

Generations of Grace at The Basilica

Faith handed on, lived out, and shared

BY MELISSA STREIT

In 2000, when writing *The Basilica of Saint Mary, Voices from a Landmark*, author Peg Guilfoyle reflected:

“The life of the community, in days and years, is made up of a long string of small events. Individual prayers, daily Masses, the communion of children, drop-in visitors who sit quietly for a moment, a helping hand to someone in need: these are the small events that, over time, make up the strong web of faith and history that forms the actual Basilica, as opposed to the physical one.”

The book recounts the stories of families who helped shape The Basilica for multiple generations. Long-time parishioners who dedicated years of their lives to building and growing this parish community through weekly dedication and regular sacraments, year after year. Though much has changed since the church was designated a basilica in 1926, a new generation is growing up in this parish community and continuing to build a multi-generational foundation of faith.

Maggie (Andrews) Zawasky

“I have a long history with The Basilica. My parents chose to attend The Basilica in the 1960s because the priest at the time encouraged children to be present at Mass. My four siblings and I were baptized at The Basilica and have celebrated many sacraments here: weddings, baptisms, and my dad’s funeral. We always sat in the fifth or sixth row in front of the pulpit. Today, I drive my 86-year-old mom to Mass every Sunday and it is now where I sit with her, my sister’s family, and my three boys. Showing up was important to us growing up, and I continue to instill that in my children. Spiritually, The Basilica has been the place where faith has been practiced, modeled, and passed down.

Our family was very involved in the liturgy. My parents taught CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine or faith formation), ran a Bible study, served as a lector, and as chair of the finance council over the years. My siblings and I were involved as acolytes, greeters/ushers, reception desk volunteers, and cantors. We loved the music at The Basilica so much that some years at Christmas, we would attend the children’s Mass and then go back for the Midnight Mass!

My dad, Charlie Andrews, also donated his legal services to review contracts, including Basilica Block Party band riders. I was honored to be asked to co-chair the Basilica Block Party the first year after he passed away. Through that volunteer opportunity, I learned even more about The Basilica and was fortunate to work with great staff and volunteers. The Basilica has been present for our greatest joys and our deepest grief. I will



Maggie Zawasky as BBP co-chair with Fr. Bauer, 2010

never forget flying home the day after my dad died and meeting my family at the 9:30 a.m. Mass. It was during the intercessions that the congregation around us learned he had passed. So many people stopped by to console and comfort us — we were truly surrounded by community. My sister and her family worship here as well, and her children sang in the choirs.

The Basilica remains a priority because it has shaped who I am and what I believe the Church can be. It is a place of comfort and belonging, but also of conviction. It has shaped how we understand community and service, and I’ve always been proud of how this parish lives out its call to be present in the city. It never shies away from difficult conversations or issues. I feel proud of the way this community lives out the call to ‘seek the welfare of the city,’ to love neighbors, and to care for the least among us. The Basilica doesn’t just talk about faith — it practices it in visible, meaningful ways. That integrity is why I continue to give my time and support here.

For my family and me, The Basilica isn’t just where we attend Mass. It’s been a steady presence in our faith across generations.”

Cathy Edwards

“When I began looking for a [staff] position in parish ministry, I applied to a number of Catholic communities. The first time I walked into the rectory at The Basilica of Saint Mary, there was just something — a pull, an invitation, a welcome perhaps. That welcome led to my ministries in faith formation and pastoral care. I was privileged to prepare parents for baptizing their children, children to celebrate their First Eucharist, families to celebrate the life and grieve the loss of a loved one, and to have the honor of listening to the important stories of many people. Just shy of thirty years later, after two attempts at retirement (and one that finally stuck), I still feel that Basilica pull; it welcomes, protects, nurtures, challenges, accepts, and offers deep, abiding love to me, my family, and so many.

My children and grandchildren have run down the aisles, climbed to the choir loft, ridden in (and mourned) the demise of the old rectory elevator, celebrated baptisms, attended and taught faith formation classes, lived so many sacramental moments. Together we have marveled at the windows, the sheer size of the building, the incense, the choirs, the music.

Most recently, sharing volunteer opportunities with my grandson, Owen, has been an amazing experience for me. Together, we are aware of the grandness of the building, the importance of the work, and the timelessness of our hours of service. The Basilica has been ready so many times to reach out and hold her community; when 9/11 struck, when

George Floyd was killed, this past summer with both political assassinations and the horrific school shooting at Annunciation, and now with immigrants and our entire state needing care and protection, The Basilica was and is a beacon.

As an elder, I watch and am so grateful to Owen and other young people in this community, and I think, ‘Yes, this is good, with a little, well perhaps a lot, of plaster and restoration, our Basilica will be ready to be a much-needed beacon for another 100 years.’”

Owen Hewitt, Cathy’s grandson

“I used to love exploring the beautiful church and wandering around in the undercroft with my grandma when she was working at The Basilica. She would also let me sprinkle the birdseed she kept in a jar on the windowsill of her office, and we would watch the birds come up and eat. I was very interested in the old rectory, and we used to ride the elevator over and over again. When the elevator was taken out of commission, Dave Laurent gave me the buttons from inside the elevator; I still have them all these years later.

On a Basilica visit when I was 7, I noticed some of the plaster on the ceiling crumbling. I asked how The Basilica was taken care of and my grandmother said that thousands of people donate each year in order to help with the upkeep. After she drove me home, I went right up to my room and brought a donation of \$2.03 downstairs, and told her that I wanted to donate it to The Basilica. I then campaigned at family dinner to get more

donations and was able to raise \$45.25. My story and picture were sent out to parishioners to raise even more money for The Basilica.

When I was in seventh grade, to complete some Confirmation service hours, I asked my grandmother, my Confirmation sponsor, what we could do together at The Basilica to help. We spent three hours filling bottles of holy water. It is a wonderful memory. As a high school freshman, I began volunteering with her to livestream Masses for people who aren’t able to attend in person. Originally, it was a way to expand the number of guests that could attend my older brother’s graduation from DeLaSalle High School, held at The Basilica.

As I continued the livestreaming, I enjoyed helping people who were unable to attend services because of illness, distance, or other reasons, so we began volunteering at Christmas and Easter. Eventually, there was a need for monthly teams to sign up and run the livestream. After we had been volunteering for a few years, there was an opening on the sound team for the Saturday night 5:00 Mass. Because I have been so involved over the years, a staff member was familiar with my love of The Basilica and my experience running sound and lighting for my high school theatre department and recommended me for the job. I was delighted at the prospect of getting to work in The Basilica just like my grandmother did (admittedly, in a very different role).

I started working as a sound technician in January 2025 and have loved the position. When I decided to attend the University of Minnesota, I happily realized I could continue volunteering and working at The Basilica in college. One night at Mass, when Joan Prairie was at a table recruiting Eucharistic Ministers, I talked to her about it. I had been interested in it for a while but never committed to it. So I decided to sign up and my grandmother



Cathy Edwards with grandson Owen Hewitt, 2026



Owen’s donation, ten years ago

Continued

joined me. We have been doubling up each month; we livestream the 9:30 a.m. Mass and then are Eucharistic Ministers at the noon Mass.

Now, over ten years after I made my donation to the restoration fund, I still think about The Basilica the same way I did as a child. It is a part of my life and somewhere where I feel a deep sense of belonging. I find all the work I do at The Basilica to be very meaningful and important. I can help other people in their faith journey and make our liturgies beautiful. I feel at home at The Basilica — it is a wonderful place to be. Some of the staff members who have worked at The Basilica for a while have been able to watch me grow up and grow in my faith as well. It is especially meaningful to meet someone new, tell them that I am Cathy Edwards' grandson, see them light up, and tell me that they remember me from when I was a kid. Usually, they tell me how lucky I am to have such a wonderful grandmother, with which I wholeheartedly agree.

My older brother and some of my cousins have been baptized at The Basilica, I graduated from high school here, and this is where I have had my first real, consistent job. My great-grandfather, Deacon Harold

Hughesdon, baptized my brother here. Although his home parish was elsewhere, religion was a large part of his family. I feel the deepest sense of belonging and that I am doing what I am meant to do at The Basilica."

The Amigon Family

(Antonio, Gretchen, and six children)

"The Basilica has been a stable faith home for us since we joined the community about ten years ago. We've been most integrated with the faith formation community, volunteering as a family, both as catechists and catechist assistants for multiple levels. At The Basilica, we've made friends who are dedicated to serving others, who have been there for us in joyful times as well as difficult ones.

When my son was diagnosed with cancer and throughout his multi-year treatment, The Basilica community lifted us up with prayer, meals, a prayer shawl, and regular check-ins. We love the sensory experience of attending liturgies at The Basilica. My children love sitting towards the front and are active participants, singing, responding, and going for 'Catholic' donuts after (as Fr. Joe says, they are holier in the middle).

We continue to prioritize The Basilica because it is a place of belonging, where we are seen and heard and encouraged to share our talents. We are happy to be a part of a community that opens its doors to all and ministers to the marginalized in our community, while also prioritizing sacred art and working for justice."

In 1926, Pope Pius XI designated this parish as a minor basilica, in part, due to the piety of its worshippers. That honor recognized not only the beauty of the building, but the living faith of the community within it.

May we continue to be worthy of that distinction for another hundred years — through steadfast prayer, vibrant liturgy, generous service, and enduring commitment to one another.

Ad multos annos! ✚

Melissa Streit is the Director of Engagement and Family Life at The Basilica and has been an active volunteer and parish member since 1996.



Gretchen Amigon with some of her sixth-grade students, 2024



Antonio Amigon-Torres, 2022