

Archdiocese agrees to pursue sale of closed Catholic school

By Brooke Donald, Associated Press Writer | June 13, 2005

BOSTON --The Archdiocese of Boston, criticized by parents and government officials for the abrupt shutdown of a Catholic school facing closure, agreed Monday to pursue selling the school to parents who want to turn it into a community center.

The announcement came after a more than three-hour meeting between Boston Archbishop Sean O'Malley and the Presentation School Foundation, a group from Our Lady of Presentation School in the city's Brighton section.

Kevin Caragee, the chairman of the foundation, said members of the group were exhausted, but happy about the agreement, which he said "recognizes the importance of this building as an anchor of this community."

"I think they recognize it was a remarkable story and they're the authors of the story," Caragee said. "A few days ago a devastating event happened .. we're all just totally worn out."

The school has been among church properties scheduled to close under a reorganization of parishes in the financially strapped archdiocese. In January, parents offered to buy the school, where they want to offer preschool and adult education courses.

"We regret the unpleasant events of last week," O'Malley said after Monday's meeting. "We regret the misunderstanding."

Last Wednesday the archdiocese, saying it had learned that an occupation and vigil might be in the works to save the school, abruptly changed the locks and closed the school two days before the last day of classes. Church officials said they wanted to keep faculty and students from being caught in the middle of the dispute.

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

"The intense conflict of recent days is over," said Caragee, 49. "This is a good day for Boston. This is a good day for the Archdiocese."

Caragee said a "tent city" erected in a square near the school to protest the sudden closure would be taken down immediately.

He also said the group had always intended a community center for the building's reuse, rather than assuming control and running the existing school.

The foundation members and O'Malley did not characterize Monday's discussion or how they overcame the events of the last week to reach the agreement.

But in a joint statement, the two sides said: "Both parties developed increased understanding of the needs and interests of each other."

The two sides agreed to put aside for a future date the issue of whether the building would be used as a school again. The archdiocese said it would want to investigate how such a school might affect existing Catholic schools in the area.

Sale details have not been worked out, and the two sides plan to meet in two weeks. The archdiocese said it needs to discuss the potential sale with a series of archdiocesan panels, including the Finance Council, before it can be approved.

The school, which had about 120 students, pre-K through grade 6, was supposed to close last year, but was given a

one-year extension that was funded in part after Secretary of State William Galvin, an alumnus, put up a personal \$100,000 line of credit. ■

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