

## Metropolitan United Church

### Description

The property at 56 Queen Street East is worthy of designation under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its cultural heritage value or interest, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, historical and contextual value. Metropolitan United Church is situated in the block bounded by Queen Street East, Church Street, Shuter Street and Bond Street, with the Metropolitan Church Parsonage (51 Bond Street) at the north end of the site. The church was originally constructed in 1870-1872 as Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church. It was renamed in 1925, following the union of the Methodist, Congregational, and two-thirds of the Presbyterian churches in Canada as the United Church of Canada. In 1928, a fire destroyed the building, with the exception of the tower, parts of the south facade, and the entrance porches at the south end of the side (east and west) elevations. The church was rebuilt the following year on the same foundations. The interior of the chancel was restored in 1999-2000. The property was listed on the inaugural City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties in June 1973, and authority has been granted for a Heritage Easement Agreement.

### Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Metropolitan United Church is architecturally significant for its Gothic-inspired detailing. Reflecting its development in two phases, the building blends late 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival elements on the principal (south) façade and the surviving parts of the towers, with the rebuilt features and spatial organization influenced by early 20<sup>th</sup> century Neo Gothic design. The portions of the original 1872 church retain their elaborate stone detailing and medieval-inspired elements. With the rebuilding of the sanctuary and the addition of the chancel in 1929, the plan “reflected the changes that Methodism had undergone in the previous fifty years” (Dendy, *Lost Toronto*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1993, 147). Instead of replicating the former interior configuration with a horseshoe gallery and chapel, architect J. Gibb Morton designed a ‘cathedral-like’ plan with the narthex, a nave with side aisles, transepts and a chancel. On the exterior side walls and the new chancel, the detailing was more restrained than that found on the earlier church, with Tudor arches replacing the earlier pointed-arched versions on many of the openings.

Historically, the church is an important institution in the Church Street corridor where the Anglicans and Roman Catholics built cathedrals to the south and north, respectively. The Metropolitan Church was known as the “Cathedral of Methodism” in Toronto, and has been a leader since its founding in ministering to the social and spiritual needs of the surrounding community and the underprivileged.

The church is associated with two prominent Toronto architects who oversaw its original construction and rebuilding. Henry Langley was identified with church architecture during his long career, executing the plans for more than 70 edifices, and altering, enlarging or completing many others. Following his apprenticeship with local architect

William Hay, Langley formed a partnership with Thomas Gundry in 1862 that lasted until 1869. During this period, the architects oversaw the reconstruction of St. Stephen's-in-the-Field Anglican Church on Bellevue Avenue (damaged in a fire in 1865). In solo practice, Langley designed Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church before forming a new partnership with his brother, Edward Langley and his nephew, Edmund Burke. J. Gibb Morton, who prepared the plans for the rebuilding of the church, was sought after as an architect adept with ecclesiastical designs. In Toronto, Morton's Corpus Christi Church (completed in 1927) at 1810 Queen Street East, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church (1929) at 208 St. Clair Avenue East, are recognized on the City's heritage inventory.

Metropolitan United Church exhibits a high degree of craftsmanship. As part of his scheme for the rebuilt church, architect J. Gibb Morton designed the carved wood screen in the chancel. The other interior fittings were carved by international artisans under the direction of Andrew Brown of Globe Furniture Limited of Waterloo. Robert McCausland Limited reproduced most of the stained glass windows after the fire (according to the company's original designs), and a new memorial window was unveiled on the north wall. The tower contains a 35-bell carillon that is one of the few in Canada.

Placed in a parklike setting, Metropolitan United Church is a landmark in the City of Toronto and, with its dominant spire, is important in context with St. Michael's Cathedral to the north and St. James' Cathedral to the south.

#### Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of Metropolitan United Church related to its design value as a significant example of Gothic-inspired styling are found on the exterior walls, roofs and the interior as described below, consisting of:

- The materials, featuring a steel frame, sandstone base, white (yellow) brick cladding, and limestone, brick and wood trim, with elaborate medieval-inspired stone detailing on all elevations
- The rectangular plan, with a nave and side aisles, transepts and porches, an orthogonal chancel at the north end, and an entrance tower at the south end
- The nave, rising one extended storey and covered by a steeply pitched gable roof with slate tiles and a chimney

#### **South (principal) Façade:**

- The principal (south) façade, where the gable end wall is anchored by octagonal towers and marked by large pointed-arch window openings with tracery
- The main entrance to the church, which is placed in a portico at the base of the central tower and reached by limestone steps
- The entrance portico, with a four-pointed arch supported on either end by four columnettes with carved capitals

- Inside the portico, the pair of double wood doors separated by a similar columnette and containing leaded and glazed inserts
- Above the doors, the tympanum containing a single octofoil window flanked by a pair of quatrefoil windows
- Surmounting the tympanum, the stone gable with crockets and a sexfoil opening that is supported by two carved stone angels and terminates with a poppyhead finial
- Above the entrance portico on the south side of the tower, the large pointed-arch window opening containing tracery
- The tower, where the four faces are divided horizontally by band courses and, at the midway point, brick corbels mark a series of niches with ogee arches and lancet windows
- Near the top of each face of the tower, the pairs of pointed-arch openings incorporating cinquefoil openings above columnettes that support ogee arches with scalloped louvers
- The gables that extend above the roof of the tower and contain blind trefoils
- The balustrade marking the flat roof where a diminutive spirelet is centered on each face
- At the corners of the tower, the full-height octagonal towers that are capped with carved stone octagonal spirelets
- The tower at the southeast corner that contains a staircase lighted by lancet windows

**East and west (side) elevations:**

- On the side elevations (east and west), the window openings containing stone tracery and, in many cases, stained glass
- The projecting two-storey entrance porches that are placed near the south end of the east and west walls
- On each porch, the buttresses flanking an arched entrance that contains a pair of wood doors with inserts and an intricate transom
- Above the entry, the pointed-arch window opening with a hood mould
- South of each entrance porch, the small pointed-arch window opening set in an arched surround with a sloped sill
- The side aisles, extending five bays from the porches to the transepts, which have stepped buttresses to organize the pointed-arch window openings
- On each transept, the gabled frontispiece where a monumental arched window opening is flanked by buttresses and turrets
- Above the side aisles, the nave where clerestory windows are placed between pilasters

**North (rear) wall:**

- The rear (north) wall of the nave, featuring a gabled parapet with a finial, a monumental memorial window and, at the corners, diminutive towers with turrets

- The flat roof and stone balustrade, introduced on the side aisles, which continues on the chancel as it wraps around the north end of the nave
- On the chancel, the buttresses organizing the arched window openings, which are irregularly spaced and rise two stories beneath hood moulds
- The entrances to the chancel that are placed under oversized pointed-arch windows with tracery

**Interior:**

- The entrance porch, narthex, nave, side aisles, transepts and chancel that are included in the Reasons for Designation
- In the nave, the brick and stone finishes under a vaulted wood ceiling with timbers and carved angel heads
- The arcade of pointed arches springing from multiple columns that separates the nave from the side aisles
- At the north end of the chancel, the reredos (screen) incorporating intricately carved religious symbols and a sedilia (throne)
- The organ screens and canopied choir stalls, which display wood carving

The movable features (altar, communion rail, baptismal font, pulpit and pews) are not included in the Reasons for Designation.