

## Letter: Archdiocese, not the parents, is guilty of staging a lockout

Thursday, June 16, 2005

To the editor:

Like many people, I procrastinate at times when it comes to cleaning out the attic because it means often looking at things and wondering why I had it up in the attic in the first place. Priceless heirlooms they were not; sorry, no Picasso was found. More often than not it was put in the attic or basement by my family because it's hard to throw stuff out permanently in the weekly trash.

One of the things I came across was a baseball hat from when World Youth Day was held in Denver. It says Boston Denver with a cross and World Youth Day. With the two recent stories in the papers on the Our Lady of Presentation School in Brighton and the handling of the pension trust for retired priests, I couldn't help to think looking at the hat what a difference a few years can make in the archdiocese.

One day during World Youth Week, young people were divided into different age groups and heard from different American cardinals. My group got to hear from Cardinal Bernardin, then archbishop of Chicago. It was a highlight of my trip. I knew of him for his aggressive stance on priest abuse and opposition to the nuclear arms build-up. I wish we had a few more like him in the church hierarchy today. He died of cancer a few years after World Youth Day.

Cardinal Law, in talking to other young people from across the country, impressed many with his talk to them. Who could have foretold what would happen a few years later? He would have to resign. I thought it had to happen though because it was a necessary step in order for people to heal. I know the pain it must have caused people trying to heal to see Cardinal Law saying one of the Masses for the late John Paul II. I understand why, as the archdeacon for one of the four primary churches in Rome, he was given this honor. I wish Cardinal Law though had declined the honor so as to not cause abuse survivors and their families additional pain.

The abuse scandal followed church reconfiguration (reconfiguration, a nice word for closing). I give Archbishop O'Malley credit in that he did what Cardinal Law could not do, and that is reach a financial settlement with abuse victims. I give him credit in that he realized that reconfiguration needed to be reviewed and now some churches marked for closure will be reopened. I can't give him full credit because this review would not have happened without parishioners in some of the churches starting around-the-clock vigils.

I know the settlement will never replace the innocence lost though for those abused and the families of those abused. I was saddened to see the name of a priest my family respected greatly among those who were charged with abuse. The charge against him went back to the early 1970s. The charge appears to be true and he was laicized by Rome. In light of the charge though I still respect him for the kindness he showed to my family when my father died.

While O'Malley has made steps that I hope will help in the healing process, the two most recent stories that I mentioned at the start of this letter need to be addressed.

What happened at Our Lady of Presentation School in Brighton is, simply put, a disgrace. Hearing that parents were prepared to start a vigil to save the school, church officials proceeded to cut the school year short by two days, changed the locks and canceled a graduation ceremony. The parents want to buy the school and take it private plus use it as a community center. No, church officials have said because they want to use it as the new home of the Metropolitan Tribunal. Fancy name. Among the thing the tribunal hears are annulments.

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By the way, there has been no proof that parents were planning to take over the school, but church leadership has gone to great lengths to try to stop any possible vigils from taking place. Locks are changed on churches and police details in place if there is even the hint of a vigil being considered by parishioners of a church being closed.

School and church officials decided to engage in what is essentially a lockout, a lockout not of striking workers or athletes but of children, so they can turn a school into a place that will hear annulments or as my non-Catholics friends put it, divorce ... Catholic style. O'Malley gave the school a one-year extension, as it was supposed to close last year. I think if the parents have made a valid offer for the property, then let the church do the right thing and sell the property to them. The lockout led to the graduation ceremony being held on a traffic island, of all places, for kindergarten kids. Give Mayor Menino credit for offering Faneuil Hall for the sixth-grade graduation.

Now, I attend church weekly, and I'm not looking for a medal with that statement. I remember every Easter and Christmas we were told that there would be one collection; it was for the retired and infirm priests of the archdiocese, so please give generously. I am concerned in that what I was being told was not exactly true. The money was going into a trust not only used to cover the health-care costs of retired and infirm priests, but active priests as well. I don't think that would have changed one person from giving, but it has led to the ironic statement of borrowing from Peter (the retired and informed priests) to pay Paul (active priests).






This has led to the church having to admit to its own priests that it has not set aside enough money for their retirement. I think this shows the church be more transparent in how its money is managed. It is also a situation that will not get better as health care cost rise and the average age of priests (now 58) approach retirement.

Seeing old stuff stored away in an attic bring back memories, often pleasant ones. I found a baseball hat. It made me smile but it also made me sad, sad because I see a church that I care about still struggling.

**Stephen Smith**

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