

Latin American ecumenical leader dies, guided churches under dictatorship and democracy

by [Gustavo Vasquez](#) and the World Council of Churches in the [July 19, 2017](#) issue

Oscar Bolioli, 83, a Latin American ecumenical leader, died June 18 in Uruguay after an illness.

He was head of the Methodist Church in Uruguay, serving three terms in different decades. The first was 1975–1979, when the country was ruled by a dictator and many community leaders, including pastors and laypeople, suffered imprisonment, exile, torture, and disappearances. Bolioli helped people in danger to flee the country and distributed aid to relatives of political prisoners, among other human rights work.

He began engaging in ecumenical work in the 1960s, holding several leadership positions with the World Council of Churches. From 1982 to 2000, he directed the Latin American and Caribbean department of the National Council of Churches. He led the São Paulo Process, which brought together churches and ecumenical and civil society organizations from all over Latin America and the Caribbean at a time when many countries were recovering from dictatorships and military regimes and struggling for democracy.

Also during his time with the NCC, he participated in the mediation carried out in the case of Elián González, a Cuban child whose family had a custody dispute over him in 2000.

After retirement he returned to Uruguay, where he was again elected president of the Methodist Church, serving from 2002 to 2008, and 2012 to 2016.

“His struggle for human rights and his untiring work for ecumenical relations are testimony to a life dedicated to the gospel,” said Luis de Souza Cardoso, leader of the Buenos Aires regional office of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

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