

Bishop Malooly says sanctity of human life ‘crucial’ to just society

WILMINGTON, Del. – The new bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington said he intends “to build a supportive and trusting friendship” with U.S. Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware and other public officials to help them and all citizens “understand how crucial the sanctity of human life is to a just society.”

Bishop W. Francis Malooly made the comments in a statement Sept. 10 after leaders of the U.S. bishops’ conference had issued their own statement in response to Biden’s comments Sept. 7 on “Meet the Press” regarding church teaching on abortion.

Addressing the people of his diocese, the bishop said the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ statement explained “the truth of the matter in a clear and concise way. As your bishop, I want you to understand our church teaching, embrace it and promote it.”

The bishop, the former urban vicar of the Archdiocese of Baltimore who was installed Sept. 8 as the ninth bishop of Wilmington, then included the statement from Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, head of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life committee, and Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., head of the doctrine committee, before concluding: “It is my intention to build a supportive and trusting friendship with Sen. Biden and as many public officials as I can.

“I will do my best, with your prayers, to assist him and all public officials as well as all citizens of our diocese and beyond to understand how crucial the sanctity of human life is to a just society in the state of Delaware, the Eastern Shore of Maryland and our entire nation,” he said.

Bishop Malooly’s diocese covers Delaware and nine Maryland counties.

Sen. Biden’s views on abortion and church leaders’ responses to them have gained greater attention since his selection Aug. 23 as Democratic Sen. Barack Obama’s vice-presidential running mate.

A Catholic who graduated from the Norbertine-operated Archmere Academy in Claymont and who attends St. Joseph on the Brandywine Church near Wilmington, Sen. Biden said on “Meet the Press” that he accepted Catholic teaching that life begins at conception but did not believe that he could impose his beliefs on others.

Calling the matter a “personal and private issue,” Sen. Biden said, “I’m prepared as a matter of faith to accept that life begins at the moment of conception. But that is my judgment. For me to impose that judgment on everyone else who is equally and maybe even more devout than I am seems to me is inappropriate in a pluralistic society.”

Cardinal Rigali and Bishop Lori issued a critique of Sen. Biden’s comments, saying that “the obligation to protect unborn human life rests on the answer to two questions, neither of which is private or specifically religious.”

Bishop Malooly’s statement follows earlier remarks he made in The Dialog, Wilmington’s diocesan paper, describing the approach he intends to take on the issue of Catholic public figures like Sen. Biden who support keeping abortion legal.

“I look forward to the opportunity to enter into a dialogue on a number of issues with Sen. Biden and other Catholic leaders in the Diocese of Wilmington,” the bishop said then.

“However, I do not intend to get drawn into partisan politics nor do I intend to politicize the Eucharist as a way of communicating Catholic Church teaching,” he continued. “It is critical to keep the lines of communication open if the church is going to make her teachings understood and, please God, accepted.

“It is my belief that Catholics of all occupations have the same duty to examine their own consciences before determining their worthiness for the reception of Communion,” he said.

He added that he thinks he will “get a lot more mileage out of a conversation trying to change the mind and heart than I would out of a public confrontation.”

“That might not make some people happy who feel there ought to be a confrontation but I have to follow my own conscience and try to do what I can for the long term,”

Bishop Malooly said.