

(44 priests – 60%- of active, incardinated priests, signed statement)

Statement from the Priests in the Diocese of Belleville March 12, 2008

As priests serving in the Diocese of Belleville, we have become increasingly frustrated by the lack of collaborative and consultative leadership of Bishop Edward K. Braxton since his installation in June 2005. Our repeated attempts to work cooperatively with Bishop Braxton through the Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Diocesan Finance Council, Priests' Personnel Board and annual Priests Convocation have proven futile. Because of the Bishop's lack of cooperation, consultation, accountability and transparency, it is the judgment of a great number of the presbyterate that he has lost his moral authority to lead and govern our Diocese. Therefore, it is requested that Bishop Braxton resign from his office as Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville for his own good, for the good of the Diocese and for the good of the presbyterate.

Recent revelations of Bishop Braxton's misappropriation of funds have only intensified the lack of trust the priests, religious and laity of our Diocese have in our Bishop. We believe that his spending patterns, his pursuit of outside donors to cover these expenditures and his lack of transparency in finances and other areas has resulted in a total lack of trust.

We also publicly affirm our trust in the integrity and competence of Mr. Bill Knapp, Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese. We believe it is imperative that Bishop Braxton renew his contract for another term if any trust is to be restored. Mr. Knapp has earned our confidence during his 10 years of dedicated service to our Diocese, and without his presence in the Diocesan Finance Office, we fear that Bishop Braxton will not be held accountable for his administration of the temporal goods and finances of the Diocese.

We also take this opportunity to encourage all members of the Diocese of Belleville to give their generous support to the 2008 Catholic Services and Ministry Appeal so that we can continue the essential pastoral, educational, social and outreach ministries that make Christ visible in Southern Illinois. We pledge to ensure all these funds are closely monitored and used only for their intended purposes.

We make this statement as advocates for all the people of God in the Diocese of Belleville, whom we are privileged to know, love and serve. We also hereby re-commit ourselves to being more collaborative, consultative and transparent in our own pastoral ministries. We will continue to work and pray for healing and reconciliation in our Diocese.

(Forty four priests --60% of active incardinated priests-- signed this statement.)