Santiago, National Hero of Spain: In New Mexico, Santiago was thought of as a powerful protector of the people in their struggles on the frontier.

The Trinity: These three panels feature the traditional Father, Son, and Holy Spirit image taken from a portrayal at Laguna Pueblo Museum.

San Ysidro, Patron Saint of the Fields: A Spanish peasant much revered in New Mexico, San Ysidro is the patron saint of farmers. According to legend, his desire to pray while at work in the fields was so great that an angel came to drive his oxen for him.

Saint Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Animals

Our Lady of Sorrows (La Nuestra Señora de los Dolores): A traditional source of comfort in times of sorrows.

Our Lady of Refuge, the Blessed Mother

Santo Domingo, Founder of the Dominican Order: This saint is a favorite in New Mexico, revered each year with the elaborate corn dance at Santo Domingo Pueblo.

Santa Barbara, Protectress of the Home

San Rafael, Protector of Travelers

San José with Child

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Our Lady of Guadalupe: Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of Mexico. The choice to depict her here shows the cultural tie between New Mexico and Mexico.
B

uilt in 1962 as a memorial to alumni killed in the nation’s wars, the UNM Alumni Memorial Chapel has served the campus community in joyful and trying times. Dedicated to UNM’s fallen soldiers of World Wars I and II, Korea, Viet Nam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, whose names are listed on its south wall. The chapel is a place of both reflection and remembrance. Thousands of weddings and numerous memorials have taken place within its walls. Its simple elegance complements any occasion, public or personal.

In the Beginning

The idea of a memorial building or chapel was first proposed to the university by the Alumni Relations Office in 1944. By 1953, alumni, students, faculty, staff and businesses had raised $40,000 for the project. The following year, architect John Gaw Meem of the firm Meem, Holien, Buckley and Associates drew the first plans. By 1959, $75,000 had been raised. But costs were rising faster than donations. Meem’s firm was asked to eliminate the retablos and other furnishings from the bid. The plans were finalized in December 1959, bids were advertised in January 1960, and the contract was awarded to Bradbury and Stamm Construction in March 1960. The completed costs would run to $106,000. The university agreed to furnish the remaining funds.

The property for the building was north of Mesa Vista, north of Ziefman Library and the current site near Scholes Hall. Architect John Gaw Meem had wanted the building to be located north of Mesa Vista so students could get “physical refreshment” from the Student Union and “spiritual refreshment” from the nearby chapel.

The consulting firm of John Carl Warnecke and Associates, which was preparing a campus master plan, suggested that the chapel be built on the site near Scholes Hall, reserving the interior campus space for academic buildings. That swayed the decision toward the chapel’s current location.

The chapel’s architecture is based on Franciscan Mission style. The building is constructed of cinder block, slate brick and hollow tiles, combined to create a gentle slope from the ground up. Architect Edward Holien designed the landscaping, in consultation with committee members and the physical plant.

Inside the Chapel

The original three site proposals for the building were north of Mesa Vista (near today’s Ortega Hall), in the grove of trees north of Ziefman Library, and the current site near Scholes Hall. Architect John Gaw Meem had wanted the building centrally located north of Mesa Vista so students could get “physical refreshment” from the Student Union and “spiritual refreshment” from the nearby chapel.

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The Retablos and the Retablo Mayor

Installed in 1964, the chapel’s retablo mayor (altar screen) was designed by art professor John Tatsch following sketches by John Gaw Meem. The retablos (pictures drawn on a board) displayed on it were painted by santero John M. Gonzales of Las Vegas, New Mexico, in 1984. All the santos depicted relate in some way to New Mexico. Gonzales also sculpted the bultos (sculptures) in the center of the display. This artwork was made possible by a gift from Bill and Jean Macey.

The chapel has a 15’ x 25’ American flag, donated by Bill and Jean Macey, which can be lowered over the retablos when desired. There is also a roll-down screen that can cover the retablos.

Use of the Chapel

The UNM Alumni Memorial Chapel is non-denominational and available to students, faculty, staff, and alumni for weddings and memorial services. More information about prices and reservations can be found at unmalumni.com or by calling the UNM Alumni Relations Office at 505-277-5808 (800-258-6866).

The UNM Alumni Memorial Chapel needs gifts to help restore the wood beams in the ceiling and walls, spruce up the stucco and paint, maintain the carillon bells, and cover other preservation projects to keep its structural integrity intact. If you can help, please contact the UNM Foundation at 505-277-4503 (800-UNM-FUND) or unmfund.org, or the UNM Alumni Relations Office at 505-277-5808 or unmalumni.com.

gifts to the chapel

UNM ALUMNI MEMORIAL CHAPEL: A PLACEHOLDER OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE LIVES OF ALUMNI.