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GLOBE EDITORIAL

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Tussle at Brighton school

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THE DECISION this week to cancel graduation ceremonies for elementary students at Our Lady of the Presentation School in Brighton opens a new chapter in clerical clumsiness for the Archdiocese of Boston.

Fearing that Presentation parents might occupy the school building following graduation, archdiocese officials Wednesday changed the locks and canceled final classes. The reason, according to archdiocesan spokesman Terrence Donilon, centered on Archbishop Sean O'Malley's concern that young children would be placed in the middle of an adult battle. Presentation parish is among roughly 80 slated for closure as the archdiocese tries to cope with priest shortages, an unfunded liability in its clergy pension fund, demographic shifts, and the continuing fallout of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that led to an \$85 million settlement for 500 victims.

Donilon called the decision "regrettable but necessary." But the archbishop's strategy backfired. Presentation School parents and their supporters were enraged by the lock-out. Hopes for a restoration of calm and civility collapsed as children waited for their lost school and church critics vowed to fight the decision in courts of law and public opinion. The rhetoric sizzled.

"It will be a long, hot summer if they think they are going to kick us out," said Brighton's City Councilor Jerry McDermott, a former altar server at Our Lady of the Presentation and a graduate of the parish school.

Parishioners and the public should demand better from O'Malley, known as a reflective leader and comforter of people facing all manners of social stress. A priest with O'Malley's experience should have been able to find a way to broker a deal so that even if a demonstration took place, it wouldn't have interfered with the ability of the last class of Presentation students to receive recognition for their studies and present gifts to their teachers.

Even with all the rage and disappointment, something good may still arise. Donilon said yesterday that the archdiocese is now "revisiting" its plan to redevelop the empty school for archdiocese offices. That could breathe life into an earlier proposal from a community coalition to buy the school and develop a "youth and family campus," including an independent school, immigration services, and a YMCA after-school program. The proposal was dismissed by the archdiocese in January without an opportunity for the Brighton coalition to meet with O'Malley. Such a meeting, if held now, could redeem both Presentation's school building and the relationship between the archdiocese and its Brighton neighbors. ■

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