

# MEGAN HALL MAKEOVER

*Since it was constructed more than a century ago, the building on DWC's campus now known as Megan Hall has served a variety of roles. An exact history of the structure doesn't exist, but one thing is certain – it has been home to a lot of students!*

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## **EARLY HISTORY**

The DWC campus started as a Methodist school called Epworth Seminary in 1857. According to Epworth historians, a three-story building was built for the school when it opened. After just seven years in operation, the seminary closed. Then a Presbyterian minister reopened the campus as a private school, which only lasted five years before it, too, closed. Next the property returned to its role as a Methodist seminary and this time it flourished, especially between 1880 and 1890. As enrollment increased, more buildings were built to accommodate the growing student body and local historians believe that Megan Hall was among those newly-built structures. Eventually, the seminary closed in 1923. It reopened briefly as Epworth Military Academy and during that time, the building was called Husted Hall.

## **HISTORY WITH THE SOCIETY**

The Society of the Divine Word purchased the site to establish a minor seminary. It was named St. Paul's Mission House and dedicated in 1932. By then, the eight buildings on the site had been vacant for several years. In 1949, St. Paul's transitioned into a junior college. It continued in that mode until 1955 when it became a "belated" school, serving young men from public schools who needed advanced study of philosophy and theology in order to enter the major seminary. In the 1950s, there was a move nationally for accreditation of educational institutions. In the early 1960s, it was decided that the SVD needed a four-year liberal arts college and its property in Epworth was chosen for the site because of its central location in the country. During that time, the Society of the Divine Word razed all of the century-old buildings on the



***Did you know?** The name of the building is pronounced Mee-gan, not Meh-gan.*

property – except for Megan Hall. Nearby, today’s main, all-inclusive building that spans the length of two football fields was built and the Society established a four-year, liberal-arts institution of higher learning called Divine Word College.

#### ***CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY***

In 1999, the cupola that rested atop Megan Hall for more than 100 years was removed and donated to the Epworth Historical Society. It was relocated to what is known as the “Epworth Gateway” and currently tops a brick and limestone arched base that prominently features the city’s name. The gateway greets visitors and residents alike as they enter the town from U.S. Highway 20.

#### ***MODERN-DAY MEGAN***

For the past 20 years, Megan Hall has served as an administration building and pre-novitiate housing. After the first four religious sisters enrolled at DWC in 2006, the number of sisters studying at the college jumped to more than 30 within just three years. To accommodate this new group of students, Megan Hall was transformed into a residence for the religious sisters in 2009.

Today, it is home to approximately 40 religious sisters from around the world who are studying here at Divine Word College.



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### ***Who is Megan and why does DWC have a building named after her?***

Actually, Megan Hall isn’t named after a woman at all! The building is named after Fr. Thomas Megan, SVD. This early American Divine Word Missionary was born in Eldora, Iowa. He entered formation with the Society of the Divine Word near Chicago in 1913 and was ordained in 1926.

Fr. Megan was assigned to work in China and was the first American SVD to be made a prefect apostolic. He spent 22 years serving in China and reportedly felt very connected to his ministry there. Fr. Megan organized relief efforts during the 1940s when countless Chinese people suffered and died from severe famine. He returned to the United States in 1947 and worked in Mississippi until his death in 1951.

His extraordinary efforts in China and dedication to the mission made him an influential figure who seminarians have looked up to for generations.

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