

The Community Page

Bringing Faiths Together

For believers in Idaho Falls, the beauty of a stained-glass window represents more than artistic grandeur or even the light of Christ. For this community, the variety of shapes, colors and radiance represent a newly-formed alliance that will bless



*Reverend Brenda Sene,
chair of the Greater Idaho
Falls Interfaith Council*

this community for years to come. The formation of the Greater Idaho Falls Interfaith Council in 2008 heralded a new era of community, friendship, understanding and direction.

This fledgling organization, under the chairmanship of Reverend Brenda Sene, pastor of the

Trinity United Methodist Church, has a membership of approximately 30 different faiths including Catholic, Protestant, Unitarian, Evangelical, and Latter-day Saint with friends from local Jewish families. Reverend Sene came to our community with a strong desire for ecumenical outreach, and when approached by the Public Affairs Council of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, responded positively and started the proverbial ball rolling.

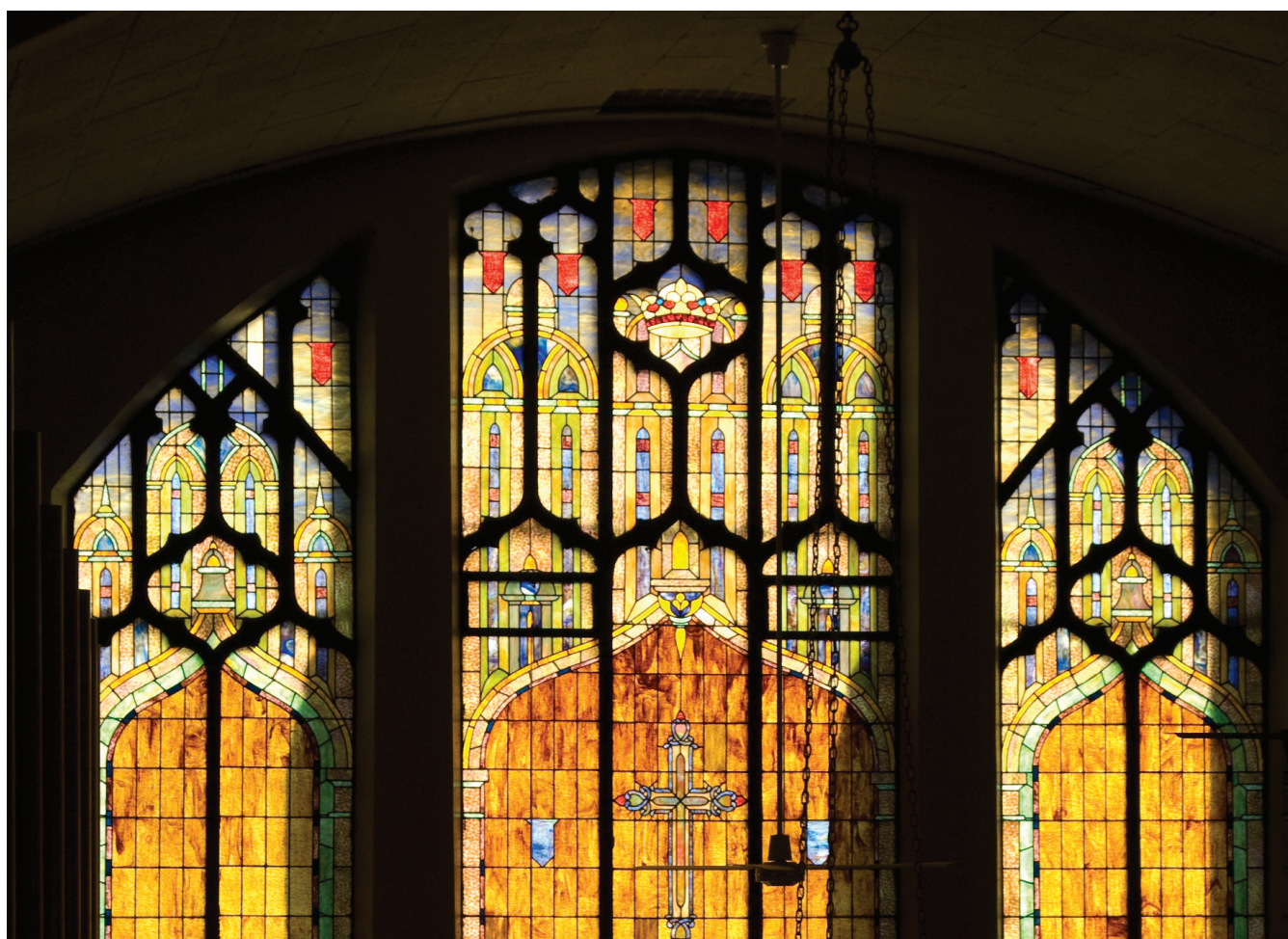
It may seem that the above are far too different in far too many ways to be able to come together for the purpose of unity in our diverse society, a society that has for some time felt the sting of religious criticism. Whenever there is a blend of religions in any community, there is a possibility for hurt feelings and misunderstood motives, and for real or perceived abuse. But on the contrary,

there is more that unites our neighborhoods than divides us, and this young and eager organization is discovering that the differences in our faiths can be left for individual Sabbath worship. Our likenesses—which are many—can be celebrated in discovering and addressing the needs of our community.

We have a great history on which to build this alliance. The record of the very early days of Eagle Rock reveal a community nearly as diverse as today, in which local congregations frequently celebrated together and found more in common than in opposition. Those early churches often met

in one another's buildings while constructing their own, and recreational pursuits were shared and held in various buildings. That sense of hospitality, born of necessity in a frontier community, unites everyone regardless of their diversity of belief.

That pattern is again being followed today, and its value to this area is much like the transcendent beauty of the stained glass windows in the historically registered Methodist Church where the Council meets. When the light of the sun shines upon the diversity of shape and hue, the pattern is both illuminating and inspiring.



The stained glass window of the historically registered Trinity United Methodist Church.

THE BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY

The first meeting of the Greater Idaho Falls Interfaith Council was a congenial discussion of purpose. All attending agreed that there are many needs to which the Council can lend its efforts.

The Council has taken under its wing the annual Interfaith Messiah Sing-In committee, and oversaw the second annual gathering at Hillcrest High School's Performing Arts Center on the last Sunday of November 2008. This year's performance featured soloists from local high schools and was an uplifting beginning to the holiday season. Directing, together with the selection of soloists, is a responsibility that is rotated among the many talented musicians of this gifted community.

The second scheduled event, the "Ole Fashioned Christmas and Winter Festivals" exhibit came as an invitation to the Council from the Museum of Idaho to collaborate in a Christmas Celebration. With the generous sponsorship of Chesbro Music Company, the fun and inspiring display—showing antique Santas, a room full of gingerbread houses, and two floors of nativity collections—was presented without any charge to the viewing public. Other winter festivals such as Hanukkah and Kwanzaa were also featured to the enjoyment of all.

The City of Idaho Falls provided the enormous lighted Christmas tree in the Museum's outdoor

plaza, with the Mayor at the grand opening to throw the switch. The large Santa mailbox was returned to its historic place in front of what used to be the city library.

The third event that falls under the direction of the Interfaith Council is "Feeding the 5,000," an event that has been provided in other communities and that the Council feels best exemplifies its goal to help the needy in our area. On a scheduled evening this spring, members of all represented faiths will gather at the LDS Cannery in Idaho Falls to donate their labor in canning fruits and vegetables for a gift to the Idaho Falls Community Food Bank. The Food Bank, already deluged with greater need than it can possibly provide, is itself an outgrowth of shared labor by interfaith volunteers.

The Greater Idaho Falls Interfaith Council is slightly less than one year old, but already has proven its worth to this community, and will continue this pattern in the years to come. All can be justifiably proud of helping the needy and perform-

ing service projects to enhance the beauty of this area, but perhaps the greater good is the breaking down of barriers between people of good will who simply happen to worship differently. All have the desire to spread warmth and light, and, in their own different way, can contribute to the whole in all its beauty.

