

**By Dr. Carly York | Correspondent**

The missionary spirit of St. Patrick was evident in every aspect of the Belmar-Lake Como St. Patrick's Day Parade, as first responders, schools, parishes and the community at-large came together to ensure that the 46th annual celebration was a success.

“Good and gracious God ... turn our hearts toward the green of spring. Today everyone is Irish,” Msgr. Edward Arnister, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church, Belmar, said at the start of the March 3 parade. “Bless the marchers and all who will warm our hearts in this parade today. Be with us and bless us as we come together as friends in community.”

**Photo Gallery:** [Belmar-Lake Como St. Patrick's Day Parade](#)

While the weather may have been gray and chilly, the atmosphere was full of light and warmth as the Union County Police & Fire Pipes and Drums played a moving rendition of “Amazing Grace” to honor the first responders who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

“This parade is important for all of our towns,” said Spring Lake Police Chief Ed Kerr, explaining that it unites the towns “and gets us ready for summer.”

Msgr. Arnister, too, touted the event as a way to foster community. “The parade is important to our parish because many have Irish heritage, and it is a sign of pride.”

A day before the parade, the Belmar parish hosted the annual Investiture Mass, which saw parishioner Michael Ryan installed as grand marshal and Margaret Neafsey of Visitation Parish, Brick, as deputy grand marshal.

In his homily, Father Christopher Dayton, parochial vicar, encouraged everyone supporting the parade to follow the missionary example of St. Patrick.

“When we march in this parade, we wear signs and symbols of our Irish heritage. When we walk out of Mass, that is our weekly, and yes, sometimes daily march where we take the visible signs of our faith and of our virtuous living,” he said. “People should see that we have just as much joy in our hearts at receiving him in the Eucharist as we do at marching down Main Street. This is the time through the intercession of Patrick that we can light the fire of God's love on the earth and bring Christ to the world.”

Indeed, there was a lot of love and community spirit throughout parade day.

“The best thing about the parade is the way people come together for fun and to honor the Irish heritage. I love being out here with my brother firemen,” said Pat Duffy, an Avon-by-the-Sea fireman.

Paul Caverly, a member of the parade committee since its inception, proudly wore his sash from being the 2015 parade grand marshal.

“It is so wonderful that this parade continues. People come back every year like they are part of a family,” said Caverly, a graduate of Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft, and member of St. Catharine-St. Margaret Parish, Spring Lake.

The Coughlin family of Holy Cross Parish, Rumson, showed support for their son, William, who marched as a piper in the CBA pipe and drum band, under the direction of school president Christian Brother Frank Byrne.

“It is such a wonderful group! Brother Frank teaches all the students, most of whom have never had bagpipe lessons, so that in just a few months, they are ready to march in this parade,” Bill Coughlin explained.

Kevin Higgins – mayor of Lake Como, where the parade began – said “everybody is in a summer mood today! People come and enjoy our towns for the day, but for the locals it is the start of summer.”

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