

Amid stress of protests, St. Paul's mulls closing

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London, October 20 (ENInews)--Feeling the stress of a growing camp of anti-corporate protesters on its doorsteps, London's iconic St. Paul's Cathedral on 20 October closed several entrances and said it is reviewing "the extent to which it can remain open."

"People entering the cathedral through the main west door are able to move around as normal and, if they desire, go down into the crypt," press officer Hannah Talbot told ENInews. However, she added, an entrance that leads from the street into the crypt has been closed. One of London's most famous visitor attractions, St. Paul's receives about 1.9 million visitors per year, she noted.

The lower-level restaurant and gift shop, which provide income for the 17th-century building, have also been closed due to a sharp drop in visitors since the protests began on 15 October.

About 180 tents have been set up outside the cathedral and Naomi Colvin, one of the organizers, said, "we're staying where we are."

Colvin, 31, a freelance publisher, told ENInews that "hundreds will be outside the cathedral, drawing attention to our anger about capitalism and the way economies are being handled all around the world. We have Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and anarchist protesters -- pretty much a cross-section of modern Britain." The group calls itself Occupy London Stock Exchange, after the Occupy Wall Street protests that began last month in New York City and have spread around the world.

On 16 October, as Sunday services began, the Rev. Giles Fraser, canon chancellor of the cathedral, defended the group's right to protest and asked police not to move in.

However, in a statement issued on 19 October, the cathedral's clergy said that "the increased scale and nature of the protest camp is such that to act safely and

responsibly the cathedral must now review the extent to which it can remain open for the many thousands coming this week as worshippers, visitors and in school parties. Is it now time for the protest camp to leave? The consequences of a decision to close St Paul's cannot be taken lightly."

The last time St Paul's was closed was during the Nazi bombing of London during World War II.