

A well-liked seminarian

Father Robert F. Leavitt, S.S., made an impact on Bishop W. Francis Malooly's ministry when, as a young priest just ordained, he taught the future bishop in a theology course at St. Mary's Seminary, Roland Park, in 1968.

Before that, the priest and the bishop were seminarians together.

"What Francis Malooly is like as a bishop today," said Father Leavitt, who taught at St. Mary's until 1980 and served as president-rector between 1980 and 2007, "is exactly how he was as a seminarian."

Father Leavitt remembers Bishop Malooly as friendly, well-rounded, easy-going, smart, quick to help others and prayerful.

He was "a natural ... a good student," he said, "and an excellent basketball player who had quick reflexes and natural speed. Everyone liked and respected him."

Apart from meals and playing sports, the seminary program that formed both these men did not allow much opportunity for extended conversation.

"Silence and study were a large part of the day," said Father Leavitt. The bishop was also taught in the late 1960s by Father Raymond Brown, one of the leading biblical scholars in the world.

"That has made him especially sensitive to Scripture," said Father Leavitt, "and how best to interpret the Bible."

Bishop Malooly was the only student at St. Mary's then who had an uncle for a bishop - the late Bishop T. Austin Murphy, auxiliary bishop of Baltimore.

"It seemed to us as if he had a certain 'ecclesiastical pedigree' the rest of us didn't," said Father Leavitt. "But neither he nor his uncle made anything of it - quite the contrary. There were no airs about either of them."

The late 1960s was an evolving time for the seminary, the priest said, from a monastic-type routine to a greater emphasis on pastoral formation, personal

responsibility, collaboration with the laity and ecumenical awareness.

Some, like Bishop Malooly, handled the changes well, taking the best of the past after starting their formation in a more traditional setting.

“Some were too caught up in the freedom,” said Father Leavitt, who is currently on sabbatical writing a book on theology and rhetorical theory but will return to St. Mary’s faculty in 2009 as professor of fundamental theology. “They lost sight of fundamentals. Fran Malooly never did.”

The larger pastoral world that opened for the seminarian would prove very important for his later episcopal ministry.

“Since his ordination as a priest and later as a bishop, I’ve admired Bishop Malooly’s pastoral energy,” said Father Leavitt, “an ability to balance a strong work ethic with time for an extraordinary array of lay friends and acquaintances, his responsiveness and attention to administrative detail without any fuss, great judgment, grace and good humor under pressure, and real care for his brother priests.

“There’s a wholesome and effortless quality to him as a human being and as a bishop.”