

National Cathedral suffers 'significant damage' in quake

by [David Gibson](#)

August 23, 2011

(RNS) The earthquake that rumbled up the East Coast from Virginia on Tuesday (Aug. 23) "significantly damaged" the central tower of Washington National Cathedral, shaking carved stone finials from atop the iconic church.

The quake also left cracks in the flying buttresses that support the cathedral, an Episcopal church that serves as a religious focal point for the country and a "house of prayer for all people."

Cathedral spokesman Richard Weinberg said there were about 200 people, staff and tourists in the cathedral and adjoining offices when the 5.9 magnitude quake struck at 1:51 pm, but no one was injured.

"There's been significant damage to the central tower," Weinberg said. "In addition, the finial stones have fallen off three of the four (corner spires) entirely."

The ornate finials are the crowning pieces atop the central tower, which was completed in the 1960s and restored in the 1990s after repeated lightning strikes.

Weinberg said there was minor damage to other decorative elements, and said some may be in danger of falling. Engineers found cracks in the flying buttresses that support the oldest part of the building, but the supports on the central tower "seem to be sound."

No damage was reported to the cathedral's stained glass windows.

The cathedral will remain closed while engineers assess the damage, Weinberg said, and he encouraged supporters to donate through the

church's website. "We will be working to fix the damage and raise the funds necessary."

Weinberg said the cathedral had only suffered minor damage from lightning in the past, and nothing on the scale of Tuesday's quake.

Formally known as the Church of Saint Peter and Paul, the National Cathedral was erected under a charter passed by Congress in 1893, but it receives no support from the federal government.

Completed in 1990, it is the sixth largest cathedral in the world and the second largest in the United States.