

At this Beverly church service, pets are welcome

By Cate Lecuyer

Staff writer

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BEVERLY — Cindy Antonuk, a seminary student and member of the First Baptist Church, fostered three puppies last year who'd been sent from a shelter down South with a high rate of euthanizing its animals.

One of those puppies had "accidents" all over her couch, so she bought a new couch from Jordan's Furniture. Then the Red Sox won the World Series — again — and her couch was free.

Faithful fans have given God his share of recognition for the championship, and Antonuk isn't one to argue, especially when the game touched her on a personal level. Perhaps the new couch was a thank-you for taking care of some of his creatures. Perhaps not.

Either way, it doesn't hurt to pray for them.

"We talk a lot in church about how God loves all of creation, and we don't have a lot of ways that we show that," she said.

So on Sunday, all pets are welcome at a short service that will honor them as important members of the family. There will be animal songs, snacks and the opportunity to receive an individual prayer after the service. If a pet has died, people are welcome to bring pictures, and children are encouraged to bring their favorite stuffed animals.

"It helps to solidify the bond between a person and an animal," Antonuk said about the service.

She'll be there with Dakota, a Great Pyrenees and collie mix that she rescued in February from an abusive family that had adopted him from a kill shelter in Tennessee. She's now teaching him to become a therapy dog and hopes he can provide comfort to those who are sick or dying. He gets along well with her other dog, Shadoe, a 12-year-old mutt.

"In watching my older dog train my younger dog to be a part of the family, I realized God works in so many ways," she said. It's what inspired her to offer the service devoted to pets.

Like animal blessings held by other churches, she hopes to turn this into an annual event, and one that embraces the entire community, not just members of the First Baptist Church.

Instead of a traditional money offering, people should bring items for the Northeast Animal Shelter in Salem, which will have a booth at the service. They are in need of laundry detergent, liquid bleach, paper towels, cat litter, newspapers, dog and cat toys, towels and blankets, high-quality dry dog and cat food (such as Nutro), jars of all-meat baby food (beef or chicken), dog and cat treats, and kitten milk replacement (KMR brand).

All pets should be restrained with leashes, or in carriers, tanks or cages. That means no exotic snakes draped over shoulders or birds flying around the sanctuary.

"I hope people would use some common sense," Antonuk said. "I'm trying not to worry too much."

CREATION CELEBRATION

What: Special church service honoring pets

When: Sunday, April 13, 3 p.m.

Where: First Baptist Church, 221 Cabot St.

Who: Public invited with pets

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