

Rain doesn't dampen religious reconciliation

By Staci Matlock
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DIXON – Storm clouds gathered as more than 350 people from all over Northern New Mexico met in the small village of Dixon to witness a historic reconciliation between the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches.

Archbishop Michael Sheehan of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and Rev. Jim Collie of the Presbytery of Santa Fe encouraged members of both churches to respect each others' differences and celebrate their common faith.

Sheehan began the ceremony in the Embudo Presbyterian Church with a call to worship and a penitential rite. Father Adam Lee Ortega y Ortiz of St. Anthony's Parish gave the homily.

Rain soaked the crowd as they walked across the street to

St. Anthony Catholic Church singing "*Caminando Unidos*" (Walking Together). No one seemed to mind the downpour.

"Our Native American brothers and sisters believe rain is a good sign, a blessing," Sheehan told the mixed congregation.

Collie continued the service inside St. Anthony's. Rev. Andrew McComb renewed the baptism of everyone present, Catholics and Presbyterians both receiving the blessed water.

The ceremony was marked by moments poignant, spontaneous and even funny.

As the archbishop and Collie hugged after signing a statement of reconciliation, the congregation erupted with applause.

Collie said despite differences, Presbyterians and Catholics could get along. "Our past need not bind our future," he said.

Later, an elderly Presby-

terian woman coming down from the balcony of St. Anthony's missed the last step and tumbled into the purple-curtained confessional. After making sure the woman was OK, a Catholic woman quipped, "We'll get you in there one way or another."

And a few church-minded canines felt comfortable enough with the whole affair to wander around church isles and right up to the venerable church fathers.

Perhaps the most poignant moment came when Ruby and Fred Martinez, clasping hands tightly, went up to give the special plaques they had created to Sheehan and Collie. For Ruby Martinez, a Catholic, and Fred Martinez, a Presbyterian, it was a formal recognition of the shared faith they have lived for three decades. A surprise gift was two large carved crosses made by the Martinezes for each church from wood salvaged from



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Singers keep making music through the rain at Sunday's (May 23) reconciliation ceremony between Catholics and Presbyterians.

the St. Anthony's rectory. "One cross for one Christ," an emotional Fred Martinez said.

Proceeds from the collection taken during the service will go to the new Embudo Clinic of

Health Centers of Northern New Mexico, used by both Catholics and Presbyterians.

Tony Duran, an elderly man who grew up in Dixon and remembers a time when people

of the two faiths didn't speak much to each other, drove up from Albuquerque when he heard about the reconciliation. "It is good to see this happen," he said.