

Pets large and small will head to church for blessing in October

NEW YORK (CNS) — In October a procession of pets large and small will head toward churches across the country for the annual blessing of the animals.

The blessing is conducted on or around Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, in remembrance of the saint's love for all creatures.

"The bond between person and pet is like no other relationship because the communication between fellow creatures is at its most basic," says Franciscan Fa-

ther Kevin E. Mackin.

Individuals and their pets "are two creatures of love," he said in a statement on the blessing ceremony released by his New York province. "No wonder people enjoy the opportunity to take their animal companions to church for a special blessing."

At Franciscan churches, he notes, a friar wearing a brown robe with a white cord usually welcomes each animal with a special prayer of thanksgiving to God for all living creatures. Then he gently sprinkles the pet with holy water.

"Some people criticize the amount and cost of care given to pets," said Father Mackin, who is director of St. Anthony's Guild in Paterson, N.J.

"People are more important, they say. Care for poor people instead of poodles. And certainly our needy fellow humans

should not be neglected."

But "every creature is important," he added. "The love we give to a pet and receive from a pet, can draw us more deeply into the larger circle of life, into the wonder of our common relationship to our creator."

The following churches have notified the *Catholic Courier* of upcoming pet blessings or other events to commemorate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi:

Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 304 Demarest Parkway, Elmira: Tuesday, Oct. 3, at 6 p.m. in the parking lot, rain or shine. Organizers said "in case of rain, animals will be paired two by two." The pet blessing is sponsored by the Liturgy Committee of Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Call 607/732-6261 for information.

Holy Apostles/St. Anthony of Padua Parish Cluster, Rochester: Wednesday,

Oct. 4, at 5:30 p.m. in Jones Park, located directly across from St. Anthony of Padua Church, 60 Lorimer St. According to Marie Hammer, the event will include a visit by the Rochester Police Department Mounted Patrol and Canine Unit. Call 716/254-7170 or 458-1180 for information.

Catholic Charities, 1700 College Ave., Elmira: an evening program titled "Peace With God, Peace With All Creation," on Wednesday, Oct. 4, from 7-10 p.m. The program's presenter will be Father John Surette, SJ, director of the Spirit Earth Spirituality Center in Albany. All are welcome. Registration required by Oct. 2. Call 607/734-9784.

St. Joseph's Church, 206 Fremont St., Wayland: Saturday, Oct. 14, at 1 p.m. Pets and small animals are welcome. Call 716/728-2228 for information.



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