



NDICE NEWS

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Notes from the president.



Greetings and salutations from the current president. The excitement is beginning to build

over the prospect of having NDICE in 2022!!! We are working to get all the speakers for our conference which has the same theme as we would have done in 2019. Really looking forward to meeting everyone again. It has been hard not being able to be with fellow NDICER's. We are trying to line up several of the same speakers and have a similar schedule we would have had. This pandemic has had a huge impact on not just us but the whole wide world. I think our faith, trust and love of God has been really put to the test. But our faith is very strong and we will persevere in all three. More to come on speakers and schedule. Looking forward to July 2022.

Max Roadruck

One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: Ecumenism

By Thomas Wong



Every family gathering, I look forward to catching up with my relatives over good food, interesting stories, and lively table talk. Inevitably in my family, the conversation transitions to religion. It's a heated discussion given that my immediate family is Catholic, whereas the rest (on my mother's side) is Coptic Orthodox. From then on, our respective faith traditions are more or less pitted against each other as theological matters are analyzed and debated. Of course recognizing that at the core we are Christians united to our Lord through our baptism, we continue to respect each other's beliefs (cf. [Galatians 3:27](#)). We still pray and hope for unification, too, though there are disagreements among us as to how this might occur. In any case, these opportunities to

evangelize are enjoyable, as each of us advocates for the faith that has shaped our lives and beings.

"The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council." This first sentence of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism is still surprising to many Catholics. It set the stage for the last fifty years of Catholic dialogue and conversation with our Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican brothers and sisters in the Faith. The Decree gives "Catholic Principles on Ecumenism." Even Jesus, at the Last Supper, prayed for unity, that His disciples be one (see [John 17:21](#)). Ultimately, Christian unity is God's will and the work of the Holy Spirit rather than solely our

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Belleville Bishop Edward K. Braxton opens up about the 'racial divide' in the Roman Catholic Church

Written By Jesse Bogan • Jul 4, 2021 • Reporter from the  ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

BELLEVILLE — The Most Rev. Edward K. Braxton, one of the few African American bishops in the Roman Catholic Church, rarely talks to the press. He says he doesn't live in a "yes or no" world, and instead makes statements in pastoral letters and other writings.

"My thinking is more nuanced than something you put on the 5 o'clock news," said Braxton, 77. "I write as I speak. I have a moving viewpoint from many experiences."

His parents, Baptists from Mississippi, migrated to the south side of Chicago in 1941. Catholic schools motivated their conversion. Braxton said he went on to be the only African American in his graduating class at a high school preparatory seminary. There, he chose Aristotle over basketball.

Ordained a priest in 1970, he became a post-graduate student in Belgium, earning doctoral degrees in theology and religious studies. He taught at Harvard, the University of Notre Dame and other places but ultimately realized he wouldn't be happy as a priest "exclusively focused on the life of the mind."

His formal demeanor followed him to his role as a pastor and bishop. To some, he seems distant, most at ease surrounded by books and art. His ringtone is set to the Lord's Prayer sung in Latin. Last summer, after 15 years at the helm, he became bishop emeritus of the Belleville Diocese. He'd formerly served as a bishop in Louisiana and auxiliary bishop in St. Louis.

He recently agreed to visit at length with the Post-Dispatch. The topic was his new book, "The Church and the Racial Divide," which details some of the things he's been thinking about all these years. He wrote that clergy sex abuse has been the greatest crisis in

the history of the Catholic Church in the United States since he was ordained, followed by the "reticence to speak up in the public square about systemic racial bias in society and in the practices of the church."

He makes the latter argument across 208 pages dedicated to African American Catholics, "who, remarkably, have remained steadfast in their commitment to the Catholic Church, even though the racial divide continues to manifest itself within the church in many ways to this day."

Q: Why did you name your book, "The Church and the Racial Divide" instead of "The Church and Racism"?

A: The racial divide is much more complex and widespread. The racial divide embraces the vague biases and negative feelings that many people have toward people of other races that are not hatred, that would not lead to violence or harming people. All people, unconsciously live with bias — religious, racial, sexual, social — but it would never be acted out in attacks on individuals or groups. Racism, to me, is overt. The overt psychological and mental attitude of "I hate those people. I wish them harm." I have much more to say about this.

Q: What was it about the Michael Brown shooting that motivated you to write this book?

A: It simply provided an occasion for me to organize things that I've been thinking for many years. It wasn't the first time I heard of a bad, painful story about an altercation between an African American man and a police officer that resulted in the death of a young person. I've heard many of those. My experience goes back to

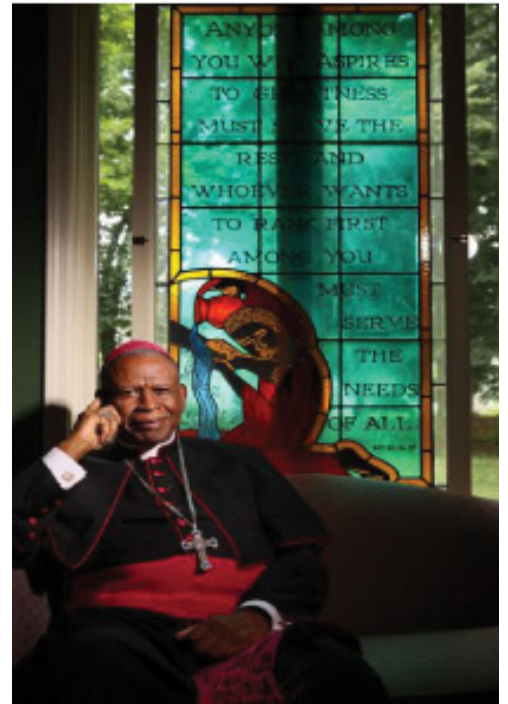


Photo by Christian Gooden, cgooden@post-dispatch.com

Belleville Bishop Emeritus Edward Braxton poses in the Thomas More room of his home on Thursday, July 1, 2021, beneath a verse from the Book of Matthew in stained glass.

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Emmett Till and beyond, but it became the occasion for me to take the time and organize my thoughts in a way to be of service to the church.

Q: Your book mentioned personal instances of being stopped and questioned for walking and driving through white neighborhoods. Why not say when and where this happened?

A: It's just meant to be an instance to make the reader aware that I know where I speak. I could have written the whole book on personal experiences of unkind things said and done to me and my family. I never would write such a book.

Q: As a boy, when you went to Emmett Till's visitation in Chicago, your uncle warned you to stay away from such hatred. Though St. Clair County wasn't technically part of the South, it had more reported lynchings than any other part of Illinois. How has the racial divide

affected your ability to lead the flock here?

A: I have heard that some people may have said unkind things about me because of the racial divide, but I've never had any direct confrontation with anyone. If anything, some people may have thought we are a rural farming area, we really are not looking for someone who is a professor of theology. I brought missionary priests called [fidei donum](#) priests from Nigeria and Uganda who are still here. There were some instances there where people seemed unwelcoming.

Q: Do you think you were sent here to fix a flaw in the foundation?

A: No.

Q: Regardless, have you moved the needle on race?

A: Yes. At the same time I would say that was not my primary goal. My primary goal was to serve the people of God as a good and faithful priest, and bishop, and to build up the church by helping people to grow in their Catholic

identity and education. A phrase I use almost every time I visited a parish was the phrase: "Learn your faith, love your faith, live your faith." And within that context, part of learning your faith is learning about the dignity and value of every human person, which within that addresses racial prejudice, racism, the dignity, the value of unborn life, the value of the life of a person on death row. If you are doing that, you will see that your faith impels you not to support bias and prejudice or racism.

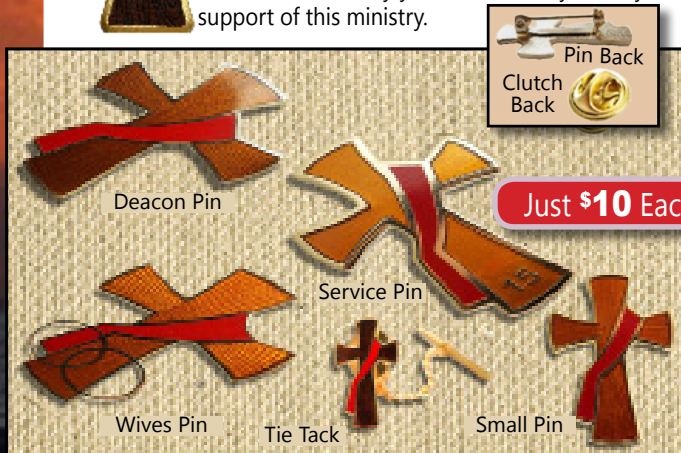
Q: Yet your book is dedicated to the late Congressman John Lewis and African American Catholics, "who, remarkably, have remained steadfast in their commitment to the Catholic Church, even though the racial divide continues to manifest itself within the church in many ways to this day." What are a few examples of that?

A: You are trying to get me to wallow in the mud which is something I don't care to do.



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Q: A main point in your book is to not be silent.

A: I haven't been silent. Everything I have to say is in that book.

Q: Your father was refused entry to the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic fraternal organization. Instead, he was referred to the Knights of Peter Claver, named after the patron saint of slaves. Do rejections like that still happen in southern Illinois?

A: The human condition being what it is, certainly possible. Nothing that was ever reported to me. But don't forget for a person of color to be refused entry to the Knights of Columbus, there has to be a person of color that's there. The parishes of this diocese are racially very monochromatic for the most part.

Q: Why aren't there more African American Catholics? They got you ...

A: More my parents, you might say. I became a Catholic as a very young child. The schools attracted my mother. The world has turned now.

Q: Has being Catholic limited the activism that you could do on the issue of race?

A: I discussed this with Jesse Jackson years ago. My temperament is somewhat introspective and highly refined or highly nuanced. It holds in tension many complex ideas. I read a lot, and I've traveled the world a lot. So I can't so easily say, "This is it. You guys are all white racists, and that's the end of the story." I can't do that because I don't believe that.

Q: What church practices still reinforce bias?

A: The fact that people have very little contact with people of very different racial backgrounds can reinforce existing biases. We have wonderful Catholic schools in the diocese. We have wonderful teachers, and the history texts that we use are good and better than they were in the past, but they don't cover in a clear and full way the magnitude of the racial divide. It's very hard for the Catholic

Church not to appear Eurocentric.

Q: You write about sacred art not being reflective of diverse society.

A: If you want to invite people of color into the world of the church, couldn't some part of it look like them? Yet I am not advocating that you go into churches built by German immigrants and take black paint and spray it all over the saints and angels. I am not proposing anything as simple as that. But there is a reason I chose the cover of my book myself. I wanted to show an Afrocentric Jesus washing the feet of an Afrocentric Peter.

Q: Did you curate more inclusive art in the diocese?

A: I did in the sense that every time we had printed programs, I put more diverse art. Pastorally, I am very sensitive to people where they are.

Q: It seems like low hanging fruit for the Catholic Church to make a meaningful change.

A: People have written about it and talked about it for decades now and it hasn't happened. I think there is a sensitivity towards not wanting to seem accusatory of the people who are actually in church on Sunday. We are still building churches around the country to this day in all neighborhoods and all the angels, all the stained glass windows are people who look like Europeans.

Q: Didn't you have something to do with the sculpture outside the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis that has a diverse group of children playing around the base of a tall, African American "Angel of Harmony"?

A: Sculptor Wiktor Szostalo designed and created it. I made suggestions, including using the image of my brother Lawrence, who had recently died of cancer, as the face of the angel. The archbishop at that time was Justin Rigali. He was supportive. We got Mrs. (Adelaide) Schlafly to fund that in honor of her husband.

Q: Safe to say that was something you've done to try to make the

Catholic Church more welcoming to people of color?

A: Well, yes and no, because not many people go to the basilica. But I tried, by using art, to help people to see an image different than all the angels inside the basilica. There are all kinds of angels inside the basilica. Beautiful angels in the splendid mosaics that are there.**Q: One takeaway from your book is there is a need to do more instead of make more statements.**

A: That's true of most things. The Catholic Church is very good at issuing statements because that is something we can do. It's easier to write a book about the racial divide than it actually is to overcome it. It's by encounter that bridges are built.

Q: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recently made news for its debate to deny President Joe Biden communion for his stance on abortion.

A: Which isn't going to happen. What the bishops really were discussing was a pastoral letter on the importance of the Eucharist. Some have suggested there be a chapter on receiving communion worthily — if you are sinful you shouldn't receive communion without going to confession. In that context, some would like to discuss the idea of should there be a ban on giving communion to people who support abortion, including the president. The idea of a universal ban doesn't exist. And it's not going to be created.

Q: Do you think he should be denied communion?

A: I think that President Biden should be reminded that he is a Catholic and asked why is he so vigorously supporting a policy that is directly contrary to the clear teaching that developing human life in the womb should be protected. This is a matter he should discuss with his spiritual director. But he's not under my jurisdiction. I am very aware that it is very difficult for a person with strong religious conviction to be elected to public office, since

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neither political party in the United States have platforms consistent with all the major teachings of the church.

I understand why bishops have different opinions on this. It would be unwise to single out one high-profile Catholic. The church would need to be consistent and bar all Catholics who do not abide by the church's teachings on other important issues such as, same-sex relationships, euthanasia, divorce and remarriage, and racial prejudice. Pope Francis has recently reminded us that while the Eucharist is the bread of life for saints, it also the bread of life for sinners.

Q: Would you give the USCCB an "A" for trying to protect the unborn?

A: Pro-life is one of the central themes of the Catholic bishops. Sure, why not?

Q: What grade would you give them on bridging the racial divide?

A: They know that they are doing

more in favor to deal with the complex moral issue of abortion than they are with the racial divide, though the most recent pastoral statements have been very strong and very good. It would be very difficult for the bishops to say all Catholics who are white supremacists in their thinking shouldn't go to communion because it's not a legal statement like Roe v. Wade.

Q: You designate a chapter of your book to the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., and suggest that bishops spend some time there, perhaps when they are in town for a nearby USCCB meeting.

A: I don't want you to paint the bishops in one stroke. All the bishops are different kinds of people and they are all in different kinds of dioceses. Different ones are doing more on the racial divide than others. Just like different ones are doing more on abortion.**Q: What are a few things**

that regular people can do to bridge the racial divide?

A: One of the things that I think is so hard for people to do is to seek accurate information. To read more. If you give a talk and you say in passing, "Of course this has been the case ever since the Jim Crow laws, or this has been the case ever since the Dred Scott decision," and you have people afterwards who say, "Bishop, who is Jim Crow? Who is Dred Scott? What was the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean? How could it be that Roger Taney, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, who wrote the Dred Scott decision, was really Catholic?" I had people get up and say he wasn't Catholic. And he was. I am sorry. You can't dispute facts.

This interview has been edited for space and clarity.



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own. The Decree nevertheless urges all Catholics to participate in the noble work of Christian unity (#4). This work— our conversation, dialogue, and service with others— calls for complete honesty. We must represent the position of others with truth and fairness and never be dismissive or ignorant of the other traditions. By not pointing fingers and recognizing that any blame for schisms in the Church is shared by all, a heartfelt and meaningful dialogue can be achieved.

Ecumenical dialogue, rather than making us less Catholic, makes us more so. By searching within our own faith, we are made aware of the commonalities that we share with our fellow Christians. As for the divergences that we also discover in doing so, it is the Holy Spirit who will

help us to overcome them; ecumenical conversation leads us back to prayer: "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism'" (#8). To engage others, then, a spirit of humility, honesty, patience, and gentleness is needed. After all, the Church is stronger when its members are open to and inclusive of all traditions. How can the Church, being commissioned to spread the Truth to all, fully honor her call if she does not communicate well with fellow Christians (see [Matthew 28:19-20](#), cf. [1 Corinthians 10-15](#))? Though we may not agree on every theological point, Christians of all traditions continue to work towards the unification and the strengthening of Christ's body (see [1 Corinthians](#)

[12:12-27](#)). We worship the same Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sacrificed Himself for all without distinction. We answer the same call to evangelize and offer ourselves in loving service to all. The holy sacrifice of the Mass offered and the reception of the sacraments by Christians each day are the same gifts and sources of grace from God. And the ultimate witness of martyrs for their belief in Christ across the world and time further lead us on the road to unity. The Church continues to face uncertain times, just as she always has; Christ, likewise, remains steadfast in His promise to stand by her (see [Matthew 16:18](#), [John 16:33](#)).

Thomas Wong an undergraduate at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily by Deacon Ed Posvar – July 4, 2021

On this Independence Day Weekend, I am struck by the words of St Paul in today's 2nd Reading - urging us on in perseverance in the face of hardship and persecution, and how applicable that is today - to the challenges we face to our liberty and American values.

Unfortunately, today we can see many disparate groups of people in our country - Socialists, Marxists, and Communists embracing ideology that replaces God with the State; they have a radically different view from what our Founding Fathers envisioned. This is not a Democrat issue or a Republican issue, but an American issue — critically important in the survival of our democratic Republic.

So what did the Founders envision, and explicitly state in the Declaration of Independence — they said, *"we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights (that means they can't be taken away), and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."*

They felt so strongly in these values and in their faith in God, that they closed the final paragraph of the Declaration of Independence With these words - *"We therefore, the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions.... and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence do mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."* (so they knew it could cost them everything)

My brothers and sisters, Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness are divinely given to us by God and we are now their guardians. We can no



longer sit in our homes and churches and shake our heads at the direction our country is headed. In opposition to our founding American values, those who embrace radical ideologies - are now coming after us and our liberties. The time has come for us to become Christian-American activists, before it's too late. This will take fortitude, but that's one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we all received in the sacrament of Confirmation.

As Thomas Jefferson so eloquently stated after we achieved independence from England, *"How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy!"* One of our greatest presidents precisely stated the consequences and action needed, in these words - *"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them - so they can do the same."*

So what does our faith teach us about the three great values in the Declaration of Independence — [1] LIFE. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition. In our society today, human life is especially under direct attack from the abortion industry. It's so obvious, if you have no life then liberty and happiness are irrelevant.

Other direct threats to the sanctity of human life include euthanasia, assisted suicide, human cloning, in vitro fertilization, the destruction of human embryos in the name of research, human trafficking, and pockets of racism — just to name a few more examples.

[2] LIBERTY. There are those in the public square today who are trying to tell us that the intention of

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our Founding Fathers was to give us "freedom FROM religion", but there sure is gigantic difference between "freedom of religion" (which we rightly possess), and "freedom FROM religion" (which contradicts our founding values). These nefarious actors are well funded and skilled at direct attacks, covert manipulation of public opinion, and through the dissemination and application of counterfeit notions of human freedom. At the basis of the ideologue's strategy, is the insistence on the detachment of human Rights from the moral law.

The crisis in American liberty is a moral crisis. As Christians we are called to denounce and oppose those elements which run contrary to the Gospel. Regardless of the strength, duration and outcome of the storm in which we are immersed, as Christians, as men and women informed by the light of faith, we cannot lose hope. St Paul was crystal clear in the battle against darkness — "If God is for us, who can be against us."

[3] THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. With those words we are reminded of the spiritual purpose - for which we are created and the end toward which we are directed.

Correspondence between James Madison and James Monroe in 1786, notes that "happiness" cannot simply be identified with meeting people's freedom to pursue goals that makes them happy, but it includes a higher reference.

So besides occupying one's life with the activities that provide for overall Wellbeing, it goes beyond that - to include humanity's spiritual and moral condition, and our government - has been tasked to protect it. It assumes an objective moral order from which a person may not alienate himself.

As Catholics we must be at the forefront today in advocating and fighting for these three indispensable pillars of our nation's foundation:

Whether it's involves our City Councils, the local School Boards, our County government, our State Legislature, the US Congress, or even the Executive branch - we can no longer remain disgruntled observers. You know all the issues. They are in our face every day - on television, in the newspapers, and on social media. We must stand up for the values that our country was based on and our faith. We must stand up for the freedom not only to worship, but also to live our faith - Without government coercion to violate the sacred sanctuary of our conscience. Religious freedom is not only that of private thought or worship. It's the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles of our faith.

Sadly, in today's cultural climate, speaking and defending the truth can result in being cancelled and even receiving unjust and false charges of bigotry. We can expect claims of discrimination for upholding what for millennia has been considered self-evident truths. Jesus teaches us — "to render to Caesar What belongs to Caesar and to God What belongs to God". In the contemporary debate and struggle, we seek to have the freedom to do just that (Without undue influence from government).

This is part of our human dignity - not only to be free to worship God, but free to serve Him and others - through our schools, colleges, hospitals, charities, organizations, and other institutions and to do so without compromising our faith and moral convictions. It's one thing if some detractors disagree with the teachings of the Catholic Church on various issues, but it is quite another matter to deny us the right to live our faith and to conduct our lives, our ministries, and our good Works in accord with the Church's teachings.

May God Who gave us - Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness — now bless us with renewed determination to protect these cherished gifts - that we so proudly celebrate this

weekend. May God - continue to Bless these United States of America.

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