



## Church Heartbreak 101 taught at former school

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“It’s kind of like negotiating with the North Koreans . . . though that is probably unfair to the North Koreans.”

So says Secretary of State Bill Galvin, a devout Catholic, about the archdiocese's terror-state tactics negotiating with Brighton neighbors trying to do a good deed: Buy the now dark and empty Our Lady of Presentation School and turn it into a community center for new immigrants, the elderly and the poor.

Drop dead. That's the read-between-the-lines message from the church's supposed stand-ins for God on earth.

What a banner week for Catholics it's been.

But this time the holy men cannot blame church doctrine, Vatican rules, "gravely immoral" gays, uppity ex-nuns, cafeteria Catholics or any of their usual band of insurrectionist whipping boys.

No, this time a bunch of well-meaning, good-hearted, mostly Catholic Oak Square volunteers - CCD teachers and Eucharistic ministers and parochial school parents - have spent much money and time working out a deal to restore an important neighborhood centerpiece.

Known as the Presentation School Foundation Inc., they're ready to pay the archdiocese \$2 million, a reasonable price for property valued at \$2.5 million to be used solely as a nonprofit. They've made huge concessions to Lake Street, including the "heart-wrenching" one, as former Presentation parent Tom O'Brien put it, to grant the archdiocese total discretion over whether or not to allow a new elementary school there.

In other words, the Foundation folks spend \$2 million. They own the school, which they'd hoped to re-open. But they'd let the archdiocese veto that plan just for the chance to get to buy it at all.

Are they afraid of competition?

And get this: Because a separate group has sued the archdiocese over ownership of Presentation's school and church, clearly complicating the deal, the Foundation also agreed to assume significant risk. Should litigation still be pending at the time of the closing, or continue for more than 18 months, the archdiocese, the Foundation agreed, could simply walk away from the deal.

"We were inches away from the purchase and sale when they suddenly reversed their position," said Foundation chairman Kevin M. Carragee. "It's just inexplicable."

Said Galvin, "They're crushing a community."

Do they care?

When last we visited Presentation, in June, you may recall the archdiocese, fearing a parent sit-in, had locked the school down on the eve of its preschool graduation. Kindergarteners were weeping for goldfish trapped inside. Incensed parents had set up an "O'Malleyville" tent city in the square outside. Banners read: "arrogant, cheating, heartless, obnoxious, enraging." Mayor Menino said he was "disgusted." City Councilor Jerry McDermott called the hierarchy "a pack of thieves." CNN and The New York Times descended. It was a national public relations debacle and, more significantly, sped up local political abandonment of the archdiocese that began during the sex scandal.

Shortly after the Presentation mess, however, Archbishop O'Malley, said Carragee, "agreed to a good-faith effort" to negotiate the school's sale. Meanwhile the archdiocese abandoned its Keystone Cops-like notion of using Presentation as a priestly sex offender tribunal - right across from the Y!

And now, it insists it wants the Presentation sale to go through. On Feb. 21, the Foundation submitted a revised offer. And then - wham!

But why? What's in it for the archdiocese to further antagonize the powerful, to appear ever nastier and clueless? Well that's the \$64,000 question, isn't it? I found nobody with an answer, either.