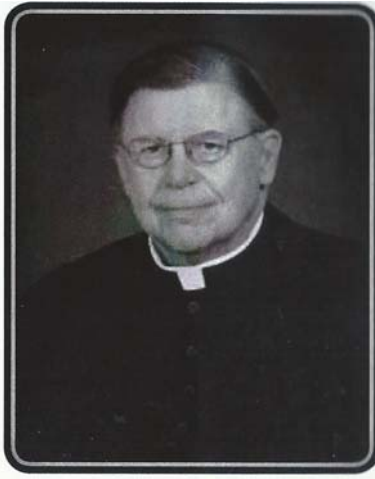


## 1986-2006 : The Rev. Leon Alexander



Father Leon further developed and perfected two successful youth programs during his service at Blessed Sacrament: Teens Encounter Christ and Camp Tygart summer camp. His impersonations of St. Nicholas, illuminating his full nature during the Christmas season delighted both young and old. Parishioners were enlivened by his stimulating homilies, sense of humor and joy through being pastor. Father Leon and Blessed Sacrament parishioners wrote an important new chapter in the educational and social history of the parish by undertaking a \$1 million capital campaign to build a greatly needed parish hall. By 2001, a successful campaign was realized, and a parish hall, state-of-the-art Kitchen, conference room, meditation garden and renovations to the upper level of the existing facility were completed. The convent was removed. In a later project, he selected the memorial garden as the best site for the parish columbarium. Father Leon served from 1986 to 2006. His mother, Rita, lived at the rectory until her death on Feb. 18, 1992.

### Homilies, TEC and Camp Tygart (later Camp Leon)

Bishop Joseph H. Hodges assigned Father Leon as Father Jody's replacement. Father Leon's activity in Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) made him a familiar face to many parishioners. He is a gifted homilist, often asking the congregation to participate. He's a storyteller. Father Leon organized Camp Tygart, giving children, ages 7-13, a week of camping before the regular season opens. Volunteers from the parish staff the camp. Even former parishioners travel back to help.

### Silver and Gold Jubilee

With parish help in early 1991, Father Leon celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination and later, on October 6th, the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary.

At Father Leon's Silver Jubilee, Bishop Bernard Schmitt presided with many concelebrant priests at a Mass of Thanksgiving. Local dignitaries shared in the celebration. Dinner for all came after Mass.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of our parish, parishioners created a memorial quilt, signed by parish families, which now hangs in our Parish Hall. A program, displays, photos and other artifacts helped explain our history.

Father Leon celebrated his Golden Jubilee as an ordained priest on May 22, 2016, with similar festivities. Father Leon concelebrated with Father John Finnell and several other priests. A splendid dinner followed in the parish hall. On the following Saturday, Father Leon celebrated a memorial Mass in honor of his brother "D".

### Growth of Complex

With continuing growth, the parish bought property on 3rd avenue next door to double the existing parking lot. In 1993, the parish bought a house (401 E St.) for youth faith formation. Now this house and others (405 E St. and 133 4<sup>th</sup> Ave) belong to the parish as rental property. All are north of the church complex. An apartment building has been razed and one rental property was razed in June, 2016.

### Vision 2000, Parish Hall and Improvements

During the Vision 2000 planning process in 1999, participants found a common thread - the parish needed a space, a parish hall, to accommodate large groups of people. The needs and level of large and small group activity at Blessed Sacrament could no longer be satisfied by either the upstairs gym or downstairs meeting room/kitchen in the school. The gym was not handicap accessible or air-conditioned. Blessed Sacrament could not grow without a new parish hall for church and social activities.

After serious consideration of present and future needs, Father Leon said, "We need it! Let's build it!". With permission from the Bishop, Blessed Sacrament parishioners responded enthusiastically to the challenging opportunity to raise \$1 million.

The Social Hall project consists of a canopy-covered entrance on 4th avenue to a foyer leading either to the Gathering Space or Social Hall and enclosing a new Meditation Garden, the site for a future Columbarium. The Hall seats 240-280 people.

Ancillary facilities to the Hall includes a state-of-the-art, fully equipped kitchen, chair and table storage room, conference room and restrooms, shelving, cabinets, equipment for serving meals and parties. The convent was removed prior to construction. The foyer has two handicapped accessible doors. The Lunch Bunch women supplied their needs for furnishing the kitchen and for hall furnishings.

The Social Hall connected by hall and stairs to both levels of the school building, plus an exit to parking at the rear of the Hall, replacing those to the Convent. Four meeting rooms became available along the upper hall. A uni-use restroom was added as well.

The Meditation Garden, with the historic Crucifix and Blessed Virgin Mary statue, each refurbished, moved to a secure centered courtyard, open to the air, in this new complex against the north school wall. Part of the east external Hall wall became reserved for the future Columbarium.

The Social Hall and ancillary facilities Capital Campaign, co-chaired by Diane Lordan and Tony Ciliberti, took place in the summer of 2000. At a June 25 gathering, parishioners viewed parishioner/architect Doug Bastian's rendition of the project and witnessed ground-breaking. Clint Bryant (Worship Space contractor) was hired for the Hall project, RC Construction removed the convent, etc. Within 3 years, most parishioners paid their pledges in full. The project was debt-free.

The campaign materials carried the Bible passage from 2 Timothy 1.6: "I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you." More than 200 families became "Keepers of the Flame" by illuminating their future and that of others through support of this important and successful project. In thanksgiving and recognition for donor generosity, a Giving Tree was placed in the breezeway.

Bishop Bernard Schmitt dedicated the parish hall March 11, 2001. Some 350 parishioners, invited guests and various priests were in attendance.

## Staff

Brecken Streit became the first full time director of religious education in 1993. She resigned in 1998 and moved to a deanery position. Jeanne Haas replaced Brecken. Becky Barnes became Music Director in 2004, following Carolyn Tenery's death.

## Worship Space Renovations

Renovations of the worship space began in the summer of 2005 and were completed by Advent. Ceiling tiles replaced the wood ceiling. Chairs replaced pews, a two-step round altar area with apse replaced carpeted wooden squares; a canopy (Baldacchino) placed over the altar area. Marcella Blomberg of Parkersburg created six stained-glass windows designed by Martina Huson's studio (in Kanawha City) and placed them in the east (E Street) wall. Parish sponsors donated the windows, which depict the seven Sacraments, as well as a bronze hanging representation of the risen Christ (created by Marcella Blomberg). The work finished when the floor tiles were repaired and floor refinished. Bishop Bransfield dedicated the renovations on April 2, 2005.

## Outreach

In 1991, the parish sponsored a family from Yemen. The father, Loc Lam, was Vietnamese and the mother was Yemeni. They had five children and no other parish or church would sponsor them because there were so many of them. We took them and they were amazing. The parents still live in Charleston as do the two oldest girls who own nail salons. The family had twin boys who went on to become an architect and an engineer, both with graduate degrees in their fields. Joan Garten remains in touch with their whole family. Their youngest child who was in third grade when the family came was valedictorian at Capital high school and graduated summa cum laude from WVU in engineering. They are a remarkably wonderful family. One of the boys is getting married in Vietnam in 2017 and has asked the Gartens to attend.

In July 1998, the church sponsored and parish workers built a house to Habitat for Humanity specifications. Usually this size project calls for multiple groups. It was quite an undertaking. The Schneider family, charter members of the parish, donated the lot at 509 Montrose Drive. The church donated the property to Habitat for Humanity.

In July 1999, the State of West Virginia awarded Blessed Sacrament the Governor's Service Award for our continuing involvement and support of non-profit agencies. Many parishioners continue to work on Habitat projects in our area.

### Giftedness and Works of Mercy

Part of his "job" as pastor and part just plain gifts from his heart, Father Leon labored very hard behind the scenes to serve sick and homebound parishioners. Many of these families became his close friends, partly for this reason and partly for his special friendship with youth. He was a Little League umpire and a talented singer and actor in the Light Opera Guild and other groups. He also portrayed St. Nicholas in the flesh. Camp Leon (Tygart) came at a time when local industry was shutting down camps to cut costs. He had a special way to ask for help - he would call and say "How much do you love me?" Who can resist that?

After serving here for 20 years, Father Leon accepted reassignment on June 14, 2006, to St. Francis DeSales Parish in Morgantown, WV.