

## A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Ashland

The early history of the First Presbyterian Church of Ashland is intimately bound with the unique career of one man, the Rev. Moses Allen Williams (1811-1897), who has been called the father of the Presbyterian Church in Southern Oregon.

This modest, scholarly pioneer preacher and missionary was a man of strong personality, deep convictions, and a strenuous life. He graduated from Princeton Seminary in New Jersey and, after a Pennsylvania pastorate, served three years as a missionary to Chile before coming to Oregon in October of 1857.

He began to preach regularly at a number of places in the Rogue Valley and established six churches, including in Jacksonville and Ashland. Assisted by the Rev. Thomas Fraser, a Synod missionary, "Father" Williams organized the First Presbyterian Church of Ashland on August 18, 1875 with twenty-two charter members. Over the years our congregation has been served by twenty-four pastors.

The cornerstone of the original church at the corner of Helman and North Main was laid June 2, 1878, and on August 29, 1879, the first church bell rang in Ashland. That same bell is still in the tower on our church grounds. The small organ in the front of our sanctuary is the one used in the Sunday School room at the original church.

On December 25, 1881, the church was dedicated free of debt, and there was a re-dedication of the remodeled building on February 11, 1906.

Because Main Street had been widened, parking became almost impossible, so the decision was made to move the church location. Ground-breaking took place at the present location (Siskiyou and Walker) on June 4, 1961.

The first service in the new building took place on May 13, 1962, it was dedicated on August 26, and a mortgage-burning service took place on July 11, 1971. The bell tower was dedicated in August of 1968, Calvin Hall on May 17, 1981, and Heritage Chapel in 1983. The stained glass windows, which had been brought from the original church, were installed in the chapel and the narthex in 1984. The Christian Education center on the lower level of Calvin Hall was dedicated in 1984 as well.