

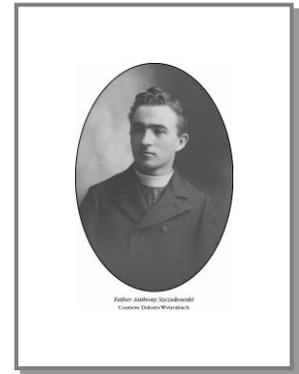
# PARISH PASTORS

## ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CATHOLIC CHURCH OF NEW BRIGHTON

The following short biographies are excerpts and paraphrasing from existing biographical information and from the 2004 parish centennial history book, "St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish: Building on a Century of Faith." Please refer to this book for more complete biographies of those pastors. The book is available in the Parish Library and, on occasion, for sale. Inquire at the Parish Center Information Desk or Office.

### **Reverend Anthony Vince Szczukowski** 1902 to 1907

Born in Poland January 10, 1875, Father Szczukowski came to the United States in 1887 settling in Detroit. He studied at the St. Paul Seminary from 1896 to 1902 and was ordained there May 24, 1902, by Archbishop John Ireland. He became the founding pastor of St. John the Baptist and was the first pastor to occupy the new rectory. The basement church on Fifth Avenue was built during his tenure. He served until August 25, 1907.



### **Reverend Stephan Zdechlik** 1907 to 1908

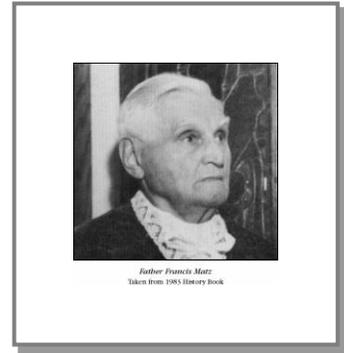
Father Zdechlik was born in Poland (Upper Silesia) December 22, 1878. He was ordained for the Diocese of St. Paul in Sion, Poland, March 5, 1905, by Bishop Mauretius. He came to Minnesota July 15, 1905. He was appointed pastor of St. John the Baptist Church August 25, 1907, serving until November 17, 1908. During that time, the land for the cemetery was purchased.

### **Reverend Vincent Joseph Yany** 1908 to 1913

Father Yany was born in Delano, Minnesota, January 21, 1881, and studied at St. Thomas in St. Paul and the St. Paul Seminary from 1902 to 1908. He was ordained by Archbishop John Ireland June 12, 1908. He served at St. John's from November 18, 1908, to December 13, 1913.

**Reverend Francis Matz 1914 to 1916**

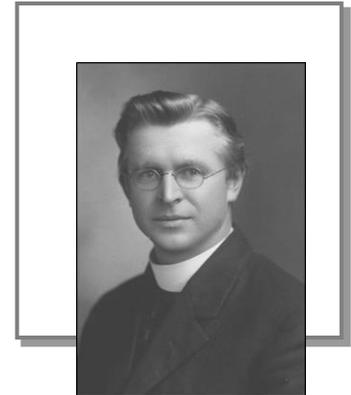
Born in St. Paul, January 2, 1886, Father Matz attended St. Thomas in St. Paul from 1903 to 1905 and then the St. Paul Seminary from 1905 to 1911. He was ordained June 9, 1911 by Archbishop John Ireland. After serving other parishes, he came to St. John's January 1, 1914, serving until 1916. He left to found All Saints parish in Minneapolis.



*Father Francis Matz*  
Taken from 1983 History Book

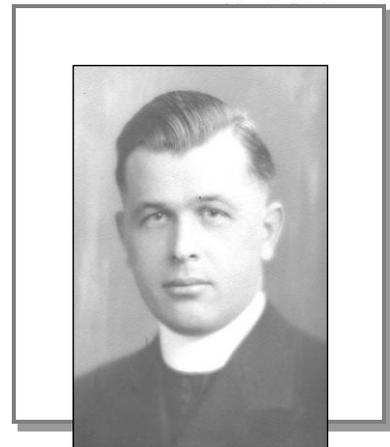
**Reverend Ambrose Nicholas Joseph Kryjewski 1916 to 1931**

Father Kryjewski was born December 7, 1879 in Matelezino, West Prussia. He studied at St. Thomas in St. Paul and the St. Paul Seminary from 1901 to 1907. He was ordained by Bishop McGolrick June 12, 1907. He became Pastor at St. John's in September 1916 and served until July 25, 1931. In 1922, during his pastorate, the superstructure was added to the basement church.



**Reverend Andrew Aloysius Handzel 1931 to 1934**

Fr. Handzel was born in Cracow, Poland, January 5, 1901. He studied at the College of St. Thomas and the St. Paul Seminary being ordained by Archbishop Dowling June 10, 1928. He became pastor at St. John's July 26, 1931. His sister, Rose Handzel, later Mrs. Frank Schutta, was his housekeeper while he was here.



*Father Andrew Handzel*  
Courtesy Archdiocesan Archives

**Reverend Maxmillian John Matz 1934 to 1950**

This Fr. Matz was the younger brother of Fr. Francis Matz (St. John's pastor 1914-1916). He was born January 17, 1896, in Minnesota. He attended St. Paul Seminary from 1918 to 1924 being ordained June 14, 1924, by Archbishop Dowling. While at the Seminary, he enlisted and served in WW I overseas in France. He came to St. John's as pastor July 10, 1934. He was active in the VFW serving as

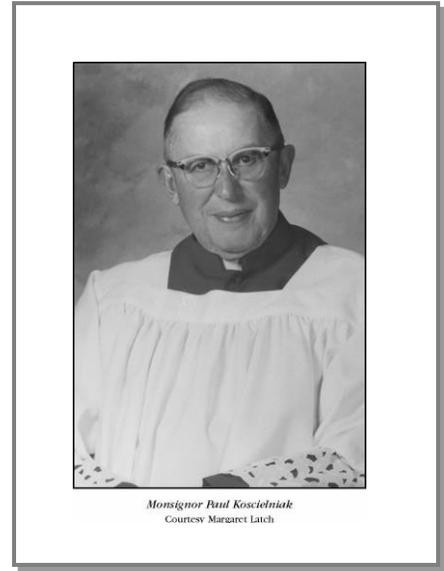


*Father Max Matz*  
Taken from 1983 History Book

National Chaplain and chaplain of the Minnesota Senate. He was well-liked and loved baseball, organizing community teams. He redecorated the church and installed new pews. Plans for a parish school and convent were being made in 1949 even though parishioners petitioned otherwise. Fr. Matz was transferred September 14, 1950, before the school was realized.

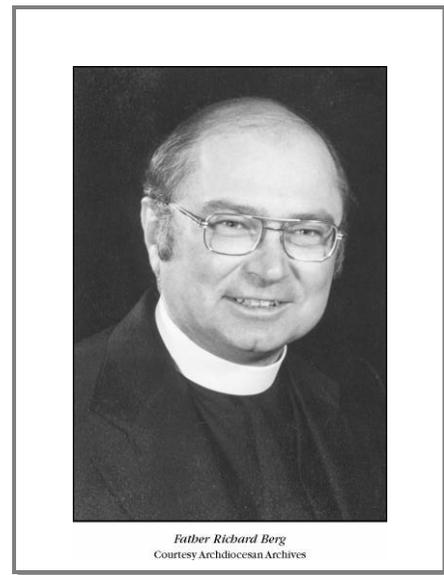
### **Monsignor Paul Lawrence Koscielniak 1950 to 1977**

Fr. Koscielniak, or Fr. Paul as he was familiarly known, was born March 17, 1910, in Minneapolis. He attended Nazareth Hall and the St. Paul Seminary, where Archbishop Murray, June 6, 1936, ordained him. He became pastor of St. John's September 14, 1950. With need for housing for nuns (teachers) for the soon-to-be completed parish school, he soon authorized the conversion of the current rectory to a convent and the building of a new temporary rectory, completed in 1952. Fr. Paul served the parish for 27 years, longer than any pastor. He guided extraordinary growth (from 500 to over 2000 families) and oversaw the building of the school, a temporary rectory, a school addition (to serve as the gymnasium church), a convent, a new rectory, and a new church. On September 8, 1973, Bishop Leo Byrne, installed Fr. Paul as an honorary prelate (Monsignor) of the Church, the only pastor of St. John's to be so elevated. Humble and down-to-earth, he was popular and well respected by parishioners and the community. He resigned September 25, 1977, and retired March 27, 1980. Fr. Paul tragically died in a boating accident while fishing on Mille Lacs, May 17, 1980.



### **Reverend Richard Val Berg 1977 to 1980**

Fr. Berg was born November 13, 1927 in Detroit. Moving to St. Paul, he went to St. Andrew's parish school, Nazareth Hall and later the St. Paul Seminary. He was ordained June 7, 1952, in the Cathedral of St. Paul. He came to St. John the Baptist in 1977. He initiated a number of new parish activities including a youth group, layperson participation, a liturgy committee, and a parish council with a parish constitution. In 1978 he helped stabilize the parish finances with periodic financial statements and a staff salary scale. The liturgical movement was important to



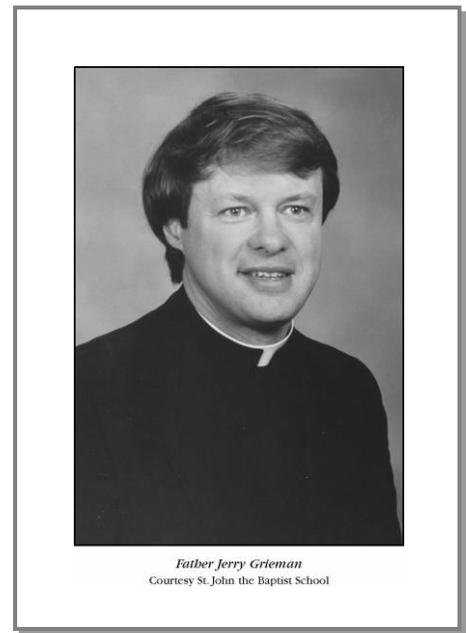
Fr. Berg. After he left St. John's June 8, 1980, he commented that our church was an ideal setting to celebrate the sacraments and all of the liturgy. He died December 27, 2012, in retirement after serving in parishes in Forest Lake and Lake St. Croix Beach.

### **Reverend Thomas Sexton Stitts 1980 to 1985**

Fr. Tom, as he preferred, was born May 5, 1935, in Washington D.C. He schooled in Washington D.C. and Massachusetts before coming to St. Thomas College and then to the Seminary. He was ordained in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, March 3, 1962. After several assignments, he came to St. John's in June 1980. He commented about the challenge of the parish due its size and changing demographics. He added to the staff, which coordinated various volunteer ministries. In 1981, he had part of the convent remodeled to serve as a parish center. In 1982 the school was extensively remodeled. In April 1983 while on sabbatical, he had to have emergency surgery for a malignant tumor. He returned in August but in June 1985 he was unable to perform his priestly duties while on chemotherapy. He was removed from ministry prior to his death in 1985, due to allegations of misconduct involving minors that, sadly, were later substantiated. (Information regarding his removal is available on the Archdiocesan website.)

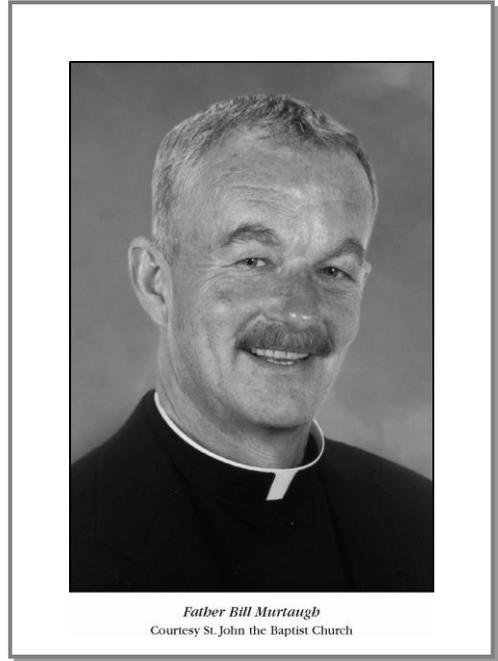
### **Reverend Gerald George Grieman 1985 to 1996**

Fr. Jerry is a native of St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a graduate of St. Thomas College and holds a law degree from Notre Dame Law School. After practicing law for a few years, he entered the St. Paul Seminary, obtaining his M.A. in Theology. He was ordained in 1979 at the St. Paul Cathedral. He was assigned to St. John's December 20, 1985. He focused on preaching and sacramental ministry, his goal being to change the world by changing hearts, not enforcing rules. He also had to focus on the nearly bankrupt parish. During his pastorate, he instituted a number of measures that eventually made financial stability a parish strength. Fr. Jerry elevated the deaconate to allow deacons to perform ministerial duties as ordained. Fr. Jerry left the parish in August 1996 and 3 years later received a medical retirement because of allergies. He currently is assisting in the Phoenix area.



## **Reverend William Arnold Murtaugh** 1996 to 2006

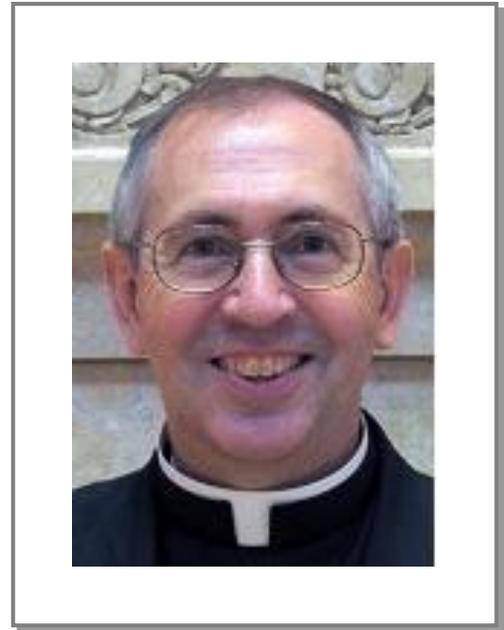
Fr. Bill grew up in Hastings, Minnesota. He graduated from high school in Waupaca, Wisconsin, and attended Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. He joined the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in New York. He also studied at John Carroll University in Cleveland and the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago. He was ordained in 1972 and after serving several parishes back east, Fr. Bill applied to become a diocesan priest for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. His first assignment was at St. John's as an associate pastor to Fr. Stitts from 1982 until 1984. After other assignments, he requested assignment at St. John's as pastor. Archbishop Roach granted his request in 1996. He focused on improving liturgy, trying to embrace all parishioners from newcomers to old-timers. He felt that it is important to support the school and its children as well as a preschool program. He considered the new parish center, dedicated in 2001, a highlight of his time at St. John's. He also oversaw the installation of a new sound system and acoustic improvements. In 2002, he led St. John's in its centennial celebration in 2002. He arrived at the open-air mass in 1930's-era priest's garb and a vintage Rolls Royce. He was very popular and had a great sense of humor, keeping things on the light side. He was very approachable – an open door. He was often seen around the church and community with his two golden retrievers. Upon leaving St. John's in 2006, he had several assignments in the Twin Cities area. He is currently pastor at Pax Christie in Eden Prairie.



## **Reverend Michael Skluzacek** 2006 to present

In 2006 Fr. Michael Skluzacek became the thirteenth and current pastor of St. John's parish. He was born in New Prague, Minnesota and grew up on a farm near Lonsdale. He studied in France and at St. John's University, St. Paul Seminary and the University of San Francisco. He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1980. He previously served at the Cathedral of St. Paul, St. John the Baptist parish in Savage and St. Michael and St. Mary parishes in Stillwater. He also served on the faculty at St. John Vianney Seminary in St. Paul and as spiritual formation director at American College in Louvain, Belgium. In addition to his parish duties, in 2011 he was appointed regional vicar (northeast region) by Archbishop John Nienstedt to help foster communication between parishes, clergy and the archbishop.

Under Fr. Skluzacek, changes and improvements continue to be made at St. John's. New ministries, such as Families Moving Forward, Feed Our Starving Children and Men's Fellowship have been established. The Servant Leader parish model for leadership and committee structure was initiated in 2013 with eight commissions established to allow greater parish participation and development of more informed leadership. The One Spirit Many Gifts campaign was established. Many ministries and parish activities continue to grow and thrive with more new ones being established, such as, Funeral Hospitality, Alpha and Vocations Awareness, among others.



Fr. Skluzacek has overseen many artistic improvements to St. John's campus. "Creation of Water" stained glass windows above the baptistery were added. Major upgrades to the organ were made in 2008 and 2013. Decorative hanging mirrors were installed in the St. Paul Plaza. A balcony area over the lower sacristy was added for special liturgies and church lighting was upgraded in 2009 and again in 2016. Stained glass windows for 4 west-side and for 3 south-side lancet church windows have been donated. The Reflection Garden with Stations of the Cross was created on the south side of church in 2010. The altar was significantly changed with the creation of a baldachin for the tabernacle, which was moved to the center of the altar under the triptych. The celebrant's chair was moved to the west side of the altar in front of the choir. The area around the rectory was improved with extensive landscaping in 2011 (ongoing) and a major rectory renovation was completed in 2014. A new school courtyard has been created in 2016 with bronze statues of Jesus and John the Baptist playing as children.