

NEEDED FAMILY

Story by Mike Latona

Photographs by Matthew Scott



of the Catholic Community of Mount Morris and ive of her six family pets.

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Karen, 16, experienced this pain after her longtime family dog was put to sleep in April.

"I just wanted to hide and not talk to anybody," recalled Karen, from St. Mary's Church in Bath.

However, her spirits were lifted when the family acquired a new puppy last month. Karen also takes pleasure in attending to her many aquatic pets, the most notable being a giant white snail measuring one foot long.

Jonathan, on the other hand, has only one pet — but his dog, Maxx, apparently keeps him pretty occupied.

"He likes barking a lot and is real playful. He likes running after balls," said Jonathan, 15, from St. Columba/St. Patrick churches in Caledonia and Mumford. "It could be 90 degrees out and he'd still be running around."

Jonathan said that Maxx is so energetic, he doesn't even bother attempting to take him for walks.

"He's just going to be right at the end of a rope, pulling you down the street," Jonathan explained.

This energy, Jonathan remarked, was the chief reason his family acquired Maxx from one of his mother's friends in the first place.

"(The friend) had a cat and (Maxx) got a little too frisky with it," Jonathan said. So Maxx moved in with Jonathan's family.

Jonathan noted that when the St. Columba/St. Patrick youth group holds its annual camp-out at his

house, Maxx joins right in.

"He sits right next to the people sitting around the campfire," Jonathan said. "We call him the 'Maxx-cot.'"

Though Maxx seems to receive plenty of attention, Jonathan observed that not all pet owners show enough responsibility for their own pets.

"Before you get a pet, you should know what you're getting into," he commented. "If you can't handle them, you shouldn't get them."

When she hears of stories about animal cruelty, Laura said, "It just makes me sick. Animals don't sin, so they don't deserve to be harmed or killed."

Laura stated that pets should be valued companions. For example, she said, "With older people, all their family might be dead — so they're very attached to their pets."

Asked whether she thought pets go to heaven, Laura stated that it's unlikely because animals don't have souls.

"I don't think animals go to the



Maxx, the Schwartzmeyer family's dog, shares a moment close to Jonathan Schwartzmeyer.

same place as humans," she said.

However, Laura added, pets have some qualities similar to those in humans.

"They have feelings and a personality and a brain," she said.

After a pause, she added, "Maybe they do go to heaven, I don't know."

Though pets may not be equal to humans, Alison feels they do have a special relationship with God.

"Pets are important in God's eyes. They're his creation," she said. "I think God definitely communicates with them."

Pets, Jonathan added, "give something to the rest of the family. Might that 'something' be the gift of love?"

"Definitely," Jonathan stated.

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