Inter-America: Eliezer Melendez, 80, was an influential Adventist youth leader

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A youth ministries director at the Inter-American Division (IAD) headquarter office in Miami, Florida, from 1998-2001, Pastor Meléndez oversaw thousands of youth leaders, master guides and pathfinders in the territory throughout his life.

A native of Puerto Rico, Pastor Meléndez served as a teacher, youth pastor, dean, district pastor, youth director, education director and health director from the 1950s to the 1990s in Puerto Rico and Mexico. He also served in the United States military from 1954 to 1955.

In addition, Pastor Meléndez served as ministerial secretary and youth director at the Antillean Union in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, and the now Puerto Rican Union before retiring with 47 years of church service.

Pastor Meléndez earned his undergraduate degree from Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, Michigan, his master's degree of religion from Andrews University, and was awarded an honorary doctorate of divinity in youth leadership from the Inter-American Theological Seminary. The Adventist institution granted the degree honoris causa during the Antillean Adventist University's graduation ceremony in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, in 2010.

Pastor Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America, speaks of Melendez as a man who influenced so many lives all over the Division territory.

"Many workers and lay leaders today can trace their youth training and their dedication to the church and the Lord from the ministry of this Godly person," said Pastor Leito of Meléndez.

"He [Meléndez] leaves a legacy of what a true youth director should be," added Pastor Leito. "Nothing was more important for him than to see the youth of the church saved in the kingdom of the Lord. He will forever be etched in our memories and the church in Inter-America will continue living according to the example given by Eliezer Meléndez."

After retiring in 2000, Meléndez continued serving at the IAD headquarter office in the youth ministries department, assisting with events and overseeing several projects.

Pastor Meléndez was recently honored in front of more than 20,000 world youth leaders and pathfinders during Inter-America's 3rd territory-wide camporee held in Mexico City, in April 2011. He was also honored as the founder of the Doulos Pathfinder Club, now the largest single club in Inter-America since the 1970s.

Pastor Benjamin Carballo, youth ministries director for the church in Inter-America, remembers Pastor Meléndez telling the story of how God called him to the youth ministry.

"When he was saved from drowning in the ocean early on, he promised right on the beach that..."
he would serve the Lord with love for the rest of his life," Carballo says.

"Pastor Meléndez left his footprint in thousands of people throughout several generations. His family and the Adventist world church will no longer have that wide smile and warm greeting from a ‘servant of God and friend to humanity’" added Carballo.

Pastor Meléndez was often quoted as encouraging and challenging young and old to join him in celebrating the biggest camporee in the New Earth. He participated in more than 962 youth camporees.

Meléndez is survived by his wife of 54 years, Gloria, four children, six grandchildren.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Puerto Rico will hold a special open casket viewing service at the Pastor Eliezer Meléndez Vazquez Auditorium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, next week. His burial will follow at the Puerto Rico National Cemetery in the nearby city of Bayamón.