



Police & Fire

Marchers Show Support for 'Black Lives Matter' in Bernardsville Gathering

By LINDA SADLOUSKOS AND GUY KIPP
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BERNARDSVILLE, NJ — Hundreds of marchers of all ages showed their support for the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, demonstrating against the death of George Floyd during a police stop in Minneapolis last week, as the organized group walked peacefully through downtown Bernardsville Saturday morning.

Police were on the scene, and Anderson Hill Road was closed as soon as the marchers set off from Bernards High School and wound down to the Bernardsville train station on Route 202.

The march was organized locally and the police and borough officials were advised of it and began preparations earlier in the week, according to Bernardsville Chief of Police Kevin Valentine.

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Many of the estimated 300 marchers echoed such chants as "No Justice, No Peace," but others just walked quietly at the tail end of the crowd. Mothers brought along children, a few in strollers, and both adults and children carried hand-drawn signs with such messages as, "Justice," and "Color is not a crime."

A few had longer messages, such as, "Christ & racism don't mix - you CAN'T say 'I love God' and hate his creation."

The group dispersed soon after reaching the train station parking lot, although some continued carrying their signs in the area.

Local clergy also joined the group. Rev. Daniel Fenco of the Camino de Fe church in Bernardsville marched to the train station accompanied by his daughter, Sophia.

Asked why he was there on Saturday, Rev. Fenco paused before answering, "We are called to love our neighbor and help them when they cry out."

He had attended with another member of the local clergy, Rev. Beth Rauen Sciaino of St. Bernard's Episcopal Church in Bernardsville. She said she was impressed with all the local demonstrators, as well as other support around the country since Floyd's death on March 25, after a video showed a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on his neck for almost nine minutes. "I think it's important to stand on the side of justice," Sciaino said.

Frank Siwec of Bernardsville, waiting in Olcott Square with a sign, "Arrest poverty, not the poor," said it was important to remember Floyd as a person.

Others joined in from neighboring communities such as Basking Ridge, including Renee Heath and her nephew, Jay Mollica, who awaited the marchers while standing on Olcott Square holding "BLM" signs.

Bernardsville Mayor Mary Jane Canose also walked down to check out the scene downtown, although she said she was keeping her distance because of age and health precautions enacted for COVID-19.

"It seems like people were here for a reason, and they expressed their opinion," said Canose, adding that the group of marchers had been "very peaceful," and added that the event had been carried out as a cooperative effort within the community.

"It was a good crowd, and everything went great," Chief Valentine told TAPinto Somerset Hills. "It was a peaceful, organized demonstration. I wouldn't even call it a 'protest'; it was orderly and friendly."

Valentine said that his estimate was that most of the participants were community members and people from nearby areas, "a good mix of families and students."

"Keeping this safe and peaceful was all that we were concerned about," Valentine said. "This was really community at its best."