

‘A real leader for the future’

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When Connecticut lawmakers proposed legislation three years ago that would have given laypeople financial control of Catholic parishes – effectively disconnecting parish leadership from clergy, Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., called on Catholics to voice their opposition.

So many emails were sent to the government that the email system went down in the Connecticut Capitol of Hartford. A religious freedom rally promoted by Bishop Lori attracted thousands of people who turned out even after the bill was withdrawn.

“Bishop Lori instantly knew we had to oppose the bill,” said Nancy Matthews, former chancellor of the Diocese of Bridgeport. “He met with all the priests and called together the principals of the schools. He was able to rally the troops in a way that reflected how much they trusted him.”

Those who know the bishop say the incident shows how passionate he is about the defense of the faith and offers a glimpse of what the Archdiocese of Baltimore can expect from their new archbishop. Archbishop Lori will be installed as the 16th Archbishop of Baltimore May 16 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen.

“By nature, he’s a very peaceful man,” Matthews said, “but, he’s very clear about what the church stands for and the right to religious freedom.”

Anthony Picarello, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ associate general secretary and general counsel, has worked closely with Archbishop Lori on the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, which the new archbishop chairs.

He described Archbishop Lori as hardworking, diligent and witty with a gentle

persona.

"I crack up often," Picarello said. "He'll just say something wry and witty at an appropriate time. At the same time, he's assertive, forceful and clear. Those things are a nice combination."

In a recent meeting with White House officials after the administration's decision to mandate insurance coverage for contraception and sterilization, the archbishop struck a "very pastoral tone ... yet (was) also kind of clear and unmistakable about the church on these issues," Picarello said.

Archbishop Lori also testified before Congress on religious liberty issues, comparing the new contraception and sterilization insurance mandate to a requirement that all businesses serve pork, including kosher delicatessens.

"It is absurd for someone to come into a kosher deli and demand a ham sandwich," he said, suggesting it was equally absurd to require Catholic institutions to provide insurance for services it considers morally unacceptable.

"There's kind of a sense of humor to it," Picarello said. "It's unusual testimony. It's parable, and it's meant to be a little light-hearted, but it also gets the point across."

George Weigel, papal biographer, said it is good that Archbishop Lori comes to Baltimore as a "relatively young man" at 60.

"He'll have the chance to be a real leader for the future," Weigel said. "He'll have the opportunity to energize people, and I mean everyone, to engage in the new evangelization."

Weigel said there are "serious challenges" with public policy in Maryland.

"Some public officials, clearly, were badly catechized," Weigel said.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan has worked closely with Archbishop Lori on religious liberty issues and as a neighboring bishop.

"It's given me a chance to observe first-hand his deep faith, his quiet but strong leadership (and) his ability to build consensus without ever compromising on

fundamental principles,” Cardinal Dolan said.

Maria Wiering, Paul McMullen and Christopher Gunty contributed to this story.