Dealing with Difficult Visitors – An approach

It is fair to say that every public organisation including Cathedrals have had its share of challenging visitors and there need to be protocols in place to handle them.

We can categorize them into at least two separate headings

**Difficult**
These visitors are sometimes hard to deal with but fundamentally pose no real physical threat to staff, volunteers or other visitors. Included here are people with clear psychological problems, homeless people, people with drink problems. There is a balance to be struck between the Christian need to help and support and the impossibility of the Cathedral taking on all of society’s social problems.

So long as they are not causing any fundamental problems with a service or the visitor experience there should be no problem in simply allowing them in for the as long as they wish. Most will already be known to Welcome Desk staff, Floor Managers or your security teams and it will simply be a question of keep an eye out and ensuring the harmony of the Cathedral remains intact. If they become disruptive then your Floor Managing team should be called in to gently lead them out. The Floor teams will have experience of this and should not pose any difficulties.

For Cathedrals which maintain a Visitor Entrance Fee a difficult visitor could be someone who resents the need to pay to enter. However, if either signage or your Welcome Team can make it clear that there is no fee to come in and pray and that the daily cost of running the Cathedral is not subsidized by the C of E or the government, most will soften. Knowing that the average donation is in pennies rather than pounds will probably stun them more and make them more supportive.

**Disruptive**
These pose the greatest difficulties. People on drugs or who are fuelled by alcohol can prove disruptive and dangerous. Protocols should be set up for the Welcome Teams to call for assistance. Personal alarms should be made available to all front-line staff and regular training should be given to ensure that the everybody knows the right procedures to adopt.