

Archbishop, parents to meet over school closing



By Jay Lindsay, Associated Press Writer | June 11, 2005

BOSTON --Archbishop Sean O'Malley and parents angry about his decision to abruptly lock their kids out of school before graduation ceremonies agreed on Saturday to meet in an effort to end their confrontation.

In a joint statement, the two sides said they'll talk at the archdiocese on Monday.

The announcement came a day after about 50 parents from Our Lady of Presentation School began a camp-out in a city square across from the school in a show of solidarity and to protest the school's closure. The Boston Archdiocese closed the school for kindergartners through sixth-graders on Wednesday, two days ahead of schedule, fearing an occupation.

"It's been a very difficult few days," said Tom O'Brien, a member of the school board. "We're hoping this is the beginning of a cooperative process."

The archdiocese closed the school ahead of schedule after hearing reports that parents intended to begin an occupation of the school building as early as Thursday.

Parishioners have started similar sit-ins at several closed churches. More than 80 of 357 parishes have closed or are scheduled to close as part of the church's reconfiguration.

Terry Donilon, a spokesman for the archdiocese, has said O'Malley shut down the school because he didn't want children caught in the middle of an occupation attempt.

"The archdiocese recognizes that the future of the Our Lady of Presentation School building is of vital interest to the Allston-Brighton community," the archdiocese said in a statement.

Parents held their own graduation for kindergartners on Thursday in the city square across the street. Mayor Thomas Menino, who has criticized the closing, allowed the school to use historic Faneuil Hall for graduation for older students on Friday.

"Obviously, what happened to the kids in the last couple of days is still damage done," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said the parents would continue the camp-out despite the upcoming talks, and have dubbed the tent village "O'Malleyville."

Kimberly Dacy-Smith, a mother of two children at the school, said the vigil aims to show church leaders, "that they can't scatter us, they can't destroy our faith."

Parents had offered to buy the property and start a new school but the archdiocese never put it on the market. A review of the Presentation School Foundation's proposal to buy the building is on the agenda of Monday's meeting, according to the parties.

"Both parties seek an expeditious resolution," the joint statement said. ■