

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Westminster Presbyterian Church had its beginnings on April 11, 1893 when a commission of Santa Fe Presbytery met in Las Vegas, New Mexico and authorized the formation of a Spanish Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe.

The organizing pastor was Rev. Guillermo Williams, and the original congregation consisted of two men and ten women who transferred their membership from First Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe. The congregation chose the name *La Iglesia Segunda Presbiteriano de Santa Fe*. The original Elders were Robert Harvey, F.B. Crichton, Victor Duran, Jose Jesus Vigil and Eugenio Romero. Of these five, only Victor Duran and Eugenio Romero were members of the congregation.

They celebrated Communion for the first time on January 5, 1894.

The first house of worship mentioned in the early records was a small *adobe* house near the Santa Fe River and Galisteo St. They had an organ (probably a pump model) and the Episcopal Church made them a ninety-nine year loan of some pews. These pews were later passed on to the Presbyterian Church at Cebolla, New Mexico and, when that closed, to the Presbyterian Church in Cordova, New Mexico. That church is also now closed, and the ninety-nine years is long past, but I don't believe the Episcopalians have ever reclaimed their pews.

The original church building was sold in the early 1900's and the congregation met in several other locations, including at the Allison-James Boarding School and in a building that may have at one time belonged to Archbishop Lamy, probably on Cathedral Place. Later they met for some years at First Presbyterian Church where they worshipped on Sunday afternoons.

For many years the girls who were boarding students at Allison-James School constituted a sizeable percentage of the church membership. These girls and the boys who attended Menaul School in Albuquerque for several generations were the nuclei of the Presbyterian Churches in the Hispanic communities in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado.

The name of the Spanish congregation changed over the years from the original name to The Spanish Department of First Presbyterian Church to The Spanish Presbyterian Church and finally to Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Over the years many devoted servants of the Lord served as pastors at Westminster Church: in addition to Rev. Williams there were Rev. R.M. Craig, Rev. W. Hayes Moore, Rev. Norman Skinner, Rev. Gabino Rendon, Rev. Carlos C. Cordova, Rev. Pa~ Warnshuis, Rev. George P. Simmonds (served twice), Rev. J.I. Candelaria, Rev. Uvaldo J. Martinez, Rev. Acorcino V. Lucero, Rev. David Cisneros, Rev. Pablo Guerra, Rev. Eliud Ortega, Rev. C. Paul Russell (Interim), Rev. Britton W. Johnston, Rev. Sara Armstrong (Interim), Rev. Robert Barnes (Interim), Rev. Chester Topple, and Rev. Dr. Antonio Aja.

It was during Rev. Simmonds' second tenure that the congregation, which had been meeting at First Presbyterian Church for sometime, decided that the time had come for them to have their own church building. Property was purchased on West Manhattan Ave. and the present building was erected in 1955. The building was designed by Mr. Richard Milner, an Albuquerque architect, and built by Lockwood and Katz Construction Co. of Santa Fe with much of the interior finishing work being done by the church members themselves. The dedication service was held on Sunday, December 4, 1955.

Women have always constituted a large and active part of the congregation. They formed a majority of the original congregation and sometimes the ratio of women to men seems not to have changed very much over the years. The vital part that women have played in the congregation is illustrated by the fact that in 1937, long before the Presbyterian Church at large authorized the ordination of women Elders, this congregation ordained two women, Mrs. Ruby Sandoval and Mrs. Susana Rodriguez, to the office of Elder.

The church was originally established as a Spanish language church and continued as such for many years. By the late 1950's services were being conducted two Sundays a month in Spanish and two in English. With the arrival of Rev. Ortega in 1966, the congregation decided that all services would be conducted in English while continuing to preserve the Hispanic cultural tradition by having one hymn, a scripture reading and some other elements of the service in Spanish. This change came about partly because of the fact that some of the newer members were Anglos and partly because some of the younger generation of Hispanic members were not so fluent in the Spanish language as their elders had been.

The make-up of the congregation has changed over the years from being entirely Hispanic to being one of Hispanics, Anglos, African Americans, Native Americans and Asians with the ethnic mixture fluctuating over the years.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is a small congregation, which strives to be a welcoming community gathered together to worship and serve our Lord Jesus Christ in Santa Fe and in missions, which extend beyond the boundaries of Santa Fe into the world at large.