

March 13, 2016

Your Holiness,

I write this note to let you know that you are very much in my thoughts and prayers, and the thoughts and prayers of the priests, deacons, parish life coordinators, and lay faithful of the Diocese of Belleville, as you prepare to embark on your fourth year as the Supreme Pontiff. Our prayer for you is that the Lord will continue to bless you with the energy and wisdom you need to continue your wonderful service. Your concern and support for the Church in the United States is a great gift to the priests, bishops, and Christian faithful of this country. We very much appreciated your visit to the United States last fall, and the extreme personal warmth and concern you showed in addressing the complex challenges we are facing in today's world.



Every year I ask the students in our Catholic elementary schools to write a personal note to you on the anniversary of your election to the Chair of St. Peter. This year, the best letter was written by Miss Mandy Fields, an eighth-grade student attending St. Theresa of Avila Catholic School in Salem, Illinois. This is an extraordinary letter and I am both pleased and proud to forward it to you. Mandy's letter is an encompassing representation of the sentiments of all the students of the Diocese of Belleville.

Happy anniversary!

Respectfully yours in Christ,

Handwritten signature of Edward K. Braxton in black ink.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville