

From auxiliary to head bishop

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Cardinal William H. Keeler and Archbishop William D. Borders have all relied on the counsel of Bishop W. Francis Malooly over the last three decades.

The western vicar had made a career out of counseling, but that's about to change.

When Bishop Malooly takes over as the ordinary bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington, Del., Sept. 8, he will have more decision-making responsibility than he has had to date.

"Now he will be in charge, and he will have to assign others to help him. It's very different going from No. 2 to No. 1," said Monsignor Steven P. Rohlfs, vice president/rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg.

The first few months should be an adjustment for Bishop Malooly, as he takes over as ordinary. Wilmington Diocese's executive, legislative and judicial powers are now his, Monsignor Rohlfs added. If a contract is going to be signed in the diocese, it will take Bishop Malooly's signature. If a tribunal needs to reach a decision, he's the one with the power to make it should he choose to step in during the case.

The Mount St. Mary's campus is in the western vicariate, where Bishop Malooly has become a familiar figure over the years. In his limited interaction with Bishop Malooly, Monsignor Rohlfs said the vicar came across as "a very fine listener, quite diplomatic and he always puts you at ease. He's very low key."

While Bishop Malooly learns in his new role, his role as an advisor will still be of use. Wilmington is a suffragan see of the Baltimore Province, along with the dioceses of Richmond, Va.; Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va.; and Arlington, Va.

The Roman Catholic Church is divided into provinces, which are metropolitan groupings of local dioceses.

“A suffragan see is to a province as a parish is to the diocese,” explained Monsignor Rohlf.

As the leader of the province, Archbishop O’Brien routinely calls meetings of the various suffragan sees and manages the agenda. After the meeting of suffragan sees, Archbishop O’Brien acts as the spokesman to Rome in addressing issues.