

A PAGE FROM THE LONG AND
AMAZING HISTORY OF ST. STEPHEN
AND THE INCARNATION EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Trial of Bill Wendt

On April 30, 1975, **Bill Wendt was tried** before a church court on the charge of disobeying his Bishop.

"Attorney William Stringfellow of New York, the man who will defend the Rev. William Wendt of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church when he goes on trial April 30 in a diocesan court, said **the women's ordination issue in the Episcopal Church "is a sign of a pervasive concern for everyone who**

is oppressed," or who is the victim of death-produced strictures in life.

The attorney, who in some circles is widely acclaimed as a lay theologian, said the question is much bigger than the Episcopal Church and

that it and all other issues thwarting mankind from realizing its full potential is the rightful concern of everyone who is baptized in the name of Christ.

From a March 31, 1975, Washington Post article about a sermon William Stringfellow preached at St. Stephen's:



Attorney William Stringfellow speaks from the pulpit at St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church recently.

**Ecclesiastical Court
of the
Diocese of Washington**

THE BOARD OF PRESENTERS
v.
THE REV. WILLIAM A. WENDT

PROCEEDINGS HELD AT ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH
WASHINGTON, D.C.

APRIL 30—MAY 2, 1975.

E. Tillman Stirling of Washington, D.C., for the Board of Presenters.

William Stringfellow of Bloek Island, R.I., and *Edward C. Bou* of Washington, D.C., for the Rev. William A. Wendt.

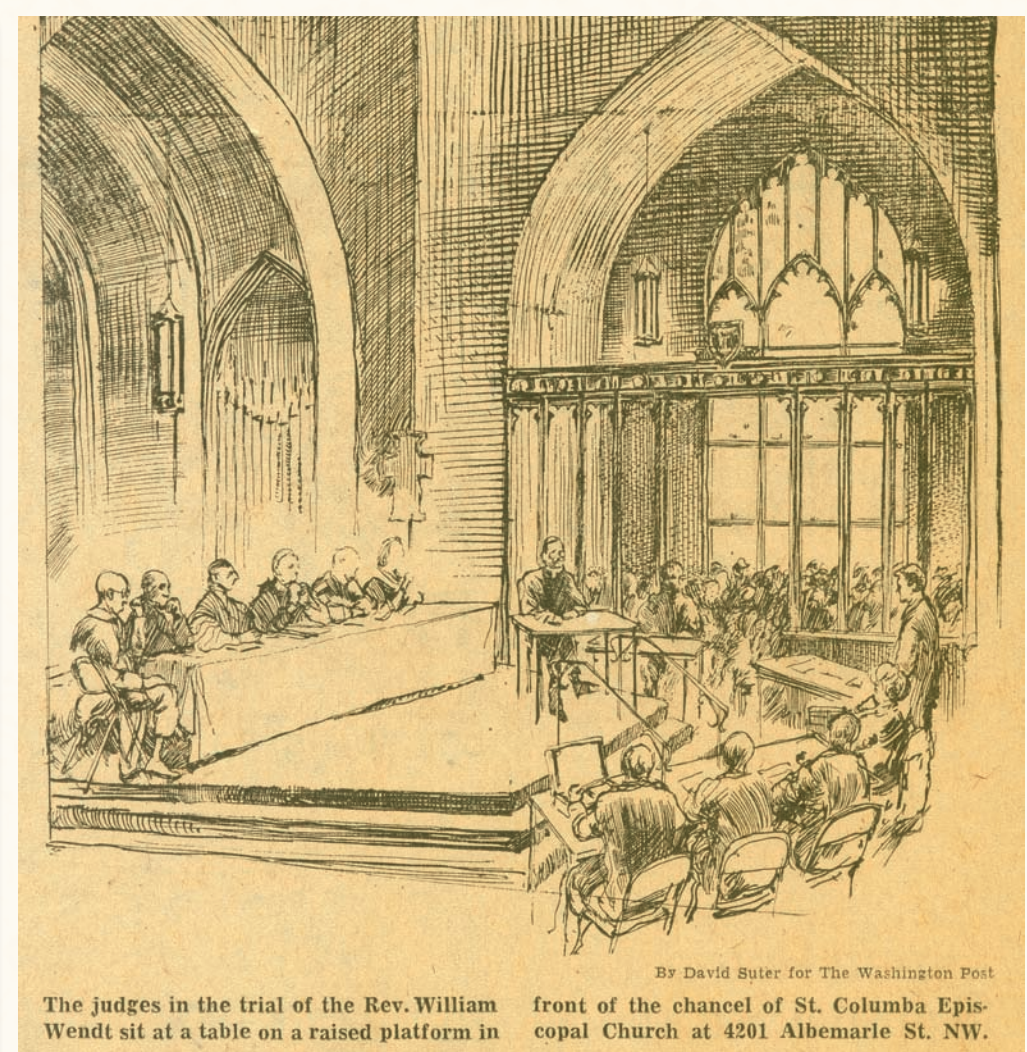
Edmund D. Campbell of Washington, D.C., Assessor and Legal Adviser to the Court.

Before LLEWELLYN C. THOMAS, President and Chief Judge,
CHARLES S. MARTIN, WM. CURTIS DRAPER, JR., H. ALBION FERRELL,
and JANET C. MCCA, Judges.

June 5, 1975

Judge H. ALBION FERRELL, with whom Judges CHARLES S. MARTIN and WM. CURTIS DRAPER, JR. concur, delivered the opinion of the Court.

This case comes before this Court, having been certified to it



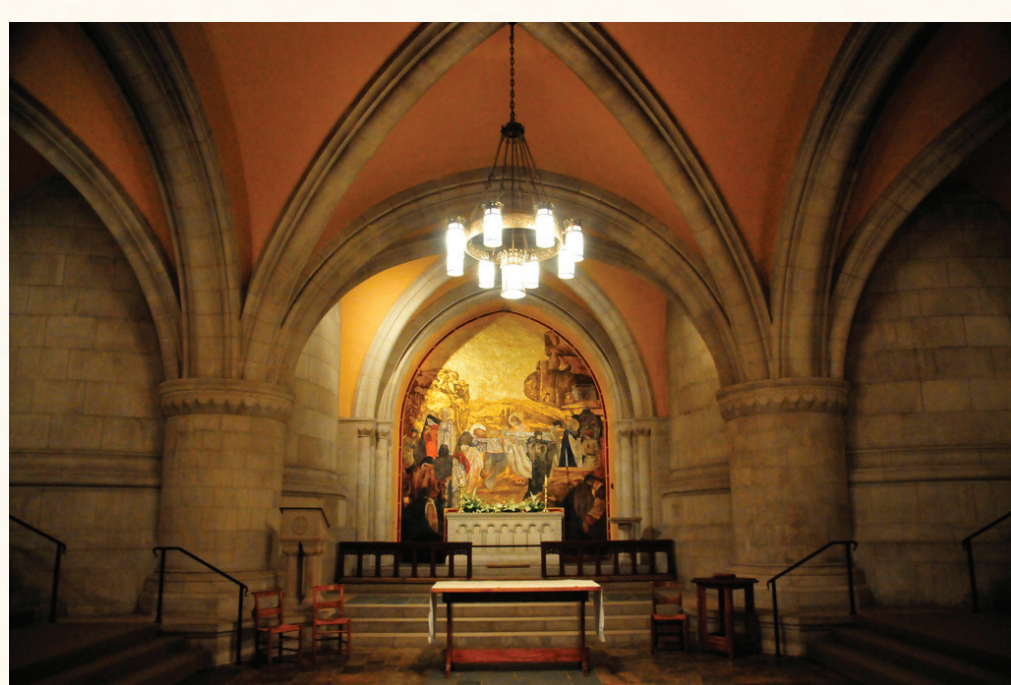
The judges in the trial of the Rev. William Wendt sit at a table on a raised platform in front of the chancel of St. Columba's Episcopal Church at 4201 Albenmarle St. NW.

The Ecclesiastical Court of the Diocese of Washington had existed in theory for decades but hadn't met since the 1920s.

The trial lasted three days. On June 5, the court returned a verdict based on a 3-2 vote: **guilty**.

The court recommended "in all charity and brotherly love" that Bishop Creighton "admonish the accused" for disobeying his godly admonition and forbid him from allowing anyone whose ordination was not "in conformity" with church canons from ministering at St. Stephen's.

Wendt appealed to the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Court of Appeal and lost again by one vote.



Bishop Creighton admonished Bill Wendt on Saturday, January 10, 1976, before 200 people—most of whom were St. Stephen's parishioners—in St. Joseph's Chapel at the National Cathedral (pictured at left). In response, Wendt said, "The efforts of St. Stephen's to provide an altar for the celebration of the priesthood of women has been an act of love in the name of Him who has lifted us all up in freedom."

Not being an Episcopalian, I had only my preconceptions to guide me when I got dressed to go to a service at St. Stephen and the Incarnation the other Sunday. St. Stephen's turned out to be one of those swinging parishes—blue-jeaned communicants waving, smiling and yakking; guitar music interspersed with the organ; lots of babies perched on shoulders; lots of vitality and joy.

I had come to St. Stephen's to observe the celebration of Communion by some of the female priests ordained in Philadelphia last summer. Somehow, after months of indifference, I had become curious about this burgeoning conflict in the church. Who were these

dissidents, anyway? What was their defiance about? Was it a political outgrowth of the women's movement, or did its roots lie in religious conviction? How much did it matter and to whom?

The answers were temporarily skewed for me by the counter-culture shock of it all. I settled into a pew and thought: so that is what it is—part of the generalized cultural rebellion, not the church militant, but the church funky.

This impression, however, did not even last out the service. It was dispelled by the manifest fervor of the proceedings, by the surprisingly high-church liturgy

of the service itself and by the evident devoutness of those involved. In the interest of full disclosure, I should probably state at this point that in addition to not being an Episcopalian, I am a notoriously wobbly spear carrier in the march for women's rights. So I was not predisposed to be impressed. But I was—and more so after talking to some of the participants in the conflict. I was struck by both the quality of their commitment and the nature of the challenge they are posing. For they are not merely asking, in the contemporary manner, for a piece of the action or a right or a new measure of respect. They are asking the faithful, in a particular way, **to alter their whole image of God.**

-Meg Greenfield, Newsweek, September 1, 1975

WIDENING THE CIRCLE THE CAMPAIGN FOR ST. STEPHEN'S