

Classic Franciscan

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A Dog And A Tau

By Jean Wonderly, SFO
and Teresa Gauspohl, SFO

An intense “Christ Renews His Parish” weekend retreat at her parish church deepened Teresa’s need to grow in her faith and led her to start her Secular Franciscan inquiry with a fledgling fraternity, to see if she had a vocation to be a Secular Franciscan. She began her studies with ten others and on August 28, 2005, Teresa was one of six, who made their permanent professions at Mass. This joyful event fit into her life, because of her love for Jesus and the gospel life. With God’s grace, the small, but growing St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity of fifteen Secular Franciscans in St. Maximilian Kolbe Region continues to do God’s work and that of St. Francis of Assisi.

The small thriving parish at Hicksville, located in Northwest Ohio, has something for all ages, including the blessing of the animals given by their remarkable parish priest, Fr. Oedy. Naturally, Teresa, who loves animals, took her dog, “Zach” for the blessing. Besides the blessing, three years of obedience school, a temperament evaluation and a special health record form from a veterinarian qualified Zach as a therapy dog. The temperament evaluation measured his behavior around people in wheelchairs, with crutches and special needs. His certification with a national agency and previous events in life led Zach, a 153 pound Newfoundland, to be in his unique ministry.

The yearly health form and the institution visits records, signed by an administrator, along with the annual fee, allow him to be re-registered. Zach’s picture badge allows him to go to nursing homes, hospitals, and libraries, where children can read to

him. Recently, therapy dogs were allowed to go into funeral homes, so the fraternity held a 12-week grief training program. Now, members can assist Teresa and her dog in this ministry.

The response Teresa gets, when she takes him to nursing homes and other places, is the most rewarding reason for having Zach as a therapy dog. The residents are so excited to see them when they visit almost every weekend. The joy this big loveable dog brings into their lives brightens their smiling faces like lighted Christmas trees! Teresa and Zach can fill a small void when they visit. It’s wonderful to hear them talk about their families and find out what is new and exciting that is happening in their lives. Sometimes the news they are telling her is not always good, but they start telling her while petting Zach, and you can see the joy he brings them. They always ask Zach if he’s been a good boy, and they ask about Abbey, a two-year-old Newfoundland, who is also being trained to be a therapy dog.

On February 17, 2008, Zach was officially made the St. Michael the Archangel’s Fraternity Mascot. How wonderful to have Franciscan Mascot Therapy Dog and St. Francis will be smiling from above. They can both wear their Taus to the places they visit. This should raise questions from the residents, and Teresa says that it will be great telling them about, Zach, the Franciscan Mascot.



Teresa Gauspohl, SFO and Therapy Dog, Zach