

National Cathedral hires a new resident mouse chaser

by [Jena Lowe](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) The newest employee at Washington National Cathedral was nowhere to be found in her office on a recent afternoon. She was probably out and about, staffers said, doing God's work.

"She likes to bring gifts from her adventures," said Jean Jawdat, the deputy director of the Cathedral Choral Society. "She presents us with mice."

There are alley cats, lap cats and house cats -- and then there's Carmina, the only cat who's able to call the House of Prayer for All People home.

The friendly feline with the black and tortoise-shell fur comes and goes through her very own customized cat door. She climbs trees, roams around the courtyard and always returns to the cathedral library for food.

"She eats a hodgepodge of things," said Victoria Chamberlin, who works for the Cathedral Choral Society, and the person who's largely in charge of Carmina's adoption. "She prefers mostly dry food, though we give her wet food at times to keep her hydrated."

Her official name is Carmina Chante Schumann, and she's called the

landmark church home for nearly a month. The Washington Humane Society found her and her litter on the city's southeast side, and took her in until each kitten was adopted into homes.

Carmina, too, was adopted, but her first home didn't work out, Chamberlin said, and was returned to the shelter. That's when Chamberlin arrived, looking for a cat of her own to adopt. She found one of Carmina's kittens, a tomcat named Ren, but when she heard Carmina's story, she decided she might find a home at the cathedral.

Carmina, who's named after Carl Orff's masterful opera "Carmina Burana," replaces Catherine of Tarragon, who retired to a home in North Carolina at age 16 with a bad case of asthma.

Since most of the staffers in the choral office have cats of their own, they bring in extra food for Carmina. And, in a duty that's probably not listed in their formal job description, they take turns cleaning her litter box in the basement.

"Carmina has always had a sweet demeanor," said Sabrina Fang of the Washington Humane Society, who helped facilitate the adoption.

"She is usually very laid back, lets you pet her," Chamberlin added. "For a young cat, she has an old temperament."

Since her arrival just before the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi -- the patron saint of animals, of course -- Carmina has scaled the walls of the library and likes to climb along the pipes in the office. She walks gingerly past a plush version of a Catherine of Tarragon doll that was sold in the cathedral gift shop.

Carmina's already carried out a few liturgical duties -- she was the first animal blessed at the cathedral's St. Francis celebrations.

"Animals," said the cathedral's director of worship, the Rev. Gwendolyn Tobias, "become an intersection between people and belief."