



“When you’re helping the animals, you’re helping the people. ... They’re proud that they have a way to get their animal taken care of,” says veterinarian John Mauterer, shown with veterinary technician Monica Arnold.

Tent Revival

A free veterinary clinic helps church minister to needy New Orleans residents

The people lining up in a parking lot on St. Charles Avenue one Saturday a month usually have little to call their own. Many in the underserved, inner-city neighborhood lack cars and show up on foot. Some forgo even basic necessities for themselves. A few live under an interstate bridge or spend nights at a nearby shelter.

But these down-on-their-luck New Orleanians have unshakable connections with at least one kind of earthly attachment: their pets.

“They’re like everything to them,” John Mauterer says.

It’s that strong bond that helps Mauterer and his wife, Deb, care for four-legged patients while also ministering to those at the other end of the leash. As members of Church of the King, the two veterinary surgeons are joined in a broader health outreach initiative by volunteers who provide medical and dental services to low-income residents.

“You walk past the people that live under that bridge, and most people are scared of them, or write them off, or think they’re not worth talking about—just avoid them,” says Mauterer. “Our purpose here is for everybody who feels that the world calls

them insignificant, not worthy, not good enough, not rich enough, not anything enough—we’re here to tell them that they are significant, and that’s what the love of God is.”

At a recent Saturday event under the tent where the Mauterers vaccinated and treated 91 animals, HSUS and Louisiana SPCA volunteers spoke with pet owners about spaying and neutering; The HSUS has been helping expand and promote spay/neuter services in the region since 2007.

Two of the patients, pit bulls belonging to a neighborhood barber, received vaccinations, heartworm preventative, and flea and tick treatment; one was treated for a severe skin condition. “The owner was so proud

when he finished and bragged to me about the medication he received. He was relieved he would be able to make his dog feel better,” says Amanda Arrington, HSUS manager of spay/neuter initiatives.

The HSUS’s collaboration with both local shelters and religious groups is all part of a larger campaign to curtail pet homelessness and strengthen respect for animals. The work of Church of the King and its non-profit ministry, the New Orleans Dream Center, can help serve as a model for congregations nationwide, says HSUS Faith Outreach Campaign director Christine Gutleben.

“They’re showing that human care involves animal care. You can’t separate them, and there’s no community that can say this more clearly and knows this better than New Orleans,” she says.

The Mauterers recently sold their 24-hour clinic so they could devote themselves to volunteer efforts, which also include mission work providing free treatment for animals in Africa, Asia, and South America. “To use your profession for something you really believe in is an unbelievable gift in itself. ... Work is no longer work when you really have a passion for it,” Mauterer says.

That sentiment reflects the ministry philosophy at Church of the King, says the Rev. Randy Craighead, executive pastor. “If we can show [people] that we’re even interested in their pets,” he says, “they can see that we’re interested in them as a *whole* person—body, soul, and spirit—and all their attachments.” — **Jim Baker**

▶ **WATCH A VIDEO** about The HSUS’s Faith Outreach Campaign at humansociety.org/magazine.

Putting Their Stamp On It

The U.S. Postal Service’s latest set of social awareness stamps features adopted cats and dogs along with the words “Animal Rescue: Adopt a Shelter Pet.” During the campaign, Ellen DeGeneres and the pet products company she co-owns, Halo, Purely for Pets, are promoting the stamps and pledging to donate a million servings of Halo-brand dog and cat food to U.S. shelters. To order stamps, an adoption certificate, or related merchandise, visit stampstotherescue.com.

