Remembrance: Persuasive bookseller Ramirez, 93, was first Hispanic GC director

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Louis A. Ramirez was such a bold and effective salesman that he could sell religious literature to other Christian ministers who had denounced Seventh-day Adventist literature from their own pulpits.

Ramirez, who died February 6 at age 93, grew the door-to-door literature sales ministry throughout Latin America in the 1960s and ‘70s and went on to become Publishing director and the first Hispanic departmental director at the Adventist world church headquarters. He held the position from 1980 to 1985.

Door-to-door literature sales flourished under his tenure as Publishing director for the Inter-American Division, said Hilda Matar-Montero, who served as his secretary in the 1970s.

When visiting Adventist colleges with fellow division officers, Ramirez preferred to stay in the dorm with students and take a few out selling door-to-door. A persuasive seller, in the 1960s Ramirez had about half of the Costa Rican Adventist vocational school students working as literature evangelists, then known as colporteurs. He would often sell to busy shopkeepers whom students thought were sure to reject him.

"He was an outstanding gentlemen," said Armando Miranda, a general vice president of the Adventist world church. "He was a persuasive, dynamic person and at the same time very kind."

Ramirez had a knack for sales throughout life. He launched Jacuzzi Universal's export business by convincing his reluctant boss to let him sell in Mexico, later returning with more orders than the company could fill. During World War II he was drafted into the U.S. Army and got out of a deployment to Japan by convincing his commanding officer to let him launch a radio show to entertain and support wounded troops on base at Buckley Field in Colorado.

He joined the Adventist Church in 1952 at age 34, having been exposed to the church by Adventist friends, missionaries, and, of course, its literature.

Ramirez was born into a Catholic family in 1918 in Richmond, California, United States. He was the only child of a railway worker who had fled the Mexican revolution. Their home, which had no plumbing, would shake when trains passed by 50 feet away.

Ramirez grew up speaking Spanish and became bilingual after entering school at age six. He was an avid reader and took several night classes in foreign trade and banking from the University of California, Berkeley. He was a local celebrity in the Bay Area as a host of a bilingual show on KRE radio.

It was an Army buddy, Kenneth Holland - who would later become editor of the denomination's Signs of the Times magazine - who first introduced Ramirez to the Adventist Church. Ramirez had him conduct chapel services on the radio at Buckley Field.

Ramirez worked for Jacuzzi from 1940 to 1958, having helped establish factories in Mexico and
Argentina, where he would occasionally meet Adventist missionaries, including David Baasch. Aboard a Pan American flight in 1948 he met an Adventist who gave him a subscription to Adventist magazines. Ramirez's wife, Virginia, read Signs of the Times and joined the church in 1950. He followed two years later, baptized by Lawrence Maxwell, a longtime denominational editor.

Ramirez continued to work for Jacuzzi and did colporteur work in Northern California before being called in 1959 to serve as Publishing director for the Central American Union, based in Costa Rica. He was ordained as a minister there in 1963.

He was appointed associate Publishing director of the Inter-American Division in 1968 and director in 1972, a position he held until elected to serve at the world headquarters.

In a 1980 article in Publishing Digest, he said, "I am convinced that prior training and experience in business as a layman, the study of the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, plus the good example and counsel of dear Christian friends have been among God's means to prepare me for service in the literature ministry."

In retirement Ramirez worked with the Pacific Union's Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department and then moved to live with his son in McAllen, Texas.

His wife preceded him in death in 2002, as well as his daughter, Martina, in 2007. Ramirez is survived by his son Luis, daughter Loretta, and four grandchildren.

His son Luis, a retired art professor, said his father still made his mark selling after retirement. Bible publishing company C. D. Stampley hired him as a consultant to develop a bilingual edition. He sold so many Bibles in Los Angeles that his bosses told him to ease up. The other companies were upset, his son recalls.

"Dad was really a dynamo. He was my best friend."

Ramirez in an undated photo at Montemorelos University in Mexico. He would often forgo special accommodations for church officers to stay in the dorm among the students and colporteurs he mentored.