

Pet blessing makes community connection

Members of Unity Lutheran, Chicago, eagerly turned to ABC7 News one Sunday to view a clip of neighbors, friends, dogs, cats and ferrets gathering at their church in a way congregations have come to appreciate on the days surrounding the October commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi. Such celebrations honor all creatures and bless the special relationships between humans and pets.

The pet blessing service at Unity grew out of the congregation's plan for mission and ministry. But there was a twist to their celebration due

to Unity's partnership with Gloria Lissner and Famous Fido, an animal rescue and adoption alliance.

The regular Sunday worship service began outside as a witness to the community. The gospel message that day reflected the opportunity to meet responsibilities of human partnership with others of God's creatures.

An offering was taken to support Famous Fido's work of rescue and adoption as an alternative to euthanizing healthy abandoned pets.

Worship tripled. Not counting pets, a third of the congregants were people who have no regular church home. Another third were members of other churches who were drawn by the opportunity to bring their pets with them to worship and join faith with advocacy.

The final third were regular worshippers who enjoyed the opportunity to deepen relationships by learning more about each other's "loved ones."

After worship all gathered for a dinner provided by Lissner and associates.

"One thing that struck me as a twist," said the Rev. Fred Kinsey, "was seeing our neighbors from across the street bring their pets and join the blessing in front of the church. The house they live in used to be owned and operated as a hostel sheltering young immigrant women who came to work in this community. The church has new ways of becoming a sacred, sheltering, healing space for our neighborhoods.

"We don't own this task but join with others like Gloria in strengthening the web of care as our expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in invitation into the life of discipleship."

Unity has planned another service in connection with Famous Fido around Christmas called "Let Heaven and Nature Sing." □

Then the next crew from Good Shepherd came with a hearty Sudanese meal.

As Good Shepherd enters the mentoring stage of the process, members are not only proud of their accomplishment, but committees are working together in new ways. The RefugeeOne project taught them a valuable lesson: We are stronger when we work together for the good of others.

To learn more about RefugeeOne, contact Kim Snoddy, assistant director of development (773-423-9834 or kknoddy@refugeeone.org) or visit www.refugeeone.org. □

The Rev. Kathy Nolte
Nolte is pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Oak Park Ill.

