

## Blessing of the Animals at ICC



A perfect weather day, July 30<sup>th</sup>, began for many at the Immanuel Congregational Church on the corner of Farmington Avenue and Woodland Street. ICC held an outdoor Blessing of the Animals service for people with pets. It was the first Blessing of the Animals service by ICC in living memory, and the first outdoor service. They couldn't have chosen a more perfect day on which to honor nature's magnificence, and the unity of all created beings as spiritual family.



Several church members and visitors had pets in tow, mostly dogs. Many brought their favorite stuffed animal! Tracy Gormley spoke to the children about the ways in which a dog can teach us about God. A dog is loyal, generous, and forgiving. We can find these qualities in our understanding of God, if we are so inclined. Tracy also mentioned that there are more pets than children in the US - what a surprise!

Reverend Kari Nicewander told a story of Holy Horses, which were purchased by the United Church of Christ in South Dakota. A crisis of three successive youth suicides prompted this line of action. In order to give youth an outlet for their deep-seated emotions, the youth and the horses were taken to Standing Rock, South Dakota, and were asked by the Native tribes to stand at the front line, to serve as a symbol of protection for the Water Protectors, and as an emblem of Native honor. Later, the youth were found petting the horses through holes in the fences, appreciating their strength, service and nobility. A crisis of youth despair had been staunched through this human-animal bonding intervention.

Whether one attends church, temple, mosque, loves the outdoors, or simply turns one's thoughts inward to an appreciation of life and all it presents, a perfect weather day makes it easier to feel gratitude for the bounty of nature and the comradery of our animal friends. Hopefully, the first-ever Blessing of the Animals at ICC will become an annual outdoor service for those who have pet companions, and all who appreciate the oneness of creation by the Creator.

More photos can be seen at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/O043zHWd9hhkjKhF3>