

# St. Mel principal keeps on fighting

**By Charles Nicodemus**  
 The principal of beleaguered Providence-St. Mel High School, spurned again by the Catholic School Board, vowed Monday night to "do everything possible to keep our school open—I'll even go to jail."

Principal Paul Adams made the vow after the school board, with John Cardinal Cody looking on, reacted with silence to Adams' last impassioned plea that the widely praised school be saved.

For 15 minutes, Adams had brought the board up to date on the all-black, West Side school's financial situation:

More than \$25,000 in cash had been raised since late March, when the school board announced it was ending its subsidy, which meant the school would have to close.

**ABOUT \$8,000** more in pledges has been received.

The archdiocese's subsidy had been cut from \$240,000 in 1971 to \$150,000 this year and was dipping further.

But wide and burgeoning support was coming in—from the news media, from the business community, from renowned universities and educators all over the country, from public and Roman Catholic schools, from the Assn. of Chicago Priests, Adams said.

"And when it was all over—silence," the principal said in describing the meeting, held in the rectory of St. Thaddeus Church, 9540 S. Harvard.

"I couldn't believe it," he

said. "It was incredible. So I started again—I begged them. I begged them to reconsider."

"But there was nothing. No reaction. Just one brief question. Then more of that stony silence . . . with Cardinal Cody just sitting there and Msgr. (Francis) Brackin (chief administrator of the diocese), too."

"So we left."

A board spokesman reported that the board "promptly went on to other business, with no further discussion of Providence-St. Mel."

"The board's earlier decision was final—that the diocese could no longer afford that burden," the spokesman said. "There was nothing to discuss."

**BUT ADAMS** insisted that "we're not going to accept that."

Returning to Holy Name

Cathedral, where 35 students and parents had been picketing in a prayer vigil to "save our school," Adams told the students to go home "but keep the faith."

"We're going down to the chancery on Tuesday," Adams said, "and demand to talk to Msgr. Brackin again. And if we can't make any headway there, then we'll go find Cardinal Cody."

"On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, he's going to be at the Conference of Catholic Bishops, down at the Palmer House—with all the bishops and cardinals from all over the country."

"We're going to go right on down there—right in there—and we're going to talk to him, no matter what, even if I get arrested."

"We've got to make him and others understand our sto-

ry. It's a proud story. And it would be a crime just to let this school die."

Providence-St. Mel, at 119 N. Central Park, is the last of the Catholic high schools serving the West Side's black community.

**IT IS KNOWN** for its strict discipline, its high academic standards and its unusually high percentage of graduates who go on to college (85 to 90 per cent annually)—including some of the most prestigious colleges in the country.

"We're not going to let them forget how good we are," said Adams, "how dedicated these kids and teachers are."