

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

The First 25 Years

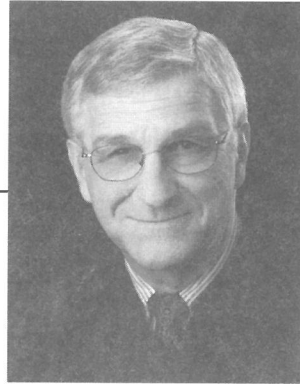
1986–2011

Time Line of RRPC Pastors

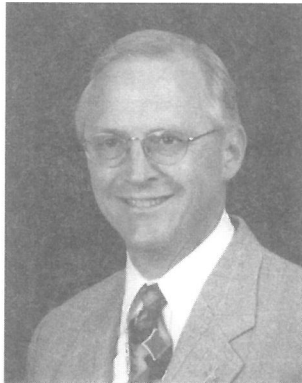
Rev. Dr. Kay Huggins
Organizing Pastor
Sept. 14, 1986 – May 31, 1999



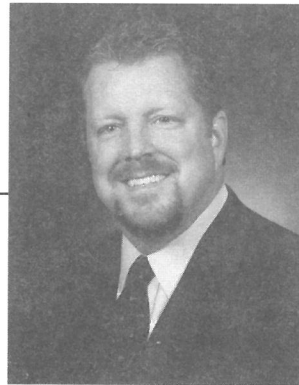
Rev. Dr. Robery Clary
Interim Pastor
July 1, 1999 – Jan. 31, 2001



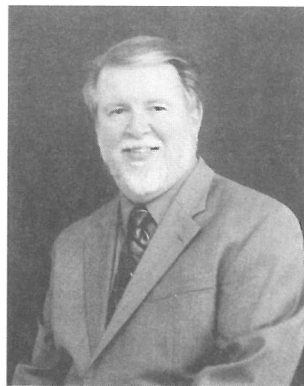
Rev. Dr. Larry Hitchens
Pastor
May 6, 2001 – July 13, 2004



Rev. David Schreffler
Designated Pastor
Nov. 21, 2004 – Sept. 22, 2006



Rev. Jerry Foust
Interim Pastor
Dec. 1, 2006 – July 7, 2008



Rev. Trudy R. Morphew
Pastor
July 8, 2008 – Sept. 30, 2012



Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

The First 25 Years

Beginnings

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:1-2

The wind rolled across the mesa and through the new, high desert community of Rio Rancho, New Mexico, stirring the dust on a landscape speckled with chamisa, bending trees, and sending leaves scurrying. In 1984, Rio Rancho was a small community of about 20,000 people northwest of Albuquerque – a blend of young families and retired Easterners and New Yorkers, many of whom had purchased property sight unseen. But in December of that year, a different kind of wind stirred in Rio Rancho when the Presbytery of Santa Fe established a Task Force on New Church Development to conduct a survey. The Task Force found that one in 10 homes indicated an interest in a new Protestant congregation being formed in the community. One in 50 of those surveyed responded that they were very interested. With the survey results and projections from the city and Sandoval County, the Task Force wrote a Mission Statement and Job Description. The Presbytery purchased nearly three acres of land consisting of two commercial and three residential lots for the church they hoped Rio Rancho residents would build.

Next, the Task Force started a search for an organizing pastor. At the same time, a young Pennsylvania pastor was growing restless to return to her native west and began to seek a call from a western church. “My husband and I proposed a challenge: the first one to secure a job west of the Mississippi sets the direction for the future,” said Rev. Kay Huggins as she remembered the events leading up to her call to Rio Rancho. She had served as the pastor of the Allegheny United Presbyterian Church of Leechburg, Pennsylvania for eight-and-a-half years. “I had been called to renew a small congregation and I knew I had accomplished the initial challenge,” she said. “The congregation, while not increasing in size, had grown

in Christian maturity and strength. When I arrived, they were discouraged and sad; when I left they were confident and resilient. Together we had moved from part-time to full-time ministry, with the necessary development of lay leadership to conduct vibrant educational and community mission programs.”

Rev. Huggins submitted her information and geographic preference to the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) National Office while “pinning my hopes for relocation on [her husband] George’s search,” she said. But during Advent 1984, she received a response from the Reverend William Aber of the Presbytery of Santa Fe. “Bill was a friend who formerly was the Executive Presbyter of Redstone, the presbytery adjoining Kiskiminitas Presbytery” [both Presbyteries are in western Pennsylvania]. He was working on her behalf, and in the spring of 1985, Rev. Huggins received an invitation to interview. “It was a stunning interview; Bill’s support consisted of introducing me and leaving the room ... the most dignified manner of recognizing my skills I could imagine,” she recalled. “I surprised the committee; in 1985 there were few women with a decade of pastoral experience in ministry. Then, as still continues, many women crashed and burned within the first few years of their initial call ... and for most women getting a second call posed a severe difficulty. I knew the realities I was up against, but something about a ‘new congregation’ inspired and encouraged me. Evidently the committee felt the same way. The call was offered, the summer was spent preparing to move and our family relocated in August 1985. The call officially began September 15, 1985.”

On September 22, 26 adults and two children met for devotions and discussion at Rev. Huggins’ home. The group agreed to meet on Sunday evenings to plan the establishment of the church. On October 6 – World Communion Sunday – 16 adults and five children attended the evening communion service. The Sunday evening group shared covered dish dinners at the meetings. “It was not really like Sunday morning church – it was more like Sunday evening fellowship. People sat on the floor and on the couch. There was not a formal sermon – more like a meditation. George played the guitar. We did a lot of singing,” remembered Charter Member Judy Tucker, who was the church’s first choir director. “Kay was very welcoming. Her spirit really was embodied in that first organizing group.” Throughout Rev. Huggins’ service at RRPC, the congregation passed the peace and sang “My Peace” accompanied by George. The worshippers began a tradition of ending the benediction with, “And all God’s people say, Alleluia, Amen.”

Charter Member Dick Fuller noted Rev. Huggins’ talent for reaching out to people. “A lot of times, people visited. She would make sure to talk to them and invite them back.” Charter

Member Lori Osburn described Rev. Huggins as “incredibly dynamic” and said, “It was important in the early days that Rev. Kay got people involved. She got across the point that your time was just as important as your money.” Lori added, “The church had that family feeling. We went to Ghost Ranch every summer.” Charter Child Stephanie Lawlor Smith added, “Rev. Kay was like a mentor to me. There were not a lot of strong females to look up to. Kay was strong.” Charter Members also remember Rev. Huggins’ husband, George, as being active and involved with the church, especially with Youth activities, and supportive of his wife.

Coming from what she described as “an unenlightened culture with strongly held prejudices against women,” Rev. Huggins recalled she was always in the position of “proving myself.” It was through those acts of proving herself that she gained experience that would later serve her well as an organizing pastor. She served on Presbytery’s Committee of Ministry and as Vice Moderator, Moderator and Chair of General Council; moderated sessions of vacant congregations; directed summer camps; coordinated a campus ministry (during a colleague’s sabbatical); and served on Synod committees, eventually chairing Education and frequently teaching and leading worship at the Synod of the Trinity annual school at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Yet, her most important experience, she observed, was that of being an outsider in Pennsylvania. She explained that “this period of time helped me gain the most critical skill of ministry: cultural sensitivity. I had to challenge every assumption I held, translate every high-minded theological concept and learn to appreciate values quite foreign to my western orientation. Because of this challenge, I learned to preach, teach and pastor much as a missionary.”

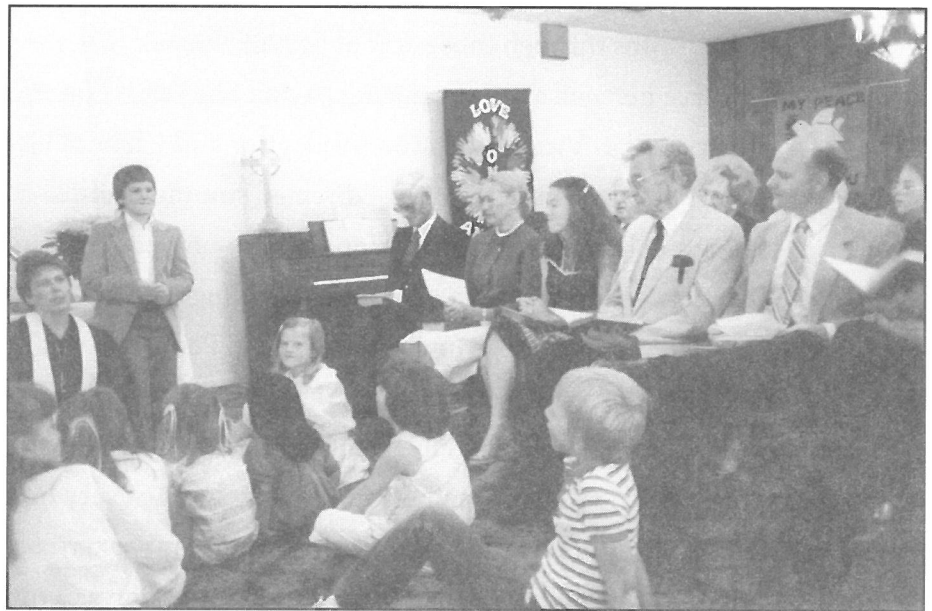
As Rev. Huggins’ living room began to overflow on Sunday evenings, the group negotiated a rental agreement with Rosewood Funeral Home for use of the chapel and childcare space effective November 3, 1985. Fifty-eight people attended that first service in the funeral home. The coffins were pushed to one corner for the service. Stephanie Lawlor Smith remembers that Sunday School was in the viewing room. “Christopher was upset at being in the viewing room – he cried the whole time,” Lori Osburn said about her son.

Planning and development meetings continued on Sunday evenings. The group formed three committees – Worship, Nurture, and Witness. Members of the Worship Committee were Joanne Parker (organist), Judy Tucker, Sandy Taylor, Jan Parker, George Huggins, and David Wilkes. The Nurture Committee included Julie Darling, Jo Holts, Mollie Trafican, Linda McClanahan, Kathleen Willis, Joyce Silver, and Karen Wilkes. The Witness Committee

members were Tom Isaacs, Del Kirby, Laura Kirby, Jeannette Miller, Jack Parker, Chuck Reardon, and Ray Tucker. Congregational representatives to the Task Force Steering Committee overseeing the project were Steve McClanahan, Sandy Taylor, and Laura Kirby. In December, the group started a church school and a mid-week Bible Study and presented its first budget. An average of 65 people were attending worship as 1985 came to a close.

On January 5, 1986, the fledgling church voted to decide on a name. The members chose from three suggestions – Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church, Peace Presbyterian Church, and First Presbyterian. The congregation voted to name itself Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church on January 19.

With attendance increasing, RRPC needed a larger facility for Sunday services. So, on Easter Sunday, March 30, the church announced the decision to move to the Rio Rancho Inn the following Sunday. Although coffins and viewing rooms were not a common setting for a church service, neither was the Rio Rancho Inn where Sunday School was held in the bar and the service in a conference




Children's Time during service at Rio Rancho Inn.

room. "It was almost funny when we wound up in the bar. We'd look back and see a 'Beer' sign," recalled Dick Fuller. Judy Tucker remembers washing the communion glasses in the bar sink.

Sensing a call to serve Christ in their community and wherever else He led them, members presented a petition to the Presbytery of Santa Fe on April 26 to charter the church. The Presbytery approved the petition and RRPC obtained a loan for \$6,000 from the Presbytery to buy an additional half-acre residential lot. On Pentecost Sunday, May 18, 1986, at 3 pm, RRPC became the forty-second congregation of the Presbytery of Santa Fe in a Chartering Service held at Rio Rancho Community Auditorium. During the service, Rev. Huggins and the congregation read responsively the Declaration of Purpose:

Pastor: Dear friends, the Scriptures teach us that the church is the household of God, the body of which Christ is the head, and that it is the design of the gospel to bring together in one all who are in Christ. We have come together to be formed into a new congregation of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., which is a part of Christ's holy church, Therefore, let us affirm before God and one another our intention.

Chartering Congregation: In response to the grace of God, we desire to be constituted and organized as a church, to be known as the Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church. We promise and covenant to live together in unity and to work together in ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ, bound to him and to one another as a part of the body of Christ in this place according to the principles of faith, mission, and order of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.


The Presbytery of Santa Fe
invites you to celebrate
the chartering of

Rio Rancho
Presbyterian Church

in a service of worship
Pentecost Sunday
May 18, 1986
at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Community Auditorium
4110 Sabana Grande Ave., S.E.,
Rio Rancho

Reception following



Judy Tucker conducts the choir during the Chartering Service.

Several area churches participated in the service, including ushers from Rio Grande Presbyterian Church, banners from First Presbyterian Church, and a reception coordinated through the Santa Fe Presbytery. Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church Bell Choir rang for the service and their Adult Choir joined RRPC's Church Choir for two anthems. RRPC's choir continues to sing one of the anthems – "First Song of Isaiah" – each year on Pentecost Sunday with the congregation joining in on the refrain. The children sang, "I Am the Church." All of the 260 chairs were filled and a few people stood against the wall. Rev. Robert Tedrow, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Santa Fe, declared the congregation organized, and the members then adopted by-laws and elected officers. Rev. Kay Huggins was called to be the church's first pastor. Members of the first Session were Ray Tucker and Jack Parker in the Class of 1986, Joan Wiley and Bill Pirnie in the Class of 1987, and Karen Wilkes (the first Clerk of Session) and Tom Isaacs in the Class of 1988. Members of the first Board of Deacons were Sandy Taylor and Charles Reardon in the Class of 1986, Dick Fuller and Del Kirby in the Class of 1987, and Phyllis Rasmussen and Lauren Dyer in the Class of 1988. During the service, Treasurer Ray Tucker presented a check for \$1,000 to Executive Presbyter Bill Aber as partial repayment for the \$6,000 loan for land. RRPC also held its first baptism at this service – Stephanie Dawn Lawlor, daughter of Charter Members Ronald and Elizabeth Lawlor. Elizabeth Lawlor's mother, Charter Member Pauline Potucek, was the first member of the church to pass away. She died in 1987. The skylight in the narthex was donated in her memory.



The first baptism at Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church was performed at the Chartering Service with the baptism of Stephanie Lawlor.

The First Song of Isaiah

By Jack Noble White

REFRAIN:

Surely it is God who saves me;
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense,
and he will be my Savior.

VERSE 1:

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing
from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say,
Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name.

REFRAIN

VERSE 2:

Make the deeds known among the peoples;
see that they remember his Name is exalted.
Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things,
and this is known in all the world.

REFRAIN

VERSE 3:

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion,
ring out your joy,
For the great one in the midst of you
is the Holy One of Israel.

REFRAIN (sung twice)

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The Sunday after chartering, about 30 members and their families joined in the Hands Across America celebration, carrying two banners to proclaim who they were. More than five million Americans held hands in the 4,152-mile long human chain known as Hands Across America that reached from New York to Long Beach, California, to raise money to fight hunger and poverty.



Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church members participate in "Hands Across America" on May 25, 1986. Left to right: Tim, Priscilla, Amanda, and Tom Isaacs.

On June 2, RRPC held a Service of Ordination and Installation. Elders, deacons, and ministers from Rio Grande, New Life, First, and Covenant Presbyterian churches attended to assist with the laying on of hands. The next evening, the Session and Deacons met jointly to begin their work. At the end of June, members commissioned a Task Force on Building to learn about facts, figures, and possibilities for the building program. In July, the Task Force on Building divided into four working groups: Mission Design, Pre-design Considerations, Long-Range Planning, and Finance.

Meanwhile, RRPC obtained an additional room at the Rio Rancho Inn in August for the youngest church school classes and for use as a nursery during worship. Rev. Kay Huggins was installed as pastor on September 14 in a Service of Installation with members of a commission from the Presbytery attending the service. Robert Reinovsky moderated and Presbytery Executive Bill Aber delivered the sermon. Elder William Burk III charged the congregation and Rev. Al Parker charged the pastor. The charge is the directive given to the pastor and the congregation. In an installation service, the charge focuses on the ministry and pastorate that lie ahead. Two weeks later, the Task Force on Building reported their findings to the congregation and established the foundation for the next phase of planning. During October, the Session discussed the possibility of a land trade for a church site with local developer AMREP. The property purchased by the Presbytery of Santa Fe was zoned commercial and residential, but, due to changes in the City of Rio Rancho's Zoning Board, it appeared that the entire area around the church property would be developed as commercial.

As worship attendance grew – the average was 133 in November – the members began to think about a new temporary place of worship. Ralph and Gloria Danella suggested the

Italian American Association Hall. The Worship Committee contacted the association, signed a rental agreement, and RRPC began holding Sunday services at the hall on December 14. Charter Member Nadine Loetzer remembers the hall had folding chairs that church members would set up and take down each Sunday. “A strong memory that all of the children hold is picking up beer bottles in the parking lot on Sunday mornings prior to Sunday School. The disco ball, bingo boards, and Italian area flags became a routine part of the surroundings and, after a while, were just part of the setting rather than a distraction,” Charter Member Elaine Isaacs said. Sandy and David Rasmussen donated an organ that they agreed to store until the church had a building. On Christmas Eve, worshippers joined together at 6:30 pm in the traditional outdoor service on church property and a candlelight service at the Italian American Hall at 8 pm. At the end of 1986, RRPC had grown to 105 members.

In 1986, RRPC hired Tina Resner to provide childcare during worship, a position that she holds 25 years later. “Doc and Joan Wiley were members. I was cleaning house for them at the time and they told me about the position,” Tina said. She was also providing daycare at her home. She interviewed for the childcare provider position and was hired. When there are few small children to care for, Tina and her assistant, Kathy Hallquist, help with coffee and snacks during the hospitality hour following worship. “The kids let us know what they want to do – crafts or let them play. I really cherish my job,” she said.

Building

*I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*

Psalm 122:1

The Church Building Committee was commissioned February 8, 1987. Members of the Steering Committee were Tom Isaacs (Convener), George Huggins (Program/ Interpretation), Amy Scheuerman (Oversight), Jack Parker (Finance), and Rev. Huggins (Ex Officio). The Program /Interpretation Work Group included Julie Darling, Jan Parker, Ernestine Sade, and W.C. Wiley. Serving on the Oversight Work Group were David Callins, Joyce Krause, Jesse May, David Rasmussen, Judy Tucker, and Web Zeigler. The Finance Work Group consisted of Steven McClanahan, Kathy Rustmeyer, Betty Vick, Allan Wilcox, and Nathan Wilkes. The Session prepared a proposal for exchanging property with the goal of locating the church in a mixed usage area, i.e., residential and commercial.

At a special Session meeting held on March 9, the Oversight Work Group presented George Rainhart, AIA, and recommended him for architect. The Session voted to retain Rainhart for the initial design stage of the building project. The church financial campaign was set to kick off Sunday, May 17, the first anniversary of chartering. RRPC marked another milestone in its history when the corporation held its first meeting in May and announced that all indebtedness to the Presbytery of Santa Fe had been retired. Still, the land exchange remained unresolved, so the Building Fund Campaign was postponed until, in Tom Isaacs' words, "the way be clear." Needing office and meeting space, the church leased two offices on the ground floor of an office building on 20th Street (now Unser Boulevard). Session members continued to look for mixed use properties in Rio Rancho, yet the city did not enact any zoning changes. But in August, property adjacent to the church land became available and the city welcomed the request for a zoning change. The Session made an offer on two lots on one acre adjoining the two acres that RRPC owned, and members waited with hope that the building project would soon begin. Meanwhile, George Rainhart was already working on a schematic design for the building. The congregation met with George on September 27, reviewed the plans, and made new recommendations. The future of the building project would be decided the next night.

On September 28, RRPC's request was the last item on the docket of the Zoning Board

of the City of Rio Rancho. The board approved the church's request for conditional special use for the two lots adjacent to the east of the current holdings. Finally, the way was clear to purchase additional lots and proceed with the Building Program. PCUSA Moderator Isabel Rogers and Vice Moderator Jaime Quinones visited the church school social hour and opening of worship in October. RRPC was the fastest growing church in the PCUSA at the time. Moderator Rogers said to the congregation: "This is where the church is! In the midst of a young congregation, with all the struggles and joys. God is at work." Church members chose February 28 as Commitment Sunday for the building. RRPC made application to the national church for a PCUSA loan to be submitted in March and anticipated approval in April. Loans would also be secured in April and May from local lending agencies. Construction was set to begin as soon as possible after May 22. With inspired hopes, 40 people braved the falling snow to attend the outdoor Christmas Eve service at 6:30 p.m.

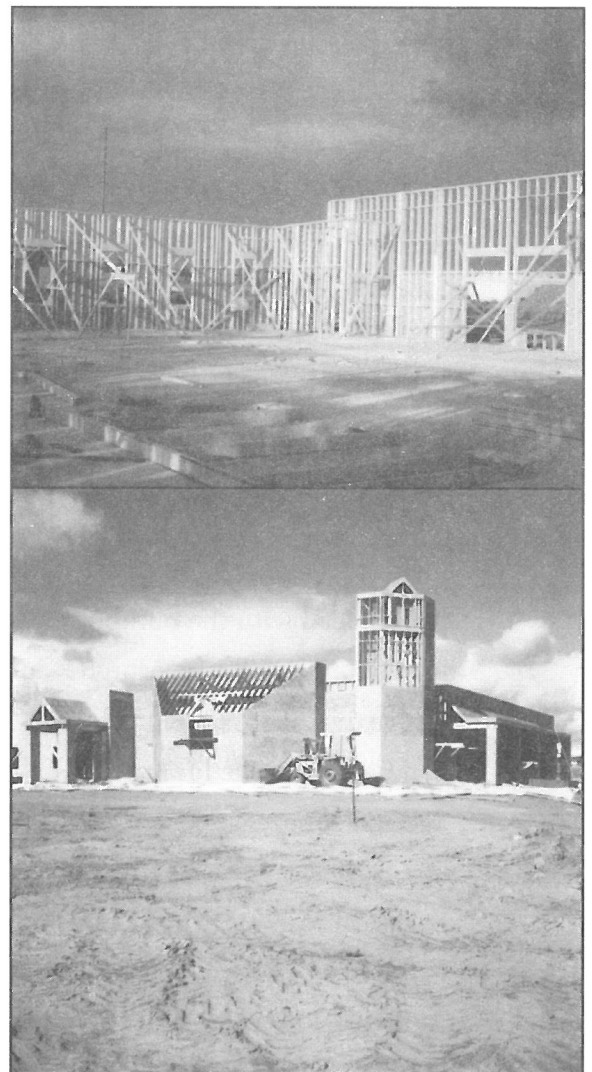
As the new year began, the congregation turned their hopes into commitment to build their sanctuary. On January 5, 1988, the Building Fund Campaign subcommittee leaders, visiting stewards, Elders, and Deacons met with Campaign Director Kiki Swanson. RRPC committed to a three-year goal of \$150,000. At the annual meeting on January 31, the closing balance on all accounts was \$12,957. On Commitment Sunday, February 28, Rev. Huggins, Synod of the Southwest Executive Presbyter Rev. Gary Skinner, and Campaign Director Kiki Swanson each talked briefly about the past, present, and future of RRPC.

Thirty-three visiting stewards were commissioned to call on the 146 members for their pledges. Before they began their visits, more than \$90,000 was pledged. By 5 pm that Sunday, \$120,000 was pledged to the Building Fund. "Giving for building the church was a three-year commitment," said Charter Member Phyllis Rasmussen. "We didn't have anybody that didn't make a pledge of some kind. We were surprised at how much we got in pledges – we decided to go ahead with the building." The Session approved the formal application for a \$200,000 loan from PCUSA on March 7 and forwarded the papers to the Presbytery, Synod, and Office of Corporate Finance. Rev. Huggins announced to the Session on May 2 that the loan had been approved for the new church building. The total project was limited to \$556,875 and the congregation received permission to borrow up to \$292,000 from a local lending institution. Jack Parker oversaw the development of the loan proposal that was submitted to five local banks. On Pentecost Sunday at 3:30 pm, Presbyterians from all over the Santa Fe Presbytery gathered on the church property. Executive Presbyter Bill Aber, architect George Rainhart, and Moderator of the Presbytery Shannon Webster spoke. Five Presbyterian

churches – New Life, Immanuel, La Mesa, St. Andrew, and Laguna – donated a beautiful pulpit Bible. Children, members, neighbors, and visitors took shovels, surrounded the proposed church outline on the property, and broke ground. With each turn of the shovel, the people gave the liturgical response: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the people labor in vain.” With faith that the Lord would indeed build this house, RRPC then offered to host the July 1989 meeting of the Presbytery.

Invited contractors prepared bids that were opened at George Rainhart’s office on August 9. Gerald Martin Construction Co. was willing to work with the congregation to reduce their bid to an acceptable figure. For the next 20 days, the company and RRPC recommended and reviewed cuts, adjustments, substitutions, and deletions. The final bid was \$490,000. Chair of Building Tom Isaacs, Clerk of Session Karen Wilkes, and General Contractor Gerald Martin signed the contract during a congregational meeting on August 28.

The first earth was moved on the building site on September 15. By November, the building was progressing to the point that the walls were up, and the parking lot and street graded. On Christmas Eve 1988, 50 members and friends stood around a bonfire on the church property to hear the Christmas story. The pace of construction enabled the congregation to move into the new sanctuary on Easter instead of Pentecost Sunday, as planned. On Palm Sunday, March 19, 1989, 216 excited and happy members and friends of RRPC met for the last time at the Italian American Hall. Phyllis Rasmussen recalled, “We started the service at the Italian American Hall, then we got in our cars, and waved palms as we drove to our new church. There was a long banner with everybody’s hand print on it.” A police escort accompanied the joyful worshippers to their new 11,000 square-foot home where the oldest member, Allan Wilcox, entered the sanctuary first. “The choir



*Construction on Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church’s building.
Above right: October 29, 1988
Right: November 26, 1988*

sang a seven-fold Amen,” remembered Judy Tucker. “The sound of the voices in the sanctuary was wonderful. I started to cry as I was starting to direct – I was so moved by their voices. I had no idea I was going to cry. The sanctuary had no chairs – just people and space – and there was a wonderful sound of voices.” The first full service in the new sanctuary, including chairs, was held on Easter.



Palm Sunday at Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church's new building.

The Service of Dedication was held on Pentecost Sunday, May 14, 1989, at 4:00 pm – the third anniversary of the chartering service. At the conclusion of the Litany of Dedication, the congregation recited together: “To the glory of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we dedicate this building and ourselves.” Reciting together the Prayer of Commitment, the members prayed:

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church
Rio Rancho, New Mexico

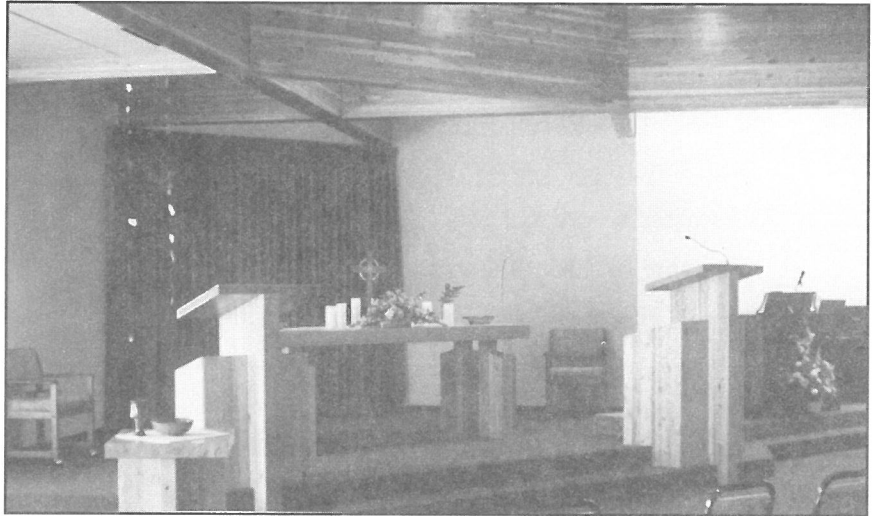
The Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church
invites you to a
Service of Dedication
Sunday, May 14
at four o'clock in the afternoon
1004 24th Street
Rio Rancho

— Reception following in the Social Hall —

O God, the provisions you give for our journey have always been simple: something to eat, a path to follow, and a star to aim for. What you ask of us is equally simple: Trust in you, Trust in each other. The covenant between us is as simply beautiful as a rainbow spanning the sky; it is rough and sparse like the wood beams forming the cross. Wherever we go, whatever we do, remind us, God, of life's necessities; your great love for us, our love for you, and the opportunity to cherish each other. Amen.”

The bulletin for the Service of Dedication described the new church:

The style of the building combines two ideas: that beauty is found in simplicity and that functionality comes from flexibility. Most of the interior spaces are multipurpose, thereby allowing the congregation to develop new ministries and to grow in unexpected ways. The exterior style witnesses to the heritage of the Presbyterian Church in New Mexico by recalling the feeling of a northern New Mexico plaza town – the towns in which Presbyterianism took root in New Mexico.



On Pentecost Sunday, 1989, all was ready. The flowers on the Communion Table were presented in memory of Dr. Ed Hamilton; the flowers in front of the organ were given by the Sixth Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, PA.

The bulletin also described the design of the sanctuary:

Worship is central to the life of our community. It is through worship that we praise God, listen for God's word, and commit ourselves to serving God.

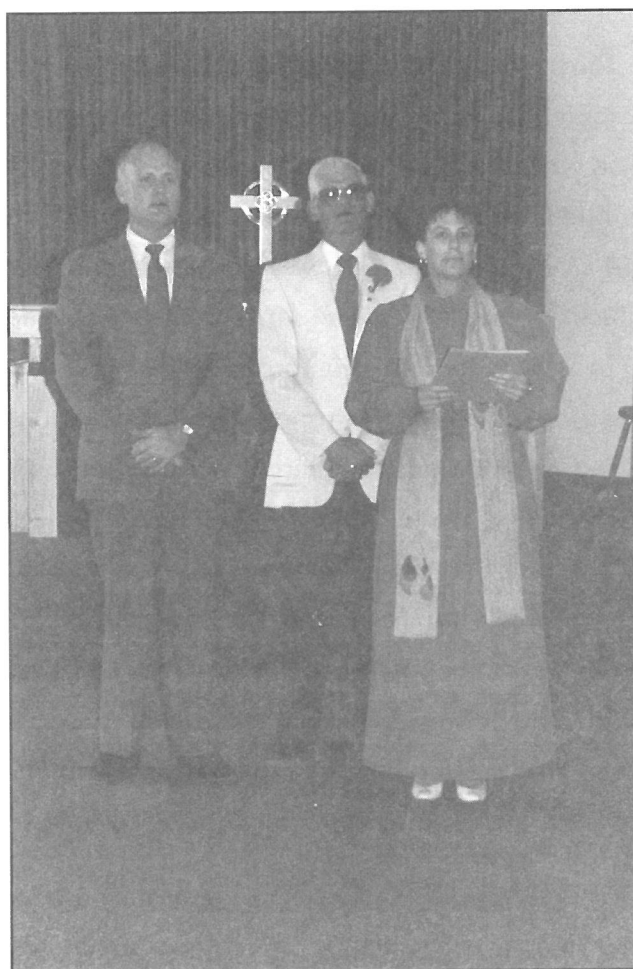


The Chancel furniture was designed by George Rainhart, built by Steven Smith, and materials were donated by Kay McMann, in loving memory of her husband.

Our new sanctuary has been carefully designed to enhance the experience of worship. The west windows bring the beauty of the Sandia Mountains to the gathered congregation. The circular seating arrangement emphasizes the corporate nature of worship. The wood beams define the worship space and weave a sacred canopy over the chancel area. This is holy space.

Looking around the sanctuary, the worshipper can see the cross woven into the design from the wooden beams above the pulpit area to the panes in the windows to the furnishings – the communion table where the legs form a cross, the font, and the candleholder. Steve Smith, Judy Tucker’s son, built the communion table and all the furniture for the sanctuary in accordance with architect George Rainhart’s design with materials donated by Kay McMann in memory of her husband.

“The day we dedicated the church – after the service, we found that someone had forgotten to plug in the coffee pot. It was a large pot and took a long time to heat. Everybody was thinking of so many things,” Nadine Loetzer said. There were no pews in the church, so Presbyterian Women (PW), of which Nadine was treasurer for 19 years, donated money to purchase chairs. “Laura Kirby and I sewed a quilt and raffled it,” she said. Nadine often used her considerable talents as a seamstress for the church. She and Liz Lindsey made the original wine-colored curtain behind the altar. “The original curtain held up about 20 years – it was heavy material, quite a job to work with. I did so much of the work. It was a lot of material to handle. It was a dressy-looking curtain,” she said. She also hemmed the material for the white tablecloths to be used for weddings and other special events. Nadine also made the cream-colored, purple, and red robes for Rev. Huggins. “The cream-colored robe has a high cuff and full sleeve pleated into the top. She chose the pattern and material for the purple and red robes. She enjoyed wearing them.” PW gave Nadine a Lifetime Membership Award in honor of her service and dedication to the group.



Tom Isaacs, Jack Parker, and Rev. Kay Huggins just before the benediction at the building dedication.

Serving

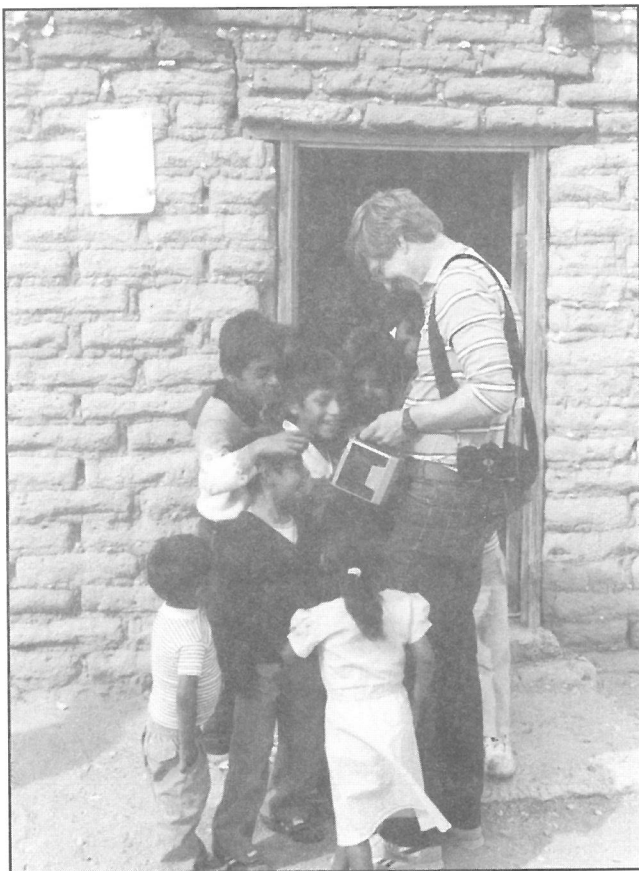
*For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*

Matthew 25:35

The new church building fulfilled more than just the goal of having a permanent place to worship. “From Day One of this congregation, it was always the purpose to use the building as an outreach. From the first moment we talked about a building, it couldn’t be just our building – it had to be an outreach to the community,” observed Elaine Isaacs. Rev. Huggins said, “When the building was completed, one financial vow proved difficult. We had a core value of giving 10 percent of our income to the General Mission of the PCUSA and another 10 percent to local mission projects. The strain of the mortgage challenged this formula; the Deacons responded by proposing the building be used as ‘mission.’ It was an appropriate response for at that time there was precious little neutral meeting space in Rio Rancho. We hosted soccer registrations, four AA groups, County Agent workshops, counseling for parents of special needs children, foster parent training, elections, and celebrations of other faith traditions. Most of these groups used the facility without charge, but many made significant contributions to the life of the congregation.” True to their word, the congregation fulfilled the promise they had made at the groundbreaking and hosted the July 1989 meeting of the Presbytery of Santa Fe. In 1991, the church became fully self-supporting after five years of New Church Development financial support.

RRPC’s first outreach to the community was to establish a food pantry in the hall closet of Rev. Huggins’ home. “It was Christmas, one of our members knew of a family in need in her community,” Rev. Huggins remembered. “We started to stock up, let the police know, and folks often arrived at the front door (641 Summer Winds) for help. Later there would be a larger cabinet in the rented office space and, of course, when the building was finished, there was one closet for food storage. The Deacons established guidelines and kept clear records. Later these records helped to challenge the myth current in 1990 that there were no poor in Rio Rancho. Through the efforts of the West Mesa Ministerial Association and especially of the members of Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church, Storehouse West was incorporated in 1992; the expertise and devotion of RRPC to Storehouse West is a clear trajectory of a concern for the poor among us.”

Although it was a young church, RRPC was already maturing in its sense of mission – both to the surrounding community and beyond national borders. In 1989, the church started making a difference in the life and health of a small Mexican community when the Men’s Group raised \$1,500 to fund a portion of a water project through Waterlines. Waterlines is a non-profit organization based in Santa Fe and established in 1986 to help communities in developing countries obtain clean drinking water. David Douglas, executive director of Waterlines, remembered that nationally, Presbyterian Men were expanding their mission work with water projects. “Rev. Kay Huggins suggested, ‘Why don’t we use Rio Rancho Presbyterian as a model for what a Men’s Group can do?’” Douglas said.



Scott Henriksen with children in Los Trojes de Belén.

The project helped Los Trojes de Belén, a community of about 90 people in the state of Guanajuato four hours north of Mexico City. The word “trojes” means “granary” or “olive bin,” and “Belén” means “Bethlehem.” Because the former well in the village had turned dry after the water table dropped, the women there had to walk about a mile to an agricultural well and carry tins of water back on burros. “Several men saw this as a particular mission they could help with and they raised the money,” Douglas said. The core working group that encouraged the congregation to participate included Scott Henriksen, Rev. Huggins, Men’s Group leader Roger McNeil, and Deacon Don Pruitt. Luis Brito, a Catholic social worker in Los Trojes, coordinated the project and convinced the Mexican government to fund part of the cost of the water system. In a letter to Rev. Huggins in October 1989, Douglas wrote:

“I think it is fair to say that Rio Rancho’s willingness

to pursue this project provided leverage that Luis could use in persuading contacts in the Mexican government to help.” Douglas and RRPC members Scott Henriksen and Anji and Mark Easterday traveled to Las Trojes in November 1989 to connect with the community. After returning to Los Trojes in 1992, Douglas wrote to Rev. Huggins, “With Luis Brito, I visited several households in Las Trojes, seeing faucets in the yards issuing forth an abundant supply of clean water.”

Yet, this was not the end of RRPC's mission to the village. In 1993, Brito asked for collaboration on a project to repair a small dam where rainwater was stored for cattle and goats to drink. The project would also enable irrigation for more fruit trees. In 1994, the Men's Group sent a check to Waterlines for \$2,000, two-thirds of the amount needed. The group continued to raise the remaining \$1,000 while Waterlines covered the entire amount with no obligation to RRPC to reimburse the organization should fundraising have fallen short. The village had enough money left over after the dam repair and irrigation to build a new schoolroom beside the old one. In 1995, the Men's Group sent the final \$1,000 to Waterlines. Continuing their commitment to the community, in 1996, the Men's Group gave \$750 to Los Trojes to build a fence around the schoolhouse to keep out animals and allow the planting of fruit trees in the enclosure. A reminder of RRPC's mission to Los Trojes hangs on the wall outside the library: a pencil drawing of a burro carrying a water tin with the RRPC building in the background. Valerie Kimball, who attended discipleship classes at RRPC, created the drawing. It was printed on note cards, the back of which state, "Proceeds from the sale of these note cards benefit the Rio Rancho Presbyterian Men's Project to bring water to Los Trojes de Belen, Mexico."



Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church Youth at Mora, NM, June 1992.

Another mission that began early and has continued through RRPC's history is the Youth program. Scott Henriksen was the first Youth Group leader for several years before his daughter Kristen was born. Charter Member Nancy, Scott's wife, was the first Christian Ed "Director" and taught Children's Sunday School as well for several years. In July 1988, the Youth volunteered to spend a week leading a

vacation church school with the El Rito Presbyterian Church in Chacon, New Mexico. The host congregation's members were all over the age of 60, but provided a Community Church School annually for more than 80 children and youth. For several years, RRPC Youth supported Presbyterian churches in Chacon and Mora by holding annual vacation Bible schools, bringing supplies, teaching, playing games, and cleaning. Mora County, noted

Youth Group leader Linn Jenkins, is New Mexico's poorest. The Youth also led Bible schools in Cuba, New Mexico, from 2003 to 2009. They traveled to Leadville, Colorado in 2010 and 2011 to conduct Bible schools. RRPC Youth have also cleaned out cabins and trails at Sandia Conference Grounds, a retreat center owned by the Presbytery. Each February, the Youth



sponsor the Souper Bowl of Caring, a national hunger project held on Super Bowl Sunday. A Presbyterian Youth Group in Columbia, South Carolina, started the movement. Proceeds from the RRPC effort are donated to Storehouse West. The Youth also participate in the annual CROP Walk sponsored by Church World Service to raise funds to fight hunger.

Youth participate in CROP Walk in October 1987. Left to right: Amanda Isaacs, Tom Isaacs, George Huggins in bear costume, Scott Henriksen, Priscilla Isaacs, Stacy Brager and daughter, and Rev. Kay Huggins.

The Youth also traveled to Mexico to help at Arbol de Vida (Tree of Life) Orphanage in Juarez. On their first trip during Labor Day weekend 2000, they

built a chain link fence around the compound. On the second, in 2001, they planted trees and installed water lines. They put in concrete to fortify the fence during their third trip, May 28–29, 2008. “Wild animals were getting under the fence and taking their chickens,” said John Husler, who helped with the Youth trips. “We also took kids from La Mesa and Immanuel Presbyterian churches. We used Immanuel’s bus on the first and second trips.” Usually, about 20 youth and adults participated in these missions. “Linn Jenkins and Scott Strommen did so much for the Youth. It was a pleasure working with them,” John observed.

RRPC has always had at least three youths attend the Triennium, a national meeting held every three years at Purdue University for high-school age Presbyterians. Amanda Isaacs Ball, daughter of Tom and Elaine Isaacs, served on the National Youth Ministry Council, a three-year commitment, while she was in high school. Linn and Debbie Jenkins and Tom and Amanda Isaacs also represented RRPC at the Youth Connection Meeting in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania.

Judy Tucker retired as choir director in 1993 and Tom Neill was selected as part-time minister of music. In January 1995, Bonnie Husler became director of music and served until

August 1, 2003. “I started with nine people in the choir, no bell choir, and no organization,” she remembered. She nurtured that very small seed of a music program and grew it into a choir of 45 members, raised funds for three octaves of handbells, and worked with Rev. Huggins to collect donations for a grand piano. “I tried to make music fun,” Bonnie said. She developed three handbell choirs – ensembles for children, middle and high school students, and adults. Bob and Rosemary Perkins donated an Allen electronic organ during Bonnie’s term as director of music. Nancy Leffler served as pianist and organist. Bonnie directed the choir in a performance of John Rutler’s “Gloria” – “a challenge for the choir, but they did great,” she said. She and husband John played for “Die Polka Schingels,” a German dinner and music performance to raise money for one of the Mexican mission trips. Bonnie also encouraged RRPC’s young people to develop an interest in music and become involved with the church’s music program. Jared Strommen, Christy Bass, Jacob Bushma, and Hadley Furlano studied trumpet with Bonnie. Children of all skill levels have always been encouraged to participate and play their musical instruments during worship, much to the delight of their parents and the congregation.



Christmas 1993: Christopher Osburn (left) plays Joseph and Debbie Phillips (right) plays Mary.

Seeking direction for the future, RRPC conducted the Church Home Improvement Project consisting of four surveys taken during the spring and summer in 1997. The first survey was a series of 10-minute interviews in which a sample of members answered six questions. The second survey presented simple questions on three-inch by five-inch cards over three consecutive Sundays in May. The responses were published in a booklet supporting the theme of “The Church as a Family.” The third installment was known as Walk-the-Wall. A sheet of paper for each group within the congregation was taped to the wall of the Social Hall at the June 22nd picnic where members wrote their ideas and suggestions. Finally, a four-page survey was sent to members, friends, and youth age 12 and older to obtain demographic information for planning ministry and mission. The Research Service in Louisville, Kentucky, tabulated and analyzed the questionnaires. On September 30, the congregation heard the results of the survey.

The Session responded to the survey with the decision to add almost 2,000 square feet of space to the building for Christian education and other needs and to hire a Christian education coordinator and Youth Ministry staff person. Star Construction began building the three additional classrooms in April 1998 and the new space was dedicated in September. Additional work on the building included repairing a roof leak over the choir area, adding a nursery overhang support beam, landscaping on the northwest corner of the building, painting the exterior trim, and transforming the meeting room into the parlor and the library. Steve Smith crafted the pine cabinets for the narthex to match the sanctuary furniture he had previously built.

As the decade came to a close, change was in the wind. After nearly 14 years, Rev. Huggins announced in a March 3, 1999, letter to the congregation that she was leaving. “In short, I was exhausted. The public reason was the reason most pastors leave, a sense of accomplishment and a sense of intrigue about the future,” she said. Her final service was on May 23 – Pentecost Sunday – the anniversary of the church’s chartering. She and George relocated to Tucson, Arizona, where she could have the opportunity to write and teach and where George had been offered a job. The church library was dedicated to Rev. Kay and George for their service to RRPC.

Through the years, retired pastors and those in between calls have been a part of the congregation and have been willing to support the pastor and fill in as needed. As Tom Isaacs observed, “Kay was very good at letting others play in her sandbox.” Rev. Al Parker was the first retired pastor to join the young church. His wife, Joanne, was the church’s first pianist. His sister, Jane Parker Hubert, wrote new lyrics to old, familiar hymns, many of which are in the *Presbyterian Hymnal*. Peter Denlea, a retired U.S. Navy chaplain, was part of RRPC when Rev. Huggins left. Peter performed the marriage ceremony for Priscilla Isaacs and Joshua Landon after Rev. Huggins left and later returned to baptize their son, Tyler. “He had all the children in the congregation come forward for the baptism. He used it as a mini children’s sermon and, just as he had told us he would, he used ample amounts of water, sprinkling it generously and probably getting a few drops on every child present,” Elaine said.

From July 31, 1999 until January 31, 2001, Rev. Bob Clary served as interim pastor. Rev. Clary had worked as an interim pastor at several churches and said in an interview in *Albuquerque Journal’s West Side Journal* on June 18, 1999 that serving as an interim “has always been sort of a passion of mine.” Rev. Dr. Larry Hitchens was called to serve as pastor on May 6, 2001.

While serving RRPC, Rev. Dr. Hitchens encouraged Elaine Isaacs and Sally Stilgebouer to participate in a Walk to Emmaus. "Walk to Emmaus is a weekend retreat for men or women in which you have no contact from Friday afternoon to Sunday evening with your family or anyone outside the group," explained Elaine. "The retreat is for spiritual reflection and awakening and self-reflection. It includes classes and Bible verses about you and your personal journey. Through that retreat, Sally got involved with prison ministry." Sally reached out to help incarcerated women through Kairos Prison Ministry and supported the development of A Peaceful Habitation Home and Aftercare Ministry. Leticia Chavez-Paulette developed A Peaceful Habitation after she was released from prison to help women transition from a correctional facility to an independent God-centered lifestyle. "Sally and I met when she was a Kairos volunteer at the prison," Leticia said. "She was a great support and mentor and a friend to me. God called me to develop A Peaceful Habitation. She and Larry began providing support in 2007. They encouraged Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church to provide hygiene products and quilts for the women. She purchased coats for the ladies [with the support of Presbyterian Women]. She was a great example for me of someone who was dedicated to helping women who were released from prison."

Rev. Dr. Hitchens also introduced the Starfish Foundation to RRPC. The foundation has helped build schools and provide money for scholarships in Mexico. The Starfish Foundation took its name from the Loren Easley story, "The Star Thrower," in which a man watched a young man as he threw starfish on a beach back into the ocean. When asked why he was throwing the creatures back into the sea, the young man answered that they would die if left on the beach.

Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean.

As it met the water, he said, "It made a difference for that one."

(from www.thestarfishfoundation.com)

Although Rev. Dr. Hitchens left RRPC on July 13, 2004, members continued to work with the Starfish Foundation. Rev. Dave Schreffler served as designated pastor from November 11, 2004 until September 22, 2006. Rev. Schreffler, Bill Cox, June DeFore, and Joanne and Bill Thornton made their first trip to Mexico in 2005. They stayed in El Paso and went into Juarez during the day. The men helped repair or build schools and churches while the women

conducted Bible School and helped with crafts. Other projects involved installing a water line into the school, resealing a roof, and installing heaters. “It was interesting because a lot of the Mexican kids helped the men,” said Joanne Thornton. “The kids were absolutely amazing. One year they invited us to their graduation ceremony from sixth grade. They divided us up so each one of us was with a child. The kids gave gifts to us. They danced and sang at their ceremony. It costs each child money to go beyond sixth grade. We pledged money to help. We can’t go anymore, but we can still help the Starfish Foundation. Our work has affected a few people – it matters to those people,” Joanne said in reference to the story of how the foundation got its name. In 2007, four members went to Juarez to participate in a weeklong Starfish work project. In addition to raising funds for materials, travel, and housing, the congregation also donated \$1,400 for seven scholarships for the Mexican high school students.

The year 2005 was an active year for RRPC’s outreach in Spanish-speaking countries. Sally Stilgebouer had spent some time at the University of the Americas in Mexico as a youth and had also enjoyed traveling to England, the island of Iona (off Scotland), Morocco, and Spain. She joined a group organized and led by Susan Smith of First Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque to visit Presbyterians in the country of Cuba from December 1 to 10, 2005. Susan had first visited Cuba in 2000 with a network of Presbyterians from around the U.S. and returned to Cuba in 2003 with the Presbytery.

“I was interested in forming a scholarship/partnership with a needy church in Cuba,” Sally said. “Many churches in the Presbytery have formulated partnerships with the Cuban churches – we learn from them and they learn from us. We are on equal footing with one another.” The group of 12 visited 32 churches on the island as well as the Presbyter and Presbyterian seminary. “The value of the trip was to develop individual love and respect between the people of Cuba and the U.S. forever,” Sally added. The group spent most of their nights in Old Havana where First Presbyterian Church meets. Hector Rodriguez, Moderator of the Presbytery in Cuba, conducted a tour for the group. “The dormitories and eating quarters were nice,” Sally said.

Although Cuba is officially a secular state, the churches in that country serve their communities. “Most churches have taken over the social work of the community after the [Castro] Revolution. Funding for public libraries was discontinued, so the libraries moved into Presbyterian Church buildings and now people can check out books more freely. Care for the elderly and their laundry and delivery services is done as a mission or service by the

churches,” Sally explained. “Hospitals and medicine are free in Cuba, but one has to bring their own sheets and gowns. The church supplies the gowns for the local hospitals.” Noting the contradictions between the Cuban people and their government, she added, “In Cuba, one may not gather in groups at street corners or unoccupied buildings because the government believes these groups are having meetings to overthrow the



Sally Stilgebouer (front row, second from right) with Cuban children.

government. One cannot walk on roofs because the government fears they might be a sniper. Nevertheless, the Cuban people as a whole are very friendly, and they want partnership with the people of the U.S. We supply money to the Presbytery and churches of Cuba for their utilities, buildings and maintenance, and salaries. We were able to bring a large amount of money on our bodies when we went through Customs there because Cuba is not allowed to appear needy. Women were given envelopes of money to wear in their bras and men around their waist.” Sally continued her interest in Cuba after returning home. “She participated in offerings and went with me to work group meetings in the Presbytery,” Susan Smith said.

Rev. Russ Dykehouse of the Reformed Church is a retired pastor who worships with the RRPC congregation. At RRPC, Russ is Associate to the Pastor, preaches occasionally, teaches Bible studies, and works with the Membership Committee. He and his wife, Genevieve, an RRPC member, accepted a call to serve Christ in Bahrain. From 1973 to 1988, they had been missionaries at the Jicarilla Apache reservation – Russ as pastor and Genevieve as an RN, clinic nurse, school nurse, and finally as a public health nurse. The Reformed Church has a large mission at the reservation. “When we retired, we traveled a while. We decided we wanted to do something,” Russ said. “I called the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The Reformed Church got right back to us – they needed us for Bahrain. We left for Bahrain on June 4, 2008 and returned home on March 24, 2009. Their pastor was on furlough; then

their hospital chaplain went on furlough.” The Reformed Church has had a mission church and hospital in Bahrain for more than 100 years. The church has seven different worshipping congregations in seven different languages. All Christians of one language worship at the same time. “The English-speaking church had two services – the Friday morning service was almost Pentecostal with a lot of raising of hands, a very lively worship service. The Sunday evening service was smaller, the people were mostly from India, more traditional, sang mostly hymns we know – a very traditional and very formal service,” Russ said. Russ preached, taught, counseled, led Bible studies, conducted chapel services at the hospital, and visited patients and staff. He was also involved with the Ecumenical Council, performed marriages and family counseling, and preached to the Urdu and Telegu congregations through an interpreter. Genevieve, with her broad experience in hospitals and clinics, helped the hospital prepare for re-certification, held classes, and wrote policies.

Russ and Genevieve have warm memories of their time in Bahrain. They felt comfortable and safe. They noted that the Muslims donate a lot of money to the hospital. “In many ways, we received as much as we gave,” Russ said. Russ and Genevieve remembered that on Christmas Day, several women who didn’t know them sang to them “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” About the experience of serving as pastor to the church and hospital in Bahrain, Russ said: “For me, it impressed on me that God’s people are everywhere. We can have a sense of being brothers and sisters in Christ no matter where we’re from or what language we speak. Even though you couldn’t communicate with them, you felt they were a brother or sister in Christ.”

Paul Bower followed Bonnie Husler as director of music in 2003 and continued to enrich the life of the congregation with an inspiring music program. In 2004, RRPC hosted a handbell festival and enhanced the congregation’s worship through music with the addition of the *Renew Songbook*. In 2005, Paul combined RRPC’s choir with two other church choirs to perform “Savior of the Nations, Come,” an Advent hymn festival by Michael Burkhard, with a small orchestra. He also conducted a performance of Vivaldi’s “Gloria” in 2009 with a small orchestra and soloists. In 2010, Paul initiated the annual Lenten Recital Series, featuring professional musicians from Albuquerque and Rio Rancho in free concerts open to the public during Lent. Jake Rittenhouse succeeded Paul as director of music in August 2010 and has continued the Lenten recitals.

Generous members and friends of the congregation contributed to the purchase of a carillon in 2006 through a campaign led by Kim Bass. The electronic carillon was placed in

the tower at the southeast corner of the sanctuary in 2007. The timing and selection of music and daily noon chimes can be programmed.

In addition to music, the visual arts have also enhanced both the worship setting and spirit at RRPC. In 1994, Ed Peeples donated the large stained glass window in memory of his wife, Catherine Anne Peeples, in the sanctuary behind the choir loft. The wings of the white dove in flight and the sweeping panels of blue, purple, pink, and mauve lift the eye and spirit toward heaven. Kim Bass designed and made many of the vividly colored banners that hang in the sanctuary. Charter member Elizabeth Lawlor donated the framed banner on the wall behind the pulpit. The banner features a purple crocheted cross on which gold, white, and lilac flowers have been embroidered. Elizabeth's grandmother, Antoinette Habnec, brought the cross with her when she emigrated to the U.S. from Czechoslovakia. Glenn Lemon constructed the wooden cross that hangs in the front of the sanctuary. Fred Kelley made the cross on the Communion table. Joe Bunt and Janet Lacy created a series of eight stained glass windows for the east wall of the church with the help of several members. The windows portray the Natal Star, the Manger, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christ's Death, Resurrection, Pentecost, and the Trinity.

Rev. Trudy Morphew began serving as pastor on July 8, 2008. She followed Rev. Jerry Foust who served as interim from December 1, 2006 until July 7, 2008. At a time when she was feeling that her call to the church she previously served was coming to an end, Rev. Morphew received a letter from RRPC's Pastor Nominating Committee inviting her to read the Church Information Form and to consider submitting her Personal Information Form for the position of pastor. "I have learned to pay attention to such 'coincidences' as nudges from the Holy Spirit," she said. "I was particularly moved by the diversity of the congregation, the church's role in starting Storehouse West, the flexibility of the sanctuary, and the church's sense of being without a vision for her mission and purpose in our wider community. I discerned that this church was the place and people where God was calling me to serve in my next pastorate. Simultaneously, the PNC discerned the same thing."

When asked what experiences prepared her for ministry, Rev. Morphew first explained, "I am a cradle Presbyterian; in other words, I was born into a Presbyterian family; baptized, confirmed, and was married in a Presbyterian church to another cradle Presbyterian. Randy and I have been members of a Presbyterian church all our married life. We raised our children as Presbyterians. These life experiences shaped my understanding of church as much as any other." She and Randy were involved in the youth ministry at their church in Longview,

Texas, until she returned to college to complete her undergraduate degree in order to enter seminary. “The school of the wider church,” as she referred to her leadership experiences in the Presbytery of Grace and the Synod of the Sun, further grounded her in Presbyterian theology and polity. “Over the course of the last forty years, as a member, elder and minister, I have been part of or worked with congregations as small as 30 members to the church of my internship at 700 [members]. The church I grew up in, John Knox Presbyterian, Tulsa, reminds me very much of RRPC, except for the physical plant. In other words, I believe my perspective and experience of church and churches prepared me to understand church in many and diverse ways,” she added. “Of course, seminary did its particular work of preparing me for ordained pastoral ministry, too. But the best training for being a pastor has taken place on the job.”

First Presbyterian in Stillwater, Oklahoma, more than 100 years old and with a membership of 650, was the first church Rev. Morpew served as a minister member of the Session and staff resource to the Deacons and other committees, as well as the pre-school operating in the building. A tragic event at the church further affirmed her response to the call of pastor. “On one occasion, while my colleague and Senior Pastor was on vacation, one of our members was fatally burned,” she recalled. “The event and the family needed special care, as he didn’t pass away immediately. And there was concern over hazardous materials at the accident site, which meant police involvement. The experience was painful and demanding, yet while I was in the midst of it all, I became vitally aware of the privilege I was given to be pastor to these people and to the congregation who were also grieving. It was a critical experience for forming me as a pastor for the years and people to come.”

The congregation has two lay pastors – Marjorie Davison and Scott Henriksen. Marjorie became the first Certified Lay Pastor in the Presbytery of Santa Fe. She and her husband, Jack, moved to Rio Rancho the week after RRPC broke ground for the new sanctuary. In 1996, while Marjorie was serving on Session, Rev. Huggins decided the elders should replace the minister when she was away from the pulpit. “A light came on in my brain,” Marjorie said, recalling that she had always wondered how ministers wrote their sermons. She enrolled in interdenominational classes that the New Mexico Conference of Churches organized for lay people. After she completed all the classes, she was examined by a committee on Commissioned Lay Pastors and by the Presbyter, and then certified. “The year was 2002. That Presbytery meeting was held at Cuba [New Mexico],” Marjorie said. The Cuba Presbyterian Church – with a membership of about 20 – had found it difficult to obtain a pastor when

a stated supply pastor – an acting pastor – could not be there. Sensing an opportunity to help, Marjorie became a Commissioned Lay Pastor, which enabled her to serve the Cuba Presbyterian Church under contract. She serves in Cuba about 11 times per year, performs funerals and baptisms when the pastor is away, and has preached at more than a dozen churches in the Presbytery of Santa Fe.

Scott is a Certified Lay Pastor and began leading worship for Rev. Huggins when she was away with the congregation camping at Ghost Ranch or another activity. “Marjorie Davison was in the forefront of getting the Lay Pastor program moving in the Presbytery of Santa Fe and taking classes for her lay pastor training. She invited me to join a homiletics class she was taking. I just sort of kept going one little step at a time.” Scott recalled. “The congregation continues to support both Marjorie and me by giving us both the opportunity to lead worship and teach. I was allowed to go along on RRPC pastoral visits when enrolled in that same [homiletics] class.”

An Unexpected Gift

The simple act of friendship and an invitation to attend church blessed the life of one part-time Rio Rancho resident who, in turn, bountifully blessed RRPC. “At the 20th Anniversary of RRPC in 2006, it was noted that our 20-year-old building and grounds were looking pretty shabby and in need of repairs and updating,” Bill Cox said. “We were still located on an unpaved 24th Street, the parking lot was full of pot holes and the lighting was poor. The exterior and interior were in need of repair and painting, and there were many needs to update our facility to provide services to our members, staff, and community. Fortunately for us, the Lord must have been talking to Frank and Vivian Petura because they left us a bequest and donation of over \$500,000 for use in our Building and Grounds fund. These funds, along with funds from the sale of our lot bordering on Southern Blvd, enabled us to embark on a much-needed repair, enhancement and addition plan.”

Vivian Petura’s permanent home was in Florida, but she spent time in Rio Rancho in the summers. Waddie Fertig and Kay McMann befriended her, and she started attending church and enjoyed RRPC church life. Frank and Vivian Petura had an irrevocable trust; and when Vivian died, RRPC received a sizable gift. The first check the church received was in the

amount of \$478,669.68; the second, \$52,127.32, for a total of \$530,796.20. The Building and Grounds Commission presented a list of potential improvements projects for the facility and also asked the congregation for their wish list.

The Session appointed a task force to review the lists, make recommendations, and oversee the Petura Fund. Task Force members were Scott Strommen, Susan Ivey, Tom Isaacs, June DeFore, Drew Hoffman, and Bill Cox. Bill was head of Building and Grounds at the time and was selected as Chairman of the Task Force. "We felt we needed to invest the funds. We invested \$450,000 in CDs with Dain Rauscher. The balance went into our savings account at First Community Bank," Bill said. "The funds were maintained at First Community until March 2009 when it was recommended we invest with the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP). We put \$250,000 in PILP in Mission Market account funds. Then we put \$180,000 in US New Mexico Federal Credit Union where the money would earn interest, but be available to us at any time." The funds in PILP matured. The Petura Committee and Building and Grounds made a recommendation to the Session in 2006 to replace the old heating and air conditioning, put in new carpet, add Classroom D at the back of the Fellowship Hall, and remodel the front office for a total of \$48,000.

In 2007, the parking lot was resurfaced and new and brighter lighting added to the lot. The exterior stucco was repaired and painted with an elastomeric paint that expands and contracts with heat and cold. The Session also took \$25,980 from interest from the CDs and put the amount toward the mortgage. These projects totaled \$73,130, and were all paid from interest.

A new telephone system and Bose sound system for the sanctuary were installed in 2008. The sound system cost nearly \$20,000. Roof repair, trim painting, and an Oval Window Induction Loop Assisted Listening System for hard-of-hearing worshippers brought the total for that year to \$24,086. "Never use principal, only use interest – that was our plan for paying the mortgage," Bill explained.

The Petura Fund was a blessing that enabled RRPC to reach out in the name of Christ and open its facilities to Share Your Care, an adult day care service. Six weeks after Rev. Morphew began serving as RRPC's pastor, she received a call from her friend, Rev. Frank Yates, Pastor of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque, inviting her to see and learn first-hand about St. Andrew's ministry with Share Your Care. "I was so impressed with how well their building was being used during the week, the particular ministry (as I saw it) being offered by Share Your Care, and how often Frank told me during our tour and lunch that Share Your

Care was the best mission partner he had ever had in any church throughout his ministry,” Rev. Morphey recalled.

Rev. Morphey invited the Session to learn about Share Your Care and consider offering them the church’s facilities for their Rio Rancho site. Although joining with Share Your Care required RRPC to do some remodeling and new construction, the Session believed the church was being chosen for this mission. “And so we began the journey with Share Your Care which has been exactly what we hoped, a partnership with common goals – to serve God’s people on the margins of society and their families. Indeed, this was something Jesus would have wanted us to do. And I suspect that his Spirit led us in the way,” Rev. Morphey observed.

When RRPC was considering Share Your Care as a ministry, the Session informed the City of Rio Rancho of proposed changes. “The City said we couldn’t do anything until we had a new fire sprinkler system,” Bill said. RRPC hired Western Sites Fire Protection for which the initial expenditure was \$37,259. A new fire alarm system was also required. The down payment as part of the contract with Protection One amounted to \$3,300. After the City of Rio Rancho decided to pave 24th Street, RRPC paid \$8,944 for the sewer assessment. Since Share Your Care wanted the church’s rolling cabinets, RRPC paid \$1,600 as a down payment to Corrales Woodworks to install permanent cabinets. RRPC also added a new antenna for the sound system.

The total spending for 2010 was \$228,435 – all drawn from the Petura Funds. “We couldn’t have done any of this without the Petura Funds. All of this was done with the approval of the Session with an eye to a long-range plan. Our mission to our community was to provide Share Your Care. We used some Petura interest – \$3,000 – to help toward the mortgage,” Bill said. The church purchased the needed fire sprinklers, completed the installation of fire and smoke alarms, and paid the City to connect to the new sewer and water main for a total of \$93,255. Two special-needs restrooms, a new storage room, and a wall of windows in the Fellowship Hall were added and the cost shared with Share Your Care, resulting in the church spending \$57,004 for the projects. Other projects included closing the septic tank, cabinetry in classrooms A and B, new cabinets in the Fellowship Hall for kitchen storage, a new sign on 24th Street, and landscaping and installation of an irrigation system. In response to the congregation’s request, a fenced playground was built on the east side of the church. Additional improvements in 2010 were painting the Fellowship Hall and sanctuary, painting the front doors, remodeling the restrooms, and purchase of a 10’x12’ portable storage unit.

The Men's Group provided paint so that the Building and Grounds Committee could paint every room in the church. "Building and Grounds provided all the labor for taking out the toilets and wash basins and reinstalling them. We installed new tile," Bill said.

In 2010, the Session also approved \$15,000 of the Petura Funds to be loaned to the Session to pay bills and the mortgage. All \$15,000 was paid back to the Fund. At the same time, due to the economy and its effect on pledges, the Session decided to use the Petura money for 15 months of mortgage payments. "We didn't have the money. Our total income was way off because of the economy. For 15 months, we did not make a mortgage payment out of our pledges," Bill added. In 2011, the Session decided to pay off the mortgage using the Petura Funds. The church had \$119,485 in one of the mission market funds at PILP and \$9,811 at another account at PILP. The checking account for the Petura Funds had \$28,610. All went toward paying off the mortgage.

In 2011, total expenses charged to Petura were \$162,633, most of which was paying off the mortgage. Other items were smoke alarm maintenance, roofing repair, installing a downspout off the roof on the northwest corner, stripping and rewaxing vinyl floors, and new lighting for the restrooms. Forever Lawn gave artificial turf for the playground and the church moved the gravel, purchased crusher fine gravel, and installed the turf. The year-end balance in the Petura Fund was \$10,377.12 after paying off the mortgage. The Session has determined to deposit \$500 every month into the Fund and build it back up. "My hope also is to encourage members of the church to put RRPC in their wills," Bill said. "We have looked into purchasing adjacent property. We have property that Share Your Care hopes to expand on. I really believe that our facility is in good shape."

The Men of the Church have supported many missions and activities as well as provided fellowship to its members through monthly breakfast meetings. Peter Denlea introduced retreats to the Group. Their contributions have included supporting the Youth mission trips, missionaries, Storehouse West, and giving a donation to the preferred charity of male members when they pass away. The group has also bought paint for the interior of the church and provided support for transportation to health care providers. Doug Thomas served as the representative of Presbyterian Men to the Synod of the Southwest. He was honored with the John Knox Award at the annual Conference of Presbyterian Men in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2007. He was also appointed as the national Membership Chair for Presbyterian Men and continues to hold the position.

The first meeting to form Presbyterian Women (PW) was held at Rio Rancho Country Club on January 18, 1986. On March 1, 1987, PW sponsored a "Communities of Faith" gathering at which more than 60 women representing a dozen churches and synagogues in Rio Rancho met for fellowship, support, and sharing. PW has supported many missions throughout RRPC's history. The organization sponsors the Arts and Crafts Fair annually in November to raise funds for Storehouse West. PW also supports A Peaceful

Habitation Home and Aftercare Ministry for women who have been released from prison, prevention of malaria through sales of Mother's Day cards, and Haven House for abused women and children. PW sponsors the Birthday Offering each spring to raise funds for up to five projects not included in ongoing General Assembly mission support, such as agricultural development, childcare, community organization, and others. In the fall, PW collects the Thank Offering, of which 40 percent funds health ministries throughout the world and the remaining 60 percent is designated for new ideas for mission. Members make baby quilts for newly baptized infants; sew baby gowns, caps, and blankets to send to the Women's Clinic in Malawi, Africa; and give scholarships to women and/or teens going to the church wide Triennium. The organization helped support Martineztown House for Kids for children in need for many years until the project was suspended due to lack of federal funding. The project is connected through Second Presbyterian Church of Albuquerque, a predominantly Hispanic church in the Martineztown area. In 1998, PW started the "Two-Cents-a-Meal" project for the Presbyterian Hunger Fund. An offering is taken every fifth Sunday of a month and given to Storehouse West. The concept of "Two-Cents-a-Meal" encourages members to remember the hungry by setting aside a few cents at each of their own meals to contribute to those in need. In 2001, PW began holding annual Women's Retreats. PW began collecting and transporting donated items to the Torreon Thrift Store on the Navajo Reservation near Cuba, New Mexico, in 2003.

PW also donated the Coffee Bar in the Fellowship Hall. The Coffee Bar consists of a counter with drawers, cupboards, and a sink outside the kitchen. In 2001, PW made



Before "The Witness" began to be e-mailed, members, left to right, Joe and Pegge Emery, Teddy Walston, Nadine Loetzer, and Virginia and Fred Kelley, folded the monthly church newsletter for mailing.

a commitment to purchase 200 chairs for the sanctuary through their Chairs for the Congregation project supported by fundraisers and individual donations. The members purchased 90 chairs by the end of 2001 and an additional 59 in 2002. They continued to add chairs to the sanctuary through 2005 and also bought nine new round tables for the Fellowship Hall.

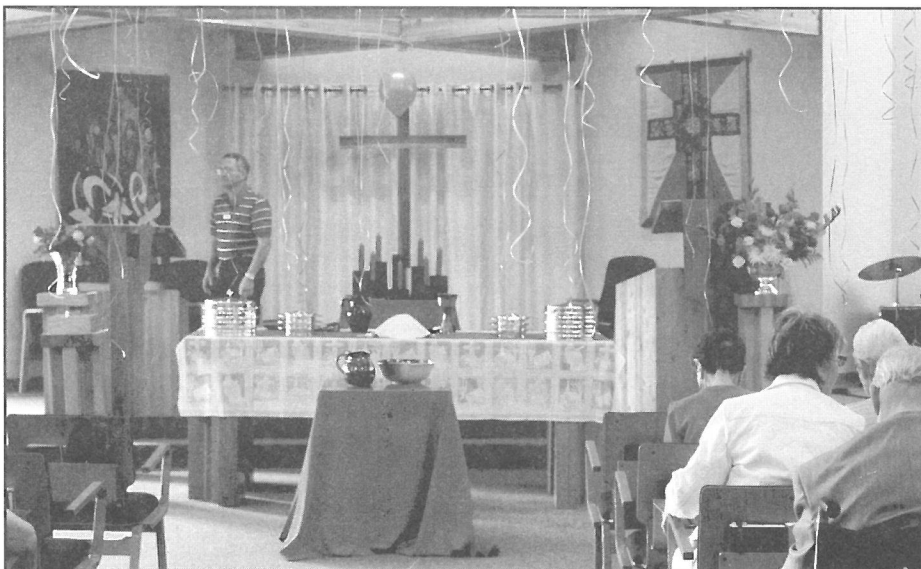
In 2011, member Gina Mitchell worked with the Outreach Commission to charter a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group through RRPC. MOPS is an international organization that offers mothers community and friendship. Any mother, an RRPC member or not, is welcome to join the group. MOPS meetings feature guest speakers; videos on family, parenting, and faith; discussions; and crafts.

Grace

*For by grace you have been saved through faith
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*

Ephesians 2:8

On Pentecost Sunday 2011 – June 12 – red, orange, and yellow balloons floated above the heads of the congregation. Members were dressed in those same bright colors as they celebrated 25 years of worshipping together, 25 years of proclaiming the Gospel to the community – both local and worldwide. The flame-colored balloons and ribbons were a



Sanctuary on Pentecost 2011 – 25th anniversary of Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church.

reminder of the tongues of flames that sat above the heads of the disciples at the first Pentecost as the Holy Spirit empowered them to preach the Gospel throughout the world. The hymns – “Every Time I Feel the Spirit,” “Spirit of God,” “Spirit, Now Live in Me,” “Spirit of the Living God” – reminded worshippers that this was

the birthday not only of RRPC but also of Christ's church worldwide. Because birthdays call for parties, worshippers enjoyed two birthday cakes and a catered lunch donated by Martha Zukas. Charter Members who could be present received a stained glass cross made by Joe Bunt in honor of their commitment to the creation of this church.

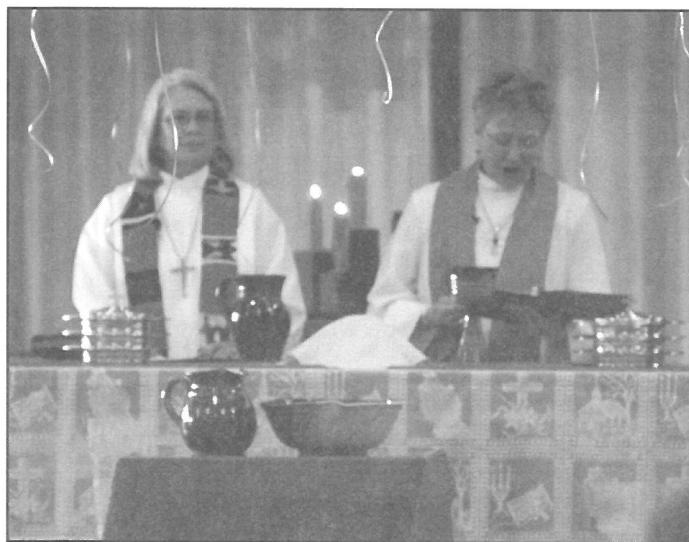


Director of Music Jake Rittenhouse conducts the Chancel Choir.

Organizing and Founding
Pastor Rev. Kay Huggins' words

emphasized the importance of the church in her sermon "Out of the Believer's Heart." She spoke to the congregation: "Looking at this beautiful facility, receiving the smiles from your joyful faces, and being in such an emotionally rich moment, the refrain of an old gospel song comes to mind: 'We've come this far by grace... we've come this far by grace.'"

The text for the day was John 7:37-39. "On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."



Rev. Kay Huggins (left) and Rev. Trudy Morpew during Communion.

In her sermon, Rev. Huggins said: "Believing, believing... we tend to think of that word in such a cerebral manner... as if believing were only about quieting doubting minds. As if belief were a simply a spoken act. But here's the New Testament (and particularly Gospel of John) take on believing: believing is a powerfully active verb, full of Spirit-power able to make saints out of sinners, friends from enemies, servants from masters.

Believing involves heart and mind and will. Believing is a way of life and believing means change. I don't have to tell you about the changes by which we mature as Christians! Think about your own life; create your own testimony from:

- bad habits discarded,
- sensitivities cultivated,
- changes made to adapt to difficult situations,
- remarkable strength to carry on, regardless.

That's believing. Believing is how the new testament church, and every subsequent congregation, cared, shared and loved neighbors, strangers and aliens until others, with awe in their mouths, declare, 'See how these Christians love!' Believing is all the individual stories of repentance, reconciliation and new life collected and woven together to be a force for justice, compassion and always, always!, the things that make for peace. Believing, as you well know, is the on going spiritual maturing of those who seek to live as Christians. Believing is what this congregation and every congregation does ...

“At the deepest point, living water rushes through changing lives: marriages strengthened, children raised, parents honored, difficult paths walked with grace. At the highest expression living water floats persistent prayers, generous sacrifices, healings and deeds of wonder. The breadth of these rivers is stretched from pastoral ministries within the congregation to social and evangelical missions around the world. Indeed, every glimpse of heaven and each manifestation of wondrous love contribute to this stream ... until it flows, converges, mingles and increases as a beautiful river renewing the world with God's great love. And within this river, deep and high and broad, one theme continues: We've come this far by grace. We've come this far by grace.”

Going Forward

The wind still blows through Rio Rancho. More homes and buildings hug the horizon, more roads crisscross the desert. More people to witness to, more needs to serve. RRPC is in the midst of the community, keeping the promise made at the chartering service “to live together in unity and to work together in ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ.”



*Charter Members who attended Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church's 25th Anniversary.
 Front row, left to right: Nadine Loetzer, Joanne Parker, Sue Phillips, Julie Darling, Phyllis Rasmussen, Judy Tucker,
 Stephanie Smith. Back row, left to right: Elaine Isaacs, Tom Isaacs, Tim Isaacs, Lori Osburn, Blake Osburn,
 Roger Phillips, Ray Tucker, George Huggins, Rev. Kay Huggins.*



Charter Members

Heather Axtell	Ronald Lawlor	Ernestine Sade
Kris Axtell	Linda McClanahan	Amy Scheuerman
Elizabeth Baxter	Steven McClanahan	Ernst Schwarz
Pauline Biddle	Jeannette Miller	Margaret Schwarz
Jana Blair	Blake Osburn	Joyce Silver
Lola Bamboy	Lori Osburn	Prudence Soto
James Clark	Anne Padilla	Sandra Taylor
Jeffery Cole	Diane Padilla	Mary Teeter
Lynn Cole	Leo Padilla	Mollie Trafican
Gloria Danella	Jack Parker	Rachel Trafican
Julie Darling	Janet Parker	Judith Tucker
Lauren Dyer	Nadine Patrick	Paul Tucker
Ann Eytcheson	Roger Phillips	Ray Tucker
Nathan Eytcheson	Sue Ann Phillips	Cullen Watts
Richard Fuller	Marian Pirnie	Dorothy Watts
Nancy Henriksen	Willis Pirnie	Allan Wilcox
Scott Henriksen	Pauline Potucek	Virginia Wilcox
Allen Holts	David Rasmussen	Joan Wiley
Joann Holts	Sandy Rasmussen	W.C. Wiley
George Huggins	Harold Rasmussen	David Wilkes
Elaine Isaacs	Phyllis Rasmussen	Karen Wilkes
Thomas Isaacs	Charles Reardon	Nathan Wilkes
Delmar Kirby	Deborah Reardon	Kathleen Willis
Laura Kirby	Kathy Rustemeyer	Irene Wilson
Joyce Krause	Richard Rustemeyer	Paul Wilson
Paul Krause	Travis Rustemeyer	Lillian Ziegler
Elizabeth Lawlor	Debra Sade	

