

Parking privileges for churches challenged in Nottingham

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Last year, Nottingham City Council decided to introduce charges for on-street parking on Sundays and evenings in the city. As soon as the councillors announced their intention, the city centre churches began demanding exemptions.

The charges were introduced in November 2011 and church members were offered a £50 prepaid permit book, representing savings of around £70 per year. Other discounts, not as generous, were offered to patrons of some (but not all) city centre restaurants and of two cinemas.

In a BBC radio interview last week, Nottingham Secular Society's president, Dennis Penaluna, criticised the city council's decision. He said: "We believe that if there has to be a law, a regulation or rule; then those laws, etc. should be applied equally to everyone. It is a simple and basic principle. So when you get self-serving and self-interested groups coming along, they should not be given exemptions and privileges purely on the basis of having a religious belief."

On the same show the previous day, the Dean of Nottingham's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Rev. Geoffrey Hunton, claimed that the church had lost 10% of its congregation since the introduction of the scheme and continued to demand free parking for churchgoers.

This week, in a complete *volte face*, the same Rev. Hunton is asking the City Council to repeal the extension. He feels the vouchers, or permits, have had little effect.

Mr. Penaluna commented: "It appears the Cathedral has concluded that the only way it can get free parking is if everyone is treated equally. That must be quite a novel concept for the Roman Catholic hierarchy."

He added that he has sent a Freedom of Information request to the City Council asking if the same discounted privileges would be extended to the City's Muslim and Jewish communities on Fridays.

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