

Museum News: El Buen Pastor Methodist Church

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

In the very early 20th Century Hispanic families continued their migration into the Sanderson area to work on the railroad and area ranches. With them came a few families of the Methodist faith. Much missionary work was done by the Methodists along the border with indigenous Hispanics beginning in 1874 and met with much success.

Among the Sanderson Hispanics were the Zepeda and Rodriguez families. Very devout in their beliefs, they felt the need to have a church to meet their spiritual needs and for the training of their children.

The Zepedas had arrived in Sanderson in 1904 and soon sought out other families for Christian fellowship. The Zepedas and the Vicente Rodriguez family met in each other's homes for prayer and services when a preacher was available.

By 1908 enough families had been gathered and it was decided to construct their own church building. They called their first regular pastor, the Rev. Melchor Chaparo, and work on the church was begun. With about 20 members, they began to make adobe and gather lumber as funds became available. All the furniture...pews,

pulpit, altar table... was hand-made and the adobes were laid by the parishioners. The church was christened El Buen Pastor Mexican Methodist Church and it became the spiritual home for Hispanic Methodists in Sanderson, the center of their religious and family life. The building served for many years.

In 1959 the congregation decided it was time for a new building. They had outgrown the venerable old building. With funding from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and contributions from local friends they created a fund for the new building, which, as with all Methodist properties, belongs to the area Methodist organization, the New Mexico Conference, El Paso District. However, problems arose and the congregation decided to invest the money in a rental property to raise more funding.

The flood of 1965 caused much damage to their rental property so the church decided to continue with plans to build a new sanctuary and include Sunday school classrooms and a fellowship hall. Lots were secured adjacent to the old building and a groundbreaking ceremony was held in April of 1968. With O. J. Cresswell as the contractor, the building was completed by October and began to be used for special services in November of 1968. The building was officially dedicated and used full-time in May of 1974 after it became debt-free. For many years the congregation moved forward, but as the population of Sanderson began to dwindle, so did the membership. By the year 2000 very few services were being held as a visiting minister came infrequently.

In 2015 the church was closed and the property was disposed of by the New Mexico Conference of the Methodist Church, with the new building, the old building and the parsonage going into private hands. Hispanic Methodist work in Sanderson at the moment is on hiatus.

