

DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE
Office of the Bishop

September 27, 2008
Saint Vincent De Paul

Dear People of God,

May the Peace of Jesus Christ be with you.

On September 5, 2008 I wrote to you about the decision involving the Diocese of Belleville made by the St. Clair County Court on August 27, 2008 concerning a gentleman who was allegedly abused by a priest of our Diocese. In the light of the court's ruling, I asked everyone in the Diocese to pray for all who have been harmed by priests who have sexually abused minors. I firmly believe that it is only by prayer that we will have the spiritual peace we need in the face of our present challenges.

I have been praying with you, especially for the wisdom to make the best decision about the course of action to follow after the court's ruling. As Bishop of Belleville, my first responsibility is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church. That Gospel charges me to provide for the ongoing pastoral care of all the People of God in southern Illinois, particularly those who are suffering in any way, with compassion and justice. It also requires me to be a faithful steward of the resources of the Diocese so that the pastoral services of the Catholic Church may continue without interruption for generations to come.

There are times when it can be very difficult for me as your Bishop to determine the best course of action when both of these mandates must be carefully weighed. The recent court decision is an example of this difficulty. I have sought and received guidance and suggestions from appropriate advisors and consultative bodies. I have carefully weighed and prayed daily about this case.

Today I wish to inform you of my decision. I have authorized the filing of a Motion for a New Trial in St. Clair County Court. I have been assured that this legal action is the only recourse available to give the Diocese the time needed to assess further all of the possible pastoral options available to the Diocese, without putting any of these options in jeopardy.

I am very aware that not everyone will agree with this decision. However, I am sure that you understand that the factors that I have had to evaluate carefully are far more complex than media reports might suggest.

I fully understand that there are those who think the Diocese should exercise every legal remedy available to appeal this decision, confident that the statutes of limitations and repose will lead to this verdict being overturned and assuring that the Diocese of Belleville will be able to provide pastoral services to the People of God of southern Illinois for many years to come.

Still others think the Diocese should immediately issue funds in the full amount of the judgment to the person who filed the suit. This action, it is argued, might help the entire Diocese to put this horrific chapter of our history behind us. This might lead to the beginning of healing deep wounds.

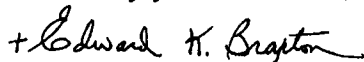
There are others who are deeply disturbed because it seems that they, who have done no wrong, are being asked to bear the burdens of the sins of others. It is important to note that the actions that I have authorized today are a first step; a step that may help us take future steps that are compassionate as well as just.

I realize that the course that I am following, after considering the careful counsel of my advisors and various members of the Diocese, constitutes a legal action that may seem to prolong the suffering of everyone whose lives are touched by the misdeeds of the past. However, simply complying with the judgment as written would diminish diocesan resources and significantly limit the Church's ability to continue to serve our people, our parishes, our schools, all who have been victims of abuse, and the many others who benefit from the outreach of the Church. I believe that the course we are following is the wisest at this juncture.

I wish to conclude by repeating what I wrote on September 5, 2008. "I will renew the efforts by the Diocese in preventing any future acts of abuse. I assure you that I will never assign a priest to your parish whose sexual abuse of a minor is known to me." I renew the commitment of our Diocese to offer counseling and assistance to anyone affected by the sin and crime of abuse.

Once again I urge all of us to be united in genuine and Spirit-filled prayer. Pray for those who have suffered abuse and for their families. Pray for the people of the Diocese who are distressed by these sad events. Pray for the priests who continue to serve you faithfully. Pray for those who have been removed from ministry. And pray for me as well. May we all move through these difficult days holding fast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville

P.S. The substance of his letter should be communicated to all of the Faithful at the at all of the Masses in the parishes of the Diocese of Belleville this weekend, Saturday and Sunday, September 27-28. It may be read from the pulpit. It may be duplicated and inserted in parish bulletins. It may be copied and made available on tables for parishioners.

It should also be shared with parish leadership including the Parish Council, Trustees, and school faculties and staffs.