

Bishop helped plan pope's Baltimore visit

When he was a seminarian, Bishop W. Francis Malooly spent years studying theology.

In the mid 1990s, he also received crash courses in logistics, political science and security.

Then Monsignor Malooly was the chancellor and vicar general of the Archdiocese of Baltimore during perhaps the most important day in its 200-year history, the visit of Pope John Paul II on Oct. 8, 1995.

His final day in the United States was a whirlwind tour of Baltimore, with a Mass for 50,000 at Oriole Park at Camden Yards and a prayer service for a more intimate gathering at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, among the stops sandwiched between a welcome and a farewell at Baltimore Washington International Airport.

Delayed a year after the Holy Father was injured in a fall, the papal visit required cooperation from entities ranging from the federal government to the Baltimore City police to the Orioles, who didn't come close to making the American League playoffs.

In Wilmington, Del., Bishop Malooly will succeed Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, who in 1995 was his counterpart in the Diocese of Newark, N.J., where a papal Mass at Giants Stadium drew 95,000.

"Preparing for the papal visit, we met once a month, and they were intense meetings," Bishop Saltarelli said. "You're coordinating with the Secret Service, FBI, delegates from the Vatican. Bishop Malooly was zealous about making sure that everything was done right. Baltimore gave the Holy Father a marvelous reception."

Cardinal William H. Keeler, then the head of the archdiocese, entrusted duties to his secretary, Father Michael White, and Bishop Malooly.

“In the same day,” Father White said, “the Holy Father was welcomed at the airport, said Mass at Oriole Park, had a parade on Pratt Street, lunch at Our Daily Bread, a walk through the basilica, a prayer service at the cathedral, a brief visit to St. Mary’s Seminary and a farewell at the airport.

“Vice President (Al) Gore attended the closing ceremony at the airport. The U.S. government bidding farewell to a head of state is a major event in itself. You don’t exhale until the jet takes off.”

While crowd estimates for the parade ranged from 300,000 to 500,000, a handful witnessed the Holy Father inside the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Even seemingly mundane matters, like seating arrangements, became major considerations.

“It was very important that we assigned the seats at the cathedral. I worked closely with Bishop Malooly on that,” Cardinal Keeler said. “A couple of people thought they weren’t situated properly and promoted themselves. That’s life.”