

Features

Best fills free hours with family of feathered friends

... example, are very competitive and jealous. The African grays make the best talkers ... Sheba and Elijah are the disciplinarians of the bird room." Other birds' names reflect their owner's varied interests. Nadia, a macaw, was named for the tiny Romanian gymnast who stole hearts and a gold medal at the 1976 Olympics. Jacinta, a huge hyacinth macaw that Father Sundholm sold his sailboat to purchase, recalls one of three Portuguese children to whom the Blessed Mother appeared Fatima. A long-time friend and pastor at neighboring St. Mary's Church, Father Edward Zimmer, was the namesake for a lovebird who inspired the slogan "E.Z., come home" last year during brief flirtation with freedom.

... responsible for his attachment to his avian family. "The old-time rectories were places where there were a lot of priests around," he recalled. "With the kind of life priests live today, there's not much opportunity for socializing, even when you have an assistant. And nowadays, most priests live alone."

Although some Holy Family parishioners have undoubtedly questioned their pastor's conversion of the rectory into an aviary or sorts, he has received no direct complaints. "I think it depends on your reputation," he said. "My reputation is that of not taking anything from anyone."

Nor has the East Bloomfield native ever been half-hearted about his enthusiasms. Tropical fish claimed his fancy as a young assistant at Sacred Heart Cathedral in the early 1960s. At one time,

he owned six aquariums ranging in size from 55 to 90 gallons. "The joke was that when I moved from St. Cecilia's to St. Salome's (where he was named pastor in 1974), I just flooded (Culver Road) and floated the fish down," he recalled.

His passion for plants was equally intense; the rectory was filled with them. But most of his other leisure-time predilections paled once Father Sundholm discovered birds.

On his way to purchase a hanging plant to replace another that had died, he encountered a friend who suggested buying a bird instead. "It'll last longer and it's cheaper than buying a good plant," the friend counseled.

So Father Sundholm purchased a parakeet, and found a new fixation, which he sold his plants and fish to satisfy. "It wasn't something unique to me

or to the parakeet," he explained. "It has more to do with pets that are personable ... I mean, fish are beautiful to look at but you can't have a personal relationship with a fish."

To see the priest handle his birds is to witness a bond that is very personal indeed. His characteristically blunt manner quickly gives way to tenderness as he strokes one's brightly colored head or gently persuades another to enter the sink to bathe.

"There's something inherently attractive about animals," he said. "I have the feeling that an animal is something that cares about you, that makes you feel as though you have something to offer."

"I always liked any kind of animal," he added. "Maybe if I'd bought a giraffe, I'd be collecting giraffes now."



... collected so many birds that feeding them can be a lengthy procedure.

Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal



... carries on piece of stationery for the real thing.



Father Sundholm says goodbye to one of his African grays, before closing the door of the cage.



E.Z., named for another Auburn pastor, Father Ed Zimmer, takes his daily bath.