

NYC Mayor to Skip St. Patrick's Day Parade Over Gay Policy

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio won't march past St. Patrick's Cathedral and on down Fifth Avenue in the city's famed St. Patrick's Day parade because he opposes organizers' ban on marchers' gay pride signs.

The new mayor said he will participate in other events to honor New Yorkers of Irish descent on March 17. "But I simply disagree with the organizers of that parade in their exclusion of some individuals in this city," he said Tuesday.

Organizers from a coalition of Irish-American groups say gay people are welcome to march in the parade, which typically draws more than a million spectators, but participants may not carry signs that indicate their sexual orientation.

De Blasio's predecessor, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg, was a supporter of gay rights but marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade. De Blasio did not march when he served as the city's public advocate. But he said he will not stop any city employee from marching in uniform.

Gay groups in New York City acknowledge that court rulings have established the parade as a private, religious procession that may exclude gay groups. But allowing city workers such as police officers to march in uniform violates the city's human rights laws, they argued in an open letter to de Blasio.

Bill Donohue, head of the conservative Catholic League, responding to de Blasio's decision, said the parade does not exclude gays.

"The great myth has always been that the parade is anti-gay:

In previous years, I have gone on the radio inviting gays to march with the Catholic League, provided they do not draw attention to themselves or to some extrinsic cause," Donohue wrote. "The parade is not about homosexuals, or abortion, or anything other than honoring St. Patrick."

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