

Quake-damaged cathedral faces millions in repairs

by [Lauren Markoe](#) in the [September 20, 2011](#) issue

The iconic Washington National Cathedral, already struggling with financial problems, faces millions of dollars in repair costs from the damage inflicted by an August 23 earthquake. And nothing is covered by insurance, according to a church official.

Clergy and a team of architects and engineers spent the day after the 5.8-magnitude quake that centered in Virginia assessing the condition of the huge cathedral. They found significant damage, including fallen carved angels on the church's roof, cracks in flying buttresses and missing finials from the pinnacles of the central tower.

"We run a very tight budget here at the cathedral, and we have had our financial challenges that we've worked through very well," said the dean of the cathedral, Samuel Lloyd, who recently announced that he was ending his six years there to take a post in Boston in September. "But there is nothing in our budget that would allow us to step up and do this," he said.

Joe Alonso, the cathedral's chief stonemason, said it will take years to complete the repairs. "It's going to be millions, no doubt about it. Millions," he said. "As large as this structure is, it's all handmade."

Hit hard by the recession, the Episcopal cathedral in recent years has weathered several rounds of staff layoffs and been forced to cut programming. The charge now, Lloyd said, is to go back to those who contributed to the construction of the cathedral, which began in 1907 and was completed in 1990.

"It was built by people across the country who believe having this space for the nation in the heart of the nation's capital is a hugely important enterprise," said Lloyd. A new feature on the cathedral's website encourages donations.

Officially, the cathedral is the mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, but it bills itself as a "house of prayer for all people." It is often the scene for postinaugural services and funerals of U.S. presidents and other major government figures.

The earthquake and the subsequent damage "has not been a jarring thing for our faith," Lloyd said. "What it has done is challenge us to claim our faith, to go to work to make this place be as grand, as beautiful and powerful as it's always been." —RNS