

# R ECON CILIATION

On a day blessed with rain in  
Dixon . . .

## *Historic service on Pentecost Sunday*

**O**ne hundred years ago, no one would have ever imagined that a service of reconciliation between Roman Catholics and Presbyterians could possibly occur.

But this is exactly what did happen on a rainy afternoon on Pentecost Sunday in Dixon, New Mexico.

With Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan, archbishop of Santa Fe; the Rev. Jim Collie, regional presbyter for Santa Fe Presbytery; the Rev. Andy



**Regional Presbyter Jim Collie and Archbishop Sheehan lead the procession into St. Anthony's.**

M c C o m b , Embudo Presbyterian pastor; Fr. Adam Ortega y Ortiz, St. Anthony's Catholic Church pastor, and other clergy of both faiths participating, the enmity and tension which have existed between these two faith communities

for over 100 years was symbolically brought to an end.

Parts of the service were held in the Embudo Presbyterian Church and St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Included in the worship celebration was the signing of an agreement statement about the heritage of the two faith communities and of mutual relations for the future.

The service was to prepare for the new millennium in the spirit promoted by Pope John Paul II, who has

## *An Affirmation*

The Affirmation of Hope, Reconciliation, and Unity signed by representatives of the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian faith communities on Pentecost, reads in part:

"We wish to affirm together that a reconciliation of past tensions and disagreements is important to the people of God in New Mexico. While some of these differences have been already reconciled by individuals and families, we pray that this reconciliation will be deepened and celebrated throughout the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and the Presbytery of Santa Fe.

"Though there will continue to be many religious, social and political issues that divide us, we hope that these differences will be appreciated as gifts rather than matters for dispute, division or hatred. We wish to invite all Christians in New Mexico to the reconciliation which Christ came to bring to the whole world. The visible unity of all Christians is a sign that God has sent his Son for the salvation of the world. It is a sign of God's love for us and of our love for God and neighbor.

"We pray that the reaffirmation of our baptism, our common belief in the centrality of Jesus Christ and our shared prayer will call all of us to continue to emphasize what we share together as Christians. May we appreciate our diversity as the work of the Holy Spirit who calls us to use our gifts to enrich one another. May we work together for the coming of God's kingdom among us, until we rejoice one day to be united with Jesus Christ and with all our brothers and sisters who have gone before us."

# Leaving the past . . . moving into the future

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Service  
celebrated  
the gradual  
drawing  
together of  
people of  
both  
churches

prayed and worked to make the third millennium one in which Christians are more reconciled and united.

Source of the tensions and animosities between the two faith communities began with the arrival of Presbyterian missionaries in the northern Mountains of New Mexico more than 100 years ago.

Along with needed educational opportunities and health care which the Presbyterians brought, they also began proselytizing Catholics. Families were split and communities were divided as a result.

Animosities came to a climax in the years between 1947 and 1951 with the "Dixon Case," initiated by Presbyterians. The case went to the Supreme Court which resulted in the prohibition against Catholic nuns teaching in public schools. Prior to 1947 Catholic religious women taught— even in their religious habit — in public schools where Catholic religious instruction was part of the daily curriculum.

While this was a victory for separation of church and state, it was seen as a defeat for Catholics.

The Pentecost service celebrated the gradual drawing together of people of both churches through the ecumenical movement and the many opportunities for sharing which a close-knit community provides. It recognizes the continuing dialogue taking place in ministerial associations and other groupings across church lines and the unity which already exists among the people.

## *Seen and Heard at Dixon*

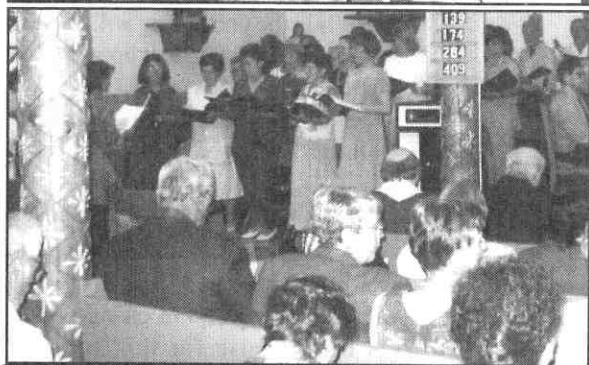
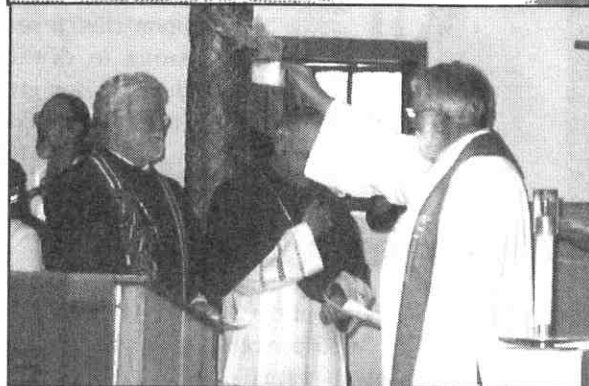
- In his remarks, Archbishop Michael Sheehan referred to the rain pouring down outside as a blessing in this parched land and a sign that God was looking favorably upon what was taking place.

- The Embudo Presbyterian church was more than filled and St. Anthony's Catholic church was filled for the special service. When Regional Presbyter Jim Collie wondering how many had come to the service from communities other than Dixon, at least half of the people raised their hands.

- Among those present were two retired nuns who had traveled from Michigan to be a part of the service. Teaching at Peñasco at the time, they were directly involved in the Dixon Case.

- Picking their way through mud-puddles, participants were served refreshments both in the old Presbyterian mission school and St. Anthony's parish hall. The two structures are across from each other on the main street through Dixon.

- Fred and Ruby Martinez created two large tin and copper plaques featuring a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit which came upon the early disciples on the day of Pentecost. Using wood salvaged from grills over St. Anthony's Church, the two artists carved crosses which were also presented to the two faith communities.



Regional Presbyter Collie and Archbishop Sheehan sign the agreement (top). During the reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, Pastor Andy McComb, Dixon, sprinkles water on participants. A combined choir from both churches sings. Fred and Ruby Martinez present gifts of tin and copper work which they made to the two faith communities (bottom).