

# Half a Century of Faithful Service

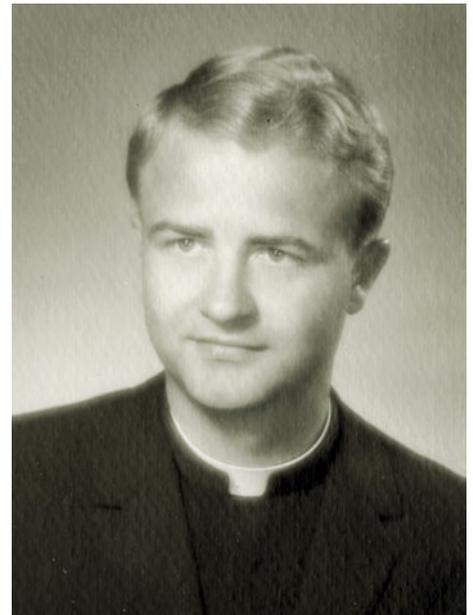
*Weekend presiders at The Basilica*

**T**HE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL closed in 1965, and dioceses and parishes around the world began implementing the widespread changes instigated by the Council. At that same time, four men who serve The Basilica as weekend presiders graduated from the seminary and began their careers in ministry. As they each mark almost a half-century of ordination, we learn more about their faithful service.

## REVEREND PETER BRANDENHOFF

Fr. Brandenhoff was born in Duluth; his family moved to Fairmont, Minnesota, when he was in grade school. His family, including two sisters and a brother, was active in their local parish and he served as an acolyte and organist. He always felt “close to the Church,” so entering the seminary felt like a natural part of God’s plan.

He attended Saint Mary’s College and Saint John’s University before being ordained in 1970. The Second Vatican Council was in process while he was enrolled in college seminary. Brandenhoff recalls that, while he loved the pre-Vatican II liturgy, he welcomed what transpired



and found the excitement and change very exciting. His ordination day was “like a fairy tale,” with so much happening that it was almost overpowering.

Brandenhoff served as a parish priest, chaplain, and teacher in the Diocese of Winona for over twenty years before moving to the Twin Cities to pursue a master’s degree in social work. He served

BY MELISSA STREIT

Fr. Pat Griffin's first Mass February 1967, Shieldsville, MN.

as a Licensed Social Worker (LICSW) in a clinical setting for 18 years while helping in parishes throughout our Archdiocese on weekends.

A personal highlight for Brandenhoff was a six-week trip to Israel led by a biblical archaeologist with Saint John's University. One of the most profound moments was reading scripture at dawn in Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. "More than anything else, it brought the scriptures to life," and images flood his mind even 35 years later. That experience inspired his acquisition of an icon depicting Peter walking on water with Jesus.

Brandenhoff started as a weekend presider at The Basilica in 2016 and finds it to be "second to nothing" in the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic liturgy. He says, "Tradition is a living thing to hand on — the living tradition of the faith. As I approach a half-century of ministry, it is very humbling to have been part of so many people's lives."

#### REVEREND PAT GRIFFIN

Fr. Griffin, the youngest of four children, was raised on a farm in Shieldsville, Minnesota. He laughingly recalls an "Irish, democratic, and Catholic" upbringing, and his oldest sister, Sheila, also entered religious life as a Dominican nun. Griffin entered the Saint Paul Seminary "at a fascinating time" in Church history, and especially enjoyed theology classes examining the implementation of Vatican II, "not just the philosophy."

He was ordained in February 1967 and presided at his first Mass on a cold and snowy day back in Shieldsville. "I was scared to death," he recalls with a laugh. Griffin always felt called to ministry as a diocesan priest, and "there was so much reflection occurring at that time on what it meant to be Catholic and the people of God."



Throughout his career and in a number of parishes around the Twin Cities, including Saint Timothy (Blaine), Risen Savior (Apple Valley), Saint Pascal Baylon (east side of Saint Paul), and Saint Stephen (Minneapolis), Griffin recalls a tremendous blessing in the lay communities at each parish. "I enjoy ministering to the needs and challenges of lay life." He especially recalls the "wonderful privilege" of serving people in need at Saint Stephen. "The poor have a lot to teach all of us."

Griffin continues to be fascinated by Church history, what it has become today, and the various people who bring our Church to life. He enjoys reading, especially history and the documents of the Church and the Second Vatican Council. "It brings a whole new understanding of Jesus the Christ in the modern world."

Although recent health problems have limited his ability to preside at The Basilica, Fr. Griffin has an affinity for our "wonderfully mixed" and welcoming parish community. He admires that all of us, "young and old, rich and poor, families and individuals," intentionally chose to engage in parish life at The Basilica. "It is what a parish ought to be."

#### REVEREND HARRY TASTO

Fr. Tasto, the second oldest in a large family, grew up on a prairie farm in western Minnesota near the South Dakota border. He enjoyed repairing things that were broken or dilapidated and at one time dreamed of being an architect. Their parish priest was also the director of vocations in the Diocese of New Ulm, and at his urging Tasto enrolled in the seminary.

His father's cousin was the Bishop of Superior (Wisconsin) in 1968, and was given delegation to ordain Tasto in the hometown parish church where three

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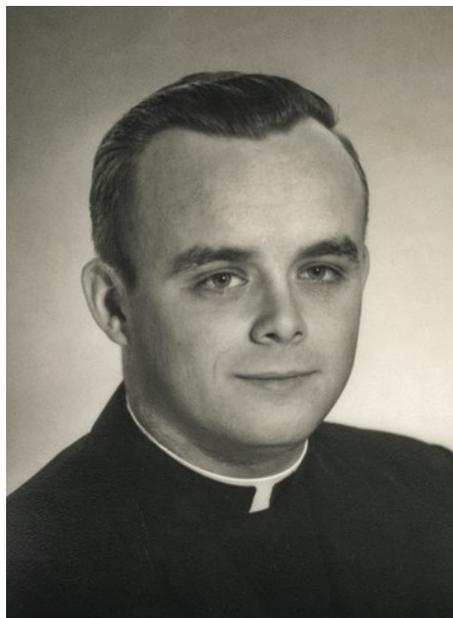
## REVEREND HARRY TASTO

generations of his family had worshipped. Their town had six Protestant churches in addition to the Tasto's Catholic parish, and he invited those pastors to process with the other vested clergy at his ordination Mass. Five pastors accepted the invitation, and most of them met for the first time that day. One month later, they formed a ministerial association which still continues.

Tasto describes his first parish as "one of those scenic white clapboard churches" often seen in rural villages. The other church was of United Church of Christ denomination and Tasto became dear friends with their pastor, a retired seminary professor. After his sudden death from cancer, the parish had difficulty attracting a new pastor and Tasto conducted Sunday services at their church for almost a year (in addition to two regular Sunday Masses). Many years later, when the congregation was celebrating its 100th anniversary, Tasto was invited to attend as a former "pastor."

After a decade in rural Minnesota, Fr. Tasto came to the Twin Cities for graduate school and worked at local parishes while completing two Master's degrees. Bishop Lucker gave him permission to join this Presbytery and he served our Archdiocese for 36 years, while also completing a doctorate degree. Fr. Tasto was pastor at many local churches, including Saint Timothy (Blaine) and Saint Thomas the Apostle (Minneapolis) before retiring. Fr. Tasto began as a weekend presider at The Basilica in Fall 2016.

Known as a man of a million hobbies, Fr. Tasto enjoys woodworking, building and home remodeling, vegetable and flower gardening, cooking, baking, cycling, traveling and reading. Father Tasto will celebrate his 50th Jubilee with a reception on July 1 after the 11:30 A.M. Mass at The Basilica.



## REVEREND GREG WELCH

When asked about his childhood, Fr. Welch bemuses "I've spent my whole life within one hour." He grew up in Saint Paul with two sisters and attended Cretin High School before entering Nazareth Hall and the Saint Paul Seminary. Welch was ordained in February 1967. "There have been enormous changes between then and now," Fr. Welch reflects. For post-Vatican II priests like him, "there was a lot of excitement on implementing the Vatican Council."

He served at four parishes as an associate pastor, and recalls those early years as challenging personally "because I'd never done it before." But he also says it was—and still is—a privilege to be part of people's lives in such a meaningful way, especially at funerals and weddings and in experiences of confession or counseling. As a priest, he explains, "you take the reputation of everyone who served before" and are invited to "celebrate with people and parishes in all points of their lives."

He became a pastor in 1978 and led four local parishes — All Saints (Lakeville), Saint Luke (now Saint Thomas More in Saint Paul), Saint Austin (Minneapolis), and Saint Patrick (Edina) — before retiring in 2011. Welch is "very rooted in this area" as a diocesan priest, and he enjoys the stability of the Twin Cities where he has a community of school classmates, relatives, and former parish members.

As a weekend presider at The Basilica, Welch "likes the feel of it here" and specifically cites the wide diversity of worshippers. "There is a pluralism of people and in the liturgies themselves. The Sunday evening Masses are very different from a 9:30 A.M. Mass." In all the various Masses, though, Welch notes the high caliber of staff and volunteers involved with liturgies and music. "Even if the Mass is a little long, people don't leave," he chuckles. "People stay very intentionally because they want to be here." He also admires our social justice and interfaith outreach efforts. "There is just a lot to like about The Basilica!" he says with a smile. ✚

*Melissa Streit has been an active volunteer and parish member since 1996.*