

Synopsis of Interview with Patricia Ditter
February 11, 1992
Tacoma, Washington

Patricia Ditter has been a parishioner of St. Leo's parish since 1964. She, her husband, and children moved here from California. Upon their arrival, they were staying in the Doric Hotel and went to Mass at St. Leo's that first Sunday. Her reminiscences indicate that it was as a result of this first Sunday experience that the family bought a house within the boundaries of St. Leo's and became parishioners. The congregation and pastor made such a wonderful, friendly impression upon the newcomers, they decided this was where they belonged.

Pat and her husband became foster parents through Catholic Community Services. Soon they had adopted several children. Eventually, Pat became employed by the agency. Today, she is Division Director of Children and Family Services for Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, Washington.

Many, many areas are covered in this transcript. Pat speaks of the difficult decision the parish council and pastor made when they closed the high school in 1974. Then the grade school was closed in 1976. This decision alienated many parishioners. It was during this time that a number of families left St. Leo's and relocated in other parishes. Also during this time, Vatican II changes had begun to be implemented. Because many of these appeared drastic and unfamiliar to people, they were not received well. It appears that the priests who were initiating these changes also were not concerned with the feelings of many of the older parishioners. On top of these occurrences, the mission of St. Leo's was beginning to focus more on social justice issues. This appeared to alienate a number as well. Father Bill Bichsel, associate pastor, became politically involved with many demonstrations and causes. At times he was arrested. Of course, the newspapers always identified him as from St. Leo's -- and this upset some of the more conservative. These are

some of the issues that St. Leo's dealt with in the late 1960's and into the 1970's which are discussed in greater detail in the interview transcript.

Pat goes on to speak about various pastors and events which have taken place over the years. Father Bill Hausmann, Father Gerard Morin, Father Pat Hurley, Father Peter Byrne and others are discussed in relationship to St. Leo's. Currently, the pastor of St. Leo's is Father Pat Carroll. He is greatly admired by the parishioners and Patricia speaks of him highly.

During the 1970's St. Leo's became active in many social justice issues. Huge Christmas and Thanksgiving Day dinners became a tradition at this time. They now serve between 1000-1400 needy people each of these days. Other programs which have been initiated over the years include the Food Connection, Hospitality Kitchen, Neighborhood Clinic, L'Arche Community, Guadeloupe House, and others. The Martin Luther King Ecumenical Center was a project initiated by a group of citizens with Father Bill Bichsel. It has grown and prospered throughout the years. Many parishioners of St. Leo's have been involved with the MLK.

Pat also discusses how she views the involvement or lack of involvement of other Catholic churches in social justice issues here in the community. Her feelings for St. Leo's future are discussed. In the last section of the interview she discusses what St. Leo's has meant to her personally. This is a moving tribute to what a church such as St. Leo's is and should be. Pat's interview was interesting and informative and a nice experience to have had.

February 11, 1992 Interview with **Patricia Ditter**, parishioner of St. Leo the Great Parish and Division Director of Children and Family Services, Catholic Community Services, Tacoma, Washington

Can you share with me a little bit about your self, your family history here in Tacoma. Were you raised here, was your family raised here? Tell me a little about that part of your life leading into our eventual discussion of St. Leo's.

My husband and I came to Tacoma in 1964 -- in the spring of 1964. We came because he [husband] had a new job here. That's what brought us here. We are both from Southern California originally. At the time we came to Tacoma we had two children -- Theresa, who was in the second grade and Rick who was in the first grade. So we had just the two children when we came. And then when we came here we didn't have a place to live, so we stayed at a place downtown called the Doric Hotel, which no longer exists.

That first Sunday we were in town we came up to St. Leo's because it was the closest Catholic church. I remember -- I'll never forget that first Sunday as long as I live, because the pastor at the time was Father [George] Purdy and the two assistants were Father [Francis] Harrington and Father Gerard Morin. We went to Mass and we came out after Mass and were standing in front of the church for a few minutes. Father Harrington came up to us and said, 'I've not seen you before' and he introduced himself. We introduced ourselves and we said we were new in town. He said, "Oh, you have to join a study club right away. That's how you'll get to meet people." ...he took our name and where we were staying and he also gave us the name of a woman, Betty Benson, who was really a member of St. Rita's but her children were attending the school and she was somewhat active at St. Leo's at the time. He gave us her name and phone number and said, 'be sure and call her'. So that was our very first Sunday at St. Leo's.

I walked away saying, "Gee, if they are this friendly, this is where I want to go". So we actually searched for a house to be within that geographical boundary. Back in 1964 you had to live within parish boundaries in order to go to the parish. We decided that [St. Leo's] was the parish for us. We found a house within the geographical boundaries. And we did call Betty Benson and introduced ourselves and said we'd like to get involved. Within the first month

we were in Tacoma, we were already in a St. Leo's study club. They had several of them [study clubs] back then where couples got together and studied scripture. We then met a lot of people real quickly through that process. Some of those people are still friends of mine after all these years. That's how we got started at St. Leo's.

That was in 1964, like I said in the spring. By the fall, or August, of 1964 we had also discovered Catholic Community Services and being foster parents. In August we became foster parents. My kids were in school and I didn't want to go back to work. I didn't know what to do with myself. I met somebody who was a foster parent who said, 'Oh, they have all these babies and they need help'. So we had our first foster child by September. We adopted her immediately. We knew that wasn't what we wanted to do. We knew that we really wanted to adopt children. And subsequently we adopted five children in all, including this first one. We did foster parenting for years as well. I don't know how many kids we had, I lost track long ago.

So that was how my family got started here at St. Leo's. From that time on, no matter where we lived, even after the geographical boundaries kind of fell down and we bought a house in the north end -- and we lived there for about 7 or 8 years --we still went to St. Leo's. I live in University Place now and I still go to St. Leo's. We have never attended any other church but St. Leo's.

Did your children go to school there?

Yes, they did. My two older children started in the first and second grade and went all the way through St. Leo's grade school. Then my son went to Bellarmine and my daughter went to St. Leo's High School. They both graduated from those schools. The younger children, because there was like 8-9 years difference between the two groups of kids, all started [school] in St. Leo's and went to St. Leo's until it closed. We were trying to recall this over the weekend, but I think it closed in 1974. The grade school went on for one year after the high school so it might not [have been 1974].¹

The high school closed first?

¹ St. Leo's High School closed after classes were completed in Spring 1974 and the grade school closed after classes were completed in Spring 1976.

The high school [closed] first. I think the high school closed in June of 1974 and the grade school in 1975. I think.

Was it mainly an economic situation that forced the closure?

It was [that] the Catholic schools back then couldn't support themselves, couldn't keep...We had at that time 3 high schools. We had Aquinas Academy which was in the North end of Tacoma. We had St. Leo's which was for girls and Bellarmine which was for boys. And what they did was merge all three of those schools into one. The decision by people who were involved in the school programs at that time was that we [Catholic community] could support one [high school] but we couldn't support three. Each one of them had this dying syndrome going on. Then the following year St. Leo's [grade school] and another Catholic school closed their grade school. I think it might have been Sacred Heart. Two grade schools closed but St. Leo's was the first grade school situation to close. Then there were others that came later.

How did those that were in the parish feel about that, since the school had been there for a good number of years?

Well, the closing of the schools was really divisive to the parish. It was probably the single most divisive thing that ever happened. Of course, we had lots of people who were at St. Leo's because their kids went to school there. There was a lot of anger, a lot of bitterness [when the school closed]. The parish was very divided over the issue. There were strong people who wanted to keep the school open at all cost and there were also strong people who said there are other things in the world that we are called to do by the gospel besides educate our children.

There was a period of time, like the two years that preceded the closure of the school and the few years following it, where that parish just didn't know any peace. There were just factions constantly. And lots of people did leave. Lots of people left when the school closed. Either they left out of anger, and a lot of them did leave out of anger, or they left and joined the parish that had a school so their kids could go there [to school]. I know, personally, a lot of people who left out of pain and anger, feeling that they had put a lot into that school and [that] the parish clearly had a choice. The choice was we can take

all of our money and sink it into the school and have nothing else or we can close the school. ...and that was the choice that got made [to close the school].

Who was the pastor at this time?

Patrick Hurley. Hurley.

So Father Hurley was still there? And this was the early 70's?

This was the mid 70's--'75. I remember very clearly that Bill Wetzler was President of the Parish Council the year we made the decision to close the school. Bill was a teacher at Bellarmine and Bill was very vested in Catholic education. But he also saw all of these social needs that were going unmet. He strongly supported the parish's need to close the school. And, as the President of the Parish Council, he led that council through the process [of closing the school] and [he, Bill] lived with it. He took a lot of flack for that. So, it was Father Hurley and Father Hauseman and Father Morin [that] were the 3 priests there at the time the decision was made.

Was Father Bichsel there at that time?

Father [William] Bichsel was always there. Bichsel came early 70's -- maybe 1970-71 -- somewhere in there. Father Bichsel came and he was always there. He wasn't assigned to the parish as I recall.

He was in residence?

He was there to do community work. Yes. He had gone through his own transition at that point and was very committed to the poor.

So his impact or his ministry, per se, didn't really have an impact on the decision the parish was making at that point?

I think it did. In the sense that, until he came, it was a fairly traditional, conservative parish that had a school, an Altar Society, a Holy Name Society, ushers and altar boys and pretty much your traditional parish. When Father Bichsel came he brought a whole new consciousness to us. And [Bichsel]

started to say, 'there are poor people walking the streets right past this church, what are you doing about them?' that kind of thing. He started his own, what I would call silent, ministry, because it really was [silent]. He did incredible things that nobody every knew about. He didn't --

Because Bichsel wasn't an organizer, in the sense that he doesn't start clubs and groups and that sort of thing, he just kind of needs to go out there and take care of whatever he finds. ...that's what he was doing. He was just getting up in the morning and walking down the street and finding somebody who needed help and helping them. But in the process of doing that, and because they [the priests] all still lived in the rectory at that time, [Bichsel] just kind of brought that [need] in front of us. He made us aware of it and began to talk about those needs. There were people within the parish that began to gather around him and say, "we really see what you are doing and we understand this." Probably the most unfortunate thing about what Bichsel did [was] that he did it in a non-traditional fashion. He really offended a lot of people. Because his way of breaking down the barriers was to say Mass in his jeans and tennis shoes with a serape draped around his back, that kind of thing. The parish wasn't ready for that. So, of course, he became known as the hippie priest. That's when we were going through a lot of changes in the church anyway [and now] there was another faction of the parish that was anti Bichsel -- that would have done anything to get rid of him. So the 70's was a time of great turmoil for St. Leo's parish. It was a time of transition away from that conservative element.

Then Father Hurley followed Father [Gerard] Evoy as pastor. Father Evoy [had been] that very traditional pastor, and then Father Hurley came along [with] his very militant controlling style. He had a pretty explosive temper. You know [his style] was just to kind of cram things down everybody's throat. So, there were a lot of things going on at one time in the 70's -- Father Hurley's style of leadership and Father Bichsel's kind of anti-establishment peace, and there was this big school which we couldn't support or afford any more and what do we do about it? And so, if we'd probably been a cohesive parish at that point, the decision could have been made easier. But instead you had factions fighting amongst themselves as to what should be done. And, of course, Father Bichsel's thing was to close the school and put it to good use. He was going to have housing for the elderly and he was going to have a shelter. I mean he had every room in that building filled already, in his mind,

as to what he could do with it, free this and free that. He didn't really want to care too much about where the money was going to come from. If you did it, God would provide kind of thing. So that was a very painful time in the parish. But we did subsequently close the school. The whole concept of a parish council...

We had, lets see, in the late 60's I recall a census that said we had something like 60 percent or 65 percent senior citizens at St. Leo's. You didn't see many kids. I mean children were pretty unique. What was common place at St. Leo's in the late 60's and even into the early 70's was funerals. That was the biggest thing we did -- was funerals -- because we had them all the time. That's all we did. We had this huge population of elderly. Then as the transition and transformation took place, and young people were attracted to the social programs that Father Bichsel was beginning to develop, families started to come into the parish. We went into another whole dynamic from predominantly elderly to becoming a very family oriented parish again. And now today, of course, we've got kids coming out of our ears down there [at St. Leo's].

Now the families, the elderly that were there, did you get a feeling that these were people who had been in the parish for many years, that it was a stable neighborhood?

At that point it was. The less expensive housing was in the area where St. Leo's was. But it wasn't second rate housing. Kitty corner from the parish there is an apartment building right across from the convent. It was called the Granada Apartments at that time. I don't know what it is called now. At that time the Granada Apartments were very old places but they were very nice places. Most of them were filled with single, widowed Catholic women who were living kitty corner from the church so they could go over and pray all the time. So there was lots of that kind of housing in the area. Naturally the older women on fixed incomes tended to live around there. And as a parish we really took care of them. We watched out for them. So they felt very comfortable there.

Was it a very ethnically grouped parish at all, or was it very homogenous?

It was pretty much all white. There were very few minorities and those that were there kind of stayed by themselves. Back in the '60's and '70's we had relatively few minorities who went to St. Leo's. That's all changed now.

So with the school closed now, you did have a certain percent of families that moved out of the parish. Were there also a percent that moved just due to the friction and disagreement that was going on?

Oh yes. I can think of one family who now come around and do some things with us, but for years they wouldn't come near it [St. Leo's] just because they didn't like the change from the conservative or traditional -- really wasn't ever conservative -- but the traditional to the much more liberal attitude that St. Leo's is known for now. They just couldn't live with that. They just couldn't cope with it.

Of course Vatican II had been going on prior to that. Did some of the results of that [Vatican II changes] trickling down and the changes within the church [St. Leo's] have something to do with this as well?

Yes. Then we had gone through another process. This one I don't remember the dates on but -- it's probably the late 60's about 1968-70 because Pat Hurley was there. I think Father Evoy was there for 3-4 years before that -- so the late 60's. Since 1964 I have seen two renovations with the church. When I came to St. Leo's...it had statues every place you looked; it had votive lights² every place you looked. I remember on each side of the altar, and of course that was back when the altar still faced the back of the church and it [altar] was white and marbled and ornate, and there were angels on each side that held candelabra. It was truly the old, kind of glitzy type church. The first renovation process got rid of all the statues except the ones that are still there. I think [the statues of] Mary and Joseph are the only ones left now. And that [renovation] just caused -- that caused incredible pain in the parish. First of all, because Father Hurley did it with no sensitivity at all. He just said they are going. And there were people alive in that parish whose parents had contributed to the purchase of those statues. It was a very personal thing to a lot of people. They could remember that was the statue(s) my mother gave up

² Votives are small candles in glass containers. Usually placed on a stand in several rows of ten or twelve candles and placed at side altars at the base of statues.

[something], whatever, so long to save the money to buy it. So there was incredible pain in that first renovation. It was in the first renovation, or maybe in the second, I just remember, the terrible turmoil about taking the communion rail out. Oh, and that was another one when Pat Hurley was there. I am sure it was. And he didn't tell the parish, he just did it. He did it and one Sunday you came to church and there was no Communion rail left. So, it was these kinds of things that the parish has been through that has also been the pain of not being told...just not having a say. So when we went through the last renovation, there were lots of public meetings held and lots of opposition to it. But at least it got processed and sure there were some people who didn't like it.

When was that?

Well that's been within the last 10 years because my John [husband] worked on that renovation so we were already married. So it was sometime within the last 10 years, but probably 8-9 years ago I'd say, that we renovated. Of course now they've got plans afoot to renovate it again. But it was that first one [renovation] that took the statues away and took the communion rail away and moved the altar and did away with all of those things that just caused...

How long was Father Hurley there? When did he leave?

Again, that's real clear in my mind. He was there for maybe 3 years. I don't think he lasted much more than three years. He clearly had a mission when he came in [late 60's]. I think he was sent to clean things up a little bit [renovate]. When he left Bill Hausmann, who had been his assistant pastor, became the pastor and Bill was there for 7 years. And Bill [Hauseman] was the peacemaker.

So he bridged the transition?

He really, I mean Pat Hurley, kind of came in and tore the church apart, renovated the church, did all of these things. Then Bill Hausmann was made pastor and everybody loved Bill. He was everybody's favorite priest. So he was there for a period of about 7 years in just healing. He [Bill Hausmann] has

done that several times since -- in parishes he has been sent to because he is so good.

He [Father Hausmann] was there in the period of time after the school closed?

Yes. He really helped a lot of people through their pain in that. Yes. Then I think Peter Byrne came after Bill Hausmann left. I can't remember how long Peter was there.

During that period of time then, with the exodus of many families, did it take very long before you saw a rebirth of many families coming into St. Leo's?

It did. After the school closed and so many of the families left, there was a period, you know I would guess four or five years really, where the parish was just kind of dull. It didn't do much of anything. It didn't die but it didn't grow and it didn't change a lot. It was just kind of that death period. And era was over and I think we really didn't know what to do with it.

At that very same period of time Father Bichsel was gathering momentum for his social programs and trying to get the Hospitality Kitchen kicked off. He is the one that really took our Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners, which had been very small events for the parish up to that point...and he [Bichsel] said, "How can you sit here on Christmas Day and have this nice little dinner and you've got poor people walking the streets out there. You've got to invite them in." He's the one that got us started on this huge thing [Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners for the less fortunate] we do every year. But that was a very low period of time, after the school closed, before the social side of the parish really caught on and people started promoting those kinds of programs that we got into. Then when that became popular, that's when the families really started to come back [to St. Leo's parish]. We started to see baptisms again. That had become a rare occasion and suddenly it [baptisms] became a more common thing again.

Going into the social justice area, how many programs can you think of that were started in the neighborhood directly as a result of St. Leo's [parish] initiation and participation, or Father Bichsel's?

Gosh, a lot. Obviously the Hospitality Kitchen and the Food Connection and an organization called Neighborhoods First that took buildings and refurbished them. Martin Luther King Center was clearly kicked off by St. Leo's. Then you had what we called the "G" Street Community. It doesn't exist anymore. But it was an effort that Father Bichsel made [started] to put some housing together for mentally ill people who were roaming the streets. The Sanctuary Movement... that was all part of that same social justice and peace [movement]. Then the drop-in-center for -- what's it called -- gosh, Keith Hagen runs it and now I'm drawing a blank. We still have it for the mentally retarded adults in the area. It's on that same block and it is a house St. Leo's owns. People can come and take a shower and have a hot meal, play some games, etc. Then, of course, Nativity House evolved out of St. Leo's. Really Father Rothrock started that. He had been in residence at St. Leo's.

The L'Arche Communities³ -- that all happened then. I can't say that L'Arche was St. Leo's brainchild. It wasn't. Father Rothrock started that with Peter Byrne. He had been involved with the L'Arche Communities in France. When he came home, after his studies abroad, he brought that concept back with him. He [Rothrock] had a real interest in it and started the first L'Arche house, which was Hilltop House, on our block. At the same time he was in residence at St. Leo's and had the support of St. Leo's. We [parish] made the house available and people helped in many, many ways. The L'Arche communities, even as they exist today, are predominantly St. Leo's people that are involved -- their board, their fund raisers, and that sort of thing. They are very much identified with St. Leo's. So that's another thing that started out [with St. Leo parish and clergy involvement].

Did the other churches in the area participate in these ventures at all with St. Leo's?

They did with the MLK Center because that had the intention of being ecumenical from the get go. Some of the black parishes -- and of course, Allen AME still had its church there at that time, so they definitely were involved in that one. They were involved in Neighborhoods First but I'm not real aware that they were involved in a lot of our other programs. I'm not sure that we did

³ Secure residential home and work environment for mentally challenged adults.

a good job of making them involved or inviting them in to be involved. ...I think that the slowest thing that happened at St. Leo's was not only becoming ecumenical but becoming multi-cultural. That is really a very recent phenomenon. I'd say [only] in the last ten years that I think people of other ethnic backgrounds have come there and felt comfortable. Yes. That wasn't always there. It was a very white parish for a long time. So --

How do you think the community of Tacoma as a whole viewed St. Leo's during these periods of time? Or do you have a feeling on that?

Probably not. ...I do and I don't. If you say community as a whole, I'm not sure that they even have an attitude about St. Leo's. Certainly in the Catholic community, I think that St. Leo's has, and still has, and probably always will have, a reputation for being that other Catholic church. This is because we do so many non-traditional things, because we do a lot of things you're not going to find in the other Catholic churches. Also, there were times, certainly the Vietnam war comes to mind as one time, and there have been a couple of other issues, that St. Leo's has taken a very loud stand about.

Can you elaborate on the Vietnam issue and some of the others?

Well, the Vietnam issue...the thing I remember so clearly was an ad that was taken out in the Morning News Tribune. You know I don't even remember what the ad said now, but it was an anti-war piece and it was signed by Catholics [from] all over Pierce County -- anybody who wanted to [sign it]. But it was hard to find somebody that wasn't from St. Leo's on that list. All of the priests signed it. Father Hausmann was there at the time and he signed it. There were people [at the parish] who just loved him who were so disappointed in him. That caused a lot of difficulty and people didn't feel good about us [St. Leo's] because of that.

So speaking out politically was frowned upon?

Yes. Speaking out politically really was [frowned upon]. And I think it still is -- I still think it is. Especially when you get into anti-war issues or anti-government issues, I think that --

Of course, Father Bichsel, he made the newspapers more times than I would care to count, and they were very, very rarely positive. They [demonstrations] were his way of making a statement. He was forever being arrested because he climbed somebody's fence or picketed or laid down on the RR tracks or what have you. And, of course, he would always be identified as from St. Leo's. Even some of us who love him dearly, would wish he'd be a little more subtle. So again, I think we are the only church in town, that I'm aware of that's really gone out on the limb and stood up and said, 'this is how we feel' or the majority of people have said that.

Do you think that since it has been staffed by Jesuits vs. Diocesan priests that this has made a difference?

I definitely think so for a couple of reasons. Their [Jesuits] own mission, I think, took a turn from being purely educators, which they were for a very long time, to being the front runners in social justice. So that had an effect on whatever parish they were in. Also because they are an order rather than diocesan, we've always had an abundance of them. In most parishes if you had two [priests] you were lucky. St. Leo's always had, well, three [priests] up until Pat Carroll came. Maybe we went down to two and then down to one...but, no we still have two because Joe's there [Father Joe Stocking, Parochial Vicar]. There's always been all those other priests around. Even now we have Father Rothrock around, Father Bichsel around, we have -- no we don't have Father [Gary Smith] down at Nativity House anymore. But there's always been others around [in residence at St. Leo's]. And then, of course, all the [Jesuit] priests up at Bellarmine. So we've had many, many more [priests than most parishes].

How has the archdiocese reacted to St. Leo's over the years? Has there been much consternation over the activities they've been involved with or has there been any friction between the Archbishop and the pastor(s)?

You know -- I don't know if I know the answer to that. I am aware of some of things that were said back when Archbishop [Thomas] Connolly was still Archbishop -- that the less he knew about what we did, the better. And certainly [Connolly] he was still Archbishop when Father Bichsel first came to St. Leo's. There were people who wrote to him and complained but I don't really know, what if anything -- if he tried to do anything or if he said anything

[to Father Bichsel or priests at St. Leo's]. And then of course when Archbishop [Raymond] Hunthausen came along he was totally in support of what we [St. Leo's] did. We went through that whole long period of time when there wasn't any problem at all. You know, more often than not, Archbishop Hunthausen was with us doing whatever we did. It's too soon to tell with Archbishop [Thomas] Murphy what's going to happen.

Coming up into the 80's did you see any major changes that come into play as far as St. Leo's? How has the economy of Tacoma itself affected St. Leo's?

Hmm, good question. Coming into the 80's St. Leo's has had its biggest and strongest growth -- in the 80's. The number of families in the parish has increased, number of parishioners in general has increased and the giving, the financial giving has increased significantly in the 80's. I think that's due in part to the whole process within the church of sacrificial giving, and that just reinforcing it enough times, that people are on the band wagon now. Actually people at St. Leo's are incredibly generous with their money. It's just amazing sometimes. Also [we have seen] the transition from that fixed income elderly person, who can only give a dollar a week, to a more diverse parish, where you do have some moneyed people and younger working people who can do that sort of thing [contribute].

There has been tremendous growth in the 80's. There's been, I think, a settling down in the parish. I think the 60's and through the 70's, historically, are going to be identified as a real era of turmoil through which we came out at the end of the 70's. In the 80's we settled into a pattern that we are into today-- that is pretty comfortable, doesn't change a lot. School is no longer an issue for us. Educating our kids is an issue for us. We have this tremendous need for space because we've got more kids on Sunday morning coming to Sunday school than we know what to do with. Dealing with that kind of a problem concerns us. We are pretty focused on our social justice programs and they are pretty solid now. MLK [Martin Luther King Ecumenical Center] has spun off and is its own entity now. Hospitality Kitchen is really its own entity -- although it retains a strong tie to St. Leo's. ...the Clinic and the Food Connection are our programs. We do run those.

But I don't see any new programs coming along. Now that could change with this new five year plan that is being developed. And certainly there is a day care on the drawing board. It may or may not ever get off the ground. But I think the 80's became a very settling down time for St. Leo's. Those people who liked it stayed and those people who didn't were already gone. I don't see factions now. I don't see the parish being polarized around issues. I think it runs fairly smoothly.

And from what you know at this point, it's a matter of continuing with the programs that are in place rather than adding quite a few new ones to put the financial resources into? Is it maintaining what you have?

I think so. If there's an issue looming on the horizon that I see would be a St. Leo's kind of issue -- and a lot of people interested in it -- it's AIDS. They are concerned and they talk about it. I just don't think we know what to do about it yet. ...The house that was L'Arche, that belonged to L'Arche, has now been leased by an organization for women with AIDS. They can live there with their children as long as possible. That is the first thing which has happened. ...no it's not St. Leo's program, but it's on our block and anything that is on our block we get pretty invested in. I just see that issue [AIDS] kind of popping up all over. I just don't think it has any direction yet. Maybe the problem, this is awful to say, hasn't hit bad enough yet.

Too soon to know which way to direct it?

Yes. But, I would think, if there is a program that probably you'll see St. Leo's involved in before its over, it will be something to do with people with AIDS.

Has the crime issue, the drug issue that is reported so much in the Hilltop area seemed to have affected your neighborhood or St. Leo's or the reaction of any of the parishioners that actually physically live within those boundaries, do you see a great concern there?

Yes, I do. And it has an effect on the parish there's no question about it. We have had many, many instances of cars being broken into while we are at Mass. That never used to be a problem. Now we have to be concerned about

[whether] someone is watching the parking lot. That doesn't feel particularly good to people. We have long time parishioners who still live close by and share their worries and concerns and we share with them in those worries and concerns. I don't think St. Leo's has taken great steps to do anything. Certainly, they are involved in Safe Streets [program] but they haven't taken the leadership role -- in how do you deal with crime in our neighborhood. They just kind of participate in whatever is going on in the community.

At the same time, you know, there has been a great deal of criticism about the Hospitality Kitchen and the fact that it does attract a certain element...and it's true. Drug deals are made in our parking lot every day of the week. Now it's better than it was for a while because they have -- kind of -- moved over to the east side now. But I can remember, within the last year or so, going upstairs in the rectory for a meeting that was going to be held in that family room upstairs, and the windows that look down on the parking lot were covered with plastic sacks with little slits cut in them. The parish was letting the police go up there [roof] and spy on the parking lot and they [police] were making drug busts. Well that bothered me that I was sitting in a room where this kind of activity was going to go on. So it clearly has had its affect on and been criticized for bringing [that] element into the neighborhood. On the other hand, I think the people who are real involved in that [Hospitality Kitchen and Food Connection] say, "Hey, those folks get hungry like anybody else and they need to eat. And were not going [to move]." Now it did get so bad for a while that even the Kitchen hired an off-duty policeman. Oh, yes. It got to the point there was some violence and they had to do something about it. I don't think they felt good about it but they simply had...to not be foolish. You can't jeopardize several hundred people for a few. So that whole activity has had a tremendous effect.

On the other hand, I think, the vast majority of people at St. Leo's are not inhibited in any way in going down there [to St. Leo's] day or night. Our meetings have not stopped -- our practices, our rehearsals, or whatever. I go down there. I think I use common sense. I always park as close to the rectory as possible so that I don't have to walk clear across that parking lot. If it's very late and I'm getting out of a meeting I'll usually walk out with somebody but I've never felt like I'm not safe. And I think if you talk to most people they feel the same way.

The way the parish incorporates people who are different -- because we always have the mentally ill with us, we always have the retarded people with us, and they come in [to church]. Sometimes our Sunday morning Mass looks kind of crazy because you've got people roaming the aisles. I remember one time this Black man used to come up the middle of the aisle with his bible and shout about Jesus. Recently, we've had a woman who is enamored with the few statues that are left. She'll get up in the middle of Mass and do big demonstrative things in front of them [statues]. People go on with mass. That's part of what St. Leo's is all about. ***(There to serve everyone?)*** Yes. Of course, all the people from L'Arche come every Sunday. So, we have all those folks and its just a normal part of us. On the other hand, we've had some people who were mentally ill, who got violent, and they [ushers] don't think twice about calling the police and having them taken away. But I think they are real patient. I think they are real good about that. Well, that's what makes St. Leo's -- St. Leo's -- makes them special.

Do you find that the community supports the Hospitality Kitchen, the Food Connection?

The St. Leo's community?

Well, no, the community as a whole?

You know, I really think it does. I'm on the board of the Food Connection so I have a a better sense of what happens there rather than the Kitchen. However, I think in both cases -- it is amazing to me the donations that are made from the community that have nothing to do with even Catholic, much less St. Leo's. ...When I work on the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, the calls that come in that have nothing to do with the dinner at all -- some store saying we didn't sell out of bread, we've got three shelves of bread, do you want to come and get it? The philosophy I observe is they never say no. They always have somebody that will run and get it. The result is that the donations are just incredible. I think if there's one thing that is really supported by this community, its' those programs.

How many feeding type programs are there for people in that area?

None that I know of. The Rescue Mission, of course, has their food program every day but the men who go to the Rescue Mission tend to stay in the lower part of the downtown area and don't come up the hill. Nativity House is the same way. They do a lunch there. I don't know if they do a dinner, but they do a lunch and a breakfast, I think. Those folks tend not to come up the hill. Those are the only other two feeding programs that I'm aware of. Now I know I've read in the paper, from time to time, about a lady from one of the Black [community] churches who takes her truck and goes out on the streets and feeds people. I'm sure there are other small programs but nothing the size and nothing of the consistency that the Hospitality Kitchen is. And now they have restaurants taking a day and calling us to work. They will call and say, "I want to take one day, next Friday, and do lunch." They will bring their own staff. So that kind of thing is just incredible to me. I think that is real proof of the support from the community.

Are you seeing more and more families?

Oh, yes. Oh yes. That's heartbreaking. I can remember when, ten to 15 years ago, doing those Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners and all you really saw were pretty hard-core folks, the derelicts, the homeless men, but you didn't see a child. You never saw a child at one of those dinners. Now we have as many families as we do any other kind of folks. ***(And on a daily basis?)*** Yes. And when the Food Connection opens up for the food line, after the lunch is served, and the folks are coming through for the groceries, [it is] just family after family. And the thing we have said so many times, Cindy, is that it could be your next door neighbor. They are not the stereotype of the bum--no way. They are folks that you [may] know--clean, neat, well mannered, just down on their luck kind of folks. [They] are so grateful for what they can get because they just can't go to the food bank but only so many times.

Do you find with the economy, the downturn in the last couple years, and even a little earlier than that, that it probably accounts for a part of the reason that you're seeing so many now as well?

Yes, I'm sure that's true.

Do you find that many of them were or have lived here for many years, or do you find more of a transient population, that came in hoping to better themselves and haven't found the work here, or is that even evident?

I don't know if I could tell. My sense is that it is some of both. There certainly is, and I know from my Food Connection board meetings and my involvement there, a significant population in Tacoma that is transient. They come here thinking they are going to find work. That was probably true more when Tacoma Boat was more active and hiring so much. Somehow that word gets out across the United States that there is a place in Tacoma, Washington that is hiring. So, people flock here, that sort of thing. There is still a population that comes through looking for work and moves on when they don't find it. But there are also the people who have been around a long time.

How do you find, or do you at all notice, any reaction or support of the governmental officials in the city as regards to the parish or its programs, or anything like that?

Again, I'm not sure that I know. I think my guess would be, for the most part, that the city, primarily the city, because we are in the city, but county also, looks favorably upon those programs. I think they've gotten some significant funding from government over the years. The one issue I can remember, clearly, that was negative was maybe three or four years ago. There were some troubles around Nativity House and some people on the City Council decided that Nativity House was not a good place because it was drawing a [certain] element. At the time they were trying to develop another hotel and revitalize downtown Tacoma. The Pacific Avenue strip hadn't been torn down yet, so you still had all of that problem going on. Somehow Nativity House was looked upon as contributing to the problem. There were some...lots of drug stuff going on. Although it wasn't going on inside of Nativity House, they were congregating on the street in front. I remember during that period of time there were several newspaper articles and people who wanted to shut it down. It was when that abatement law came out [and] they [city] was threatening to use it. You know...that kind of thing. And I remember [Father] Gary Smith [of Nativity House] being real hurt and real devastated but just

being real patient about it and working, processing with them [city]. Eventually the whole problem seemed to go away. Then Maureen Howard had the same problem when she tried to move the Last Chance Shelter. Nobody wanted it next door to them. So there have been some negative things around that. But, for the most part, I think the Food Connection and the Kitchen are just highly thought of.

Lets go back to the parish activities. At one point you mentioned that the parish had its traditional St. Vincent de Paul Society etc. Other than the social justice area, currently does the parish still maintain "your regular organizations" that you would see in a lot of the other parishes?

No, No. It has an Altar Society and it will continue to have one as long as we have these elderly women who have been there for a long time. That is important to them. I don't see the young women coming into that at all. And I think it [Altar Society] will die a natural death. So, I think the Altar Society, while it still exists, exists primarily for the benefit of those elderly women who would be heartbroken if they didn't have it. And actually, they don't even call it that any more. They call it the Tuesday Group. It is really our senior citizens program. It's everything all wrapped into one. They still do the receptions for the funerals when people want them. Washing the altar linens and those tasks have always been theirs. That is the only organization that you would call the traditional -- that you would find in other parishes.

There is a St. Vincent de Paul link but it doesn't -- it isn't organized. Joyceann [Hagen] really has the link to that and it's part of her whole social justice, social ministry program. She has the ability to help people out financially with some St. Vincent de Paul funds. Up until about 4-5 years ago, maybe even not that long ago, we did have one day a week where the St. Vincent de Paul [Society was present]. People [officers] were present and you could come and get help. However, that got unruly. Because we are in an area where everybody needs help and there was never enough money to go around, people would get angry when we would have to say there's no more money. They finally closed it down completely because they could not cope with the crowds and what went on there. Joyceann does it on a case by case basis now. So that's [St. Vincent de Paul Society] really not an organization. We do not

have a Holy Name Society. We have Sunday school. We have a youth group that is real important. But there are no other official organizations.

You mentioned you have a youth group, have they always had one at the parish?

No. Again, that [youth group] came about when the young families started to come back after our very dull period of time. Suddenly we were confronted with, we've got kids. What are we going to do with them? All of a sudden someone said, "and we've got teenagers. What do you do with teenagers?" And so that's when the parish started [a youth group]. There used to be a junior and senior high group but I don't know if it is still broken up that way or not. But we do have an active group. ***(Are they fairly active?)*** Yes they are. The parents of kids that age tend to come to do it [supervise]. We have a staff person who is responsible for family ministry and that comes under her area of responsibility. So we have those kinds of programs but we don't have any other kinds of organizations down there.

When did Father Pat Carroll join St. Leo's and become pastor? What can you tell me about him?

Well, I think Pat's been there seven years, so mid eighties, I guess he came. Pat Carroll was known to us. Back in the early 70's to mid 70's Father Pat Carroll was the rector at Bellarmine. ***(I didn't realize that)***. Oh yes. And of course, that's when my two older children were involved in Catholic high schools. That's how I got to know Father Pat--when he was the rector at Bellarmine. He would come down to St. Leo's because any time you have Jesuits at Bellarmine they are going to come down to St. Leo's. So a lot of us knew him from Bellarmine. Then he went off [left Bellarmine] and did all his other stuff [ministry]. When he came back, he really wasn't a stranger to a lot of us.

I was personally real excited because he was such a wonderful homilist. I thought to get him back was a real treat. I just personally liked him real well, so --

Has he been a strong pastor for the parish?

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Oh, I think he's been -- he's been just great. [Father] Peter Byrne followed [Father] Bill Hausmann and when Peter Byrne left the parish was just crushed. Peter had been a Scholastic with us and we almost raised him -- as a parish. He was ours all through his Jesuit training. So when he came to us as his first assignment after ordination this was a love relationship that was never going to end. Then Peter eventually had to move on, which he needed to do for himself -- and it was really good for him. I will never forget the day Peter left. We had a final Mass for him and a reception in the back of the church. Two hours after Mass was over people were still lined up to say good-bye to him. There was not a tear left in his body, not a tear left in my body. It was beyond anything I've ever seen in any church. When we had to say good-bye to Peter it was a death experience.

Following Peter we had a pastor who was pretty ineffective. I don't want to be critical but he just didn't -- he wasn't what we needed. We were grieving and he couldn't help us. He just didn't have that capacity and he had myriads of his own problems. We wound up helping him more than he helped us, I think. So there was this very short time...he was only there a couple of years...and then [Father] Pat Carroll came.

We were like...in the desert at that point. We needed somebody desperately and he [Father Pat] has just really, really been the answer for us. He is so dynamic. Spiritually he is so good for us. He is so enriching spiritually that you get so much from him. At the same time, he knows how to play and he loves to play. He knows how to be a leader. He's been very, very good for the parish. I think its going to be real tough when he goes...to say good-bye to him, too.

Now is that anticipated at any certain time?

No. He made a commitment a few years back to stay for five more years. So we probably have at least 2-3 years more of him before he moves on. At some point he will leave. At some point I think they all [pastors] feel like I've done all I can do. I need a new fresh beginning and he'll [Pat Carroll] leave.

Who are some of the other parish members that you can think of that have been important over the years and have been extremely active in the path St. Leo's has taken?

There's probably a whole lot of them. ...one of the thoughts I've had ever since I talked with you is...the number of people we have around the parish that aren't going to be there much longer--just given their age--who carry a lot of our history. Somebody should be sitting down and talking with them.

Al and Josephine Carbone...who I told you about before ***(I'm talking with Al on Saturday)***. Well they've been there for ever and ever and ever. Their youngest kids were about the age of my oldest kids. I knew them through the school. It's not that they have done anything so dynamic, it's just that they've always been there. Barbara Thomashofski was the same way. And Barbara was, of course, in her younger years when she had kids in the school, very involved in the school. She had a strong leadership role in the parish. She doesn't now simply because she is kind of wearing down. Who else would I think of? There's a lot of people who were there that are gone now -- that have just moved on for one reason or another. There's a whole segment of folks that fall into my age category that you'll find at the 8:00 Mass on Sunday morning -- simply because they like to go to an earlier Mass -- no reason other than that. But they seem to congregate at that 8:00 Mass. All, at one time, were the real movers and shakers of the parish--the Mullens, the Fenglers, the Mondaus and the Wetzlers, Paul and Karen [Martin].

From the time that you've been at St. Leo's, if you could just pick one incident or one period of time, what would the saddest thing that has happened to St. Leo's be?

Oh, I think without a doubt the saddest was the day that Peter [Father Byrne] left. I can't think of a sadder moment, as just pure heartbreaking sadness, as the day Peter left. Sad, from the perspective of unfortunate, would probably be the era when Father Pat Hurley and Father Dick Mercy [were there]. [They] did all of that insensitive remodeling of the church, changing the way we do things, without caring a lot about the feelings of the people. The sadness is there because it hurt so many people it didn't need to. That is one thing I feel so sad about. Some of our seniors went to their graves with that pain...because they hadn't been considered. So those would be the two things.

What are some of the happiest memories, or the most outstanding?

Nothing pops to my mind as some big -- ...I guess if I -- and I don't know if I would call this outstanding -- but I think the way liturgy is done at St. Leo's is in itself outstanding. It is meaningful. It is not just rote. It's not just a set of prayers and set of circumstances to go through the hour so you can go home. There is all kinds of incredible thought [preparation] put into liturgy at St. Leo's that makes it real meaningful. You go away feeling like you were personally involved and you take something with you. I think that liturgy itself, for me personally, is just an incredible experience at St. Leo's. You are not going to find a 45 minute Mass at St. Leo's. If that's what you want--don't go there. If we get out in an hour and twenty minutes we are lucky but it's because people aren't worried about that [time]. People are concerned about the content of the liturgy. So, I think that is something really, really significant.

Over the years I think we did a better job of partying than we do now. I can look back on some -- especially when the school was open, of course, that gave us more reasons to party -- parish picnics that were just incredible experiences [as well as] some dances and things like that we used to do as a parish. I think maybe we've become a little too social conscious and forget that we need to take care of ourselves once in a while. We don't do a very good job of that any more. But I can think back ...and, of course, Gerry Morin's death [former associate pastor died January 1992] brought so much of that back -- One of the things people said over and over again at Gerry's services was "If there ever was a man who knew how to play, it was Gerry Morin." We will always have memories of him, of his parties, his dances, and things he liked to do.

When was he at St. Leo's? Was he there when you came? He was an associate pastor?

Well he was there for 31 years and he left there officially probably five years ago. So you would have to back into those dates. Jerry did not have the skills to be a pastor. Jerry was unique. I mean I don't know how he ever made it to be a priest. I think he had the calling to be a priest. How he every got through the training I'll never know because Jerry never quite got it together. He was always, in a lot of ways, pretty marginal. I can remember back in the

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years when we used to go to confession on a regular basis. If you'd go to Jerry -- I mean you could have said I told a lie or I killed somebody and you would get three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys and that would be it. No discussion, no questions, no talk, nothing, just go. He was a terrible homilist. You just wanted to groan when he had the homily [because] it was never going to get connected. You know it was just -- kind of say what you have to say and -- finish. He just couldn't do it -- it just wasn't in him. But yet, on a one-on-one basis he was just a wonderful, wonderful man. So he was there for 31 years. He was there a long time, and as I said, was there when I came so. I don't know when he actually started.

What do you see as the future for St. Leo's?

Oh, I think I see a good future for St. Leo's. St. Leo's has got some real pains to go through again. I feel some concern about what the next few years might be like because we will have to do something about that school building [demolition]. We will have to do something about the programs. If the CCS doesn't go [future development], then we've got to make other decisions. The day they implode that school building will cause pain again, and will probably dredge up all kinds of old pain that we'll go through again. I will be really glad when we get over that hurdle. Once we get beyond it and we redefine ourselves as to what our buildings are going to look like, where we are going to be, and that sort of thing we'll be fine. St. Leo's is not dying. St. Leo's is growing. I think that it will continue to be that other Catholic Church in Tacoma. I think it will always be different. It will always be very liberal in its philosophies. It will be the parish that's concerned about the poor -- not that other parishes aren't because, I think, they are. We have an opportunity because we are geographically [located] where the majority of the poor are. I think we are going to continue. I don't see a shift in the way we go. I certainly don't see a shift. Well, I shouldn't say that because, once again, the unknown is Archbishop Murphy himself. [St. Leo's will not change]...anything short of him [Murphy] mandating us to change, and even then I think he would have some problems he wouldn't want to deal with. I think it's just simply going to be a few years of change while we define this whole building situation. It will be a very solid parish and continue to grow in the direction it is in. I don't think it will change.

Do you see any other parishes within Tacoma, either due to your influence or their own internal awareness, becoming more involved in social justice issues at all in the future or at least to more of a degree than they are now?

I think there are some that have already been affected by what we do. St. Charles is probably the most significant example. I can remember, personally, years ago St. Charles [Parish] kind of sat up there in its nice neighborhood and took care of its nice folks and put its blinders on -- like a lot of parishes did. And the change in that parish has been phenomenal. Their support of us, their support of our programs is just extraordinary. The number of people from St. Charles that join our boards of the Kitchen or the Food Connection and take an active role -- I think we have already had an impact on St. Charles. I feel, because of us, they are doing things now they wouldn't have done 10 years ago. And I don't think that will change. I think it will continue.

Sacred Heart is another parish that found themselves with some of our problems. Some of the poor began to migrate to the East side of town. Sacred Heart found them in their parish and looked to us for some leadership and still does. They don't do a lot but, I think, they do a whole lot more than they used to and at least they accepted it as their problem. That is a real step in the right direction. Of course, they've got a lot of Southeast Asian people in their area. They have had to set up some ministry to deal with these new immigrants. The flip side of this is Holy Rosary [Parish] which has continued to sit in the same neighborhood that we are in, and looking at the same kinds of folks that we look at, and said, 'No.' I don't know. Holy Rosary, again, that's an order parish⁴. It is not a Diocesan parish⁵ and whether that [their policies or mission] is the influence of the Order or what I don't know. I have not been involved in that parish [Holy Rosary]. It is still a very conservative, traditional, school, Holy Name Society type parish and doesn't do much else.

You mentioned the Southeast Asian influx. Do you find many of them within the boundaries of St. Leo's?

⁴ Order parishes fall under the appropriate jurisdiction of the Archdiocese in question but are staffed by priests who were educated in seminaries of particular orders such as Jesuits, Franciscans, etc., and when ordained may be sent to a variety of different locations not tied to a specific diocese or parish.

⁵ Diocesan parishes fall under the appropriate jurisdiction of the Archdiocese in question and are staffed by priests who were educated in Diocesan seminaries and remain within that particular Diocese for their ministry.

Oh yes. Oh yes. We've had a significant number of [Southeast Asians] at St. Leo's. I think they feel pretty comfortable there. Some of the older Asian women who still wear the traditional gowns and things, that have come there [St. Leo's] since they first came to town, just feel very comfortable there. Yes, there is a significant..

Have you noticed or ever found that St. Leo's, due to its geographical location in the city, tended to be an area where many, depending upon the period of time, immigrant groups would normally become attracted to, or actually end up, because of the housing situation and would locate in that part of the city?

My tendency is to say yes. But at the same time, it wasn't until the movement of the Southeast Asians that it became very obvious. I can't think of a time before that [period] when I would have said to you, "Oh, I remember when the Irish came, or the -- I don't remember that." I go back to what I said earlier, that before the shift we were really an all white parish. ...We had a few Black folks who have been with us forever and ever, but by and large, we were pretty much an all white -- I don't remember anything until the Southeast Asians. Then the Sanctuary Family came which had another impact on us.⁶

If you could sum up St. Leo's in just a few words, what would they be?

Well, in a real generic sense, for me it would be home. It would be things like -- where I belong. I'm not sure that everybody would respond [the way] that I feel. But for me, when I look back over my own life, and particularly the major tragedies in my life, it was St. Leo's that was there for me. So my bond to St. Leo's is more than just what they do. My bond is this whole historical piece.

When I went through my divorce [first husband who moved here with her], and the year prior to the divorce went through the death of our daughter, St. Leo's was very involved with me during that period of time. I had no family here [and because] I had no family here, St. Leo's was my support. St. Leo's was my family. I can remember so many people coming up to me and saying,

⁶ For more information on the Sanctuary Family see March 5, 1992 interview with Father Bill Bichsel, March 2, 1992 interview with Reverend Dave Algers, and Research paper enclosed.

not -- not -- "Oh, you poor thing". It wasn't that at all. It was just... "[I] want to let you know how much I care. If there is anything I can do, call me." ...and that type of thing.

I see that goes on today. You know somebody has a problem and -- ...recently one of our young moms went through some really extensive major surgery. She's got a little child whose not quite 2 yet and another [older] child. Next thing I knew, we were all taking a day to cook a dinner for them, go over and prepare the meal and serve, and put the baby to bed. It's that kind of response that goes on even now. Somebody's painting their house and they say, "Hey, I'm painting my house next Saturday" Or, recently a fellow, whose wife had cancer and they've had some problems, needed to roof his house. After Mass one Sunday he said, "You know, next weekend I have to roof my house and anybody who can come" ...I guess they had a huge turnout to roof his house. It's that dimension that's really hard to know how to describe.

But it is over and beyond all the structure, all the organizational pieces, it is who the people of St. Leo's are -- that's what they are all about. That's my tie to the parish. That's my tie to St. Leo's parish. I don't belong to any organizations and I'm not super active anymore. There was a time when I lived down there. I don't do that anymore. But that bond is so strong. It's just -- home. Yes, that's why I belong. That is what it feels like to me and I think a lot of people would say that.

Thank you very much, Pat, for sharing all your wonderful memories and thoughts on St. Leo's. It has been very pleasant and a great help.

You're welcome. You're welcome.