

## American Presbyterian History

### Week 15 – The OPC in Novato

### Trinity Presbyterian Church

#### 1. Planting a Church in Novato

- a. In 1969, two OPC families (Williams & Cantwells) were living in Novato but were commuting to Berkeley for church. Rev. Richard Lewis, pastor of the Berkeley congregation, started a bible study for these two families and some friends.
- b. In 1970, Rev. Robert H. Graham was asked by the Berkeley OPC to work with this group.
  - i. Graham was one of the ministers deposed along with Machen by the PCUSA in 1936, and was a constituting member of the First General Assembly of the OPC.
  - ii. The new work was established officially in Novato on May 3, 1970 as a mission work of our denomination.
- c. The church was formally organized as a particular congregation on May 13, 1971, under the name Novato Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
  - i. Graham was the first pastor, and Bob Williams and Jerry Cantwell were the first elders. Jennie Brown was the first member along with 20 other communicant members, and 17 covenant children.
- d. Early troubles
  - i. Within six years, only 4 of these original 20 communicants were still members. The Williams and Cantwells both had to move away, and the denomination had to provide financial support and a temporary session.
  - ii. Graham resigned from the pastorate as of Nov 15, 1973. During this time, the pulpit was ably filled on many occasions by the Rev. John W. Betzold, US Army Chaplain and OPC minister.



#### 2. Growing a Church

- a. Rev. Richard C. Miller faithfully pastored the church from 1974 to 2006.
- b. Sal Borruso was installed as an elder in 1975, restoring the session with a local elder.
- c. A time of growth came in 1976, when the Simmons, Hibbitts, and Mains all joined. Ben Simmons and Richard Mains would become deacons, and Jeff Hibbitts an elder.

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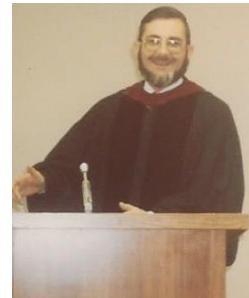
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d. The church's name was changed in 1976 to Trinity Church, Orthodox Presbyterian.

e. Various ministries of note happened during this time, including:

Vacation Bible School, Reformation Rally, Ministries to Canyon Manor, Hill Road and Tam Creek, Internships of Dave Bush and Hugh McCann, Christmas Caroling, and even a radio ministry called *The Reformation Hour*.



f. Examples of ups and downs during this time:

i. There were sporadic times of great financial struggles for the church.

ii. Evening service was cancelled in the early 2000s.

iii. Building fund began by a generous anonymous gift in 2002.

g. Miller retired in 2006. At that time, the session consisted of Elders Kevin Perkins and Marlin Viss. Presbytery appointed Rev. Wayne Forkner of the Berkeley congregation as ministerial advisor.

#### 3. The Last Decade in Review

a. After Miller's retirement, the time without a pastor proved quite challenging:

i. Membership was already down, and when an initial pastoral call that was issued did not come to fruition, several families decided to leave the church, including the family of Elder Perkins. The labors of Elder Viss and Deacon Mains were especially instrumental in preserving the church during this time.

ii. Then Licentiate Timothy Black served as a stated supply for six months during this time.

b. Rev. W. Reid Hankins, was ordained and installed January 11, 2008, and Presbytery committed to provide 4 years of financial support.

c. Notable ministries started during this time include an annual BBQ and church open house, reestablishing children Sunday School classes, regional community groups, Joe Johnson internship, and an outreach prayer meeting.



4. Assessment: Much of our church's history has been marked with various challenges including low attendance and membership. How should we think of this, and what can we learn from these challenges to help the current ministry here in Novato?