

# Bob Edgar, ex-congressman, NCC general secretary, dies at 69

News in the [May 15, 2013](#) issue

Bob Edgar, a Methodist minister and former congressman who used his fund-raising and organizational skills in leading the National Council of Churches, died suddenly at his Virginia home on April 23. He was chief executive of Common Cause, a citizen's lobbying organization promoting open and accountable government.

Edgar died one month short of his 70th birthday. He suffered a massive heart attack while exercising and could not be revived, according to Paul Fanlund, editor of the *Capital Times* in Madison, Wisconsin, who had interviewed him 11 days earlier.

After earning his M.Div. degree at the Theological School at Drew University, Edgar served as a United Methodist pastor, college chaplain and community organizer before winning, in 1974, the first of six terms as a Democratic representative from Pennsylvania. He coauthored the GI Bill for the all-volunteer service.

Edgar was named president of the financially strapped Claremont School of Theology in California in 1990, serving for ten years. "He brought a school on the brink of collapse back to institutional health," according to a National Council of Churches thumbnail sketch.

He was then tapped in 1999 by the NCC for a similar task. After taking office as general secretary on January 1, 2000, Edgar improved the ecumenical body's finances while continuing NCC initiatives to overcome poverty, protect the environment and foster interfaith understanding. The 36-member organization continued to struggle, however.

By 2007, Edgar moved on to become president and CEO of Common Cause, where he was credited with raising the national profile of the nonpartisan organization. He oversaw the relaunching of some seven local chapters. "We are deeply saddened and shaken by the passing of Bob Edgar," said board chair Robert Reich.