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HEADLINE: Church's social mission is lost in reconfiguration

BYLINE: By PETER GELZINIS

BODY:

Why is it so hard for the Archdiocese of Boston to do the right thing?

In Brighton, people of good faith want to transform a doomed grammar school into a campus of hope, featuring a wide array of social, spiritual and educational programs.

Bishop Richard Lennon says the church needs the building to try fallen priests and annul Catholic marriages.

In South Boston, a thriving tutorial and mentoring program is faced with extinction. Why? Because Bishop Lennon thinks the old convent that houses the Paraclete Center is worth more as a development property.

It makes no sense. But then, very little this archdiocese has done in the wake of its great moral tsunami has made any sense.

On Friday, after the last child marches out of Our Lady of the Presentation School in Brighton, the archdiocese wants to march in priests charged with abuse.

“They will need a zoning variance to accomplish that,” said Kevin Carragee, “and believe me, we will be there to fight that with all our might.”

The “we” Carragee refers to is the Presentation School Foundation, an impassioned community of Brighton people who've produced a stunning multifaceted proposal for the rebirth of the Presentation school. The Oak Square Partnership for Youth and Families has been heartily endorsed by every pol from Tommy Menino on down, and nearly every corporate and civic group in Brighton.

Two months after he dismissed the plan in an icy little letter, Bishop Richard Lennon granted a brief audience to Kevin Carragee and several foundation members. When the group repeated its offer to purchase the old school building for \$2.5 million, Bishop Lennon responded with a word that's haunted Kevin Carragee ever since.

“He (Lennon) came up with the word ‘hypothetically,’” Carragee recalled, “as in: ‘Hypothetically, what if someone else were to submit an offer of ... \$4.5 million?’” Needless to say, Lennon's hypothetical has begged at least two big, fat questions:

Is the church really serious about its plan to locate a so-called tribunal at the Presentation school? Or could it be a maneuver to stonewall a far more innovative and useful community proposal?

“We believe we've provided the archdiocese with a golden opportunity to help address its financial crisis,” Carragee said, “but more importantly, we think the plan we've laid before them works to advance the social mission of the church by providing services to the

very people and children who need them most."

So, why would the church turn its back on an idea that could help close the open wounds left by priests who abused Brighton children for decades, only to use this Brighton school now as a clearinghouse for those priests charged with opening the same wounds?

If there was a logical answer to that question, then maybe there'd be an answer for why Sister Ann Fox and Barry Hynes are forced to wage a fervent petition drive to save the Paraclete Center in Southie?

Located in a convent that once housed the Notre Dame nuns who taught at the now defunct St. Augustine's School, the Paraclete Center has become an after-school oasis for the mind.

Southie kids fill the old building not only for help with their homework and test prep, but to mingle with Rwandan refugees and help build a wooden dorey by hand.

Bishop Lennon knew nothing of the Paraclete Center's 10-year existence. All he knew is that the church's bean counters think the convent and adjacent dormant school are worth more as a joint piece of condo fare.

That's nice. But where in the bottom line do you look for the church's social mission?

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