

Evangelical pastor Luis Palau dies at 86

by [Gillian Flaccus](#) in the [April 21, 2021](#) issue



(AP Photo / Marianne Armshaw)

Luis Palau, an evangelical pastor who was born in Argentina and went on to work with Billy Graham before establishing his own powerhouse international ministry, died March 11. He was 86.

The Luis Palau Association said he died at his home in Portland, Oregon. He had announced in January 2018 that he had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

Born to an affluent family in Buenos Aires, Palau rose from obscurity to become one of the most well-known international Christian evangelists. Over a career that spanned more than half a century, he authored 50 books and addressed 30 million people in 75 countries at evangelical “festivals,” his

modern-day take on the more traditional “crusades” that boosted his mentor Graham to fame.

Palau’s radio programs, including the international Spanish-language *Luis Palau Responde*, are broadcast on 3,500 stations in 48 countries, and his Portland-based Luis Palau Association organizes dozens of events each year on five continents.

The vastness of his evangelical empire, especially among Spanish-speaking faithful, long ago earned him the nickname the “Billy Graham of Latin America.”

Palau, who had hoped to become a lawyer, was working an entry-level job at a bank when he heard Graham on the radio in 1952. It was transformative, he would later say, and Palau decided he wanted to become an evangelist himself one day.

Palau began his Spanish-language radio program in Colombia and gave sermons in Latin America throughout the 1970s.

After becoming a US citizen, he began attracting tens of thousands to his appearances in Colombia, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Spain. In 1978, Palau incorporated his ministry in Portland and later set an attendance record at the city’s enormous waterfront park.

Reaching an American audience had presented a challenge. Palau’s 1999 shift from crusades to outdoor festivals was meant to draw nonbelievers. The events had corporate sponsors and featured Christian rock bands, skate parks, and family activities.

“It revolutionized everything we do,” Palau said in a 2003 interview. “I’d never go back to the old model unless God held a gun to my head.” —Associated Press