

PARADE

Popular Priest To Lead St. Pat's Parade

By Danny Schrafel

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A Huntington priest who has distinguished himself in a bit more than four years at St. Patrick R.C. Church will lead the 81st annual Huntington St. Patrick's Parade this March.

Father Stephen Donnelly, 59, an associate pastor at St. Patrick's on Main Street since June 23, 2010, was an easy choice to lead the Ancient Order of Hibernians' annual celebration, said Rich McGrath, a 2008 grand marshal who co-chairs the selection committee with 1979's grand marshal, Dominick Feeney, Sr.

"Father Donnelly has been embraced by the Huntington community in a way we don't see too often," McGrath said. "Parishioners and non-parishioners all seem to know and love Father Donnelly."

The Hibernians will officially introduce Donnelly, who serves as the organization's chaplain, to the community during a \$50-a-head "halfway to the parade" celebration at Finley's on Green Street, with food by Storyville American Table, on Oct. 5.

Donnelly said he's touched by the honor.

"I feel very blessed that I'm here at St. Patrick's Church. It's a wonderful honor to be selected as the grand marshal," he said. "Looking back at the people who have been grand marshal, it's a great honor."

When he graduated Deer Park High School in 1973, he aspired to be involved in law enforcement and earned a degree in criminal justice. When that didn't pan out, he took work with an A&P supermarket. After 15 years as a manager, he began his theological formation in September 1991 and was ordained in June 1997. He then began assignments in New Hyde Park, North Merrick and Sound Beach before coming to Huntington a little over four years ago.

"For me, it's a wonderful community because of the warmth of the people," he said. "This is a very vibrant parish in the fact that we have many different activities



Long Islander News photo/Danny Schrafel

Associate Pastor Stephen Donnelly, pictured in St. Patrick's Church on Saturday, will lead the Ancient Order of Hibernians' 81st annual St. Patrick's Day Parade this March.

and the people come forward."

McGrath said the "gentle giant" embodies all of the best traits of an exemplary grand marshal: a devout Irish Catholic committed to uplifting Huntington's residents and local Irish culture.

"This year's pick was an easy one. Although he is diehard Jet/Met fan, the Giant/Yankee fans are equally part of his flock, as is anyone who needs an ear with any problem," McGrath said.

Personal Experience Drives Ministry

Among those problems he counsels parishioners on,

Donnelly is well known for his hands-on work when it comes to addiction and recovery.

Donnelly, who became a priest in 1997, is a recovering alcoholic, something he's deliberately open about. His candor is as much for his benefit, he said, as that of anybody else.

"I have to be honest," Donnelly said. "I don't go blabbing through the rooftop, but I'm not ashamed, because my weakness became my strength. A day doesn't go by where I'm not helping somebody or assisting somebody. Just by helping them, I'm helping myself."

At the beginning of his priesthood, Donnelly said he was still drinking. Then, in November 2000, an intervention, staged by the diocese, put him upstate for four and a half months in rehab – and on the road to recovery. Sept. 11 of this year marked his 12th anniversary of sobriety.

Donnelly said the vast majority of his parishioners know he's in recovery, and about once a year, when the gospel reading is geared toward a topic of healing, he shares his story. The rocky road he traveled, he said, gives him an opportunity to better connect with parishioners in crisis.

"We're all wounded healers – I believe that," he explained. "As a wounded healer, and because of my own personal experience, I'm able to reach out and touch many other people."

In addition to person-to-person work, he's been involved in a number of drug awareness organizations and has hosted and participated in community forums.

It's a calling with life and death implications. Donnelly said he's led several funeral Masses for young people who have died of overdoses and stressed the disease of addiction doesn't discriminate.

"I think another asset, another benefit of me, is they see a priest," Donnelly said. "Sometimes there's that stereotypical attitude toward alcoholics and drug addicts – 'Oh, it's the bowery bum.' But it could be the attorney in Lloyd Harbor, it could be the doctor. It could be anybody."

HUNTINGTON VILLAGE

Restaurants Host 250 Seminary Guests

By Peter Sloggatt

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If it looked like a priest convention had landed in Huntington village this past Tuesday night, that's because, well... a priest convention came into town to sample the area's restaurants.

The legions of clerics – 250 in all – were in town for a convention hosted by the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor. The National Conference of Diocesan Vocational Directors, NCDVD for short, is an international conference held annually for religious educators who train seminary students for the priesthood and was this year hosted by the Lloyd Harbor



Visiting priests flocked to restaurants throughout Huntington village Tuesday night in a dine-around arranged by the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor, host this week of an international convention of vocational educators. This group, from Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, dines at Jonathans.

seminary.

Although the conference is being held at the Hyatt Regency in Hauppauge, seminary Executive Director Rose Sullivan wanted to give attendees a taste – quite literally – of nearby Huntington village. So on Tuesday night, following a reception at the seminary hosted by Bishop William Murphy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, priests from around the world piled onto buses for a short ride to Huntington. Stepping from buses at the post office parking lot on Gerard Street, they fanned out, destined for restaurants throughout the village.

For a few moments, at least, the village looked like Vatican City with large groups of black-suited priests walking toward restaurants they had chosen ahead of time. Long Islander News staff, organizers of DineHuntington Restaurant Week, had helped by arranging for many area restaurants to offer special menus or discounts on dining.

At Vitae Restaurant and Wine Bar on New Street, general manager John Estevez was an attentive host to several large tables of priests.

"For a minute I thought I was in the south," Fr. Joshua Rodrigue of Louisiana joked about the gracious service.

"It was absolutely amazing," said Fr. Matthew Long of Shreveport, Louisiana, of the meal.

Fr. Michael McCandess of Cleveland, Ohio, seated at another table, said that everyone looks forward to the annual conference.

"This is one of the best parts of the year be-



Vitae Restaurant and Wine Bar hosted several groups from across the country.

cause it's the only time we get together with other religious vocational directors," he said.

At Jonathan's, manager Alex Vergara was ready for the 7:30 p.m. onslaught of priests. Nearly 50 arrived at once and sat at a half-dozen tables. A special menu showcased the quality of the restaurant's food, making preparation and service that much easier.

The diners were not disappointed with their choice of restaurant, said Fr. Joseph Lopez of Texas, who dined with a dozen or so priests from the Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas region of the country at

Jonathan's.

"There were a lot of options thrown at us, and there were some difficult decisions to make trying to get everyone's tastes together," he said.

Additional flocks of priests were spotted at Neraki on Main Street, Acacia and Honu on New York Avenue, at Massa's Italian Restaurant on Gerard Street, and other locations throughout the village. A separate busload of priests and religious educators opted for a specially prepared menu at Prime on Huntington Harbor.