

Church must practice as it preaches

By Charles D. Chioppo
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The tragic sexual abuse scandal may have wreaked havoc with the Archdiocese of Boston's finances, but its arrogance remains intact.

Last year, Our Lady of Presentation, in Brighton's Oak Square, was among the churches closed in the wake of the debacle. But acquiescing to parental pleas, the parish elementary school was granted a reprieve after Secretary of State Bill Galvin, who once attended the school, put up a \$100,000 personal letter of credit. But Bishop Richard Lennon made it clear that while the school could remain open for the current school year, the archdiocese would provide no financial support.

Our Lady of Presentation parents, after months of work, presented the archdiocese with an offer to buy the school building for full market value and a detailed plan to partner with the neighboring YMCA and Faneuil Branch Library to create an Oak Square Youth and Families Campus on the site. The campus would include affordable day care and preschool services, an independent elementary school with a Catholic focus, YMCA after-school and summer programs, and adult education.

The archdiocese's response to the 150-page proposal that included a financial plan was a five-sentence rejection that said the building would be retained for archdiocesan needs. The tribunal that annuls marriages and performs other administrative functions would locate there.

Having spent years living in Brighton, much of that time in Oak Square, I was shocked to learn that while between 1990 and 2000, Allston-Brighton saw a startling 14.7 percent increase in poverty. Of 13 Boston neighborhoods studied, Allston-Brighton and Roxbury were the only two that had more residents living in poverty than it had people who owned their own homes.

The Youth and Families Campus proposal - which is supported by Mayor Tom Menino, the City Council, Boston University and virtually every Brighton civic organization - would serve families in a fragile urban community with a growing immigrant population.

Given these facts, it's hard not to conclude that the archdiocese sees doling out annulments as more central to its mission than helping those in need.

Community leaders continue to fight for the proposal and hopefully they will prevail. But even as the church's lack of a moral compass exacerbates a bad situation, some good may yet come from this.






The driving force behind the Oak Square Youth and Families Campus has been Tom O'Brien, whose twin daughters attend the school. In 11 years as an assistant attorney general, O'Brien never thought about running for office. But his leadership role in the Our Lady of Presentation effort has led him to enter a special election to replace Rep. Brian Golden, who has accepted a position with the Romney administration.

Like many who never contemplated running for office, O'Brien is registered as unenrolled, despite Democratic leanings. That won't make it any easier for a political novice running in a heavily Democratic district made up of parts of Allston and Brighton and a sliver of Brookline.

O'Brien and I may have different views on a range of issues, but I don't know anyone more committed to trying to do the right thing. And that alone places him in stark contrast to the powerful opponent he has been fighting for the past year.

(Talk back to Charlie Chioppo at charleschioppo@rcn.com.)




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