

# Baltimore and Wilmington, forever linked

When Monsignor John O. Barres heard that Bishop W. Francis Malooly was going to be named the ordinary of the Diocese of Wilmington, Del., he looked for a cross he owned.

It had belonged to Bishop Thomas Joseph Mardaga, who in 1968 went from the Archdiocese of Baltimore to the leadership role in Wilmington. On Sept. 8, Bishop Malooly will become the fourth bishop from the archdiocese to follow that path, so the late Bishop Mardaga's cross has a new owner.

"I took that cross and gave it to him," said Monsignor Barres, the vicar for priests in Wilmington. "I thought it was a wonderful symbol of the relationship between Baltimore and Wilmington."

Bishop Malooly is following in the footsteps of Wilmington's second ordinary, Bishop Alfred Allen Curtis, whose 10-year tenure from 1886-96 including bringing the Josephites to minister to the African-American community, and its fifth and sixth bishops.

Bishop Michael William Hyle (1960-67) established The Dialog diocesan newspaper and attended all sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Bishop Mardaga (1968-84) continued his predecessor's ecumenical work and established a Ministry for Migrant Workers.

Geographically, the two Catholic dioceses share Maryland with the Archdiocese of Washington. The Diocese of Wilmington, rare in that it crosses a state line, encompasses Delaware and Maryland's nine Eastern Shore counties: Cecil, Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester.

"Even though Wilmington is closer to Philadelphia, there's a closer bond to Baltimore," said Father John Hopkins, pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland in Glasgow, Del. "For the people in the nine counties on the Eastern Shore, it's probably easier to just go to Baltimore for Camden Yards."

The Diocese of Wilmington has no seminary, so many of its prospective priests, like Father Hopkins, pursue their vocation in Baltimore. Father Hopkins resided in Charm City from 1970 to 1977, attending minor seminary at St. Charles College in Catonsville for two years, then St. Mary's Seminary and University.

"It's probably the primary place where most of our priests are educated," Father Hopkins said.

Local church historian Father Michael Roach, a professor at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, said Wilmington as a diocese aligns spiritually with Baltimore, but is pulled north culturally.

"From a secular standpoint, it aligns with Philadelphia," he added of the city of Wilmington. "There's always a sort of tension between Philadelphia and Baltimore over who is going to have the next Wilmington bishop."

Philadelphia produced one bishop for Wilmington - Edmond John FitzMaurice. None of the nine Wilmington bishops have been from the diocese.

Monsignor Barres, Father Roach and Father Hopkins all agree that Bishop Malooly's proximity in the past decades should make the transition smooth.

"A lot of Baltimoreans have moved to the Eastern Shore," Father Roach said, "so he will not be a stranger when he goes to Ocean City."