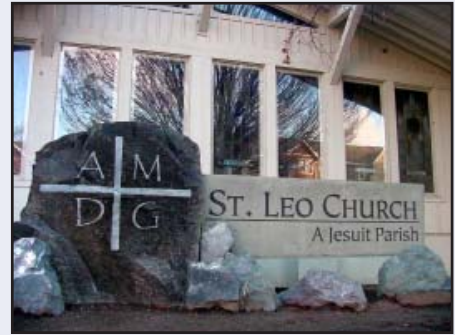


# St. Leo Church:

## *A Parish of Destination*

By Fr. Steve Lantry, S.J.,  
Photos by Kevin Tomlin, S.J.



in perfect “Cat Pose” is a kitten. “Who does this kitty belong to?” she asks. No response for awhile, then a timid voice

**P**icture this: a staffer at St. Leo Parish heads into the entrance of the rectory where, as usual, there stand several folks from Tacoma’s Hilltop neighborhood waiting in line for emergency services. As this staffer hits the front of the line, she notices that third in line, waiting patiently

intones, “I think Kitty is here on his own — maybe he’s waiting for a hygiene kit!” Thus begins the journey of Brother Leo, the newest “member” of St. Leo Parish.



For most Catholics, their parish is the place where faith life and practice intersect with the realities of the culture; St. Leo Parish in Tacoma is a place where this intersection occurs in

sharp relief. Since people attend the parish from approximately 75 ZIP codes, St. Leo’s is often called a parish of destination. While people are drawn for many reasons, the chief motivation seems to be St. Leo’s commitment to direct service to the poor and the outcast of society.

The parish sponsors The Food Connection, the largest food bank in the county, serving 10,000 people a month. In partnership with St. Vincent de Paul, St. Leo’s provides emergency services four days a week to those seeking assistance at the rectory — remember Br. Leo? These services include I.D. replacements; hygiene kits and clean socks; prescription assistance; vouchers for clothing and furniture; bus tickets to get to medical or VA appointments, or for those who have jobs; and referrals to other service providers like Catholic Community Services and the Neighborhood Clinic.

St. Leo Parish also cooperates with The Catholic Worker

community; Nativity House, a drop-in center for homeless people; the Hospitality Kitchen, serving 19,000 hot meals per month; L’Arche Tahoma Hope; and Operation Keep ‘Em Warm & Fed which provides blankets, tarps, ponchos and food for those either waiting for work at Labor Ready or waiting for the Pierce County Methadone Clinic to open. With more than 60 volunteers working in pastoral care, St. Leo’s is able to send people to visit parishioners in hospitals, nursing homes, and those who are home bound.

On the parish staff are eight full-time people, including two Jesuits. There are also four part-time employees. On the Jesuit side, St. Leo Parish enjoys the rare privilege of having a full-time Jesuit regent. Regency is a period of active ministry, usually two to three years, on the road to becoming a priest. It follows First Studies and is an assignment to serve in an apostolic work of the Society and gain experience and skills for later ministry. Last June, Kevin Tomlin, 28, completed his first studies at Loyola University, Chicago. At St. Leo, his main responsibility is overseeing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), a program to bring adults into the church. He also works in other parts of faith formation,



Brother Leo

including the infant baptism preparation team. Part of his responsibilities include working in religious education, and serving one day a week on the emergency services desk. He and the pastor, Fr. Steve Lantry, S.J., and a second-year novice Todd Keough who volunteers at Nativity House, make up the small community of Jesuits at the parish.

Yes, Br. Leo hit the jackpot — we suspect that he got far more than he bargained for when he was “waiting in line” for services that day! Indeed, many other human parishioners at St. Leo Parish find tremendous experiences of community and service. It’s one more place where faith and culture intersect, one day at a time, here in Tacoma’s Hilltop neighborhood.