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## A CHANGING CHURCH

**W**ELL-ADVISED actions by the Archdiocese of Boston in recent weeks offer hope for a period of calm in the ongoing process of parish closings and sales. The church has taken some good steps to minimize the separation pain for parishioners and to lessen the threat of neighborhood destabilization when churches change hands.

A largely lay advisory commission appointed by Archbishop Sean O'Malley is expected to announce today that it has completed its review, with recommendations, of 62 controversial parish closings since last summer. Some disappointment is inevitable as the archdiocese struggles to regain its financial and institutional footing after the clergy sexual abuse scandal. But many signs are good, and it is clear that O'Malley is listening carefully to forward-looking parishioners.

In the largely Hispanic area of Hyde Square in Jamaica Plain, where fear of gentrification is constant, the archdiocese is negotiating exclusively with a trusted nonprofit group seeking to buy the five-building Blessed Sacrament Church complex. Richard Thal, director of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, says his group is close to inking a deal to redevelop the church property into 120 units of mostly affordable housing along with spaces for recreational use by

the neighborhood. The chief competitor for the space was a developer of luxury condominiums.

The most dramatic turnaround comes in the Oak Square area of Brighton, where supporters of the former Our Lady of the Presentation School erupted in anger three weeks ago when O'Malley ordered the school shuttered before the graduation ceremony for fear of demonstrations. Earlier, the archdiocese had rejected a compelling plan from a neighborhood coalition seeking to buy the building for the creation of a "youth and family campus." The archdiocese is now wisely reconsidering that proposal, though church officials are fearful that the proposed private school in Oak Square might draw students away from area parochial schools.

The archdiocese shouldn't worry. A surfeit of good schools in a Boston neighborhood is a blessing, not a burden. Some healthy competition could stem the exodus of education-minded families from Brighton, and might even attract families from nearby Newton and Waltham. O'Malley is eager to be heard on issues of social justice, immigration, and Catholic education, says a church spokesman. The reconfiguration controversy has been a sound barrier. Just outcomes for local parishioners and church neighbors create the openings that O'Malley desires.