

## **ROSADO ROUSSEAU, LEONCIA (“MAMÁ LÉO”) (1912– )**

“Imagine a person like me, who had never even smoked a cigarette, unworldly, working with addicts, breaking their habits cold turkey, without aspirin or anything.” Virginia Sanchez Korrol. “In Search of Unconventional Women,” in Vicki L. Ruiz (ed.) *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women’s History*.

The spiritual leader, the Reverend Leoncia Rosado Rousseau, known to many as Mama Leo, was born in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico. It was there that she first heard the voice of God calling her into his service. She arrived in New York City in 1935 because she felt her calling was to bring God’s word to the lost and needy in the Diaspora. Along with her pastor husband she founded the Bronx-based Pentecostal denomination Council of Damascus Churches in 1940. When the pastor was drafted into military service, the Reverend Rosado Rousseau became the first Latina Pentecostal pastor in the city. Rosado Rousseau’s ministry was groundbreaking in many ways. She established a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, the Damascus Christian Youth Crusade, within the church later housing it in a separate building. This program became a state-wide model and Mama Leo’s ministry garnered recognition for the many followers whose lives were transformed. She continued to preach, teach and minister well into her nineties. Suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, the Reverend Rosado Rousseau entered a nursing home in 2005.