

The bishop they were hoping for

When Bishop W. Francis Malooly was named the ordinary of the Diocese of Wilmington, Del., in July, Father John Hopkins was elated.

“It’s rare when you’re awaiting an appointment, that you get the bishop you were hoping for,” said the pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland in Glasgow, Del. “The reality is Bishop Malooly is probably here until his retirement, which is a real blessing.”

Bishop Malooly will replace Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, 75, who announced his resignation in January. The appointment answers the speculation over the last decade, that Bishop Malooly would be assigned his own diocese and that the logical destination would be Wilmington.

In addition to geographic proximity, one of the reasons Bishop Malooly appeared to be a natural successor to Bishop Saltarelli was a similar approach in management style.

“The key for us has always been in his presence and that he has been very collaborative,” Father Hopkins said of Bishop Saltarelli. “We’ve always had guys who are approachable.”

Clergy in Wilmington say Bishop Malooly’s reputation throughout Maryland and Delaware has been “low key,” which fits the diocese’s image.

“For me, I find him to be 100 percent priest,” said Monsignor John O. Barres, Wilmington’s vicar for priests. “It really shows that he loves the priesthood. He is very caring and concerned and tries to be an instrument to help stir the flames of evangelization.”

Under Bishop Saltarelli’s leadership, Wilmington has grown gradually.

Father Hopkins’ church was built during Bishop Saltarelli’s time, and three new schools have opened or are being readied. The diocese is growing in other ways, with an influx of Hispanic worshipers seeking job opportunities, particularly on Maryland’s Eastern Shore.

Much like Baltimore, the Diocese of Wilmington presents the challenge of balancing both large urban and suburban communities.

“Perhaps it’s not as multi-ethnic or as multi-racial as Baltimore, but it probably has a larger Hispanic population,” said Father Michael Roach, an Archdiocese of Baltimore historian and professor at Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg.

“Everyone is in good spirits,” Father Hopkins said. “The guys really like each other. The reaction to his appointment is that people are very, very happy to get him.”