

St. Leo's Short-Range Parish Plan

October 28, 2022

After a year of serving St. Leo parish as Priest Administrator, I am sharing a short-range plan for the parish with you. The plan is the outcome of the Town Hall meeting that was held in the Fall of 2021. After reviewing the feedback that you provided for us, the Parish Council made the recommendations reflected in the plan.

In the summer of 2021, my hopes for St. Leo were bleak because we were feeling the effects of the pandemic, and of the divisions that formed in our parish community prior to COVID. However, my spirit was high and my love for St. Leo grew stronger.

Amid the setbacks and the challenges that we have faced, I have seen beauty and growth in our parish community. I now start this year with hope and confidence in the Holy Spirit, and in faithful of our St. Leo community.

The short-range parish plan is not a comprehensive plan, it only takes into consideration the major topics that came out of the Town Hall meeting. If something was not included, it does not mean that it was not important. The plan is not the fruit of a parish-wide discernment process. However, it does include the voice of those who participated in the meeting.

As you know, the Jesuits West Province is currently discerning an apostolic plan for the whole province, and the Archdiocese of Seattle continues to discern its pastoral plan. St. Leo is a member of these two entities. Thus, we need to continue to discern the signs of our time even more so now than before because everything is changing at a fast pace. Amid the changing realities, I believe that we are living in a time of hope rather than despair.

The Jesuit community of Tacoma is supportive of the existing Jesuit apostolates in the area, which include St. Leo, Bellarmine, and Sacred Heart. We also know the importance of having lay collaborators to sustain these apostolates. On a personal note, I believe that in the future, these three apostolates will work better if we engage each other in a cross-institutional collaborative and congenial manner.

The goals of the short-range plan were set by those who attended the Town Hall, and I am committed to them. Obviously, the outcome we hope for depends on all of us working together: the staff, the leadership of the parish, and all the members of the parish community. This short-range plan is not perfect, it is a living document that provides opportunity for engagement over the next two years.

I am grateful to Jack Peterson for his attentive listening and for investing time in crafting the short-range plan. I am also grateful to Colleen Mulligan's wisdom and contribution to it. Above all, I am grateful to you all for your investment, passion, faithfulness, and love for St. Leo amid changing times.

Thank you,

Elias Puentes, SJ

St. Leo Church

Short-range Strategic Plan

Fr. Elias Puentes SJ with assistance from Colleen Mulligan and JackPeterson@ManagingforMission.com

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In the Fall of 2022, the faith community at St. Leo Church recognized that it needed a new Strategic Plan to help the parish navigate into the future. It had been 5 years since the parish formulated its recent five-year plan, in April 2017, and much had changed in the environment within which the parish operates. The recent pandemic has impacted Mass attendance, the way parishioners attend mass, the parish's revenues, and staffing, as well as the needs of the broader community served by the parish.

Some of the emerging needs are so pressing, that the Priest Administrator of St. Leo's, Rev. Elias Puentes, S.J., decided that before a Long-range Strategic Plan could be formulated, the parish needed a short-range Strategic Plan to address them. He recruited two volunteers from the parish to assist him in developing a draft Short-range Plan, which is this current document. This draft plan will be reviewed with parish staff, the Parish Council, the various commissions, and the parish membership in general. It will be used to engage the parish community in addressing and resolving the urgent issues facing the parish and lay the foundation for a process to develop a more visionary long-range plan.

Pursuant to formulating the Strategic Plan, the parish had conducted a Town Hall meeting in October 2021 to gather input from parishioners on their experiences with, needs from and aspirations for their parish. Additional input was also gathered through the recently established worldwide Synodal Process. Through this process, the upcoming synod of bishops would for the first time also incorporate input from parishioners in every parish and diocese throughout the world. For its part, St. Leo's conducted five listening sessions—three in-person, one on Zoom and one for the L'Arche community. The parish will continue to use this input as it shapes its planning for the future.

From this input, four major long-range Goals were identified in three areas: 1) Community Building, 2) Stewardship, and 3) Liturgy and Faith Formation. This draft of a Short-range Strategic Plan has taken these three Goal and identified urgent actions that need to be taken in the next one to two years in order to correct serious deficiencies and put the parish in a better to position to identify and begin implementing its longer-range vision.

Goal 1: Community Building

St. Leo Parish will nurture and build community amongst parishioners as a concrete expression of the Body of Christ.

For decades, St. Leo's has been known for the vibrancy of its community. This has been experienced not only in its spirited liturgical life but in broad participation in ministries of the parish and serving the community beyond the parish. Several factors have developed which have weakened this vibrancy.

1. The COVID 19 pandemic shifted all Masses for a while to a streamed format, and even when in-person liturgies were resumed, in-person Mass attendance declined 56% from what it had been (from an average in-person attendance of 637 in 2019 to 278 currently)
2. The housing crisis and the inadequacy of mental health and substance abuse services have overwhelmed the parish-sponsored outreach ministries, as well as the parish's ability to work with its community partners. Camping on or near its property, as well as high volumes of clients with behavioral health issues have led to both real and perceived safety and security concerns. This has discouraged mass attendance, especially for the vulnerable and elderly, and has undermined the confidence of parishioners who would like to address the needs of those suffering at their doorstep.
3. Divisions have formed in the parish as changes intended to strengthen management of the parish have created friction and, in some cases, alienated long-time volunteers and mission partners.

In light of these issues, this plan recommends that the following objectives be pursued urgently to revitalize the parish community and refocus its characteristic apostolic vitality.

1. *Ensuring safety of Parishioners*
 - a. **Improve communications and the working relationship with Catholic Community Services and adjacent ministries.** While CCS and St. Leo's are two separate entities, they are nonetheless "connected at the hip," with Nativity House and the CCS administrative offices now sharing the campus with the parish. The leadership of each entity has been conscientious about coordinating their efforts, but the connections and communication must be broader than just between a few individuals. As time consuming as establishing broader bandwidth between two very busy staffs may be, such an investment is an existential necessity and can be great source of grace for each. We should also attend to our relationships with other partner ministries.
 - b. **Improve security, especially around Mass times.** The very virtue of St. Leo's willingness to be close to the poor is also its weakness. Two communities are sharing space, each is under-equipped to understand or cope with the needs of

the other. To prevent this from injuring either community, or the individuals in them, appropriate security must be provided for all Masses, funerals, weddings, and other special liturgies. This has a financial cost, which also must be addressed by the appropriate entities.

- c. **Recruit and train more ushers.** The intention of having greater security is not to turn people away from joining the community in worship, but to make sure that those coming to worship feel welcome, and those who have other needs or whose behavior will disrupt worship are redirected to where they need to be. St. Leo's ushers do a great job of welcoming people, but there are times when we don't have enough of them. Nor can we simply recruit them and not prepare them for the challenges of people with diverse and sometimes acute needs. We must develop a program for training ushers for their crucial role in St. Leo's mission and ministry.
2. *Pastoral Care for parish community members: the elderly, bereaved, sick and the searching*
 - a. **Provide formation for staff.** The parish is experiencing or anticipating significant turnover in key positions, and talented and committed ministers are being hired to carry on the work. The parish needs to provide formation for these staff members to support them as ministers, managers, and collaborators on a pastoral team. They will benefit from having greater clarity about the parish's mission and their role in it, as well as management practices that live out the values and goals of the parish. They will also benefit from having a deeper understanding of how to work effectively with their staff colleagues, volunteers, the parishioners, and partner organizations in order to coordinate the complex constellation of ministries by which the parish addresses the needs of those it serves.
 - b. **Add Staffing.** The parish needs a person dedicated to providing office support and to be a central point of communications. While volunteers and other staff are generously trying to fill this role, the complexity of the parish ministries requires greater consistency, which additional staffing could provide. At some point, additional staffing could also help in coordinating the day-to-day logistics and the availability of information, especially for those seeking help from, or seeking to help, the parish.
 - c. **Develop better communication processes.** When apparent needs and the processes to address them do not change over time, people feel less motivated to coordinate with others, because everyone knows their pertinent. But when needs and the processes to address them are rapidly changing, an investment of time and effort in communicating with other key players has become critical. This requires clear policies, protocols, and staff accountability, including reporting relationships and regular meetings as appropriate. At St. Leo's it is critical that communication protocols include the parish commissions, which are

the key resources for consultation about the needs of the parish. Furthermore, these protocols should include ways for providing adequate communication to the parishioners.

- d. **Recruit and train volunteers.** Reliance on volunteers is important for three reasons. It extends the ministries of the parish which would be limited if the parish used only paid staff. It provides a way for parishioners to live out their own vocations in a way that enriches their experience of the worshipping community. And volunteers bring gifts, experiences and relationships which go beyond what the staff can provide. St. Leo's has a strong tradition of the active involvement of its parishioners. Recently, however, this has fallen off, as the needs have evolved leaving veteran parishioners perplexed about their role, and new parishioners unsure of where they fit in. Three critical steps can be taken to make progress in this area: 1) Develop an accurate, updated list of those who are registered; 2) Train the commissions in how to recruit and train volunteers; and 3) Encourage and provide ways for commissions to proactively build relationship within the parish community.

Goal 2: Stewardship

Fostering the community envisioned in Goal 1 requires resources which only a healthy spirit of stewardship can provide. The converse is true as well: achieving healthy stewardship requires an active and vibrant community. Accomplishing the following short-range objectives will be crucial to the continued vitality of the parish.

1. **Clarify expectations for new and current parishioners.** Historically, parish income has been tied to mass attendance, since responding to the passing of the basket was how contributions were received. For several years the parish has encouraged online giving, which was proven providential during the pandemic. But Sunday offerings fell off drastically when in-person attendance was not allowed, and it has still not bounced back. Coming out of the pandemic, the parish needs to review how it welcomes new parishioners and articulates expectations for them and for continuing parishioners as well. The Stewardship Commission should revisit the plan for welcoming new parishioners and presenting expectations to existing parishioners in their 1) financial support, 2) volunteering and 3) participation.
2. **Publish financial information in the bulletin.** This has been the practice of the parish, but we need to follow this more consistently. We also need to determine the most helpful ways of presenting the information so that parishioners can make more informed decisions about their support.
3. **Review shared staffing between the administration of two parishes and the Food Connection.** The Food Connection is a ministry of the parish, but in order to meet

growing needs, it has become more autonomous and has successfully expanded its own ability to raise funds. The parish currently shares its Business and Facilities administrator with Sacred Heart Parish, and half of his time is spent with the Food Connection. This is a way for the St. Leo's to support this important ministry, as well as to assure that the Food Connection complies with governmental regulations and sound financial practices. But it also impacts the parish in terms of potential conflicts with responsibilities related to parish administration. We need to consider whether staffing these positions should be handled in a different way.

4. **Conduct a facilities assessment.** The St. Leo's campus includes buildings of various ages and types, including: a church originally built in 1903, and most recently remodeled in 1999; a school building built in 1912 now housing Catholic Community Services and the Food Connection; a Rectory/priest residence built in 1959 and converted to the parish office by making changes to the interior furnishings; and a recent addition in Bichsel Hall, built in 2016. The most critical needs for these facilities are:
 - a. Replacing interior lighting in the church
 - b. Regrading between the church and the CCS building
 - c. Roof replacement for the church and rectory
 - d. Relandscaping behind the rectory
 - e. Reclaiming the area along G Street

The parish also owns several residential facilities which are providing low-income housing, but the condition of which represents a current and future liability for the parish, and lease agreements need to be reviewed.

The parish needs to have all the aforementioned facilities reviewed for conditions which could potentially cause safety issues or degrade the usability of the facilities. This assessment could help uncover issues which must be dealt with urgently, as well as begin laying a framework for the parish's long-range Strategic Planning.

Goal 3: Liturgy and Faith Formation

The third area of the plan, Liturgy and Faith Formation, is also integrally tied to the other two. It is through the celebration of the liturgy and openness to spiritual formation that members of the community are attracted to St. Leo's, strengthened in their faith, and motivated to participate in the parish's ministry to its own members and the surrounding community. Sustaining this spiritual vitality will require accomplishment of the following objectives:

1. **Resolve priest staffing for St. Leo's and Sacred Heart.** St. Leo's has three masses on weekends (plus a 4th once a month) and daily masses on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Sacred Heart has 5 masses on weekends and one during the week. In addition, Sacred Heart is constantly celebrating weddings and Quinceaneras on Saturdays. Currently, two

Jesuit priests are assigned to cover both parishes, along with one Deacon at St. Leo's and one at Sacred Heart. Some help can be provided by the Bellarmine Jesuit community, but it is not enough to meet the needs for Sacred Heart. Given the demands placed on the many apostolates of the West Coast Province, it cannot be assumed that the Province will automatically assign more priests to St. Leo's and Sacred Heart, particularly if the parishes cannot demonstrate that they provide a distinct opportunity for the Province to live out its own Jesuit mission, captured by its four Universal Apostolic Preferences¹. St. Leo's/Sacred Heart needs a strategy to attract at least the equivalent of one additional priest, preferably one who can celebrate mass in Spanish each Sunday.

2. **Develop more multi-cultural liturgies that mirror our multicultural community.** St. Leo's itself has an ethnically diverse community with representation from the Latinx and Filipino communities. The Latinx community in particular is growing segment of the Church. This community will likely participate more in the life of the parish if they feel engaged by liturgical celebrations that speak to its culture and experience. Many, perhaps most, of the Anglo community also value the multicultural dimension of St. Leo's liturgies. The parish has grown in this area but must make a consistent commitment to involving the Latinx and Filipino communities in liturgy and educating the Anglo community to increase its ability to support the multicultural approach.
3. **Increase involvement of children and youth in liturgy.** St. Leo's is an aging parish and the number of children in Catholic families in general has declined with the exception of the Latinx community. If the parish is to maintain its vital multicultural ministry in Tacoma, these young people must experience its impact in their lives. Liturgies must be designed to include them, and the youth ministry program must be engaging, consistent and connect them with a parish that wants to embrace and support them.
4. **Establish a stable children's faith formation program.** The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was able to attract young families and form their children. Today we need a program that meets the needs of families, especially Latinx families, and is experienced as a ministry of the parish community as a whole.
5. **Provide adult faith formation opportunities based on Ignatian spirituality.** Within the broader umbrella of Catholic tradition, St. Leo's has promoted itself as a Jesuit parish. By doing so, it wants to let current and potential members know that they can find one of the most welcoming and inclusive experiences in the Catholic Church. Those who come to St. Leo's will experience an Ignatian spirituality based on God's mercy, God's laboring alongside us in our lives, God's preferential concern for the poor and marginalized, and God's indwelling in all of creation. The very richness of Catholic tradition and Ignatian spirituality requires St. Leo's to make an explicit commitment to inviting its staff, its

¹ 1) Showing the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment; 2) Walking with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice; 3) Accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future; and 4) Collaborating, with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's creation.

commission leadership and all interested parishioners into a deeper understanding and practice. This includes greater focus on various dimensions of the Spiritual Exercises through formation programs adapted to the needs and availability of its members.

There is much more that St. Leo's is doing and will need to do than is mentioned above in this draft Short-range Plan. The plan's purpose is only to highlight the most urgent circumstances requiring our attention over the next one to two years. This document is intended as a vehicle for engaging parish staff, commissions, volunteers, and parishioners in designing our immediate and short-range response to these challenges. Drawing on the insight, experience, and apostolic commitment of all members of this community, we can take the circumstances God has given us and meet the immediate challenges. We can also lay the foundation for a longer-range discernment of where the Holy Spirit is leading us and how we can answer Jesus' call to feed his sheep.