



## **First United Methodist Church Brief History** *First United Methodist Church of Las Vegas, NM*

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Methodism likely came to New Mexico with the Army of the West and there are records of early Methodist missionaries preaching in Santa Fe (probably at Fort Marcy) and later at Fort Union in the 1850's, but the effort sputtered until the arrival of the Rev. Thomas Harwood in 1869. Harwood traveled thousands of miles around New Mexico, on horseback, preaching the gospel and encouraging the development of schools. Together with his wife, Emily, they established both a church and a school in Tiptonville which served as a base for his travels.

In 1872 he met with the few Methodists to be found in Las Vegas and advised that they form a temporary affiliation with the Presbyterian Mission, organized in 1869. With the arrival of the railroad in 1879 came other Methodists and in August of that year Harwood organized a congregation with 16 charter members.

Things moved quickly after that. In September the Bishop arrived with the first local minister, the Rev. D.W. Calfee, and sufficient funds to purchase four lots on what was called "Zion Hill". (possibly because the Episcopal Church was also organizing at about this same time, and the Jewish Synagogue was also nearby). By October a contract had been let for construction of a

frame building, 30 by 45 feet, and the new church was dedicated in February of 1880. As the congregation grew, a two-room addition was built on the rear of the sanctuary but by 1922, with the membership near 300, the need for a larger structure was obvious. In March, a contract was signed with local builder and church member Mauritz Martinsen Sundt, (M.M.) for construction of a new brick building. The old frame church was sold to the Normal School (now Highlands) and moved across the street to a location on the south side of University Avenue where it was used as the Science Building and later as the Little Theater. The new building was dedicated with a week-long series of events in March of 1923. M.M. Sundt Construction was responsible for many of the most iconic buildings in Las Vegas, including the Meadows Hotel (El Fidel) and Ilfeld Auditorium.

Our organ, manufactured by the Moller Organ Company, is Opus 3481 (serial number) (1923). It was likely the 2<sup>nd</sup> pipe organ in Las Vegas. The first church organist was Cora Johnsen, daughter of M.M. Sundt.

A central feature of the sanctuary is the collection of stained glass windows which draw attention to events in the Life of Christ and other images of religious significance. The windows were designed and created for the church by the Jacoby Art Glass Company of St. Louis, Missouri. The contract for the windows was issued in August of 1922 and provided for the production of a total of 44 windows – the three large images that dominate the sanctuary and 41 smaller panels placed throughout the church.