneously, a shock shot through her entire body, and she experienced healing before the pastor finished his prayer. To everyone’s amazement and surprise, she got up and walked around. This scared her family and friends, who started mourning her loss. Upon seeing her walk around, her nurse exclaimed, “Don’t put any dependence on this, for people often get like that before they die.” Mae reported that she was completely and miraculously healed. After the healing she never touched a “drop of medicine” for 18 years or more (Frey, “I am the Lord that Healed Thee: Healed of Tuberculosis,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, January 28 1928, 13).

### *Making Compresses and Knitting Sweaters*

Not only did Mae Eleanor Frey pastor when women pastors were rare, but she also served as a Chaplain late in WWI. After spending time in prayer for the soldiers fighting overseas, she emerged beyond the gender expectations of “making compresses and knitting sweaters” by entering chaplaincy. Being a woman of pure grit and action, she took up a course in nursing and entered into hospital work with the Red Cross as a chaplain nurse. Feeling this was her duty, she spent endless hours working tirelessly at the hospital as a volunteer, all the while still maintaining

her preaching schedule on Sundays. The list of her duties as a chaplain-nurse included ministry to both spiritual and physical needs. She stated, “It was my duty to receive the sick, bring them into the ward, minister to their physical needs, and then find out if they were Christians, what their church membership was, and if they wished to see their pastor.” She attended to dying men and women with the utmost care and compassion as they “tried to reach out for a single ray of light to help them through the dark valley” (Frey, “An Evangelist’s Story,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 9).

Forty-four years before the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Frey received equal pay for her work as a pastor. After her work at the hospital, she returned to her pastorate. She preached at Echo Lake Baptist Church faithfully despite a growing dissatisfaction concerning her personal spirituality. As an ordained pastor for Echo Lake Church, she received a payment, recorded as “Paid Mrs. Frey,” of \$5.00 each Sunday for her preaching (Echo Lake Baptist Church 1921). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average hourly pay in 1919 ranged from \$0.537 cents to \$0.75 cents for manufacturing jobs, bakers and bricklayers (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1946, 1914–23). Bakery foremen managing or leading a group of workers made up to 93.8 cents an hour in Brooklyn, New York (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1920, 1919).

In 1918, she preached twenty-two times and amassed a total of \$110.00, plus a collection and a stipend for the gas it took, picking up her family to and from the station. Between 1918 and 1921, her total pay went up and included her transportation. Before she left, she was receiving \$8.00 a Sunday per preaching engagement at the church. Within the same collection of financial records for Echo Lake Baptist Church it shows that, once she left, the payment returned to \$5.00 for the next minister. It did not matter whether the preacher was male or female, they each received the same amount: \$5.00 a Sunday (Echo Lake Baptist Church 1921).

Despite her efforts and income as a pastor, she increasingly grew dissatisfied with her preaching. Her heart grew restless as she sensed the “Spirit of God” drawing her more than ever in her life. One night she woke up with the words, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” ringing in her ears. She knew deep in her heart she could never accomplish this feat on her own. This, along with other conversations with minister friends experiencing “Pentecost,” made her heart thirst for more (Frey, “An Evangelist’s Story,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 9).

## *Let it Fall*

Her search for something more landed her in a Pentecostal Assembly where a special guest from Newark named W. I. Evans was preaching. As she listened to his

words, her body began trembling and shaking. Upon thinking she was coming down with the “grippe,” she left and sensed the Lord saying to her, “You are not sick in body, but your soul is sick: you have been drawing back for twelve years. At that time I would have baptized you with the Holy Spirit, even as I did the disciples of old, but you listened to the voice of men and drew back.” She went back three months later, feeling spiritually parched like “a salt land.” This was her first exposure to the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace and to Pentecostals who “spoke in tongues” as evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Frey, “An Evangelist’s Story,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 8).

With all the tenacity she had, she fought against this experience much like she resisted her ordination. After she accepted the invitation to a convention at Bethel Training School in Newark, New Jersey, she had a personal revelation. The experience turned her heart toward Pentecostalism. She recounts her story of praying for this experience:

As I knelt there, my soul was in a commotion. It just seemed as though my whole life was a failure. Sister Little said, “Begin to praise the Lord, Sister Frey.”

“I can’t praise Him.”

“Praise Him anyway.”

“No, I am not a hypocrite and I don’t feel like praising the Lord,” I repeated sentimentously.

“Say it again.”

“Praise the Lord, O, I don’t feel any different.”

“But praise is comely, Sister; offer Him the sacrifice of praise.”

“I never did that before. I don’t believe in shouting,” I answered.

The minister and everybody around me were praying and praising the Lord, making the loudest noise I ever heard, all praying at once “Sister, God wants to baptize you, say, ‘Praise the Lord.’”

“Praise the Lord,” I snapped. O, how good He was, patient, loving Christ. All at once something was pouring down from above all over me.

“It’s the Latter Rain” said Sister Little, “Oh Lord, let it fall.” And fall it did.  
(Frey 1926, 22)

This experience in Pentecostalism changed the trajectory of her life and ministry. In her prayer time, she received “visions of lands, countries, great mountain peaks, prairies, oceans, ships, people of every class and condition.” Her husband soon received a similar experience, which they refer to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. They both stayed on in their pastorate for a year and a half. In 1921, she resigned her pastorate with Echo Lake Baptist Church to follow the vision God gave her for worldwide evangelism (Frey, “An Evangelist’s Story,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1926, 9). She affiliated herself with the Assemblies of God and sought ordination at age 54. This was 14 years before the AG took an official stance in their bylaws and constitution on the ordination of women in 1935 (Qualls 2018, 502-57).

### *Still on the Firing Line*

Although Frey enjoyed a full life of ministry, traveling, and doing the work of an evangelist, she experienced many challenges that are not mentioned in her personal correspondences. In some of her letters to the leadership of the Assemblies of God in 1928, she used the phrase “still on the firing line” (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Written to describe her intense ministry schedule and travel, it characterized her family challenges as well.

After marrying P. I. Frey in 1887, their first son, Stuart Wells Frey, was born in 1889. Twenty-one years later, they unofficially adopted a daughter, Catherine Elizabeth, and named her after Frey’s mother (G. King, pers. comm., September 16, 2019). The records of the 1900 census for Paterson, NJ, indicate another child, known as “Lidia,” was born in 1884, three years before Mae and P. I. married or met (U.S. Dept. of the Interior 1901, Passaic County, ward 1, district 106). In the 1910 census conducted from Cattaraugus, New York, Lydia A. Frey’s mother was listed as being from Minnesota and her father from Pennsylvania (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1913, New York, Cattaraugus, Salamanca, district 0100). Another son, known as “A. L. Frey of Philadelphia,” also surfaced in connection with Mae Eleanor Frey’s husband’s obituary in 1928 (“Deaths with Funeral Announcements: Frey,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1928). Newspaper stories predating his obituary connected an A. L. Frey in Philadelphia to various petty theft incidents.



Though these children present a mystery, a newspaper article in 1885 revealed the possibility of a previous marriage for P. I. Frey. "Mrs. Isaiah Frey, who has been very ill of typhoid pneumonia, is convalescent. Several of Benj. Frey's [brother to P. I.] children are also sick" ("Home and Other Matters," *Wyoming Democrat*, April 24, 1885).

Though Frey spoke of both her son Stuart and daughter Catherine affectionately in her correspondence to Assemblies of God General Superintendent J. W. Welch, her children had their own share of challenges (Frey 1925). Their private lives remained tumultuous, but these stories were rarely shared with the public. Stuart Wells Frey's marriage and engagement to Edna Mountfred (Mumford), highlighted in the *Times-Tribune* newspaper, listed all participating in the wedding party as if it was the social event of the year ("Marriage Announcements," *Times-Tribune*, June 30, 1909). On October 21, 1914, Stuart landed in the newspaper again in a divorce case against his wife Edna, printed as one of "Fifty Cases on Divorce Schedule" (*Scranton Truth*, October 21, 1914). Their little girl Elizabeth was only four years old at the time. His second marriage, to Floris Frey, ended in divorce as well. According to a death certificate, they lost their five-month-old baby girl, little Floris Frey, to bronchial pneumonia complications caused by a skin disorder called *Erysipelas* in March 1928 (Pennsylvania Dept. of Health). He remarried a third time, to a Minerva, and they settled in Florida ("Deaths in Tampa, Other West Coast Cities," *The Tampa Tribune*, November 21, 1966).

Following her granddaughter's passing, Frey poured herself yet even more into ministry. At the age of 63, she spent six months in Canada. While there she preached twice daily, and her schedule remained "dated up until Christmas." According to a letter written to J. R. Evans on October 31, 1928 (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), Frey hoped to return home to her husband and spend Christmas with him.

Earlier in the same year, she expressed raw and frank frustrations in letters of correspondence to J. R. Evans, Chairman of the Assemblies of God, concerning realities she faced as a woman in ministry. Relentlessly, she sought to find a pastorate in Southern California to be near her husband in his failing health.<sup>1</sup> Her requests were denied. She wrote, "There is absolutely no open door for me in the pastorate in Pentecost in California. At their last Council I felt like a criminal as they brought in their foolish women question again. As I should say their foolish resolutions about women and thrashed it and thrashed it from and con until one felt like asking God to forgive us for being women" (M. E. Frey to J. R. Evans, September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).

Due to her husband's poor health, Frey's evangelist work provided the sole support for her husband and her daughter, who attended boarding school. She

lamented this fact in her letters to J. R. Evans (e.g., September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), but remained faithful to her vocation in spite of these hardships. While she traveled, doctors in a Glendale sanitarium cared for her husband and worked to extend his life. Unfortunately, her husband did not make it to Christmas. He died on November 25 of the same year.

### *We Can't Trust Them*

In her letter, as well as in articles she wrote for *The Pentecostal Evangel*, Frey continued to speak her mind about the challenges facing women in ministry. She used her own experiences to speak out against the duplicity of those in Pentecostal ranks on the topic of women in ministry. She penned, “The men will wax eloquent in their frustrations about women but when some of these very men want to go away for a rest they send for me to come and take their pastorates while they are gone, and I marry, bury their dead, give the Lord’s supper and do the very same things that any pastor is obliged to do.” She kept nothing back when she asked them why they called her, a woman, to pastor while they were gone. The answer always given, “We can’t trust them, we would not have any work left when we returned, but we have confidence in you, Sister Frey.” Her frustrations mounted with the California Southern Council to the extent that she contemplated moving her credentials back with the Baptist Denomination or even taking on a pastorate with Aimee Semple McPherson’s “crowd” (M. E. Frey to J. R. Evans, September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).

### *I Detest Denominationalism*

Frey was also a woman of great paradox. Although she was ordained as a Baptist minister early on, and with the Assemblies of God in the second half of her life, in her own words, she “detest[ed] denominationalism.” The thing she detested was the very framework she forged. Torn between a love for the experience of the baptism of the Spirit she found as an Assemblies of God minister, she missed the freedom she possessed as a female pastor within the Baptist ranks.

I sometimes wonder if my ministry has narrowed or widened since leaving the Baptist church. Many, many times I would hold campaigns in a Methodist or Presbyterian church in a place where there were Baptist churches and the Convention board never paid [sic] any attention to it—I

had more freedom that way, but not the blessed freedom of the Full Gospel as I have it now. (Blumhöfer 1995, 82)

She continued in ministry with the Assemblies of God, traveled around the country preaching across denominations and faith communities. She preached wherever an open door or invitation came (Frey, “Preaching to the Mormons,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 9, 1926). Her journey with the Assemblies of God ultimately led her across continents with the Pentecostal message.

## *World-famous Evangelist*

Her first overseas trip carried her to Greece, Spain, Great Britain, Italy, France, Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine, sailing on *Baltic* in 1924 at age 57 (Frey 1923). When she returned, she frequently lectured on her overseas work and drew large crowds. *The Oakland Tribune* promoted her as a “World Famous Evangelist,” under nonsectarian religious services (“Non-Sectarian,” advertisement in *Oakland Tribune*, August 30, 1924). *The Californian* described her as a “Famous Lady Preacher” (“Evangelist Mae Eleanor Frey,” *Californian*, December 11, 1924). Another paper reported her presentation about the Holy Land was, for those who attended, “the most dramatic lecture that they ever heard” (“Large Audience Hears Evangelist,” *Napa Valley Register*, July 6, 1927).

Twenty years later, she continued to speak her mind against forming associations among the broader Pentecostal groups when the first “exploratory conference” occurred in 1947. This small beginning and conference formed the current Pentecostal Worldwide Fellowship. She wrote a letter on August 24, 1948, directly to General Secretary J. R. Flower asking him,

Why do we need to organize another group many of whom are fanatical to the extreme and who hold to doctrines that, as the Assemblies of God, we cannot accept? I suppose that even the group that handles snakes can be admitted, for fundamentally they are sound ... Well, maybe I am narrow and off the record in writing this letter to you but “them’s my sentiments.”  
(Mae Eleanor Frey Collection)

## *The Minister*

In 1938, at the age of 74, she expanded her contributions to religion and Pentecostal theology in a unique and innovative way. She wrote a novel called *The Minister* that

was informed by her experiences as a female Pentecostal minister. With each character, she intertwined portions of her theology and belief system. She creatively used the genre of fiction as a teaching tool for Pentecostal doctrines. *The Minister* was an extension of her ministry. Her work appealed to blue-collar people within the American religious landscape. It unlocked a fascinating look into many people's social and spiritual lives. She integrated stories of "everyday people" while embracing her love for Pentecost. Innovative for her time and place as a woman, the book became a means to teach Pentecostal theology through narrative fiction.

The plot traces the story of a mainline denominational minister who "reached his thirty-fifth year and had not yet fallen in love" (Frey 1939, 14). He met a young woman named Mildred, who was also unmarried. She received a supernatural experience at the Pentecostal-like tabernacle revival meeting that came to town, yet he remained complacent. Because of her convictions, Mildred refused marriage to the minister. Many, if not all, of the convictions of this new church, which echo Frey's holiness themes, spread to the people in the community. They discuss the beliefs over dinner, at the meetings, at home, and through the romantic scenes as well.

The antagonist, a girl named Jane Hampstead, longed for the heart of the minister. She tried to break up Dr. Stillwell's love by getting Mildred's family to send her to a sanatorium because of her experience at the tabernacle. Mildred left for England and there met someone who directed her to work in India. This broke up the relationship until they met once again at the Taj Mahal on an unexpected trip in India. According to Frey, "The Minister has been compiled from different incidents that have come under my own observation and which have taken place during thirty-five years of my ministry. Names and locations are all fictitious. The Divine Healing meeting was an actual occurrence. I was an eyewitness to many marvelous things" (Frey 1939, preface).

Themes like the infallibility of the Bible, salvation, Trinitarian belief, baptism of the Spirit, along with other elements of the "Sixteen Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God," materialize throughout the storyline. After Mildred experienced "Spirit baptism," the rhetoric shifts and includes vocabulary used within Pentecostal circles.

"Mildred," the minister was ruffled, and he spoke sharply, "I suppose you know that the Bible is not to be taken literally. So much of it is figurative; besides the translators have made so many grave mistakes; large parts of it are rejected by modern scholarship."

"I believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God," was Mildred's quiet reply.

“Certainly,” was the minister’s quick response, “it contains the Word of God, but Mildred, I hope you are not among the deluded set who believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible.”

“Yes, James, I am among that number,” was the girl’s answer. (Frey 1939, 44)

In other instances, Mildred speaks of being filled with “God’s Holy Spirit” and “spreading the gospel story” (Frey 1939, 45). Ultimately, the story ends with their marriage and declaration to serve Christ the rest of their lives. The same admonition conveyed in *The Minister* to serve Christ wholeheartedly characterized Frey’s life.

Five years later, at the age of 78, she published to a wider audience through the Eerdmans Publishing House of Grand Rapids while pastoring Bethel Full Gospel Church in Rochester, New York (M. E. Frey to J. R. Flower, August 2, 1943, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Her second work, *Altars of Brick*, intersected with the acceptance of the Assemblies of God and other classical Pentecostal denominations into the National Evangelical Association. Using different rhetoric from her first book, she appealed to the Church at large but again used narrative to deal with the theological and ethical issues of her time. “Gone were references to Pentecostal peculiarities so evident in *The Minister*, although, in step with other evangelicals, the common enemy remained theological modernism” (King 2009, 60).

### ***“Wait Until I’m Dead!”***

During the same year *Altars of Brick* was published, on August 2, 1943, she wrote in a letter to J. Roswell Flower that her life was only beginning. “Life begins with me at 78. I sure am getting along. For eleven months, I have supplied the pulpit of this important church. I hope now the Council is sending us a pastor so I can go home for a couple weeks’ rest and do some work with my pen beside get going in campaigns that are waiting for me to be free” (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Her schedule was full up with preaching, radio broadcasting, campaigns, interim pastoring, and writing for four more years. Although placed on the superannuated list for aged and retired ministers, she continually refused this designation in her letters. One such correspondence, dated September 11, 1944 (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), expressed her frustrations. “My dear Bro. Flower, I have to hurry and answer your letter before you put me on the superannuated list of old preachers, Mercy! Wait until I’m dead, but not while I’m alive. You see it’s like this, I have calls

enough to keep me going until 1948 so I have to fill them if the Lord carries.” Another year later, she sent in a donation to the retirement fund instead of receiving from it.

Finally, in September of 1954, she settled down to retire at her son’s home in Connecticut. She conceded her retirement but continued to preach as opportunities presented themselves. At the age of 89, she preached a revival at the Rev. Norman S. Farrington’s church in Huntington, New York. Farrington graciously presided over her funeral a few weeks later, after she “retired from this life” peacefully at Stamford, Connecticut, December 4, 1954 (King 2009, 62).

## Conclusion

Mae Eleanor Frey’s exemplary contribution as a woman fully engaged in Baptist and Pentecostal ministry left an indelible mark on American religion at a time when women struggled to make their place known. Her pioneer work in Pentecostal literature, ministry, and life spanned two world wars, the Great Depression, the early American Pentecostal revivals, and so much more. She faced struggles of balancing ministry, health, and family with both grit and heartache. Through it all, she displayed to other men and women that gender and age remained inconsequential to answering the call of God. “God almighty is no fool—I say it with all reverence—would He fill a woman with the Holy Ghost—endow her with ability—give her a vision of souls and then tell her to shut her mouth?” (Blumhöfer 1995, 82). She spoke up when others stayed quiet. Her legacy continues today within the lives of all women who answer the calling to ministry and share God’s story with all who will hear.<sup>2</sup>

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## Notes

1. In a letter to Evans on September 8, 1928, Frey wrote, "I am his sole support. I would love to take a settled pastorate for there is nothing else I can do but preach the Gospel. California is the only place he can live. I also have a young daughter just reaching 17 that I must support until she finishes school" (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).
2. The author wishes to thank Phyllis Reigle Funk for sharing oral stories of Frey's influence on her family. With her contributions, and through sharing resources

put together by her father before his passing, the author was able to piece together the information and timeline of Frey's work and life.