



Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, speaks in support of traditional marriage during a Nov. 30 press conference at First Apostolic Faith Church International in Baltimore. (CR Staff/George P. Matysek Jr.)

There's no doubt that same-sex marriage is going to be the hot-button issue in Annapolis next year.

Gov. Martin J. O'Malley, a Catholic, has already said he will sponsor legislation to legalize same-sex marriage in Maryland – sparring with Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien over his high-profile attempt to fundamentally alter the definition of marriage.

Gay marriage came close to passing last session, but was ultimately defeated on the last day of the session after the state's interfaith leaders made a push against the controversial measure.

Religious leaders plan to do even more in the coming 90-day legislative session that begins Jan. 11.

During a press conference last week at the First Apostolic Faith Church International in Baltimore, people of many faiths – Catholics, Protestants, Jews and others – came together to announce the formation of the nonpartisan Maryland Marriage Alliance. They promised they will not sit still as the governor tries to push gay marriage through the General Assembly.

Two speakers struck me with a message that combined tough resolve with respect for all people.

Bishop Angel Nuñez of the Bilingual Christian Church in Baltimore called out the governor by name, noting that the governor's "pretty words" will not change the fact that marriage is between one man and one woman. Bishop Nuñez went on to address what he believes true tolerance is about.

"Traditional tolerance respects and accepts the individual without necessarily approving of or participating in his or her beliefs and behavior," he said. "That is

what we have done and will continue to do.”

Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, echoed that point, noting that no one supports discrimination against homosexuals. The current laws of Maryland, she said, “reflect an appropriate balance between preserving the special role of traditional marriage in the creation and upbringing of our future generations of children, and the granting of rights to other committed couples.”

“It is not discrimination to treat fundamentally different things differently,” Russell said.

You can hear the statements of Bishop Nuñez and Russell below.

This is just the beginning of what is going to be a very passionate debate over the next several months. If gay marriage is signed into law, it will surely go to referendum. What’s your opinion?