

Ideas for Community Partnerships Around Pet Blessings

"Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless this pet. By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen."

It's that time again. Pet blessings are right around the corner and I want you to be prepared. This is a major evangelism opportunity if you do it right.

We have lots of things we already do as Church but we don't always use them to our best advantage. Think about the explosion of dog parks in recent years. We even have a dog park/pub in Houston, the Bone Yard, where you can have a beer and play catch with one of 60 canines of varying sizes and shapes.

Here are some ideas, from the Diocese of Texas, for bringing pet blessing activities out of our sanctuaries and into our communities:

Here's the how to:

Pet Portraits: Locate a photographer in your congregation to offer pet portraits at your pet blessing, put them on Flickr and let people order their own copies—simply provide the service. You could even have the Sunday school kids paint a backdrop on a \$10 painter's canvas from the local hardware store.

Support Your Local Animal Shelter: Invite the animal shelter to bring a mobile adoption unit to your campus the afternoon of your pet blessing. Ask your members to donate dog food for the shelter and have a bake sale of dog biscuits at the pet blessing benefitting the shelter. There are thousands of recipes online and this gives everyone in your congregation buy in for the event.

Offer Rabies Vaccinations: Dip into your evangelism dollars and underwrite \$10 rabies vaccinations from a local vet (who might even be a member of your congregation) and offer these at your pet blessing.

Add Food: Serve holy hot dogs and hush puppies! Have a drawing for a new dog bed. Print up blessing certificates with the St. Francis Prayer and your website on them for everyone.

Be sure to let the local news station and paper know about all this in plenty of time for them to write a story and make sure it's on your Facebook page. Tell your members to share the information with their Facebook friends. Take out an ad on Facebook. (Trinity, The Woodlands, TX did this and had a 20% increase in ASA for their "Blessing of the Backpacks" on August 26! The ad cost them

\$107.00)

Don't forget to have a few members who can answer questions about the Church or provide a quick tour. Have some information on your services and programs available and make everyone WELCOME!

Then you can start planning for **Epiphany** and making sure you reserve a tree shredder to make all those noble firs into mulch (instead of burning the greens). Believe it or not, you can get bags printed with your name and website here: http://diversifiedplastic.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=itemlist&layout=category&task=category&id=6&itemid=61

But plan early and let people know beginning right after Thanksgiving.