

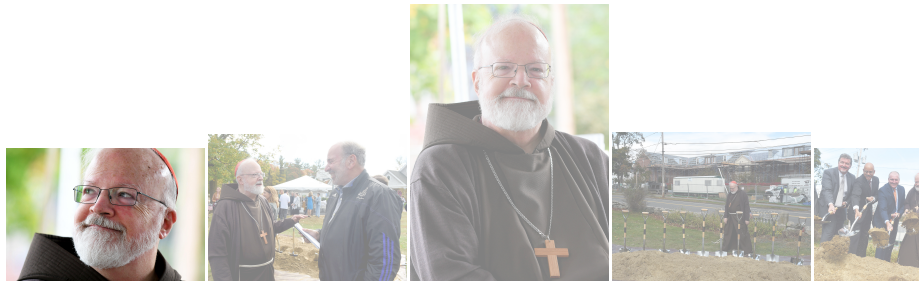
Gelzinis: Church creates an oasis for families with a dream

Peter Gelzinis Tuesday, October 24, 2017



Credit: Jim Michaud

Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Mally, and Herald columnist Peter Gelznis, during a ground breaking ceremony at the Bethany mixed income apartments, 37 units were planned in a building that formerly was used as a dormitory, Monday, Oct. 23, 2017, in Hanover. Herald Photo by Jim Michaud



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None of the players who tossed a symbolic shovelful of dirt for the cameras yesterday stood to make a dime off this particular development deal.

They weren't breaking ground for another soaring glass box with multimillion-dollar views. In fact, they were doing precisely the opposite.

Some 25 miles south of Boston, just below a chapel in Hanover where the remains of Richard Cardinal Cushing are interred, his successor, Cardinal Sean O'Malley led a contingent of developers, bankers, town officials and Lieutenant Gov. Karyn Polito in celebrating the transformation of a former school dormitory into 37 units of adaptive and affordable apartments.

On the campus of a school long dedicated to realizing Cardinal Cushing's dream of providing special needs children with the tools of self-sufficiency, some 37 families will soon find a place where they can afford to build a life.

The Bethany Apartments, Cardinal Sean told the gathering, was the perfect name for a project that was all about empathy.

“In the gospels,” O’Malley said, “Bethany is a very special place where Jesus had many friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He would go there for a good meal, good conversation and to be home with family in a supportive environment.”

This special moment in Hanover was a reminder that empathy can still be the currency that drives a deal for housing that families can afford. But sadly, it would appear to be the exception.

Today’s harsh, uncompromising realities have seen venerable church buildings transformed into condos and school classrooms recycled into high-end apartments.

Empathy is indeed under siege these days. We have a president whose idea of compassion is tossing rolls of paper towels to hurricane victims who have lost everything in Puerto Rico, or asking his chief of staff to tell him what he should say to the widow of a fallen Green Beret.

Yesterday in Hanover, they celebrated the creation of an oasis where families will be given the opportunity to hang on and

build a life.

So, I asked Cardinal Sean about those other families who live and work in the shadows, along with the DACA children who don't know if they will be allowed to remain here in this country and build a life.

“Obviously,” O’Malley said, “the church is very concerned about the attitude toward immigrants. You have more than 800,000 young people who are getting an education, who are going to make a contribution to our country. They have virtually spent their whole lives here.

“To not see the wisdom of giving these dreamers a path to citizenship frankly remains a mystery to me,” O’Malley said. “I am hoping and praying that Congress will be able to bring about a permanent solution to the problem.”

What Cardinal Sean is hoping for is the kind of empathy that was showcased in Hanover yesterday.