

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

## **Las Cruces pooches receive blessings at annual event**

**By Lauren E. Toney For the Sun-News**

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LAS CRUCES - A congregation of dalmatians, dachshunds, Chihuahuas and other pooches gathered, along with their owners, Saturday afternoon for St. Anthony of the Desert Orthodox Mission's Blessing of the Pets.

Holy water was sprinkled on 65 dogs - some more eager than others to receive the blessing - outside St. Andrews Episcopal Church during the second-annual event.

"It's an all-dog day," quipped the Rev. Gabriel Rochelle, pastor for the St. Anthony of the Desert Orthodox Mission. "There are no cats, alligators or even piranhas."

The Blessing of the Pets, which about 10 dogs and their owners attended last year, served as an opportunity to celebrate all creatures large and small, Rochelle said.

"Regardless of faith, people want that sense that animals really are a blessed part of their lives," he said. "We sometimes lose touch with nature in this concrete, modern society and animals remind of us of nature and remind us to celebrate that wildness."

Alizae, a 4-year-old Chihuahua carrying a litter of puppies, wasn't as enthusiastic as other pooches to get splashed with holy water.

"I had to catch her," said Israel Jimenez, 9, after chasing Alizae in the parking lot. "She was pretty scared."

Mother Rachel Jimenez, who held the quivering pooch, said, "She's been with our family for so long and the children wanted to make sure she'd be all right throughout her pregnancy."

The Las Cruces plan to return for next year's blessing - possibly with another four-legged addition to the brood.

"If we deserve it, they deserve it," said Forest Patterson, 20, of the blessing.

Holding an eager 10-year-old Australian shepherd named Spot by the leash, Patterson added, "They're part of the family."

Also blessed was mother Lana Patterson's 1-year-old teacup poodle, Danger, who wore a black-and-hot-pink- striped outfit to the special event.

"He's got a better wardrobe than I do," she said.

After the blessing, food treats provided by Better Life Pet Foods were passed out to owners.

Danger didn't hesitate to start performing tricks in return for a treat or two tossed in the air.

"Spin! Lay down! Roll over!" said Lana Patterson as Danger happily obliged.

"He can jump through hula hoops, too," Forest Patterson added.

Not only was the event a chance for pet owners to show their appreciation for these four-legged family members, but also "a chance for them to interact with other dogs and for us to get to know other dog lovers," Lana Patterson said.

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