

Bishop calls for defending marriage

Written by Beth Miller *The News Journal*

Feb. 02

delawareonline.com

In a pastoral letter published Friday, Bishop W. Francis Malooly urged the more than 233,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Wilmington to defend traditional marriage, support married couples and – when necessary – remind the state that marriage “is not a creature of the state.”

The letter, which outlines Catholic teaching on marriage, arrived during the same week that the gay-rights advocacy group Equality Delaware launched its campaign for same-sex marriage in Delaware.

Legislative proposals are expected to reach the General Assembly this spring and Gov. Jack Markell already has said he believes same-sex marriage is “inevitable” here. Same-sex civil unions have been legal in Delaware since Jan. 1, 2012.

The bishop’s letter – published Friday in the diocese’s newspaper *The Dialog*, and on its website at cdow.org – was not triggered by that effort, according to Diocese spokesman Robert Krebs. It has been planned in concert with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops since November, he said.

“The truth about marriage is not undone by human sin and human folly,” the bishop wrote. “It remains what it is – a gift of God to men and women, the ultimate expression of love between husband and wife, for the survival and the blessing of the entire human race.”

Douglas Marshall-Steele of Milton said he has no problem with Malooly explaining Catholic teaching to Catholics.

“As a non-Roman Catholic, I have a real problem with Bishop Malooly telling me or other non-Roman Catholics what we should believe,” said Marshall-Steele, whose blog, towardequality.org, lists more than 130 [leaders](#)

[of faith communities](#) in Delaware who have expressed support for the civil rights of same-sex couples, including civil marriage.

“It is unfortunate that the bishop would confuse ecclesiastical marriage as taught by his church with civil marriage, which is a strictly legal construct,” Marshall-Steel said. “Civil marriage equality is a justice issue and gay people like myself, who are in a committed relationship, do not have over 1,000 civil rights and protections that accrue to marriage on the federal level.”

Malooly’s letter traces the Catholic Church’s historic view of marriage, the Scripture upon which the teaching is based, and notes that marriage vows are under pressure in a culture that “militates against permanence.”

“Marriage is a unique and exclusive relationship between one man and one woman,” the bishop wrote. “It is not merely a private institution. Marriage is the foundation for family, where children learn the values and virtues that will make them good and productive people. The importance of marriage for children highlights the importance of marriage for all of society.

“Marriage thus belongs to all peoples but in the Church it is additionally valued as a sacrament, a means of God’s saving grace. Marriage is nothing less than a participation in the covenant between Christ and the Church. Simply

and gloriously, the grace of marriage assists husband and wife on their way to final salvation. The grace of marriage also strengthens them for their responsibility in the beautiful vocation of child bearing and child rearing and the very real challenges of sharing their lives amidst a culture that militates against permanence.”

The Episcopal Church has struggled and splintered over the question of same-sex relationships. Earlier this month, though, officials at its National Cathedral in Washington D.C. announced they would conduct same-sex marriages at the iconic site.

The Rev. Max Wolf has conducted civil union ceremonies and said he would gladly conduct same-sex marriage ceremonies as rector of two Episcopal parishes in Sussex County – All Saints Church in Rehoboth and St. George’s Chapel in Harbeson.

“I feel blessed to grow up in a country and a time when men and women are considered equal,” he said. “This is a natural step, marriage equality – living in to those vows.”

Wolf said gay and lesbian military veterans have helped to frame the question for some of his congregants.

“Some of our more traditional members saw that and said, ‘Shouldn’t they have the same rights as anybody else? They put their life on the line for our freedom, shouldn’t they be entitled to those freedoms that they risked their lives to defend?’”

Wolf said he and his wife did not have children, but that doesn’t make them less of a loving couple or a faithful witness, he said.

“More and more we are committed to our baptismal covenant ... to serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being,” he said. “We strive to do that imperfectly, but we know that it is a call of God to respect people as they are born.”

Malooly was not available to elaborate on his letter Friday, Krebs said.

But the bishop wrote that contemporary views of marriage have become distorted.

“We live in a society that has driven wedges between sex, marriage, and procreation – a society that has separated what God has joined together,” he wrote. “We live in a society that has increasingly embraced the notion that marriage is about adult life-style choices.”

He urged Catholics to defend marriage, support married couples, and “when necessary to remind the state in [simple](#)

 terms what marriage is and that it is not a creature of the state.

“This we do for the authentic good of all,” he wrote. “It is an attack on no one.”

Contact Beth Miller at 324-2784 or bmiller@delawareonline.com. Follow on Twitter @BMiller57.