



CASE STUDY

Lutheran Church of the Reformation

How a historic Capitol Hill congregation replaced years of reactive repairs with a campus-wide master plan, grounded that plan in a clearly defined identity, and positioned its building to attract outside capital and support ministry.



LOCATION

Capitol Hill, Washington, DC

A 1934 Art Deco church one block from the U.S. Capitol, behind the Supreme Court building, and next door to the Library of Congress, home to a congregation founded in 1869.

CHALLENGE

Deferred maintenance and a recurring roof leak

Reformation was an important hub for worship and community life, but its building was struggling. Water damage from a roof leak was being plastered over rather than repaired at the source, and deferred maintenance had accumulated.

OUTCOME

A master plan and a funded path to repair

A campus-wide master plan, a clearly defined congregational identity, and a capital campaign supported by a \$250,000 historic preservation grant and more than \$500,000 in matching funds.

The situation

Peter Beeson joined the staff of Lutheran Church of the Reformation in 2012, serving alongside senior pastor Rev. Michael Wilker. The congregation had a long history of public witness. It responded to the 1968 uprising following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., helped found Capitol Hill Day School and Southeast Ministries, and became a Reconciling in Christ congregation in 1987. Its building served as a meeting place for advocates, artists, and community organizations.

The physical plant told a different story. A roof leak had allowed water into the building for years, and the congregation had fallen into a pattern of plastering over the damage rather than correcting its cause. Each patch deferred a larger problem, and the backlog of deferred maintenance continued to grow.

Why it mattered

Reformation's building is central to its ministry. Beyond Sunday worship, it serves food pantry guests, hosts community groups, and generates space-use revenue that supports the congregation's mission. A failing building puts all of that at risk.

Reactive repairs could not keep pace. The congregation needed a shared understanding of its identity, a clear assessment of what its campus required, and a realistic capital plan to fund the work.

The work

Over two years the congregation moved from reactive repairs to a coordinated, campus-wide plan, with the congregation's voice at the center of the process.

Campus master planning

Peter led a campus-wide master planning process, including drafting and issuing a request for proposals to qualified firms. The result was a comprehensive assessment of the entire facility rather than a response to the next leak.

Congregational listening

A structured listening process clarified the congregation's goals, values, and identity, and defined what its building needed to make possible. Those priorities became the foundation of the master plan.

Capital campaign launch

Peter launched the capital campaign process and was part of the team that laid the foundation to secure a \$250,000 historic preservation grant from the National Fund for Sacred Places to enhance the congregation's efforts.

What changed

Repair replaced patching

The master plan identified the building's true capital needs, allowing the congregation to address problems at their source.

Identity guided investment

The listening process translated congregational goals into campus priorities and built ownership of the plan before fundraising began.

Outside capital followed

The \$250,000 National Fund for Sacred Places grant was matched by more than \$500,000 raised by the congregation, funding hazardous materials abatement, new fire alarm and door security systems, electrical and lighting upgrades, plaster repair, and restoration of the sanctuary ceiling and exterior doors.

Operating costs came down

Peter led a partnership with Washington Interfaith Power & Light to transition the historic building to 100% renewable energy and negotiated a new HVAC contract that saved more than \$25,000 annually.

Patching a leak buys a season. A plan grounded in the congregation's identity secures the building, and the ministry it houses, for the next generation.

Reformation today

Lutheran Church of the Reformation continues to offer worship in person and online, operates a food pantry, and makes its space available to community groups. By 2016, space-use fees were generating more than \$100,000 annually in support of the congregation's ministry. In the congregation's own words, the completed repairs created "a much more welcoming and safe environment" for congregants and community members alike.

The result is more than a repaired building. It is a historic asset positioned to sustain ministry on Capitol Hill.

Project highlights

Planned before spending

An RFP-driven master planning process gave the congregation a whole-campus view of its capital needs before committing major dollars.

Leveraged outside capital

A \$250,000 national grant and more than \$500,000 in matching funds put over \$750,000 to work on a historic sacred place.

Building as a revenue asset

Space-use fees of more than \$100,000 annually demonstrate the building's value as a revenue-generating asset that supports ministry.