

# Reaching out through humor

When Fran and Paul Ibello met a seminarian named W. Francis “Fran” Malooly at St. Joseph, they didn’t know their budding friendship would touch generations of their family – with good-hearted jokes and laughs in the mix.

Bishop Malooly was then a young man spending a year at the Cockeysville parish before his 1970 ordination. As he prepares to take on a new role as bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington, Del., Mrs. Ibello believes the “wonderful sense of humor” she has witnessed in Bishop Malooly throughout nearly 40 years of friendship will help him.

“No matter what you say to him, he gets it and he runs with it. He can take a joke better than anybody I know,” said Mrs. Ibello.

Her four children were married by the bishop, who also baptized Mrs. Ibello’s 10 grandchildren and confirmed two.

Over the years, the bishop has made the family laugh with lines about the excellence of Mr. Ibello’s homemade Italian biscotti and the availability of Mrs. Ibello’s youngest daughter for family events.

However, the bishop’s sense of humor is about more than a few laughs, as it serves as a way to connect with people.

“I think that’s why people were so attracted to him,” Mrs. Ibello said of Bishop Malooly’s sense of humor. “He never, ever placed himself up on a pedestal, even as a bishop.”

Bishop William C. Newman, who described Bishop Malooly’s Irish wit as quick, sharp and refreshing, believes it has aided his ministry.

“We’re taught in the seminary, in our homiletics, to render the audience benevolent,” said the retired eastern vicar, explaining that humor is one way to engage and relax parishioners. “Bishop Malooly is a master at that.”

Bishop Malooly connects with people of all ages and backgrounds, according to

Monsignor Jeremiah F. Kenney, head of archdiocesan tribunals, judicial vicar and delegate of the archbishop for canonical affairs.

When Monsignor Kenney's secretary was leaving a few years ago, the monsignor recalled, Bishop Malooly thought she should be recognized for "putting up" with the monsignor, so the bishop presented her with a medal of honor.

Although Bishop Malooly understands his responsibilities as a bishop, Monsignor Kenney said, he makes an effort to reach out to people, particularly young people and parishes in the western vicariate.

"He's really there for people. He's there because he loves people," said Monsignor Kenney, who has known Bishop Malooly for more than 30 years. "He tries very much to affirm people where they are and confirm them in their faith."

Bishop Malooly has also tried to see the bright side of things even in difficult times, according to Monsignor Kenney.

"He really shepherded us through the very tough days of the sexual abuse crisis," said Monsignor Kenney, who believes Bishop Malooly's strong prayer life and sense of humor sustain him.

"I think the people of Wilmington will really enjoy his ministry."