

# Bishop apologizes for purchase problems

BELLEVILLE, Ill. – The bishop of Belleville, under pressure from his diocesan finance council over some expenditures, issued an apology Jan. 22 and said the costs being questioned would be covered by an anonymous donor.

The statement by Bishop Edward K. Braxton briefly explained his reasoning for using certain funds to buy furniture for the pastoral center and vestments for the cathedral and apologized for anything he did to contribute to “the confusion, mistrust, misunderstanding, loss of confidence and even anger caused by these developments.”

The finance council had questioned the purchases in a letter copied to the Vatican nuncio in the United States, Archbishop Pietro Sambi. Several priests who are members of the finance council or the priests’ council have been openly critical of how Bishop Braxton handled the purchases and the disagreement has been widely covered by area news media.

At issue were the bishop’s purchase last year of a conference table and chairs for a meeting room at the chancery at a cost of \$10,100, and five sets of vestments bought for the Cathedral of St. Peter at a cost of about \$8,000.

Bishop Braxton’s statement explained that he believed using the funds he tapped for those purchases fell within his discretion as bishop.

“When I decided that the new table and chairs for the chancery office conference room and the vestments and altar linens for the Cathedral of St. Peter should be paid for out of a special fund for diocesan buildings from the Future Full of Hope campaign and a bequest for the Propagation of the Faith, it was my judgment that these were funds over which I had some discretionary power,” he wrote.

“At the time of this decision I stated, in writing, that if it was determined that my judgment was incorrect in this matter, I would replenish both funds with revenues obtained from an outside benefactor,” he said in the statement. “After several weeks

of discussion, the chief financial officer and the diocesan finance council have not agreed with my judgment.”

The Future Full of Hope campaign is a diocesan fundraising effort for programs for children and adults.

Critics had particularly singled out the vestments’ purchase, saying the funds were intended for the collection for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, a pontifical missionary society under the direction of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It raises money through an annual missions collection.

Under the Vatican’s rules, all funds collected for the mission appeal, minus overhead expenses, are to be forwarded to the society’s national office in New York.

In the statement, Bishop Braxton said in light of the ongoing disagreement he had “secured a gift from a benefactor that will replenish both funds completely.”

He added that while the gift resolves the immediate issue of how funds were used “it does not resolve the larger question of the confusion, mistrust, misunderstanding, loss of confidence and even anger caused by these developments. I regret this very much, and I apologize for anything I may have done, even unwittingly, to contribute to this situation.

“A serious effort on my part and on the part of those charged by the church to assist me in the stewardship of our finances will be required to move forward,” he continued.

“After discussing this matter with the finance council yesterday, I assured them of my desire to work closer with them to ensure that such a problem does not occur again. In order to be sure we move from words to deeds, we will discuss specific steps to be taken during our February meeting,” he said.

Monsignor John Kozar, director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the United States, told Catholic News Service the national office has no formal system of auditing collections in the dioceses, although they are required to send in financial reports.

“We trust in the integrity of the individual dioceses,” he said.

Monsignor Kozar said collections for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the Diocese of Belleville have averaged about \$50,000 in recent years.