

Animals blessed at St. Andrew's in L'Amable



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By Chris Drost

St. Andrew's United Church in L'Amable welcomed pets and their owners on the afternoon of Aug. 18 for the Blessing of the Animal ceremony conducted by Brother Allan Gaebel of the Franciscan Brothers, a religious order within the Catholic Church, founded in 1209 by Saint Francis of Assisi.

Reverend Lynn Watson said, "Seven years ago when I arrived here my instructions were to close this church, but there is something about the space. It would be a shame not to use it." Since then it has been used as an alternative spiritual space for everything from the Indigenous community, for a labyrinth and for local Buddhists. This is the fourth time it has been used for the Blessing of the Animals.

A few years ago, Joan Gaebel told Rev. Watson that her husband's nephew, Allan Gaebel, who lives in Toronto, is a Brother of the Franciscan order. He was contacted and agreed to conduct the blessing the first year, and every time since. In fact, Gaebel has a very interesting connection to St. Andrew's. It was his great-great grandfather, Charles Henry Gaebel, who milled the lumber for the structure and he is credited for having built the church.

Home Again organizer, Rosemary Dixon, and animal foster, Joan Phillips, brought Peri along for the blessing. Peri is a Papillon mix who was adopted by Joan as a rescue and now works for Home Again with Joan.

Rev. Lynn Watson arrived with Cohen, her beautiful three-year-old golden retriever. Cohen is named after Leonard Cohen, the famous poet, songwriter and musician. Watson says her dog is registered with the name "Gold Paws Bird on a Wire," a nod to one of Cohen's most well-known songs.

Dawn Robinson carried her black and white cat Kiwi into the church while Eric Poulton brought along Scrub. Both cats relaxed in their owners' arms throughout the short service and blessing, undisturbed by the odd woof from the group of canines. Robinson said, "We are bringing them to be blessed because we want them to live a long, happy, healthy and as safe a life as possible."

Judy Edgar said, "I had to bring Abby to be blessed because she goes to work with me at the church."

Alwood, a sweet little yorkie, sat up nicely in the pew between owners Cathy and Jenny waiting to be blessed while 13-year-old Rocket, said calmly at his owner's feet.

Following a prayer for the animals, asking for any that are not well to be healed and for them to live long and healthy lives, Brother Gaebel cited various sections of the scriptures where animals are specifically mentioned. He said, "God made a covenant between mankind and all animals. We are all interconnected." After a prayer of blessing, each animal was individually blessed by Gaebel. This year, everyone who brought an animal took away a certificate of blessing and an offering was taken up in support of local animal rescue organization, Home Again.