

# *Overview of the United Methodist Building*

*100 Maryland Avenue, NE ~ Washington DC 20002*



The United Methodist Building is owned by The United Methodist Church, a Christian denomination with 8.3 million members in the United States and about 2.5 million in Europe, Africa and the Philippines.

The United Methodist Building houses the Washington office of *The General Board of Church and Society*, the international public witness and social action agency of The United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Building was built in 1923 and dedicated January 16, 1924. Methodist Women raised 70% of the \$650,000 it cost to construct the building. Thousands pledged 50 cents, 75 cents, or one dollar a month to raise the needed money.

The rotunda area is graced near the ceiling with two Bible passages from the Book of Micah. Micah 4:3 says: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares.” Micah 6:8 reads: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” These passages serve as a reminder of God’s call for all Christians to be advocates for peace and justice in the world.

When the building was dedicated there were two powerful social movements in the United States that involved thousands of Methodists and other people of faith:

1. ***The Temperance Movement*** – Methodists were leading figures in this movement, especially Methodist women. The president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was a Methodist lay woman from Chicago – Frances Willard. Ms. Willard later became the first woman to be honored with a statue in the U.S. Capitol Building.
2. ***Labor Reform/Social Gospel Movement*** – In 1908 a group of Methodist pastors met to develop what became the *1908 Social Creed* (posted to the left of the elevator). This document was then presented and adopted as the official Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the 1908 General Conference. In it the church declares its support for:
  - Abolition of Child Labor
  - One day off in seven for workers
  - A “living wage” in every industry

**The sign over the elevator** reads “Oikoomenay” – a Greek word from which we derive our English word “ecumenical.” An “ecumenical” service is one that includes several denominations coming together to worship. Many faith groups use this building to meet, plan, network, and carry forth ministries of public witness and advocacy on a broad range of social issues.

**The UM Building** houses the Washington offices for the National Council of Churches of Christ, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, Catholic Relief Services, Mennonite Central Committee, Church World Service, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Faith and Politics Institute, Interreligious Coalition on Smoking and Health, Churches for Middle East Peace, and a number of other boards and agencies. Other United Methodist offices include: UM General Commission on Religion and Race, UM Committee on Relief, UM Women’s Division, and United Methodist Bishops.

**Conference Room 3, The Wilson Room**, is the wooden paneled room, the first one you come to as you walk down the hall on the west side of the building. *The Americans with Disabilities Act* was written in this room. President George H. W. Bush was committed to seeing this bill signed into law. Members of the House, the Senate, and the President’s staff all came together here and hammered out the language for the final version. The ADA dramatically changed life for many, many people in the United States who are now much more able to participate fully in the society.

The room is named for the first general secretary of the *Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Moral*, Clarence True Wilson and his wife, Maude. Mrs. Wilson drew the original plan for the United Methodist Building. Her plan was accepted by the Board and given to an architect to develop working drawings.

**Simpson Chapel** – Since its dedication in 1929 Simpson Chapel has served as a place of worship and praise for the Capitol Hill community. A special service was held here the night that congress approved the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Coretta Scott King addressed the service that night and led the celebration. More recently, it was the site of a memorial service for Sen. Paul Wellstone, his wife, daughter, and two staff members who were killed in a shocking plane crash in October 2002. So many people attended the room and hallway were filled to capacity and many more were invited to come back for a second service an hour later. Again the room was filled.

The Chapel is named after Bishop Matthew Simpson, a prominent Methodist leader in the 1800s. Bishop Simpson was a beloved friend of Abraham Lincoln and actually preached Lincoln’s funeral eulogy (sermon). Bishop Simpson also was quite progressive in his social beliefs and spoke boldly for the rights of women. He is quoted as saying in 1880, “The nation will never be reformed until women have the right to vote.” This was forty years before women were given the right of suffrage.

**Chapel services** are held each Wednesday at 12:10 P.M. The public is cordially invited to attend.

For more information or inquiries concerning the ministry of The General Board of Church and Society visit [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org) or call 202-488-5600.