

Sun Myung Moon, Leader Of Moonies Sect, Dies

SkyNews

September 3, 2012



Sun Myung Moon, the self-proclaimed messiah who turned his Unification Church into a global business empire, has died at the age of 92.

The religious leader died of complications from pneumonia at a hospital, owned by his church, in Gapyeong, east of the South Korean capital Seoul, church officials said.

Rev Moon, who became a US citizen, had been on life support since Friday after suffering critical organ failure the church had described as "irreversible".

He believed he was chosen by Jesus Christ to continue the work of establishing an ideal world of peace and harmony.

From 1961 until recently, he oversaw mass weddings at which thousands were matched with spouses they sometimes had just met and who were often from different countries.

One of the largest ceremonies, held in Seoul's Jamsil Stadium in 1992, saw 30,000 couples simultaneously tie the knot.

Critics have vilified his ministry as "heretical" and accused it of indoctrinating its followers - often described as Moonies.

Born to a farming family in 1920 in what is now North Korea, Rev Moon founded the Unification Church in 1954 and built it into a global religious movement that now claims some three million members.

As the church rose to prominence in the 70s and 80s, it spawned a parallel multi-billion dollar business empire encompassing dozens of firms involved in construction, machinery, food, education, the media and even a professional football club.

Its media holdings include the Washington Times and the United Press International news agency, and it also dominates the fishing and distribution industry supplying sushi outlets in the US.

In 1974 he met President Richard Nixon at the White House and urged Americans to forgive their leader for the Watergate scandal.

In 1991 he travelled to North Korea to meet the communist country's then leader Kim Il-sung for talks on inter-Korean economic co-operation projects and the reunion of separated families from the North and South.

After moving to the US in 1972, he was indicted on tax evasion charges in 1981, in what his followers denounced as an official conspiracy to force him out of the country. He was convicted and served more than a year in a prison in New York.

Rev Moon returned to live in South Korea in 2006 and handed over control of the church and businesses to several of his children.

His youngest son, Hyung Jin Moon, succeeded him as the church's most senior leader in 2008 at the age of 28.

A church spokesman said Rev Moon's funeral would probably be held on September 15, although a precise schedule had yet to be drawn up.