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Kids become pawns of archdiocese's 'wounded arrogance'

BYLINE: By PETER GELZINIS

BODY:

I always thought media consultants were supposed to prevent public relations disasters - not create them.

So what is the Archdiocese of Boston paying Larry Rasky for, if not to stop the raging river of bad blood that flooded Oak Square yesterday morning?

Amid the cake, the balloons and all those adorable toddlers locked out of their last two days at Our Lady of the **Presentation School** in Brighton, there was nothing BUT bad blood . . . and plenty of media.

State Rep. Michael Moran gazed at the tiny offspring of his constituents, who lined up to receive replicas of diplomas still under quarantine in the brick building across the street.

Frustration simmered in his eyes and beads of sweat formed on the forehead of a politician who traced his own childhood memories back to this locked school.

"You know," Moran sighed, "it really seems like the only thing the church knows how to do these days is hurt people. Couldn't the archdiocese see what it's doing to these kids and their parents?"

"You deny them a moment like this, their first graduation in their first school . . . you can't get that back again. And for what? Look at them standing there . . . does the church really believe these people and their children are some sort of threat?"

The church's blunder quickly became the city's boon. It didn't take long for Tom Menino to become a hero to every embittered parent marooned in Oak Square by offering Faneuil Hall for this morning's graduation of the **Presentation School's** sixth-grade class.

But reaping a ton of goodwill did not stop Menino from furiously spitting out words like ``outrageous, cold-blooded, cloak-and-dagger, disgusting" and ``heartless" to describe the church's decision to evict the children before their big day.

``I see this as a huge step backwards," he said. ``My church was built on compassion and caring . . . this (decision) is more like a corporation saying, `We don't want you.' I'm really very disgusted."

Hard to imagine anyone could come up with a new way to send Tom Menino's blood pressure into the red zone, but yesterday the archdiocese managed to do exactly that. A shrewd move, indeed.

Late yesterday afternoon, the archdiocese still insisted its intent was to protect the children. Theoretically, outside agitators - not the **Presentation School** parents, a spokesman was quick to point out - were going to bring sleeping bags to the school today and pull a St. Albert's. You may ask, so what?

Which spokesman Terry Donilon would counter by saying Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley made a decision not to have the children used as pawns. So, what happened? The children became pawns of what one **Presentation School** parent called ``the church's wounded arrogance."

Apparently, O'Malley considered and then rejected several other approaches, such as going to the media with an impassioned plea that Presentation's children be allowed to celebrate their graduation day free of any building sit-ins.

He could easily have enlisted the help of those **Presentation school** parents and friends who've come to the archdiocese with a serious proposal to buy the building. Instead he's chosen to have no discussions with them.

In the aftermath of yesterday's fiasco, Donilon, the archdiocese's new voice and the loneliest man in town, said what's needed is ``a way to turn down the volume."

That will never happen by locking out children, or freezing out those people of good faith and good hearts who have presented the archdiocese with a viable way Our Lady of the Presentation can continue to shape the lives and memories of Brighton's children.

You don't need to pay a media consultant to figure that out. All you need is a little humanity and a touch of common sense.

Talk back to Peter Gelzinis online at bostonherald.com.

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