



DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

Office of the Bishop

Bishop Braxton Leaves for Rome for His *ad limina* Visit to the Holy See

On February 7 Bishop Edward K. Braxton will leave for Rome to make his *ad limina apostolorum* visit to the Holy See. He is scheduled to return February 22. He will be going with the Bishops of Region VII of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which comprises the ecclesiastical provinces of Chicago, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis. This includes all of the Bishops of Dioceses in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana. The *ad limina* coincides with the dates of the consistory during which the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, will create twenty-two new cardinals, raising the number of cardinal papal electors to one hundred twenty-five. The practice of *ad limina* visits can be traced back to the pontificate of Pope St. Leo III, who died in 816.

There are nearly six thousand Bishops in the world, serving one billion two hundred million Catholics. All diocesan Bishops are required to make the *ad limina* trip to the Vatican every five years to make a report to the Pope and to the congregations of the Roman Curia on the details of life in their dioceses. Because of the Holy Father's schedule, this round of visits is several years late; in fact, eight years have past since the last *ad limina* of American Bishops during the final year of the pontificate of Pope Blessed John Paul II. *Ad limina apostolorum* is Latin for "to the threshold of the Apostles," referring to the fact that the visit is first and foremost a spiritual pilgrimage that must include praying at the tombs of the apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul. Bishop Braxton will celebrate Mass in the crypt of the Basilica of St. Peter at the tomb of St. Peter, who was crucified on the Vatican Hill. He will also celebrate Mass at the crypt of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls near the site where St. Paul was beheaded – not crucified – because he was a citizen of Rome.

Long before the *ad limina* visit every Diocesan Bishop is required to prepare a Quinquennial (five-year) Report for the Holy See and send it to the Vatican via the Apostolic Nuncio. The twenty-four chapters of the Report, which Bishop Braxton has sent to the Roman Curia in preparation for his *ad limina*, consist of hundreds of pages of data providing a detailed account

of every aspect of the life of the Diocese. It also contains a complete financial report and up-to-date statistics on parishes, schools, hospitals, convents, and seminarians. Three copies of the Report were sent to Rome, a fourth to the Apostolic Nunciature, and a fifth will be kept in the archives of the Diocese.

During the *ad limina* the Bishops meet in small groups with the Cardinal Prefects of the major dicasteries (congregations or departments) of the Vatican's administrative and pastoral offices to learn about the current work of the congregation and ask questions. Some Bishops visit additional dicasteries on their own because of their interest in the work of a particular dicastery.

The Bishop will meet with the Secretariat of State, which works most closely with the Holy Father in the exercise of his ministry as Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church. The Secretary of State, His Eminence, Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone is primarily responsible for the diplomatic and political activities of the Holy See, in some circumstances representing the Pope himself. Under the Secretariat of State are two sections: His Eminence, Fernando Cardinal Filoni is in charge of General Affairs, which attends to all that concerns the Embassies accredited to the Holy See. It supervises the Holy See's Official Communication Agencies and is responsible for publishing the "*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*" (Acts of the Apostolic See) and the "*Annuario Pontificio*" (Pontifical Yearbook).

The Most Reverend Archbishop Dominique Mamberti is in charge of the Second Section for Relations with States. This second section has the specific duty of attending to matters which involve civil governments, and attends to the appointment of Bishops in countries which have entered into treaties or agreements with the Holy See in accordance with the norms of international law. The Bishops will also meet with His Eminence, Marc Cardinal Ouellet, P.S.S., Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops to discuss topics of mutual concern. They meet with His Eminence, William Cardinal Levada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is responsible for insuring that books, articles, and lectures presented by Catholics are faithful to the *magisterium* of the Church. This congregation also oversees the cases of priests accused of sexually abusing children. In addition, there are visits to the dicasteries that deal with education, clergy, families, ecumenism, saints, culture and others. During his visit to the Congregation for Saints, the Bishop will get an update on the cause of Father Augustus Tolton, whose canonization has been proposed by the Archdiocese of Chicago and who once served as a priest in southern Illinois

The high point of the *ad limina* for every Bishop is the time spent in an audience with the Holy Father. This audience gives Bishops, as pastors and shepherds of the Church, the opportunity to speak personally with the Pontiff about the world Church, the Church in the United States, and the Church in their individual dioceses. Bishop Braxton, like many Bishops, has met the Holy Father on previous occasions not only as Pope but also during his many years

as Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Bishops of USCCB regions which have already completed their *ad limina* visits have reported that their time with the Bishop of Rome has been very rewarding. As Successor of St. Peter and Vicar of Christ, Benedict XVI has supported the Bishops in their ministry and “strengthened his brothers” in their faith in a very personal and pastorally sensitive way.

Speaking about his upcoming *ad limina*, Bishop Braxton said, “I am looking forward to these days with my brothers in the episcopate near the tombs of the martyrs, St. Peter and St. Paul, whose blood sanctified the Church in Rome. I will inform the Holy Father that this is the year of our 125th anniversary as a Diocese and assure him of the prayers and loyalty of the priests, deacons, religious, and laity in the Diocese of Belleville. I will also ask him to remember all of us in his prayers. I ask everyone in the Diocese to pray for me and the Bishops of Region VII during our assembly ‘around Peter’s Chair.’”