

Cash-strapped National Council of Churches to move to D.C.

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WASHINGTON (RNS) The National Council of Churches is moving its headquarters from the historic "God Box" in New York City to Washington, a change that the cash-strapped ecumenical group predicts will save as much as \$500,000 over time.

The move is part of a restructuring that has eliminated six administrative positions and outsourced human resources and other NCC departments. In its 2011 annual report – the latest available – the NCC showed \$4.3 million in revenues and \$5.6 million in expenses.

The venerable ecumenical agency has dramatically scaled back its operations and staff levels over the past decade as it struggled to find its voice and retain financial support from its member churches.

The NCC will transform its current D.C. satellite office – in a building owned by the United Methodist Church across the street from the U.S. Capitol and Supreme Court – into its national headquarters.

"The critical NCC policy work can be coordinated from any location but to be the prophetic 'voice of the faithful' on the ground in the places of power, it is best served by establishing our operations in Washington," said NCC Transitional General Secretary Peg Birk.

The 63-year-old NCC has 37 members, including mainline Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and historically black denominations. It works globally on humanitarian and disaster relief projects run through its Church World Service, and advocates in Washington on the moral dimensions of public policy issues.

The group hopes that it can maintain at least a small presence in the "God Box," a 19-story limestone office building that's officially known as the Interchurch Center, located across from Manhattan's Riverside Church and Union Theological Seminary.

In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower laid the cornerstone of the building, which was nicknamed for its many church-affiliated tenants.