

**VONETTE
ZACHARY
BRIGHT
1926-2015**



**LIFE OF
PRAYER,
LIFE OF
JOY**

When future historians write the history of the Christian church in the 20th century, one couple they cannot ignore is Bill and Vonette Bright. They led a worldwide evangelism and discipleship movement that has reached more than a billion people.

Vonette Zachary was born in July 1926 in Coweta. When she was six, she met eleven-year-old Bill Bright at an ice-cream social. Bill went to California to seek his fortune and Vonette headed to Texas Women's University, where she began to question her faith. In 1945, a letter arrived from Bill, who was attending Fuller Seminary.

They began to write daily. She received flowers, candy, and a telegram or telephone call every week. When Bill came to visit her, he proposed marriage, and Vonette accepted. As they continued their relationship over the next three years, many spiritual questions plagued Vonette. Bill sent her passages of Scripture to read, but they just didn't have the same meaning to her.

He had devoted his life to Jesus Christ through the ministries of Hollywood Presbyterian Church and Dr. Henrietta Mears, the church's director of Christian Education. Vonette decided Bill had become a religious fanatic who must be rescued. At the same time, Bill was beginning to think that perhaps Vonette wasn't a real Christian.

After graduating in 1948 with a degree in Home Economics and a minor in Chemistry, Vonette agreed to meet with Mears, who explained the gospel in a way that made sense for the first time. Now Vonette was ready for marriage and ministry. The couple married in December 1948. On their honeymoon Bill had told her he wanted their marriage to be a true partnership. "I want you to remain the person I married."

In 1951, after quitting seminary one month before graduation, Bill convinced a skeptical Vonette to found Campus Crusade for Christ (renamed Cru in 2011), beginning their work at UCLA and quickly expanding across the country. The goal was to connect with college students in campus settings and to instill a lifelong practice of Christianity.

In 1988, Vonette introduced legislation, unanimously approved by both houses of Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan, to make the first Thursday in May the permanent date for the National Day of Prayer. Today events are held nationwide. Local volunteers hold activities including prayer breakfasts, Bible reading marathons, concerts of prayer, rallies, church prayer vigils, student flagpole gatherings and observances in sports stadiums.

By 2002, Vonette had authored twenty books, received four honorary degrees, and received national recognition for her contributions to prayer and broadcasting. She refused to wallow in grief or "take it easy" after Bill died of lung cancer in 2003. She continued her ministry until her death in December 2015 at age 89.

Although not as well-known as Billy Graham or Oral Roberts, the Brights were among the country's most successful evangelists and built Campus Crusade into what was often called the largest Christian ministry in the world. Based in Orlando, Cru has annual revenues of more than \$500 million, and according to Forbes magazine, is one of the country's 25 largest charitable organizations.