

## **Little Shepherd in the Hills Episcopal Church** *Historic log cabin is home to heartfelt traditional worship*

By Gussie Fauntleroy

Crestone's Little Shepherd in the Hills Episcopal Church is about to enter the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Yes, that's 20<sup>th</sup>, not 21<sup>st</sup>.) The tiny, charmingly rustic log cabin, set back in the trees off Alder Street, was built as a summer cabin around 1913 and has housed the church since 1949. When construction of a new, slightly larger log-faced fellowship hall is completed on the property in the spring, Colorado's smallest Episcopal church will have access to indoor running water for the first time—although congregants have always had the pleasure of hearing water tumbling over rocks in nearby North Crestone Creek.

Still, Little Shepherd's small congregation has no desire to rush into the modern world. "Bishop (Robert O'Neill, of Denver) has talked a lot about intentional living and intentional worship, and we *have* to be intentional in our worship—we bake our own communion bread and bring in everything we need to the service. We're committed to the purity of an almost 1<sup>st</sup>-century type of church," observes Carol Smead of Mosca. Carol serves as Little Shepherd's representative to the vestry for the Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Salida, of which Little Shepherd is a mission church. With her husband Chuck and their sons, she has attended the church's once-monthly services for ten years.

Little Shepherd in the Hills is known as the oldest Christian church and the second-oldest spiritual tradition in Crestone, after that of the Valley's Native populations. The town's earliest Episcopal congregants began gathering for worship in the mid-1880s, first meeting in the old schoolhouse with a traveling circuit priest leading services. The group owned a piece of property a few blocks south and west of the current church; however, perhaps for lack of funds, a church was never built and the property was later deconsecrated.

The one-room log cabin that would become Little Shepherd in the Hills Episcopal Church was built by local rancher and merchant Ruben Charles Barnes not long after the devastating Crestone flood of 1911, according to Barnes's great-grandchildren, Crestone residents (and cousins) Fred Bauder and Elaine Johnson. The cabin was later moved to its present location, where Fred's mother, Eva Tooker, spent summers as a young woman before she was married. After the arrival of Philadelphia investor-turned-cattleman Alfred Collins and his wife Helen in the 1930s, Crestone's Episcopal congregation began to grow. Helen, in particular, was interested in the church's "civilizing" influence in a rough-edged town. In 1949, Alfred Collins purchased the log cabin and gave it to the church.

Today the Church of the Ascension's priest travels to Crestone on the first Sunday of each month to lead the service—which always includes the Eucharist—beginning at 2 p.m. For five years that priest was Father Yesu (the Reverend Dr. Yesupatham Duraikannu, originally from Calcutta), whose warm personality and infectious smile made him well loved by congregants. After suffering a heart attack in March 2012, Father

Yesu returned to New York City in September. Currently the Church of the Ascension and Little Shepherd in the Hills are served by “supply priests” until a full-time priest is named for the Salida church.

The new priest will preside over a Crestone “church campus” with more than double the indoor space Little Shepherd has had for the past six decades. At 24 x 32 feet—slightly larger than the church—the new building is frame construction with split-log siding to resemble the cabin. When completed in the spring it will consist of a multi-use room with kitchen facilities and a bathroom with shower. Congregants envision using it for fellowship, clergy retreats, youth mission events and community gatherings, explains Church of the Ascension member Bob Stocker, a Salida resident and contractor overseeing construction. Little Shepherd is grateful for the support and assistance of local residents and businesses, including Crestone Mercantile Hardware Store, Bob says.

Saguache area rancher and civil engineer Allen Davey, whose parents were Little Shepherd members when he was growing up, has fond memories of attending services—and playing in the creek—as a boy. Now 64, Allen and his wife Marilyn are members of the church’s congregation, most of whom live outside Crestone in other parts of the Valley. One thing that makes the church special, Allen says, is its size. “It’s very personal. There are never very many people, and we’re all close friends.” Indeed, Carol Smead smiles about Jesus’ declaration that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” She remembers at least one service attended by literally three people, including the priest.

Once a year, however, Little Shepherd’s attendance swells for the church’s annual summer picnic and outdoor service, to which members of other area Episcopal churches are invited. During these services Bob Stocker, music director at the Salida church, brings Little Shepherd’s usually quiet hand-carved organ to musical life. In spring 2013, area Episcopalians and the entire Crestone/Baca community will be invited to celebrate the new building’s dedication and open house. Watch the Eagle for the date.

While congregants enjoy the simplicity of the log cabin church and its lovely setting, Little Shepherd in the Hills nevertheless maintains the full liturgy and centuries-old traditions of the Episcopal Church. For members like Carol, these traditions are central to the beauty and sacredness of worship. “It goes back to the intentional, heart-felt meaning of the service,” she reflects. “I’m a big believer in preserving the depth and richness of our heritage.”

For more on Little Shepherd in the Hills, call (719) 480-2892 or see the church’s Facebook page. The cabin is unlocked and anyone is welcome to enter for quiet contemplation and prayer.