

National Cathedral slashes staff, budget: Cathedral College ending course offerings

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Washington National Cathedral has announced dramatic cuts to its budget, programs and staff as the faltering economy continues to affect religious institutions nationwide.

The landmark cathedral, which welcomes nearly 700,000 visitors a year and has hosted the state funerals of three presidents, will slash its budget by 40 percent next year, from \$24 million to \$14.4 million. More than 40 staffers will be laid off, retail operations at the cathedral's gift shop will be outsourced and Cathedral College's residential course offerings will cease as of March 31, 2009, according to the cathedral's announcement November 19.

"Like many other institutions around the world," said Samuel Lloyd III, the cathedral's dean, "Washington National Cathedral has been affected by the serious downturn in the financial market."

Last spring, the cathedral's endowment was valued at \$66 million, but it has since declined by about 25 percent, according to Michael Hill, the cathedral's executive director for external relations. In May, the cathedral cut \$3.5 million from its budget by laying off 33 employees and closing its greenhouse.

The cathedral, which celebrated its centenary this year, regularly hosts high-profile guests, concerts and events—such as the memorial service after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2006 installation of Episcopal presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. However, the huge Gothic cathedral is not supported financially by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, the national Episcopal Church or the federal government. The endowment, private donations and revenue from events fund its budget, Hill said.

“Serving as the nation’s church and as a place of prayer and spiritual renewal is a significant responsibility,” Lloyd said. “And we are committed to being conscientious stewards of this revered cathedral building.” -*Religion News Service*