

# La Casa de San Gabriel

## COMMUNITY CENTER

Cheryl Prentice, CEO 203 E. Mission Road

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Volume 2 Issue 2

April 2007

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## Reverend Cesar Mason Lizárraga

### La Casa's Founder

#### 1913-2007

By Dr. David C. Lizárraga

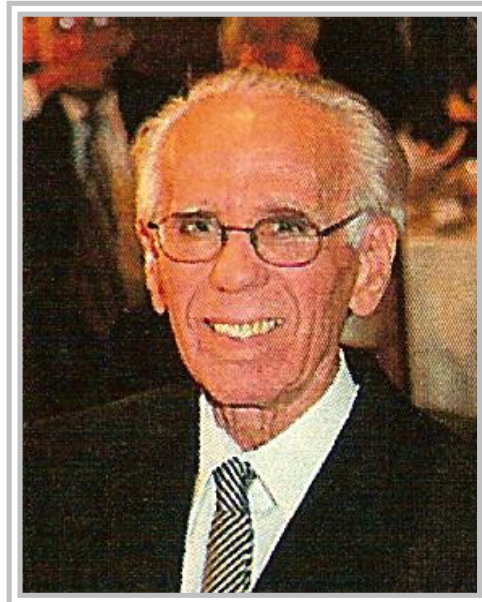
*This Article was excerpted from the eulogy for the Rev. Cesar M. Lizárraga, delivered on March 30, 2007.*

My father was born in the small town of Pitiquito, Sonora on October 4, 1913, the eldest son of a family of 6 sisters and 5 brothers. My grandfather Papa Ramón was a rancher, a teacher, a composer and a musician who learned to play the piano and every stringed instrument, from the violin to the big bass.

Papa Ramón would travel north to the United States in order to sell his cattle. On one trip he met a group of musicians who invited him to join their Mexican string orchestra in the Hollywood movie called "Valencia." He returned home to Pitiquito, sold everything he had, gathered his family, and said goodbye to family, friends, loved ones. They embarked on the grand journey north to what they considered the "Promised Land" in search of opportunity and a better future. And at the age of 12, my father, Cesar and his family said goodbye to their beloved Mexico.

What a strange sight it must have been to see a family of 13 plus an aunt, in 1925, traveling across Arizona into California and right down Figueroa Street, past Olvera Street- like the Beverly Hillbillies- with everything they owned tied on to the used car Papa Ramón had purchased.

They traveled further north to the orange groves of San Fernando where they settled and found employment working in the fields and orange groves. It was there where my father met a man, the Reverend Ballesteros, who while my father was on a ladder picking oranges looked up to him and said, "As you now harvest the fruit of the tree, you have now been chosen to harvest souls for the Lord."



With the help of many, my father began to prepare himself for the ministry. He left the fields and received a scholarship to a Methodist missionary school in Gardena, California. Following that, he went to yet another Methodist School in El Paso, Texas, where he met Angelita Rodriguez, the beautiful

daughter of copper miners from Zacatecas, and later Jerome, Arizona, who was also studying to be a missionary. It was love at first sight.

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My father returned to the Los Angeles area where he attended Chapman College for 2 years while he worked and served as assistant pastor at a church in Watts. He received another scholarship so that he could attend USC. Five years later, he became the first citizen of Mexican descent to receive a degree in Theology from USC's Theological Seminary.

In June 1939, he was ordained in the ministry. He served as assistant pastor at the Methodist church on Olvera Street- La Placita in Los Angeles. That same year, my parents were married and began their journey together that lasted for sixty-six years of marriage.

My father and mother pastored several churches, the first being in the barrio of Casa Blanca in Redlands, California. Then, on to San Gabriel, where he served as pastor of the first Presbyterian church for 10 years. It was there, in 1946, he founded La Casa de San Gabriel- a community center that to this day still serves the community- on the other side of the tracks.

Dad knew that church on Sunday was not enough- that the true demonstration of God's love

was to serve all. My mother, Angelita, directed the community center and Dad pastored the church, providing a number of innovative programs for the community. Dad was the first Latino to be honored by the City of San Gabriel as Citizen of the Year. He was also the first Latino to run for political office in San Gabriel at a time when Mexicans were not allowed to swim in the public swimming pool.

When I was 12 years old, mom and dad received a calling to pastor a church in East Los Angeles. The church was called El Siloe, after the pool of

Siloam, where the sick were healed. It was a grand church, with a huge extended family that also extended itself to the community through its community center- the Cleland House of

Neighborly Service.

My father was a pioneer, a pastor, a visionary. But first and foremost, he was a servant of the Lord. He was also a husband, a partner, a father, a grandfather, a great-grandfather, and a living symbol of the love of God.

**"Cesar was much beloved by the family of La Casa. His and Angelita's vision of a commitment to the community continues to inspire us today." -Cheryl Prentice, CEO**

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A fund in the names of Reverend Cesar and Mrs. Angelita Lizarraga was established by La Casa several years ago. If you wish to contribute to this fund in Cesar's memory please send your check to the address on the masthead of this newsletter. Thank you so much.

-The Board of Directors