

## DIocese OF BELLEVILLE

May 26, 2008  
Saint Philip Neri

Dear Brother Priests,

Bishop Braxton asked the Presbyteral Council to meet in Executive Session (cf. Statutes Article VII) on Monday, May 19, 2008, from 10:15 AM to 1:15 PM. The purpose of the gathering was to follow up on the Bishop's statement in his Holy Thursday letter, "I hope that after Easter we can initiate conversations with our priests about things we can do differently and better for the sake of the Gospel of Christ." The Bishop invited Mr. Tom Reid, of The Reid Group, a consultation and mediation service which specializes in assisting Catholic organizations transform challenges into opportunities (see enclosed sheet, Mediation Services for Dioceses), to facilitate an open discussion among the members of the Council and with the Bishop.

The goal of the discussion was to explore ways of working towards better communication among priests and between the Bishop and the priests in order to move beyond the current situation. The consensus of the participants was that the conversation was a beneficial beginning and a cause for hope. The long-range goal is to establish a series of facilitated meetings with the priests and the Bishop in the hope that honest communication will help to renew a spirit of trust among priests with diverse points of view and between the priests and the Bishop. This is essential for reconciliation and future collaboration. The members of the Council and the Bishop agreed that if this initiative is to have any hope of succeeding it should remain an "in-house" conversation and not be discussed with the media. There was a general agreement that this process has the potential of helping us move forward in faith.

Bishop Braxton, and the Executive Committee of the Presbyteral Council, with the assistance of Tom Reid, are working to establish a Steering Committee. They will share more information about this proposed effort with the priests of the Diocese and plan the steps that need to be taken to arrange a number of meetings with the priests and Bishop Braxton. Some initial steps will be taken during the summer. However, due to the summer schedules of the priests and the Bishop, the process will need to continue into the Fall.

Since we all care about one another, about the Catholic Church, and about all of the people we serve, we hope that you will give this effort a chance and join us in praying for its success. May the Holy Spirit help us find more effective ways of communicating, cooperating, and collaborating for the good of the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ Edward K. Braxton*

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton  
Bishop of Belleville

### The Executive Committee

*Very Rev. John W. McEvilly*

Very Reverend John W. McEvilly  
Vicar General, Moderator of the Curia

*Rev. Andrew J. Knopik/ka*

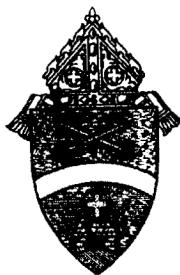
The Reverend Andrew J. Knopik  
Vice-Chairman, Presbyteral Council

*Fr. Jerry Wirth*

The Reverend Jerry E. Wirth  
Chairman, Presbyteral Council

*Rev. Joseph C. Rascher*

The Reverend Joseph C. Rascher  
Secretary-Treasurer, Presbyteral Council



## DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

### Questions and Answers Concerning The Reid Group Consultation with Bishop Braxton and the Presbyteral Council

1. ***Who can be contacted for follow-up information about this process?*** The Executive Committee of the Presbyteral Council, the Steering Committee (once established), and Mr. David Spotanski, Director of Communication.
2. ***Why are we doing this?*** The Bishop and the Presbyteral Council members unanimously agreed to on the need to find a way to move forward from the current situation. They welcome this opportunity for ongoing conversation and take these steps in goodwill.
3. ***What is the goal of this process?*** The Bishop and the Presbyteral Council are hopeful that this process of facilitated conversation will lead to a more positive and collaborative relationship of the priests, deacons, religious, the Christian Faithful, and the Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville.
4. ***Who will participate in these conversations?*** The process will be designed in such a way as to invite and encourage the participation of all the priests of the Diocese. This is a time for renewing the spiritual and ecclesial bonds established by ordination. We ask all involved to pray for the positive outcome of this undertaking.
5. ***When and where will the gatherings take place?*** This has not yet been determined.
6. ***What kind of atmosphere is needed for success?*** Only an atmosphere of respect and courtesy will allow for open and honest communication between the Bishop and the Presbyteral Council members. All the priests of the Diocese are invited to engage one another in the same atmosphere of respect and courtesy.
7. ***Will there be public comments about the contents of these meetings?*** In order for this process to bear fruit the Bishop and the Presbyteral Council unanimously agreed that the specific content of these facilitated conversations will not be a matter of public comment. Nor will they communicate with each other through the media. All the priests of the Diocese are invited to do the same. It is important that these conversations take place in the prayerful spirit of Christian fraternity and not in the public spotlight.
8. ***Are there reasons to hope for success?*** The Bishop and his priests are united in their commitment to and love for the Catholic Church and the Catholic community in the Diocese of Belleville. They hope that this process will strengthen the entire community of faith in the work of proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ.