

## Group says Catholic school closing affects neighborhood



By Greg Sukiennik, Associated Press Writer | June 14, 2005

BOSTON --The leader of a group that wants to turn a former Catholic school into a community center said a standoff with the Archdiocese of Boston was about far more than a school abruptly closing its doors.

"I used to say it's 'the little school that could,' but it's not just a school," said Kevin Carragee, 49, the chairman of the Presentation School Foundation. It's about a neighborhood, he said.

The group, which launched protests when the archdiocese abruptly closed Our Lady of Presentation School two days before the last day of classes, met for three hours with Boston Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley on Monday.

That meeting ended with the archdiocese pledging to pursue sale of the building to the foundation, and with O'Malley apologizing for how the closing last week affected all involved.

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

Carragee said members of the group were pleased that the agreement "recognizes the importance of this building as an anchor of this community."

He said the Allston-Brighton section of the city has a 23 percent poverty rate and one of city's lowest owner-occupancy rates. He recounted how it took his family four years to find an affordable house, while friends and neighbors were forced to move away.

"If you take away one of key anchors, the effects are devastating," Carragee said. "This is a tipping point, a question of are families going to remain as part of fabric of this community, or is this a community of transient residents?"

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 wanted to offer preschool and adult education courses.

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

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

The archdiocese said it needs to discuss the potential sale with its Finance Council and other church panels before it can be approved. The parties also agreed to consider later if the building would be used as a school again. They plan to meet again in two weeks.

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 F. Galvin, an alumnus, put up a personal \$100,000 line of credit. ■