

The Community Page

Methodists: Sharing Gifts With All Faiths

Some of the greatest holiday anticipation in Idaho Falls is for the annual performance of the Trinity United Methodist Church's Bell Choir under the direction of Cathy Rohrig. This is not just because of talent alone, although talent is present in abundance, nor is it solely the wonderful mixture of worship and humor shared with the audience; it is because of an obvious enjoyment by each participant as they give their yearly gift to the community in celebration of the birth of the Savior. Their delight in performing, and the obvious love they feel for the subject of their gift is nearly tangible to all who attend. For all who need a jump-start to feel the spirit of the



Reverend Brenda Sene, Pastor of the Trinity United Methodist Church of Idaho Falls

holiday, this is the place. The motivation for this gift is the same that drives local Methodists to share in many areas with their neighbors of all faiths. The Regional Council of Christian Ministries is housed in the Trinity United Methodist Church, with contributions to cover administrative costs coming from 10 different churches. This office administers the community outreach so well known in Idaho Falls. Methodist volunteers arrive weekly for the Idaho Falls Soup Kitchen and for the Idaho Falls Food Bank. Assistance is given regularly to other agencies around town that house the needy and homeless such as the Haven and the City of Refuge. Also under Regional Council's administration is Friends In Service Here (FISH), a last-chance agency, lending help to many needy residents with monetary, educational and in-kind assistance. The generosity of Reverend Brenda Sene and her congregants is also extended to the surrounding area in other ways, for example the use of their building without charge as a lecture hall for the

Museum of Idaho educational seminars. Hundreds of interested citizens have attended these forums such as those related to the Ink & Blood exhibit, specifically the Dead Sea Scrolls discussions.

The State of Idaho's oldest continuously running troop of the Boy Scouts of America was chartered by the Methodists 86 years ago. The Methodist commitment to children is evidenced by its Jack & Jill Preschool that for 39 years has provided a place for all children, providing scholarships for those unable to pay.

Such sharing is not limited to their Idaho Falls neighbors. The Regional Council of Christian Ministries also owns the Little Church in the Pines in Island Park that provides non-denominational worship services to all who vacation or live in the area.

The two Idaho Falls Methodist Churches—St. Paul's being a "daughter" organization of Trinity United—both participate in the two area progressive dinners with members of other churches, one near the city center, and the other on the east side of town.

Members of St. Paul's United Methodist Church under the direction of the Reverend Daniel Thompson-Aue provide Easter baskets each year to children of jail inmates in an effort to enhance the quality of interactions between the parent and the child. Members contribute money, baskets, stuffed animals, toy cars and bubbles, among other things, and then donate their time to fill the baskets, often with help from jail inmates who, in addition to filling baskets, have a time for prayer and understanding.

The Methodist Church sponsors two overseas missions—to Honduras and to Nicaragua—sending medical and construction help to the former and schools to the latter. They also assist Bush Elementary School with monthly donations of books, and in supplying warm hats and mittens each December with their Mitten Tree.

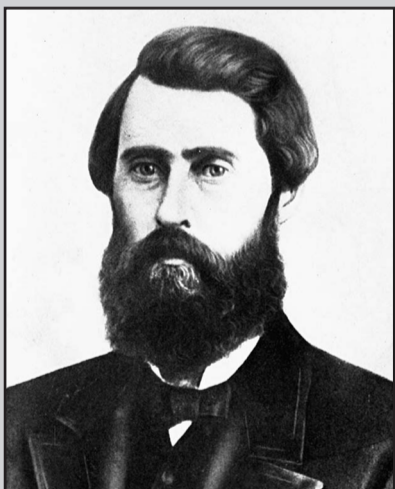
The early history of the Methodist faith, indeed the very name of the church implies strength of organizational methods in order to accomplish their mission of outreach in the world.



One thousand pipes of the historic Hilgreen, Lane organ are seen next to the stunning stained glass window of the sanctuary.

Methodist Presence Through the Years

The Golden Jubilee Edition of the *Post Register* in 1934 recorded "The first sermon preached west of the Rocky mountains was delivered by Jason Lee, Methodist missionary, on his travels from Boston to Salem, Ore., where he preached on the banks of Snake river in 1834, 100 years ago, long before there was any settlement here."



Early Methodist missionary, Jason Lee.

The first Methodists in Eagle Rock made their presence known as early as 1883, but were not formally organized until 1886 by a group of faithful under the leadership of the Reverend J.P. Morris of Blackfoot. Reverend Morris purchased ground at the present church site for \$285, but was chastened by the local newspaper, the *Idaho Register*: "We thought a church was built to serve the community, then why did the Methodists go out in the country to buy a building lot?"

Members would have to continue to meet in an old frame school building and then in a two-story parsonage for several years before the present remarkable building was completed.

Dan Sweeney, a local contractor, built the church at a cost of \$47,000, and it was dedicated on October 7, 1917. John Visser was the architect of the building that is now on the Historical Register for its outstanding design, recognized as the best example of Tudor-Gothic architecture in the state of Idaho. The stone for the building was quarried in the Ririe area, and when many years later an education wing was added, the same contractor again

oversaw the construction with the very same stone.

Idaho Falls saw its first pipe organ installed in the Methodist church sanctuary, a Hilgreen, Lane and Company electropneumatic organ with 1,000 pipes, one of the most outstanding of its period in all of Idaho. Sacred music is important to the members of the Methodist faith, especially those in Idaho Falls, and the entire community will tell you what a blessing it has become to everyone.

Currently there are two Methodist churches in Idaho Falls, The Trinity United Methodist Church

described above, and the St. Paul's United Methodist Church on St. Clair Road. Both fall under the governing national organization of The United Methodist Church.

A radio ministry, begun in the 1940s, continues to this day to spread the love of the gospel and love of their fellowmen, a clear indication that the members of the Methodist Church feel a responsibility to share with the larger community of believers. The year 2008 will see local Methodists celebrating 125 years as a congregation.



One of the state's finest examples of Tudor-Gothic architecture is seen in the historically registered Trinity United Methodist Church.