

**In Commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month
Presbytery of the Pacific, September 26, 2026
with thanks to Revs. Felipe Martinez, Margarita Reyes, Amy Mendez, Juan Sarmiento**

Hispanic Heritage Month reflects some of the diversity of the Hispanic/Latino peoples. In the United States, the Month runs from September 15—Independence Day for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, with Mexico celebrating on September 16—to October 15, encompassing Chile’s Independence Day on September 18, and October 12, which is known as Columbus Day, Indigenous Peoples’ Day, and Dia de la Raza.

Los Angeles has much to remember in this month. After thousands of years of stewardship of the land by Native peoples, this area was claimed by Spain in 1542, and became part of Mexico in 1821 as Alta California. Alta California included most of what we now call the Southwest, all the way up to the Oregon/Idaho border. Los Angeles was named capital of Alta California, but in 1848, Alta California was ceded to the United States. But the Mexican heritage of Los Angeles remains strong. In 2024, 49% of the population of LA County is Hispanic/Latino, and 74% of that is of Mexican heritage.

The Presbyterian Church has been present in Southern California for 170 years, and efforts to serve the Mexican residents took the form of churches and community centers called “houses of neighborly service.” Puente de Esperanza Presbyterian Church has been named by Fuller Seminary as the oldest continuing Protestant Latino church in Southern California. Puente de Esperanza’s mission and service began 135 years ago in 1891, and has served some of the most historic Hispanic communities in Southern California, including:

- Los Nietos, one of the oldest communities in Southern California, near West Whittier;
- La Misión, close to Olvera Street;
- near the San Gabriel Mission, the first Spanish mission in the Los Angeles area; in 1946 the Rev. César Lizárraga founded La Casa de San Gabriel Community Center next door to the church; in 2025 that land was returned by San Gabriel Presbytery to the Tongva people;
- the church moved to Rosemead in 1968, and is now in La Puente.

Within Pacific Presbytery, there are Latino-centered ministries at

- Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Gardena,
- Fuente de Vida in Hollywood,
- Immanuel Presbyterian and United University in Los Angeles, and
- Agape in Wilmington.

For centuries, the Hispanic/Latino community has been the soul of Los Angeles. Let us give thanks for the faith, the commitment, the cultural arts and values, and the perseverance that marks the Hispanic heritage of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles, “The Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels.” Amen.