The Rev. William A. Wendt

In 1960, Bill Wendt accepted the call to be Rector of St. Stephen and the Incarnation. For the next 18 years he and St. Stephen’s rode at the forefront of waves of massive change in society and in the church.

Bill Wendt was a World War II fighter pilot. He became a priest “so that I would never be involved in anything like that again.”

At General Seminary in New York, Wendt became active in the Urban Priest Group, a score of seminar students and graduates who were committed to taking the message of the Episcopal Church to everyone and working with poor people. Two of the group became Bishops—Paul Moore (Suffragan Bishop of Washington and then Bishop of New York) and C. Kilmer Myers (Bishop of California).

Wendt and others prayed with peace fasters in Lafayette Park, for Vietnam in the Pentagon concourse, and on the steps of the Justice Department for slain Black Panthers.

In 1969, Wendt organized the first public reading of the names of the Vietnam war dead—during an emergency national convention of the Episcopal Church.

Wendt was a freedom rider, defying segregated Trailways buses in Mississippi in 1961 and marching with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma in 1965.

Wendt convinced The Reverend James Reeb, former assistant minister at All Souls Unitarian Church, to join in civil rights protests. In Alabama in March 1965, Reeb was severely beaten by whites while he participated in a civil rights march; he died two days later.

Wendt was deeply pastoral and was available at any hour to people who were troubled or dying. He thought of the priesthood as a state of life, not as a profession.

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