

NEWS

Five things to know about Sean Moon, the Poconos pastor behind 'Rod of Iron' ministries

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Sean Moon split from his family's religious empire almost a decade ago to build a new church north of the Pocono Mountains.

He's a thorn in the side of those who remain in the Unification Church, but a king to those in the Rod of Iron Ministries. Here are five things to know about Sean, the pastor who worships with weapons.

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Sun Myung Moon founded the Unification Church. His death ripped it in half.

Rev. Moon founded the Unification Church 1950s, intent on unifying all religions under one banner. He claimed to be the second coming of Christ, and the Unification movement spread quickly throughout East Asia. It took hold in the west throughout the '70s and '80s, along with movements like Scientology, Children of God and Hare Krishna.

The movement became notorious for mass wedding ceremonies. One ceremony in 2009 included 20,000 couples from around the world. The church would not give its marriage blessing to same-sex couples.

Rev. Moon died in 2012, igniting a power struggle between his widow, Hak Ja Han Moon, and Sean, his youngest son. Sean claims that his father appointed him the sole successor to his ministry, but Hak Ja Han has remained the church's acting leader and public spokesperson.

"I think she really got attacked and got taken over to the to the dark side, so to speak," Sean said. "It was very clear what father desired, but unfortunately, my mom chose to go an opposite path."

Sean and his wife moved to Pennsylvania in 2013 and created the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary. They bought a church in Newfoundland one year later, once the congregation grew too large to fit inside their home.



Sean Moon prays at the Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland. *Hannah Phillips*

Sean has fought unsuccessfully to reclaim his father's empire.

Sean publicly denounced his mother in 2015 for allegedly manipulating his father's religious texts. He also conducted an arranged marriage for his father's spirit, divorcing him from Hak Ja Han and pairing him posthumously with a woman named Hyun Shil Kang.

In 2019, Sean filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to be named leader of the Unification Church. The suit was dismissed.

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"We at Family Federation USA pray every day for Sean Moon and his followers that they will soon put their guns down," wrote a spokesperson for the Unification Church once the suit ended.

Sean introduced the Rod of Iron Ministries in 2018, carving a name for himself among gun rights advocates.

The Sanctuary Church made global headlines in 2018 when Sean [conducted a religious ceremony blessing AR-15s](#). The Unification Church called Sean's theology a "perversion" of his father's beliefs, Sean said it was actually the late Rev. Moon who inspired the Rod of Iron Ministries.

"He is one with God and is still moving in the spirit," Sean said. "He was giving me the insight to see the Kingdom, not as some type of centralized government, but as a decentralized form of government."

That's where the rod of iron comes in.

It's referenced in the Bible as a tool from God used to smite and rule over nations, Moon said. To him and his followers, the rod is the AR-15, and it's the key to saving America from tyranny.

"Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession," reads Psalm 2:8-9. "You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

Related: ['Rods of Iron' prominent in Newfoundland, Pa. service](#)



Members of the Sanctuary Church congregation participate in service on February 28, 2018. PETER BECKER

The bullet crown started as a joke.

Sean teaches that all people are kings and queens in God's Kingdom. That's why he and members of the congregation sport silver and gold makeshift crowns. Bullets were introduced into the mix following the introduction of the Rod of Iron Ministries, once Sean put a greater emphasis on the right to bear arms.

"I was just making a joke about it on one of my broadcasts," Sean said. "Hey, it'd be fun to have a bullet crown.' I mentioned it one time, then one of our folks built one. I thought it was very fun. You don't see it every day."

The Sanctuary Church is growing.

The church recently bought a 40-acre property in central Texas and 130-acre property in eastern Tennessee. Sean said the land will be developed into spiritual retreat centers, as well as agricultural farm land to promote self-reliance among the congregation.

"It's like a spiritual retreat center for us," he said. "But also, it's a place that honors father."

The properties will also include space to practice using firearms safely, Sean said. The acquisition has raised [comparisons to the Branch Davidians](#).

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