



Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Bishop

July 28, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The death of His Excellency, The Most Reverend Pietro Sambì, 73, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, last night is a source of deep sadness for the Catholic Church in the United States and far beyond. I join with my brother Bishops and Priests, as well as the Deacons, Religious Sisters and Brothers, and the Christian Faithful of the United States in praying for Archbishop Sambì. “May angels lead him into paradise. May the martyrs receive him and lead him to the Holy City, Jerusalem. May the ranks of angels receive him, and with Lazarus may he have eternal rest!”

As Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Sambì was the personal representative of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in the United States and to the American government. He served as the “ambassador” of the Holy See to this country. During his six years of service, the Nuncio made the pastoral concern and support of the Holy Father present to the Church in the United States in a very personal way. With sincerity, warmth, and openness, he nurtured the faith of American Catholics by effectively communicating the Successor of St. Peter’s proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. His pastoral solicitude has extended beyond the members of the hierarchy, for which he has a unique responsibility, to all of the members of the Catholic community of faith.

Archbishop Sambì is known, admired, and mourned far beyond our shores. Ordained to the priesthood in 1964, he devoted his entire ministry to the diplomatic service of the Church beginning in 1969. He served in the Vatican embassies in Cameroon, Jerusalem, Cuba, Algeria, Nicaragua, Belgium and India. Blessed John Paul II appointed him Nuncio to Burundi in 1985.

He later served as Nuncio to Indonesia, Israel and Cyprus before Pope Benedict appointed him as Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. He particularly appreciated his service in Israel. When he learned that I had been to the Holy Land on a number of occasions, he often spoke about his ministry there in our conversations. He was deeply aware that this was the land in which the Lord Jesus Christ, His mother, Mary, and his apostles and disciples lived. As he put it, "It is where the Word of God became flesh!" He had a deep love and concern for both the Palestinians and the Israelis and he was deeply distressed by the fact that so many efforts over such a long period of time had not resulted in a final, lasting peace accord. He was very pleased when I told him that the Diocese of Belleville was sponsoring a pilgrimage to the Holy Land next year to commemorate our 125th anniversary.

Here in the United States Archbishop Sambini took a great interest in the far-flung and diverse Catholic community. He regularly inquired about the pastoral situation of African-American Catholics. He was particularly sensitive to individuals who suffered sexual abuse by clergy as minors and he was pleased to host a pastoral visit for some of these victims with Pope Benedict XVI at the Nunciature during the Pontiff's visit to the United States in 2008. While concern for the victims was paramount, he was also concerned about the priests involved in these terrible cases and the complex legal and financial challenges dioceses were facing in the wake of this tragedy.

I always appreciated his many kindnesses to me personally and his pastoral solicitude for my wellbeing and for the Catholic community in southern Illinois. I will travel to Washington, D.C. on August 6, 2011, the Transfiguration of the Lord, for the Liturgy of Christian Burial at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

I ask all of our people to join me in commending Archbishop Sambini to the Lord whom he served with such dedication and love. Pray for him particularly in the Prayers of the Faithful at all Masses this weekend. Pray that he may now be joined with Christ the great High Priest at the Eternal Eucharist before the God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies us all. *Requiescat in pace! Eius et animae omnium fidelium defunctorum per Dei misericordiam requiescant in pace.*

Prayerfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward K. Braxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville