

Shifting course, St. Paul's orders protesters out

Al Webb Religion News Service | Oct. 25, 2011

LONDON -- More than a week after welcoming anti-corporate protesters onto its grounds, London's historic St. Paul's Cathedral now wants them to go away because their presence is costing too much money.

Asking the demonstrators to leave peacefully after nine days of occupying a makeshift tent city in the churchyard, St. Paul's dean, the Rev. Graeme Knowles, said, "We have done this with a very heavy heart."

At first, the cathedral opened its doors to the Occupy London Stock Exchange group and ordered police to stay away.

But after nine days, the demonstrators -- protesting against what they described as corporate injustices and greed -- showed no signs of leaving, and the iconic cathedral decided to roll up the welcome mat.

Tourism is one of St. Paul's biggest income sources, and every day the protesters remained was costing the cathedral £16,000 (about \$25,000) in income from tourists, church authorities said.

But Knowles said the protestors' tent village poses insurmountable safety hazards.

"It is simply not possible to fulfill our day-to-day obligations to worshippers, visitors and pilgrims in current circumstances," Knowles said.

The about-face marked the first time since 1940, in the dawning days of World War II, that the 17th century St. Paul's had closed its doors to outsiders, but "we have no alternative but to close," the dean said.

Even as the original protesters insisted in staying, another band of demonstrators -- the campaign group UK Uncut -- said it was ready to join the movement and swell the growing numbers of protesters around the cathedral.

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