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Cathedral needs \$25 million to repair earthquake damage, pay expenses



View Photo Gallery — Washington Post photographers Nikki Kahn and Bill O'Leary document the damage and repairs being made to the Washington National Cathedral. A 5.8-magnitude earthquake damaged the cathedral in August and a crane that was put in place to repair the earthquake damage toppled onto the cathedral as high winds and rain swept through the area. The restoration will cost millions.

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By Michael E. Ruane, Published: October 4

Washington National Cathedral needs to raise at least \$15 million for initial repairs to the earthquake-damaged edifice, officials said Tuesday, and the chief stone mason there

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thinks overall repairs could take a decade to complete.

The English Gothic cathedral in Northwest Washington remains closed as workers stabilize large stone pinnacles and other decorative elements shaken from their foundations during the Aug. 23 quake.

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Last week, Joseph Alonso, the Washington National Cathedral's chief stone mason, showed the extent of the damage and talked about the kind of repairs that will be needed. Alonso believes the damage could take a decade to repair.

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cathedral operations through the end of 2012.

“The short-term priorities are . . . stabilizing the building, reopening the cathedral, and continuing its operations and mission,” the cathedral said in a statement.

Full restoration is expected to cost “tens of millions of dollars,” the statement said, and the cathedral “will seek contributions large and small from across the country.” Cathedral operations are not funded by the government or a national church entity.

The cathedral had said after the earthquake that the repairs could cost “millions.” But the damage was more extensive than first realized.

One finial had fallen off and struck the cathedral roof during the quake. Another had fallen into the shrubs far below. Shattered stone littered gutters and roofs where ornate pieces had come loose and fallen.

Another elaborate section had its decorative pillars snapped.

Plans are for a reopening Nov. 12, but much work remains to be done.

Late last week, during a tour of the cathedral, officials showed some of the damage that still must be addressed.

Numerous stone finials, pinnacles and ornate gargoyles were toppled or knocked askew by the quake. Several remain balanced precariously, as if another jolt might send them crashing down, too.

One gargoyle, the head of a ferocious-looking cat, hung only by an internal metal pipe attaching it to the building hundreds of feet above the ground.

Several of the 600-pound finials shaken loose from the pinnacles on which they sit resembled chess pieces about to fall off the edge of a table.

Others had been more slightly displaced.

All would have to be removed for safety's sake.

Cathedral officials said Tuesday that they would be seeking to raise a total of \$25 million — \$15 million for the short-term repairs and \$10 million to help pay for

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Further problems could be discovered during the repairs, a spokesman said.

The cathedral has recently undergone severe budget-cutting. Several years ago, its staff was reduced from 170 to 70, and spending was slashed after its endowment plunged in the economic slowdown.

But fundraising has been strong in the past year and is on track this year, officials said.

Meanwhile, Joseph Alonso, the cathedral's chief stone mason, said last week that the repair project could take 10 years, "if not more."

"I don't know how much money the cathedral has to throw at this," he said. "They're throwing some serious money at it right now. How do you pace yourself?"

Plus, he said, the repairs must be done right, especially concerning out-of-the-way stone decorations that most people rarely see.

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