

**Diocese of Belleville**

**The Bishop’s Residence**

July 16, 2020

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Dear Parishioners of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish and Holy Spirit Parish:

May the peace of Jesus Christ be with you!

I share your deep sorrow over the untimely death of your Pastor, Monsignor Kenneth J. Schaefer. It is difficult to believe that he has died so suddenly. Just weeks ago, he called to tell me how well he was doing. He was getting around better and he had so much energy that he felt certain that he no longer needed the assistance of Father Iuvenis Iheme. Indeed, he insisted that I send him to parishes that were in more urgent need of assistance. With some reluctance, I did as he asked.

I was stunned when he called me from the hospital and told me that his illness had suddenly become far worse and life threatening. I called upon the whole Diocese to pray for him and kept informed about his condition through his dear sister, Norma Brune. Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus pandemic, I could not visit him.

Finally, I was allowed to see him last Thursday, the day before he left the hospital to go to his sister’s home. I was privileged to spend an hour visiting with him, his sister, and members of their family. I was able to pray with them for this good and faithful priest. We prayed prayers for his comfort and peace as well as prayers of gratitude for his remarkable ministry in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ and, in a special way, for his twenty-six years of servant leadership at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Spirit Parishes.

When I was with him, I told him that I brought with me the prayers, concerns, and appreciation of all his parishioners as well as the Priests and people of the whole Diocese. I anointed him and gave him absolution. Since he could not swallow the Eucharist, we made a spiritual communion with Christ.

He warmly shared many thoughts about his life and ministry. He told me his father, August, who died at the age of 62, would have been 112 years old the day before my visit. He expressed his profound gratitude for the people of his two parishes for all the ways they helped him throughout the years and especially during his illness. He said that the parishioners went out of their way to make the rectory comfortable for him and to provide meals and transportation to the hospital. He clearly loved you as much as you loved him.

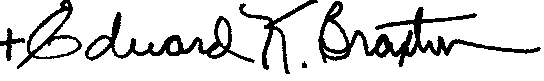
Monsignor Schaefer said he was particularly pleased with how much evangelization has taken place in his parishes and how many new members of the Church he brought to the Cathedral for the Rite of Election each year.

After a period of simple silent being together, Fr. Ken said “I was doing so well, Bishop. I just can’t believe that I have gone downhill so fast!” We then had a truly remarkable conversation about the mystery of human suffering. Before departing, I kissed his hands in which he held the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ as he nourished the People of God. I thanked him from my heart. He seemed at peace. I am truly sorry that I cannot be with you for the Memorial Mass on Saturday. However, I will Preside and give the Final Blessing at the Liturgy of Christian Burial at St. James Parish on Monday.

How blessed you were to have this energetic, dedicated, and faith-filled Pastor for so many years. I know that you will continue to show your love for him by praying for him often and incorporating his virtues of faith, hope, and love in your daily lives. Now cracks a noble heart.

May flights of angels lead him to his rest!

Prayerfully yours in Christ,

  
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton

Apostolic Administrator

Diocese of Belleville

Copies: The Reverend Iuvenis Iheme, Parochial Vicar, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish

Dr. Don Guebert, Trustee at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish

Ms. Marlyn Cairatti Trustee at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish

Mr. Richard Hartke, Trustee at Holy Spirit Parish

Ms. Ruth Bradford, Trustee at Holy Spirit Parish

**P.S. This letter should be distributed at all of the Masses at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Spirit Parishes the weekend of July 18-19, 2020. It should be placed on the website of the parishes. If it is possible and thought appropriate, the letter may also be read at the Masses.**