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Leoncia Rosado, also known as "Mama Leo," founded the "Iglesia Cristiana Damascus" and envisioned a ministry among drug addicts that for years has been an integral attempt to do mission. That's why she established the "Damascus Youth Crusade" [in 1957]. Many addicts were transformed by the ministry and pastoral care of "Mama Leo."

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4044/is_200201/ai_n9026546/pg_2

Rev. **Leoncia Rosado Rousseau**, known as Mama Leo, for coming to New York City in 1935 simply because she heard a "voice" while on a mountain in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico. Mama Leo birthed the Damascus Christian Churches movement and had a ministry to drug addicts that eventually brought some of today's greatest men and women of God into the kingdom, including Nicky Cruz, who went on to establish TRUCE, a worldwide evangelistic ministry, and Jim Jimenez, pastor of the Rock Church. Mama Leo found support from neither women nor her male counterparts, yet continued to minister until poor health subdued her.

<http://209.85.215.104/search?q=cache:ioCpvWejNmIJ:www.esa-online.org/Images/mmDocument/PRISM%2520Archive/In%2520Like%2520Manner/NovDec05InLikeManner.pdf+%22Leoncia+Rosado%22&hl=es&ct=clnk&cd=14&gl=es>

Rev. Leoncia Rosado Rousseau, born April 11, 1912 died yesterday (October 6, 2006) in NYC, known as "Mama Leo" to many she has been promoted to glory. She was the founder of Damascus Christian Churches (later pastured by Rev. Enrique Melendez) and was the spiritual mom to many including Nicky Cruz, Jim Jimenez of the Rock Church in Virginia Beach and Bishop Jerry Kaufman, founder of Love Gospel Assembly in the Bronx. I wrote about her in my chapter *"The Ladies are Warriors": Latina Pentecostalism and Faith-based Activism in New York City* for Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States [Download ElizabethRios-12](#)

Iglesia Cristiana de Jamaica

144-64 87th Avenue

Jamaica, NY

<http://lizrios.com/2006/10/06/a-pioneer-in-ministry-dies/>

"Mama Leo" is what all the hundreds of ex-addicts, prostitutes, alcoholics, and street people call Rev. Leoncia Rosado. These are the social outcasts no one cared for; sad to say, even the church. But Mama Leo was called, along with her husband Rev. Francisco Rosado, to minister God's grace to these so-called outcasts. She cared. They both cared enough to begin in **1957 the Damascus Youth Crusade** while they were pastoring La Iglesia Cristiana Damasco in the South Bronx. The Damascus Youth Crusade was to become the seedbed, leader, and inspiration for hundreds of Christian drug programs throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and Latin America. Mama Leo's conception of the gospel always includes a social dimension. She speaks of her concern for social work, community involvement, and helping the needy-"the outcasts," as she calls them. Hers is a wholistic gospel responding to the whole person.

Rev. John Gimenez, ex-addict and alumnus of Damascus, who now pastors the large and influential Rock Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, in his book *Up Tight!* gives a compelling and powerful witness to Mama Leo and the Damasco church:

But all of us—directly or indirectly—trace our "delivery" to that little Spanish church at 861 East 162nd Street. It was God's house all right. He was there. You go inside Damasco, and boy! something happens to you! It's like the excitement and gripping power of a new love affair.... In the little parlor you see Mom Rosado sitting with the Bible in her lap and she's got two or three boys sitting around, listening to her explain the message of God.... And people come in—broken people, rotten people, no goods, unwanted. The misfits of society walk through those open doors to new life.... Damasco was like the center of a new life for addicts, and out from the temple there stretched life lines into the gutters of the great city of New York, and then further out into the towns and cities across America.

Many of the "graduates" of Damascus Youth Crusade have gone on to develop outstanding drug programs and outreach ministries. Evangelists, missionary workers, and pastors are among the alumni of Damascus, nurtured under the loving, dedicated, and sacrificial service of Rev. Francisco Rosado and Mama Leo.

<http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=15814&pagenum=3&lang=>

Oral interviews of **Leoncia Rosado** Rousseau and Aimee Garcia Cortese by Sanchez-Korrol and Benjamin Alicea in 1985, led to biographical studies that create a link between the early Puerto Rican settlements established in the 1920s and 1930s and the rise of this community in the United States after World War II. Reverend Leoncia, or Leo, as she is called by her followers, came to the United States in 1935, convinced that she had been chosen for an evangelical life in the Protestant Church. Her prophecy came true when her husband, Roberto, was drafted by the United States armed forces during the second World War, and she succeeded him as the new pastor of the Damascus Church in the Bronx, the church in which they worshipped. As part of her ministry, Rosado Rousseau established programs for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, ex-convicts, and gang members, programs which began to deal successfully with some of the more serious problems that affected the Puerto Rican community at the time. The life story of Rosado Rousseau, thus, was tied to the early migration experiences and events in the Puerto Rican community in later years.

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Damasco Christian Churches: Rev. Leoncia Rosado Rousseau, Angel to the Outcasts

Born on April 11, 1912, Rev. Leoncia Rosado Rousseau or "**Mama Leo**," as she is affectionately called by many, came to New York City by boat on September 22, 1935. Although when I met her, she was ninety years old and suffering from the beginning stages of a progressive, neurodegenerative disease, Mama Leo could still recall her dramatic beginnings in ministry.

"there were no programs really dealing with drug addicts that were faith-based other than Teen Challenge and **Mama Leo's Christian** Youth Crusade, which was part of the Damasco **Christian Church**."

From the seedy corridors of some of New York City's worst barrios, her ministry to "the outcasts" of society—the drug addicts, gang members, prostitutes, and alcohol-

ics—has birthed some of today’s greatest preachers, pastors, and evangelists, like **Nicky Cruz**, who went on to establish a worldwide evangelistic ministry; **Jim Jimenez**, who pastors the Rock **Church** in Virginia Beach, Virginia; and **Bishop Jerry Kaufman**, now deceased, who was a Jewish drug addict and went on to become a well-known figure in New York City after leaving John 3:16 to establish Love Gospel Assembly in the Bronx, to name just a few. “It was in the mountains,” she says “of Toa Alta, Puerto Rico, when God spoke to me and told me I had to go to New York City.”

²¹ After having a huge argument with her mother about this “voice,” she arrived in New York, where she met **Rev. Francisco Olazábal**, who she credits for opening many doors of ministry for her. “I would go to services with him where he would be the invited speaker and out of nowhere he would say, ‘I feel from the Lord to have Leoncia speak,’ ” she recalls. “You could see the disapproval of all the male ministers on the pulpit” but “I walked through every door God opened,” she said. A great opportunity for city government sponsorship of her program came when Nelson A. Rockefeller was governor. “She actually said no to \$12 million dollars!” said Sonia Gamboa, **Mama Leo**’s personal assistant for the last eleven years and a frequent participant of the **Center for Emerging Female Leadership**. “The *New York Times* actually wrote about her for this situation. Rockefeller offered her \$12 million in state assistance to help fund the program she developed for drug addicts and prostitutes of the street but there was a catch, she had to take out the name of Christ in her programming.” Sonia believes that the exact statement **Mama Leo** told them was “you can keep your \$12 million, I will keep my Christ.”

When asked about the discouragements and struggles she faced as a Latina in ministry, she said, “I was rejected by many.” Sonia, her assistant, explained: “Cops didn’t like [**Mama Leo**] because she was working with these really bad people who already had records in the police department. Ministers didn’t like her because she was a woman “doing a man’s work.” It would have been easier to deal with” said Sonia, “if **Mama Leo** had other Latina sisters to talk to, but at that time not many of them were doing what she was doing. She was isolated.” Another struggle she faced was money for operating costs. It was difficult to meet some basic needs for her program participants, although she says, “God always provided.”

Today, while the drug and alcohol rehabilitation program no longer exists, she says it does live on through the legacies of the people she touched. However, **Damascus Christian Church** still operates successfully and has a Latina woman heading its operations as bishop. **Mama Leo** still attends the **church** she started in the 1970s, “Iglesia Cristiana de **Jamaica**,” which currently has a membership roster of about 150 people. **Mama Leo** went to the toughest neighborhoods, talked and ministered to some of our society’s less desirables, because she knew without a shadow of a doubt that God had called her. Perhaps that is what is missing in some of our emerging Latinas, a sense of divine purpose. Leo summed up her life with the quip, “if my life inspires other Latinas to get to know God then that is a good thing.”

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pg 205 # 9 “the ladies are warriors”

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