

National Prayer Breakfast organizer and 'pastor to people in power' dies at age 88

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [March 29, 2017](#) issue

Doug Coe, organizer of the annual National Prayer Breakfast and a spiritual guide to many politicians, died February 21 at age 88.

Coe died at his home in Annapolis, Maryland, after a heart attack and stroke, said A. Larry Ross, spokesman for Coe's family.

Coe was the longtime head of the International Foundation, a Christian organization also known as the Fellowship and as the Family, which was responsible for bringing together politicians, diplomats, and presidents since Dwight Eisenhower in Washington, D.C., each year on the first Thursday in February. At the most recent gathering, at which President Trump spoke, Coe remained out of the limelight as usual.

Time magazine named Coe on its 2005 list of 25 influential evangelicals, calling him "the Stealth Persuader." Coe tried unsuccessfully to convince the editors to remove his name and then declined to provide a photo.

"He was a man who liked to work behind the scenes, who did not call attention to himself, who was a sort of a pastor to people in power," said Michael Cromartie, director of the Evangelicals in Civic Life program at Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center. "He would meet with anybody if it would mean he'd get a chance to talk about Jesus to them."

In her memoir Hillary Clinton described Coe as "a genuinely loving spiritual mentor and guide to anyone, regardless of party or faith, who wants to deepen his or her relationship to God."

[Jeff Sharlet wrote a book about Coe's organization in 2008, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. [In a review for the *Christian Century*](#), James L. Guth summarized Sharlet's argument that the Family advanced a cultural agenda during the 1980s that ignored issues of poverty and the environment, and that "the messianic direction of U.S. foreign policy since the 1960s is largely the handiwork of the Family's person-to-person spiritual diplomacy with

foreign autocrats.” Yet the book has more assertions than evidence, Guth wrote.]

In 2008 Sharlet predicted that Coe would prove to be more influential than conservative Christian leaders such as James Dobson.

“Dobson might be able to muscle his way on an individual vote or in an individual election, but Coe and the Family’s influence is going to be much longer term, much more enduring,” he said. —Religion News Service