

Illinois bishop, diocesan finance council tangle

WASHINGTON - The bishop of Belleville, Ill., whose finance council went to the Vatican with concerns about the source of money he used to purchase some vestments, has said he will ensure that the expenditures are covered from unrestricted funds.

The finance council of the Diocese of Belleville in December asked the Vatican to look into how Bishop Edward K. Braxton used money the council members say was collected for an overseas mission fund.

In a Jan. 17 statement sent to Catholic News Service, Bishop Braxton said he would meet with the finance council within a few days.

“I am scheduled to meet with the finance council in the coming days to examine the question of restricted and unrestricted funds of the diocese,” he said in the statement. “It is my intention that these expenditures are paid from funds that have no restrictions on them.”

Bishop Braxton told CNS that after that meeting a fuller explanation of the situation would be made available.

The statement said he regrets the “controversy caused by the media discussion” of a letter from the finance council that took issue with his purchase of items for the church. The statement did not elaborate further.

Bishop Braxton confirmed to CNS in a phone call Jan. 15 that a letter to him from the finance council questioning the purchase of vestments for the cathedral had

been forwarded to the Vatican's nuncio in the United States, Archbishop Pietro Sambi.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch newspaper said the complaint arose over about \$8,000 worth of vestments for St. Peter's Cathedral that the bishop bought with funds the finance council said were collected 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.

Archbishop Sambi did not reply to questions faxed to his office.

Monsignor John Kozar, director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in the United States, told CNS 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.