

## Blessing of the animals



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Dozens of dogs. Several cats. A pair of rats. A snake, a rabbit and a goat.

All these animals received blessings at the annual Blessing of the Animals service held at the Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan in Corvallis on Sunday afternoon.

The church's rector, Simon Justice, said the event honors pets, and the tradition of St. Francis of

Assisi who saw the spirit of God in the world surrounding humankind. St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals.

"It's all about love, the love our pets show us: tremendous unconditional love, and it brings out the best in us. It shows God's love for us."

Justice said about half of the approximately 50 people at the event were not parishioners at the church, and he hopes the event is a way to connect people to the church.

Hopefully this is a side of church that is unexpected and joyful, he said, and less formal or judgmental than people might expect.

Justice said the event has steadily grown over the seven years he's been with the church. He said part of its increase in popularity is due to the environmental movement, which has made people more conscious of their need to be stewards of creation.

Cammie Bella, a parishioner at the church, brought her puppy Ember to the event, and has been five or six times before with other animals.

"It's a special way to honor St. Francis and the animals, and it is just so fun," she said.

She said the blessing was nice, but she feels like animals are blessed all the time anyway.

Bella said you can really see the love people have for their animals at an event like the blessing.

"It's obviously a real animal crowd."