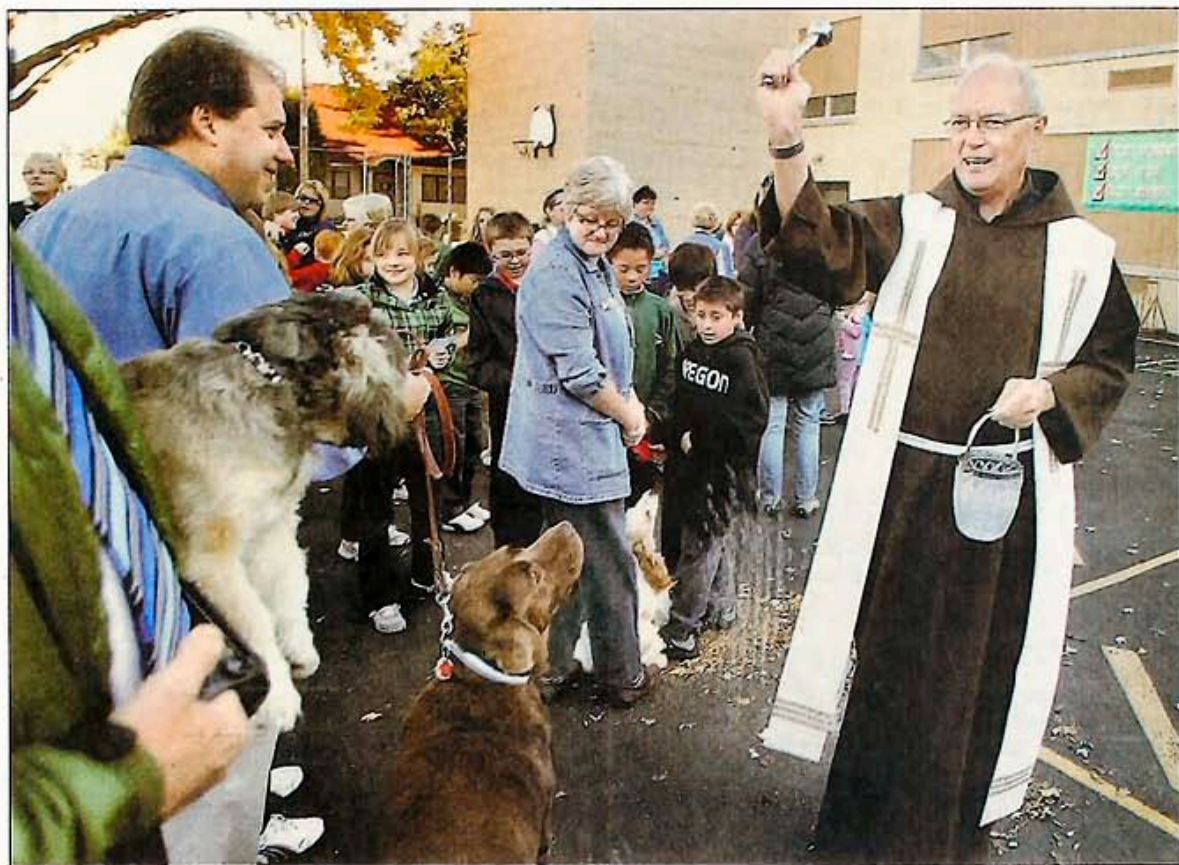


# A celebration of people, pets



Post-Crescent photo by Wm. Glasheen

**THE REV. JIM LEARY** sprinkles holy water Monday during the blessing of the animals at Catholic Central Elementary School in Appleton. The blessing is done in honor of St. Francis of Assisi.

## Participants thrilled with Catholic school's blessing ceremony

By Kathy Walsh Nufer  
Post-Crescent staff writer

APPLETON — Spaniels, golden retrievers, wiener dogs and chocolate Labs showed up early Monday on the Catholic Central Elementary School playground.

Mice, guinea pigs, a crab, a betta fish and even a stuffed bunny or two arrived just before the start of the school day, too.

You name the pet and Catholic Central pupils and their parents brought it for what Principal Carol Wilant called the school's first blessing of animals marking the feast of that most famous lover of all God's creatures — St. Francis of Assisi.

Wilant said she did have "visions" of possible catastrophes, including bad weather that would force everyone from the playground into the school building, but all the participants, including the four-legged and two-legged varieties, were on their best behavior regardless of whether they were on leashes, or riding in pie pans, cages or fish bowls.

"We are gathered here with our animal friends on the Feast of St. Francis who once said: 'Those who do not show compassion to God's

### On the Web

For a video of the blessing of the animals, visit this story at [postcrescent.com](http://postcrescent.com).

animal creatures usually do not show compassion to other people either," Wilant said in opening the prayer service.

The Rev. Jim Leary, a Capuchin Franciscan, said he was happy to do the blessing because of his Franciscan ties. "This is the feast of St. Francis so it is in his honor that we continue to carry on his special appreciation and deep respect and love for God's creatures," he said.

As part of the service, Leary sprinkled holy water on the live pets in the audience and also blessed children carrying stuffed animals and photos of their favorite pets as well as "others who are in our hearts..."

"Today when you go home you should give your animals a special treat in honor of St. Francis," Leary added.

The blessing got rave reviews. "It's a wonderful idea," said Bill Ryno as he watched his third-grade daughter Sarah's hamster "Snow-

### St. Francis of Assisi

- Born in 1181 or 1182 in Italy
- Founder of what is now known as the Franciscan Order
- Penned The Canticle of The Creatures
- Died in 1226
- Canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church in 1228
- His Feast Day is Oct. 4 and it has become customary to hold "Blessing of the Animals" in remembrance of his love of all creatures. It is said that his compassion for animals inspired adoption of anti-cruelty laws.

ball" and first-grade son Caleb's betta fish "Skipper" get blessed on a sunny but crisp autumn morning. He planned to take his family's "little corner of the zoo" home immediately afterward. "I'm a little worried about our hamster. He needs to stay warm."

"I was just so excited to bring my hamster and get him blessed," said Sarah Ryno who carried Snowball in a shoebox, its cover punched full of air

See BLESSING, A-4



## BLESSING: Event honors St. Francis

From A-3

holes. "St. Francis was a really good man who really loved animals and cared about everything."

A crowd of kids gathered around fellow third-grader Charlie Kollenberg as two-year-old Rex, his bearded dragon, crawled up his chest and onto his shoulder. He said it was neat for Rex to be blessed in memory of St. Francis. "He was a really cool guy."

With her plastic bag at the ready, Joi Ahrens didn't mind cleaning up after Cooper, a Shih Tzu Papil-

lon mix, as he waited to be blessed.

"I think this is great," said Ahrens, admiring the "inclusiveness" of the event. "The kids love the animals - they are part of creation and a part of our families - and we parents get to be here, too. We're a community. And it's just fun."

Eight-year old Tyler Ahrens agreed.

"This is really great because everybody gets to bring their pets to school," he said. "I like Cooper a lot and he's really playful. He's a good dog but he's not

very old and has this one problem. He goes to the bathroom a lot in the house. We're trying to train him. I think this blessing will help."

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