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'A welcoming church,' sort of: No public restrooms at St. Patrick's Cathedral

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

According to the *New York Post*:

His prayer for relief fell on deaf ears.

A frail worshipper found out the hard way that St. Patrick's Cathedral, unlike other landmark city churches, synagogues and mosques -- and even St. Peter's Basilica in Rome -- has no restrooms open to its faithful.

Wei Li, 57, of Brooklyn, who recently suffered a stroke and uses a cane, urgently needed to use the john in the middle of Mass at the Midtown cathedral the Sunday after Easter.

The retired doctor and his neighbor, David Johnson, approached a lay church official and told him, "We had a bathroom emergency," Johnson said.

"We were seconds away from a bathroom accident ... The worker didn't even make eye contact with me and just told us to go next-door," recalled Johnson, 43.

The worker sent them outside to an office building across Fifth Avenue to use a tiny atrium bathroom there.

St. Patrick's is "a special place for the respect of God, [but] there's no bathroom," Li said incredulously.

He waited on line for the john across the street only to return to the home church of Timothy Cardinal Dolan and find someone had swiped his seat in the crowded pew.

Li, who worked as an ER doctor in China before moving to the United States in 2011, said he had recently turned to Catholicism to give him strength as his health worsened.

"In the future, we'll go to a different church because of the bathroom situation," he said.

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St. Patrick's Cathedral has bathrooms, but they are available only to religious and lay staffers.

"Ideally, we'd love to be able provide bathrooms for the public," said Kate Monaghan, a spokeswoman for the New York Archdiocese. "I am very sorry to hear about the gentleman being distressed."

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