

Building the Church:

Robert Coulter served as president of our General Conference for these 24 years. Native to West Virginia, he ministered in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Michigan prior to being selected to lead the Church. Now 78, Elder Coulter answers BA questions about this era:

BA: Your tenure as Conference president brought new levels of expertise in business and financial management, parliamentary procedure, and organizational acumen to the Church. Where did those skills come from?

Coulter: My business skills were acquired from my father in the construction trade, before I joined the Church's ministerial staff. Dad and I built upscale houses (\$20,000 - \$25,000 in the early-mid 1950s) for the Denver market. I learned how to buy and sell property and manage costs by designing the houses we built and keeping them within budget.

As a teenager, I became intrigued with parliamentary procedures while observing the biennial business sessions of our church. When I assumed the presidency of the General Conference, I joined the National Association of Parliamentarians to learn parliamentary law. It was my desire to effectively preside over meetings of the General Conference, Ministerial Council, and board of directors.

In addition to learning proper

procedures, reviewing the minutes and standing rules of the Church's deliberative bodies back to the merger of 1949 helped improve my ability to preside and expedite the Church's business proceedings.

I give credit and honor to the Lord for any success that we might have experienced while serving the General Conference.

BA: Your adeptness in human relations also served you well — a sort of sixth sense in knowing what ought to be done, how to do it properly, and getting broad cooperation for it.

Coulter: The construction business taught me to be analytical. I learned to solve problems by breaking them down into increments and seeking solutions for each piece. If something failed to serve its intended purpose, we discarded or changed it. I applied the same principles to my work with the Church — a living organism whose message is changeless but whose methods are always evolving.

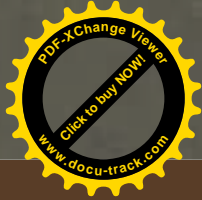
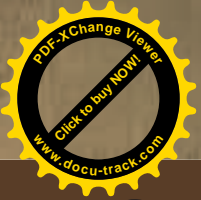
As I became more acquainted with the organization, it was apparent that some functions were not serving their intended purpose. The Ministerial Council, for example, was preoccupied with domestic issues and had no time for concerns of its international members. To address this deficiency, we proposed and organized the International Ministerial Congress.

I am a firm believer that leaders must lead by building consensus. To obtain agreement, I developed my plan, goals, and objectives, then proposed a means of funding. It was important to me not to promise more than I could deliver, to be transparent, and to consider service a privilege, not a right. I attempted to respect the assignments of others in the organization and not interfere with their prerogatives.

BA: Your tenure embraced dignity and integrity. Who were your mentors in character and churchmanship?

Coulter: My father and mother were my earliest teachers in regard to honesty, faithfulness, and diligence. I was privileged to know many ministers who made an indelible impression on me. K. H. Freeman taught me to love the Lord and His church. Archie Craig encouraged my ministerial aspirations. Burt Marrs mentored me in theological matters. E. A. Straub's friendship, dedication, and churchmanship inspired my commitment to the ministry of the gospel and to the Church of God (Seventh Day).

BA: Many goals were realized in your administration: restructuring and finance of the seven departments, free BA distribution, erection of the G. C. office building and publishing plant, creation of the International Ministerial Congress, and others.



1963-1987



Elder Robert Coulter

What memory brings the most personal satisfaction now?

Coulter: My experiences as director of Missions Abroad while serving the Conference has always been a source of great satisfaction to me. It afforded me the privilege of traveling to all the churches outside the United States and becoming acquainted with their indigenous leadership.

I take great satisfaction in the creation of the International Ministerial Congress and in observing its successful operation, bringing the worldwide Church together every four years. The congress was organized with just eleven charter member churches in 1978. Today there are forty members, and that number continues to grow quickly.

BA: What is your greatest leadership disappointment from that period, what Church goal your toughest failure?

Coulter: I consider the manner in which I approached the transfer of our ministerial training facility from Midwest Bible College in Stanberry, Missouri, to Denver, Colorado (1976), my greatest failure. I neglected to adequately consult the college board and faculty before obtaining the approval of the Conference board for that move.

As my term unfolded, I felt the Church and its ministry were maturing spiritually and could resolve conflicts in a mature manner. It was painful to learn

that not all members had grown as I had hoped. I have always been distressed over our failure to mediate a peaceful settlement for a dispute in a large California congregation near the end of my tenure.

BA: After division from 1933-49 and some turbulence around 1960, the national Church has enjoyed peace until now. To what do you attribute this?

Coulter: Two important developments following the merger of the Salem and Stanberry churches in 1949 account for the peace we enjoy within the Church.

One was the implementation of better business practices and management of funds after the layman's research disturbance of 1958-61. Greater transparency and accountability of Church affairs to its members built trust and confidence in the Church's leaders and management.

Second, opening major leadership roles to qualified laymen made a significant difference in the members' perception of their church. Prior to the 1970s all major leadership positions were filled by clergymen. As we began to realize that the organization was not the "church," we moved to include laymen and women in leadership roles. This open policy helped to break down the "we" versus "them" feelings that had existed in some minds. They began to see that the Church was inclusive of all its members.

BA: Since you retired from the presidency (1987), you've served as pastor in Grand Prairie, Texas, and Hammondville, Alabama; as Southeastern District superintendent; as Ministerial Council president; and as a member of numerous boards and committees. Now you're back in Colorado and volunteer several days each week at the G. C. offices. What remains on your "to do" list?

Coulter: I am presently engaged in researching and writing a more complete version of *The History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. My goal is to present a factual account of the development of our church.

BA: Anything you want to say to your brethren in North America and around the world?

Coulter: First, I want to greet my many friends and brethren everywhere. I am gratified by the Church's trust and support of my ministry and work and for the privilege it afforded me to serve it over the years. Last, I want to encourage every young man who has aspirations for ministry to pursue that calling. I have never regretted the years I have devoted to the gospel of Christ and His church.