



Richard and Gail Johnson

President Johnson served March 25, 1984 - October 24, 1993

Interviewed on Nov. 15, 2017

I served as a stake executive secretary in Denver before we moved to Utah, which gave me some administrative experience. I was a bishop of the Union 19th Ward when it became evident that President Sperry's presidency needed to be re-organized. Rusty Snow was called to be a mission president and there was a lot of talk about who would replace him. One of my friends said, "It's not going to be any of us." I'd had a feeling about that so I just smiled.

When President Sperry was called to be a mission president in Switzerland, Elder Dean Larson and Shirley Reynolds came to our stake conference. I was called as the new stake president and I selected Porter Hall as first counselor and Robert Busch as second. Jim Wilson became stake executive secretary. That Saturday morning, Elder Larson and Elder Reynolds interviewed all the high counselors and all the bishops in the stake. After his interview President Bush went out golfing with friends on the Willow Creek course. Partway through, as they came close to his house, he felt he needed to head home and said, "Go on without me. I'll see you later." Robert Bush returned just in time to answer the call from Elder Larson. We thought it interesting that he'd felt inspired to return home just at that moment. I myself sensed I might be called but I tried to squelch that feeling not wanting to be prideful. But I had impressions that the time had come for me to serve.

Changes

The realignment of wards and the renaming of wards took place during our tenure. All of the wards were designated as Union Wards. For example, I had served as bishop of the 19th ward which was newly created years earlier. We determined to realign the ward boundaries to even out membership. We asked the brethren if we could change the name to Willow Creek 1st through Willow Creek 9th Ward.*

During that time we were offered the opportunity to create a single adult ward and did so. About a year later the brethren changed the policy saying "We don't think we ought to have them." So we discontinued it following that counsel. About a year after that, the policy changed and they decided it would be a good thing to have single adult wards. President Monson was in favor of them but some of the brethren felt that we shouldn't segregate ward members. But as we analyzed it, we decided it would be a good thing for our area and so again we created another adult singles ward.

My cousin, Russell Tueller, was President of the Cottonwood Creek Stake, our neighbor to the west. Elder Packer lived in his stake and told him not to organize one so he complied. The interesting thing was that all his single adults came to our stake including the children of Elder Packer. We had quite a successful single adult ward.

Missionaries were a major part of our work and the highlight of my tenure. At one point we had over 125 missionaries all out at the same time.

We always had excellent participation in sacrament meetings and other areas that we reported on. Elder Reynolds, our regional representative, came by to review statistics and find out how we were doing. We were proud to show him that our statistics were way above the other stakes in the area. He said, "You ought to come with me to one of my other stakes where there are lots of widows and divorcees and see how you would do with some challenges like theirs." His point was that our stake was an easy stake to manage. There were so many quality people. It was just top notch.

What were the best and worst moments as stake president?

The hardest things for a Stake President are disciplinary courts. We had to take disciplinary action on a bishop, a high councilman, and even a returned mission president who had found themselves in situations where they lost their membership for a time. These experiences are hard on everyone. My happiest moments were the times spent with young missionaries. What a blessing to see the pride of families when their missionary left and the joy they felt when he or she returned.

I once felt impressed to call a less active couple to be temple workers. They were excited about the call. It took several weeks for them to get ready and secure temple recommends but they did. Unbeknown to us, this couple were friends of President Thomas Monson. When the husband died a few years later, President Monson came to our stake and spoke at his funeral.

Part way through our tenure President Busch had open heart surgery but continued to serve for a time until his health became an issue and he had to be released. Robert Deeds, then serving as bishop of the Willow Creek 6th Ward, was called to replace him as second counselor.

When it became time for my release Bishop Lee Crayk was serving as a bishop and doing a superb job. I don't know if he had any indication that he would be called as stake president but I certainly did. He served three or four years before he was released to serve as a mission president in Mexico.

We moved out of the stake in 2000 and I became involved with a as an owner in "Serenity Funeral Home." This business expanded to St George, so we sold our home and moved to St. George. Shortly thereafter we realized we were coming up a lot to visit our kids and grand-kids so we bought a small home in South Jordan a bit south of the Jordan River Temple, and I continued to work in the funeral business in both locations.

**According to File#3 1987-1988 – Historical Record names of all wards in the stake were changed from "Union" to "Willow Creek" as follows: Union 18 became Willow Creek 1st; Union 23rd to Willow Creek 2nd; Union 19th to Willow Creek 3rd; Union 24th to Willow Creek 5th. Union 28th was changed to Willow Creek 6th; Union 8th to Willow Creek 7th; and Union 9th to the Willow Creek 9th Ward.*